

SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AND MODERN KNOWLEDGE.

PRESENT CONDITIONS AND FUTURE POSSIBILITIES.

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"We stand at a moment when the course of history depends upon the calm reasonableness arising from a religious public opinion. A new Reformation is in progress. It is a re-formation; but whether its issue be fortunate or unfortunate depends largely on the actions of comparatively few men, and notably upon the leaders of the protestant clergy."

IN these brief and pregnant words Professor A. N. Whitehead summarises the present position and future possibilities of human life. They are taken from his arresting book, *Adventures in Ideas* (p. 206), in which he demonstrates the fact that "ideas," which he considers the driving forces of progressive life, take long ages to become fully operative in human life; this he illustrates in detail in respect of the "idea" of "freedom."

He sees humanity in the midst of a new Reformation, when a calm and reasonable religious spirit is required. He believes that the leaders of the protestant clergy have an important part to play in this new re-formation, and that on their actions the fortunate or unfortunate issue of the future largely depends. In what follows the writer sets forth his estimate of the present situation together with an indication of the spirit and aim which he thinks should guide protestant thought at the present time.

The present religious situation throughout the Christian world is interesting and perplexing. On the one hand, there appears to be a grave anxiety on the part of the leaders of Christian organisations. We are told that "our faith is fighting for its life," that "the younger generation is repudiating the Gospel," that "the modern world is rushing headlong to social and spiritual destruction," we hear lamentations over "diminishing congregations" and "the tyranny of science." On the other hand, there appears to be a growing expectancy of a revival of religious life; and, in some quarters, it is believed that all over the world the ground is being prepared and conditions ripening for a spiritual revival on a large scale.

That there is a revival of *interest* in religion cannot be doubted. Ultimate questions are being asked at the present time with an insistence which cannot be misunderstood. There is a growing eagerness to assimilate new knowledge, an anxiety to repudiate past mistakes, as well as an adventurous spirit which seeks to

make bold and sometimes wild experiments in order to attain newness of life. The wide influence of the "Oxford Group Movement" bears witness to an eagerness to respond to a higher call when presented in a novel and experiential way. The head of a firm of publishers has recently told us that religious books can now be included among the world's best-sellers. (The ultimate value of some of the religious best-sellers may be a very open question.) The popular Press is quick to gauge the feelings of the masses, and it is reflected in the increasing space given to the discussion of religion in its columns. The B.B.C. gives substantial portions of its programmes to religious services and to religious discussion, and we are informed that there is a constant expression of the interest shown by listeners in these portions of the programmes.

Whether this growing interest in religion and the response it calls forth is making any real and beneficial impression upon the masses remains to be seen, but there can be little doubt of the revival of interest in religion which may be a precursor of a return to the more normal state of mind in respect of those ultimate problems which religion sets before the human soul.

There is, therefore, good ground for attempting to estimate the actual conditions of life as it affects religion, and to consider what is necessary for directing the growing interest in religion for the awakening of the spiritual life. It is also pertinent to ask: What are the real grounds for hope of a spiritual revival? Also: Are the Christian Churches prepared for the opportunity which may be presented to them?

THE LIFE OF TO-DAY.

It is a difficult and hazardous task to generalise the condition of masses of mankind, but it is a task which must be undertaken if we are to realise the situation and face the future. Roughly speaking, we may divide humanity into three classes according to the interests which dominate their lives, or the basis from which their activities and characters are being developed.

1. There is a class whose interests, attention and activities are directed mainly or exclusively to the acquisition of material goods, or to the physical security or comfort which material possessions facilitate. To have and to hold is the chief end of life. Self-preservation and acquisition are the instincts which govern their life.

2. A second class is composed of those whose attentions, interests and activities are absorbed in the satisfaction of the emotional life. Out of this class has arisen a (new) moral philosophy which regards the unrestrained expression of the crude instinctive forces which lie at the root of human nature as the one guide of life. They have made the popular Press and the modern novel what they are to-day; they have built our cinemas, dance-halls, greyhound and dirt-track courses; they fill our night-clubs and

beauty-parlours. Among many of them "thou shalt not repress" has taken the place of all ten commandments.

That a large part of humanity come within these classes cannot well be doubted.

3. The third class is composed of those whose interests and activities are centred in an ideal of personality which seeks to live and develop from the basis of the spiritual nature of man. They seek an ever-deepening spiritual consciousness, and by active co-operation with reality about them seek to control the forces of nature and life for the service of man. It must be frankly acknowledged that this class is a very definite minority in the present day, though their real influence and effective work are out of all proportion to their numerical strength. Many of them are outside the organised religious bodies.

Among the Churches it appears that many have little grasp of a dynamic spiritual life. Much of the popular Christianity appears to be a surface emotion, largely divorced from the rest of life, an anodyne which satisfies the conscience and justifies the soul to itself. Congregations will sing the sublime utterances of the mystic and religious genius without any real grasp of the life-giving experience which the words express. Many Christians conceive the Church as a system for the maintenance of a spiritual *status quo*—not a fellowship of souls sharing the dynamic life of God and therein growing in likeness to the character of God.

If this analysis has any true relation to the facts, it is obvious that the general temper of humanity is not very favourable to a spiritual revival. There is widespread ignorance and lack of convictions about the fundamental principles and values of human life, and consequently the masses have become unstable, weary and discontented. They know that there is something radically wrong with our civilisation, but are impatient of all attempts to diagnose the disease in *personal* terms; in this impatience they are especially unjust, even hypocritical, towards the Churches, for they will not listen to the Churches but condemn them for their inability to lead mankind out of the present chaotic conditions of life and thought. The age feels that Christianity is the only way out of the morass, but it wants Christianity without the Churches. (One wonders what the age knows about Christianity apart from the Churches.) It wants a religion of love and human brotherhood, but not the self-discipline, self-giving and personal responsibility which such a religion entails. It wants sentiment without severity. It rejects the Dogmas of the Churches yet asks urgently for certainty. It seeks for definiteness, but has neither the ability nor inclination to undertake the task of defining the fundamental principles of life, its origin, purpose or goal. The age has lost its way and is desperately conscious of its need of guidance, but it rejects or ignores all obligation to follow the guidance when it is forthcoming. It seeks to be free, but recognises no obligation for restraint; indiscipline is one of the major features of its malady. The deliverance it seeks is simply to follow

its own moods without let or hindrance, it wants what it likes. It has not learned that a "man's real difficulties begin when he is able to do as he likes."

Much of the religious discussion which goes on in the popular Press is anti-institutional and anti-dogmatic. It fails to suggest how a religious life can be stimulated and developed without being embodied in a concrete organisation, or how Christianity could be taught without the formulation of its fundamental principles.

The kind of religion which the masses want is a religion of comfort and assurance which cannot touch the basic roots of all its troubles, namely, its undisciplined and undirected impulses, its ignorance and its mistaken ideals. They have followed ruinous paths of self-reliance and self-complacency, and remain largely blind to the real character of sin and its soul-destroying power.

Sir Henry Clay, in his presidential address to the Royal Empire Society at Montreal, analysed the medical statistics for that country and suggested that modern ways of life and thought tended to lack of balance so that the human constitution could not resist the evils which beset it. He called attention to the statistics of lunacy which revealed an increased tendency to loss of mental balance. He saw signs of a religious revival, but is reported to have expressed the fear that "when it developed it would probably exceed all previous records in inco-ordinated fanaticism, although begun in well-meaning endeavour." That similar conditions prevail in this country there is little doubt; and the possibility of religious fanaticism arising from religious revival is a very real danger.

We have only to remember the rise of irrational cults since the Great War—spiritualism, astrology, palmistry, Christian Science, and in Christian bodies the Cultus centred round the elements of the Holy Communion, and the Cult of Lourdes, to realise that the fears, ideas and superstitions of primitive man are but thinly overlaid by his later developments, and are prone to reappear in circles where the rational powers are but feebly developed. The truth must be recognised that a religious revival is not of necessity a spiritual awakening.

There are, naturally, other angles to the picture. The growing sense of dissatisfaction and discontent may lead to a more fruitful issue, since discontent is not a sign of weakness but rather a sign of willingness to face up to the facts of the situation. No doubt the widespread economic distress itself is leading men and women to explore or re-explore the hidden depths of life, wherein they may make important discoveries of their real inner needs and desires. The inner urge to completeness is so central and fundamental to human life that man cannot long go unsatisfied without attempting to meet the needs of his emotional and rational life. Spiritual revivals have always sprung from a discontent, and the present discontent is both a challenge to and an opportunity for the Churches, for they possess the only Gospel that can meet the situation.

THE ROOT OF THE MATTER.

Diagnosis is the first step in the cure of any disease, and not least in the diseases of the soul. Faced with the varieties of human characters and human pursuits which surround us, can we find any principle which would enable us to diagnose the disease which has stricken so many souls? The manifold variety of human lives and human characters spring from the different apprehensions of reality which different individuals have attained, and their response to the realities apprehended. Sections of humanity may be classified according to the conceptions of reality which they have attained. Wherever defective apprehensions of reality exist defective characters ensue. The intense apprehension of physical reality accompanied with weak apprehensions of the self or the spiritual life must inevitably lead to the pursuit of merely physical satisfaction and physical ends. Where the predominant apprehensions are of the self, selfish ends and the satisfaction of the emotional life will ensue. Where the apprehension of the spiritual life is dominant the self will be of subordinate importance, and the physical of still lesser importance; this may still produce a defective personal life if inadequate apprehensions of the self or the physical co-exist. (The East presents examples where defective apprehensions of the self and the physical world leads to the virtual denial of the reality of this life and this world, the latter being treated as "maya" or illusion and the former as an evil from which it is desirable to escape.)

Thus, behind the problem of human character, and constituting its background, lies the problem of reality and its apprehension. We are thus forced to face ultimate problems in the search for an understanding of human evils and the way for their resolution. Perhaps the estrangement of large masses of our people from religion lies in the different apprehension of reality which they have attained and those which they imagine the Churches to set before them. Baron von Hugel has pointed out that in the past there was an "all but complete estrangement from Nature and Physical fact" on the part of philosophers and men of religion, who tended to treat "Matter and the Visible as more or less synonymous with Non-being and Irrationality, as a veil or even a wall, as a mere accident or even a positive snare, lying between us and Reality." No wonder there has been a fierce reaction when the triumphs of science have been manifested to the whole world. The triumphs of science have immeasurably strengthened our apprehensions of physical reality, psychology has demonstrated the fundamental nature of the instinctive life, and the resultant has been a weakening of the apprehensions of spiritual reality for many souls; this has been accentuated by the opposition to new learning which has been so often made in the name of religion, and the continuance of teaching which conflicts with established conclusions of science.

THE CHURCHES' ATTITUDE TO THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD.

One of the first steps which the Churches should make towards the solution of the crisis which has invaded religion as well as all other departments of life is to appreciate the importance of the scientific attitude to life and its problems. Christian thought cannot afford to neglect the scientific mood, aim and method, for they have invaded every department of life with illuminating and transforming power. *In the growth of the scientific spirit, the writer believes, lies the surest ground for hope in a spiritual revival.* The scientific spirit and method has developed a new reverence for facts, together with a new courage for facing facts, and an enlightened method for their investigation. These are the very qualities we need in religious life. We believe that religion is founded upon facts, the facts revealed in history and in Christian experience; and the application of the scientific spirit to the facts of religion will bring a new certitude to whatever is true, and help to sift the false from the true. The facts, if they are facts, can take care of themselves. If we actually believe that goodness and truth are of God we need not fear that the teaching which results from scientific research will harm religion. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that scientific research is a spiritual discipline, that it is friendly guidance which we ought gladly to accept. The best way to banish superstition and error is to examine religious beliefs in the light of the scientific mood and method. Faith is both purified and strengthened when it is united to intellectual progress.

The fundamental basis of the scientific method is the presupposition that all our conceptions of Reality and therefore all our interpretations of experience must arise from the experience of the race. It rejects the belief that we can have any conceptions of reality which are not derived from experience. It asserts the value of this life and its importance in the development of human character. The *a priori* attitude to life and its problems has ceased to be of influence among increasing numbers of mankind. The success of the scientific method has led great numbers to trust the method, and so they are reconsidering fundamental beliefs and ideas by its aid. Nor can it be gainsaid that the results achieved by scientific investigation have profoundly modified our conceptions of life and rendered obsolete some elements of Christian tradition. The gains, however, have been enormous. The human spirit has been shown to be a higher stage in the processes of life, though it is linked with all lower forms of life. The scientific method has shown, however, that the stages of life's evolution have been achieved by new correlations of the living organism with its environment. It has traced back the mental factors to the very lowest organisms. *The supremely significant fact revealed by science is that of mind (spirit) in evolution;* the stages of which are marked by an ever-increasing correlation of the organism with an ever-increasing segment of reality. This

gives religion a sure place in the evolutionary process, and suggests that the spiritual correlations so far achieved by man can have their only rational explanation in the reality of a spiritual environment which is the very condition of there being a spiritual life at all. That mind evolves by correlation with its environment speaks to us of a spiritual reality which envelops us and with which we can be in vital correlation, which, in its fullest sense, can be a fellowship with Eternal Reality.

In spite of much confusion which exists in the scientific world concerning its fundamental concepts real progress is being made in the synthesis of experience. The advances in physics have brought us nearer to the unification of physical phenomena. Nor are there lacking signs of the beginning of the unification of the phenomena of life; although it must be confessed that certain groups of psychologists seek for the elimination of mind from their concepts, and that certain groups of biologists are still wedded to the mechanistic hypothesis. The unification of biology and psychology is much to be desired, but the increasing acceptance of mental structure in all living organisms (including the cell) tends in that direction. The problem of the relation of body and mind still eludes us, though there is an increasing number of scientists who, as a result of the new discoveries in physics, are tending to conceive that relation in terms of *radiation*. Thus even physics is being brought into close relation with psychology.

Perhaps the chief value of scientific research lies in the fact that while on the one hand it helps us to realise more clearly the limitations of human life, on the other hand it points out the way in which those limitations may be transcended. That there has been a definite break-up of the materialistic conception of life cannot be doubted, and that this break-up provides a condition under which the spiritual life may once more assert its supremacy can scarcely be doubted. From time to time men are forced to reconsider fundamental ideas and beliefs, and must attempt to gain some harmony between past and present experience, and to reach a position which shall satisfy the demands of feeling and knowledge, and give them confidence to face the future. That we are now in the midst of such a radical reconsideration cannot well be doubted. Religion as a subject of critical and scientific inquiry, of both practical and theoretic importance, is attracting increased attention. There is a deeper intellectual interest in religion, and a widespread tendency in all parts of the world to reform or reconstruct religion, or even to replace it by some body of thought more rational and scientific or less superstitious. Whenever the ethical or moral values of activities or conditions are questioned, the value of religion is involved. All deep-stirring experiences invariably compel a reconsideration of the most fundamental ideas, and modern knowledge and modern conditions are so stirring the emotional life of men that such radical reconsideration seems wellnigh inevitable.

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL.

The fact that many of our age are asking ultimate questions, and the revival of interest in religion which this involves, can be reasonably interpreted as a return to the more normal human state, and may well be the prelude to a spiritual revival. It is from the facing of ultimate questions that spiritual revival of permanent value has always arisen. It must be confessed that many revivals in the past have been little more than an emotional stir and have left small permanent results when the emotional tide has subsided. Emotional revivalism is of necessity a brief affair; what does not touch the head cannot long hold the heart. The emotional attitude of surrender and obedience needs to be supported by a systematic doctrine or the enthusiasm tends to evaporate. The doctrine must be capable of interpreting adequately the emotion evoked and thus raise the experience to another and higher intellectual sphere, namely, out of the province of submission and authority into that of clear knowledge and inward intellectual assent emanating from a deeper apprehension of Reality. Every revival of religion which has left permanent results has had its appropriate doctrine.

We are often told that spiritual experience precedes doctrine; but for the greater number the proposition that *doctrine precedes spiritual experience* appears to be nearer the truth. The religious genius—the man who enters into new and higher spiritual experience than his contemporaries—is extremely rare. It is generally through the experiences of others that we enter into wider experience. The spiritual genius interprets his experiences in terms of doctrines which are communicable to others. (We can only share thought, not experiences.) The doctrines thus formulated from experience become an essential element in the environment wherein the experience is possible for others. The whole spiritual history of mankind illustrates this process. An Amos, a Hosea, a Micah, an Isaiah, a Jeremiah, are necessary in order that the spiritual qualities of justice and mercy, personal responsibility and holiness, self-sacrifice and love, may be apprehended by mankind. Without these prophets or their like, and the doctrines which they set forth, those qualities of spiritual personality would not have reached the soul of the Hebrew race, and through them of Christendom. St. Paul's interpretations of his own spiritual experience proclaimed in his preaching and in his letters were real determining factors in the spread of the Christian experience to Europe. The Reformation could have had no lasting results had it not developed a theology appropriate to the new experience evoked.

The ebbs and flows of the spiritual life largely correspond with, and are explicable by, the variations in the fundamental conceptions of God and His relations to man and the universe. The great Methodist revival illustrates this. A rationalistic deism then largely prevailed amongst educated men—a system of thought

which fenced God off from mankind behind the laws of nature and bounded human knowledge by the limits of sense-perception and logical reason. Enthusiasm was condemned as the worst of follies. God was treated as an absentee from His world, and life was becoming godless in practice as in thought. Interpreting his own spiritual experience Wesley boldly appealed to the ineradicable religious instincts of mankind, and proclaimed a doctrine of forgiveness and acceptance, of assurance, and of "the life of God in the souls of men" (his definition of religion). Through his doctrines he liberated the souls of men who believed themselves predestined to perdition, and let loose spiritual energies which are still amongst us.

"Sow a thought, reap an act, sow an act, reap a habit" is still a very true description of living processes. The unconscious background of conceptions of reality is a real determining factor in human life, and backgrounds antagonistic to spiritual experience can only be destroyed by the proclamation of an adequate Christian metaphysic. There can be little doubt that the indifference of the masses to organised religion is in part the result of the materialistic philosophy of the last century. Ideas permeate but slowly to the lower ranks of society. The enormous advances of science have riveted attention on the physical world, and have emphasised a factor which the masses of people have always felt to be true, namely, the reality and value of this world and of this life. Materialism as a philosophy has become incredible, and from its ruins a new spirit may arise. Are the leaders of the protestant clergy ready to meet the situation? Have they developed that calm reasonableness resting on a secure spiritual basis which will enable them to use the opportunities which seem to lie before them for the establishment of a growing spiritual life among the people?

OUR ATTITUDE TO THE PAST.

To many earnest Christians it will seem that the way out of the present spiritual stagnation will be a return to the past in some form or another. The form will be determined for them by the conceptions of spiritual life they have themselves embraced. "My faith is the faith once for all given to the Saints" is quite the common attitude. Such an attitude ignores the fact that others are equally convinced that their one particular system and doctrine is also to be conceived as the one true expression of fundamental Christianity, and the one revelation of perfect truth. "It would be quite futile to contend that the way out is simply the way back, and that the path of safety is that of reaction. A contributory cause of the crisis has been the decay of institutional religion, and this has been due to the incoherence of the Christian message and its apparent contradiction with modern knowledge" (the Dean of Exeter, *Christianity and the Crisis*, p. 68).

Nothing spiritual is handed on like an heirloom from age to

age ; our spiritual heritage must be *personally appropriated* in the form in which it can answer our questions and problems and meet our present needs. We must not let the past unroll itself over us like a fate which we are powerless to resist. The past is ours to use, to remake and to enlarge.

The spirit which Christian people need to acquire in the face of possible revival is a spirit of patience and humility, especially in the region of systematic thought which we call doctrine. Christian doctrine is after all but a human interpretation of facts ; of historic facts like the Incarnation, and of the facts of spiritual experience. We must be prepared to recognise that past interpretations are not of necessity fixed and unalterable, though we may find that alteration in many parts is unnecessary.

Our highest conceptions of truth are conditioned by the nature and limits of the mind itself, and by the limitations of our experience ; and our mental and emotional constitution is the product of our inheritance and environment, in which tradition and education form conditioning factors of great weight. Even if our conceptions appear to us coherent and adequate, it does not necessarily follow that they express final truth about the reality of God and of the spiritual life. We must desist from the attempt to force the religious life into the narrow moulds which our experience has so far enabled us to frame, and recognise that what is needed is *to enlarge our conceptions by taking in new experience*. Truth is an organic whole : it is embodied in a growth which corresponds with the general growth of the human soul : it receives fresh access of strength from every new experience and every new discovery. The thought that gives coherent interpretation of experience is true so far as it goes, it is only as a final interpretation of the whole of Reality that it is never the whole truth. " Truth is no idle dream. She is a phantom only when we think we grasp her. She is real, when, recognising that she is a being enthroned above us, we are content to touch her garment " (Hobhouse, *Mind in Evolution*).

Reality may be infinite, but the conditions which govern human life and its development are finite, and there is no reason why they should not come within the scope of a coherent system of thought. The system, however, can never be a closed system ; it must leave room for new experience and fuller developed thought. Christian doctrine should be the present intellectual appreciation of actual facts and experiences, and should embrace the full range of human interests, past, present and future—the completest representation of all life and being in their eternal relations.

The fatal weakness of religion has ever been the desire to attain infallibility or stability, e.g. the Codification of the law after the prophets, authoritative councils after the Creeds, authoritative theology of Aquinas after Scholasticism, the infallibility of the Bible after the Reformation. Every crisis in the development of Christian doctrine was the result of the impact of new thoughts, new knowledge, or new experience, or the re-discovery or re-emphasis

of neglected elements on the accepted doctrine. The modern crisis results from the enormous expansion in recent years of our knowledge of the physical universe, including man, and a truer understanding of man's spiritual history. We must use the definitions which have been handed on to us as the basis and starting-point for further development, for the past is gone and can never be reconstructed in its entirety. Systems of thought (scientific, philosophic, and theological) come and go. Each period of limited understanding is at length exhausted. In its prime each system is a triumphant success: in its decay it is an obstructive nuisance. New fruitfulness springs from new constructions which seek ever deeper penetration into the realities of the universe.

The writer is of the opinion that Christian thinkers should endeavour to render their interpretation of Christian experience intelligible to the educated public. The greatest fruitfulness would spring from such a course. A new presentation of the Christian faith in conformity with modern knowledge would be quickly grasped by the educated public, whereas new ways of thinking take a long time to penetrate to the minds of the general public. The conversion of the people cannot be left entirely to the official ministers of the Churches; we need an evangelisation which is active in the ordinary contacts of daily life. If the Churches could win the educated to a dynamic spiritual life they would be able to interpret that experience to others in ordinary everyday life. The desire for a spiritual life and spiritual freedom exists, but it is choked by antagonising conceptions of religion. If it could be shown that the roots of Christian doctrine are sound, and that Christianity is capable of being reconciled with modern knowledge, we might hope for real success among the educated public.

The roots of Christian doctrines are centred in the doctrines of the Holy Trinity and the Incarnation, and it is on these doctrines that concentrated thought should be expended first of all.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE HOLY TRINITY.

In seeking to correlate the Christian Faith with modern knowledge we need to recover the intellectual fervour which was manifested by the ancient Church Fathers and the thoroughness with which they carried on their discussions; a thoroughness which can be justly compared with that of the modern scientists. Those early Christian thinkers saw clearly the issues involved, they appreciated minutely the value of words, they pushed their definitions to the last limit of thought, they exhausted fully all the categories that were then available for them, and produced a doctrine which met the needs of Western humanity for over a thousand years. Their success was the most significant achievement of the human mind in all its history.

The success of the Ancient Fathers must be sought for in the adequate metaphysical basis on which their doctrines rested. No doctrine can be more secure than the security of the metaphysical basis which it implicitly involves. They found themselves grappling

with the ultimate metaphysical problem in the realm of the spiritual ; namely, the problem of unity and plurality. Their Doctrine of the Holy Trinity arose from the supreme metaphysical intuition of *immanence*. They conceived the Ultimate Reality as three personal beings mutually immanent and therefore a real Unity, each being " God and Lord " without qualification or diminution, the whole being an unqualified Unity. They dared to use the highest category they knew in their definition of the Trinity, that of persona. This they did with diffidence since they knew that God must be immeasurably above any human personality. This term arose out of the necessity of preserving a conception of Deity which was indispensable for religion, for they could not worship a non-personal deity. Moreover, it enabled them to conceive the deepest spiritual experience, that of love, as a real element in the Eternal Reality, for love needs its object. This conception of Ultimate Reality as a Trinity of Persons was not reached by a process of abstract thought, but by an analysis of experience.

The impact of the life and teaching of Jesus upon His followers, the experience of newness of life springing therefrom, and especially the inspiring presence in their life which they described as the presence of the Holy Spirit, was such that it affected not only their way of life but also their fundamental thoughts about Reality. For them Jesus was God, and all their highest conceptions of God were summed up in Him. The Holy Spirit was God in them, and the result of that experience as it became more articulate, precise and defined was the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. From the first dawn of Christianity the Trinitarian formula was implicit in the Christian experience, and it needed only the application of consistent and determined thinking to make it explicit. This was inevitable when the faith came into contact and conflict with other systems of thought whose fundamental conceptions were in conflict with the faith. The doctrine of immanence gave a secure metaphysical background to the Christian experience, and so the Trinitarian doctrine prevailed because no other ultimate doctrine could really compare or contend successfully with it. The Church Fathers also conceived of the immanence of God in the universe which is expressed in the doctrine of the Holy Spirit ; but in this respect they made little advance, and a doctrine of the relation of God to the physical universe is much to be desired. Perhaps the scientific work of the last century is giving us material for such a doctrine. The theory of evolution undoubtedly takes recognition of an immanent energy by virtue of which the universe has come to be what it is. " It seems as if, in the providence of God, the mission of modern science was to bring home to our unmetaphysical ways of thinking the great truth of the Divine immanence in creation, which is not less essential to the Christian idea of God than to a philosophical view of nature " (Aubrey Moore, in *Lux Mundi*). Modern physics appears to be moving towards a doctrine of immanence in the sphere of the physical. For physics, the thing itself is what it does, and what

it does is a divergent stream of influence. An atom is a thing with a focal region—what we call the thing itself—and a divergent stream of energy. The divergent stream cannot be separated from the focal region; thus we are led to conceive even physical nature in the light of an immanent principle in which the whole conditions the part, and the part streams out into the whole. Perhaps the chief weakness of theologians of the past has been in the attempt to go beyond the facts of experience and to attempt to conceive God's self-sufficient existence outside of all relations with His universe and with man, the highest of His creatures. They were thus led into abstractions for which there was no warrant, for we cannot exalt God by investing Him with innumerable unknown attributes, on the contrary we may thereby rob Him of the very perfections which we recognise as most divine (cf. the doctrine of the impassibility of God, or of predestination to damnation). The only perfections which we can validly ascribe to God are the perfect existence of those very values which we recognise as the crown and glory of human nature fully revealed in Jesus Christ.

THE DEITY OF JESUS CHRIST.

The Church Fathers were also faced with the problem of the person of Jesus Christ. In their solution they refused to accept a doctrine of association or of adoption, and accepted the doctrine of the direct immanence of God in the one person of Jesus Christ. The Fathers had a clear perception that *to insert the thinnest thin edge of a wedge between Jesus and God was to place God in a region remote and indefinite as heretofore*. They would allow no term to be left unchallenged and controverted which appeared to tend to that disaster. No term could be accepted but such as could defend and explain the essential experience "that in Him was life, and the life was the light of men." The term "homoousia" was used to assert His essential identity with the Eternal Godhead and involved His pre-existence. The reality of His human body and human spirit were affirmed in the term "incarnation." The problem left over by the Fathers was what is termed the two-nature hypothesis, which has presented serious difficulties. What can we say of these doctrines of Christ's person in the light of modern conceptions? Prior to this question lies the problem of the Gospel records. The general results of the literary analysis of the Synoptic Gospels have led to the recognition of the priority of Mark, and that a Markan-like document and another consisting mainly of discourses (Q) lie embedded in the other two Gospels in addition to independent material. Both Mark and Q are early and it is probable that Q was in existence very shortly after the Crucifixion. The Johannean authorship of the fourth Gospel is generally rejected on the ground of the nature of its contents, but so far as "external" evidence goes, the apostolic authorship has a good case. Much of the material contained in the Gospels must have been promulgated in the form of *stories and preaching* before they

were committed to writing. The old idea of the oral tradition has not been banished, it has been abandoned as the explanation of the synoptic problem, but it is still necessary to fill in the interval between the events and the writing of the Gospels. The records are not biographical in the modern sense, they do not set out to give a complete picture of Jesus as a modern narrator views a biographical subject; nor are they history in the modern sense of the term. The Evangelists show marked indifference to chronological order, they were interested, not in the framework of the Gospels, but in the substance which they record. The only exception appears to be the story of the Passion which in each case is continuous and of great comparative length. Early preaching needed a continuous story of the crucified Lord and how he came to His Cross. The extent of the record of the Passion emphasises its importance and presupposes the Resurrection; for it could be no part of the Good News except in the light of the Resurrection. The Resurrection stories are disconnected; harmonisation is impossible, and should not be attempted. For the answer to the question, "Is Christ risen?" single stories would suffice—testimony was enough, and the various stories of the Resurrection reflect the various testimony to the fact. The preference for local stories would give rise to the Jerusalem and Galilean traditions. When the Gospels were written the time and opportunity for a continuous history or biography had passed. This cuts away the ground on which "liberal" theologians tried to find in the Gospel traces of the development of thoughts and plans on the part of Jesus. The work which has been accomplished in the investigation of the Gospel records has done much to restore the traditional valuation of the Gospel. Even the fourth Gospel must be valued as an authority of the first rank, for it records the effect of the life and teaching of Jesus upon the writer, and we cannot refuse to accept that effect or impression in our interpretation of Christ's person. The Gospels reveal the person of Jesus with a consistency which is a remarkable testimony to their historical value.

The unity and coherence of the life and teaching of Jesus is manifest in the Gospels. That He was truly human cannot be doubted; but was He more than human? His consciousness of a unique mission on behalf of man, and of a unique relationship to the Father, His claim to forgive sin and to demand an absolute loyalty from His followers, His claim to override the laws of His people, His insight into life, His grasp of truth, His power over the minds and bodies of men, His selfless love, all point to one who was truly human yet more than human. The effect of His life and teaching in the hearts and lives of His followers speaks of a personality immeasurably above the limitations of a merely human personality. The verdict of those who knew and followed Him may be summed up in the words of the fourth Gospel "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father," and the verdict of history is substantially the same. If God loves men as Jesus did,

He would do what Jesus did—live among men and suffer for men in order to save men. Only by becoming man could God reveal Himself as loving and as wise as Jesus was. The Virgin Birth, the Miracles and the Resurrection all fit into the picture which reveals a God “who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was made man.” The rejection of the miraculous elements in the Gospels has always rested on purely *a priori* premises, and has no real roots in objective evidence.

THE VIRGIN BIRTH.

The writer is of the opinion that the unreserved acceptance of the Virgin Birth offers the only rational solution of the Christological problem. He is well aware that this doctrine finds little support among some leaders of Christian thought, who deem it scarcely worthy of consideration. The “two-nature hypothesis” is a problem for all types of Christology, but modern biology suggests a means for its solution. Attempts have been made to surmount this difficulty by eliminating the term nature (e.g. to substitute “act” for nature or being, so that the union lies in “the harmony of two activities”), but some term must be preserved for the essential reality which is Eternal, and of which all that exists is a manifestation.

The problem of the union of two entities resulting in a single self-consciousness arises in the case of every human individual, since the individual is the development of the union of two living cells, each of which has its own particular history and its own individual inheritance. That a single self-consciousness springs from such a union is the most immediate fact of experience. Moreover, the life of every living being (through the continuity of the germ-plasm or cell) is continuous and co-extensive with the whole history of life; however we may conceive the evolution of life it must have its being in and from Eternal Reality, and must in some sense have an ontological relation to Eternal Being. Thus we are led to conceive life in its origin and being as “begotten” of God, or of “one substance” with God. The union of the Divine and the human in Jesus would therefore be, not a union of incompatibles, but of one essential reality, and would involve no contradiction. Further, every cell embraces an inheritance physical and spiritual which is sufficient for a complete individual, an inheritance which is the basis of its development and the possibility of its eventual activity. The function of sex is to unite the nuclei of two different individuals, which have slightly different powers of growth. The purpose of sex is not that of reproduction but the increase of vigour and the introduction of variety which has played an important part in the progressive development of life. There is therefore no ground in scientific knowledge which would make us believe that the Virgin Birth was an impossibility. If we believe on other grounds that Jesus Christ is and was both God and man, the Virgin Birth gives us a rational conception of the mode of such a union.

This conception of the Incarnation preserves both the Divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ, and would involve a limitation of the Godhead, since the personality of Jesus would be limited by the human inheritance and human environment in which He lived. He could not think, speak, feel or do anything at all without His peculiar human hereditary disposition and His own age coming in as factors; these factors are obvious in the Gospels, but through them shines the Divine life.

Jesus must have pondered often over the questions of the origin, purpose and the meaning of His life. When He faced the question of His origin, the answer He found was that of a unique relationship with God which He expressed in the term "Son of God," it is also found in His acceptance of Himself as the fulfilment of the Messianic office which was an element in the religious outlook of His people and age. He saw behind Him, however dimly, not as with us the blank of pre-natal existence, but *a oneness with the Eternal God which was inapplicable to others*. As He faced His life's work He was concerned, not with the immediate tasks of daily life, but with the Eternal purpose of life and the salvation of men. When in the course of His ministry He met human need, He found he possessed, not the limited power of a finite human life, but *the plenitude of Divine power* over both the souls and bodies of men. When He faced human questions and problems He found that He possessed, not the limited practical wisdom of man, but the Divine wisdom which knows *the Eternal principles* underlying all questions and problems. The Infinite breaks through the finite, the Eternal is manifested in the temporal. The Divine lives in the human. His life moves as a coherent unity at once human and Divine.

A Christology of adoption or association leaves us with a dualism, God and man side by side but never a complete unity. The divinity which ensues is either an attenuated divinity—the apotheosis of man, or merely a superior form of inspiration. The question humanity needs answering is not: Has Christ the value of God? but, Is Christ God? Only the complete affirmation that Christ is God can meet the needs of human salvation, an affirmation which Christian experience and intuition confidently endorse. In the light of the personality of Jesus revealed in the Gospels there seems no good reason for rejecting the stories of the Virgin Birth recorded in Matthew and Luke. John's Gospel is written from the standpoint of a mystical interpretation of Christ and His teaching, and the omission of all reference to the Virgin Birth does not show that He had no knowledge of it. He records a saying which seems to suggest that others knew that Joseph was not His father: "We were not born of fornication" (John viii. 41). The contemptuous reference in Mark vi. 3 "Is not this the carpenter, the son of *Mary*" may also reflect that knowledge. The absence of any reference to the Virgin Birth in St. Paul's letters has been considered as telling greatly against the trustworthiness of the accounts of it. But can we judge Paul by any normal

standard? The most obvious course for him to follow after his conversion would have been to mix up with the disciples, but no, he takes himself off into Arabia. So sure is he that he has seen the Lord that his whole mind is filled with the knowledge and the salvation he has experienced. A tacit rejection of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth has taken place; it has been considered irrelevant for faith; but the writer thinks that humanity and Divinity of Jesus can only be intelligibly interpreted in the light of that doctrine and the facts revealed in modern biology.

HUMAN LIFE.

Modern knowledge has immeasurably enlarged our conceptions of human life and our understanding of human history. It is not too much to say that the results in this direction have been a revolution which has contributed much to the present decay of religion and the chaos in intellectual and moral life. The discoveries of the astronomers have reduced man's habitat to insignificance and man seems to himself less important than when he thought his world the great centre of the universe. The evolutionary theory dethroned man from the unique heights he had hitherto occupied in his conceptions of the universe. Instead of standing proud and alone, a specially created being, he was but the last product of an inconceivably long period of change, akin to all other living beings. When recent psychology demonstrated the instinctive origin of all man's thoughts, feelings, aspirations and activities his humiliation was complete. The soul was now seen to be, not a separately derived and specially constituted element in human nature, but one in origin and essence with all other life. The feeling that sprang up in many minds might be expressed in the words of a popular scientific broadcaster: "If the soul of man is immortal why not the soul of a dog or a spermatozoon?" Expressed in this way man's destiny seemed not dissimilar to that of all other life. The successive humiliations brought home to man by increasing knowledge have resulted in the welter of intellectual and moral confusion which exists to-day; a confusion which has been worse confounded by the tenacious attitude of Christian people who have endeavoured to maintain the old dignified conceptions of man, unwilling to recognise the reality of the facts upon which the new knowledge rested. A new doctrine of man's spiritual life and progress needs to be built up in the light of the new knowledge. The problem of sin needs to be dissociated from the story of the "fall." The old antithesis of "freedom" and "grace" needs to be resolved by the conception of life progressing by increasing correlations between the life of man and the realities which constitute his environment. The value and importance of this life needs to be set forth in the light of such correlations. The doctrine of grace needs to be freed from the theory of the "supernatural" which involves a metaphysic incompatible with present knowledge. If the creative purpose of God is the development of human personality to its utmost

possibility of good by His constant friendship and aid, then such friendship and aid is in the truest sense *natural*, for it is of the very essence of true natural development. We live in a universe which is a physical and spiritual unity, nor can we rightly say that the energy which is manifested in physical phenomena is something standing over against or separate from God, we must conceive it as His energy and inseparable from His being. Such a conception would give to man a new hope for the future and enable him to use the opportunities of this life for the greater correlation or co-operation with the Ultimate Being who embraces both the physical and spiritual orders of existence. The hope of immortality would then depend upon the sharing of the life of God by working together with Him who is Eternal Life.

THE NEED FOR A TRUE CONTROVERSY.

Many voices are raised for the cessation of controversy ; such a demand betrays a fundamental scepticism, the bankruptcy of thought, an inherent mental laziness, or a contentment with the given. To assent to this demand would be to allow the efforts of past ages to degenerate into lifeless dogmas which have ceased to convey any helpful meaning to the men of our age.

We must gather up the best results of previous efforts and press on to a fuller comprehension. Such an intellectual effort will be wholesome, and, if exercised with due reverence and caution, cannot but prove life-giving. Our most priceless possessions are the fruits of such discussions in the past. What is required is not less controversy but a truer and clearer controversy, a fuller knowledge of facts, more acute analysis and examination, more precise definition. The growing scientific spirit of the age will give no heed to any organisation which refuses to discuss its fundamental concepts in the light of the best attested knowledge available. We need thinkers fearless and just, trained in accurate thinking, who are prepared to push on to the last limit of thought, and unwilling to take refuge in any trench left from the battles of old. What is needed is an interpretation of the Christian experience and the Christian faith which is at once clear and definite and at the same time eminently reasonable. There is no surer sign of the decay of faith than distrust of reason, such distrust would reduce truth to merely personal moods and impressions, and limited "points of view." Many of the teachers of religion are sceptical about reason and idolatrous about tradition—a condition which is fatal to spiritual progress and to spiritual awakening among the people.

INSTITUTIONAL RELIGION AND DOGMA.

The man who needs no human aid to bring him into communion with God is sufficiently rare to be uncommon ; for the great mass of mankind a visible institution is necessary so that by its teaching, its public worship, its rules and directions the great mass of men may receive that guidance, social solidarity

and inspiration which they really need, and without which they would relapse into primitive conditions of life and thought founded upon the irrational and little-understood primitive instincts. The appreciation of the principles and values of life, an understanding of the historic forces which have moulded or which still imprison mankind, and the knowledge of the laws which govern human life and its development would remain largely unknown to the masses of mankind save for the existence of institutions and doctrines which are the means of propagating them. Institutions, however, are for man ; not man for the institutions. No institution, not even the Christian Church, has any claim to permanence save in so far as it is actively serving the purposes of God for mankind. Whatever fails in the furtherance of human spiritual progress must eventually die. Every institution must justify its existence by its work, and must be itself alive and progressive ; it must embrace not only the best methods for carrying on its work, but also the most enlightened thought of its day. It must continually adjust its methods and its teaching to the growth of the human spirit and understanding ; over no stage of its organisation or doctrine can it write or speak the word—final.

THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES.

The Church of England is fortunate in possessing official definitions which preserve the full measure of freedom which a progressive Christianity really needs. It declares itself to have authority in doctrine and in the decreeing of rites and ceremonies. It recognises the fallible nature of all human discussions in its article on the Councils. Its doctrine is broad-based upon the Scriptures, and nothing can be required to be believed which does not agree therewith ; neither may one part of scripture be expounded that it may be repugnant to another, the latter being a valuable qualification when taken in the light of the primacy of the Gospels. Its definition of the Church leaves it free from all those absolutist forms of organisation which admit of no progressive development. These elements which are enshrined in our articles maintain the freedom of our Church to develop its structure, methods and teaching to meet new conditions and new knowledge. The Elizabethan settlement was a masterpiece of comprehension which preserved to the Church the most characteristic note of spiritual life and of the English race, namely, its freedom. This freedom is our most priceless possession in facing the needs of man in the modern world. It is imperilled by the fundamentalist who would enforce his own conception (and there are many different fundamentalist conceptions of doctrine and organisation) by the use of "proof-texts." But far more it is imperilled by conceptions of the Church which have been popularised by the Oxford Movement and its developments. In its origin the Movement was a reaction to liberalism, i.e. to freedom ; to liberalism in politics, in scientific inquiry and in theology. It found its inspiration in the traditions of the past, a past which exalted order at the expense of freedom.

The substitution of an hierarchic priesthood for the "priesthood of all believers" (the only priesthood of which the New Testament speaks) becomes an instrument for the curtailment of freedom. Grace—the free gift of God or "God in the souls of men" is re-interpreted by a conception of "grace" as a commodity capable of transmission through persons, things and acts. The logical outcome of the latter being the introduction of ritual disorder and the development of an elaborate "cultus" centering round the elements of the Holy Communion. Such a return to the bondage of the past alienates many thoughtful men and women from organised religion and has introduced an irreconcilable element into the efforts to restore the unity of Christians in British lands.¹ There can be no reasonable explanation of the diverse attitudes which pseudo-Catholics betray towards the elements of the two sacraments, nor is it possible to reconcile the universal acceptance of lay baptism with the theory that ordination conveys to a particular priesthood spiritual powers which others do not possess.

The future of Christianity depends on the openness of reason to "the light that lighteneth every man," the day of inspiration is not past. To refuse to accept new light, to repress the spirit of inquiry, is to let "that capability and godlike reason fust in us unused" (Shakespeare, *Hamlet*) and to imperil our moral and spiritual health; it also denies the possibility of *fuller equipment* for Christian influence in a world which needs it sore.

The Christian teacher must go out into the changing world like the scribe of the kingdom of heaven "who bringeth out of his treasure things *new and old*." An active religious enthusiasm based on sound knowledge and clear insight is the pressing need of Christian leaders of our day so that the New Reformation may develop into a spiritual awakening which will reveal once more to mankind the reasonableness and the strength and the power of the Christian Faith.

¹ If "grace" is God's gift to man, the two sacraments must be explicable in the light of a single principle. That sacramental theories have gone sadly astray is evident from the fact that no attitude of devotion has developed towards the element used in Holy Baptism, while the elements used in the Holy Communion calls forth in some people an attitude of devotion which is proper to Deity only.

A SON OF INDIA. A poem by D. H. Southgate. *Headley Brothers*.
2s.

This is a typical life story of a Hindu youth, told in blank verse, with a Foreword by Dr. Stanley Jones. It deals with the eternal struggle between the spiritual and the material, and in the words of Dr. Stanley Jones "is a clear exposition of that clash in the life of a youth and of his emerging through it to victory."