The Rescue of Religion.*

A few years ago, Mr. W. H. Mallock gave us 'Religion as a Credible Doctrine.' This work, notwithstanding the title, was mainly devoted to the pulverization of the religious apologists; but nevertheless, it presented at the end cogent reasons for still maintaining the general religious position. The same author's new book now before us is, as it were, a new edition of the old, with the proportions altered. It would not be truly Mallockian if it did not hold up for exhibition the weaknesses of previous writers, and indeed it does this throughout; but it does much more, it seeks to present the fundamental axioms of religion in such a way that they can be accepted, — not in spite of, but rather because of, modern scientific knowledge. Passing over the introduction, which contains some curiously poor verses, we find a closely-reasoned argument continued from the first page to the last, with little pause for breath. It is a book to be read at a single sitting, like a good novel. To say that it is interesting, well written, and appropriate to the times, is to offer it the merest justice; but to describe it as a complete success is perhaps going too far. Perhaps it would be more successful if it were less complete.

Belief, it is observed, is necessary to our continued existence. Daily and hourly — from minute to minute — we act in accordance with our beliefs. These beliefs are founded, we commonly say, on experience; but when we attempt their logical analysis we sooner or later find ourselves confronted by absurd contradictions.

> 'If the conception of freedom eludes and baffles the intellect, so in their last analysis do our conceptions of everything. As Spencer has shown, we cannot, without self-contradiction, conceive space, or matter, or motion, or causation, or our own conscious existence. Our consciousness is always a consciousness of the present moment; but the present moment is an ever disappearing point, which has gone before we can name it — which holds all, and yet is nothing. . . . Matter has three dimensions, yet resolves itself into points with none. Nothing can be thought of as not having a cause; yet all causes end at last in an Absolute which can cause nothing; and if we look on this Absolute as an absolute yet personal God, God, as Dean Mansel shows us, is all the unthinkables in one' (p. 272).

Hence the religious difficulty is, at heart, the same as the scientific difficulty, and all we can say about it is, that it appears to be insoluble by the human intellect.

Are we, then to hold ourselves lost? By no means; for just as in the ordinary affairs of life we depend upon the practical beliefs we have reached, so in higher matters must we rest upon the verities of religion, for the sake of our own sanity and the progress of civilization. What are these higher matters, and what are the verities of religion? Logic does not tell us; science, as a logical system, knows no higher or lower, better or worse. Yet, as we live, we may not, cannot, abandon our system of values, or admit that good and bad, higher and lower, beauty and ugliness, are one and the same thing. If the cosmos has no soul, if we ourselves are but bubbles formed in an instant and bursting in the next, if all we do, think, or say was predetermined in infinity, the very meaning of the higher life is lost. Man has tediously climbed the ladder of evolution, until at length he seems to see over the housetops the distant hills; and is he now to be told that they are a figment of his imagination? He will not be so stultified, logic or no logic.

Granting so much, do we therefore grant anything and everything? The sublime notoriously borders on the ridiculous, and when the other day I heard an orthodox clergyman gravely maintain that God had a throne set up in a certain part of the heavens, I could

*The Reconstruction of Religious Belief. By W. H. Mallock. New York: Harper & Brothers.

only suppose him to be wanting in a sense of humor. The truth of the matter is, that it will not do to confuse the ultimate illogicality of things, as they necessarily appear to our minds, with a system of thought which for everyday practical purposes will not work. We believe in the freedom of the will, within limitations, as a practical necessity; but to hold at the same time some of the traditions of theology and the theories of science, or even the opinions resulting from common experience, is like caging together two furious beasts, which can by no means endure one another. As O. W. Holmes said, the scandalous thing is not that such combinations make people insane, but that people profess to hold by them and retain their sanity.

But the religious apologist will say, that is true; but turn out the scientific beast, not the religious one! Why cannot we do that? Ultimately for the practical reason that the scientific animal will and does serve us in a thousand ways, and is always ready to come at our call; while the other is shy and cantankerous, to say the least. If we were monomaniacs, it might be different.

Here is the whole point of Mr. Mallock's contention. The religious beast has got to go; there is no reasonable doubt about that; but must religion go with it? If it must, the end of human progress, as we understand it, has come; but it must not, and moreover, cannot, in the nature of things. The clergy are too wedded to old traditions, and too ignorant of science, to afford much help; the scientific are for the most part too narrow; and hence the inevitable new birth is not an easy one, and the transition period is one in which men seem cast adrift. The very psychological conditions which made the coming of Christ so opportune 1900 years ago, have arisen again.

I have not attempted to reconstruct Mr. Mallock's argument in this short review, but merely to describe his general purpose. Neither has it seemed worth while to offer detailed criticism, though 'science,' as understood by many, is likely to repudiate such things as the inheritance of sense-impressions described on p. 37. There remains, however, a more fundamental objection. Mr. Mallock says:

'We must, then, recognize anthropomorphism, understood with certain limitations, as providing us with what is not only not an illegitimate, but the sole scientific means, of approaching the problem of the ultimate character of the universe. Just now we compared the Unknowable First Cause, as Haeckel, Spencer, and their whole school represent it, to a seemingly blank slab which when cleaned by a further application of the methods of these thinkers themselves, is seen to be covered with innumerable cryptic inscriptions; and we asked whether it were possible to discover any Rosetta Stone — any bilingual tablet — by means of which we might be able to spell out a part of them; and here we have our answer. The Rosetta Stone of the universe for ourselves is the human brain, in which matter and conscious mind are immediately presented to us as identical, and we are able to watch reality at work under its two aspects' (p. 179).

This attractive idea is developed at considerable length, with the result of apparently justifying, or at least rendering more or less probable, the existence of a cosmic God. The objection which may at once be raised to it is this: that the human mind cannot be thought of as cosmic and omnipotent. Our very thought — the emergence of cerebration into the field of consciousness — depends upon the existence of active conflict, and upon the reactions between personality and non-personality. If the absence of free-will is unthinkable, so equally is unrestrained free-will: it is like the conception of pushing with nothing to push. The human mind or personality, magnified into a cosmic God, would be exactly the blank slab which Haeckel and Spencer are said to have depicted, and while the conception might have value in philosophic discussions, it could have nothing whatever to do with religion. Monotheism carried to its logical extreme is Pantheism, and possesses no reality which the human intellect can grasp. The really religious man cries '*My* God,' and while he may postulate an omnipotent and cosmic deity, in reality he addresses himself to his spiritual father or friend, who is thought of as one like himself only immensely superior. Philosophically, it is perfectly reasonable to hold that each man's individual God is a phase or aspect of spiritual totality, just as each man's garden is a phase or aspect of material totality; but for the purposes of living religion, each must have his own special deity, who ministers in special ways to his needs. Thus some of the creeds of paganism are seen to be more genuinely alive and purposeful than we have been wont to assume, and polytheism is no longer a word of reproach, but a reasonable projection of the diverse aspirations of mankind.

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