

## PRAGMATISM AND POLITICS

**I**T may seem paradoxical to suggest of a doctrine essentially impatient of the absolute that it bids fair to become the chief bulwark of an absolutism the more tyrannical because it is false. Yet a democracy forgetting freedom and a philosophy careless of principles do, in fact, go hand in hand together. Nowhere better than in politics could the pragmatic creed be applied; and nowhere does it become more immediately clear that pragmatism has no creed. In this it is the motto of democracy in action, which is abandoning more and more not only creeds as creeds but even the very creed that brought it into being.

In doing so democracy threatens to entammel men for a time more effectively than ever they were trammelled in the past, through the very optimism of its crude practicality; seeking to achieve in one generation and by extraneous rules the blessings which only the long discipline of character can ever bring to the world. Lovers of liberty, then, if they would serve her now, must see that a philosophy without a standard, a wisdom that will not criticize, a doctrine that will not lead, is the greatest foe of all they have to fight.

An irreverent critic once remarked that doubtless we should all like to be pragmatists if only we knew what we should be if we were pragmatists. I am sure that it would be very easy for any accommodating person to find out that he was on the whole a pragmatist. But with a full reserve of my right to be accommodating on some other occasion, the present purpose requires a sterner frame of mind. Pragmatism is a big belief quite satisfactory to those only whose belief is still bigger. It is, I take it, the doctrine that an idea is true if it works. But inasmuch as not all that works is worth working; inasmuch as not all that works for to-day, works in the long run; inasmuch as it is as well to know, before practical