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RELIGION AND COMPARATIVE RELIGION

I

RELIGION, especially one of the higher religions, is a complex of beliefs, practices and emotions; comparative religion is a science. The former has for its object a certain relation with what is, to the believer, the most final of realities, beyond all the appearances which meet us in time and space. The latter is concerned wholly with phenomena falling within the reach of human observation and experience. The former, even in its humblest and lowest shapes, has some beginnings of a theory regarding the super-sensuous world, while as it attains to higher levels it develops an imposing system of metaphysics, such as that to which the greatest intellects of the Christian Church have contributed, or that which springs from the genius of Averroes and his like; the latter is of this world, and offers no opinion on even the most fundamental propositions of metaphysics, such as the existence of the soul, or of God. It is thus clear that the two are not sufficiently *in pari materia* for either to solve the deepest problems of the other. The religious man's intense belief in a theological doctrine, such as the Atonement, sheds not a ray of light on the historical question how that doctrine began and took shape; the fact that to him some sacramental rite, such as the Eucharist, or a mystic discipline like that of the Pythagorean adepts, is of supreme spiritual value, is quite irrelevant to the proposition that either is originally a magical practice of savages. But, while the centres of these two circles of thought can never touch, their circumferences may intersect; and thus at least some subsidiary matters in the one field may be made easier to treat by asking for guidance from experts in the other.

Here it is again fairly obvious that it is to the science that we must look for help in the discussion of religious problems, rather than the other way about. Religion is of its very nature emotional, though at best, with its intellectual content, it is also much else; its votaries cannot be indifferent to the truth or

falsehood of what are to them the central principles of their whole lives. But indifference to the result arrived at is an essential condition of calm and true judgment, as our ordinary administration of the law recognizes, when it excludes from bench and jury-box anyone who has reason to wish for the success of one party rather than the other. The science of religion is observational only; it is not concerned with either the truth of the doctrines it studies or the desirability of the practices which accompany them. Individual exponents of it may indeed have their preferences and their prejudices; religious and anti-religious men have studied the subject, and their individual feelings have too often coloured their writings and distorted their theories, even falsified their records of facts; but it is not the fault of the method if some have used it improperly, any more than it is an argument against any Church's doctrines that some who professed to hold them have been hypocrites and time-servers. Gradually, and perhaps most markedly in our own day, this branch of scientific research has become, in the hands of its leading exponents, that which it should be, a faithful quest after objective facts in certain directions, which is no more concerned with the metaphysical or moral values of its material than a chemist as such is influenced in his investigations by the circumstance that gold has a high market value, or that some unstable compounds may be used to commit a wholesale murder.

To this science, then, we may turn as to an honest expert witness, not for light on problems wholly outside his scope, but for his opinion on such facts, relevant to the matter at issue, as he has opportunities of understanding. To our witness we may put the following question. "It has often been alleged, and is to-day alleged once more, nay, fervently preached in many quarters, that religion is a thing unnatural to humanity, and so may be expected to be left behind, as many other artificialities have been, as our race develops. It is further alleged, and that with no less emphasis, that it is harmful in its effects, or at least that the good it may have done is outweighed by the evil, and that therefore men would have been better off if no such thing had ever existed on earth. And finally, it is urged that, even allowing it to have been both natural and on the whole beneficial in the past, it is no longer of use, at least to the more enlightened modern populations, and should be relegated to a museum of obsolete things, interesting no doubt to the antiquary but of no

more practical value to anyone. It is clear that any of these three propositions is contradictory to the fundamental tenets of all apologists, whether Christian or not, for they all assert that religion, or some form of it, is of supreme value, in one sense or another of divine origin, and hence permanently to be cherished and maintained. Without discussing the truth of the metaphysical propositions put forth by theologians or even the absolute or relative nature of the moral codes which accompany several of the most developed faiths, does your science throw any light on these allegations ? "

II

With regard to the first proposition, that religion is not natural to humanity, comparative religionists cannot be expected to give an absolutely final answer. Taking " natural " to mean " found in every normal human being at every stage of cultural development ", this science, like any other which deals with man, must point out that it has not examined every kind of man, and never will be able to do so ; for an immense part of the possible subjects of such an examination died long before the quest was begun. We do not know what primitive man, in the proper sense of that much abused term, was like ; we can only approximate to him by observing those specimens, alive or dead, which seem farthest from civilization, and then cautiously combining our observations and eking them out with still more cautious theories. The days are gone by when portraits and descriptions of our earliest ancestors could be produced with blithe confidence by any tolerably expert comparative anatomist. And if we are uncertain of many things concerning the body of the earliest type of *Homo primigenius*, even *Homo sapiens*, we are much more in the dark concerning his thoughts and emotions. All that can be asserted, and it is a negative assertion at best, is that so far the most industrious research has failed to find a single human society without religious ideas of some kind, among all the peoples now or within recorded times inhabiting the world. Statements have indeed been made, very often, that this or that savage folk had no religion, or no gods ; but on more careful investigation, this turns out to mean no more than that they lacked, or seemed to lack, some idea which the first reporter considered essential to religion, such as the concept of

a supreme God, of rewards and punishments in a future life for ethical reasons, or some other relatively lofty doctrine, without which, as we now know, it is perfectly possible for a very lively religious belief to exist, though we are of course at liberty to say, if we choose, that it is also a very inferior one. One of the most plausible instances, that of the Orang Kubu of Sumatra, proves on adequate examination to be a case, not of absence of religion, but of inaccurate observation; for although this is a degenerate people enough, the study of them by Dr. B. Hagen[1] makes it clear that some remnants of magico-religious ideas linger even among the most irreligious of them, the Ridans, for they are afraid of the dead and will not stay near a corpse. Furthermore, if we extend our researches as far into the past as possible, we find at a very early date in Europe, a date earlier than the first appearance of any physical types now known to survive, the custom of burying the dead. At Le Moustier, the place from which the Mousterian prehistoric culture is named, there was found in 1909 the skeleton "of a young man, about sixteen years of age. It lay on a carefully arranged pavement of flint implements, resting on its right side, with the right arm bent under the head and the left arm extended. Burnt bones and Mousterian implements were disposed about the skull, and a boucher, carefully dressed on both sides, the most beautifully worked of all the implements, lay just within reach of the left hand."[2] A similar interment had been found two years earlier at La Chapelle-aux-Saints. Both these skeletons belonged to the Neandertal race, a heavy, brutish-looking people, ape-like in several characteristics, yet manifestly human in that they could make stone tools and show evidence of several other activities possible to none of the brutes. This now extinct race, therefore, had at least enough approach to religious ideas to believe in a life after bodily death, crude and unspiritual though their conceptions of it doubtless were. If we come further down the palæolithic era, we find yet clearer traces, not only of this tendance of the dead and therefore of some sort of belief in another life, but of religious rites having reference, in all probability, to the increase of the food supply, in the famous cave paintings and occasional figures in the round which belong to the much higher

[1] *Die Orang Kubu auf Sumatra*, Frankfurt a/M., 1908.

[2] W. J. Sollas, *Ancient Hunters and their Modern Representatives*, edn. 3, London, Macmillan, 1924, p. 226. For the Aurignacians, see chap. viii of the same work. A boucher is the implement also known as a *coup de poing* or a hand-axe.

Aurignacian culture. In passing, it should be remarked that because a rite is connected with the getting of food, it by no means follows that it evokes no higher feelings in the celebrants than satisfaction at the thought of a good meal. A recent review by that excellent scholar, Professor M. P. Nilsson of Lund,[1] justly rebukes a writer who seems not to understand this and therefore to assume that the ritual of peasants can contain no possibility of anything lofty or mystical. " A true townsman," says his critic, " who buys his bread in whatever shop he chooses, our author has no idea of the holiness of bread, though to be sure there is something about it in the Lord's Prayer." If this is true from the point of view of one who understands the modern European farmer, being himself of yeoman stock, it is yet more true of the food-gatherer, who must depend on supplies much less certain than those yielded by even a simple agriculture.

But to return to the matter in hand, these and similar facts warrant us in saying at least that some vestiges of religious ideas and practices are to be found in the lowest and the most ancient human societies known to us; it may be added that of existing races some of the very lowest, notably the Australians,[2] are intensely religious, devoting much time and thought to ceremonies which evidently mean much to them. Incalculable harm has been done in many cases by suppression of such " heathenish " ritual in the supposed interests of a higher religion or culture, thus depriving the unfortunate people of their own spiritual food before they were sufficiently mature to digest the strong meat of the foreigner.

Incidentally, the existence of such rites and such ideas as these so low in the scale of human progress finally disposes of that quaint theory, first found about the end of the fifth century B.C.[3] and from time to time revived by the more ignorant opponents of religion in general, or perhaps especially by those of Christianity, which taught that religion was the invention, for selfish reasons or as a vehicle for moral or political education, of some person or class superior to the rest. In communities such as we have been considering there is neither priest nor noble, no one therefore who stands out from among his fellows to such an

[1] In *Gnomon*, Vol. XI (1935), p. 179. I have translated the original, which is in German.

[2] It should perhaps be explained that in any anthropological context " Australian " means Australian black. The white settlers are simply Europeans, in culture as in race.

[3] See Kritias, frag. 1 (in Nauck's *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta*, edn. 2, Leipzig, Teubner, 1889). Kritias was contemporary with Sokrates.

extent as to induce them to accept from him an idea wholly new to them, or indeed any innovation, unless it come very gradually, approved step by step by the community at large, or at all events by that portion of it (generally the old men) most concerned with its customs and beliefs. The economic system, moreover, of such peoples, if we can dignify anything so rudimentary by so pretentious a name, is more like communism than anything else, and there is no possibility of gains accruing to even the most subtle schemer from manipulation of this kind. Priestcraft and the political use of religion there have indeed been; but so far from being basal religious phenomena, they are degenerations, of a type possible only at a late stage, and generally in a system more or less completely outgrown and taken seriously by few but the more ignorant members of a large and complex people.

III

So far, therefore, as the first attack upon religion is concerned, the historical and comparative study of its phenomena yields no evidence for and a good deal against the proposition that it is unnatural and artificial. The second attack is more serious, for it is quite easy to compile a long and horrible catalogue of harms inflicted on mankind in the name of religion. We might start with the mutilations and other painful and dangerous practices of savages, their senseless tabus, their fear of spirits and demons which are the offspring of their own misguided imagination, their terror of sorcery and the cruel means to which they often resort in suppressing it; we might ascend higher in the scale of culture and enumerate the obscenities, the insanitary rites at childbirth and other critical times, and the dread of priestly and other magic which hang on the skirts of Hinduism; we might come nearer home and re-tell the tale of the mutual persecutions of Catholic and Protestant, the enormous harm done to our own artistic heritage by the excesses of the Reformers' zeal, and the abominations of the witch-mania in Europe and America. It is of no avail to ignore the debit side of the account or to deny a large measure of truth to Lucretius's oft-quoted diatribe against the evils which religion can persuade men to.[1]

[1] Lucretius, i, 80 *sqq.*: Illud in his rebus uereor, ne forte rearis/impia te rationis inire elementa uiamque/indugredi sceleris. quod contra saepius illa/religio peperit scelerosa atque impia facta. (Follows the famous and moving account of the sacrifice of Iphigeneia); tantum religio potuit suadere malorum.

It is for the impartial scientific observer to strike a balance and see whether the debit or the credit is the larger item in the long and often very tangled reckoning.

Something, no doubt, might be said in palliation of most of these horrors by merely comparing them with what has been done in spheres other than the religious by people at the same stage of culture. It might, for example, be urged that in the age when witches were tortured and executed by the most enlightened nations of Europe, those accused of other and more material offences fared no better, and that both alike have profited by the spread of a humaner administration of public justice. It might be pointed out that many of the worst crimes have been committed by mobs, or by feeble rulers in the power of mobs, and thus are to be attributed, not to any religious beliefs at all, but merely to the degradation to which human nature seems to be subject when many individuals come together and feel in common some strong emotion, such as fear or anger, or both. But such pleas would be rather beside the point, and it is far better to ask whether or not good has been done to the race as a whole by the fact that men have in all ages held certain ideas, be they true or false, concerning powers other than themselves and beings other than human. In this connection it is well to glance at the theories now in favour of the ultimate origins of the religious emotions and therefore of the practices which go with them. Setting aside, what grows more incredible every day, the suggestion that man in his earliest stage, as that is disclosed by the researches of anthropological science, worshipped a high god, i.e. a being conceived as supreme over all others, having very great, if not infinite, power and knowledge, and interested in mankind,[1] we are left with two tenable hypotheses, one that religion began with a belief in spirits or ghosts of some kind (the view of E. B. Tylor), and the other that its earliest form is some crude anticipation of the Melanesian and Polynesian theory of *mana*, an impersonal force which is generally superhuman, may be found almost anywhere, but is normally associated with living beings, whether human or not. In either of these cases, it is fairly obvious from all we know of the psychology

[1] This is especially the theory of Father W. Schmidt and his school; see his *Origin and Growth of Religion* (London, Methuen, 1931) for a sketch of his views. The fact on which it rests, a very interesting one in itself, is that several races in other respects comparatively primitive have developed a conception of such a deity, apparently unaided. For a parallel on a much higher level, compare the theological advances of the Hebrews, who in other respects were culturally somewhat backward.

both of savages and of children that the rudimentary beliefs were associated with vivid emotions, prominent among which were fear and awe of the unknown and potentially harmful.

IV

The part played by fear in the development of the religious consciousness, while considerable, has often been exaggerated, from the days of Nero,[1] or more probably earlier, till now.[2] Let us, however, examine it and consider what the reactions to it which may be called religious or magico-religious have been. Fear may have two results. If excessive, it causes a sort of paralysis of the will and with it a crippling of the whole system, no less real and physical because it starts from the nerves and brain, not from a disease or an injury *ab extra*. If more moderate than this, it is one of the strongest possible stimuli to action, physical or sometimes intellectual. The feats of running, jumping and other muscular exertion which a frightened man or beast will perform are notoriously far above his normal capabilities; and the quickness of wit of a man confronted with a danger which does not overwhelm him altogether has been the theme of countless good stories, all the better for having a basis in fact. In the case of the fear which seems to have most beset primitive man,[3] namely dread of the unknown and unfamiliar, the reaction was of a most remarkable and interesting kind. In every people of whose beliefs we have any definite knowledge, it produced an explanation of the cause of the unknown phenomena, and the explanation was regularly of one type; behind the happenings which terrified them (thunderstorms, floods, pestilences, mysterious noises in lonely places, the ravages of fierce or venomous creatures, and so forth) were the workings of powers, generally personal, gods, spirits, enchanters, in fact beings possessed of much *mana*. These, while by no means always malignant, were often so; hence it might seem at first sight that man had but

[1] Petronius, the author of the famous saying *primus in orbe deos fecit timor* (frag. 27, 1 Buecheler, borrowed by Statius, *Theb.*, iii, 661, a generation later) was his master of the revels (*arbiter elegantiarum*).

[2] It is much stressed by R. Karsten, *Origins of Religion* (London, Kegan Paul, 1935).

[3] It is likely to have been primitive, because beasts and young children to-day show such fears, especially if the unknown thing is noisy or moves swiftly (e.g. a train entering a station and blowing off steam usually frightens alike a human baby and a dog, if either is unused to such a sight and sound, although neither has ever been hurt by any similar thing). Primitive man presumably had a mind more developed than the baby's, but not vastly more.

substituted one fear for another. But a little closer examination shows that he had made a great advance, and that in two main directions.

Firstly, to provide an explanation, however absurd, for a phenomenon is at once to rob it of half its terrors. Every doctor knows this, and has seen the relief given to his patients and their friends by his merely naming the disease.[1] Even if his diagnosis is of the roughest and most provisional, likely to be superseded by another the next day, the benefit of altering the terrible something from which the sick man is suffering to the comparatively familiar individual disease is great; there is a definite enemy to encounter, and the man of skill doubtless knows the right procedure. In like manner it would seem that around the figure of the disease-demon, the thunder-god, the wood-spirit whose voice is heard in the mysterious creakings and sighings of the trees, man has always evolved a ritual, a procedure or, to use a favourite modern phrase, a pattern of behaviour. There is no longer an indefinite danger against which nothing can be done, but merely a dangerous being, of whose ways enough is supposedly known for those who encounter him to have definite duties, within their power to perform, in regard to him, with a view to propitiating him, coaxing or forcing him to go away, or even turning his activities, his *mana*, into a desirable course. This last point is by no means unimportant. There are beings widely believed in whose normal activities are beneficial, gods of hunting and spirits of food-plants for example. Under their protection the hunter and the tiller of the soil alike gain the optimistic confidence which is very necessary to support them in face of the many uncertainties of their callings. Sky-gods, instead of being merely terrible hurlers of thunderbolts and senders of storms, have a decided tendency to become either beneficent, like the " dear Zeus " of the Athenian prayer,[2] otiose, like the typical African creator-gods, who made the world but now live in the sky and leave things here below to their own

[1] This needs a little modification. There are some names of ailments (plague and cholera at various times and places in the history of the world, cancer among ourselves, insanity almost everywhere) which can but arouse new terrors, because their cause and cure either are really unknown to contemporary medicine or are popularly supposed to be so. One by one, as medicine progresses, these take their place as things merely serious, not demoniacally horrible. This fondness for having the doctor " give it a name " is not identical with the ancient belief that to know the name gives power over the thing, but it is produced by the same attitude of mind, and ultimately both go back to the master-fear, the dread of the unknown which is therefore uncanny.

[2] Marcus Aurelius, v, 7 : εὐχὴ Ἀθηναίων, ὕτσον, ὦσον, ὡ φίλε Ζεῦ, κατὰ της ἀρούρας τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ τῶν πεδίων.

devices or the care of subordinate deities,[1] or, in the highest developments, embodiments of the best ideals of justice and mercy which their worshippers are capable of conceiving, and also of a knowledge so wide (because the sky sees everything) that it ultimately develops into the doctrine of the omniscience of the Deity.

Emotionally, then, we find in religious practices, however absurd, cruel or immoral some of them may be, an escape from what is worse than the worst of them, paralysing fear of something unknown, against which nothing can be done. In other words, religious rites are typically human actions, for man, alone of the animals, retains a habit of struggling even against the seemingly inevitable, as a result of which he frequently achieves, in time, a really efficient method of encountering that which troubles him. The much-quoted Kelts, in Aristotle,[2] who armed themselves against the sea as against a human enemy may have been doing what was practically quite inefficient, but they were behaving in a manner superior to that of panic-stricken beasts merely yielding themselves to the flood. Their descendants have learned to build dams and sea-walls.

V

And this brings us to a second benefit, which may justly be claimed for even crude religious ideas. Whereas the accompanying practices give those who follow them a feeling that they are doing something to counter their fears and improve their condition, and thus contribute to the optimism which is the most outstanding human characteristic, in the opinion of one of the acutest observers of man in recent times,[3] the ideas themselves, in that they assign causes, however crudely, to the effects observed in experience, create a most powerful engine of thought, and especially of what seems to develop latest and with most difficulty, abstract thought. That every event has its cause is not at first apparent to the beginner in the study of this puzzling universe, and the idea that every startling or otherwise interesting event was the work of some god, spirit or sorcerer, probably had

[1] Abundant examples in R. Pettazzoni, *Dio: formazione e sviluppo del monoteismo*, I (Roma, Athenaeum, 1922), cap. 7.

[2] Arist., *Eth. Eudem.*, iii, 1229b 28, οἷον οἱ Κελτοὶ πρὸς τὰ κύματα ὅπλα ἀπαντῶσι λαβόντες.

[3] R. R. Marett; see especially his *Faith, Hope and Charity in Primitive Religion* (Oxford, Clar. Press, 1932), chap. 2.

a great deal to do with forming what is now the most commonplace of logical axioms. Furthermore, to think abstractly is one of our most valuable accomplishments ; indeed, there is no better test for the mental development of a people than to observe what facilities their language offers for forming abstract nouns and, if possible, to what extent these are used when formed. Without going so far as Usener[1] seems inclined to go in a passage of highly interesting speculation and suggesting that abstracts are in their origin names of greater or lesser deities, I would incline to believe that such names have contributed, and that in no small measure, to enriching our vocabularies with the words, and still more that the corresponding ideas have helped our minds to the thoughts without which abstract and theoretical reasoning, the supreme achievement of man as an intellectual being and his surest approach to reality, would be impossible.

When we reckon also the incidental contribution which has been made to science by the practices and theories of magic, and to ethics by certain tabus non-ethical in their origin,[2] we see that the credit side of the balance sheet is very full, and that a surplus of no small amount may justly be claimed for those thoughts and deeds which have encouraged man to face the world and its dangers and helped him to the most effective of means to understand that which he faces.

But to grant all this does not leave the opponent of religion without an argument. He may still plausibly claim that all these benefits belong to the past ; that metaphysics and logic have superseded the ancient divinities in one field, the sciences in another, now give us better means of facing and overcoming our fears than the rites of our fathers could provide ; that Vortex, in short, is king and has cast out Zeus.[3] In answer to this, two observations, both within the scope of our science, may properly be made. One is historical. The indifference to religion which has been a thousand times noticed and deplored as a sign of our times is, if we may use an astronomical metaphor, no nova, but a comet, albeit of a periodicity yet undetermined. It is plain fact that it has occurred before, and that having

[1] Usener, *Götternamen* (Bonn, Cohen, 1896), p. 371 *seqq.*, especially p. 375 : " Kann ein zweifel bestanden, ob Φόβος früher war oder *φόβος*, die göttliche gestalt oder der zustand ? "

[2] The latter point especially has been insisted upon by Sir J. G. Frazer, in *Psyche's Task* and the revised edition of the same, published under the title of *The Devil's Advocate*.

[3] Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 828, 1471, Δῖνος βασιλεύει τὸν Δί' ἐξεληλακώς. The whole character of Strepsiades in this play humorously sets forth the effect of quasi-scientific dogmas uncritically accepted upon a mind hitherto uncritically religious.

occurred it passed for no very assignable reason. To anyone acquainted with the history of religious beliefs in the classical world, one of the outstanding events is that about the time of Cicero, religion of all sorts showed distinct symptoms of becoming a thing of the past among educated people. Cicero himself, a man typical in many ways of the attitude prevalent among the most cultured persons, Greek or Roman, in his own day and for some time before, cannot be said to have had any religion at all; its place had been taken, so far as he felt the need for a substitute, by an eclectic philosophy, chiefly Platonic. When he refers to any definite cult, it is either to discuss it from without, to dismiss it with an indulgent smile as a thing which some people, chiefly women, harmlessly believed in still, or to give it its due meed of respect as part of the state machinery. The same is true of a number of other men whose views we know, from about the time of Polybios to that of the Augustan poets. But if we pass to the age which succeeded the great Augustans, we find a rapid revival of definitely religious belief, quite unconnected with Christianity, which was then but beginning to make its way, or with any new religion, but centring around a number of old faiths, such as Mithraism and the worship of Isis, which, possibly with some modifications to suit the taste of new converts, were spreading throughout the civilized world. People like Nigidius Figulus or Appius Claudius Pulcher, who in Cicero's day were regarded as amusing eccentrics for their interest and belief in things supernatural, became more and more a normal type among thoughtful men, and unbelievers became rare and somewhat suspicious figures. By analogy, we may reasonably expect the present trend of events in the religious world to take a similar turn, sooner or later. The other point is the observed incapability of the vast majority of mankind, including those most bitterly hostile to the historical faiths, to do without some substitute for religion, in the form usually of an economic or political doctrine quite as much beyond their experience or their powers of criticism and proof as any religious dogma and generally much less reasonable in itself and accompanied by much less unobjectionable practices. " It is a harmless doctrine ", says Mr. A. M. Hocart in one of his epigrammatic sentences,[1] " that God is life

[1] The author takes this passage from a work of Mr. Hocart which he has seen in typescript, and regrets that he cannot now state if, when or where it has been published. The reference is to the widespread cult of divine kings, made familiar by Frazer, concerning which Mr. Hocart holds some very interesting views; see his *Kingship* (Oxford, Clar. Press, 1927).

and that the king is the repository of that life. There are obvious dangers in a doctrine that God is infallibility and that the chief gunman is the mouthpiece of that infallibility."

VI

We thus find that the scientific study of religion in general affords no ground for the propositions that it is unnatural, harmful, or obsolescent, thus leaving the way open for any who wish to prove, by arguments proper to other branches of thought, that it is divinely instituted, of supreme value, and a permanent possession of mankind. It is perhaps not out of place to conclude by a very brief survey of the light thrown by our science on the claims of Christian apologetics in particular, the more so as the attacks now being made on religion oftener than not single out that faith rather than another as their objective. Here it must be admitted that comparative religion has less to say, for a very large proportion of those claims are of a kind to be settled, if at all, by arguments of a metaphysical nature, quite beyond the scope of any science. It is not to be expected, for instance, that any amount of observation of the facts of cult or analysis of the historical rise and progress of beliefs should contribute much to the question whether Christian eschatology is truer than that of Buddhism or the doctrine of the Trinity a more adequate formula than the Mohammedan insistence on the absolute unity of Allah.[1] But three statements may be made.

Firstly, an unprejudiced classification of all known forms of religion puts Christianity, with not more than three others, in the highest and most developed grade, as having (*a*) a central theistic belief of what may be called a philosophic type, (*b*) a ritual singularly free from actions in any way repugnant to civilized usages and showing no signs of ever having contained any such, at least since it was adopted by Christian officiants, (*c*) a complete, lofty and reasoned ethical code, which is taught as an essential part of the religion itself.

Secondly, it is now an established fact that a great many elements of the faith and practice of Christians, apart from those

[1] As in the 112th sura of the Quran (Sale's translation): "Say, God is one God; the eternal God; he begetteth not, neither is he begotten; and there is not any one like unto him." The second clause is of course polemical, directed against Trinitarian theology. Similar utterances are to be found elsewhere, as in the last sentence of sura 17, "Praise be unto God, who hath not begotten any child."

which have a confessedly Jewish origin, are not original, but have been adapted from other sources, though the precise extent of such borrowings remains matter of controversy. It may be taken as equally well established that this neither increases nor diminishes the religious value of such elements. To suppose otherwise is to make the old mistake, so often and so eloquently condemned by the late William James, of confounding origin, a historical fact, with validity, a conception falling within the scope of ethics or metaphysics. As we do not object to modern laws against theft because of their demonstrable connection, in the last analysis, with savage tabus, so the connection of such rites as baptism and confession with widely spread practices among the more backward races of mankind[1] leaves untouched the questions of their spiritual value, of the desirability of having ritual at all, and of the truth of the doctrines to which they correspond.

Thirdly, the once notorious theory which reduced the whole history of the Founder of Christianity to a myth has to-day not one follower among serious students. The author's personal view is that the Synoptic Gospels take a high place as dependable historical documents, to be used critically indeed, as all such documents must be, but remarkable for the very small proportion of folktale and other such accretions which they contain.

The claims, therefore, of Christianity to be the supreme religion, while incapable of proof by scientific research, remain uncontradicted by it. A knowledge of the methods and results of the comparative study of all religions is a useful tool to the defender of that faith in particular, as showing him, among other things, what attacks upon his position he may denounce as contrary to the findings of modern research and what ones he must meet by arguments drawn from other disciplines than this.

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[1] Concerning the former, it may be remarked that some process of physical cleansing with a ritual aim is nearly universal, both for young children and for persons entering upon a new period of life or a new status. The history of the latter is in process of being set forth by Professor Pettazzoni in an elaborate work, *La confessione dei peccati*, whereof volumes dealing with non-civilized rites of confession and with those of some Oriental religions have so far appeared.

TESTS IN THE FINAL JUDGMENT

I SHALL confine this study to the teaching of Jesus on final judgment as it is reported in St. Matthew's Gospel. At a cursory glance it might seem as if that teaching lacked unity and as if, in any case, it could not be reconciled with the apostolic doctrine of justification through faith. The object of this article is to show that a careful reading dispels this notion and confirms the conviction that here as elsewhere the New Testament is consistent with itself.

I

If one were asked what, in the teaching of Jesus as recorded by St. Matthew, is the test by which men are to be judged at the end of the day, it would certainly be easy to give a variety of answers which seem to differ from one another. Let us look at the more outstanding of these. (1) Obedience to the sayings of Jesus (vii. 21-27). Worship without obedience is here condemned even more sternly than by Isaiah of Jerusalem. Note the dread sentence: "I never knew you." (2) Our words (xii. 37). "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." (3) Our works (xvi. 27). "For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works." (4) The presence or absence of the forgiving spirit (xviii. 35). "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." (5) Preparedness for the coming of the Son of Man (xxv. 1-13). The Parable of the Ten Virgins. (6) Fidelity to one's divinely committed trust (xxv. 14-30). The Parable of the Talents. (7) The treatment meted out to Christ's brethren (xxv. 31-46). The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats.

With regard to the seventh of the above-mentioned tests I agree with those who hold that here, as everywhere else in this Gospel, Christ's "brethren" are those who believe on Him. They who prefer the more popular interpretation, that the test in this case is kindness to anyone who needs it, believer or not, must at least admit that the test is not just that kindness of which any good-natured person is capable but a kindness which reflects

the very heart of Jesus Himself. The person who has the perception to recognize and the heart to succour the humble followers of Christ will also be patient and kind to all. I believe that in the parable " the least of these my brethren " are specifically those who witness for Him before a despising and uncomprehending world and who suffer for that witness. But it should be possible for all to agree that the test of judgment in this parable is the possession of a measure of likeness in spirit to Jesus Himself.

Other expressions of the judgment-test are ascribed to Jesus in the First Gospel, but the seven which I have selected are sufficient to bring out the variety of its forms. In an article which must be brief it will serve the purpose best to deal at some length with the second on the list. For that is the one which is the most difficult to harmonize with the apostolic doctrine on the subject and if we succeed in proving harmony in this case it is comparatively easy to prove it in every case. In addition, the second of the tests has frequently been a cause for alarm in sensitive consciences. Who has not at some time spoken inadvisedly with his lips ? Who has always spoken when and as he should have spoken and been silent when silence was golden ? Many a one who is at peace with the thought of his being judged according to his relation to his Saviour is perplexed by the thought of being judged according to the words of his mouth. A discussion of the saying in xii. 37 may not only bring out the consistency of that saying with other sayings of Jesus on judgment but may shed light upon His whole teaching regarding tests of judgment.

" By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." If a first glance finds a stumbling-block in that saying, a second glance does not remove but only aggravates it. For the whole context and particularly the preceding verse make it clear that our Lord was referring specially to the words which men speak at critical moments. That might provide a momentary relief to conscience, but we are likely to be still more deeply scandalized when we note that the critical moments in question are not such as we naturally expect them to be. They are not the moments when we have had time to study our words dispassionately so that we may speak as wisely and well as we know how to do. They are the moments when, for some reason or other, we are off our guard and speak without

due deliberation. Our Lord calls the words which we speak at such moments " idle " words and declares that by these we shall be judged at the last.

II

What are " idle " words ? Scholars are not unanimous over the exact meaning of the adjective translated " idle ", but the preceding context really settles the question. An " idle " word is one spoken straight from the heart apart from any inhibition or qualification which might come from one's education or from the rigorous demands of logic. It is the kind of word which a man utters when, say, he is under some strong emotion. But if this is the meaning of an " idle " word, the saying is more disquieting than ever. For then it affirms that we shall be judged according to the words which we speak when, in the ordinary way of regarding the matter, we are least responsible. Indeed it is so contrary to the normal human view that we must make sure that we have got hold of the right meaning of " idle ".

Let us go back to the incident into which this saying on judgment is articulated. Jesus had healed a blind and dumb man to the amazement of the multitude. They were beginning to ask whether, after all, He who had performed this miracle could be other than the promised Messiah. The Pharisees who were present had to frame some explanation of the event. It had to be framed on the spot and it had to be such as would discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people. Such an explanation was ready to hand. It was to the effect that Jesus was in league with the Evil One. This would play upon the popular superstition and prevent a movement in favour of Jesus. But the explanation was born, not of reason or of good sense, but of sheer malice. This was what Jesus proceeded to disclose. First He used the disinterested, logical style of reply. If Satan has sent his messenger to torture a poor soul, is it likely that he should employ another agent to deliver that soul from the torture ? Were Satan's kingdom divided against itself, it could not stand. Then from the style of logic Jesus passed to that of moral indignation. The so-called explanation framed by the Pharisees was a direct revelation of what they were in their inmost being. " O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things ? for

out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." The virulence of their malice had thrown them off their guard so that their verdict upon the miracle was an exact manifestation of that which filled and fired their hearts, just as the fruit of a tree reveals the kind of tree it is. Their words were " idle " words, springing spontaneously from the depths of their being. No artificial or superficial consideration like logical consistency or conventional fairness was strong enough to inhibit or even modify the torrent of malice which gushed forth from their actual selves. It is always easy to camouflage a human tree, but when the fruit appears the whole disguise is pierced. Anyone can see the fruit and place the tree.

The incident makes it quite obvious what Jesus meant by " idle " words. Nor could any more suitable setting be imagined for the solemn word of Jesus : " Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." And with perfect fitness follows the more general saying : " For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

It must be noted that an " idle " word is not necessarily an evil word. It all depends upon the kind of heart from which the word flows. If the heart is essentially good, its " idle " words will be good ; if the heart is essentially bad, its " idle " words will be bad. It follows that nobody but the good man can afford to be angry. When confronted by moral baseness, a good man's heart will overflow in righteous indignation. Surely indignation was never more terrible than that of Jesus Himself in presence of the moral turpitude of these Pharisees. " O generation of vipers." There Jesus let Himself go, and He could afford to do so. Some critics suggest that so violent a phrase could not have passed the lips of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. So they think it must have come from a later hand. But criticism of this kind reveals nothing so clearly as its own moral ineptitude.

If we are agreed that the above interpretation of " idle " words is correct, we must also agree that here Jesus cuts completely across a notion which is dear to the heart of the natural man. If anything further were needed to authenticate the whole passage, its defiant originality would supply the lack. No conventional person could have spoken the words referred to, any more than a conventional person could have made the blind and dumb see and speak. Here, then, is a direct issue between

the mind of Jesus and the mind of the world. The world holds that a man should be judged by his carefully calculated words and not by the words which he speaks when he is off his guard. Jesus declares that, while all a man's words have their own importance as signals of what he essentially is, his words spoken off guard are the most revealing of all and therefore provide the real criterion for a just judgment of him. Which view is the right one, that of the world or that of Jesus ?

Before discussing this question we should note that it was not the way of Jesus to reverse the common judgments of men for the mere sake of reversing them. It has been a literary fashion of the generation now closing to shock people by turning upside down the notions commonly accepted by the race, especially when these notions have been associated with pure and exalted feelings. There will occur to readers of this article names of persons who have become famous or notorious through the lengths they have gone in making things stand upon their heads. This was a quick and easy path to fame, but two things about it are obvious. It is only those who were early in the field in this business, as in real estate, who can be expected to make huge fortunes out of it. And when all things have been reversed, if the business is to continue, all that is left to do is to turn things back to where they were. But what is important to notice is that Jesus was infinitely remote from those moderns who revel in the cheap process of shocking common sense. It is not too much to say that He commended the common judgments of the race wherever it was possible for Him to do so. And when He reversed these judgments He must have had the best of reasons for doing so.

III

Returning now to our question, is a man's essential character more surely revealed by the words which leap from him when he is off guard or by the words which he utters after careful reflection upon their possible consequences ? This question cuts very deep in more directions than one. It involves, for instance, our theory of education and our view of what education is able to do for a man. If we regard education as something which can be imposed *ab extra*, as when a State regiments its people in one particular direction, do we suppose that such education is capable

of changing the *nature* of the people concerned, so that there is no fear of any future explosion of elements which may have been neglected or repressed by the education in question? This seems to be the idea current in the totalitarian State, though this kind of State is careful to have at hand a plentiful supply of machine-guns for possible emergencies. It is a remarkable phenomenon that the age of the psychology of the unconscious should also be the age of the totalitarian State. But what concerns us here is to see that if education, scientifically administered, can change once and for all the essential character of a man, then the actual man would seem to be the man *on* guard and not the man *off* guard.

But can education, of the kind specified, make of a man a new creation? History answers this question compendiously and emphatically in the negative. And if it be held that an affirmative answer may yet come, say, from Russia, we must just wait and see. The Russian experiment has so far proved nothing in the matter which interests us here. Everything that history and experience up till now have to teach us in this connection goes to show that human nature can be radically changed only from within. Education does not necessarily possess any spiritual quality. That quality depends upon the reaction of the spirit whose education is in question. Education may render a man more efficient in his vocation, may give him an exterior polish and may widen and enrich the scope of his interests, but it may also make him a cleverer rogue than before. Moral education, no doubt, goes deeper than theoretical education. Those who have been taught from childhood to be kind have a better chance to grow into the spirit of kindness than those who have been encouraged in selfishness from the beginning. Showing mercy helps one on the way to being merciful. But he who in the time of his moral education fails for any reason to get beyond habit or law or rule of thumb never really becomes kind or merciful, and some day, when he finds himself in a testing situation, he will stand revealed as a cruel man. Not even moral education can change the nature of a human being. A new creation is solely the work of the Divine Spirit to whom the human spirit makes its free surrender.

Even if the reflection which precedes our deliberate words be directed towards making them consistent with the highest moral standards known to us, such words might not in the least reveal

what we are. Our words in commonplace situations may remain respectable long after moral declension has set in. We may be growing inwardly more corrupt while our studied words seem to others and to ourselves to continue on their former moral level. That is one reason why so many people do not recognize that they are going downhill. We do not live perpetually in testing situations, but these are sure to come; it is in them that we are tested; and it is precisely in them that we are least likely to be deliberate. If we have been on the moral downgrade, a testing-time is likely to find us overwhelmed by some impulse which sweeps us on against the moral standards to which we paid easy and mechanical deference in placid days. In the placid days we are either advancing or retreating morally, and generally without knowing it, but it is the testing, tumultuous moments that tell the tale of what has been going on in our souls.

That our studied words do not best reveal what we are is made more certain when we note that when we study our words we habitually do something else than make them conform strictly to the highest moral standards we have known. I suppose that nearly all would admit that we cannot afford to be perfectly frank with everybody. The story of the husband and wife who resolved to begin a new régime by being entirely candid with one another and for the sake of peace abandoned the new régime before one day of it had expired is true to the actualities of human life. The fact is that in most of our conversations with one another we make so extensive a use of the principle of reserve and economy that it is easy for our words to become an egregious hypocrisy. How near to a theatrical display is many a so-called friendly conversation! And perhaps the most pitiful thing about it is that the average person is far more keenly aware that he himself is engaged in a piece of acting than that the people with whom he is talking are similarly engaged. That belongs to his natural egotism. He thinks that he is walking round all the other people and that he is the only person who is not being walked round. Few people realize how far the doctrine of relativity applies to human conversation. Were it not for true friendship, which exists though it is very rare, we should fast become a race of cynics. To put it both formally and mildly, the studied word which A speaks to B does not always reveal to B what A is actually thinking about him. The studied word frequently conceals more than it reveals. Incidentally this raises the question as to

whether the candid abuse which marked the literary style of sixteenth century controversy was more or less pernicious morally than the good-mannered hypocrisy which was the top of the literary fashion at the dawn of the twentieth century. In any case the carefully calculated word is seldom a genuine representative of the depths of the soul which utters it.

It must not be imagined that the teaching of Jesus draws an absolute distinction between natural impulse and acquired knowledge. A man's natural impulses are never entirely natural. As he grows in knowledge and experience, those impulses which are at first predominantly natural become more and more spiritualized, either towards good or towards evil. Our Lord's treatment of the Pharisees in the incident which led to His saying about idle words assumed that these Pharisees had grown to be worse men than they once had been. Their natural egoistic impulse had been spiritualized into malice as a result of the education which they had received and the life which they had lived. What their egoism needed was eradication through a new birth. Instead of that, what had happened to it was further corruption through false tradition and action. The aspersion which the Pharisees cast on Jesus in connection with His healing of the blind and dumb man did not spring from an undiluted natural egoism, but from that egoism coarsened and poisoned by their wrong thoughts and feelings and ways. Instead of consenting to become as little children and to become new creations they hardened themselves in their own courses and hated Him who told them that they needed to be born again. Jesus Himself would have been the first to say that no little child was capable of such malice, but only grown-up men who had stiffened themselves in their pride. No kind of education can root out a man's natural egoism. All it can do is to change the face of the egoism. Education alone, at the best, can dress up egoism so as to look like its opposite ; at the worst, it can make egoism devilish.

IV

If the above discussion has proceeded upon sound lines it is obvious that our Lord, in declaring the special revealing character of " idle " words, enunciated a principle which applies to far more than words, even to life as a whole. It applies in the same

way to actions. When a crisis comes, in which we have to act quickly, how do we act ? That is a searching question. How we act when we are off guard may tell a plain tale of what we essentially are. The same principle applies also to our thoughts and imaginations and feelings, though in this more inward realm there is a difference. Our thoughts and feelings and day-dreams may be so hidden from others that no human being but ourselves knows what they are. In this realm, so far as other people are concerned, we do not need to be on our guard as we need to be in our words and actions. If it is not convenient to let a certain person know what we are thinking about him, we can meet him, talk politely with him, and part from him without a quarrel. It is safe to say that most people in such a case are *on* guard in respect to their words and *off* guard in respect to their thoughts. They can think what they like, without doing harm to anybody. But can they ? The teaching of our Lord denies that they can. If we think unjustly of another, we do him harm even if we keep our thought to ourselves ; for we have put ourselves in a wrong relation to him and are thus unable to obey the commandment : " Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Moreover, we do ourselves a still greater hurt, for we have given harbour to a poison in our own hearts. But apart from that, though our thought remains unexpressed to the other, it expresses us to ourselves. It tells us a warning tale about ourselves if we are not on too good terms with ourselves to hear the warning.

The more decent sort of people have a conscience on this matter. They chide themselves for thinking meanly of another and, when they catch themselves out, they put " the vital rein " upon their first unguarded thought. Take an instance which unfortunately cannot be pronounced improbable. A man of respectable character opens a shop and is for a time successful. By and by a rival, offering the same kind of commodities, opens a shop just across the street. The rival is versed in the most modern arts of advertising and window-dressing and the less gentle art of cutting the prices of certain goods to serve as bait for customers. The rival gathers the business to himself to the detriment of the man who was first on the spot. Respectable as the loser is, his feelings towards his rival are not likely to be too kindly. One day he hears that the successful man has met with an accident which will incapacitate him from business for a long time to come. What is his first feeling-reaction towards this

piece of information ? Probably a secret feeling of satisfaction to which the Germans have given the name *Schadenfreude*. But he is a man of honour and when he reflects upon that secret feeling of his he is ashamed of himself. He sends a note of condolence to the relatives of the injured man, feeling himself to be perfectly sincere in doing so. But is he *perfectly* sincere ? One psychological interpretation of the situation is that his consciousness has been the battlefield of two conflicting emotions and that the more honourable emotion has won. But the human heart is much too subtle and complex to have its ways laid out in so simple a fashion as that. A full discussion of the situation in question would require an article to itself, but the outcome of the discussion would be this, that if the man has not repented deeply of his sin of *Schadenfreude*, if he has not come under the power of Divine forgiveness and thus become a new creature, he has acted a double part and degenerated morally through the whole episode. It is tragically easy for a man to deceive himself, but it is impossible to deceive God. And since no man is ever in a position to say that he understands himself perfectly, he ought to learn to see, in his spontaneous feeling-reactions to situations which vitally affect him, sudden revelations of how his soul appears in the eternal light.

Probably enough has now been said to show how the various judgment-tests announced by our Lord are essentially one. We shall all be judged at the last by what we *are*, and what we *are* depends upon our personal relation to Jesus Christ. All the judgment-tests mentioned in the New Testament converge upon that. God reads the heart and needs no outward revelation from us to show Him what the heart is like. But we need revelations of ourselves to show us what we are, and from time to time we get them if we suffer God to open our eyes to them. Our Lord drew attention to these revelations, these inklings of the real state of the soul, which tell the tale of what we *are* as plainly as fruit reveals the nature of the tree.

V

Liberal Protestantism, which had so wide a theological vogue a generation ago, and which did so much to weaken the

witness of Protestantism, erred in its doctrine of divine judgment not only in being untrue to Scripture but also in being ethically unsound. Through the idea of God which it encouraged it discouraged the idea of divine judgment altogether. If it was right to use the word judgment in the sense of condemnation, then it was either self-acting, automatic, part of the mechanism of life, or it was a sentence which man, voluntarily or involuntarily, passed upon himself. Judgment was thus taken out of the hands of God in order that God might be made to appear purely merciful. This doctrine was palatable to the natural man and this was certainly one reason for its popularity. Even Aristotle, pagan though he was, was a sound enough moralist to recommend that a doctrine which is highly gratifying to sense should be examined carefully before being accepted. Liberal Protestants, as a class, were not so particular. They desired a God whose name was Love but who must not be the Judge of all the earth. But there is no such God. For a being of that kind would be non-moral. An age which dreams of a non-moral God is apt to be followed by an age which believes in no God at all. To justify the ways of God to man by denying that He is Judge is to take a direct step to atheism. It is frequently said that the denial of divine judgment was a recoil from the intolerable doctrines of ultra-calvinism. That may be true, but it does nothing to save the denial from being a mischievous falsehood.

The teaching of our Lord, which is reflected throughout the New Testament, insists upon those minor apocalypses of life which are meant to serve as pointers to the great apocalypse when we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ. All moments of life are important, but all are not equally revealing to ourselves. In most lives there are long stretches when we are under the impression that we are growing neither better nor worse. We have the illusion of standing still. Or perhaps it is even more common to have no impression upon the matter at all and to be untroubled about what we essentially are. All the same, we *are* growing better or worse. We are either gaining or losing our souls. And there come critical points when, unless we have handed ourselves over to the process of the blinding of the eyes and the hardening of the heart, we are permitted to get a momentary view of what we actually are, which is the nearest we can get on earth to God's unerring view of us. These are the minor apocalypses and they come to us most effectively when we

are off guard. They may reveal to us that, whereas we felt as if all our repentance and desire and faith and prayer were making little or no difference, we were actually all the time growing rich towards God. He was answering our prayers even when our eyes were too blind to see it. Or these apocalypses may reveal to us that without knowing it we have been all the time going down. The revelation may take the *moral* form of a realization that we have been guilty of some meanness of which we thought ourselves incapable. Or it may take the *religious* form of a feeling that God is not so real to us as once He was. Happy are we if in such a case we blame ourselves, thus accepting God's verdict upon us, instead of resorting to the almost universal natural habit of self-excuse. Happy are we if we abandon all our defences and cling with empty hands to the Cross of our only Saviour. There is a sense in which we have to be put off our guard before we can know the power of God. Taken on the whole, the life of this world, alike in its thought and in its action, is one immense evasion of God. And until we despair of ourselves and recognize the folly of our evasions we remain strangers to the life which is life indeed.

Egoism has always been the chief enemy of man and it is so still. Among the people who do not feel God to be a reality in their lives, how few there are who conclude that the fault is in themselves and that they must at all costs seek the way to get right with God! Certain it is that the vast majority of them assume that they themselves are the measure of all things, even of God. If God does not seem real to *them*, He cannot be real at all. This is the blind egoism of the natural man who constitutes himself the judge of all things, natural and spiritual. But the natural man cannot discern the things of the spirit. If any man supposes that what he is in his own eyes or what he is in the eyes of his fellowmen is of as much consequence as what he is in the eyes of God, then he is a man who has not begun to know what truth means. The way of truth is also the way of life. When the natural man is replaced by the spiritual man in Christ Jesus, when all our little pretences and evasions and defences have been swept away by the breath of the Spirit and we have discovered our one and sure Defence in the Crucified and Risen Christ, then and only then do we know what truth means. God is He with whom we have to do. We *are* precisely what we are in His sight, and at the last we must stand before Him defenceless, except we have

suffered ourselves here below to be found of Him whom God Himself has sent to us to be our sole Defence. All the judgment-tests in the New Testament are but varying declarations of this one supreme Truth.

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