

SOME LATTER-DAY HERESIES.

II. CHRISTIAN SCIENCE.

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A LADY whose three sons had all fought in the Great War was recently introduced to the writer of this article. She was an ardent Christian Scientist and had paid regularly for what is called "absent treatment" for each of her three sons, during the whole time of their service abroad. She herself had also co-operated in the treatment. The purpose was to try to prevent them being either killed or wounded. What was the result? Instead of being preserved from calamity, one brave boy had lost his life and another had been terribly maimed. Only one had come through safely, and he is an entire sceptic regarding the tenets of Christian scientists. Both he and the husband smile at the mother's credulity, though they are grieved to note how she blames herself—her wrong thought—for the calamities that befell the two sons. In spite of this failure, which must be heartrending to a sensitive mother, the lady still persists in her belief in, and support of, Christian Science, and endeavours to propagate its claims.

I

What is the cause of this keenness? Why do the adherents of this cult evince such tenacity and pertinacity? Why have its numbers increased with almost startling rapidity? ¹ There are at least four reasons.

(1) Almost without exception each member has experienced some personal physical benefit which is attributed to obeying the teaching of Christian Science. Some have been cured of illnesses of a serious character, after ordinary medical treatment has proved ineffective. Even though later there may be a relapse, or though other diseases may appear and medical aid be sought, they never

¹ The first "church" was founded in 1879 with 26 members. There are now said to be over 1,600 Christian Science Churches and Societies, with well over 3,000,000 adherents.

forget the first "cure," and account for the subsequent failure by their own lack of understanding of the full Truth. The system is right, they say, but their progress in it is inadequate.

(2) The fires of their enthusiasm are kept burning by constant testimonies from others. Every week there is published in *The Christian Science Sentinel* a number of "Testimonies of Healing." In the current issue (Dec. 20) there are nineteen of these, two of which are from England. Names and addresses are given. These reveal the fact that they are nearly all from ladies. At the local mid-week meetings these personal testimonies occupy much of the time. Those who have not experienced such results maintain silence, because acknowledgment of failure would seem to reflect on their understanding or faith. In the text-book no less than one hundred pages are devoted to what is called "fruitage."

(3) The possession of an authoritative book and literature. Their standard text-book is *Science and Health, with Key to the Scriptures*, by Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy. This is to be possessed and carefully studied by all members. Extracts from it are read at all their Sunday gatherings, where it takes its place as equal, if not superior, to the Bible. No sermon or address is permitted, but two well-chosen Readers are appointed, one of whom reads a verse or verses from the Scriptures, whilst the other at once follows with a specified portion from *Science and Health*. This alternation continues until the full selections for that day have all been read. The selections are chosen by the authorities in Boston. No comment whatever is allowed. All the literature circulated is published from Boston, and has to pass the official censorship. At least once a year there is a public lecture, but this can only be given by one who has been appointed and commissioned by the authorities of the "First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts." No one else is permitted to lecture on the subject, and no member is permitted publicly to defend the system when attacked. All this autocratic control is intended, no doubt, to prevent diverse teachings entering into the cult; to satisfy the cravings of some for authoritative declarations, and, not least, to prevent its absurdities being publicly admitted.

(4) For many it has seemed to make God and Spirit far more real than ever they experienced in the vagueness and variety of any previous teaching.

II

It must be freely admitted that many of the adherents are people of high moral character ; that they really believe (or believe they believe) what they profess, and that they think they possess the secret " of a power that must eventually have infinitely greater results for the human race than any discovery that has preceded it." It must also be as freely admitted that a large number of people have received physical benefit, which they attribute to Christian Science. It must still further be granted that the present revival of spiritual healing in the Christian Church is largely, though not entirely, due to the circulation of Mrs. Eddy's works and the results of her labours. For all that is good we are truly grateful. But we must object most strongly when she takes a half-truth, magnifies it until she assumes it to be the whole truth,¹ constructs a philosophy and a religion upon that inadequate conception, and *rejects everything that disagrees therewith*, including all other peoples' experience, research and faith, no matter how well authenticated. We must oppose when Christian Science casts out as untrue practically all the fundamental beliefs of Christianity as understood by the Church and-expressed in the Apostles' Creed ; when it alters and even denies the truth of the words and messages of the Bible, not excluding that which came from our Lord's own lips ; and when we believe that if its teaching and practice were given a free course, the misery, pain, sorrow and sin of the world would be multiplied enormously.

Part of the " half-truth " is the fact that Mind has a potent influence upon the body ; that it is possible for maladies of many kinds to be removed—at least for a time—without any resource to doctors or drugs. The evidence for this is abundant. Mental therapeutics, including hypnotism, suggestion, mind-healing, are fairly widely practised to-day.² Since the War most wonderful cures have been wrought in this way, equal to anything claimed by Christian Science. The other part of the " half-truth " is the fact that trust in God gives the best conditions, and assures the best results. The heresy consists in denying the need of medical help on any occasion ; in denying the reality of the disease or the suffer-

¹ " We admit the whole, because part is proved " (*Science and Health*, p. 461).

² *Vide* " Report of the Clerical and Medical Committee on Spiritual Healing " (1914).

ing, and in asserting the "nothingness" of all matter, all mortal mind and all evil. All is "illusion."

III

The "fundamental propositions of divine metaphysics" (i.e. Christian Science) are summarised by Mrs. Eddy as follows:—(1) God is All-in-all. (2) God is good; Good is Mind. (3) God, Spirit, being all, *nothing is matter*. (4) Life, God, omnipotent good, deny death, evil, sin, disease. Disease, sin, evil, death, deny good, omnipotent God, Life (*Science and Health*, p. 113).

Assuming the truth of these propositions she makes her startling statements which assert the unreality, nothingness, illusion of all pain, suffering, disease, sin, death, even matter itself. "If Spirit is *all* and is everywhere," she asks, "what and where is matter?" (p. 223). It is "a human concept" (i.e. idea), "an error of statement" (p. 277), "another name for mortal mind" (p. 591), whilst "mortal mind has no real existence" (p. 115), "there is no mortal mind" (pp. 399, 487).

Another writer, an enthusiast, who has studied the subject for years, and who tries to make clear the involved, bewildering, contradictory and oft-repeated utterances of Mrs. Eddy, gives "the basic argument or thesis of Christian Science" as (1) God is perfection. (2) All real or true life is a spiritual expression or manifestation of God; (3) and is, therefore, equally perfect. He adds, "Upon this basis the whole fabric of the philosophy and religion of Christian Science rests, so that what is provable from this basis is Christian Science, and what is not logically deducible therefrom is not Christian Science."¹

That God is perfection no Christian will deny. Scripture states it (Matt. v. 48) and reason demands it. But what is our conception of a Perfect God? What does the term "Perfection" connote as applied to the Deity? To the Christian it not only includes such attributes as Omnipotence, Omniscience, Infinity, Eternity, but also Love, Sympathy, readiness to help,—in fact all that is summed up in the fullness of the word "Father." Nothing less would be a "perfect" God. The Christian Scientists, whilst using terms that suggest otherwise, in reality refuse to recognise in Him this "perfection." God is denied all knowledge of human conditions, and

¹ *A Plea for Christian Science* (C. H. Lee), p. xx.

hence of all sympathy. "Immortal Mind takes no cognisance of matter" (*Science and Health*, p. 591). "God cannot be a party to the sin, sickness and suffering of the world, nor *indeed can He be conscious of it*" (*A Plea*, etc., p. xiv). "God has no knowledge of evil, and consequently is not conscious of this material world with all its imperfections" (*A Plea*, etc., p. 31). "God is not and *cannot be conscious of the material world as we know it*" (p. 23). "When we fully understand our relation to the Divine we can have no other mind but His . . . and *no consciousness of the existence of matter*" (*Science and Health*, p. 206).

God, therefore, knows nothing of the Great War with all its sufferings and agonies. If He were conscious of the pain, the struggle, the armies, they would all be real, and to admit their reality would overthrow the whole structure of Christian Science. He knows nothing of the suffering in our hospitals, nothing of the sin in our cities, nothing of the injustices, nothing of the wrongs of humanity. No Ear hearkens to the cry of the troubled or distressed, no Mind understands their sorrow, no Heart sympathises, no Hand is stretched out to help. "Sympathy with sin, sorrow or sickness would dethrone God as Truth, for Truth has no sympathy for error" (*Yes and No* (Mrs. Eddy), p. 30). "God . . . is too pure to think of man as sick or bad" (*Christian Science Journal*, June 19, p. 138), that is of man as he really is. Is Ignorance a factor of "Perfection?"

Sometimes Christian Scientists try to deny this terrible consequence of their teaching, and they quote passages from their textbook, e.g. : "It is the all-hearing and all-knowing Mind to whom each need of man is already known and by whom it will be supplied." "God knows our need before we tell Him or our fellow beings about it." But the context shows that these words are used to emphasise the uselessness of petition. They must also be taken in conjunction with the fundamental principle of Christian Science that sickness, suffering, disease, sin, death, are absolutely unreal to God, and do not enter into the Divine consciousness. Hence no part of man's need which God supplies can include any of those things which are the most pressing to the man, and in which he needs the most help. He cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities : He knows not our frame.

It follows as a consequence that the Christian Scientist refuses

to admit any value in Intercessory Prayer. Since both God and man are perfect ¹ there is nothing for which to supplicate, and there is no One Who can or will grant the supplication. There are no audible prayers at their gatherings, except the repetition of the Lord's Prayer, which is accompanied by Mrs. Eddy's exposition, lest this might appear to be petition and intercession. "It is true that the Lord's Prayer seems to be partly in the form of petition," says a recent Christian Science writer, "but it is beautifully explained in our text-book . . . in affirmation of the truth and denial of error, without any pleading with God to do what He otherwise might not do" (*Christian Science Journal*, June 19, p. 137). The petition "Thy kingdom come" means "Thy kingdom is come; Thou art ever-present"; "forgive us our trespasses, etc." is merely the statement "Love is reflected in love," and so on. All audible worship in the Churches is untrue, unspiritual. All petition and intercession are vain and useless. St. Paul was quite wrong when he exhorted that supplication, prayers and intercessions should be made for all men (1 Tim. ii. 1). Mrs. Eddy understands the truth far better than the Apostle. Such is the teaching of this "latter-day heresy."

IV

The Teaching about our Lord. One of the most important subjects for inquiry concerning any new religion is the conception held of our Lord's Person and Work. Christian Science naturally has much to say, but it is entirely subversive of the orthodox faith. It is, as they admit, "a very distinct divergence from the accepted teaching of all the other Christian Churches" (*A Plea*, etc., p. xv). The following extracts reveal their position. "Jesus Christ is not God" (*Science and Health*, pp. 361, 473). In the earlier editions the words occur, "Jesus was not God's son in any other sense than every man is God's son." This sentence is now omitted but it represents their thought. Mrs. Eddy distinguishes between "the eternal Christ and the corporeal Jesus" (p. 334). "The eternal Christ . . . never suffered" (p. 38), "Jesus represented Christ" (p. 316). "Jesus demonstrated Christ; he proved that

¹ "The science of being reveals man as perfect, even as the Father is perfect" (*Science and Health*, p. 302). "In spite of all contrary appearances, man is not a material being, but a perfect spiritual being" (*A Plea*, etc., p. 20). Everything else is "unreal," "illusion," "nothing."

Christ is the divine idea of God—the Holy Ghost, or Comforter ” (p. 332). Jesus “ was endowed with the Christ ” (p. 30). There was “ a dual personality,” “ a duality.” “ Jesus is the name of the man, who, more than all other men, has presented Christ, the true idea of God ” (p. 473). The difference between our Lord and other men is “ not one of origin or nature, but *only of degree.*” “ In the Christian Science view all men are equally perfect spiritual beings with Jesus Christ ” (*A Plea*, etc., p. 43), though He was “ the most spiritual man that ever lived.”

Not only is the Incarnation denied, but also the *Atonement* as generally understood. “ Christ never suffered.” “ One sacrifice, however great, is insufficient to pay the debt of sin ” (p. 23). Sin is an illusion which cannot be pardoned, but must be destroyed. “ Christ came to destroy the *belief* of sin.” “ Man is incapable of sin, sickness, and death ” (p. 475). “ The real Christ was unconscious of matter, of sin, disease and death, and was conscious only of God, of good, of eternal life and harmony ” (*Yes and No*, p. 36). A wonderful collection of words and phrases is used to try to give meaning to the Atonement, to retain the word, whilst denuding it of all Christian interpretation. Our Lord did nothing that Christian Science, fully followed, is unable to do to-day.

What about the Resurrection? The death was not real but “ seeming ” (*Science and Health*, p. 45). “ His disciples believed Jesus to be dead while he was hidden in the sepulchre, whereas he was alive, demonstrating within the narrow tomb the power of Spirit to overrule mortal, material sense.” “ The lonely precincts of the tomb gave Jesus a refuge from his foes, a place in which to solve the great problem of being. . . . He met and mastered on the basis of Christian Science, the power of Mind over matter, all the claims of medicine, surgery and hygiene ” (p. 44). This is how Rev. i. 17, 18 is quoted, “ I am he that liveth, and was dead [not understood] ; and behold, I am alive for evermore [Science has explained me] ” (*Science and Health*, p. 334). Does not this read like blasphemy? Similar language is used of the *Ascension*. At “ the Master’s Ascension, the human, material concept,¹ or Jesus, disappeared, while the spiritual self, or Christ, continues to exist in the eternal order of divine Science, taking away the sins of the world ” (p. 334). Hence the human Jesus no longer exists, and the divine

¹ Is not this a contradiction in terms? Can a *concepti* be material?

Christ is not a Person but only an "idea" of God, and Mind. Truly "they have taken away my Lord."

V

Something must be said about the claim of Christian Scientists that they alone are fulfilling our Lord's command "to heal the sick," and are accomplishing this in exactly the same way in which He Himself did His mighty works. It is strange that this one command should be accepted quite literally whilst nearly all else has to be understood spiritually. When our Lord says "*lay hands* on the sick and they shall recover," we are to understand "the word *hands* is used metaphorically" (p. 38). When He said "cast out devils" He referred to "evil thoughts," "delusions," "errors," "belief in sin, sickness and death" (p. 584). When He said "raise the dead," He meant "raise the dead in trespasses and sins," or "deny the reality of death." When He spoke about the "poor" to whom the Gospel was to be preached, He meant "the meek in heart" (p. 33), "the receptive thought" (p. 34). [This explanation is required from the fact that no literally poor person could understand Mrs. Eddy's "Gospel"; and that the *cheapest* edition of *Science and Health* is now 15s. 6d., pre-war price 12s. 6d. (Contrast the price of Bibles.) Enormous profits have been made.] "Our *baptism* is a purification from all error." "Our Bread . . . is Truth" (p. 35). After such spiritualising one would expect that the "sick" must mean the sin-sick, as the Church has often interpreted it, but this term must be taken absolutely literally. In fact power to "heal the sick" is the great test whereby true Christianity is to be discerned; all else is negligible. Mrs. Eddy's argument is that Christian Science does heal the sick, and therefore it must be *all* true, it must be divine, it must be one with the practice of our Lord. Only one so illogical as the author of *Science and Health* could make such an absurd statement. Every quack, every charlatan, every patent medicine vendor can claim to have "healed the sick," often after the patient has been pronounced incurable by doctors; every hypnotist, mesmerist, mind-healer, can claim to have worked cures without the use of drugs. Do the results prove the truth of their theories? Further, what about the failures, which are many? Do not these, in like manner, demonstrate the falsity of Christian Science? These failures would be more apparent and common if

the law did not defend the citizens, and demand medical treatment in time of need. There is one conspicuous inconsistent passage in *Science and Health* in this connection. After asserting over and over again such words as "the drug does nothing, because it has no intelligence" (p. 12), Mrs. Eddy says, "If from an injury or from any cause, a Christian Scientist were seized with *pain so violent* that he could not treat himself mentally—and the Scientists had failed to relieve him,—the sufferer could call a surgeon, who would give him a hypodermic injection, then, when the *belief* of pain was lulled [pain has no reality, it is an illusion], he could handle his own case mentally" (p. 464). This injunction is a useful admixture of a little common-sense, but it loosens the foundation of Christian Science, and overthrows their claim that they and Jesus Christ are one in principle and method of operation. Another amazing inconsistency is that their teaching denies the body all real existence, yet the one great purpose of *Science and Health* is to show how it can be kept in a healthy condition. Further, if matter, mortal mind and the physical senses are all "nothing," an "illusion," if this life is a dream, what guarantee can we have that Christian Science itself is not part of that illusion, and of that dream? When this question was put to one who had been led astray by this un-Christian teaching and who was speaking about the "dream" of life, he could not answer, but had to admit "that is what puzzles me."

Space forbids one dwelling upon the cruelty of the system to sufferers, the callousness that its teaching generates, the autocracy of its discoverer, her quarrels with her students, her law-suits, her divorce from the second of her three husbands, her large profits on her publications, or the strong denunciation of all who oppose Christian Science. What must be the mentality of one who could write, "Only those quarrel with her method who do not understand her meaning, or discerning the truth, come not to the light lest their works be reprov'd. No intellectual proficiency is required in the learner, but sound morals are most desirable" ? (*Science and Health*, p. x). Therefore if any Christian finds contradictions, untruths or misstatements in *Science and Health*, he must be either weak-minded or immoral. What an accusation !

¹ *What is Christian Science?* (S.P.C.K.), p. 17. This pamphlet contains an address to Bible Class members, and is useful for distribution.

In spite of this denunciation, we are bold to say that *many of the statements* of Christian Science *are* contrary to reason, to Scripture and to all other teaching. A diligent student of *Science and Health* has said: "It abounds in contradictions not only to be found in the same page, the same paragraph, the same sentence, but often between two words used consecutively."¹ Words are used with double meaning, and most logical fallacies find frequent illustration. Expressions occur which seem to border on blasphemy. For example, "God, without the image and likeness of Himself, would be a non-entity." That is to say, man is essential to God's existence, and before man there was no God. The system cannot be styled Christian in any honest sense, neither is it scientific in any admitted definition of that word. Yet it is spreading, and herein consists a call to the Church to re-emphasise the great truths which come as a revelation to those who are brought into contact with its devotees, and to give clear warning of its truly un-Christian tendencies.

These great Truths are (1) The Unity which underlies all creation. The All-ness of God. That Mind, Spirit, is the ultimate Reality. (2) That God is Perfect, Good, Love. (3) That sin, suffering, disease are contrary to the "mind of God." In the true life, eternal life, these can have no place. (4) That "mind" has a powerful influence on the physical condition. (5) That our Lord intended spiritual healing to continue with His Church. That "the prayer of faith" can still help to "save the sick." That prayer is at least as important as medicine. (6) That Christ alone destroys the sin of the world. Had the Church proclaimed these truths with clearness there would have been less opportunity for such a strange religion as Christian Science to arise and to spread. If her preachers now publish them repeatedly, and at the same time show the absurdities, the inconsistencies, the un-Christian teaching concerning God our Father, Jesus Christ our Lord, prayer, the soul and the future life, they will prevent leakage in her ranks towards this "latter-day heresy."

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¹ *The Truth and Error of Christian Science.* By M. Carter Sturge (Murray). This book is strongly recommended for further study. See also *Christian Science*, by Dean Lefroy. A list of contradictions is given at the end.