

Give me a man who can look with an eye of faith beyond the narrow limits that birth, or accident, or circumstance, or his means has assigned to him—

That sees beyond the circle of his years,
Beyond the border of this narrow world;—

a man, too, who lets God possess him; who not only sets God at his right hand, but allows God really to use his right hand; who each day tries to realize that he is but an instrument for God to use to help the world; who each day realizes he is not his own, but is bought with a price; and who each day says at the call of duty, 'Here am I, send me'; if it be but to pick a child from the gutter, or help a lame dog over a stile—a man who in doubt or difficulty says (yea, even in the doubt and difficulty of hard breathing before his death), 'Father, not my will, but thine be done';—a man, in a word, filled with the Holy Ghost,—and there is no telling what capacity will be developed; for whatever use God wants the man, that man's usefulness will appear at the call.

Before the rush of the day begins, let us take time to gaze or a space into the face of the King; for one whose eyes

are open to the invisible, who sees with clear spiritual sight the angels and the angels' Lord beside him, can go on his way with high courage and perfect peace, sure that all is well.

A poor shoemaker once dreamed that the Lord Jesus would visit him on a certain day. He lived in a dark basement room, below the level of the street, and could only see the feet of those who passed by. Several times during the day he saw shabby boots moving wearily past his window, and hurried out to invite the tired wayfarers in for rest and food. All day he watched and waited for the promised Guest, and went sadly to bed at last, thinking that his dream had not come true.

But he dreamed again, and the tired strangers he had cheered and helped stood beside his bed, saying, 'Martin, dost thou not know Me?' Then he saw in each face a look of the King, and knew that his loved Master had really visited that poor little home many times during the day.

This is not a parable; it is a glorious fact, Christ, in the person of some of His brethren, will surely visit us this day. Are our eyes opened so that we may recognize Him?¹

¹ Dora Farncomb, *The Vision of His Face*, 2.

The Subliminal Consciousness as an Aid to the Interpretation of Religious Experience.

BY THE REV. JOHN BAILLIE, M.A., EDINBURGH.

THE most desultory reader of the theological literature of the last few years cannot but have remarked the constant tendency among writers in other respects very different from one another to fall back upon the idea of a Subliminal or Subconscious self as the key to the solution of all sorts of difficulties. Almost every day one finds some new writer casting sanguine glances in that direction, if haply some problem long dark to him should find its solutions also in that half-lit region. Doctrinal entities so diverse as Immortality, the traditional Christology, the nature of the Deity, and the religious experience of the individual, have all been regarded as finding their true explanation in the Subliminal. What we propose to do here is to choose out one of these problems, the most central one, and ask whether the introduction of this new quantity really gives us any help towards its solution. Is the conception of the Subliminal self going to be of any help to us in the interpretation of the individual's religious experience? It is with this psychological question that we shall concern ourselves here.

Let us begin by examining the proposals of the two most representative writers who take a positive

attitude towards this subject,—the late Professor James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and Dr. Sanday in his recent *Christologies Ancient and Modern*. They are not the only writers who have positive views on the matter, but they have perhaps developed their views with the greatest detail, and probably we shall not lose anything that is valuable by confining our attention to them.

I.

Let us begin with Dr. Sanday; leaving out of account, of course, the Christological application of his view, and confining ourselves to the psychological side of it. The fact of religious experience which Dr. Sanday tries to explain by reference to the Subliminal is the indwelling of God in the soul, or the fact of union with God. 'The proper seat or *locus* of all divine indwelling, or divine action upon the human soul,' he says, 'is the subliminal consciousness.'¹ Or again, 'The deepest truth of mysticism, and of the states of which we have been speaking as mystical, belongs not so much to the upper region of consciousness—the region of symptoms, manifestations, effects—as to the lower

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 159.

regions of the unconscious.¹ He calls it here the *lower* region, but in common with most of its devotees he is inclined to make it first in importance. In general Dr. Sanday seems to urge that the sense of union with God which the religious man undoubtedly experiences cannot be explained in terms merely of the ordinary 'upper' consciousness, and that therefore we must believe the union itself to take place in a subjacent region, Myers' 'subliminal consciousness.'

And I do not think it is difficult to understand what prompts Dr. Sanday to take refuge in this alternative. He is anxious to show that the indwelling of God in man is a real objective fact, an actual contact of two separate personalities. He finds it difficult to show at what point in the ordinary psychic process this contact takes place, and therefore he welcomes with eagerness the suggestion that it does not take place there at all, but in a totally different region, the laws of which are as yet almost completely unknown. Moreover, there has always been a tendency to regard the workings of the Spirit of God as in some sense underground, unpsychological, or even half-unconscious.

The question we must now ask, therefore, is whether anything is really to be gained by referring the indwelling of God in man to a subliminal stratum of mental life? Personally, I cannot think that there is, and I shall give my reasons in detail.

(1) To begin with, it should be clear that the fact that we know little or nothing of the subliminal region is not a reason why we should readily refer certain facts to it, but a reason why we should steadily refrain from referring them to it. If we find that a certain supposed process cannot take place in the ordinary psychic life, the reasonable inference is not to say that it must take place in the Subliminal region, but rather that it does not take place at all. For if we have no evidence to the contrary, the natural thing to suppose is that the Subliminal Consciousness is, *mutatis mutandis*, precisely the same as the 'waking' consciousness. And if there are differences between the two regions, we have no reason to believe that they are such as to suit our preconceived theories. To defend a fact by referring it to the unknown is virtually to give it up; like some erratic physicist who, when he had discovered beyond doubt that some favourite fancy of his did not fit in with the

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 155.

laws of the earth, proceeded to defend its actuality by saying it must be true of the moon, whose laws are less completely known. This may appear to be an unsympathetic criticism, but so far as the reference to the Subliminal is meant as a *defence*, it is undoubtedly just; and further we should not press it.

(2) There is, however, a more serious criticism to be passed. Not only does the reference of the fact of union with God to the Subliminal do no good, but it does positive harm; for there can be little doubt that according to any reasonable view to relegate a fact to the Subliminal stratum is to relegate it to the background, and to lessen its bearing on everyday life. Despite Myers' constant contention that the Subliminal is in no way abnormal or morbid, it remains undeniably true that its salient manifestations in human experience up to the present time have been almost wholly of a pathological nature. And it would be difficult to convince men of the naturalness and normality of the life with God, if that life were shown to be primarily subliminal. Indeed we can put the matter much more strongly than this; we can say that to make the union with God subconscious, is, so far as we can guess, to make it infra-ethical. According to the most enthusiastic supporters of the subconscious, the act of *judgment* is not possible at this level, and a moral act which does not imply a judgment is something we cannot understand. Similarly it is a question whether any one would say that *purposive* life is possible on this level, and surely all value is meaningless apart from that.

(3) And there is still a third objection. The relegation of the fact of union with God to the Subliminal or Subconscious is not only harmful, but also—and we may say fortunately—quite uncalled for and unnecessary. It is, in fact, due to a misunderstanding of the nature of such union. Dr. Sanday's difficulty in seeing how God can enter into our life in the normal region of ordinary consciousness, seems to me to spring simply from the fact that he is looking for a sort of union that exists neither there nor anywhere else. He is looking for a *point* of contact, for a definite point in the psychological process when the Spirit of God breaks in or supervenes. And, of course, there is no such point to be found. But the inference is—and this is the important issue—not that it is now to be looked for in an unknown subjacent stratum, but

rather that the whole notion of a point of contact is to be abandoned for the more philosophical one of a continuous, omnipresent indwelling. We must no longer ask, with Dr. Sanday, 'Where in the human soul is the proper seat or *locus* of the divine?' The *whole* soul is God's house, and if He dwells in any part of it rather than in another, it is not in its underground crypts and cellars, but in its loftiest and clearest chamber. It is never anything but confusion that makes us seek for God in the occult and the unfamiliar and the exceptional, instead of in the open spaces of our everyday ethical and spiritual life. And there is nothing in the nature of the sense of the presence of God, which should tempt us to locate its springs in a subliminal region. It may take a subtle psychology to analyze it completely, but it should be obvious that it is from beginning to end ethical; that it is with us most in our clearest moments; and that it takes its rise, not in dim, instinctive, semi-cerebral psychoses, but in the fullest light of human intelligence. And that is all that need be said about this matter.

II.

Let us now turn to what William James has to say. Like his friend, Dr. Starbuck, he calls in the aid of the Subliminal Consciousness at a different point in the interpretation of religious experience from any that we have yet considered, his crowning instance of its operation being that of *sudden conversion*. He begins by giving us 'illustrations of subconsciously maturing processes eventuating in results of which we suddenly grow conscious.'¹ His conclusion is that 'when the new centre of personal energy has been subconsciously incubated so long as to be just ready to open into flower, "hands off" is the only word for us, it must burst forth unaided!'² Or, in greater detail, 'The most important consequence of having a strongly developed ultra-marginal life of this sort is that one's ordinary fields of consciousness are liable to incursions from it of which the subject does not guess the source, and which, therefore, take for him the form of unaccountable impulses to act or inhibitions of action, of obsessive ideas, or even of hallucinations of sight or hearing.'³ And, finally, in his concluding chapter, he says, 'When in addition to these phenomena of inspiration, we take religious mysticism into the account, when we recall the striking and sudden unifications

of a discordant self which we saw in conversion, and when we review the extravagant obsessions of tenderness, purity, and self-severity met with in saintliness, we cannot, I think, avoid the conclusion that in religion we have a department of human nature with unusually close relations to the trans-marginal or subliminal region.'⁴

The principle of these contentions is clear at once. The 'sudden incursions,' whether in the form of decisions, inhibitions, 'unifications,' or conversions, are explained as the entry into consciousness of the completed result of a 'subconscious' process. It is virtually the principle of the 'summation of stimuli,' and it has an undoubted plausibility. We must, however, leave the discussion of the validity of this principle in general to the final discussion of the whole conception of the Subconscious which is yet to come. At present I wish to suggest two difficulties of a more special nature which are raised by James' view.

(1) To any one who reads James' chapter on sudden conversions, the objection must suggest itself that he is not dealing with normal cases. An ordinary normal conversion does not present the features which his examples present; and even those *sudden* conversions with which most of us are familiar are explicable on an easier theory than that of a long unconscious subterranean process bursting suddenly into consciousness. It might be answered, perhaps, that granting this, it still remains true that the extreme, abnormal, 'limiting' cases are just the valuable ones for psychology. But in the present case it is a pure confusion to think that this is so. For in this region an extreme or unusual case is simply a case in which new, and indeed morbid, factors come into play; so that they belong to the pathology, not to the normal anatomy, of the religious consciousness. If what we are seeking is a description of the normal and healthy religious consciousness, it is manifestly unreasonable to go for our facts either to extreme or to unusual cases, where it is probable that disturbing conditions are present. This seems to me to be an almost inevitable objection to James' statement, that 'when we review the *extravagant obsessions*,' etc., 'we cannot . . . avoid the conclusion that in religion we have a department of human nature with unusually close relations to the trans-marginal or subliminal region.'⁵ For a man

¹ *Varieties*, p. 207. ² *Ibid.* p. 210. ³ *Ibid.* p. 234.

⁴ *Varieties*, pp. 483-484. ⁵ *Ibid.* p. 483, italics mine.

who studies average religious experience, and does not concentrate his attention on its extravagances, there is nothing which would lead to the conclusion that the seat of religion is outside of the ordinary 'waking' consciousness.

(2) My other difficulty is analogous to one which we found in our last section. It is the difficulty of retaining the ethical nature of sudden decisions and sudden conversion, if we accept the account of them which James offers. We may illustrate it well from certain things which James himself says about the subliminal region. 'Much of the content of this larger background . . . is insignificant. Imperfect memories, silly jingles, inhibitive timidities . . . enter into it in large part.'¹ 'Our intuitions, hypotheses, fancies, superstitions, persuasions, convictions, and in general all our non-rational operations come from it. It is the source of our dreams, and apparently they may return to it.'² I think it will be admitted that if the momentous decisions of our lives come from a region such as this, we are more at the mercy of instinct and of unintelligent, unknown forces, than most of us had fondly imagined. We must grant, however, that this appeal is not a sufficient scientific rejoinder to James' contention; for that we must go to the more technical argument to which we now proceed.

III.

For we must now ask, What is the Subliminal? and what is the Subconscious? or do these things exist at all? It will be observed that so far the result of our discussion has been to show that, even granting the general reasonableness and utility of the concept of a transmarginal mental region, there is no reason for connecting it in any special way with the religious consciousness. But now let us ask whether the concept is itself a reasonable one, whether it is of any value for the interpretation of any region of experience. Only thus can we hope to settle the matter finally. The first thing to be done is to distinguish at last between the Subliminal on the one hand and the Subconscious on the other. So far, we have been content to use these terms as interchangeably as do the writers whom we have discussed. But there can be no doubt that they properly denote quite different things. They are the results of entirely different lines of thought, and are, according to

¹ *Varieties*, p. 512.

² *Ibid.* p. 484, italics mine.

their best supporters, based upon almost entirely different facts.

(1) The Subliminal was the name given by Frederick Myers to a quantity which he himself introduced into psychology. It was offered by him as an explanation of the facts of hypnotism and 'double personality.' In what is perhaps his best statement on the matter,³ he begins by expressing his discontent with the current fashion of explaining them away as 'mere morbid dis-integrations of the empirical personality,' and then proceeds to offer his own theory that there are in all of us several strata of consciousness, of which the ordinary 'waking' consciousness is only one; and that these phenomena of hypnotism, etc., simply represent the moments when we become 'aware of some other stratum.' 'I suggest then,' he proceeds, 'that the stream of consciousness in which we habitually live is not the only consciousness which exists in connection with our organism.'

(2) The idea of Subconsciousness is something quite different. It stands, and has always stood, not for the idea that there are in man several consciousnesses, but for the idea that consciousness is not coextensive with mental facts, that there are phenomena which, though mental, are still not conscious. The Subconscious is therefore defined as the non-conscious region of the mind, the series of non-conscious mental phenomena. The facts on which it is based are roughly these: the unconscious retention in memory of past experiences; the apparent forming of associations with objects of which we were not conscious at the time of their occurrence; the effect made upon the total state of mind by objects in (*e.g.*) the visual field, which we do not seem to be directly attending to—I am said, for instance, to be subconscious of the margin of a book when I am attending to the printed matter; and the fact that stimuli which are too faint to attract our attention singly, seem to be unconsciously or subconsciously summed up, and so to burst suddenly into consciousness.

IV.

The difference between the two hypotheses should, therefore, be quite clear. The first means that there are in man several consciousnesses usually unrelated; the latter that, though man has only one consciousness, that consciousness has a

³ *Proceedings of Society for Psychological Research*, vol. vii. (1892), pp. 305 ff.

non-conscious background which is yet more than merely physical. The subliminal strata are conceived as fully conscious, though perhaps not conscious of each other; 'all this psychical action, I hold, is fully conscious,'¹ are Myers' own words; but the subconscious strata are conceived as non-conscious. The subliminal strata represent different *selves* to that represented by the supra-liminal stratum; the subconscious is simply the inactive background of the one self.

Consequently it is impossible satisfactorily to discuss a theory like Dr. Sanday's until we know definitely to which of these two conceptions he wishes to refer us. He certainly professes to base his theory on Myers' discoveries, and yet he characterizes the subliminal as 'the unconscious and semi-conscious states' (p. 137), 'the subconscious and unconscious states' (p. 144, etc.), 'the unconscious state' (p. 145), 'the lower region of the unconscious' (p. 155); and he even suggests that his hypothesis is much the same as Dr. Carpenter's 'unconscious cerebration.' No doubt the confusion goes back in part to Professor James, but perhaps that is only so far as the use of the names is concerned. But we must leave the individual theorists, and look finally at the theories themselves.

(1) What attitude are we to take to the *Subliminal*? For my own part, I am forced to consider the whole conception to be an entirely baseless one, and I would give the following as my reasons. (a) To begin with, it seems to me that part of its plausibility arises from the lack of precision in Myers' language. His usual phrase is that there is 'within us' a lower stratum which is 'conscious' but of which 'we are not ordinarily aware.' We are inclined to ask, How is it conscious if we are not aware of it? Which leads us to realize that it is only possible if we are thinking of different consciousnesses which are not conscious of each other. The only way, therefore, in which we can render Myers' view definite, is to take it as referring to two or more minds or streams of consciousness connected with the same brain, usually unaware of each other's existence, but intermingling and becoming conscious of one another in, e.g., hypnotic subjects. Now psychology does not object to hearing that two psychological individuals may represent one physiological one, that there are two minds in one body; it is not

¹ *Op. cit.* p. 305.

particularly concerned with the question. But if the two individualities ever get mixed up, as in the so-called 'incursions,' then psychology very emphatically asserts that the case is a pathological one, and that the man (or men!) is—so far—mad. And a position like that is quite valueless for Myers' purposes. (b) Secondly, the evidence adduced is far from impressive. It is notorious that parts of it are constantly turning out to be based on gossip and misunderstanding and even conscious fraud. Münsterberg gives a personal reminiscence which is worth quoting: 'In Europe I received a telegram from two famous telepathists, asking me to come immediately to a small town where there had been discovered a medium of extraordinary powers. It required fifteen hours travelling, and I hesitated; but the report was so inspiring that I finally packed my trunks. Just then came a second message with the laconic words, "All fraud." Since that time I do not take the trouble to pack. I wait quietly for the second message.'² And one could quote significant admissions which come from even the most enthusiastic supporters of the theory. (c) But one prefers to press the other point, that even such part of the evidence as is verifiable can be explained on other and much simpler grounds. Hypnotism is a good instance. It seems to me that hypnotism is most naturally and easily explained on the simple theory of abnormal suggestibility, and that it is mere perverseness that makes Myers combat this explanation so indignantly, and substitute a theory of a deeper personality. Professor James is repeatedly guilty of the same error. To take only one example, he explains our sudden recollection of a forgotten name some time after we have given up the effort to recover it, by saying that 'some hidden process was started in you by the effort, which went on after the effort ceased, and made the result come as if it came spontaneously.' But surely the correct explanation is the much simpler one, that by giving up the intense effort to recollect, which is simply an effort to urge our attention along tentative and wrong associative channels, we relieve our minds of this unnatural strain, and so allow the associative mechanism to follow its natural and spontaneous course. The same thing might be said of the cases of so-called double and multiple personality; even granted the evidence,

² *Psychology and Life*, pp. 259-260.

it does not come near to proving Myers' ambitious conclusion.

(2) Concerning the *Subconscious*, it is impossible to say very much here, as the matter is one for detailed psychological investigation. A considerable number of present-day psychologists, notably Professors Ward and Stout, make use of the conception; but, at the same time, a growing number of writers are dispensing with it, and to all appearances doing very well without it. I am very strongly inclined to follow this latter group. In the first place, the conception itself is an extremely difficult one. It is very hard to conceive a region which is at the same time mental and non-conscious; especially after we had learned to believe that, in Professor Baldwin's words, 'consciousness is the one condition and abiding characteristic of mental states.' And, of course, to give this unconscious mental region a name—to call it *subconscious*—is not to make it more explicable or conceivable. In the second place, the rise of physiological psychology has given us a real means of explaining the facts on which the theory is based. There is no reason why we should not regard all unconscious processes as also non-mental, and so leave them entirely to the brain. If the so-called subconscious states are unconscious, surely it is at least as easy to conceive them as brain states, as it is to conceive them as states of some unknown intermediary sphere.

We are now in a position to see just where it is that James' account of decisions, sudden conversions, etc., as the entry into consciousness of the completed result of a subconscious process, is mistaken. If the process is there at all, there is no reason to think that it is anything else than a brain-process, and, moreover, the whole analysis of

the case is wrong. 'Sudden' conversions are not usually so sudden as James supposes them; they are usually the result of a long process of 'quenching the Spirit.' The thought that finally issues in the man's conversion has suggested itself to him—appeared on the verge of consciousness—a hundred times, but he has always impatiently or angrily suppressed it. And then at last it overpowers him—the culmination being due to the appearance of some new intensifying condition. It was a bright light which convinced the doubt-tortured Paul that he could kick against the pricks no longer, long and wilfully though he had kicked against them. And besides this, James seems not to realize how powerful is the new motive that comes in in conversion; so powerful as to explain the greatest wonders of suddenness and completeness and permanency. Add to this the fact that the most sudden conversions usually take place in highly emotional, not to say ecstatic, subjects, as in the classical cases of Mohammed and Paul, and the explanation seems complete.

One regrets that this discussion should be so largely destructive and so little constructive in its results, though the *idola theatri* are after all the idols which one least minds destroying, and though this lack of proportion never caused a twinge of conscience—or shall we say of subconsciousness, of that *δαίμων* of his which Myers thought he understood so well?—to so good a man as Socrates. The mysteries and the subtleties of the religious consciousness are indeed crying aloud on every side for patient investigation and analysis; and there is nothing we need so much to this end as a new psychology of religion, at the same time more enlightened and more cautious. But we shall surely be disappointed if we look for help to the Subliminal Consciousness.

The Word of the Cross and the Parable of the Prodigal.

BY THE REV. J. BONNAR RUSSELL, B.D., ABERDEEN.

It has often been remarked that in the Parable of the Prodigal Son the principle of atonement finds no place. The reconciliation of father and son is a simple matter of repentance on the one hand, and

forgiveness on the other. There is no question of a price paid by either—much less by a third party—before reconciliation can take place. There is nothing to show the need of any sacrifice, to