PSYCHICAL RESEARCH: THE PHILOSOPHY OF PERSONALISM

HUMAN PERSONALITY AND ITS SURVIVAL OF BODILY DEATH. *By Frederic W. H. Myers. 12mo. 307 pages. (Abridged Edition) Longmans, Green and Company. New York.*

THE COSMIC RELATIONS AND IMMORTALITY. *By Henry Holt. 2 volumes. 8vo. 1071 pages. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston.*

MAN AND THE UNIVERSE. *By Sir Oliver Lodge. 12mo. 294 pages. George H. Doran Company. New York.*

PSYCHICAL MISCELLANEA. *By J. Arthur Hill. 12mo. 118 pages. Harcourt, Brace and Howe. New York.*

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES. *By Anna De Koven. 12mo. 273 pages. E. P. Dutton & Company. New York.*

MESLOM'S MESSAGES FROM THE LIFE BEYOND. *By Mary A. McEvilly. 12mo. 139 pages. Brentano's. New York.*

THE CASE AGAINST SPIRITUALISM. *By Jane T. Stoddart. 12mo. 141 pages. George H. Doran Company. New York.*

DO THE DEAD STILL LIVE? *By David Heagle. 12mo. 203 pages. The Judson Press. Philadelphia.*

"The chronic belief of mankind that events may happen for the sake of their personal significance is an abomination."—*William James.*

THE movement that acquired a widespread habitation and a now familiar name—Psychical Research—in the year 1882, is again riding upon a crest of interest, recorded in new issues and reissues of the eternal search for rare verities. After twenty years, the work of Frederic Myers retains its distinction. He died in 1901—an honoured scholar of the classics, and a leader of the new movement. More than any other, he was the accredited spokesman of the cause which Psychical Research expressed, and in that ex-

pression strove to legitimatize a morganatic union which Psychology with increasing emphasis declines to recognize. There were others, like Podmore, better equipped for critical appraisal; Myers had the constructive psychological talent. He had in him the making of a fine psychologist, with much of the acumen associated with the Gallic temperament. His animus is that of a psychic-researcher, not a psychologist—a paradoxical opposition with which that science is unfairly burdened.

Myers takes his start, as does the corresponding chapter in the psychology of to-day, from the study of lapses and disintegrations of personality, and proceeds in accredited fashion through the phenomena of sleep and dreams, of hypnosis, of sensory and motor automatisms, to the study of trance and its many varieties and obscurities. He includes, and rightly, the discussion of genius and those related partial and limited endowments that form a legitimate problem, as yet lacking a definite solution. Yet through the exposition run the alien strands which, to his view, make the vital pattern and the truer meaning of the world of mind. His quest is for "the latent faculties of man," which psychical research reveals, and for them posits a "spiritual environment in which these faculties operate, and of unseen neighbors who speak to us thence with slowly gathering power." He recognizes that hysteria—a potent concept, whose potency he acknowledges but with fixed limitations—is the clue to many of the phenomena of the region called abnormal psychology by the academic, and the privileged domain of "psychic phenomena," by those enlisted in the "psychical" secession. In that realm, ordinary delusions of the "paltry or morbid type" give way to those "which in themselves are reasonable and honorable" and morbid only in their intensity. There, "the vague name of *hysteria* must give way to the vague name of *genius*"; there operates a "force more concentrated and at higher tension" than ordinary thinking; its analogue is the common form of mentation to which the mind easily drifts—dreams. Hence, the encompassing theory of the "subliminal uprush" which embraces dreams and visions, calculating prodigies and flashes of genius, presentiments and telepathy, and eventually the phantasms of the dead, and the proof of bodily survival. His formula is the dissociation of personality on the one side, and the spiritual environment on the other—an emulsion of oil and water. The few, whether

by way of genius or by way of hysteria, or of moderate susceptibility to the subliminal uprushes of high or low degree, reveal the latent powers which complete as they transcend the ordinary circumscribed life of consciousness.

But the fine temper and restraint with which this theory is advanced will not save it from the inherent stigma which James called "an abomination." The Myers philosophy is the philosophy of personalism; his psychological analyses recede when they approach the crucial extension that would naturalize the supernatural. The nine-tenths of the phenomena are rendered unto psychology, but the remaining tenth—which is the choicer and rarer portion—must be rendered unto psychical research, yet ever with the sanction of a unitary science. With spiritualism as a faith he will hold no converse: "I altogether dissent from the conversion into a sectarian creed of what I hold should be a branch of scientific inquiry." The physical phenomena (though he accepts them) do not shape his belief. "If a table moves when no one is touching it, this is not obviously more likely to have been effected by my deceased grandfather than by myself. We cannot tell how *I* could move it; but then, we cannot tell how *he* could move it either." It is characteristic of his restraint that, in expressing his "absolute belief" in the moving of material objects by methods unrecognized by science, he should add: "Their detailed establishment, as against the theory of fraud, demands an expert knowledge of conjuring and other arts which I cannot claim to possess."

The "subliminal uprush" is legitimatized by its recognized part in dreams and hypnosis, in dissociation and hallucinations (sensory automatisms) and automatic writing (motor automatisms); but the fullness of its power is revealed only in the supernatural realm. The distinctive hallucination is the "veridical" one, the presentiment that comes true and acts as a personal warning; the phantasms that appear at the moment of death; the revelations of mediums: these establish telepathy and the entire world of happenings that will not square with the philosophy or the experience that guides the objective work of science and of the every-day man. This, too, is frankly admitted. "The inquiry falls between the two stools of religion and science; it cannot claim support either from the 'religious' world or from the Royal Society."

To Myers, the world assumed a different aspect after the Society

for Psychical Research announced its positive findings in favour of telepathy and of residual phenomena transcending known experience. Thence dated for him no less than for Conan Doyle and all the rest, who conspicuously lack his restraint in belief or reserve in statement, "The New Revelation." All accept the new dispensation, that year by year appeared between the covers of the Proceedings of the S.P.R. Since A.D. 1882, personalism ceased to be an abomination and became a clue to the universe and a means of salvation. In view of the personal comfort which the belief afforded one of its most distinguished adherents, it seems harsh to record the opinion, shared by most psychologists, that its chief effect has been to further a pernicious superstition and obscurantism.

Mr. Henry Holt combines the profession of publisher with that of editor, novelist, and contributor to psychical research. In the last field, he appears as a commentator, not as an original investigator, though he offers personal experiences and is clearly much influenced by them. For Mr. Holt, the "subliminal uprush" conveys slight satisfaction, and any naturalistic explanation is to him as out of date as the hypothesis of fraud which, in addition to being declared *passé*, is also dubbed silly. His master phrase is the "cosmic inflow" by which the unknown universe is brought into relation with the human soul. All the strange happenings and striking previsions and revelations of mediums result from the occasional penetration of the cosmic inflow; the strange sources of knowledge come from the cosmic memory; the polysyllabic evidence of transcendence of normal physics and normal psychology-telepathy, and telakousis, and telekinesis, and telergy, and telesthesia, and telopsis, and teloteropathy (see the glossarial index)—all the operations that produce thoughts and materials from the conjurer's hat of psychical research are supplied from the cosmic reservoir, which, however, overflows or leaks through only for personally significant moments.

The newly discovered stream—to many still the questionable "River of Doubt"—flows through the Proceedings of the S.P.R.; and a goodly share of Mr. Holt's sumptuous one thousand pages is lifted from this land of promise amply fulfilled. The "correlated knowledge," in terms of which the world does its business, serves as a brief introduction (eighty pages) to the "uncorrelated knowledge" that composes the annals of psychical research (seven

hundred pages); while the "attempts at correlation," though interesting, are forced and unconvincing. Mr. Holt, despite his cosmic terminology, is a persistent and insistent devotee of the philosophy of personalism; for him evolution has a personal momentum, and the cosmos operates for personal ends. Mr. Holt chooses the manner of lively banter, and the cosmic relations now and then are jauntily tossed between the jocular and the oracular. He guesses frequently and variably; he admits uncertainty; he has a vigorous prejudice against dogmatism. But his philosophy takes its form as rigidly from these bantering guesses, as though other guesses did not exist. His mind is firmly set in a personalized conviction. Because he is convinced that in his dreams he invents architectural refinements for which he has no wake-a-day endowment, is he assured that the source of his dream inspirations is the cosmic reservoir. The power of mediums to tap the same stream in far more marvellous fashion is readily accredited; and he is committed to the entire series of "uncorrelated" incidents in which others recognize the fertile products of delusion and fraud. No one is louder than he in denouncing much and most of the mediums' revelations as drivel and bosh; but the saving remnant is there, and by accumulation of years, the remnants—like rejected building stones—make an impressive temple, in which the altar of personalism is erected as that of the true God, however informal the inscriptions on its pedestal.

The consequences are lamentable. The divining-rod is reinstated as a manifestation of the cosmic force; the "mind-reading" performances of professed conjurers require in part a supernormal explanation; the ancient myth of the transposition of the senses becomes part of the new dispensation; dreams are invested with a significance to which controlled thinking vainly aspires; and in the supplement added in the new edition, credence is given to the preposterous experiments of Dr. Crawford, proving the power of spirits to lift tables by psychic cantilevers and to decrease the weight of the indispensable medium by fifty pounds, yet with no visible shrinkage. Standards of credibility are abandoned; subjectivism replaces criticism; and miracles are rampant. Because all these conclusions are consistent with the precepts of personalism and support them, are they cherished and embraced.

When Mr. Holt tells us that he is extremely skeptical concern-

ing most of the revelations of mediums with automatic writing, but that the Voices from the Void of Mrs. Traverse Smith seem to him profoundly evidential, we turn to those revelations with a promptly shattered hope. For they seem to the unprejudiced mind just as inconsequential, just as saturated with the errors of self-deception, as the mass of material which he rejects. The void is more impressive than the voice. And that is the marvel and the pity of this philosophy in its effects upon strong-minded men. Belief in the supernormal saps the critical faculties and blinds to glaring inconsistency. The extravagances of Conan Doyle are foreign to the comparatively temperate indulgence of Henry Holt; but the latter, independent as his thinking remains, yields to the former the tribute of extravagant approval.

The position of Sir Oliver Lodge is too well known to require detailed statement. The volume formerly called Science and Immortality is reissued as Man and the Universe, but it remains unaltered as an attempt to reconcile science and religion by way of psychical research and the philosophy of personalism. Sir Oliver's interest lies deeply imbedded in matters of faith and religious observance; he desires these aids to high living and noble purpose to be assimilated to the aspirations that science stimulates and develops. He finds the solution in the expansion of the universe beyond the realm of ordinary knowledge, but by the accredited methods of science. The revelations of psychical research, though "beyond the pale of science," are "some of them inside the Universe of fact," and their significance must be acknowledged. To him, psychical research is a supplementary revelation, profound and impressive. His system of belief might well remain secure without this consummation. It is only because this position leads logically—as it has led actually—to the pitiable irrelevancies of Raymond and the naïve confidence in questionable mediums as pillars of a personalistic philosophy, that the psychologically minded reader is tossed between admiration for the mental endowments of such men as Myers, Holt, and Lodge, and the mystery of their adherence to "facts" and "theories" so uncongenial to the intellectual temperament.

In the same class fall the writings of Mr. J. Arthur Hill, though his reputation rests solely upon his contributions to psychical research. But Mr. Hill knows the temper of science and presents a

brief which the advocate of the opposite view can respect, while he is convinced that it is penetrated with fallacy and shot through and through with an unwarranted personalism. Mr. Hill is the author of a history of Spiritualism and is much more of a spiritualist than the writers here cited. He approaches Mr. Holt in finding in some world-soul theory—after the manner of Fechner, whose leadership he reinstates—the encompassing formula for psychic intrusion; he is convinced of personal survival and accepts the personal motive that inspires (?) mediumistic and allied phenomena. The philosophy of personalism enlists its devotees, as it finds its armament, in many and unrelated intellectual as well as unintellectual settlements.

In an essay on Christian Science—whose weakness and strength he discerningly appraises—Mr. Hill explains Mrs. Eddy by one word—monoideism. "She was a person of one idea."

We need not go so far as the parable of motes and beams, to raise the issue whether the manner of adherence to the revelations of psychical research, even in minds capable of absorbing its message in the steadying terms of a responsible philosophy, has not something in common with the monoideistic cults of other bearing and admittedly of far lower logical status. When one reviews the unsavoury and discredited material in the history of spiritualistic beliefs and mediumistic practices, with which the newer evidence must somehow reckon, and which so many of the newer converts reaccept and re-instate, the optimism in regard to the saving remnant that converts an abomination into a grace, seems strangely akin to the monoideistic delusions, taking comfort in the soundness of a part of a questionable egg. Such beliefs seem to be held not wisely but too well. From the dubious practices of mediums preying upon a naïve personalism, to the philosophies incorporating their revelations in an exalted edition of the same psychological motives, there is a common nature all compact. The affiliation is real, and by that token the intellectualists of the movement assume a momentous social responsibility.

Such contributions as Mrs. De Koven's and Miss McEvilly's represent the personalism without the philosophy. They are highly individualistic and subjective. By their nature they deal with intimate relations, which the reviewer would prefer to respect, were not the publicity of their expression a challenge to a critical ap-

praisal. Mrs. De Koven introduces her revelations through a well-known medium by an argumentative defence of her faith in terms of the findings of others. It is intelligible that an amateur should be impressed by the most extravagant and discredited attests and speculations.

Such is Mrs. De Koven's comment. Accepting as facts requiring an extravagant explanation, dubious experiments including large ingredients of fraud and delusion, Mrs. De Koven enters upon the account of her communications with her deeply mourned sister, with a fatal prepossession. It is kinder to the author to refrain from further comment.

But the promoters of psychical research cannot enter a plea of "not guilty" when they are charged with responsibility for the great mass of hopeless, foolish, and insane speculation, of minds utterly ruined, and doctrines set forth with a pseudo-scientific warrant, which rivals the credulous temper of mediaevalism. The accounts of the other world revealed by a sacrilege of holy relations, take the form of a vapid feministic travesty, so pitiable in its frailty that its incoherence is masked by its irresponsibility. These are sad human documents to expose to a critically inquisitive world, yet inevitable incidents; for they are the natural issues of personalism run wild and flourishing upon an exuberant emotionalism, unrestrained by the stabilizing quality which a training in science aims to confer. Literary babblings one may call them, and fortunately evanescent, but none the less finding a by no means negligible clientele when proclaimed as authentic by A Cloud of Witnesses—spreading the fog of unreason and carrying an appeal by the very personalism that is their cardinal transgression. To the same class belongs Miss McEvilly, trained to a career as an operatic singer, but diverted by her power of automatic writing, and by such endorsements of her revelations as that of James Rhoades, "poet and theosophist," who places these banal religious pronouncements via planchette on a par with the finest utterances of Dante. On the cover of Meslom's Messages, we read that these trivial pieties are the "thoughts of a 15th century Hindu, . . . vital, palpitating, aflame." One irresponsibility leads to another—a mad world indeed if this popular brand of psychical research is to be circulated indiscriminately, to the damage of the uncertain foundations upon which a democratic faith in education places its hope.

Voices of protest are not wanting. But it will require mightier counter-thrusts than the slight rebuff of Miss Stoddart to make any headway against the encroachments of the insidious brand of personalism sponsored by psychical research. Miss Stoddart appeals to a religious sobriety that is enlisted in the cause upheld by science and sanity. But she is preaching in part to a convinced and in part to an absent congregation; nor will her invocation, cogent as it may appear to those of her persuasion, divert the powerfully motivated stream which she is trying to stem. Dr. Heagle is interested in presenting the belief in immortality as cumulatively supported by arguments derived from philosophy, from religion, from physics, biology, and psychology, and over and above these largely analogical buttresses, by the direct evidence of psychical research. An earnest and well-meaning intention will not atone for the lack of critical discrimination. The assumption that one may select the favourable bearings of certain of the conclusions of what Dr. Heagle calls "abnormal psychology" and escape the responsibility for the disastrous influences of the movement as a whole, combines the naïve with the confusing. The book is an unfortunate example of juggling with incommensurables. Religious arguments thus adulterated suggest the attitude of the "almost providential," seeking re-enforcements that add not to the strength but to the burden of argument.

Such books are significant as indicating in some quarters the realization of the need for education and enlightenment in regard to the foundations and implications of this strangely unmodern, latter-day philosophy. The policy of campaigns is determined by the magnitude of the clientele and its make-up. How to meet the formidable invasion of psychical research is an unescapable if unwelcome and discouraging task for the psychology of the era of reconstruction. It is not a question of painting and papering and refurbishing the mental appointments; it is a matter of sound logical foundations.

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