

We shall patiently wait the verdict of the future, seeing that the present has not been able to find the "facts" in this case. Whatever we may think of the twelfth chapter of the Apocalypse, we surely cannot follow Gunkel who sees

in it a version of the birth of the god Marduk. The views of Delitzsch are so bound up with his views of the Old Testament that we shall leave the foregoing views until we deal with his *Babel and Bible* lectures.

[To be concluded]

THE "NEW" AMERICAN RELIGION

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Every intelligent person wants to keep in touch with unconventional currents of thought. This is particularly true in the case of religion. In order to criticize, one needs to understand, and the present article will give one a general view of a very interesting movement in our modern religious world. Its suggestions are well worth considering, for Protestantism is now face to face with the questions of religion itself rather than those of doctrine.

During the past twenty-five years there has sprung up in our midst a new and important religious movement. The fact is not generally recognized; first, because of the many names by which it is known, and, secondly, because it lays claim to being a scientific and philosophic as well as a religious movement.

Everyone will have heard at least one of the names by which it has been called, as "Christian Science," "New Thought," "Higher Thought," "Divine Science," "Unity." Besides the groups of people to whom these names are attached, there are others who are not identified with the movement under any name, but who read its books and attend

its lectures. Of its various titles, the first two are the most widely used; in fact, the ubiquitous reporter dubs all that is not "Christian Science" "New Thought," and for convenience' sake that name will be used in this article, though it must be remembered that most of those who are in the movement object to it.

Many who have heard these names have indulged in laughter at the pretensions of the newcomers, and it must be admitted that their ridicule is often deserved. It must also be admitted that unhappiness, serious harm, and even death have often followed in their train. But it is certainly an evidence of the innate worth of the movement that

through its power to lighten burdens, increase usefulness, and change lives in spite of the ridicule of the press, pulpit, and medical profession, and in spite of the weaknesses of its followers, it has steadily increased in numbers until it now includes about a twelfth of the population of the United States.

What is this "New Thought"? What common belief unites in a certain loose fashion these different groups of people? It is this—that there is a Supreme Power within the breast of man, which some call Mind, and others call God; that this power tends to express itself according to its nature, in health, happiness, and success—all that the heart of man desires. If it does not so express itself, the fault is in us, because our belief or desire is not strong enough to vanquish adverse appearances.

Of course this idea is not new. It has long been held—in a somewhat different form—in the East, and by many since the Christian era in the West; and it has the force of Emerson and, to some degree, of Bergson behind it in our own times. But it has never until today become a popular idea in the Western countries. The work of P. P. Quimby, Mary Baker Eddy, Ralph Waldo Trine, and many others has been to translate and popularize this truth in all its bearings. Needless to say that in the process of becoming popular it has lost something of its original purity and loftiness. Around this central belief has grown up a large, loose, unorganized movement, highly individualistic, which refuses to be dissected. Under the knife its essence evaporates. It must be studied, according to Bergson, "on the wing." We

must try to grasp its spirit rather than to define its outlines save in the most general way.

"New Thought" first appeared as "Mental Science" when Dr. P. P. Quimby of Belfast, Maine, wrought many wonderful cures and attracted many followers in the middle of the nineteenth century. Mrs. Eddy drew a partial inspiration at least from this source. But from the first an essential difference appeared in the two systems, for while Christian Science denies the existence of matter, "New Thought" has always admitted it as a working hypothesis.

After Dr. Quimby's death, in 1866, his followers, led by J. A. Dresser and Dr. Evans of Boston, continued to practice and teach "Mental Science" in the vicinity of Boston. Books were written on the subject, and the newspapers began to speak of the "New Thought." A "Mental Science" convention was advertised under the name, and it has since been generally used in a more or less inclusive sense.

Since 1875 the number of those who think in the "New Way" has greatly increased; a conservative estimate places the followers of the new cult at 5,000,000, found mostly in the Central States and the Far West. Ten years ago a rough calculation based on the circulation of books and attendance on lectures set the number at over 12,000,000. There are 5,000 volumes, some very popular, in the library of this system of thought. In view of the latitude of opinion covered by the blanket name of New Thought it is impossible to reach an accurate statistical reckoning, and the writer makes no pretense at so doing, but the best and most careful observers

of the whole country agree on a figure which makes the cult about as large as the Baptists, or the Young Peoples' Society of Christian Endeavor.

The quiet, spontaneous, and rapid growth which has taken place within these years has not been accomplished through the personality of any leader, or through any strong central organization; rather has it come about because of the very lack of such organization or centralizing influence. The new faith has been disseminated by books, lectures, and word of mouth; wherever it has found fertile soil—soil adapted to it—there it has taken root. Solitary men and women in prairie towns, or in some great city, have felt it springing up within them, each believing that to him or her has come a special revelation of truth. If the one in whom the seed has sprung up proves to be a natural leader, he forthwith arms himself with literature bearing on the subject, and forms a "Center" for reading, meditation, healing, and study, giving the cult whatever name he fancies. The quick and genuine results in healing from sickness which generally attend such spontaneous efforts gain for the pioneer followers who have probably been reading and thinking about the subject in secret, but who have lacked courage to start out openly alone, and to bear the semi-ostracism that is likely to follow such a step.

Thus "New Thought" has gained twenty, fifty, or five hundred adherents at scattered points. If the leader adds a talent for organization to that of leadership, he can extend his "Center" indefinitely by correspondence until his followers number thousands. This has

happened in the case of Unity Society at Kansas City, Missouri, the largest single organization teaching New Thought doctrines, which includes 50,000 members scattered throughout the East and West.

Any movement which spreads in this way will inevitably have great values and great drawbacks. It will be highly spontaneous and vital, powerful in healing and miracle-working power. It will produce types of purest spirituality and will set free the imprisoned powers of countless individuals. It will be large, for there is no one to demand "What do you believe?" of anyone who wishes to enter it. Who can set the limit to the growth of a religious movement without creed, which welcomes all who feel at home with the rest of the family? On the other hand, it will be totally lacking in unity; it will split up as indefinitely as the amoeba, and each offshoot will consider itself the true and only creature. It will be individualistic to the point of social selfishness, and as a body will be totally lacking in the powers which come from co-operation. In its protest against the over-organization of the church, as it conceives it, it has gone to the opposite extreme, and shows what individualism run wild will lead to.

Historically to parallel this movement would be difficult. Old though we may find its component parts to be, and universal as is the truth on which it is based, the combination of these parts in America today is as new and fresh as a baby, the depositary of ancestral traits which, taken separately, are as familiar as the trees. To render the deepest spiritual truths "practical" is a conception to be expected from the

brain of a Yankee. To none but a modern Western mind would it occur to force out on the very streets, so to speak, the dreams of the mystic in his movements of rapture—the ideals murmured at the shrines of the world; to make them hustle for a living; to say to them, "Make good, or we'll have none of you! We want a religion that will make us rich and healthy as well as righteous."

As we have said, New Thought has a historical background—ancestors. For father, it can claim a system of metaphysics as old at least as Christianity. Dr. Quimby only seized on a set of ideas which have been in circulation for the last two thousand years. Alexandrian philosophers taught these ideas; Plato and the neo-Platonists preached them, and one of their number, Dionysius of Athens, in the fifth century proclaimed that *God is all; that matter, sin, and evil are not and cannot be, since all is God*. For mother, New Thought can claim the mystical movements of the past, as voiced by the never-ceasing brotherhood of those who feel the presence of God within. Theologians have always looked askance at these metaphysical teachings which seemed to them at variance with Christianity, nor have they regarded with much greater favor those mystics who have gone beyond the organized church for their religion. Certainly they never foresaw that mystical Christianity might one day be united with these metaphysical heresies. But the two have been united and from their union has sprung a product containing strains from both sides of the house.

To a large degree, the conception of New Thought, as met with in everyday

life, depends on the New Thinker. It is no more the same to the crude mind of the western miner and to the inheritor of generations of culture on the Atlantic Coast than the God of Tennyson is the God of the college athlete; or than the heaven of the scientist (if he is so fortunate as to have one) is the heaven of Jerry MacAuley.

The New Thought believer is totally unable to point to any document or to any leader (except a local one) and say, "Here is my creed and my leader." He is embarked on a sea of belief without chart, rudder, or pilot, other than his own inner leadings. Despite this fact, during the last ten years certain definite tendencies have appeared in the movement. There are in New Thought two general "drifts," and the believer in this philosophy finds himself drawn into one of these currents, together with others of his kind.

As already explained, one class of believers call the Supreme Power within Mind, while others call it God. Nor is this divergence in nomenclature without significance for from this point the two drifts take their origin. True it is that at first the two currents still mingle to a large extent; subtly do the two views intertwine; reciprocally, the "Mind" people reverence and use the name of God, while the religious people reverence and use the laws of Mind. But in the more extreme types, both of books and of individuals, the difference is more clearly marked.

Among those who call the Supreme Power "Mind" are the occultists. When, in 1893, Swami Vivekenanda gave his stirring addresses at the World's Fair, the "Mental Scientists" were among

those who flocked to hear him. He made many converts among them and, on going back to India a few years later, left behind him many organized societies for the study of Vedantic philosophy. From time to time India has sent teachers for these groups, and interest has slowly spread. Theosophy, also, that most complex and subtle of Eastern religions, has taken root in America, but, owing to its inveterate habit of splitting, it is weak as a sect. There are a few thousand Rosicrucians, members of that ancient, secret, and mystical society, also to be found. All these have much in common with the more practical everyday New Thoughtist. They all practice, in differing ways, the new American religion; they try to make the Supreme Power within manifest in outward ways, such ways as they desire. They are the extremists in this branch. All their doctrines have not been popular but a few of the Eastern beliefs have taken deep root in American New Thought everywhere, such as the doctrine of reincarnation which is almost universally held among them, and that of Karma, taught in some modified form. On the Pacific Coast especially, these Eastern occult teachings have appealed strongly to, and have become inextricably mixed with, the teachings of "New Thought" as known in the East. In former years, palmists, astrologers, and spiritualists were associated with the New Thought movement, but the association is now on the decline. These elements began to feel out of place with the rest of the family and have dropped away.

Besides the occultists, many of whom are people of high and pure mind and

character, there is a large group of persons who have perceived the commercial value of the laws of mind, and use them to their own advantage and teach others to do the same. "Prosperity treatments," popular among Christian Scientists, prosperity books, classes, and clubs are a feature of this movement peculiarly American, and in this respect the movement defies parallel. For country people, living isolated lives in New England and the Middle West, there are "Success Clubs." Taking all these together, a great number of Americans will be found who apply mental and spiritual principles to their business life today.

This phase is, perhaps, a natural if crude application of the central idea. The force within, when called "Mind," may be expected to accomplish for us whatever we desire, be it a high or a low thing—a greater or lesser good. A widespread confidence in powers that sway human life for good, powers that are not "supernatural" and that work for our well-being in every way, is a feature of American life that cannot be dismissed with a laugh. This aspect of New Thought has appealed to thousands, not among the classes that dominate, that write books or rule stock markets or are prominent in social life or reform work, but among those who belong to the "masses," who would not have been interested in the movement as a philosophy or as a religion, or even because of its healing power.

Among those who call the internal force Mind must be included many serious and thoughtful people who find in New Thought corroboration of the recent discoveries in the fields of hypnotism

and suggestion, and who realize that the study of the subconscious mind throws new light on old metaphysics. They learn from New Thought how to control and dominate the subconscious mind; how to break old and undesired habits and form new ones after a better pattern; how to check worry and conquer fear; how, in short, to become masters of themselves and of their fate. If New Thought taught nothing but these practical lessons, it could claim an important place in the moral and religious history of our times.

But there is another "drift" to be considered, one which is growing rapidly in numbers, and which is responsible for the elimination from the movement of the undesirable elements alluded to. This, on the face of it, carries a certain weight, because it is not divided. Those who call the force within, God, the God of Christianity, form an important wing of the new faith, though they are still in the minority.

This "religious" element is the true successor of the mystical movements of the past. It is not unlike a bit of primitive Christianity with its faith and enthusiasm and community of feeling, transplanted into modern life. It takes its stand firmly on the teachings of Christ, in which, together with the promises of the prophets, the psalmists, and the preacher, it finds all its needed literature and text. In touch with the past, it has a peculiar claim on the purest and strongest traditions of Christianity, and many of the marks which have distinguished similar movements in the past are to be found upon it. The very names of these bygone societies and

groups, so popular and influential in their day, would sound strange to the reader, but investigation of the manner of the growth of Christianity shows that these mystical movements have been the exponents of the deepest, most spontaneous, and most vital spirituality of their times, and that no age, before or after the Christian era, has been without them.

Naturally, great differences exist between the mysticism of the twelfth century and that of the twentieth century. Early mystics scorned comfort and wealth; they were given to the strenuous exercises of asceticism and beggary, and visions and dreams were considered necessary adjuncts of the "presence of God." Nowadays, to say the least, we do not disqualify our bodies by mortification; neither do we think it well to limit the scope of our activities by voluntary poverty, either within or without New Thought circles; while only mediums see visions and hear voices.

But now, as then, the voice within speaks louder than the voice of the church;¹ it claims complete authority, superseding even the Scriptures themselves, if haply it differs from them. The practice of the "silence," too, is a very interesting mark of identity, a practice advocated by devout and luminous thinkers since the third century.

We have seen that the part of New Thought which is called "religious" finds food for all its needs in the Old and New Testaments. It appropriates those portions of Christ's teachings which the church has generally pronounced "unpractical." These teachings deal

¹ This term is used in the sense of organized Christianity, both Roman Catholic and Protestant.

with what may be called the "power" side of Christian belief, as distinct from the character-building side, on which sufficient emphasis has been laid. This branch lays stress on the miracle-working power; the salvation from poverty, or at least from the fear that the needs of man will not be supplied to the true seeker after God; and the life of triumph instead of resignation in seeming misfortune—even the ultimate conquest of death. The mystical New Thinker dares to believe that these "impossibilities" were intended by Christ to be possibilities, if not common occurrences, and he sets himself to prove it. In order to do so he begins just where he is, his only tool in creating new conditions of life being his daring belief.

To such a one the study of the laws of mind becomes, not less important than before, but more so, for these laws are the very soul of the method by which he works. In this study he finds hints and helps innumerable in dealing with the "impossibilities" which he is attempting to metamorphose into realities. He believes that the laws of mind were consciously understood and used by the founder of Christianity, and that every little bit of "demonstrating" (as he expresses it) on his part helps the world along in the same manner that Christ helped it along, by adding thereby to the sum total of faith in God.

With such a basis one stands very near to the devout and believing Christian of either Protestant or Catholic church, save that the New Thought believer possesses the absolute faith of the first century which he is striving to put into practice in the twentieth. It is to be expected that he find himself

increasingly at one with all God-loving people, for he is in the region of feeling where differences melt away, and outside the region of thinking where they spring spontaneously into being.

If, in the face of the rational thinking of today, the church had been able to revive her first freshness of belief, the entire group might have remained within her fold, with the result that Christian Science and New Thought would not have been heard of. But unfortunately the Protestant church has never been able to find a place and a work for the mystics, the "God-finders." Catholicism has at times used them and set them to work after their own peculiar fashion. They have tended and healed the sick; they have founded and sustained powerful brotherhoods and missionary enterprises, and the church has canonized the greatest of them. Nevertheless, it must be confessed that their connection with her has often resulted in rendering them mechanical, and that the purest types and the greatest number have flourished outside her fold, for mystics love not much organization.

If Protestantism had taken a leaf from the book of the parent church, the story of Protestant missions might have been different. Wherever the mystics, inspired by their ardent faith, have crept in, great things have come to pass. But the Protestant church has been unable to withstand the stress of modern rationalistic thought, and has made demands on those fighting her battles on the frontier, which the mystic cannot meet. The result has been that Protestant missions have jogged along, so to speak, with their ups and downs, not wholly failing nor

wholly succeeding, and most effective when nationalistic thought has free play, as in hospital and educational work. Here and there in the mission field and in the Salvation Army, and also among semi-Catholic Episcopalians, are to be found the remnants of this numerous body, but much of it has drifted away to New Thought in some form—the worse for the church, and the better for New Thought.

It must, however, never be forgotten that, as regards mental equipment and training, people are essentially the same after they take up New Thought as before. They may, and indeed do, become more useful, happy, and healthful; they may “find” themselves, and life may look utterly changed to them. Nevertheless, the person who comes from evangelical Christianity will never take up with theosophy or occultism. He will seek in New Thought, and find therein, something equivalent to that which he has been used to. He who longs to make money will seek for help in doing it. The man who is trying to master himself and his fate by the strength of his own will and through the knowledge of higher mental laws will not ally himself with the religious element, but will follow the metaphysical teachers, who will lead him where he wants to go. Only he who has “the will to believe” and the power to do so will feel at home among the highly mystical group of whom we have been speaking.

Thus we behold the New Thought movement today, with its two main tendencies, the metaphysical and the religious, not opposing, but supplementing, each other. We can see how certain

phases of occultism have become identified and identical with certain phases of New Thought, and how the doctrine of the sovereignty of mind has appealed to a certain type of person as a commercial asset. Moreover, we must conceive of this complex whole as interpreted and expressed in terms to suit all intellects, from the lowest to the highest. Nor must we forget that all this teaching has a special vocabulary which it borrows from all sorts of sources, and uses to suit itself, thus greatly increasing the difficulty which the rational mind finds in understanding the subject.

What is to come? What is to be the future of this widespread system of thought, which claims to classify, and harness to the commonest uses of man, the deepest spiritual truths, and to give the lie to the evidence of the senses and experience?

An attempt at prophecy may not be out of place.

Undoubtedly, as years go on, what is worth retaining in “Mental Science” will be appropriated by doctors and educational institutions, for scientific discoveries are common property.

The occultists are a class of people who, however religious, can fit into no church life and must stay by themselves. This is not the fault of the church, which was made for the majority. The occultists will probably continue to have their passwords, gatherings, leaders, and books, and will no doubt continue to think themselves in advance of their age, in the future as in the past. In fact, the whole “mental” group will probably endure as a number of different societies, becoming more and more in number, and smaller and smaller in size, and having

less and less to do with each other. They find it a great deal easier to work alone than to try to fit in with other people.

The case of the "religious" element is different. It is now making a great draft upon a fine element in church membership, for it offers much that the churches do not, and that which it offers seems fresh and new. This draft is likely to continue until the churches awake to the fact that the mystical societies have happened upon a few of the long-unused and most valuable truths of Christianity, so that even with

their many weaknesses they have competed successfully with the church, with all her advantages of prestige and plant. These societies offer what the modern world, confronted with difficult living conditions, and almost daunted by them, most wants, i.e., *power*. If this power is supplied in a perverted form, then so much the more reason for the church to show how power may be used normally.

When the church takes up this matter, it will have completed the cycle of its development: purity, service, power.