

III

THE APPROACH TO RELIGION—MYSTICAL AND INTELLECTUAL

RESPONSIBILITY FOR BELIEF.—How far are we responsible for our belief? That we shall suffer if we disbelieve is certain: but how far are we guilty if our belief is wrong? No truth can be denied with impunity in whatever sphere it is found. A man may cherish scepticism regarding the worth of vaccination, but when the scourge of smallpox falls upon the community he and others will be made to pay for the vagaries of his belief. So, in the highest sphere of religious doctrine, if a man be an agnostic he is living in a sadder world and is preparing himself for a future in which his environment will be utterly unsympathetic and strange. It is quite plain that he will be punished for his unbelief: but how far is he morally guilty? If with an earnest, unprejudiced, conscientious spirit he had sought for an intellectual rest in the great beliefs of Christianity, and had sorrowfully to own that he had not found it, should he be in God's sight a sinner; and would his conscience affirm the justice of it if, here and hereafter, God's vengeance was denounced on his soul?

It seems fairly certain that this is not so. Principal Caird, in one of his University Sermons, dealt with this theme, and as an illustration gave a wonderfully

eloquent account of the career of those singular brothers, John Henry Newman, author of the *Grammar of Assent*, Cardinal priest of the Roman Church, and Francis Newman, author of *Phases of Faith* and an agnostic. Two careers more diverse there could not have been; nor two more different minds. One was a far loftier nature than the other, more spiritual, more gracious, more serene. Yet both were earnest truth-seekers. And their search for truth landed them—the one in opinions which seem to many people superstitious, and the other in a desolate and homeless scepticism. “Shall we believe,” asked Principal Caird, “that either of those high and truth-loving souls shall be condemned and abandoned by God? Is it not, I do not say more charitable but more truly reverential, to think that their errors and difficulties were but the discipline by which the God of truth was leading them onwards to Himself, and that in His own time and way, from the labyrinth in which they seemed to be lost, His loving hand guided them out into the light of that eternal truth for which here they so passionately yet so vainly longed?”

Every heart that has felt the Spirit of Christ must echo such a thought—certain that the blessing which Christ pronounced upon those who “seek” is not forfeited on account of their temporary failure, and that one day, here or hereafter, they will “find.”

But when this has been said, the whole question of our responsibility for what we believe has by no means been exhausted. People say, We must face the facts, and yield conviction where the facts are found. Yes; but we may choose for ourselves what facts we are willing to see, and we may wilfully shut our eyes to others. We may accustom ourselves to a narrow

range both of phenomena and of mental processes. We may seriously damage the instrument of belief. In a hundred ways our character will act and react on our opinions. While in many cases it is true that we are not responsible for what we believe, in many others—and possibly in a far greater number of cases—we need to be warned lest there be in us an evil heart of unbelief.

The nature of religious belief in itself makes this evident. Such belief is not reached by the same processes as mathematical or even historical proof. Let a man be shown a proposition in Euclid, and have the lines of its demonstration explained to him, and, if he has understood the argument, he cannot avoid the conclusion. His character has no influence on his judgement. A Saint Francis of Assisi and a Caesar Borgia must have accepted the same belief. In a historical question like, say, the character of Henry VIII. or the problem of Queen Mary's guilt there is perhaps more room for the influence of disposition upon opinion, though there also a merely intellectual judgement is the only sound one. But, when we gain the spiritual realm, our beliefs are rather an affirmation of the whole nature than a pure decision of the rationalising mind.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength”: that is to say, Christianity claims the homage of the whole man. The heart is named first as the central focus from which all the rays of the moral life go forth. Then come the three forms of activity in which that life manifests itself—the soul, the mind, the strength; or as we should say to-day the feelings, the intellect, the

will. It is thus by the whole nature rather than by any single faculty that the highest truth is reached. Take, for example, the arguments for Theism—the proofs of the existence of God which are at the basis of all religion. They call them big names, the ontological, the cosmological, the teleological, the moral proof. So far as these merely intellectual arguments go they are powerful and sufficient. But no one ever believed in God on account of the arguments that demonstrate His being. The best of them leaves a hiatus between intellectual satisfaction and that conviction which is worth calling belief. It is by the combination of many reasons and many faiths and many aspirations of the spirit: it is by the road by which a child believes in its parents' affection, or a bride gives her unshakable trust into her lover's hands: it is by the whole nature and not by a part of it that a man says the first article of the Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

If all this be true, it follows that everything which affects any part of the nature—body, soul, or spirit—will have its share in affecting our beliefs; and, therefore, in so far as we are responsible for our character, we are responsible also for its results upon our thought.

It is not only the positive statements of Holy Scripture which make us sure of the relation between goodness and the vision of truth; all our knowledge of the best souls has made it clear. Let a man ask himself, for instance, what it is in the life of the Master Himself which gives so exquisite an assurance of His intimate communion with the mind of God. It is not a sense of the majesty of His intellect, though that is

there : it is not the piercingness and inevitableness of His judgement upon men and things : far less is it any laboured justification of the ways of God with men—it is rather the rare and serene atmosphere of holiness amid which He walks, the impression of His goodness, the assurance that here is One who knows because He loves.

St. John, who lay on the Lord's bosom—whence came his intimate knowledge of the Lord ? It was not from a mind more subtle or more powerful than that of the other disciples ; nor certainly from a greater logical grasp of the relation of the things he saw to the ultimate realities where their explanation must be found. Rather he saw so clearly because he loved so much : he believed because he was good. And it has been so always—

O hearts of love : O souls that turn,
Like sunflowers, to the pure and best !
To you the truth is manifest,
For they the mind of Christ discern
Who lean like John upon His breast.

Holy Scripture has specially pointed two virtues which help towards belief, two ways in which character reacts upon faith.

The first is Purity. "Blessed are the pure in heart," our Lord Himself said, "for they shall see God." A libertine does not believe in woman's virtue or in man's honour : and, disbelieving in humanity, he is in the fair way to disbelieve in God. The American evangelist Dr. Torrey used to tell a story concerning a young man whom he had known and who, after an interval of years, disclosed to him that he had lost his faith in Christianity and had become an

infidel. "My young friend," said Dr. Torrey to him, "what have you been doing?" The evangelist did not suggest that in every case such an explanation was the true one. But in the case of which he was thinking—and in many another—the man did not disbelieve so much on account of anything he had learned as on account of something he had become. There is "an evil heart of unbelief"; "with the heart a man believeth unto righteousness." No one who has experience of life, and who forms his views, not like some closet philosopher in a removed existence but in close acquaintance with human nature, will deny that a coarsened mind has often had as much to do with scepticism as any honest grappling with intellectual doubt. Robert Burns told in memorable words the result on the mind of one kind of sensuality :

O it hardens a' the heart
And petrifies the feeling.

Everything that makes the taste grosser, that poisons the springs of the moral nature, that puts us out of affinity with the spiritual, the gentle, the pure, most certainly also banishes God farther from us, makes Christ more a name of ancient history, and the Holy Spirit a meaningless and barren phrase.

Meekness is the other avenue to belief which the Bible has pointed out. There is no greater obstacle to faith than intellectual and spiritual pride. "The meek will He teach His way." In the religious novel, more popular some years ago than it is now, nothing was more distressing than the presumption with which its heroes cast themselves adrift from the wisdom of their fathers and the traditions in which their minds were formed, and were like Robert Elsmere

“when they woke in the morning prepared to find everything an open question.” That sort of vanity could only have a brief enough day. But there is at present a vogue of books of what is called popular “science” which attempt to deal with religion. In sixpenny books the faith of generations is finally disposed of in the name of certain conclusions of experiment and investigation and inductive proof. The books are by eminent enough men. But their tone of airy confidence is disconcerting; and most of what is called “science” in them is in no sense rightly described by that name—it is speculation, philosophy, true or false, but at least not demonstrable by any method science can claim. About ether and the ultimate nature of matter and the theory of atoms, and so forth, there is much that is interesting, if little that is fresher than in the days of the Greek materialists; but there is no special reason for accepting our philosophy from a physiologist however eminent and famous he may be. One remembers Dr. Johnson’s solemn irony about such a man. “He who is growing great in electrifying a bottle wonders to see the world engaged in prattle about peace and war.” It is not too severe a judgement upon such minds to say with Dean Church, that no pedantry or narrowness which theologians ever shewed can equal the pedantry and narrowness of many who are engaged in what they call the emancipation of the mind from superstition. “Slaves of an imagination moulded and coloured by a single uniform set of familiar phenomena, slaves of customs and modes of thought which they have lost the power to review and control by rising above them and beyond them, they are, with the latest and richest eloquence of the English language,

as formal and rigid, as childishly unreal, as much in antagonism with plain things, which are certain if anything is certain, as the most fantastic of the school-men." Humility is the road to knowledge, and "the meek He will teach His way." Certain postulates we must make. If we could raise the standard of Christian living in the country we should do more against agnosticism than by much apologetic. One sincere and simple Christian is better than many books of Christian Evidences.

Thus it seems to be clear that, as character and opinion are closely bound together, we have a responsibility not only for what we do but for what we believe.

After coming to the conclusion that we are responsible, at least in some measure, for what we believe, we proceed to ask where the methods of approach to Christian faith are to be found. Probably the first and the commonest answer is in terms of mysticism.

MYSTICISM.—In a book of reminiscences of Mr. Gladstone it is told about that great man, that on the day he was commanded to form his first administration he went, as in every emergency great or small, to receive the Holy Communion. It was noticed that, after he had been given the sacrament, he remained kneeling at the altar rails. Other communicants went up and came back; but he kept his place there, evidently absorbed in communion with his Saviour. He was there till the end of the service. He had lost all thought of man. What was the statesman doing at that hour? If we had asked him, he would have answered us, in the words of the Communion office,

“Then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us: we are one with Christ, and Christ with us.” The avenues of the senses were closed, and the soul was grasping the supreme reality in that apprehension by thought and feeling which is the essence of mysticism.

Another great Englishman of the last generation, the poet Tennyson, has described a state of trance into which he often passed when he was alone. “This has come upon me,” he said, “through repeating my own name to myself silently, till all at once, as it were out of the intensity of the consciousness of individuality, individuality itself seemed to dissolve and fade away into boundless being; and this not a confused state, but the clearest—the surest of the surest—utterly beyond words, where death was an almost laughable impossibility—the loss of personality (if so it were) seeming no extinction, but the only true life.” If one had asked Tennyson for an explanation of that state, he would have answered that it was the fellowship of his soul with the Soul of all souls, not through sense-representation or the forms of the logical understanding, but by an immediate and mystical communion. Even such was the experience he made Sir Galahad find:

A gentle sound, an awful light!
Three angels bear the holy Grail:
With folded feet, in stoles of white,
On sleeping wings they sail.
Ah, blessed vision! blood of God!
My spirit beats her mortal bars,
As down dark tides the glory slides,
And star-like mingles with the stars.

That such a mystical realisation of the presence of God in Christ is the kernel of the religion of common people also there need be no doubt. Their instincts

are nearly always true, though the reasons they adduce to support them may be inadequate. "Mysticism," said John Wesley once, "is just heart religion." If we seek the devotional language in which the Christian consciousness has found its readiest expression, we see that it is always deeply tinged with mysticism. The most obvious example is in our hymns. The language of thought and emotion is for ever being strained in them to express a realisation of God's presence and Christ's love, which the soul knows, and yet sees to be beyond its speech. One of the greatest of mediaeval mystics was St. Bernard of Clairvaux. No words could better describe a Christian's experience than those of his which we use so often :—

O Hope of every contrite heart,
 O Joy of all the meek,
 To those who fall how kind Thou art !
 How good to those who seek !

But what to those who find ? Ah ! this
 Nor tongue nor pen can show ;
 The love of Jesus, what it is
 None but His lovers know.

"*Expertus potest credere.*" Here is the familiar mystical idea of the Lord as the Bridegroom of the soul, and here the ineffable experience of knowledge and love which Christians of all ages have shared, but which they have found it impossible to describe with tongue or pen. If one had asked St. Bernard what was the fact of the religious life at the back of such poetry, he would have answered (these are his words) : "The Christian who seeks divine truth must ascend to the higher life of the Spirit through love and humility ; then through discursive considera-

tion of divine truth he must proceed to intuitive contemplation, in which state moments of ecstatic absorption in the object contemplated will be granted him—transient anticipations of the perfect self-forgetfulness of the glorified soul hereafter.” That is an almost accurate statement of the method of all mystics ; and it naturally leads us from the ground of experience, where it is right to start, into the philosophical explanation of this great movement of human thought.

The basis in the facts of consciousness might, of course, be laid far wider. Professor Starbuck and Professor James have collected a remarkable series of testimonies to the mystical state. The Americans are far ahead of us in experimental psychology, and especially in that department of religious enquiry in which conclusions the most astounding are established by statistics the most fallacious. Yet in the midst of much that can only excite surprise, there are many results of their investigations to which permanent value will be attached. A brief summary of the result of enquiries into the mystical state may be gathered from some American books.

Many answer such an enquiry by saying, “I have striven to come into immediate communion with God : but that has never been : He seems to elude me,” or, “It seems as if I have to be content with receiving God at second hand.” Some persons are not able to specify any experience which cannot be classified under the ordinary workings of the mind. This is what might have been looked for. There are people with no ear for music : and those who do appreciate music grade from the school-girl at her scales up to the subtlest interpreters of the human spirit. It is

so also with religion, in which there is genius at the top, and at the bottom the deaf and blind.

Other answers to the enquiry about the mystical state speak of occasional glimpses, at wide intervals of time—reminding one of Porphyry's statement that during the six years which he spent in intimate friendship with Plotinus, that eminent mystic experienced union with God only four times. A characteristic testimony of this class is that of Henry Ward Beecher : "There are times," he says, "when it is not I that is talking : when I am caught up and carried away so that I know not whether I am in the body or out of the body : when I think things in the pulpit that I could never think in the study : and when I have feelings that are so different from any that belong to the lower or normal condition that I can neither regulate them nor understand them."

Yet another class of answers to enquiries about the mystical state have no rapt experiences of which to tell, but only a settled impression of a constant fellowship with the divine. A typical illustration of such communion is given in that very interesting book *The Practice of the Presence of God*, by Brother Lawrence, a Carmelite monk at Paris in the seventeenth century. His duty in the monastery was the humblest, the care of the kitchen, and there he records, "The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer : in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquillity as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament."

There are a sufficient number of testimonies to such a mystical state to make one sure that it is not an uncommon phenomenon even for the uneducated, such

as Brother Lawrence was, to be haunted with an immediate sense of the Infinite, and to feel that there is more in experience than thought can formulate or words can tell. And surely there are few even of the most logical and formally regulated minds who cannot speak of such moments that have come to them, moments rare and exquisite, in which visions have seemed to float upon their minds from an intellectual world larger than this, where there is a clearer air, and they have seen, in glimpses, transient it may be, but unspeakably precious, the meaning of the world and of life and of the government that is at the back of things. If that be so, then we are the better prepared to ask for the explanation that can be offered for a phenomenon of an interest so profound.

There are two ways of reaching God. The first is that which has appealed the most to our fellow-countrymen. They have sought the ultimate reality by what they called the "philosophy of common sense." Setting themselves over against God—standing, as it were, outside of Him—they have looked for the signs of His presence in Nature, and have interpreted History as the revelation of His mind. Paley's "argument of the watch" is the crudest illustration of their methods, but it is by no means the least characteristic. There is no use in under-valuing either the processes or the results of this theology of common sense, and its voyage of discovery to see if in the world there be signs of a God. But its conclusions have often borne little enough conviction, and by their very positiveness have irritated the souls of the devout. The metallic and pragmatic intelligence has gone to form that Hard Church which the late Mr. Hutton of the *Spectator* described in one

of his essays. The hard churchman has his ready theological explanation of everything in life, his cut-and-dry theory of all events. For him there is no mystery land, no twilight of knowledge; everything is sharply outlined in the clear light of dogmatic teaching. Any man whose religious thought has been more than an echo has met and been repelled by the hard churchman's scolding orthodoxy. Well has Dr. Martineau said about it: "Those who tell me too much about God, who speak as if they knew His motive and His plans in everything, who are never at a loss to explain the reason of every structure and the tender mercy of every event, who carry themselves through the solemn glades of Providence with the springing steps and the jaunty air of a familiar, do but drive me by the very definiteness of their assurance into an indefinite agony of doubt, and impel me to cry, 'Ask of me less, and I shall give you all.'" When mysticism appeared in the mediaeval Church, with St. Bernard of Clairvaux, it was as a revolt against the dialectical spirit of men like Abélard. When it appeared in England with the Cambridge Platonists, it was as a reaction, not against Romanism, but against Calvinism, a revolt of the reverences against that delight in definition which has been the curse of Protestantism. To such mystics God was an experience rather than an object. They could not find Him in any voyage of discovery through Nature. They go forward but He is not there, and backward but they cannot behold Him.

Neither can the Supreme be adequately discovered in History. He may be buried among the records of the past, just as He may be entangled in the midst of Nature's laws. Nowhere, it is true, was He revealed

as He was revealed in Christ ; but He is not to be looked for only in the Christ of history. "I want a living Christ," said George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends, that mystical sect which has been most influential in England. "I want a living Christ : you are worshipping a dead Christ." "The God that ye took from a printed book" has only an external appeal to living men. It is almost startling to discover that this protest of mysticism was made in the very earliest days of the Church. St. John's Gospel may be read as an intentional, purposed effort to show that the Master was not only a character of history, not only or chiefly that, but the Abiding Light and Life of men. And as one has read the words of that great mystic, St. Paul, "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more," one has seen how little he valued what are called the "evidences," and how the experience of the divine presence was to him incomparably more precious than any record of the great career. One has sometimes fancied that St. Paul's attitude to the other apostles was somewhat like that of a happily married woman who is a little jealous of her husband's friends, who knew him before she did, but also a little scornful of their presumption in thinking that, merely on account of early acquaintanee, they know anything at all comparatively of the dear companion of her life. In such a way mysticism has always been somewhat indifferent to the facts of history. Its great exponent, William Law, would have every Christian repeat in his own experience the whole career of his Master—divine birth, baptism, death, resurrection, and ascension. And all of them refuse to see in the outward tokens of God's pres-

ence, in the vicissitudes of the time-life, an adequate approach to the Supreme. The first way to God, that of the school of common sense, can never lead them to His heart.

They take another way. Believing that God made man in His image, and that man's soul is a mirror, in which (if only it be clean and pure) the divine can best be seen, they cease from analysing and methodising, and joyfully go forth to meet their God.

Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit
can meet ;

Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.

Mysticism would not, indeed, attempt to explain the secret of such knowledge, such fellowship. Individual mystics deal in phrases about subliminal consciousness and so forth, and seek the aid of physiology to eke out the imperfection of their theories. But for most it is sufficient to say that here is an Experience—a fact of consciousness as sure as any in life. If we want an analogy to it we are bidden to find it in our apprehension of poetry or beauty or music or human love. Socrates, in his *Apology*, tells the result of his questioning of the poets about their methods. "Taking up some of their poems, which appeared to me most elaborately finished, I questioned them as to their meaning. I am ashamed, O Athenians, to tell you the truth : however, it must be told. Almost all who were present could have given a better account of them than those by whom they had been composed. I soon discovered this, therefore, with regard to the poets, that they do not effect their object by wisdom, but by a certain natural inspiration." That is pure mysticism. But there is no more complete or more

satisfactory explanation of poetry than that which Socrates gave. Ask a great interpreter of Nature about the meaning of the outside world for the soul of man—read Wordsworth, and we shall find the same phenomenon: "Sensation, soul, and form all melted in him." "Words needed none; his spirit drank the spectacle." Beauty and sublimity came in an immediate apprehension, utterly apart from the logical understanding. It is as impossible to describe in words, yet quite as sure a fact of consciousness as the love of man for woman or of woman for man—that great root of social happiness, that turning-point of the human tragedy, which yet has no terminology that can be quoted without exciting a smile.

This, then, is the way by which mysticism would draw near to God. It utterly distrusts the senses and the logical understanding. It is as sceptical as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* concerning the possibility of reaching the Absolute by reasoning. But, like Kant's second and positive effort, it makes a great confident leap towards certainty by throwing the whole nature—thought, emotion, will—into one sublime affirmation. Man, because he is a spirit, must be near to, and must be able to commune with, the Great Spirit, the soul of man finding communion with the Soul of all souls.

It is impossible to detail the methods which mystical teachers have taken to reach the highest results of intuitive knowledge. They nearly all trace three stages in what they call the Upward Way. First is the purgative life, the life of discipline and duty. In the second stage, the illuminative life, every faculty is concentrated upon God: real virtue has begun, because self-denial is ended; and good deeds are the

outcome of a delight to do God's will. The final stage is the unitive or contemplative life in which the soul sees God face to face, and finds a fellowship of ever-deepening union with Him. It may truly be said that the root idea of them all is found in the words of our Master: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

It is not possible to make any scientific classification of the mystics such as has frequently been attempted. All the divisions overlap. The best definition should set in one category the Eastern Mystic, who follows what is called "the negative way," and seeks a mere oblivion of consciousness in fellowship with the Absolute. He deals in asceticism and ecstasies and visions, of which the better type of Mystics are impatient and even scornful. Though this mysticism is in great favour in the Roman Church, and is the more favoured the more it is marked by miraculous accompaniments, it really brings discredit on the name. Modern psychology has robbed it of its mysterious aspects, and has shown that its most distinctive phenomena can be explained and reproduced by self-hypnotism. In the other category should be set the Mysticism which can claim the name of Christian: that which seeks fellowship with God through the mediation of Christ: the mysticism which is perhaps seen at its best in the Cambridge Platonists and William Law: the mysticism which seeks not God's gifts, but God Himself, and because it believes that God is for ever revealing Himself to His people, would set itself to "hear what God the Lord would speak."

It is equally impossible to give any outline of the growth of mystical theology. There is a meagre history of mysticism. Its main features can be

discerned in almost all its exponents; and from its nature it has never been susceptible of a classified and methodical statement. The best book in English concerning the whole subject is Professor Inge's Bampton Lecture. But many owe a permanent indebtedness to Vaughan's *Hours with the Mystics*. The method of that book is almost repellent; it gives scant justice to the English Mystics, who are among the greatest of the school; and its attitude "de haut en bas" towards men of profound philosophy and pious life is merely irritating. But with all its faults, Vaughan's book has not yet found a substitute.

If one would go to the study of the mystical writers themselves, it is not well to begin with such a man as Jacob Boehme (1575)—that "man of a mighty mind," as Hegel called him—but rather with the sermons of Tauler (born 1300), and the restrained and sober pages of that book which Luther valued so much—*The German Theology* (1330). In English there is no better guide than William Law, the disciple of Boehme. The Letters of Samuel Rutherford of Anwoth, written in 1636, are a singularly noble exposition of those thoughts which come from ardent attachment to, and intimate fellowship with, the mind of Christ.

It is right, before one urges the lessons for modern Christianity which mysticism has to bear, that one should acknowledge the dangers with which in all its history that type of religious thought has been menaced.

It may be freely granted that in some of its forms it has been too impatient of theology. Let it be admitted that the essence of religion is not an acceptance of logical propositions about God, but a consciousness of His presence; yet it is not unavailing nor useless

that such a consciousness should be analysed, and that the speculative reason should enquire into its ultimate implications. A man can hear and see without any acquaintance with acoustics and optics: yet those disciplines are of value in correcting defects of sight and hearing, and in greatly magnifying the power of those faculties. So the wisest mystics, such as the Cambridge Platonists, had no sympathy with what was called "the denial of reason," for that, said one of them, "is to deny a divine light." Mysticism, in many of its forms, has neglected the sources of the knowledge of God which are available in Scripture and science, and, trusting overmuch in one avenue of approach to God—that of the Inner Light, it has suffered loss; it has wanted the iron in its bones which is got from the logical reason and the revelation of God in the field of history.

The moral dangers attending the mystical frame of mind can never be wisely neglected. Truly it is said in the Upanishads—the ancient oracle of the mystics of the East—that the path of release is as fine as a razor. On one side lie the deep gulfs of madness, on the other the abysses of sensuality. Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life. One need only think of the Indian yogi mistaking his cataleptic unconsciousness for absorption into the being of God, to see the danger on one side. And as one is offended by the erotic sensuousness of St. Teresa, and of popular hymns like that beginning, "Safe in the arms of Jesus" (which such mysticism as St. Teresa's has inspired), one is sorrowfully convinced of the reality of the danger on the other side. The Song of Solomon has its place in revelation; but it is a dangerous sphere for the

allegorising and sentimental mind. It has ever been the mystic's favourite sphere. An anarchic and self-regarding subjectivity is also a pitfall of this type of Christian thinking. And, practically, it may lead, as in the case of St. Angela of Foligno, to a torpid selfishness, in which she gave thanks for the death of mother, husband, and children because, in her pleasant phrase, "they were great obstacles on her way to God." Whenever the Eastern Mysticism of what is called "the negative way" has infected Christian minds, there have been such moral dangers. A quiescence, weary, solitary, selfish—the piety of intellectual suicide—is the outcome of such a mysticism. A soul allied to the Spirit of Christ finds its expression, not in voluptuous indolence of thought, but in the beneficent activity of all its powers. Nothing has been more remarkable in the history of Christian Mysticism than the fact that profound and pious thinkers, absorbed in communion with God, were also restless and tireless leaders of philanthropic enterprise. St. Bernard organised the vast international movement of the Second Crusade; St. Francis inaugurated a great order; Tauler threw himself with intense devotion into the task of caring for the victims of the "Black death" of 1348; Fénelon was an energetic and successful bishop; Madame Guyon was a capable woman of affairs.

It is not right, therefore, to dwell overmuch upon the aberrations into which Mysticism sometimes ran, and into which, by its very nature, it was always tempted to run. It becomes us better to recall the services which it has rendered and is rendering to Christian thought. It is specially of importance to trace its connection with the exigencies of modern religion and the modern Church.

1. Mysticism effects an alliance between religion and the scientific temper of the day. The genius of our time has taken to empiricism. It distrusts first principles and worships facts. Mysticism, as much as the latest chemistry or physics, rests on the testimony of experience, and appeals for its verification to the common consciousness of men. It may be that every one is not an expert observer; it may be that some fields of observation are difficult to reach; it may be that the eyes of some observers are obscured by impurity or prejudice: but it is in the region of observation and experiment that mysticism delights to dwell. Just as it is the barest fact of history that when Romanism grew material, it was mysticism that saved it; and when Protestantism grew dogmatic, it was mysticism that saved it; so now when a hundred spectres with names of learning and science frighten us, the home of faith is still in mystical experience. Religion is safe while there are men and women to say with all their heart, "I love Christ."

2. Mysticism is in touch with the most recent development of theological thinking—even with that which was for a time called the "New Theology." The exponents of that re-statement of our faith would say that their starting-point is a re-emphasis of the Christian belief in the divine Immanence in the Universe and in mankind. That may not perhaps be a true description of the trend of thinking in Germany, where Ritschl's school are the enemies of mysticism. But it is a true enough account of the predominant trend of opinion in England and in America, and, one may add, of the movement in France which is associated with the name of Auguste Sabatier. It is of the essence of mysticism to believe in the Immanence of God, to

believe that man and God are in personal relationship, not like two creatures at opposite sides of a river, one crying for benefits, the other throwing his rare beneficence across the stream. "In him we live and move and have our being." In the full and happy use of all our powers we should—even when we consciously do not realise the relationship—feel some kinship with the divine.

Take it on what might seem the lowest level. It was not altogether without meaning that the old nature religions have associated the passion of sex with the worship of the divine. If a man is not a mere brute beast, there is a real connection between the two emotions. Did not Goethe tell how the primitive passion made a man feel "his soul expanding to a Deity" "while his love-rapture o'er Creation flows"? Some tenderness of self-sacrifice makes even the gross divine.

Take it on a higher level, that of intellectual satisfaction. Who would think of numbering the late Mr. Huxley among the Mystics? Yet how otherwise can one explain this saying of his in his *Life and Letters*: "In these moments I feel that the real pleasure, the true sphere, lies in the feeling of self-development, in the sense of power and growing oneness with the great Spirit of abstract truth"? He goes on to add that "Science teaches the great truth which is embodied in the Christian conception of entire surrender to the Will of God." A curious commentary on that statement is found in the testimony given by an American thinker that it was in moments of intellectual doubt that he most realised the presence of God.

Take it on a higher level still, that of the moralised life. Can there be uncertainty about the experience that after making a conscious sacrifice, after fulfilling

dutifully an irksome task, there is a sense that the soul is in contact with the ultimate realities and the soul of things, and recognises duty to be the "stern daughter of the Voice of God" ?

Then reach the highest level, that of spiritual experience. There are testimonies in every Christian household to a sense of divine leading and blessing.

The teaching of all this experience is plain. If God be indeed immanent in man, we are reaching Him, as we should expect, in all the happy, free, natural activities of the soul, in pure love, in unprejudiced truth-seeking, in unselfish benevolence, in devout and earnest prayer. The experience may have another explanation ; but the readiest and most credible is that the doctrine of the immanence of God is true.

3. The modern craving for the Unity of the Church finds in mysticism a meeting-place for Christian minds. Mystical piety is the great reconciler. The very fact that the theologians argue whether its affinities are with Romanism or Protestantism is itself a proof that it mediates between the two.

At first sight, Mysticism might appear to be the natural ally of Protestantism. Its fundamental position—that the knowledge of God is direct and personal—might seem to make it sit lightly to authority and the institution. And as a matter of fact the attitude of the Inquisition to the Mystics was one of suspicious watchfulness. St. Teresa, St. Juan de la Cruz, Ignatius himself were all objects of distrust, and did not win ecclesiastical approbation until after a long series of tribulations. It is equally a matter of fact that the greater number and perhaps also the most illustrious names of the Mystics belong to reformed branches of the Church.

On the other hand, there are great Roman Mystics, St. Francis of Assisi perhaps the greatest. And Harnack thinks the system so essentially allied with Romanism that he boldly says, "A mystic who does not become a Catholic is a dilettante." This is a hard saying, but one knows what he means. It is a matter of fact that amid the accumulated and embarrassing ceremonies of Rome devout souls find in mysticism the natural home of personal religion :

Moravian hymn and Roman chant
 In one devotion blend,
 To speak the soul's sincerest want
 Of Him the inmost friend.

Is not a suggestion found here that in the essentials of religion, the communion of the soul with God, is found the meeting-place of all Christian men? The guide to such a meeting-place is Mysticism.

4. Mysticism reclaims amid the pressure of modern life its due place for Contemplation in religion. Were it a protest and no more, this testimony on behalf of the meditative life would be of inestimable worth. Hurried and distracted as life is, we can hardly even understand what Amiel meant when he said that "action is only coarsened thought." Our instincts are all in arms against the profound and pious men who set as their ideal the stripping of the mind of sense perceptions and elaborated reasoning, and its sinking back into an absorbed and silent fellowship with God. Even in the Church, with its many organisations, the place of meditation is apt to be forgotten. The careful and troubled service of many Marthas is thought the better part rather than the holy receptivity which Mary showed. In the midst of

such activities there is real worth in a study of the writings of the mystics—after the Holy Scriptures themselves the best manuals of devotion which the Church holds.

5. Modern phases of thought fall into their due significance beside the permanent elements of religion which mysticism discloses. All the really permanent elements of religion come to us under a mystical guise. It is not evidences and teleologies which are their foundation, but the universal instincts of the human soul. Unlettered men perceive them; little children have known them better than the wise; poor sufferers on their painful beds, hardly capable of consecutive thought, cling to them with an assurance which reason could never bring. And, therefore, these are the lasting things. People criticise holy books till one wonders what they will leave us of our Bible. The externals of worship become sometimes an intolerable and offensive burden to spiritual minds. But the mystic is secure from such assaults of the temporary, the passing. His heaven is in no far-off sphere, and depends on no books, no churches, no creeds. Nothing can separate him from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord. A notable instance of such an indifference to the transitory was seen in the famous General Gordon. His favourite book was the *Christ Mystical* of Bishop Hall. With it, or some such devout meditation, by his side, he never seemed to miss the helps to the religious life which public worship and a Christian society bring to us. Alone in the desert, with Heathens or Mohammedans, and a few English officers, Gordon continued the same inner life of converse with God which he would have lived in an English parish. He seemed to sit entirely free of the externals of religion.

No stroke of circumstance could deprive him of his heaven. Maeterlinck has said about all literature, "The mystical truth cannot grow old or die—a work only grows old in proportion to its anti-mysticism." About religion that could be said as truly. A mystical religion cannot be affected by criticism, science, or external environment; that religion only is in perilous case which is anti-mystical.

6. More important than any aspect of Modern Criticism of the Bible is the mystical understanding of it which reaches to its heart. Much of the deepest teaching of Holy Scripture is open only to the mind which has some sympathy with the mystical attitude of thought. Christ in you the hope of glory: God dwelling in man and man in God: We living and moving and having our being in Him: The Christian buried with Christ in baptism, crucified to the world, and raised again, even as Christ rose in the glory of the Father—what a hidden mystery is in words like these if we have thought nothing of the immediate communion of the soul with God or the indwelling of His Holy Spirit! "Wouldst thou plant for eternity?" said Thomas Carlyle—himself of the school of mystics—"then plant into the deep, infinite faculties of man, his fantasy and heart. Wouldst thou plant for year and day? then plant into his shallow, superficial faculties his self-love and arithmetical understanding." From its beginning to its end—and notably by its deepest, devoutest souls, St. John and St. Paul—the Bible has spoken to that in man which is the deepest; and it will be—it must be—to us for ever in some degree a book sealed and withdrawn if we know nothing and care nothing for the mystical things of which Wordsworth wrote—

Those obstinate questionings
 Of sense and outward things,
 Fallings from us, vanishings ;
 Blank misgivings of a creature
 Moving about in worlds not realized,
 High instincts before which our mortal nature
 Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised.

Those first affections,
 Those shadowy recollections,
 Which, be they what they may,
 Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
 Are yet a master light of all our seeing ;
 Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
 Our noisy years seem moments in the being
 Of the eternal Silence.

MYSTICISM IN EXPERIENCE.—All of us have our summits of experience some time in life—our choice and elect hours. One thing and another brings us to such rare and beautiful moments.

Sometimes it is the mere thrill of contact with nature in its lovelier phases that moves us. Our minds go wandering, at such a suggestion, to hours at which our spirits were finely touched and we were lifted, as it were, out of ourselves into something like ecstasy, into a frame of mind and spirit exquisite and rare.

Or is it the "days of the gods" in youth to which we turn for the memory of such supreme experiences? Those of our own age were round us—the comrades, the companions, keen, cultivated, eager—the choice spirits who made that time for us as if it were heaven.

Or was it some book that opened for us the door of a new world and gave us, as Lamb wrote to Wordsworth about the reading of "The Excursion," "a day of heaven"? Most people can remember such unfamiliar

and arresting thoughts at the reading of a great book when, as the poet wrote of Chapman's *Homer*, the reader was "like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken."

Or perhaps it was love—the love of man or woman—that makes some day, somehow, stand out from all the rest, and however long we live it will be the day, the hour in life for us.

It was such a time that Jesus tasted on a certain Sunday when He rode into Jerusalem; it was the elect time of His career as the Man of Sorrows. Then at last men knew Him as He was, and owned Him, and things were as they should be.

Those high hours of which we all know something have a value for us as much as any trial or sorrow. It takes all the experiences of life to make an adequate school for character. And encouragement and praise and high hopefulness do as much for us as any plough-share of the soul. If we were to believe some representations of our religion, pain is its only teacher; asceticism is its only discipline. In the Life of the late Cardinal Vaughan there is a horrible tale of a spiked bracelet which the good man wore, and which, because it did not pain him enough, he occasionally drove by force into the flesh of his arm. If mere suffering be so good for ourselves as that, why should we ever want to relieve suffering in others? Why should we not regard the Grand Inquisitor as also the Grand Benefactor? Why should we not be zealous to increase the amount of the world's pain? Those have learned of Jesus badly who forget His serene and joyful spirit.

The discipline of happiness and popularity and prosperity has its divinely appointed place for us.

Indeed, if we read aright the signs of the times, that is to be the characteristic discipline of modern life. Negatively, pain has been diminished in our time to an extraordinary degree by the use of anæsthetics, and by a hundred appliances for the relief of distress. Positively, the growth of opportunities of recreation and reading and travel have added enormously to the world's fund of enjoyment. And the training of new generations will be much more in the proper and intelligent choice of pleasures than, as in the past, in the endurance of pain. It may well be that the example of Christ will be sought ever increasingly, not as the Man of Sorrows, but as the wise and holy Master whom His disciples loved and followed, and who filled their lives with triumphant joy.

Closely allied to all mystical experiences is the superstition which may be roughly described as Magic.

MAGIC.—In a passage in Deuteronomy we are introduced to one of the most fascinating and one of the most dangerous regions in which the mind of man can roam—the field of the occult. Wherever men have lived, in every age, they have longed to reach the secrets of Providence and of the future, and magical arts have been among the methods they have pursued. Popular religion has always been deeply tinged with such superstitions.

One has only to read one's Bible to see how firmly magic gripped the great monotheistic Hebrew race. The first book of the Bible tells of Jacob's amulets and his dreams, and of the cup with which Joseph divined. And the New Testament has no more picturesque episodes than those which are connected with Elymas the Sorcerer and Simon the Mage and the

destruction of the magical books at Ephesus at the instigation of St. Paul.

A full list of the dabblers in the occult is given in Deuteronomy, the eighteenth chapter. Nine different types of magic workers are enumerated there, ending with the "necromancer"—the consulter of the spirits of the dead, such as the Witch of Endor who raised up the ghost of Samuel to speak to Saul. Upon the whole nine of these professors of magical rites the Deuteronomist pronounces an unqualified condemnation. Whether they were benign in their intentions—healing by incantations and averting evil by charms—or whether they used the black art of sorcery to bring damage to the unfortunate victims of their spells, one and all they were declared to be "an abomination to the Lord."

The dealers in the occult are with us still. In spite of modern scientific culture: in spite of (or it may be on account of) the growth of the sceptical spirit concerning the supernatural, the professor of the mysterious is as powerful a person as ever he was, and he works as much of harm. If we got any one who knows the simple peoples of Africa to tell us what is their scourge and brooding fear, he would harrow us with tales of the witch-doctors who are the only interpreters of nature and the only authorities on the origin of disease. Over vast regions of Africa witch-craft is a desolating superstition, the sorrow and shame of which it is difficult to realise. Yet among educated Western peoples there are practices even more harmful, because they tear the nature into a painful dualism—one half owning the abject foolishness of its beliefs, the other trembling lest they be true. There are hundreds of people in every city who have some such shamefaced inclination to fancy that their future can be read from the palms of

their hands. They go to creatures called "palmists" to have their fortunes told; and, though they know quite well that they are behaving ridiculously, they live for years afterwards in dread of some calamity, or in hope of some success that has been foretold. There are people whose mental balance is almost overturned because of the brooding obsession of fear which such a palmist's prediction caused.

Alongside of such manifest triviality may be set a great part at least of what is known as "Spiritualism." Of that whole system few people are competent to speak confidently. It must be admitted that men of real ability have been convinced that it is possible to hold converse with the spirits of the dead: and it is maintained that there is nothing whatever in Spiritualism that is opposed to Christianity: on the contrary, its central belief is declared to be a great reinforcement of Christian faith.

This may be true. But three criticisms can hardly be avoided. (1) Spiritualism has been the source of a vast amount of impudent imposture. (2) It has added nothing of value to our acquaintance with the Unseen world. The alleged communications from the departed have been, without any noteworthy exception, inept and uninformative. And (3) its paltry and vulgar exhibitions of rapping and table-turning associate the dead (who should bring us only thoughts of reverent affection) with ideas far enough removed from religion.

The main criticism upon Spiritualism, as upon all dealing with the occult, is that it is dangerous for mind and soul. In this sense it remains "an abomination to the Lord." The complex nervous organism of man can yield strange results. In its subcon-

scious abysses great wonders lie. But the disturbing of that nervous system, the inducing of morbid states is a risky practice, to whose evils every asylum for the insane bears witness. It is not the advocating of any obscurantism: it is not the forbidding of the search for truth in any region: it is not the refusal of welcome to any revelation by any method that the good Lord is pleased to send, when one maintains that, for most people, a dabbling in occult phenomena is only harmful. We can willingly and readily respect all those who investigate obscure and mysterious psychical phenomena, while yet we are convinced that for most it is safest to "ask for the old paths and walk therein."

Our business, however, as followers of Religious Experience is to read the meaning of those aberrations of the human intellect in regions so difficult and obscure.

They testify to the inextinguishable longing of the soul after the spiritual. No one knows what can have led such an earnest seeker after truth as the most eminent apostle of Theosophy to her present attitude of mind; but there is profound value in this that she has written "Deeply within the heart of all . . . there exists a continual seeking after God. . . . Trampled on for a time, apparently destroyed though the tendency may be, it rises again and again with inextinguishable persistence. . . . Those who hold it to be outgrown find the wildest superstitions succeed its denial. So much is it an integral part of humanity that man will have some answer to his questionings. . . . If he cannot find religious truth, he will take religious error rather than no religion, and will accept the crudest and most incongruous ideals rather than admit that the ideal is

non-existent." One does not need to know much about the Mahatmas of Theosophy in order to be sure that they and their deep speculations about an absorption in the being of God are testifying to the truth of St. Augustine's immortal saying: "Thou, O Lord, hast made us for Thyself, and our souls are restless until they find rest in Thee."

All the magicians and sorcerers and necromancers join in the plaint concerning the limitations of our knowledge that rises from every student of nature and every seeker after the ultimate meaning of things. Charles Darwin was the greatest man of the nineteenth century, perhaps of modern times. And he said, after his epoch-making achievement in the interpretation of nature, "All our knowledge of this planet is something like a hen's knowledge of a forty-acre field, in one corner of which she happens to be scratching." It is horrible to think that such a mean estimate of our knowledge is true. Every thinker would fain defy his limitations, and reach somehow—by unlawful roads if it be needful—to some larger knowledge and power. Such a longing is not altogether in vain. The magicians may, for the most part, have been impostors; their hope of influencing the quiet and holy course of law by incantations and charms may have been puerile; but at the back of their speculations there was "something" that was true. There was that eternal truth which our Lord expressed so solemnly: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."

There are secrets of Nature and Providence that are not to be worked for, but only to be waited for. Erudition is no security that a new and unfamiliar idea

will reach a learned man as quickly as it reaches the plain unprejudiced open mind that yields itself to be impressed.

It may well be, also, that some have gained and are gaining a knowledge of nature and a command over nature which the methods of science will not secure.

It is certain, again, that the spiritual world yields up contributions both of knowledge and moral force to the devout and receptive spirit which will for ever be alien to minds more intellectually vigorous and far more elaborately equipped. This truth that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy," that our little systems embrace but a fraction of the knowable, and that treasure may be won in strange ways out of the dark is the immortal teaching that Deuteronomy's nine types of magic-workers with all their grim and evil superstitions displayed. Every vagary of religious and philosophical belief to-day has some element of truth in its content to keep it sweet: but, above all, it is a testimony to the vastness of truth itself and to the hopefulness of the human spirit that truth can somehow be mastered and made our own.

The large spirit of the Deuteronomist recognised that the dim gropers after truth, whom he called—and called rightly—"an abomination unto the Lord," were yet in their own way an assertion that God would meet His peoples' need with an unfolding progressive revelation of Himself. The condemnation of spurious methods, and deceitful and unholy mystifications, was directly connected with the promise: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto Me: unto him ye shall hearken." The majestic truth at

the back of that promise is unaffected. Then, as now, it is not an answer to magician and sorcerer and necromancer and the like to say, "All truth has already been revealed: you are going beyond what is written: you are unholy disturbers of settled things." That is the answer which timorous Christians give now—as a timorous Jew might have given it of old. But the glorious reply of the Old Testament is: I know that there is more of God and His ways to learn. He is to lead His people through a lengthening avenue of revelation: prophet after prophet is to make clear the mind of God, in ever fuller manifestation of the Highest. Even when the "Express Image of His person" is seen, the Spirit of Truth will not have forsaken His progressive mission. He will lead people still into further truth. And the prophet is to be like unto Moses; that is, he is to be the evangelist of Law, with a moral and a spiritual message—a Redeemer, a Ruler, a Renovator, no magic-worker but the Saviour of the Soul.

The great English economist, John Stuart Mill, had an eye quick enough to see what this promise meant for Israel. "Religion was not there," he wrote, "what it has been in so many other places, a consecration of all that was once established, and a barrier against further improvement." It was a proud thing for such a man to have seen what the Prophets meant: it has been the shame of the Christian Church that it has so often been blind to it. Our answer to Theosophy, Spiritualism, and all the occult beliefs is—or at least ought to be—no mere dumb refusal to contemplate any new truth of God, no harsh reassertion of the letter of a closed record, no disdainful refusal to move beyond the barriers of a fiercely guarded creed. If we have learned the spirit which God Himself implanted in His

prophets—that unique spirit of ancient religion which saw itself not as a conservative fast-bound deposit of revelation, but as an ever progressive religion—it will be ours to say, We listen for every voice of God : we strain our ears to catch every new word He has to speak ; but we know just as surely that no word will be His word if it be not a moral and intellectual message : if the Prophet who declares it is a mere thaumaturge or magician.

Over against the vindication of the value of the mystical approach to religion a protest must be made against any detraction from the permanent place of Reason.

REASON.—Reason is a suspected faculty in the Christian Church. To be a “Rationalist” has come to mean to be an opponent of Christianity.

Reason is sometimes discredited in the supposed interests of Revelation. God has spoken to us, and it is not for us to question what He has said. But though it is true that there is much in the Bible that could never have been discovered by Reason, the Bible must be interpreted by Reason ; nothing in it can be accepted that is contradicted by Reason ; and there is no other faculty than Reason itself that can decide which among many professing revelations is to be believed. The Bible itself has given us warrant to “try the spirits whether they be of God.”

Reason has sometimes been discredited in the supposed interests of authority. The Church and not our fallible judgement has been set up as the standard of truth. Some teachers, like Cardinal Newman, have a deep distrust of the human reason ; and that attitude has, on the whole, been taken by the Roman

Catholic Church. It is an unwarrantable attitude. Authority, of course, ought to be given its place. It is not with a light heart that any man can find himself at variance with beliefs which have obtained the assent of generations of able men, and by which multitudes of saintly lives have been nourished. And little else than derision is deserved by the young man who comes home from his first session at College with new and wild opinions with which to shock his mother and his sisters. But, important as is the authority of the Church, the Church has often been mistaken in the past, and may be mistaken again. Her authority, such as it is, rests upon a reasoned judgement concerning the value of widespread, persistent, and ancient opinions. In the last resort no belief that is accepted merely on authority can be described as our own belief at all. It does not become our own until Reason has dealt with it and fused it in the alembic of our mind.

Reason has sometimes been discredited in favour of mysticism. It has been supposed that a direct communion with God can be established with which the intelligence has nothing to do. Strip from you everything that clothes the mind—so the Mystic requires—strip off your natural affections, the ambitions that occupy you, the thoughts that disturb you, and then with your naked soul, you may see God. That simply is not true. There is a mysticism to which the highest value belongs, the mysticism that realises religious truth somewhat in the same way as we realise the beauty of nature, or art, or poetry. With that this lecture has dealt. But that is not the abnegation of Reason; that is its highest exercise. The mysticism that would discard Reason leaves only an empty mind with which neither God nor man can have

dealings. Much of mystical meditation is mere vacuity and mental indolence, the effort to get to the top of a ladder without taking the trouble to climb the steps. There is no knowledge in the world—and least of all the knowledge of God—that can be gained by such lazy methods. Instinct and blind gropings are for children, for undeveloped humanity. The approach to God is Reason's noblest task.

Reason has sometimes been discredited in favour of mere feeling. Religion, we have been told, is a matter not of the head but of the heart. The amount of our knowledge is of little importance if only our heart be full of love. There is a precious truth behind this contention, never to be ignored. But how can I love any one if I do not know him? What worth is there in an affection that is expended on a cloud? It may well be that in our reverence and esteem for a man whom we have known, we have had a sense that there were elements in him that transcended our understanding, and the man we loved was greater than we knew. But we could not have loved him at all, if we had not in some measure understood him, and were conscious of powers in him similar to our own. So, in regard to God, the utterly Unknown can evoke no feeling except a blank dismay. We must know something concerning God if we are to love Him. Far as the heavens from the earth He towers beyond our full comprehension, but it is according to the measure of our apprehension of Him that we can have any feeling towards Him that is worth calling religious. It is as impossible to worship an unknown God as it would be to worship a God altogether known. Whatever be the sentimental and emotional states aroused by the sonorous cadencies of an old liturgy, and the

lights burning fair on the far-off altar of a cathedral, and the reverberating organ music swelling down the aisles, these feelings have no religious worth unless they rest in the last resort on Reason. "Ye worship ye know not what," said our Saviour to the woman of Samaria. "We know what we worship."

It is strange that Christian men should have sought in so many ways to discredit reason, when our Lord, and indeed the whole Bible, challenges reason and invites inquiry. "Come now and let us reason together, saith the Lord," are the words of Isaiah. "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge," said Hosea. A valuable part of the Old Testament is taken up by the exaltation of wise men, and is known as the "Wisdom Literature." Our Lord Jesus bade us "seek" and promised that we should "find." As a child He listened to the Temple doctors, and asked them questions, and thus He "increased in wisdom and in stature," until He could say, "I am the Truth"; "I am the Light of the World." "Prove all things," said St. Paul. "Be ready to give a reason to every man for the faith that is in you," counselled St. Peter. That is the characteristic Christian attitude. And it is the historical attitude of the Christian Church in its best days.

The earliest apologists were not afraid to vindicate their faith at the bar of Reason. Some of the fathers, notably St. Augustine, would have left an imperishable renown as philosophers were they not specially remembered as Christian divines. And the schoolmen, the Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages, were as emphatic as the fathers in their eulogy and use of reason. "The reasonableness of Christianity" was an idea especially congenial to the great English

theologians of the past. Butler and Paley can be described as "Rationalists" just as fairly, and far more deservedly, than their opponents. And in Scotland, if we have done any service at all to the common cause, it has been by the upholding of the place of reason in religion. There is a great passage in an appeal by the oldest and greatest Baird lecturer, Professor Flint: "The truth is never to be feared but always to be sought after: it never can be in the interests of truth that any one truth should be avoided or neglected or denied." Our people have been trained in that belief. It may be that the sermons of a past age were too long and were often dull. But at least they were a discipline of reason; and the men and women who listened to them, and were shrewd critics of them, got an iron into their blood that no amount of ritualistic mummery would ever have instilled. The Scottish character grew to be what it was because our fathers appreciated rightly the place that reason should occupy in a strong man's faith.

Nobody knows what is coming to the religious life of the country in the next few years. But it is not difficult to prophesy that the only permanent and valuable contribution we can make to the future of our country's religion will be attained by intelligent methods, and not by the revival of superstitions, or the exaggeration of either æsthetic ritual or merely practical and benevolent agencies. A right religion is a complete religion, taking account of man in his totality, and, above all, giving the highest place to that which is highest in man—that Reason whose seat Hooker declared "is the bosom of God and whose voice is the harmony of the world."

This having been said, it is with cautions that any

study of the place of Reason in religion must necessarily end. The life of intellectual self-sufficiency is a gravely one-sided and ineffectual life. Plato declared that those countries are happy where "either philosophers are made kings or kings turn philosophers." But Emerson was surely right when he commented on this advocacy of the rule of intellectuals: "This is so far from being true that, if we consult all historians for an account of past ages, we shall find no princes more weak, nor any people more slavish and wretched, than were the administrations of affairs which fell on the shoulders of some learned bookish governor." A cold and unimaginative intellect may fail where courage and sympathy and a knowledge of the human heart are necessary for statesmanship.

Mere intellect may be hard, self-conceited, prejudiced; and a man of superb reasoning faculty may live in an unreal world and be as ineffectual as a child in the practical affairs of life. A specialised study (in order to be adequate all study must be specialised) is apt to narrow the mind and atrophy faculties that are as necessary as reason for complete self-development.

Most serious of all is the risk that in pursuit of knowledge a man may forget the real end of life—what God sent him here to be and to do. The verdict to be striven for is not "well guessed" but "well done." If, as the harvest of his life, a man can only bring forward much information gained, and many subtle speculations formed, he has failed in the supreme task. The supreme task is the formation in himself of a Christian character, and the rendering to his brethren of Christian service. Only love can minister to that glorious consummation. After all

our admiration of the triumphs of Reason, we must listen to St. Paul's "Praise of Love": "Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge . . . and have not charity I am nothing." "We know in part," said St. Paul in his glorious dithyrambic eloquence, "and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come then that which is in part shall be done away."

How poor the proudest triumph of intellect in face of the Infinite! Reason pales before goodness when we judge it in the light of death and the eternal years. "Alas for those," says the Divine Speaker in *The Imitation of Christ*, "who busy themselves with men about many curious enquiries, but care little about the way of serving Me."

"The time will come when the Master of masters will appear, Christ, the Lord of angels, to hear the lessons of all; that is to examine each man's conscience. And then shall He search Jerusalem with candles, and the hidden things of darkness shall be made manifest, and the strife of tongues shall be still."

"There will come one hour," He proceeds, "when all tumult and all toil will cease."

"Do therefore that thou doest. Labour faithfully in My vineyard. I will be thy reward.

"Write, read, sing, mourn, keep silence, pray: bear like a man all that is against thee.

"There is that which is worth all these and greater conflicts—everlasting life."

Something must be added about

THE PLACE OF IMAGINATION IN RELIGION

IMAGINATION.—Imagination is the image-making faculty of the mind, and by its creative hand the

mind is furnished with innumerable pictures, just as the walls of a room are covered with paintings or engravings.

It is very evident that we cannot speak of this faculty with unqualified praise. It is rather like one of those armies of mercenaries which existed in the Middle Ages—ready to fight on either side of a cause, the right or the wrong. Imagination can be a powerful auxiliary of wickedness. If one seeks the word “imagination” in a concordance of the Bible, one will hardly find it referred to except as an ally of evil. The height of human praise was reached when the Blessed Virgin sang “Magnificat” and rejoiced that God had “scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.”

No one can know anything of human nature without realising the dangers that beset an untrammelled and unsanctified imagination. A man is demure enough to look at, and conventional in his conduct as the strictest Scotsman; but what is he thinking about when he is alone? That is the test of a man. Outward correctness and decorum matter less if the man's imagination runs on what is selfish or vain or foul.

It is this knowledge of the perils of imagination which has led many good people to a condemnation of all works of fiction. Works of fiction are fatal, they think, to application; they divert attention from plain duties; they exhaust the emotions over imaginary characters so that no sympathy is left for real distress. A girl in a shop or factory is made to dwell in a world of countesses and silks and ropes of pearls, and she learns to despise her drudgery.

Some part of this charge against novel-reading is just. Probably most people read too many novels

and too little solid literature. But no one will persuade us that the charge is wholly just. The imaginative presentment of life is sometimes the happiest solace of a weary hour. When fiction is written with the wholesome mind and the tender hand of the great Sir Walter Scott, it can excite the loftiest ambitions ; it can calm and enliven ; it can touch to pity or rouse to enthusiasm or soften to love. Grey lives would be greyer than they are if they had no resort to romance, and could not lift themselves on the wings of imagination beyond the sordid surroundings of the hour. When one thinks of the immortal and splendid pictures with which Sir Walter has adorned our literature, one hesitates to give agreement to people who speak of the dangers of imagination.

The faculty must surely be precious which our Lord Jesus Christ possessed in such a high degree, and of which He made such constant use. The whole world seemed to present itself to our Lord in dramatic and pictorial guise. Familiar scenes of the countryside colour His life and teaching ; and we only need to remember His parables to realise the extent to which He relied on imagination to bear His message to the hearts of men. Take only one incident—the blasting of the barren fig tree, sometimes fancied by pedantic dullards to be a blot on our Saviour's character—what lesson could have been more vivid, more memorable, more likely to search the conscience, regarding the uselessness and the wickedness of pretentious piety ? Thus did imagination serve to bear the loftiest teaching that ever mortals knew.

The whole Bible is full of imaginative writing which can only be interpreted by the same faculty which inspired it. Much of the Bible is history ; and no one

can understand history who does not try to reconstitute in fancy the scenes of the past and behold its characters as they lived and moved and had their being. Much of the Bible is poetry, and a literalist makes nothing of it. Job is not the record of prosaic facts, but one of the noblest examples of dramatic art. Those who try to discover plain references to the Pope or Napoleon or the German Emperor in Daniel or Revelation betray their lack of the first elements of an understanding of literature.

Further than this we can rightly go, and say that it is only by the use of our imagination that we can approach even the central doctrines of our faith. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above,"—so we are ordered in the Second Commandment; and it is our duty to obey. But we cannot obey the commandment fully and literally. For it is only by means of images that we can know anything of God at all. We call Him a King; what is kingship but an image? We speak of Him as "high and lifted up" and having His abode in heaven; and we know that at the best these are only poor pictures of reality. Even His holiest name, "Our Father," is but an image too. It cannot be denied that in a sense we are all idolaters—image worshippers—because we cannot help it. It is only by the imagination—by the image-making faculty—that we can body forth any conception of the Unseen. The baldest definition that the logic-mongers frame is couched in language that reeks of metaphor and fancy.

Just as certainly is it true that if we are to meet aright the claims of religious duty we must give imagination its free course. Every one remembers

Thomas Hood's lines, "Evil is wrought by want of thought as well as want of heart." By "want of thought" he meant want of imagination. We do not visualise before our minds our brethren's needs. The result is that we neglect them, and fail in justice or charity towards them. To see other men and women as they are and to put ourselves in their place is a divinely appointed training in benevolence. And we can only put ourselves in the place of others by the exercise of imagination. It is often a difficult task.

An English moralist once said that no man could sit at the banquet of life unless he sat blindfold. He meant that no man could eat his own dinner in peace if he had imagination enough to realise the sorrow and sufferings of his fellows. The Golden Rule is, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so unto them." But we cannot obey the Golden Rule without putting ourselves in the place of others, and imagining what we should want from them of benevolence and justice. First the dream—pray God that we dream it loftily and nobly—then the effort; and then the glorious consummation when the old hatreds and strifes are banished and God's will is fully done.

Just as certainly MEMORY has its definite place in religious experience.

MEMORY.—Perhaps the religious value of Memory is best discovered when we regard it in the light of duty, in the light of happiness, and in the light of immortality.

Seen in the light of duty, Memory is manifested not merely as a gift more or less valuable which some-

how we possess, but as a faculty for which we are responsible, and which it is our task to train. And this for three reasons :

(a) We must ever regard it as the duty of the earlier years of life to prepare the scenery and surroundings amid which the mind will live when the winter of old age has fallen. One has known old men and women who had stored their memories with psalms and paraphrases and long passages of fine poetry, and it was their constant delight to dwell amid these possessions—the precious inheritance from their youth. It is such an experience that makes it necessary to protest against a very common delusion of modern times, that nobody should learn what he does not at the moment understand. Influenced by this delusion, people discourage the practice of memorising and “getting things,” as we say, “by heart.” But understanding will improve with age, while the faculty of rote-memory will not. The boy or girl who has not stored the mind with the world’s great literature, and above all with the solemnising and uplifting language of Scripture, will miss in later years a surrounding scenery for the mind without which the mind will be lonely and cold.

(b) It is equally clear that the training of memory is needful, if we are to be fully true to the claims of affection. “I forgot” is a common excuse to cover a neglect of kindness. But often enough a short memory is only a sign of a cold heart. If we had cared enough we should not have forgotten. Love quickens the attention and disciplines the interest on which memory is founded. If we were true to our affections we should be stronger in memory also.

Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot :
Though thou the waters warp,
Thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not.

Those who have had an experience of such neglect and ingratitude would not be slow to declare that the training of memory is one of the solemnest duties of life.

(c) Finally, under this aspect of the theme, the providence of God over our life must be constantly recalled if we are to see ourselves as we should, and to worship Him as His love and goodness demand. A certain Persian vizier had a room in his palace that he called the "Chamber of Memory." It was filled with the shabby furniture and the ragged clothes of his youth, ere his advancement to rank and fortune came; and the vizier spent an hour every day in that room in order to rebuke his pride and remind himself of the road by which he had risen. It would be good for us if we kept such a chamber of memory in our hearts. What thoughts of penitence and gratitude, and what a sense of God's guidance over the course of our life it would constantly inspire! To cultivate that memory of God's goodness until it so grips and holds us that all complaining is impossible, and all doubt seems the basest ingratitude, is one of the loftiest tasks of Christian men.

Seen in the light of happiness, Memory is the source alike of the purest pleasures and of the most inexorable torment that human creatures know.

It is the source of the purest pleasure; for Memory is the one *Paradise* out of which man cannot be driven.

How often one has said to bereaved husband or wife : " At least nothing can rob you of the knowledge that you possessed that love and confidence all these years." Tennyson says that " sorrow's crown of sorrows is remembering happier things." But that is not true. Rather does sorrow find a refuge in recalling, in as vivid pictures as it can, the dear faces and happy incidents of the past ; and " the tender grace of a day that is dead " becomes even more beautiful because it is seen through a haze of memory down the tear-stained avenue of the years.

If Memory have this gracious contribution to happiness, it can also torture and scorch the soul. " If I only could get rid of by-gones," a man says. But he cannot get rid of by-gones. The Greeks had a fable that a river ran by the shore of the nether world whose waters brought forgetfulness. But the fable about Lethe was too good to be true. Some philosophers think that everything that once has been in consciousness remains for ever stored in memory. A part of our life seemed over and done with ; we have not thought about it for years. But some association unlocks the chamber of memory where it was stored ; and there it is, as vividly clear as when it was sensation, hot and new ! Whether or not everything committed to remembrance can, some day, somehow, be recalled, at least there is enough in every memory of sorrow and remorse to make it evident that—seen in the light of happiness—Memory is the most important as well as the most mysterious of all the faculties of man.

Seen in the light of immortality, Memory assumes a form yet more august. " Son, remember," said the aged saint to Dives in the place of torment ; and the

word was at once the assurance of the man's continued personal existence, and the suggestion of the chief element of his deserved and poignant misery.

Memory is the first essential to a belief in immortality, in a continued personal existence. That "corporate immortality," of which George Eliot's lines about the "choir invisible" are the best-known illustration, is not an immortality at all. Unless a man have a grip upon the past, and know himself as the same man that lived and loved and suffered and then died, it is useless to speak of a life after death.

If memory thus survive—or, as men nearly drowned have testified, and as the Bible seems to suggest, if the very fact of death be itself a marvelous stimulant and intensifier of memory—is it not evident that much of the meaning of the reward and the punishment of a future life must be interpreted in terms which Memory supplies? Forgiveness itself is not oblivion, and the saved soul in all its blessedness cannot find the balm of healing that forgetfulness would bring. That old sin stained the dead man's life and covered it with regret and remorse and pain. He confessed it before his Father in Heaven, and the sin was forgiven. There is nothing more certain in the Gospel of Christ than this. Forgiven was the old sin: but forgotten? that is another matter, and that cannot be. Even amid the angel presences of the fair land to which the man has gone, the ghosts of his buried life will rise to haunt him, and in the burden of an unquenchable memory he will know at times something of that other state where Dives was when he heard the voice of Abraham, "Son, remember."

There are alleviations to such a thought that in some degree mitigate its terror. Memory will adjust itself

in the presence of a fuller knowledge than is possible here of the consequences of actions and the power of God to turn the wrath of man to praise Him. Memory will be lightened by a hope surer than now can be discovered, and a faith firmer than that on which we stumbling mortals lean. In the conscious presence of Love itself, even Memory will yield to adoration and praise.