

RELIGION: ITS MODERN NEEDS
AND PROBLEMS . . . No. 7

**SOME RELIGIOUS
CULTS & MOVEMENTS
OF TO-DAY**

BY
HERBERT CRABTREE

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CULTS & MOVEMENTS
OF TO-DAY

AND

THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE
RELIGION OF TO-MORROW

BY

HERBERT CRABTREE

EDITOR'S NOTE

Each writer is responsible for the views expressed in his contribution to the series. No attempt has been made to limit freedom in the effort to impose an artificial uniformity. Yet a certain unity of outlook does make itself evident, and this is all the more valuable because unforced.

RAYMOND V. HOLT

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PREFACE

THE following pages do not furnish a detailed account of the history and teachings of the religious movements dealt with. The scope of the book precludes any such ambitious scheme being attempted. Nor is it necessary that it should be undertaken, for the number of books furnishing a comprehensive treatment of these cults is legion. What is actually essayed is something much more modest, yet perhaps of sufficient importance to justify yet another contribution to a much-discussed theme.

The endeavour is made to estimate the distinctive worth of each of the movements touched upon and their probable contribution to the religion of the future. Only their most significant features, therefore, are selected for discussion, and it is hoped that not only their critics, but also their friends, will feel that the treatment, though frank, is not unjust.

H. C.

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Traditional religion is declining, but new movements are springing up which seemingly offer hope for religion in the future. The old foundations and sanctions of the organised churches are being shaken or abandoned, largely because the appeal they once made no longer evokes enthusiastic response. Practical standards alone hold the interest of the modern world, and these are not for the most part offered by the churches. Will the new cults prove to be "arks of safety" for religion?

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For a belief to be established as true it must appeal to some objective fact or witness. Religion is weak largely because one objective authority after another has been discarded; first the Church, then the Bible, until now it rests upon the subjective witness of experience, which in its turn is being attacked by Psychology. The effect is a growing cynicism and pessimism, which the new cults seek to combat by an empirical quest for new objective guarantees of truth.

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In stressing the value of good health, Christian Science makes a wide appeal, but its metaphysical basis is crudely illogical, and the distinction it draws between Mind (seemingly of God) and so-called mortal mind is unintelligible. Even so, as a pragmatic faith it has done good in stressing the power of spirit to subjugate the lower conditions of being to its own higher purposes.

Christian Science has not found an objective authority, but rather presents an objective effect, of its belief.

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One outcome of the closer contact between East and West during the nineteenth century was the formation of the Theosophical Society, which claims to offer us the secret teachings which are common to, and underlie, all religions. These teachings, however, find no independent corroboration in the normal researches of the scientific and historical student, and they are too chimerical and visionary to appeal to the European mind without strong confirmation.

Reincarnation can neither be proved nor disproved, but is too speculative for the Western world to adopt. The contribution of Theosophy to the religion of the future is not likely to be of great importance.

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A remarkable and very considerable movement has grown up around the contention that it is possible for the living to communicate with the dead. Many of the *facts* of Spiritualism are now substantially accepted by serious investigators, though many reserve judgment as to the rightful *interpretation* of them. In recent years much of the evidence that has been forthcoming appears to rule out any but the specifically spiritistic theory.

Whatever the final verdict may be, its effect upon religion, in the world of thought peculiarly constituted as it is to-day, will be important. If personal survival be established, the religious consciousness will in an important respect have found objective verification.

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In anticipating the future one can only survey what seem to be the significant tendencies of to-day, and make reasonable inferences therefrom. The immediate future is uncertain, for as yet there are insufficient data available for an adequate estimate to be formed.

The main outlines of the religion of the future, however, are not likely to be markedly different from to-day, for the evolution of thousands of years is not to be overthrown within a century. Its beliefs will probably be less formal, and certainly less dogmatic, yet far more assured, than has often been the case in the past.

SOME RELIGIOUS CULTS AND MOVEMENTS OF TO-DAY

CHAPTER I

THE RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK

To assert that religion has lost much of its appeal for the modern mind is to state a platitude. Nearly all the churches have by now accustomed themselves to the sombre spectacle of annually declining statistics, and even the one great exception, the Roman Catholic Church, which boasts a constant progress in this country at least, gives evidence in the very violence of its claims that it feels itself to be living in a world that is alien to its spirit, and it certainly does not face the future with unconcern. It secures itself largely by insulating itself from the disintegrating influences of our day.

Yet side by side with the declining authority of the older churches, new religious organisations have come into being, and are seemingly flourishing. Some of them would seem to have a cheerful and a vigorous future before them. In an age that is predominantly secular they appear to move from strength to strength. In practically every town one of the brightest and newest of the buildings will probably be a Christian Science Church. Ignored and flouted by its orthodox neighbours it joyously thrives, and its members are united by a fervour and an assurance that cannot but impress the most casual of visitors.

Maybe the local lodge of the Theosophical Society or the

meeting-place of the Spiritualists will not be so conspicuous, but when found it will probably reveal as large a membership as its more wealthy but scarcely less heterodox Christian Science neighbour. Further, though the adherents of the last-named body may well be roughly estimated numerically by the attendance at its organised services, in the case of Theosophy and Spiritualism it is certain that very many accept their tenets who seldom, if ever, attend their formal meetings.

What is the significance of this strange contrast?—of the steadily weakening grip of the more orthodox churches on the one hand, and the steadily increasing success of these “historyless cults” (as they are called by Spengler) on the other? A correct answer is surely of some importance.

The churches as a whole represent an attitude towards life that is not generally congenial to current thought and interests, which for the most part are ruled by scientific and utilitarian considerations. The prevailing spirit of our age demands that all beliefs shall be either true to fact or useful in a world of fact, or better still shall be both true and useful. The world is predominantly interested in practical values, and has no patience with merely speculative and hypothetical ones. Æsthetic values also are held in but little esteem. They may be tolerated as pleasing and mellowing influences in a light that is a little too hard and cold for human comfort, but they are rigorously subordinated to the pragmatic dictates and demands of whatsoever things are rational, useful and practically profitable.

By these standards traditional religion is condemned; its beliefs are not accepted as reasonable, nor for the most part do they seem to be of any use in a world that is urgently demanding the solution of many material problems the immediate gravity of which cannot be gainsaid. “Religion is the striving of the people for an imaginary happiness; it springs from a state of society that requires an illusion, but

disappears when the recognition of true happiness and the possibility of its realisation penetrates the masses.” So wrote Karl Marx, and many who detest his economics will be found to agree with his depreciation of religion.

An apparent exception which tests and proves the rule is furnished by the Salvation Army, which receives the generous support of many sympathisers who are indifferent to, or even repelled by, its theology, on the ground that it does much useful work which no one else is particularly concerned about. Those who are not strongly biased against religion in general find in that work justification for certain methods and teachings which otherwise they would probably dislike. Mr. Hugh Redwood, in his widely read book *God in the Slums*, pays a deservedly high tribute to the social work of the “Army,” whose supernatural sanction is proved, so he holds, not by what it teaches but by what it does:—“It becomes necessary to insist, without qualification of any kind, that in the slum work of the Salvation Army there is positive and continual evidence of supernatural collaboration.” The pragmatic test of religious belief could scarcely be more tersely or more emphatically stated.

The traditional churches, with their elaborate ecclesiastical systems and hierarchies, show up rather badly when judged by such standards. A strong defence of their attitude towards social problems may be made, but to the slick impatient mind of to-day it sounds not a little laboured. In any case the churches have certainly lost the initiative in these matters; they are on the defence, and we live in a world which, perhaps too rashly, tends to find the prisoner guilty before all the evidence has been heard.

The appeal of the churches in the past has in large measure been addressed to traits in human nature and features of the world order that are no longer operative in marked degree. Thus the sense of mystery no longer exercises any considerable sway over thought and feeling. The globe has been

mapped, weighed and measured; no one would nowadays dream of inscribing, as on ancient maps, in the as yet unexplored regions, "Here be devils," "Here be Amazons," or even "Here be the Isles of the Blessed." We are all quite sure that no such creatures and places exist. Even the vast universe is now rapidly yielding up its secrets, and it is seen to be but a mighty extension of the same natural, and on the whole familiar, principles which govern our own homely little world. True, Sir James Jeans has written a book called *The Mysterious Universe*, but it is not likely that popular religion has been much influenced thereby. One has to go so far to find mystery nowadays! One must have an immensely powerful telescope or an immensely powerful microscope, and be able to use a terminology comprehensible only to a peculiarly rarefied mathematical mind. Thus it is that those aspects of scientific research which impinge upon the religious sphere are not as yet of much help to the religion of common humanity; they are beginning to touch the imagination of the thoughtful, but as yet they are far from gripping the will and transforming the heart of the masses. They may corroborate a religious sense, but they will not create it.

At the same time, this present world is becoming a vastly more interesting place; there is a great deal more pleasure to be derived from its varied possibilities than former generations ever suspected. The rewards of worldly success are far greater, and the efforts to achieve that success are more intense than ever before, and are thus more absorbing of interest and energy, especially on the part of the youth of to-day. Consequently there is not merely less time for religion; there is less positive desire for it, a far more important feature of the situation than mere limitation of time.

With the sense of mystery has gone the sense of reverence, not only for things supernatural but also for things natural. Popular culture is dominated by the cinema and the wireless,

both marvellous and valuable inventions, but often used for trivial ends. The "talkies" of Hollywood and the vaudeville programmes of the B.B.C. make a powerful appeal to the senses, but little to the intellect, and less to the higher emotions of the public mind. The ideal pursued by very many is not that of a good life but that of a good time. There is not much use for religion here.

Among liberally-minded people, the movement away from religion has been accelerated by the growth of knowledge not only of the world about us and the natural order generally, but of religion itself. The origins, history and comparative validity and worth of the religions of the world have been assiduously studied. All are seen to be rooted in certain factors common to human psychology. The mind of man reacts to its environment in specific ways, and at the same level of culture the reactions everywhere seem to be much the same. Further, various religions are found to be more interdependent than was formerly supposed; not one has sprung fully formed from Heaven to earth, like Athena from the head of Zeus; not one can legitimately claim to be peculiarly unique, as so many of them have claimed, and some a little ingenuously still do claim. Evolution applies to religion as to everything else, and to recognise a common ground in all religions inclines the moderately well-informed person to disparage and devalue them all.

And so to-day we find confusion and decline among the religions of the world. Entire communities are rejecting religion altogether, either violently or passively, as in Russia, among the intellectuals of France, Germany and Spain, and large groups in Turkey, China and Japan. Not even India, the traditional home of Oriental mysticism, is untouched. The unrest there is in no inconsiderable degree the outcome of a new interest in the world of matter and of fact, born of the impregnation of the Indian mind by Western notions of rationalistic and secularising tendencies.

The traditional churches for the most part seem helpless in the face of a storm which threatens to overwhelm them. They are adrift on an ocean the depth of which they cannot sound, and the currents and tides of which they can neither estimate nor control. If they go down in the flood, will religion go with them? Are the new cults everywhere springing up about us destined to be arks of safety for the religious spirit, or are they merely fragile rafts floating away from the decks of the sinking ships, breasting the storm for the time being because their structure is lighter, but themselves destined to be engulfed in due course? Or yet again, will the stouter material of the older vessels withstand the tumult, and thus at some future time shall we see the timorous souls who have sought a precarious refuge in these frailer craft swimming desperately back to the shelter and security of the solid, weather-beaten hulls, which constitute the great religious systems of the world?

CHAPTER II

THE QUEST FOR AN AUTHORITY

TRUTH may be roughly defined as the correspondence of an idea with its object. A true belief is one which is in consistent and harmonious relationship with something external to the mind which holds it. Truth thus has two aspects: the objective (that which is assumed to exist in the world of fact outside the mind) and the subjective (that peculiar mental state of thought, feeling and impulse, of which man is the conscious subject). A belief may be subjectively satisfying, but if it be inconsistent with verifiable facts of the external world it is not a true belief. Beliefs are formulated for all sorts of reasons, and they are often held tenaciously because they appear to solve some mental problem or furnish an emotional satisfaction; but unless they can be shown to refer to some reality beyond the mind of the believer they have no validity for anyone else. The world in general may rightly choose to ignore them if it so desire.

Religion is largely helpless to-day in the face of current world tendencies because it has no accepted standard of external authority; it has no criterion that its beliefs are objectively true. Thought is governed to-day by the scientific method, which involves the constant checking of its inferences and hypotheses by reference to objective fact. The careful observation of nature provides science with its necessary data of thought, and it is suspicious of any hypothesis which goes far in advance of such data. Its suspicions are well grounded, for imagination has been productive of far more theories than patient research has corroborated.

Modern physical science dates from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the vigorous minds of such men as Giordano Bruno, Galileo and Kepler revolted against the hitherto all but universal acceptance of *a priori* notions (*i.e.* speculative generalisations, based upon inadequate data) as to the behaviour of material phenomena, and learned to rely instead upon theories based upon direct and careful observations of the facts themselves. No belief is more disastrous to the cause of truth (including religious truth in the long run) than the very popular belief that because a notion is ancient and has been accepted by large numbers of people, it must therefore be true. Nearly two thousand years before the time of Galileo, Aristotle had taught that a falling body would fall twice as fast as another body half its weight. Because Aristotle had said so nobody questioned the statement until Galileo, moved by that intensely curious and perversely critical habit of mind which must always be the wonder and the despair of the traditionalist, thought he would see for himself. One morning, in the presence of the assembled professors and students of the University of Pisa, he ascended the Leaning Tower, taking with him a ten-pound shot and a one-pound shot. Balancing these on the overhanging edge he pushed them over together. Together they fell, and together they struck the ground. Authority, unquestioned, had ruled for two thousand years; when questioned, it was refuted in a few seconds. The observers of the experiment could not believe their own eyes; there must be "magic" in it somewhere, so incredible did it appear. Yet it had happened, and was repeated again and again until all shadow of doubt had disappeared.

What objective authority akin to Galileo's cannon-balls has the Church got as to the validity of its teaching? If we would revive religion, what guarantee have we that its beliefs correspond to anything in external Reality? After all, religious beliefs, no less than scientific beliefs, *must* be true

objectively or they are simply worthless; they are no more than what Lenin called "a spiritual vodka, an opiate of the people," the product of a sentimental romanticism.

For some generations religion has been gradually becoming more and more subjective both in its character and in its appeal to authority. First went the objective authority of the Church in the Reformation, for at any rate large masses of the population of Europe. That the Roman Catholic Church will persist for an indefinite period cannot be questioned. She will do so just because she has always recognised that an objective authority of some sort is essential to religion. By drawing a sharp distinction between the functions of Faith and Reason she has in large measure departmentalised her dogma and withdrawn it from the realm of free rational criticism. "Faith," she asserts in her Catechism, "is a supernatural gift of God which enables us to believe without doubting whatever God has revealed." If we ask what it is that God has revealed, we are told that we shall know it by "the testimony, teaching and authority of the Catholic Church." Her revealed truths, therefore, are held to be impervious to rational criticism. One cannot, for instance, disprove the dogma of Transubstantiation, though the Catholic will readily admit that it cannot be proved if the authority of the Church be rejected. When Bishop Barnes suggested that the consecrated elements might be subjected to chemical analysis, to detect whether they were different from unconsecrated matter, the Anglo-Catholics turned purple with anger, whereas the Roman Catholics merely laughed. They found it difficult to credit that the Bishop could so misapprehend the nature of Catholic belief. And so with the other great dogmas of the Church; they cannot be proved by reason, nor can they be disproved by it. The Roman Catholic Church will for long continue to attract that type of mind, not necessarily ignorant or credulous, which feels the strong and urgent need of an external assurance, an

objective guarantee, that its hopes and aspirations are not mere illusions, born of a fond conceit and a sentimental craving for comfort and peace.

Yet the Roman Catholic Church has her own troubles, not less grave because they are in large measure hidden underground. Her masses of adherents belong intellectually to the least influential groups in the world, and in even such predominantly Catholic countries as Spain and Italy the more restive and fermenting elements give patent sign of revolt against the Church's yoke. The Church will certainly not save religion in a world in which virility and independence of intellect are of primary importance.

As for Protestantism, its witness is, in one respect, in rather worse plight than that of Catholicism, for its traditional objective criterion of truth is something even more literal and rigid than a church which, after all, consists at any one time of living men. That criterion is the teaching of the Scriptures. According to Luther, there was for man only one means of grace: the saving love of Christ. Of this, the sacraments of the Church might be a visible expression, but the guarantee of their validity and knowledge of divine grace itself were given in the "Word of God." This word might be communicated orally and set forth in the sacraments, but for knowledge of what it was and how it might be sought, recourse must be had to the Scriptures. "The sacraments without the word are not able to do anything, but the word without the sacraments is. If necessary one can be saved without the sacraments, but not without the word."

That a man had found salvation was assured not by his membership of the Church, but by the inner glow of faith, the true Church being the community of saints, spiritual and invisible, not to be identified with the Church of Rome or with any other ecclesiastical organisation.

That the experience of faith was no illusion was confirmed

by the word of Scripture, and the subsequent theology of Protestantism thus became in large measure a question of the right interpretation of utterances and teachings recorded many centuries before. The living factor was religious experience; the corroborative authority, a book.

Then, during the nineteenth century, the authority of the book began to weaken. Historical and textual criticism began their irresistible work. First went the traditional Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch; then the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament came under fire, and at length, delayed but inevitable, the contents of the Gospels were dragged into the arena, and belief in their primitive literal veracity had to be abandoned. True, the modern student of both Old and New Testaments finds in them great beauty and a constant solace and encouragement in the conflicts and endeavours of the soul, but he does not find therein the same objective confirmation of his beliefs that his forefathers found. The Protestant of a former day said, "I believe the experience of my heart is true because the Bible confirms it;" the modern Protestant says, "I believe the Bible is true because the experience of my heart confirms it." The Bible used to be regarded as the record of God's Revelation to man; now it is a record of man's search for God. Thus it is that for the Protestant of to-day religious authority has become almost solely subjective. "Lutheranism" dominates theology to-day under the guise of the philosophy of "Values." We are told that the heart is its own witness; that it intuitively apprehends certain values—Truth, Beauty, Goodness—the subjective apprehension of which implies their corresponding objective reality in the Mind of God. They are claimed to be ultimate inasmuch as they are incapable of further analysis, and are thus inferred to be Absolute. God is said to be revealed in the world in those aspects which immediately evoke these perceptions of the true, the beautiful and the good in human experience; the false, the ugly and the evil being explained

as either erroneous interpretations or perverted reactions of impulses that are essentially good.

And now this last citadel of Protestantism is being vigorously assailed by the psychologists, who tell us that these values are mythological fictions, having no existence outside human consciousness, and that the majestic ideas of God, the Soul and Immortality are simply rationalisations and projections of mental phantasies evoked by repressed, and therefore unsatisfied, impulses and desires. The starved unfulfilled wish is father to the religious thought. The great hopes of religion are illusions; they correspond to nothing in the external world; at best, they are imaginary though no doubt consoling counterfeits of Reality. This activity of phantasy construction is a defence-reaction against the limitations and disappointments of life; it affords a satisfaction to the mind which, though not true, is subjectively as good as true, or perhaps even better as measured by its emotional intensity, for the partial dissociation with reality which is involved allows the emotions greater freedom in their purely imaginative creations and associations. Nevertheless, this emotional satisfaction has grave intellectual dangers, for if indulged it may lead to the acceptance of utterly erroneous ideas, which in their practical consequences may involve not only false beliefs but also pernicious behaviour. It has been well said that "what we do not know we imagine; and then, by a deft conceit, we imagine that we know." And knowledge that is merely the product of imagination has caused infinite sorrow and suffering in the world. Far better would it be for us to banish all religious idealism if it have no real basis in the nature of things than accept it solely because we find some romantic satisfaction in it. This psychological criticism is serious and must be faced.

The religion of the future must, therefore, rest on an empirical basis, not merely on a speculative one. Actually it always has done. When we read the New Testament we

can have no doubt that the apostles firmly believed that certain remarkable things were actually happening. It was not that they were being thought about; they were being done. Men really believed that their Lord, though crucified, was alive, that the sick were being healed, that there were angels and principalities in high places, that the spiritual world was very near and very potent. And so too, ever since, living religion has always in the last resort been empirical and concrete, though the fact has been masked by tradition, custom, group loyalties, and vast, misty clouds of verbiage. To-day, the subjective criteria of religion are not duly authenticated by any strong and adequate objective appeal, and the ark of the Church appears to be gently sinking beneath the waves of an illimitable ocean of vague, unarticulated, subjective sentimentalism, speculative Pantheism, and sheer Agnosticism.

As for the ordinary man, he tends more and more to become a cynical, hedonistic secularist in both thought and deed. He has no use for religion, no belief in the supernatural, and sensuous pleasure allures him as the only sure good; he is "without God, and having no hope in the world."

The result is not greater happiness for mankind, but less. One assured result of historical study is the realisation that no purely naturalistic philosophy ever truly satisfies the mind or heart of man. Whatever may be the final verdict of science as to the nature of the world, it is unquestionable that the verdict of human experience has invariably been that no abiding satisfaction is to be found in a world that is thought to be solely conditioned by mechanical and naturalistic principles. Even in its aberrations and phantasies the mind of man manifests a demand for that in Reality which is not entirely imprisoned within the present world order. Let that demand be denied, and loss of nerve results. Pessimism and depression flourish, though here and there a few noble souls are able to defy the logic of their own negations by a

courageous Stoicism. But this defence is not for the masses. "Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint" (as the Revised Version revealingly renders the familiar phrase), and it is but a further step to their perishing.

It would seem as though belief in a spiritual universe must somehow be conserved at almost any cost. If an objective belief in God cannot be justified, then let us have a religion without God. So, in effect, say the Humanists. Let us, by the power of the spirit immanent within us, create a spiritual life without and about us, and maybe we shall contribute towards the creation or emergence of God Himself, who shall be, not the Father, but the superhuman Child, of humanity.

Yet this can be but a temporary solution; few there are whose moral nature can thrive without the assurance that its strivings and sufferings are somehow already vindicated in the nature of the universe. The religious consciousness, when most vigorous, must worship something other than its own idealised self. It must discover its Object in Reality, otherwise it cannot indefinitely sustain the task of creation. When all is said and done, the strength of orthodox religion is that it presents to the believer an objective manifestation of Deity—the Incarnation—which he can worship and adore, and unless the modern critical mind can find some adequate equivalent its higher faculties will shrivel and die.

Traditional orthodoxy has certainly vanished for great numbers to-day, and to replace it is the religious task of the future. Attempts to do so are given in the rise of many of the modern religious cults which, as already stated, are among the most remarkable characteristics of the religious situation of to-day. They are all primarily empirical rather than speculative; they are for the most part contemptuous of tradition, scholarship and even logic. They claim to make a direct assault on the kingdom of the spirit. If that kingdom is real, they say, then its reality ought to be demon-

strable here and now. It is not enough that it should have been demonstrated two thousand years ago; nor is it enough that its reality be inferred or even felt; it must be disclosed and manifested to living men and women.

Further, so the advocates of these new cults argue, the traditional modes of approach to the spiritual world are apparently exhausted, for they have been so elaborately worked over that no new principle is now likely to emerge from them. For this reason, urge the advocates, formal scholarship has failed; it has done all it could, and that which is good in its achievements will no doubt endure, but it cannot do more.

What is happening is simply a return to primitive and direct methods of spiritual exploration, and it is important that a sound valuation of these independent and often bizarre methods should be attempted. We must survey a few of these modern cults with a view to ascertaining whether their efforts are legitimate, their discoveries valid, and their appeal to the world conclusive.

CHAPTER III

THE APPEAL OF CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

OF all modern cults, Christian Science is far and away the most spectacular, the most fashionable, and, numerically, probably the most successful. Its beautiful churches, its comfortable reading-rooms, and its frequent propaganda lectures delivered by exceedingly able speakers carefully trained for their work, evidence a fervour that is not lightly to be dismissed as superficial. Supporters of a new cause are not generally as lavish as are the devotees of Christian Science unless they believe and feel that, to put it rather vulgarly, they are getting "good value for their money." Clearly their faith does something to fulfil its promise. The believer is not without his reward.

The leading tenets of the movement are well known, and are simple enough. Their simplicity, indeed, is part of their appeal. Maybe a closer examination of them will disclose perplexities and contradictions, but people do not worry much about such matters if the practical results are satisfactory. That they are satisfactory in many instances need not be gainsaid; no one can attend a Christian Science Testimony Meeting without feeling convinced of the sincerity of the witnesses: though the dead may not rise from the grave yet the lame certainly do walk; though the totally blind may not in many cases recover their sight, yet unquestionably many myopic persons acquire better vision; though the loss of a leg or an arm may not be repaired, yet most assuredly many a paralytic has left his bed more or less healed.

No appeal is more universal or more easily grasped than

that of Christian Science. There is no man living who does not know the difference between good health and bad health, and if he does not ardently desire the former rather than the latter we at once suspect him of some mental or moral deficiency. A religion that can satisfy a universal craving is sure of a wide and sympathetic hearing, and no reputed eccentricities on the part of its founder will seriously diminish the number, or weaken the loyalties, of its confirmed adherents. In this case, its deeds of healing are the objective guarantee which the Christian Scientist needs to satisfy him that his subjective belief in the teaching of Mrs. Eddy is valid. It is pragmatism in its crudest form—an idea is true because it works; my religion is true because it gives me what I want; "Science and Health" is true because it implements its instruction by delivering the goods, viz. sound health. Could anything be more convincing? Only the metaphysician or logician, arguing on the low level of "mortal mind," which is the sphere in which error is said to abound, could possibly doubt the validity of Christian Science teaching. At least so the familiar argument runs.

Nevertheless, the matter is not quite so simple as all that, for the "Scientist" himself has to state his case in terms of "mortal mind," otherwise the natural, unconverted man would never hear of it. It is thus legitimate to approach the text-book of the movement as it stands (the product of an enormous number of revisions since first it left the hands of its compiler, Mrs. Eddy), and examine its principles with as independent a mind as possible.

In the sixth chapter of *Science and Health*, headed "Science, Theology and Medicine," we read:

"The fundamental propositions of divine metaphysics are summarised in the four following, to me, *self-evident* propositions. Even if reversed, these propositions will be found to agree in statement and proof, showing mathematically their exact relation to Truth. De Quincey says

mathematics has not a foot to stand upon which is not purely metaphysical.

“ 1. God is All-in-all.

“ 2. God is good. Good is Mind.

“ 3. God, Spirit, being all, nothing is matter.

“ 4. Life, God, omnipotent good, deny death, evil, sin, disease—Disease, sin, evil, death, deny good, omnipotent God, Life.”

Note that these principles are said to be *self-evident*, at any rate to the author, but are they really so to the average careful reader? So far as the first is concerned we need not discuss it, for all developed religions agree in regarding God as in some sense omnipresent, though for the notion to be completely satisfying it needs far more careful amplification than Mrs. Eddy gives to it. That “God is good” will also be generally conceded, thanks not so much to the teaching of the various revealed religions as to the evolved moral consciousness of mankind. When one reflects upon the manner in which God has been worshipped in some of the great religions of the world; when one thinks of the bloody holocausts of victims offered up in cruel sacrifice to a wrathful Deity; even when one realises how thinly veiled is this notion of a vengeful retributive God in the orthodox Christian doctrine of Substitutionary Atonement (the “Fountain filled with blood”), one may well wonder how far the notion that “God is good” has been self-evident to mankind in general. One wonders, indeed, how far it would have been self-evident to Mrs. Eddy herself had she been born a few centuries earlier and had ventured to propound her notions under the shadow of the Inquisition.

That “Good is Mind,” however, is by no means a self-evident principle. Only by a most arbitrary limitation of the term Mind can we even conceive the possibility of the statement being true. In normal experience much which exists primarily, or even solely, in the content of the mind is fraught with what the world ordinarily calls evil. Passion, lust,

greed, cruelty are all mental traits, and their reality cannot easily be denied by the average person who has wrestled with them in the loneliness of his soul. But Mrs. Eddy acknowledges no such difficulty, for she frankly and sweepingly makes the necessary limitation in her usage of the term. What is good in the world, she says, is Mind (with an initial capital), *i.e.* God. What is ordinarily called not-good or evil is actually non-existent; it is the false product of mortal mind (with small letters). At first this factor “mortal mind” might be supposed to be something intermediate between Mind, or God, and that which is commonly spoken of as matter. But no; in her Glossary at the end of *Science and Health* the authoress defines mortal mind as being “Nothing claiming to be something,” a phrase which can but be dismissed as utterly meaningless. It is equivalent to the equation $X = 0$. Of nothing one can predicate nothing. If one side of an equation or one term in a sentence be nothing, then the other side or the other term can only be nothing. Yet here “Nothing” is asserted to possess an attribute, that of striving, for it makes a claim that it is something. The notion is altogether beyond comprehension.

It is no answer to assert that the hypothetical something which somehow results from this enigmatic Nothing that is striving or claiming is an illusion, for even an illusion is something definite and real. It is not that which it purports to be, for it is, or results from, a misapprehension of it, but it certainly exists and demands explanation in an ordered universe no less than a seemingly self-evident truth. It cannot be dismissed as non-existent, and grave consequences may well result from such an attitude. A mirage in the desert is an illusion, but it is nevertheless a fact, though admittedly a distorted fact, and the wise traveller regards it as such, for in certain circumstances a reasonable inference may be drawn as to the actual whereabouts of the reality which it misrepresents but does not deny.

It is not too much to say that if this notion of mortal mind is invalid, then the bulk of Christian Science metaphysics is invalid; but that the notion is valid no competent independent student of the subject has as yet demonstrated. It is a vast illogical assumption, formulated to explain away those aspects of reality which still remain when all the valid explanation possible has been exhausted.

Perhaps the most remarkable contradiction in the book is that given in Chapter XIII ("Teaching Christian Science"), which appears after more than 450 pages have been mainly devoted to the contention that pain is non-existent, an illusory belief of mortal mind. As an instance of the argument the following may be quoted :

"You say a boil is painful; but that is impossible, for matter without mind is not painful. The boil simply manifests, through inflammation and swelling, a belief in pain, and this belief is called a boil. Now administer mentally to your patient a high attenuation of truth, and it will soon cure the boil. The fact that pain cannot exist where there is no mortal mind to feel it is a proof that this so-called mind makes its own pain—that is, its own *belief* in pain."

That is, pain does not exist, only belief in pain, and this belief is not real, for it is a product of mortal mind; if you are able "to attentuate truth" (surely a dangerous and double-edged phrase), the boil with its illusion of pain will disappear.

Yet, despite this argument, repeated so often in various forms, we read in Chapter XIII :

"If from an injury or from any cause a Christian Scientist were seized with pain so violent that he could not treat himself mentally,—and the Scientists had failed to relieve him,—the sufferer could call a surgeon, who would give him a hypodermic injection; then, when the belief of pain was lulled, he could handle his own case mentally. Thus it is that we 'prove all things; (and) hold fast that which is good.'"

No comment on proof of this kind is needed. "It may very well be grateful to the fool that takes it down." Other contradictions and absurdities might be quoted almost indefinitely, but to continue would be to miss our main purpose, which is to assess the relative merits and demerits of the system, particularly with reference to its possible influence on the religion of the future. The demerits may be summarised as follows :

(1) Christian Science is unsound logically and metaphysically, and therefore will never commend itself to first-class thinkers, who demand that a true system of belief must be consistent within itself and with the observed and authenticated facts of life.

(2) It is purely individualistic. It has no social gospel, for it does not acknowledge the real existence of poverty, squalor and economic hardship, for these with their attendant evils are merely supposed products of so-called mortal mind. Says Mrs. Eddy, "When . . . less thought is given to sanitary subjects there will be better constitutions and less disease."

(3) Its appeal is essentially materialistic, for with unceasing reiteration it emphasises the supreme value of physical well-being. If the reward of virtue be the enjoyment of good health, then assuredly that Christian Scientist who is natively endowed with exuberant vitality may well be pardoned for exhibiting some degree of smug self-complacency, and we must not expect him to evince much sympathy or consideration for his hapless, and presumably sinful, neighbour, born, let us say, of syphilitic parents. ("Heredity is not a law," says Mrs. Eddy. "In proportion to our understanding of Christian Science we are freed from the belief of heredity.")

(4) It "departmentalises" religion, and isolates Faith from contact with the common facts of life, thus giving a spurious appearance of self-sufficiency to its system of belief. Whilst

claiming God to be All-in-all it rejects as unreal those features of experience which seem not to harmonise with the supposed nature of God, yet those very facts are amongst the most stubborn that fall to the lot of man.

(5) It exalts the power of mind (or Mind), but is not concerned to study the methods whereby mind expresses itself or realises its higher ends. It offers no satisfactory definition or explanation of personality, nor does it suggest any clear notion as to how separate minds interpenetrate one another and yet retain their respective identities.

(6) It treats the Bible in a totally unscientific and uncritical fashion, selecting and transposing its contents in complete disregard of the findings either of common sense or of scholarship.

(7) It is rigorously exclusive, intolerant of, and unsympathetic towards other forms of religious life. It makes a claim to infallibility and finality similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church, though without the vast accumulation of world-wide, centuries old, racial experience which that great Church enjoys, and which endows it with a wisdom and a comprehensive understanding of the needs of human nature which, in all charity, can scarcely be allowed to Mrs. Eddy and her devotees.

But what of its positive and helpful aspects? Has it any? It certainly has, and it is to be regretted that the older churches have been so concerned with the errors of Christian Science that they have largely overlooked its genuine contribution to religious thought and practice.

It has clearly shown the immensely beneficent results of a rigorous spiritual discipline. Even its persistent emphasis upon the value of physical health is far from unimportant, for we may be sure that a world that was spiritually sound would suffer much less physical distress than has to be borne in the world as we know it. Christian Science imposes upon its believers exacting spiritual exercises, involving the regular

and skilfully directed reading of appropriate literature, habits of self-control (especially of imagination and impulse), systematic meditation and prayer, and the maintenance of a cheerful and buoyant attitude towards the world and its problems. Would that all who call themselves Christians were as consistent in their spiritual duties and disciplines as the average Christian Scientist will generally be found to be.

Further, this movement has unquestionably shown that as yet we cannot possibly establish the limits which may with assurance be allowed to the power of the mind to direct and dominate the functions of the body. It may be that ultimately the Christian Science Church will be looked back upon as having been little more than the best organised, most lavishly supported, and most widely advertised of many closely allied faith-healing movements. Even so it could at least claim that it had obliged reluctant minds to acknowledge the fact that such movements had proved not only their own peculiar utilitarian value, but also that a purely materialistic view of bodily functions could not permanently be established.

The parallel tendencies in modern medical psychology need not be over-stressed, for they are too well known to be ignored, yet perhaps they would not have attracted so much attention even in the medical profession itself but for the more extravagant claims of Christian Science. We are beyond doubt witnessing in our day an important development in the relationships of Faith and Science—the former becoming more practical and the latter more metaphysical—and the result can scarcely but be beneficial to mankind. There never has been fundamental contradiction between the two; what has been required is a readjustment of their relative claims, consequent upon a better understanding by each of the other's peculiar sphere and function.

It has been said that if doctors were but more Christian and Christian Scientists more scientific, it would not matter which of them treated a patient—so long as he had a good

nurse! There is more than satire in this witticism. We may interpret it as meaning that if medical men would but frankly recognise the great value of spiritual influences as curative factors; if religious teachers of all persuasions would but frankly recognise the importance and value of the contributions made by modern science to our knowledge as to the interrelations of body and mind—(empirically and not too intelligently applied by faith healers), and if only both would agree to work together more cordially in an atmosphere of generous and humane sympathy, the weal and woe of mankind might speedily be immeasurably reduced.

It must be asserted that Christian Science has not discovered in its power of healing that objective guarantee that its beliefs are valid which the modern world needs in its religion, but it must be allowed that Christian Science has certainly made an important experimental contribution to the fundamental religious conviction that man is a creature in whom spiritual forces are struggling to assume supremacy over the physical elements of his being. Mind is already to some extent independent of its material environment. Though conditioned by the facts of its world evolution, new ends of a spiritual nature are being discerned, and towards those ends mind is clearly striving in the higher forms of human experience. We must accept with gratitude all new manifestations of spiritual power which may be vouchsafed to us, and especially all knowledge which makes for the greater joy and well-being of man.

Mental healing is truly successful only when it raises the whole personality to a higher plane of experience. To pursue physical health for its own sake is to miss the true end of our being, for outward health is by no means an invariable sign of an inward and a spiritual grace. The Apostle Paul suffered the "thorn in the flesh" with cheerful resignation, joyously acknowledging that despite its discomfort, God's Grace was sufficient for him. The wisest

and sanest Christian thought has always admitted the reality and the importance of bodily functions, but has always placed them in subservience to the functions and purposes of the spirit. Faith in the saving power of God is the foundation of all true health, and when mankind, fully recognising the personal and social implications of faith, fearlessly consecrates itself to the task of embodying them in all human relationships, it will not be far from the Kingdom of Heaven.

and stable foundations laid by the struggling, suffering, aspiring Palestinian race of long ago.

From the beginning of the Christian era, however, the stream flowed westward. The missionary propaganda of Paul was inevitably drawn in that direction by the supreme domination of Rome, and very speedily the fermenting influences of the new faith centred there. Jerusalem remained as a mere symbol of the Church's unity; in Rome was the reality. For many centuries the great populations far eastward of Jerusalem were virtually forgotten; behind mountain range and massive wall they pursued their separate ways untouched and untroubled by the varying fortunes of the restless, querulous, inquisitive tribes of the West.

Then, within the span of but a few generations, the two great streams drew together; here and there the waters overflowed and commingled in fresh rivulets which gave promise that perhaps they too might become great rivers, indeed greater rivers than their parent streams, for did they not from their origin share the virtues and qualities which hitherto had flowed separately? One such rivulet was Theosophy. It sprang into being at a time when many thoughtful and critically minded Westerners were becoming gravely disturbed as to the worth and further promise of their own traditions. Their religious orthodoxies were losing their grip, their ideals and loyalties seemed to be ill founded, and their spiritual life was drying up under the harsh glare of historical research and the blazing achievements of natural science. And there, far away in the neglected East, were great peoples with an ancient culture, a distinctive philosophy of their own, and a tranquil outlook upon the world and its turmoil, all of which seemingly offered the peace of mind which has for ever haunted, but, alas! eluded, the triumphs of European genius.

The term Theosophy is a compound:—*Theos*, God; *Sophia*, Wisdom—the Wisdom of God, or Divine Wisdom.

CHAPTER IV

THEOSOPHY: THE AUTHORITY OF THE EAST

No modern religious movement is more persuasive in its appeal than is Theosophy. A glow of Oriental romance surrounds it; the glamour of a number of very remarkable personalities attaches to it, and the lives of many of its adherents attract attention and respect by their wide culture and serene charm. To be interested in such a movement needs no apology.

Looking back upon the course of the nineteenth century, we can well see that the emergence of Theosophy or some similar movement was well-nigh inevitable, for it was a direct outcome of the sudden impact of Eastern modes of life and thought upon the traditions of the West which that century witnessed. The Christian Church in its origin was neither Eastern nor Western. It sprang from a source that had flowed for centuries midway between the two. This source was Judaism, which neither drained away its moral energy in the illimitable sands of Oriental mysticism nor allowed itself to become too deeply drawn into the intricate channels of Occidental speculation. Neither India nor Greece laid strong hands upon it until its peculiar genius had worked out its deeper implications sufficiently thoroughly for it never to become seriously involved in the risk of absorption or marked perversion. To this day the vitality of Christianity springs from its roots in the sublimities of Jewish prophecy and the glowing raptures of Jewish psalmist and seer. Eccentricities and aberrations there may be, but they are constantly checked by recurrent reference to the solid

This Wisdom, however, is peculiar; it is "an immediate divine illumination or inspiration claimed to be possessed by specially gifted men who possess abnormal control over natural forces." So runs the ordinary dictionary (Chambers') definition. This illumination gives to those who enjoy it a deeper insight into the Divine Essence than is, or can be, explicitly taught to those who have it not, for it reveals an inner or esoteric side of religion which, though common to all religions, finds expression through them only in symbolic and sometimes impure forms, in their various dogmas, creeds, rites and practices. Says Mrs. Besant (*Theosophy*), "Where the exoteric side propounds a dogma to the intellect, the esoteric offers a truth to the Spirit; the one is seen and defended by reason, the other is grasped by intuition—that faculty 'beyond the reason' after which the philosophy of the West is now groping."

These esoteric truths are said to have always underlain the historical religions, and have sometimes been partially acknowledged by them. They were the hidden content of the Mystery Religions of Greek and Roman times; they were known to Paul, and of course to Jesus ("Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to others in parables"). In Islam too they are to be found by those who practise the discipline of life and meditation propounded by the Sufis, whilst in Hinduism full recognition is given to the notion that there are higher and lower truths, the latter imparted to the popular mind by instruction, the former to be acquired, as in Sufism, only by meditation and strict self-discipline.

This deeper, inner knowledge cannot be externally taught; the violent cannot take it by force. Only the disciplinary *methods* can be so imparted. The knowledge to which the methods lead can be acquired and enjoyed only by those who submit to and practise them. In due course the inner illumination will come; the devotee will receive enlighten-

ment, and the assured and final basis of spiritual truth will be revealed to him.

Yet this is not all. If it were it would fall into the abyss of sheer subjectivism, and would in no wise meet the needs of those who are now seeking objective truths. The trouble with the mystic has always been that his visions have no objective validity for anyone but himself. They can be neither disproved nor proved; hence their value is immediately and solely personal. They satisfy, but do not pass beyond, the seer himself. Theosophy, however, claims to do much more than this, for it offers us a cosmology and a body of doctrine concerning the origin, history and structure not only of this world but of many other worlds too. It thus claims to be a descriptive science as well as a spiritual philosophy, derived from supernatural revelations to the divinely initiated. These secondary teachings are stated in the Principles of the Theosophical Society to be

"those which are the common teachings of all religions, living or dead; the Unity of God; the triplicity of His nature in manifestation; the descent of Spirit into matter, and hence the graded ranks of Intelligence, whereof humanity is one . . . reincarnation . . . karma . . . the existence of divine Teachers, superhuman men, often called the White Brotherhood, the Elder Brothers of the Race.

"All religions teach, or have taught, these truths; though from time to time one or another of these teachings may temporarily fall into the background, ever to reappear—as the doctrine of reincarnation fell out of ecclesiastical Christianity, but is now returning to it. . . Religions do not copy each other; they are shaped in non-essentials, according to the needs of the time, by the White Brotherhood, the Custodians of the Wisdom, and hence contain the fundamental truths, with varying details."

All this is surely very interesting, and, if true, very important. Not unnaturally, many have felt that here, in the common though hitherto unrecognised witness of all the

religions of the world, inspired and illumined by Divine Wisdom, was the guarantee of the objective reality and abiding worth of the spiritual life for which so many distressed and burdened hearts have been wistfully yearning. And what could be more attractive to a mind perplexed by the crudities and arrogancies of so much religious dogmatism than the tolerant and universally sympathetic objects set in the forefront of the Theosophical Society's statement of principles?—

“(1) To form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or colour.

“(2) To encourage the study of comparative religion, philosophy and science.

“(3) To investigate the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man.”

Yet our task is not easy. We have seen that the mystic who takes refuge in his solitary visions is beyond our criticism. Provided he leaves us alone we must leave him alone. His subjective apprehensions may or may not correspond with an objective reality; he may believe they do, but we cannot know. When, however, he propounds the content of his vision to us we must examine it as we would any other testimony, and endeavour to correlate it with the assured results in other departments of research. And so we must ask what is the authority for this “secondary teaching,” and who are the White Brotherhood, “the Custodians of Wisdom.”

They are, in brief, the great Teachers of mankind, who have founded or purified the successive civilisations and religions, and who are charged with the responsibility of preserving from generation to generation the teaching transmitted to them. In any one generation they are scattered over the world but maintain intimate relations with each other. “It is to a group of these now stationed in Tibet,” says Mrs.

Besant, “that the founding of the Theosophical Society in 1875 is ascribed, and it is these who are constantly referred to in Theosophical literature as Mahatmas, Arhats, Masters, Brothers, or Adepts.”

These Brothers, who have yet to be discovered by travellers, tell us much about the evolution of the spirit in successive bodies, *i.e.* reincarnation, the direction of this progress under the law of strict causation, or karma, and a great deal of what to the ordinary reader must seem to be utterly incomprehensible matter concerning the occult history of the cosmos. On the “Akashic Records,” we are told, the Eternal Memory is recorded; from thence the Adept derives his knowledge as to what happened billions upon billions of years ago. We hear of the first human beings on this planet, the Sons of God, who were not human in shape and were about 170 feet high. These lived some forty million years ago. Then we hear of the Hyperborean race, who reproduced by extrusion through the pores of the skin; then the Lemurians (a fraction of the continent of Lemuria still remains as Madagascar), creatures with three eyes, the vestige of one still remaining as the pineal gland. Then came the fourth root-race, the Atlanteans, whose culture in corrupt form survived in the Peruvian civilisation. In this period Black Magic flourished, the Atlantean magicians assuming at times the forms of savage beasts.

“But see! out of the passage . . . comes a wild procession; hairy bipeds, long-armed and claw-footed, with animals' heads and manes streaming over shoulders, horrid, appalling, non-human, yet horribly human. They hold in their claw-like hands phials and boxes, and as they mingle with the wildest dancers they give these to the revellers most mad with drink and lust. These smear over their bodies the ointment in the boxes, drink the contents of the phials, and lo! they drop senseless, huddled on the ground, but from each huddled heap there springs an animal form, snarling, ravening, and vanishes from the cavern into the darkness of

the outside night." (*Man; Whence, How and Whither*. Madame Blavatsky.)

We may also read of the constitution of worlds and world-systems; of the "chains of globes," each chain passing through its seven stages of evolution; of the seven spheres—Physical, Astral, Mental, Intuitional, Spiritual, Monadic and Divine; indeed, if we choose to study with deep intent the works of Madame Blavatsky, Mrs. Besant, Mr. Leadbeater, and Dr. Rudolf Steiner (all save the first still living), we shall find it difficult to formulate or imagine any possible question to which some sort of an answer is not proffered.

Yet, alas! it is to be feared that the western mind will look in vain for any corroboration of these amazing narratives and revelations in any sober, independent investigation into the origin and purpose of things. Nothing but the unsupported testimony of this group of teachers appears. Again and again one is reminded, as one reads these truly remarkable productions, of the aphorism already quoted:—"What we do not know we imagine; then, by a deft conceit, we imagine that we know." It is a psychological process with which the world is sadly familiar, yet against which it has constantly to be on its guard.

The only tenets of Theosophy which call for serious consideration in an estimate of its possible contribution to the religion of the future are the twin notions of reincarnation and karma. The former, however, has long been familiar to Western thought, to which it was introduced through the philosophies of Pythagoras and Plato. That it has never taken strong hold on the mind of Europe is due, not to any lack of spiritual perception or to the pressure of ecclesiastical prejudice, but simply to the singular lack of tangible evidence put forth on its behalf. The European mind is essentially practical; it is not deficient in philosophical or speculative ability, but it has a deeply-rooted distrust of speculations

which run far in advance of concrete and verifiable data. It will allow a fair margin of hypothetical uncertainty and abstract possibility, but it demands that such inferences as are put forward by its philosophers and theorists for general acceptance shall be solidly based on properly ascertained and duly authenticated facts. It is not a mere accident of history that its peculiar product should be a vast network of laboratories, workshops, steamships and railroads, for these are tangible expressions of its practical needs and empirical values, and in its religion much of the same genius prevails. Show the average European good reason for believing in reincarnation and he will not be averse from giving it consideration. Offer the theory to him on the unsubstantiated testimony of visionaries, and he will evince but a chilly indifference towards it.

To the philosopher, the theory does not commend itself as solving the problems it purports to do, for the reincarnation of an ego that carries forward no trace of its former existences cannot be said to maintain the continuity of selfhood, nor has it any compelling force as a moral motive. It is not without significance that the awakening of India to certain grave moral evils in her social code is coincident with an intellectual ferment which is weakening her traditional belief in this very doctrine.

The teaching of karma, though in Eastern thought closely united with the notion of reincarnation, is not inseparable from it, and in certain forms has always hovered on the edge of Western thought. That a desire, an impulse, an appetite, should work itself out, with all its possibilities fulfilling themselves, not only in time but in eternity, is but a form of philosophical determinism that is not absent even from Christianity, for it underlies the Augustinian theory of human nature and is implicit in much Catholic and (where it survives) Calvinistic theology of to-day. That it must work itself out in successive incarnations of particular egocentric systems is,

however, an assumption which does not follow from the premises, and there would seem to be no adequate reason why we should accept as final an arbitrary testimony to that effect propounded by a "Brotherhood" which is seemingly self-constituted.

On the whole, it may be concluded that the contribution of Theosophy to the religion of the future will be but small. Probably the movement has already passed its zenith. The repudiation by Mr. Krishnamurti of the exalted claims made on his behalf by Mrs. Besant and her followers a few years ago, to the effect that he was destined to be the great new world Teacher, has been a severe blow to its prestige, and as the study of Comparative Religion develops on more strictly scientific lines, collaterally with psychological research into certain abnormal mental processes, we shall almost certainly see a closer and more reasonable mutual adjustment of the respective teachings and claims of the great religions of the world on lines less bizarre and enigmatical than those propounded by Theosophy.

What we do unquestionably owe to that movement is a quickening of our sense of the common unity of religions in the ground of human experience, and the recognition of the principle that every religion has its due contribution to make not only to the philosophy of beginnings and processes, but also to the philosophy of ends. In other words, the importance of Eschatology—the problem of human destiny—is still supreme for religion. Science has told us much about the mechanism and description of vital processes; it is dubious about ultimate origins; it is frankly hypothetical and tentative in its treatment of possible ends. And the soul of man is not satisfied; the riddle of the future haunts it.

"It looks before and after,
And pines for what is not."

The answer of Theosophy may be inadequate, because

unconvincing, yet the answer must still be sought. Religion can have no enduring basis unless it is able to give some assurance to its believers that the cravings of the soul are not hopeless and forlorn illusions, and that its cry for some ray of light upon its further way is not wholly without response from the great powers of the universe.

CHAPTER V

SPIRITUALISM : IS THERE LIGHT FROM BEYOND ?

OF all modern cults, surely Spiritualism is the most fantastic and extravagant ! Is it not proverbial that dead men tell no tales ? Yet here is a movement which in all solemnity claims that dead men may, and actually do, converse with living men. Common sense alone is seemingly sufficient to condemn the notion. We live in an era of motor-cars and aeroplanes, of telephones and radios ; in a world that is too full of practical things, the product of hard, sober, matter-of-fact industry, for there to be room or reason for disembodied spirits to move about, much less for them to establish intercourse with man. Our doubt is likely to be intensified when we find that not everyone is supposed, even by the Spiritualists themselves, to possess the power of apprehending the spirits' utterances. One must be peculiarly constituted, must have a highly organised " psychic " nature, which in any marked degree is seemingly an innate characteristic of but a relatively small number of individuals, and even in their case is of but limited application, to be able to communicate with the spirits of those who have passed beyond the margin of earthly life.

Also, is there not something morbidly indecent in this peeping and prying into the abodes of the dead ? Everyone knows something of that uncanny feeling supposedly inseparable from graveyards at midnight, mortuaries and the telling of ghost stories, and all sensible people agree in resisting it and avoiding the occasions and delusions which give rise to it. If Spiritualism were true, it has been suggested, we might all be in the position of being forced to believe in a life after death, whilst devoutly desiring not to !

Yet a very large movement has sprung up which does most fervently believe that these things are true, that those personalities whose bodies have been laid in the grave are not " dead," but that under certain conditions and to a limited degree may give manifestation of their continued existence in another sphere of being. In their belief that these manifestations are genuine they find that objective guarantee of the reality of the spiritual life which we have seen is the most urgent need of religion to-day.

Belief in the immortality of the soul in one form or another would appear to be fundamental for religion. Said Father Tyrrell : " What distinguishes religion from ethics is the belief in another world and the endeavour to hold intercourse with it." The Christian Church has always accepted this principle as true, though the forms of intercourse approved by it have been the traditionally normal ones of the sacraments and the practice of prayer, with a rather reluctant acquiescence in the personal exercises of mystical experience.

The more direct form of communication through the power of the psychically endowed medium—a taking of the Kingdom of Heaven by violence—has been severely frowned upon, as being either false, psychologically dangerous, or a positively malevolent practice.

Whether the attitude of the Church has been just or not, a distinction is to be rightly drawn between the doctrine of personal survival and that of the immortality of the soul. The latter doctrine can never be clearly established by the methods of psychic research or Spiritualism. It is an inference, which must stand or fall by its own logical consistency with the observed facts of being and a sound philosophical interpretation of Reality, and it is probable that it will never be capable of proof by empirical means. Nevertheless, could the survival of the personal ego after death be rationally and empirically established, the fuller doctrine of immortality would be immensely strengthened. For most people such

an established truth would probably be sufficient; it would remove from the way of the larger faith the great obstacle that is presented by the scepticism of our day; it would substitute for a rampant and domineering materialism the conception of a soul that is free to evolve from one phase of being to another until it finally achieves its immortal destiny in the consummation of the divine purpose concerning it, which is that it should "enjoy God and glorify Him for ever."

The doctrine of survival is thus of great importance, even though we allow this distinction between it and the fuller one of immortality, and whatever may be thought of the claims of psychic research or Spiritualism to have established it beyond reasonable doubt, it cannot be denied that Spiritualism must now be seriously accepted as one of the important religious movements of our day. In this country alone there are some eight hundred Spiritualist churches and societies, the greater number of which hold religious services every Sunday and many other meetings during the week. Of these, about 460 are affiliated with the Spiritualists' National Union, and adopt the "Seven Principles of Spiritualism," which are as follow :

1. The Fatherhood of God.
2. The Brotherhood of Man.
3. Continuous Existence.
4. Communion of Spirits and Ministry of Angels.
5. Personal Responsibility.
6. Compensation and Retribution hereafter for good or ill done on earth.
7. A Path of Endless Progression.

The Union has attempted, though it is to be feared with but modified success, to introduce some sort of order and reasonable co-ordination amongst the indiscriminate and often irresponsible groups that have sprung up and become self-

constituted as Spiritualist "churches." On the whole, those groups that are affiliated with it would seem to conduct their services with a real sense of reverence and a genuine desire to give expression to the higher and more refined needs of the religious consciousness. In a movement that is peculiarly open to aberration and individual idiosyncrasy it is not surprising that many bizarre and extravagant beliefs and practices are to be found, but it is evident that the Spiritualists' National Union has striven vigorously and not by any means unsuccessfully to mould this intractable material into a definitely religious organisation. It must be remembered that the movement is for the most part a very poor one, and it has thus lacked the prestige, and its meeting-places the attractiveness, of the more fashionable communions; nevertheless, it is estimated by Mr. Ernest W. Oaten, the editor of *The Two Worlds*, that "every Sunday evening there are at least six hundred public meetings held for religious purposes, at which the average attendance would be something over two hundred. This gives us an approximate attendance of 180,000 as a minimum every Sunday evening at Spiritualist meetings. At most societies," he continues, "clairvoyant descriptions of spirit people are given at two or three meetings per week, and I compute that over three hundred thousand deceased persons are described to our audiences from public platforms every year, 75 per cent. of which are clearly recognised as deceased friends."¹

The theology of these churches is fluid in character, as it is bound to be when virtually all restraints of tradition are removed and the sense of formal ecclesiastical ostracism is strong. It is probably just to say, however, that belief in God is fundamental and is strongly held, though no marked effort is made to give expression to that belief in precise terms, whilst in regard to the person of Christ the bulk of the

¹ From his necessarily limited experience, the present writer would regard this proportion as a generous exaggeration.

churches (and especially those organised in the S.N.U.) are Unitarian.

As to the strength of the movement abroad, it must suffice to mention that there is an International Spiritualists' Federation, with its headquarters in Paris, at the last annual congress of which official delegates from as many as twenty-eight countries attended.

Any attempt to evaluate all this activity, particularly by an outsider, must necessarily be personal and somewhat conjectural. Only on one point would the present writer dogmatise, viz. that all *a priori* criticism of the movement is worse than useless; it is almost bound to be wrong. No judgment that is worth a moment's consideration can be based on the uninformed assumption that the alleged facts of Spiritualism are a vast, intangible, unsubstantiated mass of illusion. That phase of criticism has passed for ever. Nor is the assertion that they are opposed to common sense of any weight. The entire progress of thought illustrates only too clearly that although the right of common sense to the first word in every argument must be conceded, it has but seldom a right to the last word.

Of one thing we may be assured: that many of the phenomena said by Spiritualists to occur, and which form the basis of their belief, actually do occur. Professor Hans Driesch, Professor of Philosophy in the University of Leipzig, in a work entitled *The Crisis in Psychology*, acknowledges their reality, though he reserves judgment as to their significance. "The actuality of psychical phenomena is doubted to-day only by the incorrigible dogmatist," he asserts. Dr. C. D. Broad of Cambridge may also be quoted, from his important work *Mind, and its Place in Nature*: "The matter collected by psychical research *must* be taken into account by any theory of the mind which honestly looks at the available evidence. Some scientists seem to me to confuse the Author of Nature with the editor of *Nature*; or at least to suppose that there

can be no productions of the former which would not be accepted for publication by the latter. And I see no reason to believe this." To refuse to acknowledge the *facts* to-day is to place oneself in the position of those mediæval priests and scholars who refused to look through Galileo's telescope!

Yet many who do deny the facts are often not clear as to what the facts really are. They confuse the term "physical phenomena" (which has a distinct meaning in psychical research) with the phrase psychical phenomena, or they describe Spiritualist séances in such a way as to arouse a strong suspicion that they have never attended one (*vide* Sir Philip Gibbs' *Darkened Rooms*, and Mr. Aldous Huxley's *The World of Light*).

However, to be reasonably assured that a substantial body of fact does indubitably lie behind the claims of Spiritualism it is scarcely necessary nowadays to frequent séances. As Mr. J. H. Tuckwell justly remarks in his book *The Faith of the Future*, "One does not consider it needful to be present at the demonstrations of the dissecting-room in order to be convinced of the truths of anatomy. Then why should it be thought necessary to attend séances in order to be convinced of the truths of Spiritism? As a matter of fact, there is almost a superabundant testimony available in both cases to enable any just and reasonable mind to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. And as regards Spiritism in particular, it is no exaggeration to say that no question has ever been subjected to more prolonged, more serious, more exhaustive, or more rigorous investigation."

It is not the facts that are to-day in serious question among competent investigators, but their interpretation, and as yet many who accept the facts hesitate to draw definite inferences from them. The prevailing conservative attitude tends to the notion that the physical phenomena of Spiritualism may be explained by the animistic theory, which is that the

extrusion of certain rather rare but quite natural forces and substances embodied in the physical structure of man is under the control of the subconscious mentality of the person concerned (the medium), whilst the mental phenomena are due either to subconscious mental activity, involving probably a partial or complete dissociation of personality, or to telepathy; possibly, it is suggested, in some cases the two conditions operate conjointly.

Certainly much of the matter one reads and hears about is explicable on one or other of these hypotheses, yet the present writer is bound to admit that in the published researches of recent years, and even within his own limited experience, there is much that cannot be satisfactorily explained within these limits. Even much that at first sight would seem to lend itself to these explanations is marked by a lucidity and a singularly forceful and intelligent appearance of purposiveness, pointing continuously and persistently towards the one end of establishing the identity of the discarnate entity purporting to be activating the phenomena, that the most sceptical investigator must at times feel his negative caution giving way. He will probably feel inclined to agree at least with the position of William James, who "devoted much labour through many years to an investigation, and he sums up the total effect which the whole mass of phenomena produced on his mind by saying it was such as to make him believe that 'a will to communicate' was in some shape there" (quoted from *The Faith of the Future*).

In recent years there has been a marked development in certain types of phenomena which would seem to rule out altogether the possibility that they might be the products of subconscious mental activity and telepathy. For detailed information reference must be made to the several modern works on the subject, among which may be mentioned the exhaustive articles in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* describing the investigations made through

the mediumship of Mrs. Crandon, the wife of a prominent Boston physician. Another record, more easily obtainable, of a very careful investigation spread over a number of years and involving some very remarkable features, will be found in the work, *Some New Evidence for Human Survival*, by the Rev. C. Drayton Thomas. A more general statement by the same author may also be commended: *Life beyond Death, with Evidence*.

Some of the aversion felt by many towards the subject-matter of psychical research is probably due to the rather unconvincing accounts given of the after-life by many reputed spirit messages. Many of these accounts are far from impressive, possibly because they are pretty much what we might expect them to be; they respond too readily to the wish-fulfilment theory of their origin. Probably, however, this is not wholly to underrate them. Any knowledge of an after-life, with probably profound differences of spatial and temporal conditions as compared with this life—differences as to the nature and extent of which even the Spiritualists themselves can but speculate—could not be more than symbolically represented, and would necessarily be coloured by present sense experience, yet it is surely no unpardonable sin of credulity to suppose that, after all, our deepest intuitions are not wholly devoid of value as pointers to a larger reality. Granted that we had a convincing assurance as to the identity of our communicator, might we not reasonably suppose that such corroboration of our dearest hopes as might be forthcoming would, within broad limits, be at least figuratively valid?

The phenomena of Spiritualism are likely to attract the increasing attention of all who are concerned with establishing the reality, and to some extent the content, of the spiritual life. The religion of the future is bound to be affected by the researches of the more scientific students of the subject, as well as by the more popular and frankly experimental religious

life of the Spiritualist churches. Even if the final judgment of dispassionate inquirers be given against the spiritist hypothesis the effects will be considerable; they may, indeed, be disastrous. Dr. William McDougall has stated that "unless Psychical Research . . . can discover facts incompatible with materialism, materialism will continue to spread. No other power can stop it; revealed religion and metaphysical philosophy are equally helpless before the advancing tide. And if that tide continues to rise and to advance as it is now doing, all the signs point to the view that it will be a destroying tide, that it will sweep away all the hard-won gains of humanity, all the moral traditions built up by the efforts of countless generations for the increase of truth, justice and charity." (Extract from Presidential Address to the American Society for Psychical Research: quoted from *Journal of Amer. S.P.R.*, January 1923.)

Dr. W. McDougall is a very high authority, but perhaps he is wrong: even so, he gives expression to a large and important body of opinion in the world of to-day.

If the final judgment prove favourable to the claims of Spiritualism the positive effects will be of immense consequence. No longer will belief in another life remain a bare hypothesis, a reasonable hope, a wistful (or fearful) possibility. It will become the mainspring of ideal endeavour, and will oblige men to acknowledge that the ends of conduct are to be sought not in things seen but in things unseen, not in a sphere which is temporal but in one which is eternal.

Psychical research, physical research, biological research; these are probably the most important departments of human inquiry to-day. The signs are patent that they are gradually drawing together and are seeking some common category of thought in which their results may be harmoniously co-ordinated. The time for that co-ordination is not yet; neither is it remote. In the relatively near future we may

expect to find conclusions elaborated of the greatest importance for man's happiness and spiritual peace.

Note.—A separate volume appears in this series on *Psychical Research and Religion*, by L. J. Belton. It should be read in conjunction with this chapter.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT OF THE FUTURE ?

To assume the mantle of a prophet (but without the prophetic gift) is an easy but a futile act. It is open to anyone to anticipate the future, and nothing but the future can refute one. But the wise man makes no such attempt. He knows not what the morrow may bring forth: how then, he asks, can he presume to know what the next generation may bring forth? All we can profitably do is to survey the tendencies of our day with as impartial and as comprehensive a grasp of the significant facts as possible, and infer from them what we may reasonably expect their outcome to be.

We have seen that what is happening to-day in the sphere of religion is the breakdown of traditional, ecclesiastical and even scholarly authority, and a frank return made to avowedly heterodox and directly primitive modes of spiritual adventure. The three outstanding modern cults we have examined have really nothing distinctively new to offer us. Indeed, that is part of their claim. Theosophy and Spiritualism tell us that their fundamental tenets will be found in the ancient religious literature of the world, not excepting the Old and New Testaments, whilst Christian Science asserts that it is merely revealing afresh the truth of the teaching of Christ. Though their respective teachings widely differ, they are agreed in their submission that they are rediscovering ancient truths that have been obscured by the flood of modern materialism. If there is anything definitely modern about them it is the method by which their explorations are undertaken. Scientific method—

“to sit down before fact like a little child” but with the cautious mind of a skilled observer—plays its part, though rather as an influence than as a rule, and whatever results may finally accrue will certainly rest upon a far surer foundation of carefully attested witness than any which the ancient world could offer. Thus, any conclusions which may be based upon them will be far more reliable than man has hitherto known.

It is highly important that these investigations and explorations should continue, for no possible sphere of existence whence light may come should be ignored, and it is to be regretted that all the traditional churches should, with some emphasis, have slammed to their doors upon them. That they *will* go on is certain, whatever the churches may think or say. Not over much notice is taken nowadays as to what the churches have to say on many matters, so they have little to lose, and possibly much to gain, by taking close cognisance of these tendencies. Apology is demanded now not from those who are plunging into the work of inquiry, but rather from those who still turn a cold and unsympathetic eye upon it.

So far as the immediate future is concerned, the outlook is confused and enigmatical. We have not as yet an adequate body of data upon which assured conclusions may be grounded. It may well be that for another generation or so this transitional phase—mainly individualistic, radical, in some measure irresponsible and irrational—will persist. But in due course the *speculative* period will return. The theologians have, alas! too often blunderingly confused metaphysics with religion, and must, in consequence, share some of the blame for the disrepute into which metaphysics has fallen, but it is a fatal mistake to fly to the other extreme of supposing that metaphysical systems do not matter. Facts and values cannot be left indefinitely in isolation, or but loosely and empirically correlated. Once again, maybe fifty years hence, meta-

physics and theology will become fashionable, and the Queen of the Sciences may re-ascend her throne surrounded by a throng of courtiers consisting of those sciences once called "natural," but which in that future time will have realised that they represent but one phase of a reality which in its totality is supernatural.

And perhaps it will be, in that not far-distant day, that the main structure of religion will not be strikingly different from that with which we are familiar. The foundations will be deeper and securer, the superstructure will lack certain details which at present bulk rather prominently, and others will be displayed which we can now but vaguely determine; yet the ground-plan will probably be essentially the same, and the broad elevation is likely to present no very substantial difference. To change the metaphor, the frame-work within which the picture of the religious life is sketched will probably be less clearly defined than in the past; it will have widened sufficiently to include much that formerly was excluded, but the main outlines of the picture will stand out more boldly, and with greater assurance than at present we shall be able to look upon it as worthily representing the convictions of man as to his ideals, his duties, and his aspirations.

To attempt to sketch that picture now would be presumptuous. Let us, however, not be deterred from allowing our imagination to play around it a little. Possibly we shall find the lineaments of God to be less sharply outlined than is often now the case. Men will be more reverently agnostic when they realise how limited and relative is their knowledge of the Eternal; they will not so readily assume that they can pass lightly and glibly from the finite to a knowledge of the Infinite; only a few of the intermediate gradations will be known to them, and they will acknowledge with a fresh but an ennobling humility that the ultimate Being whom they reverently worship is in His fullness beyond finding out. Nevertheless, their

knowledge of Him within its limits will be sure and profound, and abundantly satisfying. They will

" touch God's right hand in the darkness,
And be lifted up and strengthened."

It is possible that the doctrine of the Trinity will still play a part in the new scheme as a metaphysical symbol of the nature of God, though not as a divinely revealed dogma to be accepted implicitly and uncritically as an act of faith. The doctrine will be better understood, its limitations no less than its values being acknowledged. In its first formulations, especially in Greek philosophy, it was an attempt to solve the paradoxical problem, always present in human experience, as to how any one thing can be individual and yet, at the same time, be related with other things in a common totality. Separate objects have a distinctiveness of their own, yet they may be grouped together in classes, species and so on, which ultimately merge into an all-comprehensive unity. It is a problem which confronts everyone who attempts seriously to rationalise his own experience, his relations with his fellow-men, and above all his relations with, and knowledge of, God. It is a paradox which lies at the heart of experience and has never been satisfactorily solved, yet it involves important issues for life and thought, for it is the problem which lies behind the arguments concerning free-will and determinism, grace and necessity, and the immanence and transcendence of God.

The doctrine of the Trinity does not solve these problems, but it implicitly acknowledges that somehow they are wrapped in the supreme mystery of the Being of the Godhead, and as such it has a metaphysical value for religion which will probably result in its perpetuation when more traditional and rather naïve reasons for accepting it are abandoned.

The attempt to exhaust the manifestations of God in any particular historical event or personage will be abandoned.

So far as the person of Christ is concerned, it will be admitted that "the Incarnation is true not of Christ exclusively, but of man universally, and of God everlastingly" (Martineau). Even so, the majesty and the dignity of the historical Jesus of Nazareth will in no degree be diminished. In some high sense, perhaps even now not altogether realised, he will be acknowledged as fulfilling in his spirit the ideals of Jewish prophecy and as realising the potentialities of the sons of men. It is certain too that the symbol of the cross will still sway the hearts and bind the affections of men. It is a symbol of spiritual conflict far older than Christianity; thousands of years ago it stood for the upward thrust of the soul breaking its way through the hampering and obstructive dead-level satisfactions of the natural world, and perhaps thousands of years hence it may still retain its supreme value in this respect. As the symbol, however, of a vengeful Deity exacting the price of blood for a hypothetical primeval "Fall" it will pass into oblivion.

With a deeper conviction as to the fuller destiny of the soul hereafter, the conception of duty will deepen and strengthen in the mind of man. He will recognise that he is building not for time but for eternity, and that even as he now fashions his life so will he afterwards enjoy or suffer its own effects. The sense of human solidarity will be strengthened by this deepened belief, for realising that his life is grounded in a spiritual universe, each man will come to feel a closer affinity with his neighbour whose life also has beginnings and ends beyond mortal ken, but whose destiny is in a vital sense interwoven with his own.

Reverence and wonder will once again return. Mystery has been obscured for awhile, but has not been dispelled. The great challenges addressed by the world to the mind of man have been evaded, not solved; they still remain, and again and again, for so long as life exists on this planet, they will provide the material from which the context of religious life

and thought will emerge. The struggle and effort of mind to rise from the unconscious to the self-conscious, from the materially dependent to the materially independent, from the instinctive and habitual to the free, the noble and the dutiful: the enigma of pain and evil and the persistent frustration of the ideal by the actual: the final vicissitude of death, so poignant for those who remain, even though faith in a fuller life beyond be assured; these constitute the deeper issues of life, and whilst they remain, as always they must in this finite world of ours, religion cannot die.

And so, though the superficial forms of religion with which we are familiar to-day may pass, the foundations of religion are strong and sure. They are given in no historical church or revelation, howsoever mighty or ancient it may be. They are given in the broad facts of human experience, the volitions of the heart and the questionings of the mind. On these the religion of the future will be raised, a religion as broad as earth, as high as Heaven.

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