

ART. IV.—THE "CHRISTIAN SCIENCE" FOLLY.

THE growth of "Christian Science" in Great Britain makes it impossible for us to leave it severely alone. Mere disdain is not enough to kill this folly. Its very magnitude at least compels our attention. Personally I have for several years been acquainted with this "Revelation" as its adherents call it; but many thoughtful clergy and laity may not be familiar with its history.

Like some other curious things, Christian Science hails from America, its discoverer and founder being an American lady who is called "the Reverend Mary Baker E. Eddy." The movement began in the year 1865; it has, therefore, been thirty-six years in existence. Christian Science has had great success in America, where it professes to have adherents to the number of over a million and a half; in England it is making some way among the upper classes, and both London and Cambridge boast the possession of a Christian Scientist Church. Similar churches to the number of about 500 exist in America, Canada, Australia, France and Germany, together with over 100 institutes for the healing of the sick, while at the World's Congress of Religions held in 1894 it was claimed that more than 1,000,000 cases of disease, many of whom had been previously pronounced incurable by medical men, had been healed by Christian Science. This movement has, of course, a book, which was given to the world by the Rev. Mary Baker E. Eddy, and is entitled "Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures," which can be had separate or bound up with the Bible. Its success is testified by the fact that it has reached its 203rd edition of a thousand copies each. I think, therefore, that I am justified in saying that we ought not to pass this movement by without notice, but should get some idea of its *claims* and *practice*.

Fortunately, the articles recently published by the Earl of Dunmore present some salient points for notice, while those who care to pursue the subject can study the text-book named above, or the Society's magazine, entitled the *Christian Science Journal*. This is also the place to mention a valuable refutation of the whole movement, entitled "A Review of Christian Science," in the form of a pamphlet published by the S.P.C.K., from which I have obtained much information. Not the least interesting sign of our times is the fact that this so-called Christian Science which a woman gave to the world has received a remarkably powerful reply from a truly Christian and scientific woman.

To revert to the proclamation of his creed which Lord

Dunmore has recently given forth to England, and which no doubt will give the movement a new prominence in our country, I will commence with what he describes as the *object* of Christian Scientists: "To endeavour to get a spiritual insight into the knowledge of those laws and principles which relate to Christ and His teaching, as we find them in the Scriptures, and to so order their lives as to act up to those principles." So far we see nothing new in the system, and we are reminded of texts in St. Paul's Epistles, as well as phrases in our own Church Catechism. Later on we are told that this is no new religion, but a clear and intelligible apprehension of the religion of Christ; soon, however, we receive a shock, for when distinguishing between faith-healing and Christian Science, the writer goes on to say that the latter does not work "through *blind faith* in a *personal* God," but through understanding and realizing of two main axioms: (1) that there is but one mind (God) and that mind governs all, (2) that man being God's spiritual idea is the reflection of His Divine Father (God).

You may not, perhaps, quite understand this, and I am afraid that I cannot enlighten you, nor, I suspect, can the writer of the sentence; in fact, nothing strikes one more than this: that the promoters of this movement evidently do not understand the expressions which they use, and whose grandeur impresses them exceedingly. We have, however, got hold of *two things*: the *non-personality* of God, and the perfection of man, which run counter to the teaching of the very Scriptures which Christian Science professes to follow.

In his second article the writer begins by disposing of Satan. The gist of a long paragraph consists of this statement: "You believe that God is omnipotent, and yet you believe in a personal power of evil; it is impossible to conceive of God as infinite good, and then to incorporate *within that* an entity called Satan, or Spirit of Evil." I have emphasized the words *within that*, for there is the flaw in the reasoning. No follower of Christ teaches that Satan is within God; only a Pantheist would be influenced by such a statement. Denying a personal God you find yourself in a difficulty of which the quickest and indeed the only way out is to deny a personal Satan. The same writer goes on to say, "Christian Science recognises the Almighty as being a God of infinite love, and *not a personal* God," and yet almost in the same sentence he writes we "acknowledge and adore one supreme God," and "acknowledge *His Son* and the Holy Ghost."

"It is impossible," he adds, "to hold to the old idea of a personal God," and yet in the same sentence he speaks of

"Jesus Christ, His Son;" with all reverence we may ask, "Whose Son?"

The healing of the sick is stated by Lord Dunmore to be only a part of the work of Christian Science, but an absolutely essential part, for since Christ connected the two things "preach the Gospel and heal the sick," we have no right to separate them. Then there is also the more important "metaphysical healing from sin" (I quote his own words), by which "sinners have been reclaimed, habitual drunkards have turned from intoxicants, and have regained not only their health, but their self-respect; . . . lunatics have regained their sanity, and one law after another that constituted the illusory bondage of mortal mind has been broken in the name of the Son of God." How this is stated to be done we shall see later on, but he clears the ground by expressing the opinion that persons who use medical science "deny the omnipotence of God, inasmuch as they place more reliance on a box of pills or a bottle of medicine than on the power of Him who rules the universe." I will not delay to expose the amazing confusion of ideas and language which this sentiment exhibits, as they are apparent, but I will make bold to suggest that when Isaiah said, "put a plaster of figs upon the boil," he did not deny the omnipotence of God, but believed, as we believe now, that God would bless the means used. The writer then proceeds to assert that the promise of Christ, "these signs shall follow them that believe," etc., was clearly meant for all mankind, for all time, and in all places; if this be so, why is there no distinct teaching on this subject in the New Testament, and what are we to make of St. Paul's "thorn in the flesh"—some physical trouble from which even an Apostle could not get free? Neither could he deliver his friend, for "Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick." At this point Lord Dunmore gives us *three axioms* or essential points on which Christian Science rests:

1. "Life never dies, for God is the only Life." This grand-sounding sentence has a fatal fallacy in it, that which logicians call "undistributed middle"; for unless he can say what kind of life is specified, the writer is clearly wrong—the life of the vegetable or animal, the bodily life of the man, does die. If spiritual life is meant, he has borrowed this from the Bible and it is nothing new.

2. "God is not the author of sin, sickness, or disease." I have not yet discovered anyone profane enough to say that He was; but now listen to the so-called reasoning: because He is not the author of sin, *therefore* sin can have no part in His kingdom! (These are Lord Dunmore's words, and they are a faithful transcript of his preceptress, the Rev. Mary Baker E. Eddy.) Again, "as sickness and disease cannot be called

very good, *the logical deduction* is that as God made everything, and as everything He made was very good, sickness and disease were never creations of the Almighty." Here I venture to ask again, "Whoever said that they were?" I pass by the amazing mistakes in reasoning, and merely suggest that since God Himself tells us *how* and *when* sin, sickness, and disease invaded the world which He created "good," His statement is worth our acceptance. I am not surprised, however, that in the Christian Science text-book (which can be had bound up with the Bible) the account of the Fall is styled only "a dream narrative."

3. The third axiom comes down from the clouds to practical matters: "Divine truth, which is Life, casts out human error and heals the sick."

How is this done? "Metaphysical treatment, through the power of Divine truth, is able to heal mortal mind of *the illusion of sickness*, and when the mind is relieved of its illusion there is no sickness left to disappear." We now have reached an important stage. Up to this point our dealings have been chiefly in doctrine: we have done away with a Personal God, and, of course, a personal Satan; we have abolished the Fall of man, and, of course, the Atonement, and even sin itself. Now we come to practical matters; sickness and disease, like sin, are only *illusions* and must be treated as such. How is this moral and physical treatment to be carried out? The answer is, "By thought." Thought governed by fear makes people ill, and governed by sin (which, by the way, "does not exist") it makes them bad; direct the thought into the right channel, tell them that sin and disease do not exist, are illusions, and sickness and sin will disappear, for thought has triumphed. The same holds true, we are told, with animals; how you can "direct into a right channel" the thought of a pig suffering from swine fever and convince the unhappy beast that its illness is an illusion, I know not; but a poor parishioner of mine, who lost his all in that way recently would have been glad of the secret. I had but just written these words and asked myself, "Why insult my readers with all these statements?" when, looking up from my work, my eyes fell upon a paragraph in a newspaper lying on the table, in which Lady Abinger gives a glowing account of the healing of one of her horses from a violent cold that settled on its lungs—a cold which, after defying the skill of a veterinary surgeon "during months of suffering," was set to rights in a couple of days by a Christian Scientist telegraphed for from London!

The paragraph begins: "I have found with my animals such great help from Christian Science treatment" (*Daily*

Mail, May 22, 1901). You will therefore acquit me of triviality.

But to return to men. Speaking of sin, or moral evil, Lord Dunmore writes: "If we know that evil is nothing more than an outcome of erroneous thought," what is the remedy? "Change the thought in order that error which kills may be supplemented by truth that gives life." That there is a sense in which these words may be charitably construed is evident, but let us not be taken off our guard by mere words; for how is the sinner to be helped? Not by turning his thoughts to the Saviour of sinners, but—here I quote again from the text-book—"In order to cure his patient, the metaphysician should first cast moral evils out of himself;" and Lord Dunmore continues: "A man has . . . to go through a course of self-purification before he can attain that spiritual freedom which will enable him to cope with the sufferings of his fellow-creatures."

Here is the attraction, and it is a very old one—as venerable as the tower of Babel. You need no assistance from above; you can make your own way to heaven. First cleanse yourself, and then you can purify everybody else. Is it any wonder that this delightful system is attracting many followers? You may think, perhaps, that, as is often the case, the disciple goes beyond the teacher, and that Lord Dunmore exaggerates what he has received. Far from it. The articles from which I have quoted are written in a guarded manner, full of Scriptural words and phrases, that no doubt have already captivated many unwary souls. They do not approach the extraordinary statements of the prophetess of the movement, who accepts or rejects Scripture as suits her purpose. Creation she accepts, and deduces from it that man is "incapable of sickness, sin, and death." The Fall she rejects, as we have already seen. Heresies innumerable snare her feet, but they do not hinder her triumphant progress. The "dual personality" of Christ is one of these. The "Man Jesus" suffered because He had not overcome the illusions of matter—the Divine Idea, or Christ, could not suffer. Lightly does she cast aside the words of the Holy One Himself—"Ought not *the Christ* to have suffered?" The Reverend Mary Baker E. Eddy is a philosopher, and builds her house on two foundation-stones, of which *one* is that since matter is the result of mind, the human mind can control all material phenomena; the *other*, that because matter is dependent on mind it is unreal, or a delusion. Having reached *per saltum* these satisfactory conclusions, many more are attained in similar ways worthy of the companions of "Alice in Wonderland." Everything bad is a delusion; do not believe in it. Sickness

exists "in belief"; here is the rule taken out of the text-book therefor: "Deny persistently everything the patient says." Sin is a similar delusion; how can that be proved? With the greatest ease. "If God is good, is real, then evil, the opposite of God, is unreal." Light, we might venture to suggest, is real, therefore darkness is unreal; the pole of my magnet which attracts one end of the compass-needle is real, therefore the other pole which repels is unreal. These little objections to her philosophy are, however, of no weight. There is no sin; it is all a mistake. Man needs no redemption; he is already perfect. How do you prove that? Because he is the idea or reflection of God, and therefore so long as God is perfect, man must be so too. You are in the midst of a world of sin and suffering; you feel their effects in yourself and those around you. The unbeliever despairingly says, "There can be no God." The believer trustfully says, "God has shown us how sin can be overcome and suffering endured." The Christian Scientist smilingly replies, "You are both mistaken; there is no sin, no suffering; only believe that there is none—hey presto!—it will vanish."

With wild inconsistency she admits the existence of *sorrow*. "Sorrow," she teaches, "is salutary." "Sorrow has its reward . . . the cup our Father has given, shall we not drink it?" Our sorrow is one of the results of sin, and how a thing which has no existence can have a product that is beneficial I cannot understand.

The whole system is bristling with illogical absurdities, with bombastic phrases—philosophical, medical, and religious—evidently picked up from a superficial acquaintance with the religious books of the Hindoos and not understood by those who use them, as well as with statements in direct opposition to the Word of God. Yet with all this there is a certain amount of attractiveness in a system that is not one for aggrandizement or pleasure, but which claims as its object the relief of sin, sickness, and sorrow. It is easy to see that what is *good* in Christian Science is not peculiar to it; wherever *sense* appears in its rules or statements, it is some old truth out of the Scriptures in a fantastic setting. The question is, *Whence comes it?* And according as we make reply we shall perhaps see how we ought to treat it. Is it a kind of reaching forth after that holy life and power over evil, the very yearning after which is a sign of the heavenly origin of the spirit of man?

Every form of error in our Church's history has arisen from neglect of some truth. Perhaps it is so here, showing us if Christians had realized more the power of prayer, the presence of God in our daily work, and the potentialities of a Spirit-filled

life, we should have heard nothing of Christian Science. Or is it something of quite a different origin? We have seen how full of Scriptural phraseology the system is—it takes the Bible professedly as its guide, and is like the very best Christianity with something less and something more; it is not an opposition, but an imitation. Now here is the trade-mark that seems to show from what factory it has come. In that remarkable chapter describing the "perilous latter days," 2 Tim. iii. (you recollect the word translated "perilous" occurs only once elsewhere in Holy Scripture, when it is used of the demon-possessed men of Gergesa), it is said that one of the forms of resistance to the truth should resemble the plan adopted by the Egyptian magicians—that, you recollect, was not open opposition; by no means, it was IMITATION, by which the Apostle meant to teach us that in the closing days of this dispensation the Devil, when he finds open opposition to be a failure, will return to his old tactics, and by means of an imitation Gospel will draw away many unwary souls. If this be so there can be no doubt of our attitude towards Christian Science. "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say." At least, let us be on the alert, so that we may keep that which has been entrusted to us from the schemes of our Great Enemy, whether he comes openly as a bitter foe, or in the hypocritical guise of a seeming friend.

Since writing the above, I have read in one of the daily papers that at a recent trial in America in which there came out some matters damaging to "Christian Science" an important witness was required, who was none other than the founder herself. It was stated, however, that, "owing to illness," the lady could not appear. Has the Rev. Mary Baker E. Eddy no friends, not one willing to point out to her that "sickness is an illusion," and prepared to "deny persistently everything the patient says"?

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