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THE VALUE OF MYSTICISM IN RELIGIOUS FAITH AND PRACTICE.

THE word 'Mysticism' has been used with many and diverse significations, from what is little more than a fanciful use of an epithet up to an over-mastering experience which has been the guiding power of a life. In speaking, however, of religious mysticism in the usually accepted meaning of the term we are dealing with a kind of consciousness which claims to give the mind a certain knowledge of reality; and hence the discussion of its value must proceed along mainly philosophic lines. And this necessity raises a certain difficulty at the very outset of our task. For Mysticism has often claimed to transcend the intellect and to dispense with logic altogether; while thinkers of the rationalistic type, which the late William James has graphically described as 'tough-minded', are in the habit, whether consciously or not, of upholding the sovereignty of reason in a sense which excludes beforehand the very possibility of mystical knowledge. Thus the common antithesis between Rationalism and Mysticism tends to create a prejudice against the latter, as though belief in it were incompatible with a reasonable theory of the universe. On the other hand, transcendental philosophers from Plato to Hegel and his modern followers have used an intellectualist logic as a means to proving a metaphysic which is almost undisguisedly mystical in its conclusions. Hence the intellect has alternately been employed to shut the door on mysticism altogether and to guarantee absolutely some particular form of it. In modern times, however, the absolute supremacy of the intellect in all matters of knowledge—the assumption on which both these schools of thought implicitly rely—has itself been the object of severe and damaging criticism. Kant was the first philosopher explicitly to maintain that the moral

side of man's nature enabled him to reach a knowledge of reality which pure reason was powerless to gain or to prove; but this side of Kant's teaching was left undeveloped by his immediate disciples. In the world of technical philosophy it has been left for the pragmatist movement to draw full attention to the part played by the will and the emotions in the attainment and testing of knowledge, and to create a widespread and insistent doubt as to the infallibility, or rather the possibility, of a purely intellectual criterion. It would of course be out of place to enter here into the intricacies of philosophic controversy; but it may be broadly stated that the tendency of the most distinctively recent thought has been to assert that the intellect, instead of being the infallible guide to all truth, is but an imperfect human instrument whereby our personality seeks to satisfy its cravings and achieve its ends. It is obvious that this suggestion once admitted takes us far indeed along the path of scepticism. Perhaps the furthest point has been reached by M. Bergson whose method William James so warmly commended in one of his later books.[1] Starting from the inability of the intellectualist logic to give any satisfactory account of causation, activity, and change in general, they suggest that this failure is due, not, as Platonists have thought, to the unreal character of the objective world of sense, but to the limitations of the intellect itself, which in order to work at all must regard its concepts as static and unchanging and so can never represent to itself adequately the ideas of activity and motion. The knowledge of these latter realities does not come to us by the operation of the senses and the intellect upon the external world, but is part of that self-conscious life which we experience in our 'free' actions and which constitutes us persons. It would be irrelevant here to enter into all the difficulties and self-contradictions into which the developement of this theory appears to lead, when it claims to deal with all intellectual knowledge as a necessarily imperfect abstraction from reality itself. It is, however, worth while to notice that competent philosophers are maintaining that the whole self-conscious life of a personality supplies a certain knowledge which the intellect, as being only one function or aspect of that life, is of its nature powerless alike to prove or to deny. In other words, while systems of

[1] H. Bergson *Évolution créatrice*; W. James *A Pluralistic Universe.*

philosophy have always hitherto tended to find the ultimate reality either in abstract Mind or in abstract Matter, the trend of much recent thought has been towards asserting that the personality which abstracts is a more ultimate reality than the abstractions which it makes through reflexion either on its own self-conscious life or on the external world which is the object of its experience. If then personality in this sense is a mystery which transcends the intellect, surely the door is open wider than ever for the discussion of mystical experiences, the claim of which is precisely to deal with the deepest realities of personal life.[1] And we need not be surprised when we find philosophers like William James turning from the abstract God of Theology to the Living Power apprehended in the direct experiences of the religious soul. Now, if ever, religious mysticism has an opportunity of vindicating its claim to make a real contribution to the sum of human knowledge and experience. Even if we refuse altogether to follow either Bergson or James in their constructive theories, we may allow recent criticism the credit of having shewn that the mysticism of transcendental philosophers, such as Plato, Fichte, or Hegel, was at least as much the emotional inspiration of their reasoning as its logical consequence.[2] Even Mr F. H. Bradley has acknowledged that metaphysics are a satisfaction of the mystical side of our nature.[3] Such idealistic thinkers at any rate fight on the side of the religious mystic against the rationalist who would crush the aspirations of the human spirit with the dead weight of a mechanical determinism. And, even in proportion as their dialectical arguments appear to fall short of the rigid and universal cogency once claimed for them, the mystical instinct of so many great minds stands out clearly as demanding recognition and respect.

We may therefore enquire into the content of mystical experience without any *a priori* scruple or prejudice of the intellect

[1] M. Bergson's position is peculiar, and it is only fair to say that his constructive system would exclude such an inference—whether consistently or not, cannot here be discussed.

[2] In connexion with Hegel this point has been very clearly brought out in an article by G. P. Adams entitled *The Mystical Element in Hegel's Early Theological Writings* which appears in the *University of California Publications in Philosophy* vol. ii No. 4; see especially pp. 92 sqq.

[3] Cf. the very interesting remarks in the Introduction to *Appearance and Reality.*

against the validity of what it has to convey. Almost inevitably the first step is to give some rough definition of what we mean by 'mystical'. Giving the term its widest sense we may perhaps safely assert that the claim of all mystical experience is to tell us of some wider reality beyond ourselves which is not directly apprehensible by or through the senses. And since this reality is either apprehended immediately as God, or at any rate cannot but have an intimate connexion with and effect upon the mind's ideas about God, all mysticism has in a sense a bearing upon religion. Hence the examination of the content of mystical experience from the religious point of view (i. e. by putting the question, What does it tell us of God?) cannot do much to limit the forms of that experience which demand our consideration.

To any one who seeks the answer to this question in a candid spirit the results at first sight must indeed appear bewildering. Even the most cursory and limited examination of the records which mystics have left is sufficient to create a doubt whether any truth at all can be extracted from such a mass of contradictions. It is true that in the fold of the Catholic Church is to be found a company of mystics whose direct experiences of the presence of God or Christ may make us feel as never before the beauty and truth of an orthodox Christianity. St Francis of Assisi, St Catherine of Siena, St Catherine of Genoa, our own Juliana of Norwich, and occasionally perhaps St John of the Cross and St Teresa—all these and many others may seem, while we rest under their spell, to guarantee to our minds the Church's revelation. Outside what may be called the classical school of Christian mysticism, spiritual lives undeniably laying claim to a mystical experience, such as those of Bunyan, John Wesley, William Law, and a host of others in various Christian communities, may have a similar effect in confirming our faith. The revivalistic phenomena moreover of which William James has given such a valuable account, for all their occasional lack of spiritual dignity, remain true to broadly Christian teaching. And even the experiences of a religious individual like Tolstoy, who belonged to no church or denomination, shew no vital discrepancy with the central doctrines of Christianity, even where they do not yield them direct support.[1] But what are

[1] I refer to Tolstoy's spiritual experiences as described in *Why I Believe*, not necessarily to his actual faith.

we to say of the vast and organized system of Eastern mysticism which teaches the absorption of the soul in a universal characterless and impersonal Unity? Does not Plotinus, the father of European mysticism, occasionally use similar language,[1] and can we not trace the course of a similar non-Christian experience and doctrine passing through pseudo-Dionysius into the heart of the Catholic Church, where with inconvenient persistency they leave their mark on the writings of some of her most distinguished children?[2] Can we hope to Christianize wholly the teaching of the *via negativa* even as understood by so devout a churchman as Meister Eckhart, both in its theoretical denial of attributes to God and in its practical consequences of withdrawal from the world of men?[3] Then again, turning still further from East to West, and from ancient systems to modern, we are met by the strong body of mystical experience which is the central feature of the American Mind-Cure movement. This again must seem definitely un-Christian in its substitution of a world-life absorbing the individual soul for the Love of God which encircles it.[4] The problem presented by the pantheistic tendency of mystical thought will engage our attention later. But mere pantheism is by no means the least orthodox belief into which mystical experience can lead us. Records are not wanting of experiences of the Infinite which are definitely evil in character and which leave on the mind an impression of horror which words can never represent. And they are apparently not limited to persons of otherwise unsound mind, though no doubt lunatic asylums could furnish innumerable instances of a similar nature.[5]

In face of the facts the unbiased critic must admit that all these various and conflicting experiences are alike in the objectivity which they claim and in the psychological certainty they

[1] i.e. in his description of ecstasy; cf. Inge *Christian Mysticism* p. 97. The Platonic theory of ideas which is the basis of his philosophic system is naturally opposed to such teaching.

[2] Cf. Inge *Christian Mysticism* pp. 104 and 114.

[3] Cf. *ibid.* pp. 159, 160 note. This tendency in its philosophic form is particularly noticeable in the German mystics of the fourteenth century; cf. *ibid.* pp. 181, 182, and the *Theologia Germanica* cc. ix, xxxi, xxxii, xliii. The subject will come up again later.

[4] Cf. James *Varieties of Religious Experience* pp. 100 and sqq.

[5] Cf. *ibid.* p. 426; also the case of J. A. Symonds quoted *ibid.* p. 385.

inspire in the minds of those to whom they occur; and he cannot but agree with William James that the mere fact of such experience can be used almost equally well to support any kind of religious or irreligious belief whatsoever.[1] At any rate, then, the inference is inevitable that mystical knowledge carries with it no internal criterion of its own objective validity. It is manifestly impossible even to draw a rigid and immediate distinction between the results of divine and valid and those of diabolic and illusory inspiration; the shades of the experiences are too varied and pass too subtly into one another.

And at first sight, no doubt, the recognition of these facts brings with it a temptation to sweep away the whole claim to mystical knowledge as a snare and a delusion. But a little reflexion should suffice to shew that any such hasty step would only be the result of an intellectual prejudice such as we have already sought to dispel. Of course if the only human way of attaining knowledge is by the reflexion of the intellect on the data of sense-perception, then either mystical knowledge must be imposed from without by some higher power whole and complete upon the mind of man, or it must be some empty illusion of the mind itself probably due to pathological conditions. But if mysticism has its root in a really human means of apprehending reality which differs from the ordinary operation of the intellect upon sense—and to this possibility we have seen no *a priori* objection—it is hard to see why its deliverances must be regarded as either infallible or worthless. Why then should the contradictory beliefs of mystics invalidate the whole of mystical knowledge any more than the conflicting views of experts destroy the value of philosophy and science? Yet if such an analogy is to be of any assistance, certain important admissions are inevitably involved. The mystic's claim to know absolutely in virtue of the peculiar form which his experience takes must be disallowed, and mystical knowledge, in so far as it is to have objective worth for mankind at large, must like other knowledge be brought to the bar of human criticism. And it would be idle to pretend that the immediate givenness of the mystic's knowledge, the universality which it claims, and the intense psychological certainty which it inspires, do not make

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience* p. 425.

the distinction in it of degrees of truth and falsehood a peculiarly difficult and doubtful task.

Before, however, proceeding further with the enquiry how the mystical experience is to be tested and what after all it has to convey, it may be well to notice another line of argument which, if its conclusions were established, would make our trouble superfluous. Quite apart from the contradictoriness of mystical revelations, minds of a healthy and Philistine type have sought to discredit all such abnormal phenomena as being merely pathological in origin. In support of this contention it is asserted that, while, in the dwellings of the apparently sane and righteous, mystical experiences are occasionally to be met with, quite similar cases are the routine of the lunatic asylum or may readily be excited by the liberal use of particular drugs. Moreover, it is pointed out that even in the case of the most revered and saintly mystics these abnormal experiences are usually associated with peculiar psycho-physical and nervous accompaniments, which bear a remarkable resemblance to the admittedly morbid conditions of hysteria. Further, stress is laid generally on the eccentricities of behaviour to which holy men have frequently been addicted. It is not necessary here to say much in reply to such reasonings. In its cruder form such question-begging carries with it its own refutation, and its more plausible suggestions have been quite adequately met by W. James and Baron von Hügel.[1] It would therefore scarcely be worth while to enter into any discussion of the questions how far the vision of the mystic and the hallucinations of the insane may be said to resemble and pass into one another, and up to what point the practices of self-mortification and detachment by mediaeval saints are and are not to be condemned as 'morbid'. For the present, at any rate, it is perhaps enough to point out that, if mysticism represents a genuine human faculty, the possibility of its corruption is no argument against its value. And it may well be that the most finely-tempered spiritual organism is the most liable to be strained or broken, and the price which it has to pay may be the very measure of the preciousness of that which it has to confer.

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience* Lecture i; *The Mystical Element in Religion* ii c. ix. I have nothing to add to these discussions.

If then we may assume that the pathological bogy has been laid, on what principles and by what criteria are the data of the mystical consciousness to be judged? Perhaps it may be of service first to state some of William James's very interesting conclusions and to consider how far these represent a satisfactory method of dealing with the facts.

(1) William James, as we have already noticed, interprets the varieties of content displayed by mystical experience as shewing that 'the mystical feeling of enlargement, union and emancipation has no specific intellectual content whatever of its own. It is capable of forming matrimonial alliances with material furnished by the most diverse philosophies and theologies, provided only they can find a place in their framework for its peculiar emotional mood.'[1] Hence, 'no authority emanates from mystical states which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically.'[2]

(2) Nevertheless 'these states' (including presumably the intellectual content they convey or presuppose) 'when well developed usually are and have the right to be absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come.'[3]

(3) Although no one specific intellectual content can be extracted from them, yet their form usually follows a certain well-marked type and is attended by definite emotional results. The 'nucleus of agreement' is found in the feeling of the subject that his higher self is 'conterminous and continuous with a More of the same quality which is operative in the universe outside of him and which he can keep in working touch with and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck'.[4]

(4) Differences of theological belief—apparently within the very vague limits just sketched—do not matter in practice.[5] Let every one abide in the beliefs to which his own experiences tend,[6] and meanwhile a comparative study of religions may in the slow and purely hypothetical manner appropriate to scientific thought gradually proceed to frame the general theories which

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience* p. 425. In stating James's conclusions I have rearranged them to a considerable extent for the purposes of the present discussion. I do not think, however, that I have misinterpreted his meaning.

[2] *Ibid.* p. 422. [3] *Ibid.* p. 422. [4] *Ibid.* p. 508.

[5] *Ibid.* p. 504. [6] *Ibid.* p. 488.

shall best fit the facts and which can then be recommended for universal acceptance.[1]

What criterion then does James supply? In the first place he rules out altogether the claim to objective validity of all harmful and depressing experiences, either because of their exceptional character (which is perhaps not quite sufficiently established) or for the more pragmatic reason of their negative value for life. In spite, however, of all admission of exceptions the chief criterion on which he relies is the internal criterion of agreement. His method is to find a common nucleus of unanimity in mystical experiences, and to disparage the claim of 'over-beliefs' as secondary.[2]

But careful reflexion on the facts seems to shew that neither from the religious nor from the scientific point of view is this a satisfactory solution.

(1) It will not really do to distinguish between a primary and objective nucleus which in the last resort is little more than a comfortable feeling of expansion, and the secondary and subjective beliefs of a more or less theological nature which vary in different cases, and are only valid for the person who has the experience. For to the mystic himself the sole value of the experience often consists in the assurance it brings him of the universal truth of his own particular 'over-beliefs'. Hence, whatever the logical order of validity may be, psychologically speaking the comfortable feeling of expansion which James calls primary depends for its existence on the supposed truth of the 'secondary' over-belief. And this is most true precisely in the case of the greatest religious geniuses. For it is obvious that in religion more than in any other branch of knowledge the mind requires an absolute assurance. The spiritual force working through the religious life absolutely depends for its effectiveness on the strength of the convictions which on the human side of the relationship are its source. As Herrmann says, 'only that which overwhelms us with the force of undoubted reality has power over our inmost life.'[3] As long as we confine ourselves to abstract debate we may talk of the need of regarding all our religious over-beliefs as the merest hypotheses liable at any

[1] *Ibid.* pp. 510, 511. [2] See especially p. 504.

[3] *Communion of the Christian with God,* 2nd English edition, p. 82.

moment to complete reconstruction; but how would our scientific caution appear to men like St Paul, St Francis of Assisi, Luther, Wesley, Isaiah, Mahomet, or Buddha, or indeed to any one who has really done great things in the religious world? Yet these men are after all the experts in religion, and their views must command respect. The plain truth is that if my religion can *only* satisfy *my* needs it cannot even begin to satisfy my need for religion. Hence all the religious persecutions, oppressions, and intolerance the world has ever seen. No doubt such exhibitions are in the highest degree regrettable; but it would be strange indeed if they did not have their source in some genuine need of the human soul. James indeed does seem dimly to realize the difficulties of his position, when he admits that 'the science of religions may not be an equivalent for living religion, and if we turn to the inner difficulties of such a science we see that a point comes when she must drop the purely theoretic attitude, and either let her knots remain uncut or have them cut by active faith'.[1] It is precisely this active faith, which all great mystics have possessed, that is the source of all religious power, and which James's doctrines if believed would inevitably destroy. Of course it would be unfair to press a practical difficulty too hard on a scientific theorist. But on purely empirical grounds we may conclude that James has failed to reckon with the sweeping objectivity of the claim made by the religious 'over-belief' and its inseparability (no matter how various in different cases its content may be) from the highest and most effective forms of mystical experience. To call the 'over-belief' as such secondary is really a quite uncritical proceeding. Perhaps it is almost the only conclusion which all mystics would unite to condemn.

(2) This conclusion is further strengthened by a doubt which suggests itself whether after all James has not been too hasty in discovering a nucleus of agreement common to all mystical states. This highest common factor he describes as a feeling of the subject that his own highest self is 'conterminous and continuous with a More of the same quality which is operative in the universe outside of him and which he can keep in working touch with and in a fashion get on board of and save himself when all his lower being has gone to pieces in the wreck'. Now it is

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience* p. 489.

evident that this language is very carefully chosen and that it really does cover a very great deal of ground. It is excellently suited to the phenomena of the American Mind-Cure movement, e.g. to the case of the lady who describes herself as feeling 'one with Omnipotence' and 'a conscious part of the Deity'.[1] At the same time it is obviously in accord with leading ideas of Hindu, Buddhist, and Mohammedan mysticism. Lastly it receives undeniable and striking support from one whole side of the teaching developed by the classical school of Christian mystics. The doctrine of the deification of the soul which early found a place in Christian theology, and the theories of the soul's absolute union with God in virtue of the divine nature of the 'spark' within it (teaching which occurs in most Catholic mystics and schoolmen), all seem to have remarkable affinities to William James's description.[2] But is there not another equally important aspect of Jewish and Christian experience for which that description cannot legitimately find a place? Can the phrase 'a More of the same quality continuous with the self' ever include the intense and vital sense of otherness involved in the relationship of the creature to the Creator? Surely it would be an abuse of language to say that the Hebrew prophets (Ezekiel, for instance, whose prophecies shew clear traces of mystical consciousness[3]) experienced God as of the same quality with their own higher selves. No doubt they had an anthropomorphic conception of God; but even in proportion as they employed human categories to describe Jehovah's nature they attributed to it an infinitely higher quality than man could ever reach. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts.' And this feeling of infinite otherness is a necessary constituent of that combination of love and reverence which is the distinctive feature of the Christian attitude towards God. It is not quite satisfactory to treat all the extravagant expressions of self-abasement before God and of our utter difference from Him, with which the writings of Christian mystics teem, as merely representing the experience of contact with a More of the same quality as their highest selves.

[1] *Ibid.* p. 104.

[2] Cf. Inge *Christian Mysticism* Appendix C.

[3] On this point cf. Baron von Hügel *op. cit.* ii p. 45, and Dr. G. C. Joyce *The Inspiration of Prophecy* pp. 114 sqq.

Moreover James's remarks on the eternal unanimity of Hindu, Neoplatonist, Sufist, and Christian mysticism[1] require considerable qualification. No doubt, if we follow the popular terminology and confine the term 'mystic' in the Church to those holy men and women whose lives most nearly resemble those of the oriental contemplatives, the similarity is indeed remarkable; though even here the Christian conception of God as Love forms a glaring contrast with the oriental notion of impersonal unity. But if we call 'mystical' any direct consciousness of God's presence and nature, and so consider more generally the types of religious experience found in the Christian and the oriental religions, the difference becomes at least as striking as the resemblance. The truth seems to be that the more pessimistic ideal of an absorption in an eternal unity, where salvation consists only in the escape from life, and the optimistic ideal of a union of love, where the equally vital elements of unity and otherness are held in an eternal balance, really constitute two principles irreconcileably opposed, however much intermediate forms may be found to mingle with and interpenetrate each other. It is perhaps possible to distinguish two main conceptions of God in the religious experience of the highly developed human consciousness. There is on the one hand the more anthropomorphic and transcendent God, the God of love and power, and on the other hand the more impersonal and immanent spirit of the Universe.[2] In the first case, in proportion as God is conceived as like man, He is held to be distinct from and utterly above him; and in the second case, in proportion as all human and personal attributes are denied to God, He is held to be the underlying and immanent reality of the self. It is this complication which gives the phrase, 'a More of the same quality continuous with the self', its undoubted plausibility. Now it is the glory of Christianity to hold together *the best* in both conceptions: for the doctrine of the Trinity expresses both the immanence and the transcendence of God, and the teaching of the *via negativa* is always complementary to 'the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry Abba, Father'. But William James's phrase seems an unsatisfactory and ambiguous piece of terminology which mediates between the two without including

[1] *Op. cit.* p. 419.

[2] Cf. the contrast brought out between Jehovah and Brahma in *The Creed of Buddha*, by the author of *The Creed of Christ* c. i.

either, or else can only be stretched to include both at the cost of losing its own significance.

On the whole then it would seem that the distinction of a primary nucleus of agreement from secondary and varying over-beliefs is misleading; and that the over-belief instead of being an excrescence really goes down to the very root and centre of mystical experiences. If indeed all these experiences agree in anything it would be fairer to maintain that in all of them some Universal Life or Power is apprehended, except that this would contradict James's own metaphysic of pluralism.

The internal criterion then has broken down and we are driven to seek some means, external to the experiences themselves, of discriminating between their truth and falsehood. But if the mystical experience were our sole means of knowing God, our task would be hopeless. For we could possess no other standard by which to correct our data. It is, however, of the essence of the religion of the Incarnation to declare that we may see and know God, not only immediately in our inmost selves, but also mediately and externally, first in the record of our Lord's life, and then in whatsoever things on earth are pure, lovely, and of good report. Further, besides the general test of life, we must reckon with the authority over belief claimed by various organs of institutional religion. It would be out of place to plunge into the mazes of theological controversy, but at least we have in the Church a store of tried and tested experience which has arisen out of the constant interplay and friction of the mystical, moral, and intellectual activities constituting religious life, and should serve as a check on individual extravagance as well as an inspiration to individual endeavour. In other words our method is to test God's inward revelation of Himself to the individual soul by His outward revelations of Himself both as embodied in human life at large and as crystallized and formulated by the religious society. The first test will tend to be moral and practical, the second theological and speculative: for the formulations of the Church must primarily be the work of the intellect and take an intellectual and abstract form. Of course it would not be justifiable to limit God's wider revelation of Himself to morals and theology. The secular reason both in science and in philosophy also claims, and claims legitimately, a certain right in the

criticism of mystical, as of other, phenomena, though the previous argument will have suggested that by itself, and considering the mystical data only, it can establish no positive result. Something further, therefore, will have to be said of the relation of the secular intellect to mysticism in general. Now all these criteria are in a sense external to the mystical experience itself; but it cannot be too strongly insisted that for the Christian, at any rate, none of them is irrelevant. For if the principle of Incarnation is once admitted, God is in a measure revealed by every human action in so far as it is really good, and by every human speculation in so far as it is really true. To limit all knowledge of Him to the particular form of immediate mystical experience cannot but lead to a barren obscurantism which would hinder and mar the fulfilment of every human faculty in Christ.

(1) Our Lord's great practical criterion, 'By their fruits ye shall know them', is as applicable to mystical states as it is to individual lives. It is of course a mere truism that the test of good life provides the oldest, surest, and most universal witness to God in the world. Not every one has mystical experiences, not every one is learned in theology or belongs to a Church, but every one has some notion of the difference between a good and a bad life: and this is why the human conscience is the final and ultimate court of appeal for all religions. A higher revelation, whether contained in Buddhism, in Confucianism, or in Christianity, can only gain man's adherence and belief because it convicts him of sin in contrast with the higher ideal which it sets before him. We may therefore confess boldly that our reason for rejecting some mystical experiences as morbid, harmful, or illusory is that they do not tend to make life better; they do not stimulate the moral faculties and other healthy branches of human activity, but rather undermine character, weaken vitality, and diminish the forces at war with evil in the world. No doubt certain experiences derived from the use of drugs and some hallucinations of the mentally unsound claim a complete objectivity and inspire an intense conviction; but their truth is not verifiable in the world at large, they will not stand the test of application to human life. They are therefore to be

combated and avoided, and we cannot admit that they have the right to be authoritative even over those to whom they come. But no theory more flagrantly violates the facts than that which would disparage the mystical form of experience as a whole on the ground that it has no value for practice. Even if we confine the term 'mystic' to the more completely contemplative type of mind, so as to exclude men of action like St Paul, Luther, and Wesley, such a conclusion seems to gain hardly more support. At any rate it cannot be disputed that in Indian, Greek, and Hebrew history the highest moral teaching has gone hand in hand with mysticism. The blending of these two characters in the person of Buddha is too obvious to need illustration. There is a strong vein of mysticism in the profoundly ethical genius of Socrates, who constantly felt the guidance of his daemon, and was apparently subject to a peculiar form of trance. Moreover, it certainly seems that the mystery-worship was the only serious and organized attempt made in Greek history to connect morals with religion. It is evident again that some kind of abnormal experience inspired the fervour of the Hebrew prophets; and it is perhaps worth while to remark that Ezekiel, whose peculiar psycho-physical constitution seems to resemble most nearly that of the mystic-saints,[1] was at the same time the first Hebrew to perceive and formulate the fundamental postulate of ethics that the individual is responsible for that which he himself has done. And when we turn to the Christian saints the amount of practical energy and ability, as well as of moral fervour, shewn by some of those in whom mystic states are of most frequent occurrence, is a phenomenon which compels attention. The most obvious instances which at once spring to the mind are those of St Francis of Assisi and St Catherine of Siena, whose lives are too well known to bear more than a passing allusion. Of St Francis we may certainly say in the words of his latest biographer, 'au lieu de s'abandonner à l'ivresse de la contemplation il se demanda bien vite comment il rendrait à Jésus amour pour amour, à quelle action il emploierait cette vie qu'il venait d'offrir.'[2] And the great

[1] See above p. 171 n. 3.

[2] Paul Sabatier *Vie de St François d'Assise* p. 63.

movement of reform which he instituted, even if its immediate effect was short-lived, is still felt as an inspiration to lives of self-sacrifice in the service of God and man.[1] St Catherine of Siena is famous as the inspirer of the papal policy during a critical period in its history. It is true that the bold advice she offered was most imperfectly carried out. Often in the then condition of society it may have seemed impracticable, and certainly at times her judgement was warped either by the partisanship of the doctrinaire or by the simple-mindedness of the child of light.[2] Still it will hardly be disputed that in the main her counsel was as sound and statesman-like as it was undoubtedly the fruit of her inward communing with the unseen. Even her ineffectual advocacy of a Crusade displays a wise principle of practical policy, and may be compared with efforts of Cimon's party at Athens to avert civil strife among the Greek states by uniting them against the barbarian foe. In her unflagging zeal for the reform of the Church she suffered only through being in advance of her times, and the fearless idealism with which she approached the most unscrupulous politicians of her day is at least a noble example of that charity which often succeeds because it believeth all things.[3] The less celebrated St Catherine of Genoa affords another example of the influence for practical good of the mystic character. Baron von Hügel draws a most attractive picture of the circle of friends who gathered round her; and the courage and efficiency with which she and her disciple Ettore Vernazza, a Genoese physician, dealt with the most appalling outbreaks of plague give proof of attention to method no less than of heroic self-sacrifice.[4] Again, the society of German mystics of the fourteenth century known as the Friends of God, however dangerous in certain directions their teaching may have been,

[1] The Brotherhood of the Imitation recently founded in India by Mr Stokes is distinctly Franciscan in its aims and character.

[2] See her letter to the ruffianly mercenaries who were fighting the Pope's battles: 'If you survive you have made a sacrifice of yourselves voluntarily to God and will be able to keep what you possess with a good conscience': quoted in Gardner's *Life of St. Catherine of Siena* p. 311.

[3] See her letters to Bernabo and Beatrice Visconti and the Queen of Naples, *ibid.* pp. 115, 117, 139, &c.

[4] Baron von Hügel *op. cit.* i pp. 143 sqq., 330 sqq.

at least stands out as a group of pure and noble lives in the midst of uproar and corruption. The truth seems to be that the contemplative spirit of mystical piety, where it does not lead to excesses of quietism and detachment, issues in a serene, steadfast assurance, unappalled by horrors and unshaken by failure, which is one of the strongest forces at work in the world. The familiar story of St Catherine of Siena and Niccolò di Toldo,[1] to take a single instance, cannot fail to impress the most unmystical of minds; and when we reflect that this wonderful power was combined in Catherine's case with all the shrewd sympathy and affection displayed in her letters, we cannot be surprised at the little company of men and women who were ready to follow wherever she might lead. St Teresa is in some respects perhaps a less admirable character; but the serene sympathy and spiritual insight of the following passage from her Letters will perhaps justify the quotation of it. 'I am not saying', she writes, 'that men should not seek to be devout nor that they should not stand in great reverence in the presence of God, but only that they are not to vex themselves if they cannot find even one good thought; for we are unprofitable servants. What do we think we can do? Our Lord grant that we understand this, and that we may be those little asses who drive the windlass I spoke of. These, though their eyes are bandaged and they do not understand what they do, yet draw up more water than the gardener can draw with all his efforts.'[2]

This width of view on the part of one who believed herself to be receiving direct communications from God is indeed remarkable, and leads on to a further point which, in dealing with practice as a test of mystical phenomena, must on no account be overlooked. Many of the greatest mystics have expressly recognized that the test of the truth of mystical experience lies in its influence for good on practical life. William James remarks that 'the Vedantists say that one may stumble into superconsciousness sporadically without the previous discipline, but it is then impure. Their test of its purity . . . is

[1] This story is told by Gardner *op. cit.* p. 379.

[2] *Life of St Teresa*, tr. by D. Lewis, p. 170.

empirical. Its fruits must be good for life'.[1] Baron von Hügel quotes passages of more vital importance from St Teresa and St John of the Cross. 'I could not believe', says St Teresa, 'that Satan if he wished to deceive me could have recourse to means so adverse to his purpose as this, of rooting out my faults and implanting virtues and spiritual strength; for I saw clearly that I had become another person by means of these visions.'[2] And on another occasion it is recorded in her Life that 'she never undertook anything merely because it came to her in prayer. For all that her Confessors told her that these things came from God, she never so thoroughly believed them that she could swear to it herself, though it did seem to her that they were spiritually safe because of the effects thereof'.[3] 'All visions, revelations, and heavenly feelings,' says John, 'and whatever is greater than these, are not worth the least act of humility bearing the fruits of that charity which neither values nor seeks itself, which thinketh well not of self but of all others.'[4] Again, on another occasion St Teresa alludes to a passage from St Vincent Ferrer about raptures, which runs in the Latin: 'Si dicerent tibi aliquid quod sit contra fidem et contra scripturam aut contra bonos mores, abhorreas eorum visionem et iudicia tanquam stultas dementias et eorum raptus sicut rabiamenta.'[5]

It is of course true that many mystics have by the practice of self-mortification crippled themselves mentally and physically in a way which the modern conscience would condemn. It may freely be admitted that here lies the besetting sin of what may be called orthodox mysticism; and certainly it is idle to follow pessimizing critics, with whose ill-concealed complacency we are nowadays so familiar, in ascribing our dislike for such performances to the luxury of a materialistic age. At least,

[1] *Varieties of Religious Experience* p. 401. I have only James's authority for the latter part of this assertion and am not in a position to verify its accuracy. Vivekananda, whom he quotes just before, is a modern writer affected by European notions, and the very favourable opinion of Yoga quoted from Karl Kellner (p. 401 note) hardly agrees with the account given by J. C. Oman in *Mystics, Ascetics and Saints of India.*

[2] Baron von Hügel *op. cit.* ii p. 48.

[3] *Ibid.* p. 49.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 51.

[5] *Life of St Teresa*, tr. D. Lewis (edition 1888), p. 152 note, quoted from St Vincent Ferrer *de Vit. Spirit.* c. xii § 14.

however, the mystic has always borne witness to the principle of utter self-sacrifice which is the foundation of all practical ethics. In times of intellectual stagnation and material self-indulgence he has furnished the startling example which alone could pierce dull ears and blinded eyes: and if in so doing he has sometimes forgotten that the end of this renunciation should be to lead men to God and establish peace on earth, at least as much as to save his own soul 'so as by fire', yet at any rate overwhelming evidence can be brought to prove that this form of vicious detachment is no integral part of the mystic character. Indeed, the day when this reproach could carry weight is already past.

Lastly, Baron von Hügel has shewn that although well-marked mystical experiences may often be accompanied by peculiar psycho-physical and nervous conditions, occasionally of such a nature as to undermine the subject's health, it by no means follows that the experiences as a whole are harmful. We must not forget, as he reminds us, 'that physical health is not the true end of human life, but only one of its most important means and conditions . . . Hence, the true question here is not whether such a type of life as we are considering exacts a serious physical tribute or not; but whether the specifically human effects and fruits of that life are worth that cost.'[1] And on the whole it seems that this question may be answered in the affirmative, especially when we contrast the inward peace enjoyed and the actual good accomplished by such lives with the nervous depression and lassitude which would probably have been their lot, had their mystical instincts been checked and stifled.[2] Only it must be remembered that the outward form and conditions of mystical states matter nothing for religion; it is the spiritual value of their content which alone makes them worthy of reverence or of contempt.

(2) But, granted that the good life is the final and ultimate criterion which in a sense embraces all others, it does not follow that the purposes of good life will best be served by the immediate and exclusive application of practical tests to all mystical phenomena. The problem is by no means so simple. Suppose a mystical experience is found to make the life of the

[1] *Op. cit.* ii p. 57. [2] *Ibid.* p. 59.

person to whom it comes happier and better. That is good; but obviously its claim to truth will be further established and its practical results widened and intensified, if at the same time it agrees with and throws light upon a theology which the religious intellect approves as the best expression of the nature of God to the mind of man. But can theology venture to suggest to the mystic the terms in which his experiences should express themselves? The plain fact is that it inevitably does so. For it is clear, as William James implies, that the mystical experience tends to take its form from the doctrines of the society in which it occurs. Thus Hindu and Buddhist experiences lead on the whole to belief in an impersonal Godhead, while Christian mystics speak of an intense feeling of the love of God or Christ, and, in Roman Catholic countries particularly, visions of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints are of not infrequent occurrence. We have seen that the abnormal form of the experience must not be taken as guaranteeing the theological doctrine. But it by no means follows that we should therefore disparage the theology as being a mere accompaniment of purely secondary importance. On the contrary it seems proved that just as mysticism may give new life and meaning to theology, theology up to a point inspires and determines the form of mysticism. Hence we should naturally expect that the highest theology would tend to produce the best mysticism; and instead of seeking to discount all the theological element in mystical experience, we should strive rather to use theological beliefs to procure the highest developement of mysticism.

And perhaps this proceeding seems less arbitrary when it is recognized that all mystics agree in declaring the ineffability of the mystic state. Its content is admitted by them to be extremely difficult to formulate in language at all, to formulate adequately quite impossible—and indeed it may very well be that the particular mystic himself is by no means the person best qualified to make the attempt. To take an example of this difficulty, the teaching of the *via negativa*, which would deny all attributes to God, seems to take from Him all character and reality; but it has often been pointed out with much truth that the mystics themselves only meant these denials to represent an intensity of character and reality beyond all human

expression. A recent English writer makes much of this point in regard to Hinduism. The Upanishads use 'the language of paradox and negation' about the Divine, only because, 'dwelling at the heart of man as the unbeholden essence of all things . . . he is at once too subtle to be grasped by any effort of mental analysis, and too vast to be encompassed by any flight of imaginative thought'.[1] Certainly the description of God in negatives, which the Christian mystics borrowed from pseudo-Dionysius, was intended to be understood in some such sense, and was in their case corrected by teaching of a more positive character.[2] Still, when all allowances are made, it is clear that some mystics, especially in the East, have been led into actually treating God as a characterless and all pervading unity into which all things are to be merged. The ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας persistently tends to pass into what for moral purposes is οὐκ ὄν. Others, on the other hand, and especially Christians, have represented God's goodness and love as so utterly real and intense as to be a distinct personal force excluding absolutely every taint of evil. Thus the mystical experience seems balanced on a razor edge between two extremes. Again, the mystical doctrine of the soul's union with God is often expressed in terms which seem to exclude the reality of the individual person altogether, and here too mystics have been led by this negation both to speak and to act as though they themselves were unreal, and to represent the end of life as the attainment of complete absorption in the All. Yet mystics who at times use just this language about the individual often seem, nevertheless, to presuppose a consciousness of this union on the soul's part, which already implies an otherness; and further, Christian mystics speak of and feel this union as an ecstasy of love, which must mean in some sense the eternity of personal distinction.[3] And if it is objected that this is never clearly expressed, it must not be forgotten that in an intense emotional consciousness of union, the unity would be the only aspect felt and recorded, whereas

[1] *The Creed of Buddha*, by the author of *The Creed of Christ*, pp. 176, 177.

[2] Cf. Inge *Christian Mysticism*, on Augustine, Erigena, Eckhart, Tauler, &c.

[3] I am aware that a writer like the author of *The Creed of Buddha* quoted above, can speak of 'the impersonal passion of universal love' (p. 87). I can only say that to me such an expression is meaningless. Herrmann's remark 'all love is joy in personal life' seems much nearer the truth (*Communion with God* p. 275).

the otherness is logically presupposed in the feeling—a reflexion which suggests that the pantheism, of which even Christian mystics are not unnaturally accused, may in part be due merely to confused expression. However that may be, here again mystical experience is balanced on a razor edge between the eternal reality and the complete nothingness of the human personality.[1] It is in cases like these that theology, representing the general religious experience of the society as a whole, may perform a real and legitimate service in correcting the balance. It is by theology that mysticism may be, and has been, saved from falling, in its eagerness to escape the phenomenal world, into an exclusive and therefore empty and unfruitful unification of all things. And in so doing, theology may perform the further function of mediating between the experiences of the individual mystic and the minds of other members of the society. In correcting the balance of mysticism it may also interpret it and express it in categories which the ordinary mind can grasp and appreciate. Thus too, mysticism itself will be further encouraged and inspired.

William James, however, seems to imply that any such intervention of theology is at least superfluous, because mystical states have the same value for life, whatever be the theological beliefs with which they ally themselves. 'Saints,' he says, 'whether Buddhist, Christian, or Stoic, are practically indistinguishable in their lives.'[2] But the truth of this assertion is by no means self-evident. Perhaps if we compare the external actions of Gautama with those of some Christian mystics, we shall find that in similar circumstances they react, on the whole, in much the same way. But looking closer at the whole trend of Buddhist and Christian saintship we are struck by a difference. In the Christian Church we have a magnificent succession of more or less mystical personalities, who not only instituted religious orders, but also exercised a most important influence in practical fields, such as politics, education, and the care of the sick. On the other hand, oriental mystics, while leading

[1] The controversy whether Nirvana means eternal life or complete annihilation is not yet settled. And there is the further problem, which of these union with, or absorption in, the All most nearly approaches.

[2] *Varieties of Religious Experience* p. 504.

pure and noble lives, tend to cut themselves off from men and to survey the world with a superior, though kindly, pity, which can only withdraw itself from the evil it knows to be invincible. The difference lies really in the whole spiritual power breathing through these two types of life: the active power of the love of God on one side, and the passive stability of union with the All on the other. In other words, the Christian mystic is inspired by a better theology than the oriental. The Incarnation is a more fruitful principle than pantheism.

As an illustration of the possible influence of an orthodox theology upon mystical experience, we may perhaps quote the reason given by Dr Joyce for the fact that Greek divination, as contrasted with Hebrew, never rose to the heights of prophecy, but remained on the lower level of magic. 'It was', he says, 'one of the many noxious consequences which issued from the medley of Greek polytheism. The power to whose action the wonders of divination were attributed by the Greeks was no one God, personal and holy, but a mixed crowd of gods and goddesses of all ranks, grades, and characters ... It was thus debased theology which rendered the Greek religion incapable of producing from among its seers any one worthy of the title of prophet.'[1] Certainly it cannot be denied that the Church of Rome, where the influence of orthodoxy is strongest, has also been the richest of all Christian communities in the best and noblest type of mysticism, as well as in its more degenerate and superstitious forms. Moreover, mystical saints, for the most part, emphasize the need the spiritual life has of external guidance. St John of the Cross, St Teresa, St Catherine of Siena, and St Catherine of Genoa, all feel intense dread of deception and delusion in raptures and visions; and would regard such mysticism apart from ecclesiastical authority as dangerous in the extreme.[2] St John at times seems to treat these experiences almost with contempt; and the others certainly adopt a more or less critical attitude towards them and are much influenced by their confessors and spiritual superiors.[3] All this tends to shew that

[1] Dr G. C. Joyce *Inspiration of Prophecy* p. 41.

[2] This dependence is specially characteristic of St Teresa, and instances of it occur again and again in her life.

[3] Most remarkable passages from John of the Cross have been collected by Baron von Hügel *op. cit.* ii pp. 50, 51. For Catherine of Genoa cf. *ibid.* i pp. 206, 207, 247. The attitude of Catherine of Siena is substantially the same.

the mystic state 'having no specific intellectual *content of its own*', needs to be united with the best theology in order to reach its highest developement.

As a final instance we may perhaps refer to the American Mind-Cure movement.[1] Its leaders have indeed grasped a genuine and permanent aspect of mystical truth and applied it in a way which the Church may have ignored to her cost. But it is difficult to imagine that exhortations 'to realize one's own Divinity' and 'feel oneself a conscious part of the Deity' who is all things, will either meet with a wide response or inspire the noblest form of saintliness. Might not the influence of an orthodox theology have preserved the practical efficiency of this teaching, while preventing its expression in terms which are not only intellectually absurd in the sense that they utterly fail to support the practical inferences drawn from them, but also jar most harshly on the sense of reverence inseparable from the highest type of religious mind?

We may conclude, then, that we have a right to use theological tests of mystical experiences. But of course to say this is by no means to justify the suspicion with which mystics have often been regarded by ecclesiastical authorities, or the actual persecution to which they have at times been subjected. For indeed, from the point of view of the society, the value of mysticism lies in its power of giving life to theological doctrines, and it can only perform its function if it is free to express itself as it pleases, at any rate within such very wide limits as have already been suggested. Even the least intellectual of great mystics, Mother Juliana of Norwich, was able to suggest the profoundest view of eternal punishment in the words 'to me was shewed no harder hell than sin'.[2] Catherine of Genoa attempted a somewhat similar spiritualization of the doctrine of purgatory.[3] It is the spiritual liberty of the mystic which has preserved the life of the Church in times of theological formalism and ecclesiastical oppression. It would be a difficult task to estimate the enormous power gained at critical periods by the Western Church through the lives of Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, Teresa, and

[1] See James *Varieties of Religious Experience* pp. 94 to 126.
[2] *All shall be well* (Selections from Juliana of Norwich) p. 15.
[3] Cf. Baron von Hügel *op. cit.* i pp. 283 sqq.

John of the Cross, or that which it lost by its treatment of Molinos and Fénelon. And how far was the rejection of our Lord Himself due to the fact that the free and ethical mysticism of Ezekiel had either been stifled by Pharisaic formalism or driven to seek refuge in extravagant visions of a material restoration?

(3) As regards the relation of mysticism to philosophy in general something has already been said, and since philosophy is not so much a department of our life and thought as a criticism of the whole, all discussion in a sense presupposes the value of the philosophic criterion. The special problem of the relation of mysticism to the intellect cannot further be considered here; but it has already been pointed out that the mystical instinct has itself been the inspiration of most great systems of metaphysics. As a matter of fact the opposition to mysticism usually comes from minds of the scientific as opposed to the metaphysical type; and since it is in relation to science that mysticism possesses what is perhaps its special religious value at the present day, it may be worth while to say a few words on the subject.

Psychology during recent years has made a considerable advance towards furnishing an 'explanation' of the form of mystical experience by referring it through the hypothesis of the subconscious self to the process known as automatism or auto-suggestion. And it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance such explanation may have for religion. For in proportion as any experience is inexplicable it remains from the human point of view not only miraculous but fortuitous, since we can know nothing of the conditions under which it arises or the principle on which it is bestowed. So long as conversion remains merely a miracle, *we* cannot help the sinner to attain it; and, in a world where mind and body interact so continuously on one another, any neglect of the physical side of experience is sure to bring its own nemesis. All scientific explanation, then, is to be welcomed; but it must never be forgotten that in the last resort such explanation can only deal with the form, method of transmission, and conditions of the experience, whereas, to repeat our former conclusion, it is the spiritual value of the content which alone is of importance for

religion and alone proves that the birth of such knowledge is of heaven rather than of men.[1]

But, apart from the services of psychology in explaining forms of mysticism, the leading ideas of mysticism and science do sometimes seem to come into collision with each other. The immediate aim of science is to assist the human control of nature, and hence its method is to find the general laws governing the phenomena which are its subject-matter. It is of the essence of science to generalize: the particular is nothing to it except as an example of the universal. Hence science inevitably regards all the particulars with which it deals as *specimens*. And we have to ponder before we realize how deeply this method of thought is ingrained in the modern mind. It would be interesting to estimate how far depression, culminating sometimes in suicide, and the general lassitude, indifferentism, and lack of driving power so common at the present day, may be traced to the half-conscious feeling of the individual that after all he himself is only a specimen which may serve for the exemplification of general laws, but can possess no unique and eternal importance of its own. How in the last resort can it matter in the course of the universe

[1] An objection may here occur. If the form of mystical experience is entirely due to an automatism, in the sense that it is but the reflexion of present and past states of emotional conviction, then the mystical experience, however healthy and beneficial, is worth no more as an experience of reality than the convictions which gave it birth. Hence either the specific character and value of mystical experience must be altogether abandoned and its special claim to be an immediate apprehension of reality acknowledged to be illusory, or else some importance must be attached to the form of the experience and its explanation by automatism denied. This objection, however, involves a double misapprehension. (1) All that is meant by asserting the unimportance of the form in comparison with the content is that the form cannot be used to guarantee the validity of the content. But that the form is important in the sense that it *may* provide a knowledge or inspiration otherwise unattainable, is not denied. (2) This does not really bring us into conflict with scientific explanation by automatism. All science can do is to point out that in the phenomena of automatism we have experiences claiming to proceed from powers other than ourselves, which as a matter of fact come to us *through* the workings of our subconscious self; and our knowledge of the imperfections of this instrument must make us very critical of all such revelations. But, as Dr Joyce says (*op. cit.* p. 79), 'when once we have fully grasped the principle that the authority of a revelation is not really authenticated by the circumstances of its communication but by the nature of its contents, we shall no longer feel ourselves bound in the interest of revealed religion to demand that divine truth should have entered the soul of man along a channel reserved for its own peculiar use.'

precisely what John Smith does or fails to do? The fatal consequences of this scientific realization of the cosmos have never been more vividly depicted than in the fiery protests of Nietzsche.[1] But even Nietzsche, with all his contempt for scientific knowledge, does not get clear from the scientific point of view. For him it is the great characters, the self-assertive geniuses, who alone count; the rest of humanity exist simply to make their production possible and to serve their ends when produced. Hence the vast majority of mankind, even for Nietzsche, have no ultimate and individual value; they remain specimens of humanity. Now the very antithesis of this point of view is represented by mysticism. For the mystic, if he falls in any way short of an absolute pantheism in which the individual is completely merged and lost, must assert strongly the capacity of the soul to enjoy union with the universal Power, and hence by implication he claims an eternal and infinite greatness for every human person.

It is clear then that mysticism on its spiritual side does not come into such close touch with science as with morals and theology. Science, therefore, for which the particular and individual, the really active and undetermined, have no meaning, cannot directly criticize a mystical experience the reality of which lies in the depths of the spiritual person. The spirit bloweth where it listeth, and science may hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth—so, quite rightly, she ignores it. Mysticism and science then represent two opposite sides of truth, and fully to correlate them would be to explain the universe—a task to which the finite mind must ever remain unequal. Meanwhile their value for each ~~other~~ is indirect and practical rather than directly critical. Each furnishes a corrective and a supplement rather than a criterion of the other's truth, and we have no right to demand that the pronouncements of the one should give direct support to those of the other. Mysticism can lighten the load of the material universe when it seems almost to crush the mind in whose thought, in a sense, it exists. And, as Baron von Hügel insists, science supplies to the mystic

[1] I refer especially to the essay on the 'Use and Abuse of History' in *Thoughts out of Season*.

'a manly and bracing humiliation',[1] an intense realization of his littleness and of his need which all his asceticism and self-detachment is apt rather to obliterate. For science can give him a sense of littleness, not only in relation to God, but also in relation to His creatures. It cannot but soften that note of appropriation of the Almighty which seems to sound through some of the extravagances of mystical literature. Lastly it forces on the attention alike the supreme need of practical method and the reality of intellectual difficulty and doubt, aspects of life which all but the greatest mystics tend most fatally to ignore.

We have seen that the mystical side of our nature can only claim to represent one human faculty among others, and that the experience which it gives us cannot be superior to criticism from all the other sides of human life. It is a platitude, but a platitude too often overlooked, that all the different forms of our experience and of our thinking must criticize each other, if the whole man is to 'grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ'. We have endeavoured to see how, when once this principle is recognized, mysticism can establish its claim to give us a real knowledge of reality and to form a necessary constituent of the best human nature; and in dealing with the operation of other aspects of life upon it, we have suggested in general terms something of its value for each. It now remains in conclusion to consider the whole subject from a more directly personal point of view. What part has mysticism to play in the religious life of the individual? How far and in what sense should every religious man be a mystic?

It would seem to follow, as a result of the foregoing discussion, that the most general and necessary function of mysticism is to keep the eternal before us in our earthly and temporal life. After all, the main difficulties in religious life are probably more often spiritual than directly intellectual. It is not really so impossible to give an intellectual assent to the fundamental propositions of a Christian theology. At any rate the average man with 'intellectual' objections would not in all probability find the Absolute of a Hegelian metaphysician

[1] *Op. cit.* i p. 44 sq.; ii pp. 330, 331, 377 sqq.

one whit easier of acceptance. But it is intensely difficult to realize eternal truths in the midst of actual living. It is hard to feel oneself constantly in the presence of God, to make real to one's mind His love, His mercy, and His justice. And it is just this experience of the eternal which mysticism provides.

But the average man may be incapable of mystical experience, and the mystic's assurance can then only influence him at second hand. We must then make a distinction between mystical experience and faith. No doubt all states of strong faith and emotional conviction tend to pass into something very hard to separate from the vaguer forms of mystical experience; and hence the line of demarcation is by no means easy to draw. The difficulty is indirectly brought out in Dr Herrmann's striking book, *Communion with God.* Herrmann will have nothing of Christian mysticism and strongly opposes even Kaftan's attempt to distinguish its legitimate from its illegitimate forms. 'The Christian', he says, 'can never even wish that God should specially appear to him or speak down to him from Heaven. He receives the revelation of God in the living relationships of the Christian brotherhood, and its essential contents are that personal life of Jesus which is visible in the Gospel and which is experienced in the lives of the redeemed.'[1] 'There can be no such thing as communion with the exalted Christ.'[2] But elsewhere the same writer insists 'that we must regard as revelation only that which brings us into actual communion with God'. 'Thus', he continues, 'all that can be the object of Christian doctrine is summed up in religious experience, and first gains satisfactory definition in that communion. But on the other hand we can describe as religious experience only that turning towards God which takes place under the influence of the revelation of God within us and can be expressed in doctrines of faith.'[3] Now this distinction between mystical experience and the experience of faith is really a very subtle one, and in actual fact is probably less rigid than Herrmann would have us believe; and certainly his somewhat dogmatic estimate of the com-

[1] *Communion with God*, English translation (2nd edition), p. 193.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 291. [3] *Ibid.* p. 37.

parative value of the two experiences will not meet with general acceptance.[1] Still the difference does exist, and to identify, as William James suggests, the mystic state with the faith state[2] would be to confuse the issue by unduly limiting the scope of the term faith. Without entering on the intricacies of pyschological description it will perhaps be enough to affirm that the belief of all religious people is in a sense mystical, but not the experience of all. Is this fact then wholly to be regretted? It would be a mistake to return too hasty an answer in the affirmative.

The truths of eternity, God and immortality, furnish as it were the background to the lives of ordinary religious men and of many who could hardly even be called religious. All great and good pleasures with which a man for a time identifies his whole self claim eternity in a very real sense beyond the limits of their actual duration. To realize at the time their inevitable transiency and the ultimate oblivion into which they must fall cannot but be fatal to their enjoyment. More especially is this the case with those pleasures in which the society of those we love plays a leading part. When we reflect, the very experience of them seems to imply a God of goodness who is Himself the crowning glory and living guarantee of their immortality; and we feel that no heaven in which they are not preserved is worth our attainment. At times the emotional claim may be so strong in sensitive minds that death itself seems degraded to a mere hoax, foolish if it were not so ghastly, perpetrated by the Devil on those who lack eyes to see and hearts to feel.

'Fool! all that is at all
Lasts ever past recall.
Earth changes, but thy soul and God stand sure.'

But reflexion on the eternity claimed by the best and most intense human joys seems also to convince us that this eternity is after all but the everlastingness of the temporal. We love experiences and people as they are, and if we attempt to abstract from their temporal and earthly appearance

[1] For a criticism of the Ritschlian position with regard to mysticism cf. Edgehill *Faith and Fact*, especially pp. 195 sqq.

[2] *Varieties of Religious Experience* p. 424.

we cannot but lose much of what seemed most precious in them. Often in the case of persons, some particular kind of life we lived with them with all its material conditions is inextricably interwoven with themselves. Perhaps there is some sympathy in all of us with the feelings which Pater attributes to Marius sitting by the death-bed of his friend Flavian. 'It was to the sentiment of the body and the affections which defined . . . that he clung. The various pathetic traits of the beloved suffering Flavian, so deeply pondered, had made him a materialist, and with something of the humour of a devotee.' Often certainly it is the method of the expression of the personality hardly less than the personality itself, the loss of which seems intolerable. Moreover, with all our enjoyments their variety in time-succession seems a necessary condition of their pleasantness.

Now all this is really in startling contrast with the conception of eternity expressed by the mystic who claims direct experience of its truth.[1] The religious mystic invariably represents eternity as the union of the soul with God; and in order to realize this union he tends more and more to turn away from the human and temporal altogether and not only from its lower and more material forms. Even in the case of those mystics who have been most devoted in the service of men, their desire and aim is only to bring them also to know the one love of God which embraces all things. They are absolutely silent as to any eternal preservation of particular love between human persons, and *a fortiori* of any joy connected with the material and earthly conditions of human life. For them God seems so entirely to fill the whole horizon of eternity as to exclude all the human joys for which alone the natural man in his weakness postulates his immortality. 'He who loves any other thing together with God', declares St John of the Cross, 'makes light of Him, because he puts into the balance with Him that which is at an infinite

[1] A. B. Sharpe's criticisms of Dr Inge forcibly illustrate the present point (*Mysticism its True Nature and Value*, 1910, c. i). 'There would seem', he says, 'to be little in common between the suggestive and symbolic aspect of things in which the world appears as the true manifestation of God, and that in which the same world is felt to be the one great obstacle which conceals the eternal reality from the sight' (p. 11).

distance from Him.'[1] 'My father,' says St Teresa on one occasion, 'as he had now risen to great heights of prayer himself, never remained with me long; for when he had seen me he went his way, saying he was wasting his time.'[2] And of her life in the new convent of the reformed Carmelites which she founded, she writes: 'It is the greatest consolation to me to find myself among those who are so detached. Their occupation is to learn how they may advance in the service of God. Solitude is their delight; and the thought of being visited by any one even of their nearest kindred is a trial, unless it helps them to kindle more and more their love of the Bridegroom. Accordingly none come to this house who do not aim at this; otherwise they neither give nor receive any pleasure from their visits. Their conversation is of God only; and so he whose conversation is different does not understand them, and they do not understand him.'[3] The *Theologia Germanica* puts substantially the same idea in philosophic terms. 'Where (the true) Light is, the man's end and aim is not this or that, Me or Thee, or the like, but only the One, who is neither I nor Thou, this nor that, but is above all I and Thou, this and that; and in Him all Goodness is loved as one Good.'[4] Truly the Lord God of the mystics is a jealous God.

It is as though the goodness of life were a picture of which eternity forms the canvas and human joys and affections the colours which lie on it. The ordinary man in his absorption with the colours does not enquire about the nature of the canvas, which is nevertheless their necessary ground and support; while the mystic seems to him, in his passion to reach the canvas itself, to wipe off the colours which it exists to uphold. Both ordinary man and mystic believe in a God of love, and to both His relation to evil is essentially the same. It is in the valuation of human goods and the conception of God's relation to them that we find the fundamental contradiction. To the religious mind which has little or no abnormal experience God and immortality are the

[1] *Ascent of Mt. Carmel* i 5 § 4.
[2] *Life*, translated by Lewis, p. 44 (edition 1888).
[3] *Ibid.* p. 314.
[4] *Theologia Germanica* xliii (tr. Winkworth).

background of many various and special goods; while for the mystic God and immortality themselves absorb the whole field of consciousness to the exclusion of all lesser objects of joy and love.

It is obvious that from an intellectual point of view the mystic's position is far the easier to maintain. For the mystic at any rate has some clear idea of what he means by Heaven; whereas it is the essence of the ordinary man's belief that Heaven remains a background and implication of other conceptions rather than a definite conception in itself. Reflexion seems to shew that he cannot even say clearly what he demands from it and what he wishes it to be. Even were it possible that the everlastingness of his temporal joys should in some inconceivable way be guaranteed to him, no imaginable fulfilment of his hopes could prove finally satisfactory. On analysis the claim to immortality, which still is essential to the best human enjoyments, tends to vanish in a fundamental self-contradiction. Again, the very idea of an everlasting existence in time is philosophically almost inconceivable; and if we try to postulate existence not in time, it is evident that some one unvaried experience, which we may call the fruition of God's presence, will best suit the conception, for all variety will be found to imply consciousness of succession.

Yet the general religious consciousness of mankind refuses to be satisfied with a unification of eternal life which excludes rather than includes the elements of variety and differentiation.[1] We catch an echo of this protest even in St John of the Cross. 'All that is wanting now', he writes to one of his penitents, 'is that I should forget you; but consider how that is to be forgotten which is ever present to the mind.'[2] And we have the emphatic witness of almost universal Christian belief and human need that all our highest joys and affections, various and particular as they are, shall find preservation and fulfilment in the life of the world to come. Should we then seek to make all our ideas of eternity conform exclusively to the experience of the mystics? Or has the ordinary religious

[1] Cf. Baron von Hügel *Mystical Element in Religion*, especially i p. 66 sq.
[2] Quoted by Baron von Hügel, *ibid.* ii p. 353.

consciousness grasped a side of the truth which the experts have tended to ignore? And in the latter case how are we to reconcile the paradox that just those minds which know most of eternity tend to divorce it most completely from all that really appeals to many of our deepest convictions? The most that can be done in answer to these questions is to suggest very tentatively the general lines along which an ultimate solution seems most possible.

In the first place, it is worth noticing that it seems possible to trace two views of eternity, or life after death, running at any rate through the three leading religions of the world, and the inconsistency between them which we have remarked in Christianity, has arisen in a somewhat different form both in Hinduism and Islam. To go back to the simile already suggested: in the one view the canvas predominates, in the other the colours; and they may be called respectively the mystical and the popular view. The Hindu mysticism of the Upanishads and the Buddhist mystic in his conception of Nirvana remove all colour from eternity far more completely than the Christian contemplative, for whom the intense and fiery hue of God's love absorbs and blots out all other shades. On the other hand, in more popular Hinduism the doctrine of metempsychosis, which Buddhism also has incorporated in its creed, brings down anthropomorphic notions of a future life completely to earth by representing it merely and only as a series of earthly lives stretching out into an indefinite future. In Mohammedanism the corresponding contrast is to be found in the very carnal heaven of the Koran and the teaching of Sufis, which reproduces all the essential features of oriental mysticism. Mohammedanism has attempted no synthesis between the conflicting points of view; but Buddhism, in proportion as the contrast between them is more complete, has found the task of reconciliation an easier one. The series of human lives through which the soul transmigrates has only to be represented as the road by which it is to reach the final mystic state of Nirvana.

What, then, does Christianity contribute to the solution of the problem? In the first place, through the principle of Incarnation it has suggested a much deeper and more spiritual truth in the popular view. The Christian believes that God has revealed

Himself as man, that there is therefore something essentially man-like in the nature of the Godhead itself, and that this truth does not depend on any vain construction of an anthropomorphic imagination, but is part of God's own revelation of Himself to man. Hence, all the highest of man's life here on earth, all wherein it approaches most nearly to Christ's life, must find a counterpart and a fulfilment in eternity. And not only do we find our Lord constantly using popular notions about the hereafter, as though they at any rate represented some important aspect of the truth, but in His life, if anywhere, we notice an intense care for human individuals in their individuality, and a wonderful value set on the commonest tasks and modes of life through which personality is expressed. And, as might be expected, it is precisely the Incarnation which of all the great Christian doctrines seems to have been least realized by the classical school of mystics. They certainly tend either to ignore our Lord's life on earth altogether, or, if they mention it, to dwell exclusively on His sufferings and crucifixion. The *Theologia Germanica* is an excellent example of the latter type. It is full of allusions to the life of Christ, but only with the purpose of dwelling on the atonement wrought and the example set by what He suffered. St Catherine of Siena is continually speaking of the Jesus of history, but never without immediate reference to the saving blood. St Teresa indeed does regard it as a deadly error to seek to pierce beyond the Sacred Humanity in the highest forms of contemplation[1]; but for the guidance of such spiritual exercise she gives the most instructive direction that if a sensitive mind finds continuous meditation on the story of the Passion unendurable, it may occasionally turn for refreshment to the risen and glorified Christ.[2] It is never even suggested that any incident of our Lord's life except His actual sufferings could form a subject for religious contemplation. The eternal importance and dignity imparted by the Incarnation to ordinary temporal human life is completely ignored. Of the best mystics it would not be true to say that the specifically human has no value for them; we have seen something of their keenness and efficiency in practical spheres, and certainly their missionary

[1] *Life*, tr. D. Lewis, p. 163 (edition 1888).
[2] *Ibid.* p. 166.

zeal is often unquestionable. But to them, human activities and characteristics are, speaking generally, only a means to an ultimate union with a Divine Love which is altogether super-human and even inhuman in its seeming exclusion of the temporal and the various. The human is transitory, the divine is eternal. The transitory is a means to the eternal, the human to the divine. But the antithesis is rigid: there is no hint of an eternal and absolute value within the transitory itself or of a human nature within the Divinity which should uphold and guarantee it. This is the almost universal[1] false antithesis of Christian mysticism which it is one glory of the Incarnation to overcome. Baron von Hügel indeed calls attention to the fact that even one of the most austere mystics, John of the Cross, does occasionally rise above the level of his more habitual point of view. 'No one', writes St John, 'desires to be loved except for his goodness; and when we love in this way our love is pleasing to God and in great liberty; and if there be attachment in it there is greater attachment to God.'[2] But in the light of other passages it is but natural to conclude that St John, if pressed, would have admitted the rightfulness of such particular affections to be but a concession to human weakness, a passing phase, incidental to our earthly sojourn, of that one pure love into which they must shortly disappear. Neither here nor in the already quoted passage addressed to one of his penitents[3] do we find any recogni-

[1] Catherine of Siena seems to have been a genuine exception in her practice, and in one of her letters she writes, 'The perfect soul rejoices at everything and she does not judge the servants of God nor any rational creature; nay, she rejoices at every state and every way that she sees, saying, "Thanks be to Thee, Eternal Father, who hast many mansions in Thy House." And she rejoices more at the diverse ways she sees than if she saw all going along one path.' (Quoted by Gardner *op. cit.* p. 97.)

[2] Quoted by Baron von Hügel *op. cit.* ii p. 353. A passage of similar import occurs in the *Dark Night of the Soul* i 4 § 8: 'When the love and affection we give to the creature is purely spiritual and founded on God, the love of God grows with it; and the more we remember the earthly love, the more also we remember God and desire Him; the one grows apace with the other.' Passages taking the lower point of view are of constant occurrence.

[3] See p. 193. Surely Baron von Hügel's interpretation of this passage (*op. cit.* i p. 68; ii p. 354) is a little forced. To take it as shewing that 'affection as pure as it was particular was . . . fully accepted and willed and acknowledged to its immediate object as entirely conformable to his own teaching', is to ignore the first half of the sentence. The words 'all that is now wanting is that I should forget

tion of the eternal and ultimate value of the specifically human and earthly. We must conclude that the mystic has missed something of the profound and unique meaning of the doctrine of Incarnation in its highest developement. This is the real truth underlying the somewhat exaggerated and undiscriminating attacks on Roman Catholic mysticism, which are associated with the names of A. Harnack and W. Herrmann. It would be an exaggeration to assert with Harnack that the mystics 'always lacked their full momentum so long as they took any notice of whatever was outside of God and the soul',[1] or with Herrmann, that when the mystic has 'found God', he has 'left Christ behind'[2]; but it is undeniable that the mystics never realized the full significance of the fact that God's supreme revelation of Himself took the form of an ordinary human and temporal life in the world.

But on the other hand, Christianity does a great deal more than furnish a vague support of the popular view of eternity: it also supplies its corrective by emphasizing the complementary truth grasped by the mystic. Christianity could never allow popular imagination to depict heaven as simply the intensification of all it happens to find most pleasant on earth. And it provides an objection to such wild ideas deeper even than their intellectual absurdity. For, side by side with the Incarnation which is the guarantee of self-realization, it sets the Cross, the symbol of self-denial. If Christianity teaches anything clearly, it teaches that all human visions and aspirations are clogged and marred by sin. Hence, whatever we may ultimately keep in eternity, we must abandon all to possess it. We must give up our very lives if we would save them. The kingdom of God is a pearl of great price which cannot be bought for less than all that the merchant has. While this sacrifice is being accomplished we must see in a glass darkly, and every human imperfection is but another speck of dust which clouds and blurs the vision. This truth may be realized in a fervour of

you' seem to shew that after putting his penitent in the path of salvation, John had decided scruples about continuing the acquaintanceship. The case then is very much in point.

[1] *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte* iii p. 382, quoted by Herrmann *The Communion of the Christian with God* p. 23.

[2] Herrmann *op. cit.* p. 30.

religious humility or in the colder fit of common sense; but it remains the first great lesson to be learned by all. This, the mystics have seen with overwhelming clearness; and, not despairing, they have caught the glow of everlasting hope which lurks in its fullest appreciation. They have felt with an intense conviction that the love of God is the one ground and support of eternal life, and that indeed there are many human colours which can by no means be made to lie on such a canvas. Popular faith may, in virtue of the Incarnation, legitimately claim that this teaching taken by itself and in an exclusive sense is one-sided, and that all the best in human individuality and particularity must be preserved. But the very same religion, which alone supports its claim, forbids it to pretend to know how much eternity can keep or how the mortal can put on immortality.

In any case, it must always be recognized that one supreme problem which confronts any church claiming catholicity is to combine in the society, if never completely in the individual, the heroism of the mystic path of renunciation with the no less divine normality of the ordinary religious life. Both elements are essential to a true religion; yet each seems to exclude the other. There are three conceivable ways in which a harmony might be effected.

The first, and perhaps the most obvious, is to make the experience of the mystic in all cases finally normative, and to assign a merely educational, though very real, value to those popular beliefs which tend to find eternity in and through the purest forms of earthly attachment and desire. This view indeed is at once defensible and attractive; and no doubt it has been widely held by thoughtful and Christian minds. The only real objection to it lies in the suggestion the foregoing pages have put forward, that the general religious feeling of mankind seems to centre in a claim which the Gospel-story appears in a measure to admit and justify, but for which the mystical heaven cannot be stretched to find a place. If this is so, it is difficult to represent the mystical view as simply a higher level of religious thought up to which the popular mind can naturally expand and develope. And then the terrible danger begins to shew itself, of admitting two doctrines and two lives, an exoteric and

an esoteric way, within the fold of the Christian faith; and we become entangled in all the evil duplicity of the system which Clement of Alexandria so light-heartedly set forth.

The second solution is to adopt a boldly anti-mystical position and, while admitting the value abnormal experiences may have for certain oddly constituted individuals, to declare roundly that to consider them as in any sense special manifestations of God's presence is, broadly speaking, a mistake. This conclusion, however, would be contrary to the whole bent of true Catholicism; and we have seen that, once mysticism is rightly understood and criticized, neither ethics, nor science, nor theology, could justify us in disparaging a side of religious experience the worth of which has been so abundantly proved in the past, and for which there is still such ample scope in the present. It is just the loss of that sense of direct contact with the eternal which is perhaps the most dangerous weakness of the modern world.

It has been the task of this essay very dimly and uncertainly to suggest that the theology of the Cross and the Incarnation seems to make a third way of reconciliation possible, a way in which these two sides of religion, which seem so profoundly opposed, may in the end be found true complements of each other. The Cross represents the negative side of the Christian call, the aspect of renunciation and suffering. The Incarnation and the Resurrection convey its positive gospel of consecration and life. To all Christian lives both elements are essential, and, indeed, in one very real sense they are inseparable from each other; for the renunciation which belongs to the Cross is rooted in the grand affirmation of God's all-sustaining love and presence, while consecration is only possible on earth through self-denial. Yet it may well be that some are called to set forth more especially than others the life of renunciation; and it would appear that it is only at the level of renunciation, when the realization of the Cross absorbs the consciousness almost to the exclusion of other aspects of Christian truth, that man attains a special and mystic sense of contact with the Divine. Certainly in a sinful world it is not hard to understand why an experience of eternity which transcends the Cross cannot be granted to the human soul. The mystic apprehension of Christianity, therefore, though supremely true, is partial; and

it is the failure to recognize this incompleteness which has sometimes led mystics into an inhuman detachment hardly less repulsive than ordinary sin. In using this language it is not for a moment implied that the normal Christian life, which seeks to consecrate rather than to renounce, is on a higher plane than the mystic's. Only, as the life in the carpenter's workshop found its true fulfilment not on Calvary but in the Resurrection, so the ordinary Christian's life is not fulfilled in the mystic's visions. Both look, or should look, for a consummation beyond the highest flight of the human spirit upon earth.

We must, then, accept to the full the tremendous teaching of the Cross. We must insist as strongly as any mystic that the man who loves anything on earth more than Christ is unworthy of Him, and that the Christian, whether in the workshop or in the monastery, must take up his Cross daily to follow his Lord. Yet we need not forget that it was in the workshop of the carpenter that the Son of God first revealed Himself as man. However much the life of utter renunciation may inspire us, we may yet doubt whether it has entered even into the mystic's heart to conceive all the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him. And, finally, in religious matters it must always be borne in mind that sometimes it is the mouth, not of the expert, but of the babe, which is uttering the deepest truth.

O. C. QUICK.