

# THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

BY THE REV.

ERNEST R. HULL, S.J.



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## PREFACE

THESE papers were originally written for the columns of the Bombay *Catholic Examiner*, in which they appeared during the course of 1904. They were occasioned by the recent appearance of two articles on Theosophy in the magazine *East and West*, and were addressed to Indian readers, especially to Parsees, some of whom took a good deal of interest in them. Theosophy has not many adherents in this country, but it has some, and its hypothesis of Reincarnation is not unfrequently discussed. But what is of much more consequence, the Problem of Evil, which Theosophy is an attempt to solve, is one of the most burning of questions for those who take interest in the reasons which people allege for the loss of their faith. It is because Father Hull discusses this question in so able and instructive, and at the same time so temperate, a way, that his little volume seems likely to prove acceptable to English readers. The original form of newspaper articles, with the Parsi gentleman's letter included, has been preserved, as it may perhaps be found pleasing rather than otherwise.

S. F. S.



# CONTENTS

## I. Ethics

	PAGE
1. <i>Ethical Ideals</i> .—Dividing the contents of Theosophy into a collection of ethical ideals and a set of doctrines, we make the following distinction :—That Theosophy, as a set of doctrines explanatory of the universe, is so antagonistic to Christianity as to allow of no reconciliation between the two. On the other hand, when considered in its ethical <i>entourage</i> , it may be regarded as a selection of the noblest and best growths of the human spirit. These ethical elements claimed by Theosophy are enumerated as follows :—The divine in man, the brotherhood of man, freedom from sectarianism, superiority to ceremonial worship, freedom from base hope or fear, superiority to formulated creeds. We take these in turn, and show that while the dogmatic element involved in each is antagonistic to Christian belief and practice, their ethical aspect is in each case found already in Christianity, and therefore that Christianity in its ethical principles has nothing to learn from Theosophy—the real case being that Theosophy has directly or indirectly to a large extent derived these elements from Christianity . . . . .	9
2. <i>Ideals in Practice</i> .—The Theosophist claims a superiority over the Christian, in that he must realize these ethical ideals in practice or else he is not a Theosophist ; whereas Christians are esteemed to be such, even though wanting in this realization of their ideals. To this we answer that it is easy to exact a high standard in a select society of the <i>élite</i> of humanity ; but that Christianity is a school for the imperfect, and that it was by the gradual training of the imperfect in the middle ages that the Church made the higher realization of ethical ideals possible in modern times. It is thus indirectly to Christianity and its work through many centuries that the Theosophist owes his capacity of appreciating and carrying out the ideals he has adopted . . . . .	20
3. <i>Will Theosophy Work?</i> —The question next arises, whether the superiority to ceremonial worship and to formulated creeds, on which the Theosophist plumes himself, would ever have worked in practice. Taking humanity in the mass, as a collection of the imperfect, we conclude that “worship in spirit and in truth,” as it is called, unaided	

	PAGE
by external means, would have failed; and that if it is now possible among the higher few, this is only because those higher few have gone through the training which ceremonial worship and formulated creeds have afforded. Even in their case it is much to be doubted whether "the religion of the heart" can subsist for long unless externated in the way adopted by the Catholic Church. But as to the mass of humanity, a religion without such aids would never have done its work. Theosophy could never have regenerated the human race . . . . .	29

## II. God

4. <i>The Three Dogmas of Theosophy.</i> —This is a preliminary summary of three Theosophical doctrines:—(1) The oneness of essence of the spirit in man with God; (2) Re-incarnation; and (3) Karma. The first doctrine leads us to study the Theosophical idea of God and his relation to man . . . . .	37
5. <i>Rival Ideas of God.</i> —In this chapter we expound the Christian idea of a Personal God, and show how our knowledge of Him, though inadequate, is still correct, in the sense of being on the right lines— <i>Parvi passus sed intra viam</i> . In contrast with this, we expound the Theosophical idea of God as the unknowable and the unknown—showing, too, the difficulty which arises from identifying the spirit of man with God . . . . .	45
6. <i>The Basis of Religion.</i> —The destruction of the personal relation between God and man, which follows from Theosophical teaching, is shown to destroy the rational basis of religion, and to bring Theosophy practically down to the level of atheism . . . . .	57

## III. Evil

7. <i>The Problem of Evil.</i> —As the central problem which Theosophy attempts to solve is the mystery of evil, we first confine ourselves to physical evil in the lower creation; and show that Materialist, Theosophist, and Christian must all come to one agreement, viz., that the existence of what we call evil must be right, no matter what difficulty our minds may find in it. Hence, whether we accept the Christian or the Theosophic solution, the difficulty remains the same for both. From this conclusion we learn to be content with an incomplete solution of the problem—since whatever the divine Being has produced or sanctioned must be consistent with the perfection of the infinite Being . . . . .	63
8. <i>Evil and God's Free Will.</i> —We next carry the argument further. The Theosophist holds that God produces the world (including its element of physical evil) by a necessity of His nature, while the Christian holds that he does so by His free will. We here show	

## Contents

7

that whatever is right it produced by necessity, must also be right if produced by free will—hence no objection to believing in free creation. In fact the imperfection of the world shows rather that it *must* be the product, not of a divine necessity but of a divine *free choice* . . . . .

PAGE

71

9. *The Fatherhood of God*.—Having thus restored the doctrine of the personality of God—so far at least as to remove objections against it—we next consider God as our Father. After clearing away morbid ideas as to what a loving father means, we expound the idea that our life is a training-ground, an apprenticeship for another life ; and that the probation actually given, though involving a few mental difficulties in detail, can still be explained consistently with the divine love, justice and goodness. It is also shown how the exercise of mercy can be reconciled with the idea of justice. By this means not only the personality but also the fatherly relation of God to man is justified . . . . .

79

10. *A Parsi's Letter and a Comment*.—Contains a closer elucidation of some points treated in Nos. 7 and 9, and some explanation of the Christian idea of the Fall and the consequences of sin on the race . . . . .

93

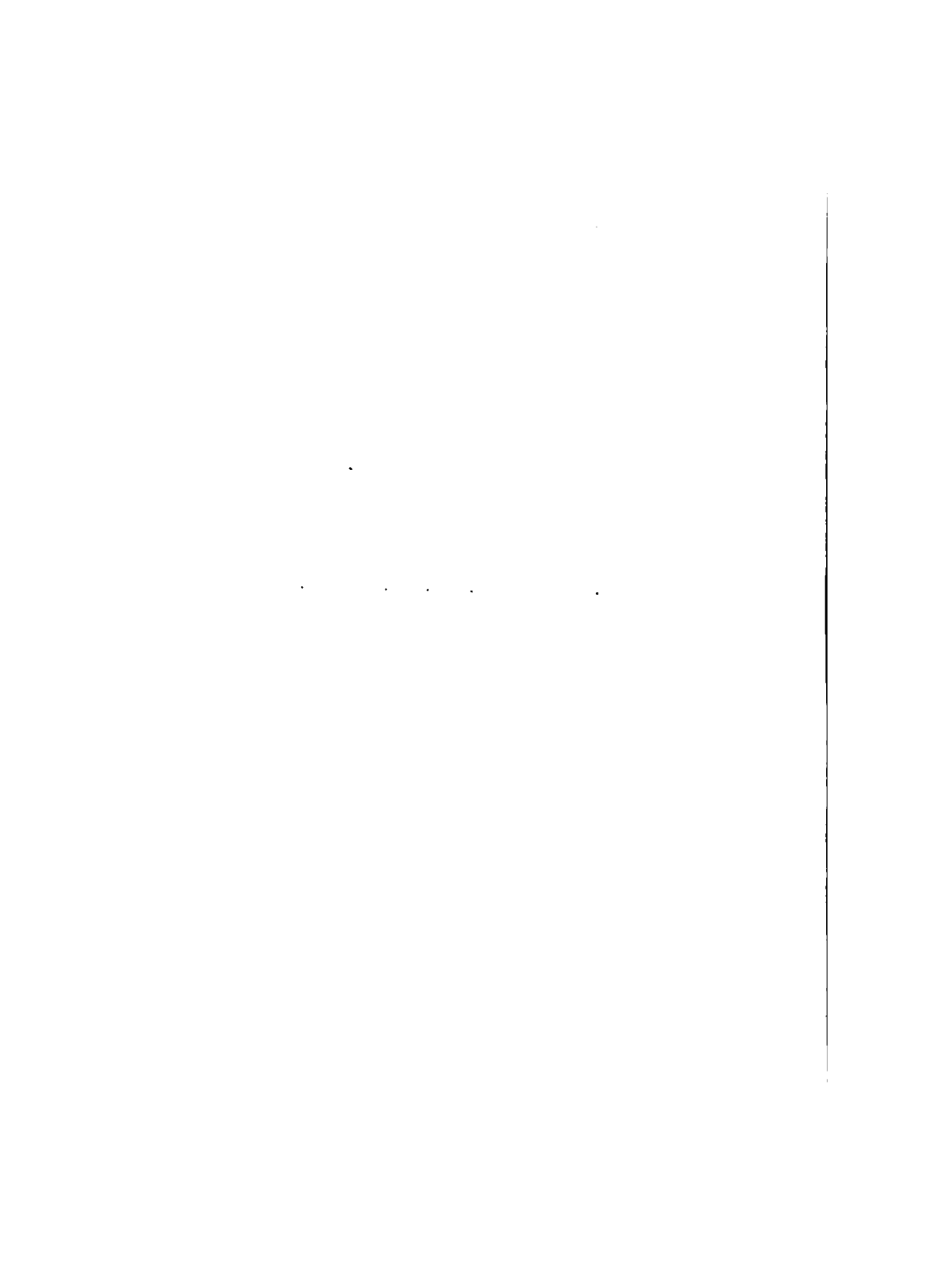
### IV. Karma

11. *Karma in General*.—In its abstract rule that "As a man sows, so shall he reap" the retributive principle of Karma is common to Christianity and Theosophy. The dispute begins when we consider how this principle is carried out. Theosophy asserts that it is carried out by means of re-incarnation, and the claims of the re-birth theory rest on its power of explaining the inequality of human conditions and similar problems of life. The question is whether it possesses this power of explanation, or does it only remove one difficulty by creating another? . . . . .

105

12. *Objections to Karma*.—We find that although the re-birth theory seems to explain certain differences in connatal fortune, it fails altogether to explain the fluctuations of fortune during life. But more than this : the non-continuity of consciousness through the series of lives deprives reward and punishment of their moral significance. Moreover, instead of fostering incentives to virtue and deterrents from vice, it has the contrary effect of destroying both ; and tends to issue in degeneracy rather than in the evolution of the race. The re-birth theory, in short, instead of explaining anything explains nothing ; and instead of removing the old difficulties it only creates new ones. We conclude that it furnishes no rational ground for its acceptance, and much rational ground for its rejection .

114





# THEOSOPHY AND CHRISTIANITY

## I.—ETHICS

### I

#### ETHICAL IDEALS

THE two articles on Theosophy from the pen of Mr. Beaman, which appeared in *East and West* for March and November, 1903, seem to deserve a degree of attention which cannot be claimed by the bulk of the literature current on the same subject. And the reason seems to be this. Theosophy in the hands of its most popular exponents has been so surrounded by a veil of mystery, occultism, mysticism, or esotericism—call it by what name you will—as to excite the suspicion of sober and common-sense minds, and to appeal only to those temperaments which delight in the mysterious and the weird for its own sake. The discredit thrown on the movement by the dubious proceedings of certain of its pioneers is by this envelope of mystery fostered and sustained. Besides this, most Theosophical expositions abound in an array of archaeological erudition which on examination proves to be neither accurate, thorough, or logical; and there is found a singular want of definiteness in the principles which are supposed to guide the inquirer in his investigations or the controversialist in his attacks. These very defects, it is true, have served in some way to enhance the attractiveness of the system to the common mind; and we believe that many

whose previous religious convictions have been of the vaguest, have thus been brought to think and speak in the terms of Theosophy, and to find in its suggestiveness a special charm not felt in less involved and more clearly defined systems. On the other hand, nothing can be more repellent to the earnest and sober-minded inquirer after religious or theological truth, than this mystifying and foggy envelope. It is for this reason that the articles referred to deserve special attention. They represent a type of serious thinking with which one may absolutely disagree, but which one feels bound to respect. They leave the question refreshingly free from irrelevances and side issues, and all and sundry incumbrances with which such discussions are usually attended. They present Theosophy as a definite code of thought or belief, with a definite claim to credence, with a definite purpose and a definite result. Taken as it stands this view may be only the view of an individual exponent. But it is at least a tangible and, as it seems, a fairly representative view, and therefore one which can profitably be discussed.

### Summary of the Case

Beginning with a summary of the salient points of the essay, we gather the following results. The claims of Theosophy rest solely on its truth; not on the spiritual consolation it affords to the feelings, nor yet on any extrinsic authority. It is not claimed that Theosophy ever existed as a formulated creed or code, handed down in a systematic manner, by a definite tradition, through the hands of any organized secret body of men. Its elements are found scattered here and there among the religions of the past and of the present. For these elements a divine origin is claimed, only in the wide sense that they are the best thought-products of the human

mind. Modern Theosophy as a formulated creed or code is essentially eclectic—ancient beliefs of all sorts being rejected wholesale, and only those portions selected which recommend themselves to the mind by their inherent merits.

Such is the method of selection. What is the aim? The aim is to construct a system of thought which will meet the demand of the human mind for a satisfactory solution of the deepest problems of human life and destiny. Theosophy, observes the writer, is an explanation of the whole cosmic scheme. It aims at teaching man what his place in nature is, what his duties and responsibilities are—how to understand the problems of transcendental philosophy, and how to reconcile the apparent contradictions of nature. Theosophy does not profess to fathom the unfathomable or to know the unknowable. Accepting the facts of experience, it offers a set of ideas claiming to carry us forward into their explanation—farther forward than any of the existing codified systems—thus extending the limits of the thinkable. It is in short a further advance than has otherwise been made, whether by science or by the creeds, towards an adequate, workable, fully thinkable and unified knowledge of the *whence* and the *whither*, the *how* and the *why* of human aspiration and human destiny.

In the wider sense, Theosophy claims to be not only a philosophy but also a religion—a religion, however, without ceremonial or cult, priesthood or sacred machinery. Theosophy is unsectarian and tolerant. It embraces all religions, looking with a loving eye on what is good and with a pitying eye on what is bad in their total presentment. It merely asks men to accept wisdom on reasoned grounds; teaches that good conduct counts above all *formulae* whatsoever; looks to raising the moral level of society, appealing not to the base passions of hope or fear but to the highest and most unselfish qualities of the human mind. This too not by a creed, but

by an explanation of all the facts and experiences of our mundane life and of much else that is more important.

To the Theosophist, every good man who has striven for the right, who has valued the spiritual element above the material, has contributed his mite to the development of his race, or has co-operated with the great beneficent principle of which he is an emanation—has been a useful though unnamed Theosophist.

Nevertheless, despite this vague universality of comprehension, Theosophy, thoroughly tolerant of doctrinal divergences, does still claim to point out the truth underlying all divergences, and thus to harmonize and explain what on other assumptions has not been properly explained, and to supply a rational scheme of the universe. "Whether this scheme is true or not, the writer [Mr. Beaman] does not pretend to say; but looking at it from the outside quite dispassionately he will say that it calms the reason, encourages every sane hope, and banishes every senseless fear."

The above summary, which leaves certain doctrines special to Theosophy yet undeclared, is we hope fairly representative of the writer's mind, as it certainly is of the impression created in ours. Before proceeding, we shall point out in passing the truism that the whole question about Theosophy must ultimately resolve itself into this one point, which the writer himself frankly acknowledges that he has not solved, viz., *Is it true?* We do not intend to make controversial capital out of this acknowledgement. It would be unfair to argue that he fails in the essential point when it is not his point at all. Mr. Beaman's object is, we understand, no more than to expound the Theosophical idea, and he only pleads that it is worthy of consideration. In this we entirely agree; and what follows is the outcome of the consideration we have given to it.

**Our Own Conclusions**

Our purpose is not controversial or even argumentative. It is simply to state, on the basis of his exposition, certain impressions as to the relation in which Theosophy, thus expounded, stands to Christianity. Not to beat about the bush, we shall anticipate by stating these conclusions first, so that the reader may know at once what to expect. It must be remembered, however, that we are not concerned with the vagaries of Theosophists in general, but only with Mr. Beaman's personal statement of the case. These conclusions, then, are as follows :—

(1) Theosophy, taken in what we may call its *ethica. entourage*, is a selection out of the noblest and best growths of the human spirit. But this does not entitle Theosophy to any special claim as a system to be substituted let us say for Christianity—seeing that the Christian ideal already comprises this selection, and has in fact originated the spirit which Theosophy aims at making its own. In short, Theosophy, regarded ethically, is a reflection of Christianity in its purest ground principles; and thus viewed, is not antagonistic to Christianity nor yet an improvement on it. We maintain, in consequence, that no one already a Christian need feel the least difficulty in claiming for himself as a Christian all that Theosophy holds out to him; since he inherits by his Christian birthright all that is good in Theosophy, and need not seek outside his own religion what is already there.

(2) On the contrary, Theosophy taken as a *creed* or collection of *doctrines* explanatory of the universe (or, to be more definite, explanatory of the religious and theological relations of God with man and of human destiny) is so antagonistic to Christianity that it is impossible for any one to maintain the profession of a Christian and at the same time to be a Theo-

sophist. Both in its fundamental ideas and in its special dogmas—using dogmas in the widest doctrinal sense—the opposition between the two is irreconcilable. One must be taken and the other left.

The remainder of the present chapter will be devoted to illustrating these two conclusions in a series of instances suggested by the articles in *East and West*. We say illustrating rather than proving them; for anything like a proof would exceed the scope of a pamphlet like the present. We begin with those points which occur in Mr. Beaman's first article, and in which the ethical aspect prevails.

### Six Points Claimed

A Theosophist, asked to state those ethical elements in which he might claim an advantage over the typical Christian, would, we fancy, enumerate six points :—

- (1) His assertion of the Divine in Man.
- (2) His assertion of the Brotherhood of Man.
- (3) His freedom from sectarianism.
- (4) His superiority to ceremonial or ritual worship
- (5) His freedom from base hope and fear.
- (6) His superiority to formulated creeds.

Each of these points contains its doctrinal aspect and its ethical aspect; and in each of them we believe that the two foregoing conclusions will be found verified.

In treating these claims we are of course not concerned with their actual realization in practice. There may be professing Christians, just as there may likewise be professing Theosophists, who do not live up to their ideals. This point shall occupy attention later. At present we are concerned with the theoretical Theosophist and the theoretical Christian

—the ideal specimen according to the programme. Secondly, leaving the differences in the background to be treated in the sequel, we are laying stress rather on the likenesses—the features common to the Theosophist and the Christian scheme.

Taking then the six points in turn :—

(1) According to the Theosophist, the *Divine in Man* involves the theory of “emanation from the One Supreme,” which differs from Pantheism only in its vagueness—“We are divine because we are *substantially* one with our original.” The Christian keeps the divine and the human substantially distinct—“We are not physically God, nor any emanation from God.” The positions are therefore doctrinally antagonistic. But when we turn to the ethical import of the idea, as far as it is used by the Theosophist, we find a strong element of agreement. The consciousness of a divine origin, a divine original, and a divine destiny, is taken by the Theosophist as a stimulus to a higher life. In this purely ethical sense the Catholic Church also teaches the divine in man—a divinity not by substance but by “participation,” as the schoolmen express it. We are divine in a certain *moral* sense, in that we bear in our souls some reflection of the divine nature—being created in His image and likeness. We are divine in the sense that the communication of Grace to our souls elevates us to a certain kind of divine order and relation. We are divine in that our future destiny is to be united morally with the Godhead in final beatitude. From these considerations Christians derive all that ethical stimulus which a Theosophist claims; and in fact the personal and moral character of the Christian relations to the “One Supreme” have a far richer significance than the vague impersonal relations maintained by the Theosophist.

(2) *The Brotherhood of Man* is notoriously a Christian idea

In the Catholic theory, differences of race, nationality, temperament, talent, wealth or social standing count for nothing. The comprehensiveness of Catholicity places all men's souls on an equality before God, and inculcates the effectual recognition of this equality in practice—as far as the exigencies of social usage will allow. Whatever may be said of the practice—which all will acknowledge to be bristling with difficulties—the ethical ideal with all its philanthropic outcome is there; and is practically for Theosophist and Christian the same.

(3) As regards *Sectarianism*, the case at first sight is not so clear. In this matter the doctrinal difference comes prominently to the fore. The Catholic Church is sectarian in the sense that it maintains a corporate body with terms and conditions of membership; asserting the objective obligation of all men to belong to that body, even though many are excused because they fail to realize such an obligation. This doctrinal position is based on the claim that the Catholic Church embodies a revealed religion, which is a gift of God supplying for human needs. It is not built on a motive of self-assertion, nor on a wish to impose any set of arbitrary opinions on all mankind. Doctrinally, then, Theosophy and Catholicism are antagonistic on this point also. But if we take sectarianism ethically, it generally means something different. It means some kind of unlovely fanaticism by which, under cover of zeal for one's own persuasion, charity is hurt. It means that a mental and speculative intolerance of error issues, not merely in earnestness to persuade others, but in endeavouring to win by physical or moral pressure a compliance which cannot be secured by persuasion. It means trying to make others suffer because they do not see things aright as we see them. This is no part of the Christian ideal, nor is it a logical outcome of Christian principles; and the most that can be said in palliation of sectarianism in this objectionable sense is that it is a defect



incidental to a virtue—none the less unlovely on that account. That Theosophy is incapable of this defect—theoretically at least—is easily explained on account of its principle of individuality and indifferentism. But of this later. It suffices just now to note Mr. Beaman's admission that sectarian hatred is not a legitimate consequence of Christian teaching (p. 306).

(4) Take next the question of *External Ritual* or *Ceremonial Worship*. A doctrinal difference with an ethical agreement again recurs. The Catholic Church holds, as a fact of history, that by Christ's institution certain external actions have been appointed as an outward vehicle of communication between God and man—we refer to the Mass and the sacramental system. But the Church regards these outward forms as in no way substitutes for the interior spirit; and there would be no difficulty in showing how it consistently requires interior dispositions corresponding to the actions, as conditions for fruitfulness in their use. The Church repudiates formalism in worship as earnestly as any Theosophist could desire. The ideal Catholic, no less than the ideal Theosophist, is one who worships in spirit and in truth. Outward forms do not, as such, constitute religion, but are only its outward expression in suitable and symbolic acts. Ritual, being in itself a neutral thing, acquires its value according to the religious truth it embodies or the religious feeling it serves to express.

(5) The Theosophist repudiates the *Base Passions of Hope and Fear*, and appeals to the nobler motives. The Catholic Church agrees substantially in this also. Theologians treating of that servile fear of hell which is reducible to what is vulgarly called "saving one's own skin," declare that such a motive, even with the aid of sacramental absolution, is insufficient to secure forgiveness of sin. A reverential fear, however, is never repudiated, nor any other motive which serves as a stepping-

stone to higher things. The fear of the Lord is the beginning (more correctly the foundation) of wisdom, even though perfect love casteth out fear. A motive of fear will stir up a man where higher incentives do not appeal. But no Catholic would wish the matter to rest here. Again, surely the Theosophist's doctrine of Karma furnishes motives of hope and fear, which it would be only reasonable for him to entertain, even though the motive of virtue for virtue's sake is the goal towards which he should ultimately strive. Frightening naughty boys—and men too, for that matter—by threatened punishment seems legitimate, given that the punishment is not a fictitious one. And, both in Karma and in Christian retribution, the punishment is held to be real. Here, again, there is a doctrinal difference as to the nature of the fear and the hope. But ethically it seems that the Theosophist and the Christian can claim common ground, in not appealing to hope and fear as *base passions*, and in trying to raise men to more virtuous motives.

(6) Lastly, the Theosophist glories in *Reasoned Belief*, as opposed to the unreasoned acceptance of a formulated creed. Theosophists maintain the non-existence of any dogmatic authority in the world ; while the Christian holds as a fact of history, that such an authority exists in the person of Christ, seconded by the Church as a medium of transmission. Here, again, there arises a doctrinal antagonism, but one which is based on a question of fact. Once given that God has conferred on man a gift of doctrinal truth, that gift must take the form of a set of propositions ; and the proof lies not in investigating these propositions, but in investigating their claims to a divine origin. History, not philosophy, will be the criterion in this case. As we accept the declarations of human science on the word of scientific men, when once we are convinced that their authority is reliable, so the Catholic accepts the

word of Christ because convinced that His word is true, and the teaching of the Church because convinced that it is a reliable medium of transmission. But assuming the existence of a divine creed, the Catholic Church has no wish to encourage formalism in doctrinal profession, by the parrot-like repetition of words. It wishes that the mind shall grasp the truth and inner meaning of the creed, and adhere to its articles with an intelligent and living faith.

So far as regards the mainly ethical elements of Theosophy. In this brief summary we have not done justice to the case on either side. We have contented ourselves with indicating a line of thought which will serve to clear the ground for a closer study of the further questions at issue between Theosophy and Christianity. Reviewing what has just been said, we find in every point the same thing repeated : Theosophy maintaining a position whose purely ethical elements are already embodied in Christianity ; so that the Christian can claim, as already his own, those ideals which are claimed by the Theosophist, and has no new principles to learn from Theosophy. But as soon as the doctrinal basis of these ideals is touched, antagonism begins.

## II

### IDEALS IN PRACTICE

So far we have considered the theoretical Theosophist and the theoretical Christian. Our next step will be to meet an objection which must have arisen in the mind of the Theosophist while reading the above outlines, viz.: What about the real, practical, living Theosophist and Christian? How far does a Christian embody in practical life the ideals which in theory he rightly claims in common with the Theosophist? Is not the Theosophical ideal something which is bound up with practice; and is not the history of Christianity a proof that the Christian ideals are a paper code, of which Christian practice is a standing contradiction?

Let us state the case as we conceive it might be stated by a Theosophist of the type depicted by Mr. Beaman:—

“I maintain,” says the Theosophist, “this incomparable advantage over the Christian, that my ideals *must* be verified in my life before I can be a Theosophist at all. A Theosophist by his very definition is a man who realizes the divine in humanity, and the Brotherhood of man, and who therefore lives for the effectual carrying out of these ideals—for the betterment of self and of the race. Unless this is the case I am no Theosophist at all. I *must* be tolerant and unsectarian, free from narrow bigotry and full of sympathy with every form of belief. Unless I am this I am no Theosophist at all. I cannot be slave to the base passions of hope or fear, for my system admits no such motives as possible. I cannot be a

formalist in worship, because I perform no worship unless moved thereto by the interior spirit. I cannot be a formalist in belief, because I profess to believe only what I understand, and only what recommends itself to me on intrinsic grounds as true. Thus from the path of a Theosophist are removed all inducements to fall into exactly those defects which I find among Christians in the present, and specially in the past. I could not fall into them even if so disposed. Show me a Theosophist who is a sectarian, who is even disposed to be intolerant, or a persecutor of those who differ from him, or who is a formalist in belief or in worship; and I reply that *eo ipso* he is a sham, and is no Theosophist at all.

“But when I turn to the history of Christianity what do I find? In the first place I find scattered through the ages, in vast numbers, grand and heroic men imbued with lofty ideals, and realizing them in life in a way which makes me proud to claim them as my own—as Theosophists called by another name. Again I admit that these ideals have not been restricted to a few, but have in all ages been preached as Christian doctrine. But still, look at the history of the past. These pure teachings have been crowded out and practically thrust aside—overwhelmed by an incubus of sectarian policy, of ceremonialism in worship, and of formalism in belief, which makes the history of Christendom one of the saddest inconsistencies in the world. Look at the intolerance, the persecutions of the Middle Ages and of the Reformation period. Look at the unlovely jarrings of strife in the name of a religion whose primary principle is love to God and man. Look at the insistence on set forms of worship; so that the practical test of a Christian was not his interior spirit, but his presence at stated times at a ceremonial function ill-understood by the crowd, and his willingness to repeat and swear to a set of propositions only half-understood, under the penalty of

being regarded as a heretic and an outcast if those propositions are doubted or denied. Let me allow as much as you demand for the weakness of human nature and its failure to realize all that it professes and ought to carry out. Let me allow that much is to be accounted for by the semi-barbarous conditions prevailing in the past. Let me admit that the picture is often drawn in darker colours than the reality. But when this has all been allowed for, the truth still remains—that, whereas no man can be acknowledged to be a Theosophist unless he possesses the internal spirit of one, a man consistently can and has been acknowledged to be a Christian on the strength of certain ceremonial acts and certain doctrinal professions—no matter whether these acts and professions were sustained by a corresponding interior spirit, or were merely a lip-profession and an empty shell. In this regard, then, a Theosophist can surely claim a superiority over the Christian.”

This is no imaginary case. The more conversant one becomes with current religious literature of various sorts, from Harnack's *What is Christianity?* down to the humblest *Methodist Weekly*, the same idea recurs. It may be described as traditional outside the Church; and all the more harmful because it sounds so plausible—because it contains a certain element of truth. The grosser misrepresentations of Catholicism, past or present, are not so mischievous as this; and Theosophy, in asserting this view of the Catholic Church, is perhaps putting forward the most telling recommendation of itself. When we meet with the indictment in its cruder forms we feel inclined to take up a merely controversial attitude; but with a writer like Mr. Beaman this attitude would be useless and out of place. Sober, reasonable men do not want controversy. What they want is exposition and explanation. We are not therefore concerned in distinguishing to a nicety how far the indictment is exaggerated. Eliminate as

we will, there will always remain sufficient of it to stand in the way of understanding the Catholic position, unless that position is carefully explained.

### **Christianity a Training School**

Our explanation runs thus. As Father Joseph Rickaby somewhere shrewdly observes, the Catholic Church suffers the disadvantages of having a history. A divine institution, were it purely such, ought to have a spotless record. But a divine institution worked by human instrumentality, not so. Wherever the human spirit is introduced, there imperfection sets in. Now the Church is divine in its institution, but human in its instrumentality; and history, which perpetuates the faults of men more than their virtues, will naturally accumulate a record full of defects. To attribute these defects to the Church, when they are the product of the imperfect human spirit in the Church, is obviously unfair.

But this is only by the way. What we are coming to is this. It is all very well for the Theosophist to make invidious comparisons; but the terms are unequal. The Church is not a select society of the perfect. It is not a club for the aggregation of the *élite* of humanity. It is essentially a training school for mankind—a school for raising imperfect men towards perfection. Christianity takes in the raw material of humanity and works upon it, getting as much as can be got, and counting as a success any amelioration, however small, it is able to effect. The history of the Church is a history of the struggle between the deep-rooted depravity of unrestrained humanity and the elevating principles of the Gospel. Christianity had to do what civilization, what culture, what refinement, what philosophy had failed to achieve. Read in the pagan authors of Greece and Rome the stark and

gruesome refinement of viciousness which, in spite of Plato and Socrates and Aristotle and the Stoics, had supervened upon the literary and artistic culture of the World-Empire. Then contemplate the wild savagery of the northern barbarian who was to reduce this decadent and degraded civilization to a wreck. Lastly, join together these effete remnants of degraded culture and these brutal elements of Gothic savagery, and consider the blend which would result from their contact ; and then you will have before you the material on which Christianity had to work.

### Its Gradual Progress

And how did the work progress? In the case of many individuals, even in the most savage periods, the struggle was short and the triumph complete. These we call the Saints. In others we find strong but wild natures half redeemed from their wildness. In others again a compound of strong faith and weak practice. In the masses of mankind the result varied from above mediocrity to almost *nil*. And this stupendous work of bettering savage humanity went on, with varying success, through the agency of a clergy selected out of the very people who were to be ameliorated. What wonder, then, if the clergy themselves often reflected their own circumstances and origin, or if they often enough stood in need of amelioration too? In such a state of things who can reasonably look for the immediate realization of a high ideal in large masses of men? If the Church were a select society of the perfect ; if no one were accepted to the Christian profession but those who had already attained Christianity's goal—then indeed Christian history would have retained a spotless record, and represented the *élite* of mankind. But what about the masses of degraded humanity? No! the Church from



the beginning was a school for the imperfect, a net sweeping the world, enclosing all, however faulty, who showed the least disposition to learn, and prepared to give the full rights of membership to those who aspired—nay, even to those who might be hoped to aspire—just because the work of Christianity was not to segregate the just but to bring sinners to repentance.

And if, in the records of the past, the successes are modestly written and mostly unnoticed, the failures blazoned large and clear, it is only an illustration of the disadvantage of having a history when, as we see, the point of that history is missed, and Christianity is accused of embodying an imperfect ideal—just forsooth because its ideals have not been realized in a manner commensurate with the number of its professing members. It is all very well for the Theosophist to claim superiority of ideals and of their realization. The history of Theosophy, not more than one generation long, is already dubious enough. What would it have been had it endured for the last nineteen hundred years?

### **Modern Results**

But to resume. It is an idea which cannot be repeated too often, that the high ethical ideal, which the modern Theosophist finds himself capable of appreciating, is historically speaking a result of nineteen hundred years of work laboriously carried on by the Christian Church. We prescind from the means used—external pomp of ceremony, religious symbols and outward forms, the insistence on formulated creeds, the mixture of politics with religion, the conjunction of Church and State, the backing up the teaching of the Church by the civil arm; rancorous controversy, excommunications, suspensions and interdicts, and every other form of contrivance

which lays itself open to objection in the modern mind. We waive all this, as involving us in endless controversy. We even can and must leave out of count the great split of the Reformation. For in this matter Christianity stands as a whole. What we say is that by looking under the surface it is manifest from history that the Theosophic man, according to his best ideal, is only capable of realization to-day, just because of the past labours of the Christian Church. We have already insisted on the fact that the foundation work of all that is ethically best in modern European civilization was laid in what are called the dark and middle ages; that Catholics have laboured, and Protestants have entered into those labours; that now, when belief in Christianity as a dogmatic and organized system is in many parts on the wane, and the naturalistic gentleman is taking the place of the Christian—even now the naturalistic gentleman owes his existence to the Christian Church; and what is the ideal Theosophist but the naturalistic gentleman under another name?

It is a thesis we cannot prove in the scope of a short chapter. But we can at least indicate a line of thought capable of being verified at leisure. Whence does the Theosophist derive his ethical inspiration? Under what guiding spirit does he select the materials of his creed and code? From the East he derives his three chief doctrines: his identity of the spirit of God and man, his theory of Karma, his transmigration. Good! But whence come his ethical ideals—his sense of the divine, his inward moral aspiration, his comprehensiveness, his universal brotherhood of man? Certainly not from Hinduism—which is the very embodiment of outward forms and formulas, of caste sectarianism, of indifference to others, of racialism, of traditionalism, of unreasoning belief. Certainly not from Buddhism—which, though it contained in its original code certain principles to this effect, failed absolutely

to impress them on mankind. Without an influx from the West, the Oriental peoples of to-day are the antithesis of all that Theosophy holds most essential. Whence, then, is the modern Theosophic ideal derived? We answer again: From the struggles of Christianity in the past. Its gradual effects, not perceptible in the decade, became perceptible in the century. The firm but gentle pressure of the Gospel message on the consciousness of Europe gradually worked its way; and the outcome of centuries of struggle has been the gradual creation of an atmosphere in which the ideals of the Gospel could live and flourish. There is no conscious acknowledgment of this indebtedness. The Protestant will acknowledge no indebtedness to the Middle Ages. The naturalist will acknowledge no indebtedness to Christianity. The Theosophist will acknowledge no indebtedness to either. But each of these is wrong in not confessing the rock out of which he has been hewn—in not recognizing that he can be what he is to-day because the Christian Church has prepared the way for his formation.

### A View from Within

Again we suggest the thought and pass on. A final consideration is this; and it is addressed not to Catholics who see the Church from inside, but to those who see the Church from the outside; or rather, gather their impressions of it from hearsay. They are told of subtle metaphysical disputations in the schools, of insistence on formulas and ceremonial worship, of sectarian intolerance which no longer issues in action but still survives in theory and feeling. They read of multifarious devotions choking the interior spirit of religion as the brambles choke the trees, of the freedom of thought and conduct crushed by a complexity of disciplinary laws. And a man of the ideal Theosophical type

would infer from this, that entrance into the Catholic Church must mean a moral strangling—a loading of the spirit with fetters and chains. The impression is absolutely untrue. To a man unconvinced of the paramount claims of Christ, submission to the teaching of the Church would of course be both unnatural and intolerable. But given that conviction, and a willing submission to it, and everything follows. The mind, no longer alienated, would soon fall into line with the system that conviction involves; and at the same time the sense of spiritual liberty would not be found to suffer harm. It would then be seen how fully personal ideals could be realized without external restraint; how little of legal obligation and how much of the spirit of spontaneous devotion can flourish and does flourish in the Church. The various dogmatic determinations which compose the Catholic creed would soon take their natural place in his mind. The multitudinous forms of devotion around him would appear no longer as clusters of barnacles retarding the progress of the ship, or as thickets of brambles choking the grove. They would appear rather as luxuriant growths of fruit issuing from the tree itself; to be tasted by all, and to be selected from according to individual taste and spiritual utility.

The wrench, in fact, does not lie here. As we have emphasized before, and now emphasize again, the real controversy lies in the simple question, Has God left man altogether to his own devices in matters of religion; has He left him to gather together his religious convictions piecemeal from all quarters of the globe, or has He at any period of history come to the aid of struggling and benighted humanity by setting up a dogmatic declaration of the truth, or furnished any definite channel through which that truth can be satisfactorily ascertained? In other words, Are the Theosophical or are the Catholic principles of religion true?

### III

#### WILL THEOSOPHY WORK?

**WE** are not yet ready to discuss the fundamental doctrines of Theosophy on their own merits. There is still wanted an answer to another question of altogether practical import, Will it work?

The Theosophist is disposed to regard such a question as irrelevant. He will, according to Mr. Beaman, answer that truth, not consolation or expediency or utility is the measure to look to. This we must grant and even maintain. The sole and final test is truth. Consolation without truth means a fool's paradise. Expediency where divergent from truth is radically immoral. Utility comes to much the same thing. Yet if we read Theosophic efforts to vindicate the truth of Theosophical doctrines, we find that sober exponents like Mr. Beaman acknowledge the proof of their truth to be just what is wanting. Theosophical theology is at the best a hypothesis; and its chief recommendation seems to be that the hypothesis will work. Whether the explanation of the cosmic scheme afforded by Theosophy can be proved as true—so, at least, thinks Mr. Beaman—it affords a thinkable and satisfying explanation of perplexing problems; it stimulates a high standard of conduct on high motives; it removes base hope and fear. In other words, Theosophy recommends itself chiefly to the mind because of the consolations and comforts it affords to those who accept it. Moreover, in fostering and encouraging the spirit of brotherhood and the advancement of the race, it

shows itself to be both expedient and useful. These advantages, in short, will be claimed as a reasonable ground for inferring its truth.

With this as an abstract principle we agree. It stands to reason, when we go to the roots of things, that truth carries with it consolation and comfort; that truth is the only sound expediency and the only solid utility. Conversely, too, consolation, expediency and utility (of the higher kind at least) give an *à priori* presumption of truth. We may go further and opine that any system which affords spiritual consolation, promotes the soul's growth, or advances the higher happiness of man, will do so only in so far as it contains truth. And this will apply even where the system is largely erroneous—the good result being an outcome of the truth and not of the error contained.

We have already in our first chapter confirmed this view by showing how Theosophy (as expounded by Mr. Beaman) is in its ethical ideals a reflection of the spiritual principles of Christianity. We can even go further and remark that, inasmuch as Theosophy appeals to the moral nature of man, it is so far furthering the work of Christianity, which has ever been directed to the same end. But then we went on to remove a misapprehension by pointing out that, whereas Theosophy claims as its own only the *élite* of mankind, the Christian Church avows itself to be a school for the imperfect. Hence while the Theosophist professes independence of what we may call *external machinery*, the Catholic Church makes full use of external machinery—the practical reason being that such machinery is both useful and necessary, at least for the mass of mankind. Of course the Church does not regard this practical utility as the full *raison d'être* of corporate bodies, religious membership, public worship, ceremonies, and formulated creeds. For instance, the Church maintains the

sacraments simply because they were instituted historically by Christ. Still the institutions of Christ must have been what they are on account of their utility—otherwise He would not have ordained them, being useless. However, we are now concerned with the practical phase of the question, and treat it from this point of view.

The exact point can be thus clearly introduced:—Were all mankind morally and mentally in a highly-developed condition, we could imagine God instituting a scheme of religion as free from external machinery as that which the Theosophist proclaims—a collection of luminous theological ideas placed in the world, appealing to the mind as true, and bearing directly on conduct. On these ideas the intellect would be fed; and the will, moved by them, would issue in a noble, upright, and spiritual life of the highest order. But the question is whether, taking man as he is, and especially as he was, such a system could work its effects on the masses of men. Can humanity in general live on such food and flourish?

It is related that Erasmus, wishing to make a skit on the transcendental subtleties of the Mediæval Schoolmen, once concocted the following heading for an imaginary philosophical thesis: “*Utrum Chimæra bombinans in vacuo possit comedere secundas intentiones.*” That is to say, “whether a Chimæra, booming about in a vacuum, could feed on reflex ideas”? We might similarly ask of the ideal Theosophist, whether a man floating in the ethereal regions of speculation can support his soul’s life on intelligible explanations of the cosmic scheme? If a few transcendently-minded persons of such sort can be found, the next question is whether mankind in general would have the remotest chance of doing the same; and whether the select few who can do so now would ever have come into existence had mankind been so nourished from the infancy of the race.

If we view the subject in the light of history, it seems certain that no religion has ever worked for long, if at all, on these ethereal lines. Are we to regard this fact as indicating corruption and degeneracy? It seems not, even though many religions have been subject to degeneracy, and many ritual forms have been the embodiment of moral and mental degradation. To us it seems that the explanation lies in human nature. External machinery is required for several reasons. In the first place, there is the natural instinct of man to express himself outwardly; and so dependent is he on outward expression that without it the inner life languishes and dies. We hear a great deal of "worship in spirit and truth"—and rightly; for worship is so much affectation unless it is in spirit and truth. But as soon as worship begins at all, it must exterminate itself. The first instinctive outward expressions will gradually develop into a system and thus become stereotyped. This is the natural origin of ritual. Ritual being stereotyped, it is possible for men to perform it by rote, and an effort may be needed at times to ensure the corresponding interior spirit. This is a concomitant disadvantage, but one which does not justify the rejection of external forms. These forms still remain a help. A man who goes to church out of a sense of duty will out of a sense of fitness try to pray when there; and, by the aid of external actions symbolic of prayer, will generally succeed. But a man who, on the plea of worshipping in spirit and truth, stays at home, is much more likely to take up the newspaper than to pray—simply because he lacks an external action to which praying is attached. It is worth noticing that just in those quarters in which religion is most conspicuously on the wane we hear most of this "worship in spirit and truth."

Hence the Catholic Church is not at all fond of the plea. As a plea she distrusts it. She has had some experience of



humanity in various forms ; and she says—" Let us secure attendance at public worship. That at least is a tangible thing. It involves a profession of praying ; and well-disposed people will not rest satisfied with a mere profession. With public worship *some* praying will be done ; abolish it, and nothing will be done."

These remarks are rather for the benefit of those who look on Theosophy from the outside, and who want to see how it squares with their own religious belief and worship. We must not forget that Theosophy itself cannot consistently find a place for prayer in its system. The most it can do is to furnish matter for meditation on "ethical ideals" and "intelligible explanations of the cosmic scheme." No ritual is needed for this. Is it not therefore true to say that the reason why the Theosophist is superior to forms is because he has nothing left to him of the belief which underlay and vitalized those forms ?

So the Theosophist's strictures on ceremonial worship are simply to be taken as an attack on the religious convictions of mankind in general ; and as such are to be refuted by showing the reasonableness of such external symbols, given that there is something to symbolize.

To proceed. Another reason for external machinery is the corporate strength which it produces. Common public membership of a religious body is in itself a support to each individual. Whatever the cause at heart, that cause is sustained by seeing the rest of the community publicly professing and publicly practising what pertains to the cause. It is on this account that the Catholic Church presents so strong a front to its opponents. Like a compact battalion, it offers only stragglers to the ravages of the foe. Hence the stability of Catholicism in countries like Ireland. Hence the leakage which follows as soon as individuals from such a com-

pact community get scattered among thousands of strangers in the slums of an English town ; where the moral support of a public profession, in an atmosphere of Catholic public opinion, is lost. Hence the importance, in outlying countries like India, of organizations which will bring isolated Catholics together, and give them a sense of union and fellowship instead of leaving them like solitary units alone in the wilderness, and out of touch with the rest. Hence too the comparatively small influence exercised, let us say by Theosophy, on Catholics. Perhaps it is this comparative impregnability of the Catholic body which accounts for the singular exception implicitly made by people of the Mrs. Besant class, whose comprehensiveness enables them to praise and flatter every other religion—Hinduism, Parsiism, Mahomedanism—but never Catholicism. It is because they recognize in Catholicism their connatural foe ; and this, not only on account of doctrinal antagonism, but also on account of the corporate strength which, through an external profession of creed, membership, and worship, baffles all direct attempts to make a breach in the walls.

We might amplify this inadequate treatment of the theme ; but let it suffice. Catholicism certainly works, not only with the educated classes, but with the masses of men. In this respect Hinduism, Mahomedanism, and others of the greater religions also work. And they work just because they take into account the needs of humanity for an external machinery in religion. If Parsiism is on the rapid decline, it is worth asking the question whether one of the most direct reasons is because the Parsi religion is so little sustained by external machinery—possesses so little of a dogmatic creed, code and ritual to be imparted by regular instruction to the young, and outwardly practised by the collective community. We suggest the question and pass on.

The mention of the young involves another point of importance, and one which was noted by St. Thomas even in the thirteenth century. It is this. Everybody will recognize the importance of early habit in religious matters. And a religion which is to be of service to mankind must be so constituted as to admit of application to early as well as adult years. Now it is obvious that children are incapable of reasoned belief. They must begin by receiving implicitly those truths which are to be the basis of their religious life. The later development of intelligence will not supply the loss which would accrue if religion had to remain in abeyance till the age of maturity. The Theosophist (no less than the Christian) must teach his children the principles and sanctions of morality: the divine in man, the brotherhood of man, the law of Karma, &c. Unless this were done, child-morality would be without basis. The boy would find himself praised for some actions and whipped for others, without the least moral element being introduced into his mind as to the why and wherefore. Hence as regards childhood at least the implicit acceptance of a creed and the use of other religious machinery is inevitable. But when we pass on to adult life, is it not also true to say that the vast masses of mankind are utterly incompetent to form a reliable judgment on the objective truth of such deep propositions as religion involves; and in this respect do not most men stand in a category not unlike that of children? This thought will bring out once more the idea we wish to impress on the reader, viz., that Theosophical principles, granted that they might work among the *élite* of a civilized and cultured race, would certainly not work in practice with the masses of mankind even to-day, and would, if exclusively taken up, abandon the race generally to darkness and ignorance as regards ethical and religious ideas.

We are of course aware of the interruption which the

Theosophist would probably make at this point. A believer in evolution, he would acknowledge the practical need of external machinery in the earlier stages of development, both of the individual and of the race. He would argue that each man should retain whatever religious beliefs or practices he finds useful to him, till such time as he can rise superior to them as the ideal Theosophist has done. This is the idea underlying the policy of teaching that each religion is best for those born in it, till such time as they feel its imperfectness and aspire to higher things. Into the question thus raised we shall not enter now. Sufficient to say that it carries us deeper into the dispute on fundamentals ; since it turns all existing religions (except Theosophy) into provisional expedients, and throws us back on the great question : Is there such a thing as an absolute religion ; and is that absolute religion Theosophy, or is it Christianity ?

## II.—GOD

### IV

#### THE THREE DOGMAS OF THEOSOPHY

WE now pass from ethical and practical considerations to those of a more speculative character. As to these we have already prepared the reader to expect a marked antagonism between Theosophy and Christian teaching. Nevertheless it is not our intention to insist on this antagonism in a controversial manner nor yet to strangle discussion by falling back on the principle of authority. Nothing could be more futile than flinging authority at the heads of persons who recognize no authority. The only useful course is to take up the question on the lines of reason and evidence, examining on that ground alone the case for both sides.

Mr. Beaman has supplied us with the peg on which our discussion can conveniently be hung. "Theosophy," he says, "has these three great dogmas: first, the oneness in essence of the spirit in man with God; second, re-incarnation; third, Karma, or the law of justice."

These three dogmas cannot be treated apart. They are linked together by an internal connection which is obvious as regards Karma and re-incarnation, but no less intimate though perhaps less obvious as regards the first item. In order, therefore, to manifest this connection we must begin with a summary, in our own words, of Mr. Beaman's exposition, which seems to run about as follows:—

### The Problem of Evil

The root problem which the Theosophist by these dogmas claims to solve is practically speaking the problem of evil. He does not admit that there is in the usually accepted sense any evil at all. What we call evil only means conflicting tendencies. However, evil is admitted in the popular sense. The unmerited sufferings of humanity and the ruthless and savage methods of nature have to be accounted for. The Christian has still to reconcile this state of the world with his idea of a personal God, the Father of us all, whose attributes are perfect love and omnipotence, whose children we are. The difficulty arises precisely through separating God off from the universe and making Him into the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of the world, and in regarding Him as one who bears to us the love which a human father bears his children. For in that supposition, God must be the conscious and responsible agent inflicting on these children not only frightful punishments for grave faults but equally frightful sufferings for no faults at all. Viewed thus, God's love presents itself to us as the cruellest hate instead of paternal affection. If God is a personal ruler of the world, the conclusion is that He is either wanting in wisdom and goodness or wanting in power, and we may remark that by no modern writer has this argument been more forcibly developed than by Mr. Mallock in several of his works. Such, according to Mr. Beaman, is the difficulty involved in the Christian idea of the personal Fatherhood of God.

### Theosophic Solution

Mr. Beaman thinks that this difficulty is solved, at least more thinkably than on any other system, by assuming the three dogmas of Theosophy. First, God is no longer a person

in the Christian sense. What He is heaven alone knows—for want of any more definite idea we must regard Him as an *essence* or a *power* which only for convenience and brevity we may call God. He, or *it*, is different in kind from ourselves; yet we are in our spiritual nature a part of that divine essence; and the realization of our identity and final reunion with it constitute the motive power of all moral action. This supreme essence is designated *Mind*. Over against this mind there stands *Matter*, whatever that may mean. How matter comes to exist is not explained by Mr. Beaman; but since we are told that the whole universe is an emanation of mind, matter also must be a product of mind, which we can for convenience regard as a sort of preliminary *objective* on which the divine mind projects itself as on a screen. Upon this objective background, the Supreme [indeterminate?] Mind breathes itself out in the form of partialized essences—"sparks of the divine" as they are metaphorically called—and these partialized essences are *Human Souls*, endowed with personality and consciousness but immersed in matter, as we find ourselves to be. Nevertheless these emanations, which in one sense involve separation, retain, in another sense, an identity with their original. Human souls are therefore parts of the divine essence, involved in or infused into matter [cf. the scholastic doctrine of matter as to the principle of individuation]. As it is by an inexorable law of the divine essence that it should thus project itself as sparks or particles into matter, so it is by an inexorable law that these sparks or particles should tend to evolve themselves again out of matter by an upward progress, till they emerge out of their confinement, and, losing their partialization, return to indeterminate identity with their original whence they had emanated. By projection into matter the homogeneous *One* becomes the heterogeneous *Manifold*; and by gradual emancipation the heterogeneous

*Manifold* again resolves itself finally into the homogeneous *One*. To use another figure; the tendency of matter is centrifugal or dispersive, while the tendency of spirit is centripetal or concentrative. Mr. Beaman repudiates the name *Pantheism* as usually understood—why and with what justification it is not easy to see. But with the thing so clearly before our view we need not trouble about names. In scholastic terminology we should call his theory, “Emanative Pantheism,” in which God is the *One* and the *Manifold* and the *All*. The introduction of mind as the power of involution and evolution seems to suggest Idealism, though Mr. Beaman does not make his meaning clear on this point. A Sanscrit scholar of our acquaintance thinks that he recognizes in Mr. Beaman’s view the modified Vedanta of Ramanuja.

### Human Life

We are, however, only concerned with the broad outlines of his theory. Given that matter exists, and that souls identical with and yet distinct from the Supreme Mind are involved in matter, the next step is to explain the meaning of human life [or, the life of divine sparks in matter]. Mr. Beaman is emphatic in postulating the freedom of the human will, and the consequent power of choice between the right and the wrong, the virtuous and the vicious, in human conduct. On this subject all his language is practically identical with ours. According to his view, there is, it is true, no such thing as *duty to a personal lawgiver*, but there is an upward and a downward tendency which the will can embrace. The upward tends away from self and matter, and towards the One Supreme; the downward tends to self, and to deeper involution in matter. Each tendency, we understand, is infallibly effectual—what we call virtue inevitably results in a higher state; what



we call crime inevitably results in a lower state. The law of Karma is not an infliction from without. It is the inherent effect of the act. Hence, as Hegel expresses it, "Punishment is the other half of crime." Properly there is no *punishment*, but only *consequence* or causality. For convenience, however, the ordinary terms are used. The history of each divine spark comprises a series of cycles which we call "lives." Each life consists of a series of optional acts. Each act produces its inherent result. Virtuous acts and vicious acts cancel each other in their consequences, the balance of each cycle or life being a higher evolution or a lower involution. By some cyclic law, each life comes periodically to the termination called death, either by internal or by external causes. The spark leaves one body only to occupy another. According to its state, resulting from the balanced sum-total of its virtues or vices, it takes possession of a second body exactly proportional to that state—scholastic philosophers will recognize here a perfect analogy with the scholastic theory of *Forms* which can only be introduced into matter proportionally disposed for *that* form and for no other. The result is that each succeeding life begins with an exact resultant of the virtue or vice of the previous life ; higher or lower as the case may be. And thus, virtue mechanically has its own reward and vice its own punishment. Each new life starts in that stage of elevation or depression in which the last resulted ; and thus starting with a heritage from the past, each soul is left to make the best of its present state, and so to achieve further progress or the contrary as the free will may decide. This is the meaning of the law of Karma—which is a quasi-mechanical system of consequences as accurate in its working as the laws of dynamics ; and re-incarnation is the means by which Karma works itself out.

**Fair Presentation**

We are not seriously concerned to know whether the above sketch is in every detail a reflection of Mr. Beaman's mind, though we believe that it is. At least it represents the system in outlines sufficiently clear to open out the real questions at issue between Theosophy and Christianity. We have tried and shall try to represent the theory not in its worst but in its best light, as a thinkable system which, whether true or not, affords an explanation of the facts of life and of the universe. Apart from fair play, which consists in giving credit equally to both sides in their best aspects as well as their worst, nothing is gained by setting up as the adversary's case a presentment which he repudiates, and then refuting it as if it were correct. On the other hand, much is gained by stating the adversary's case so that he is satisfied with the presentment. Still better is it if possible to represent the case as effectively as the adversary can represent it himself; so that he has nothing more to say than we have said for him. Then every shot will hit the mark and there will be no waste of powder.

With regard to Theosophy this is particularly the case. People who are attracted to Theosophy must be so attracted because they find in it something more satisfying than anything *they* possessed before—we refer particularly to serious thinking men. And to tell such a man that Theosophy is *not* satisfying, when he feels that it *is*, is like telling a man that he is hungry when he feels sated. We must therefore take Theosophy at its best; estimate truly how far it answers the problems which need answering; and then go on to show how far it does *not* meet them, or how far it involves new and insuperable difficulties fatal to its exalted claims. Lastly, as the present papers are intended to compare Christianity with Theosophy, we have to show how far the Christian system

really contains the same amount of light ; how far it contains more. We anticipate finding in the long run that those who reject the Christian solution in favour of the Theosophical solution can be convicted of having studied the Theosophical theory at its best, and the Christian system at its worst or practically not at all—convict them, in short, of having given Theosophy every chance while they have given Christianity none. We fancy that, as a rule, those who now figure as exponents of Theosophy began first to think over the problems of life only when they came under the influence of Theosophy—that while they were nominal Christians, or anything else, they never thought about or felt these problems at all. Never having given the Christian system a chance, and having accepted their ideas about it from hearsay—*chiefly through Theosophical channels*—no wonder if they speak disparagingly of Christian thought which they do not know, and enthusiastically of Theosophical thought which they do know.

### Summary of Contrasts

To sum up this preliminary chapter. The following are the points of contrast to be discussed :—

(1) The quasi-Pantheistic idea of identity between God and souls ; as contrasted with the Christian idea of the separate though dependent existence of souls.

(2) The impersonal, unconscious, indeterminate mind of the Supreme ; as contrasted with the Christian idea of a personal, conscious God.

(3) The necessary evolution or emanation of the universe from this Supreme ; as contrasted with the Christian idea of free creation according to a free plan, and under a free, wise, omnipotent and benevolent providence.

(4) The mechanical law of Karma working out good and

evil effects by necessary [physical] causality : as contrasted with the Christian idea of a [moral] law of right and wrong, with God as a personal lawgiver, judge, rewarder, and punisher.

(5) The working out of retribution in a series of lives ; as contrasted with the Christian idea of one life of probation, and a final destiny determined by that one life.

(6) The inequality of the lot of individuals accounted for as the result of a previous existence of the same individual, so that each bears his own burden and penalty ; as contrasted with the Christian idea that inequality of lot is under Providence the product of circumstances, and due—so far as it is hereditary—to the faults or virtues of other individuals.

It will be seen from this list that a large number of deep and stimulating questions are before us for examination. As to the order in which the three dogmas stand related, it seems that the doctrine of Karma, regarded as a solution of the problem of inequality of lot—or of evil as we may call it—is the root question on which Theosophy stands or falls. The other two dogmas hold a secondary place. Re-incarnation comes in simply as a necessary corollary, explaining the means by which Karma is worked out. The identity of souls with God enters in as the only alternative when, by the law of Karma, we have expelled the idea of a personal God. Few men—unless like the Hindus they have been habituated to Transmigration and Pantheistic theology—would feel themselves inclined to accept these two ideas unless they were involved in the comforting law of Karma, in which they claim to have found rest to their souls, in presence of the deeply perplexing and practical question of the existence of evil.

## V

### RIVAL IDEAS OF GOD

THE first great dogma of Theosophy, according to Mr Beaman, is "the oneness in essence of the spirit in man with God." So vast a subject cannot be treated in the lump. Moreover its treatment will be worthless unless prefaced by perfectly clear ideas. Thirdly, there is no better way of getting clear ideas than by placing two diametrically opposed systems in contrast ; since we only know properly what a thing *is* when we have also defined to some extent what it *is not*. Lastly, we are looking at Theosophy from the point of view of an inquirer ; and as such we must approach the question from an outsider's point of view. As Mr. Beaman devotes a large part of his paper to attacking and disposing of the Christian idea of a *personal God*, we begin in this paper with a clear popular statement of the system which he attacks, and on the ruins of which he places his Theosophical idea of God. What, then, is the Christian conception of God which Mr. Beaman thinks he has destroyed.

#### The Christian God

The Christian defines God as infinite being—infinately perfect, immaterial, spiritual, eternal, uncircumscribed by time and space ; conscious, intelligent, volitional ; necessarily willing the Good, but free as regards the exercise of infinite power to create or not to create ; possessing the attributes of power, goodness, justice, love, and the rest. Briefly, the Christian

conceives God by aid of his highest ideal of a perfect human soul, at the same time regarding that ideal as ridded of its human limitations and multiplied to infinity. All theologians allow that this conception is imperfect, because of the incapacity of man's mind to comprehend the infinite. But what they maintain is this—that such a conception, though falling short of the reality, is still on the *right lines* as far as it goes; that if it needs correction, this correction does not consist in *contradicting* the ideas it contains, but in amplifying and advancing them further on in the same direction. Thus the divine justice will still correspond to human justice, though it is magnified to infinity; the divine intelligence will still be intelligence, though infinite; the divine personality will still be personality, though freed from the limits which are inseparably bound up with our human concept of personality. In other words, the human mind, in advancing in its conception of the divine essence, does not, like the wife and child of Æneas, make *grandes passus sed præter viam*, but rather makes *parvi passus sed intra viam*—that is to say, small strides but on the right track.

According to the Christian theology, God is of His own nature self-sufficient, and is the only being who stands in no need of anything other than His own infinite perfection—whether as an object of thought, or as an object of will, or as a condition of perfect well-being. Such self-sufficiency is hard for us to imagine, though it is logically involved in the notion of infinite being. We in our feeble way tend to imagine God's life as something solitary and monotonous, His mind inactive and stationary, and His will inoperative. This is a difficulty inherent in our concept of the infinite. Moreover, it is well to emphasize the existence of such a difficulty. We do not claim that the Christian concept of the divine is easy. What we do maintain is that although it runs *beyond* the limits of human

thought, it still runs on the same lines ; and lies in full analogy with the religious convictions of the best of mankind in general, wherever a lofty ideal of personality prevails. It does not reverse this ideal, but lifts it up to a higher plane.

However, this difficulty, which is felt so keenly so long as we think of God *alone*, is considerably diminished when we consider God together with the world. By creation God places Himself in relation to finite being as the term of His thought and will. Naturally a new crop of speculative difficulties spring up as soon as the finite and the infinite are put into relation. But this is a difficulty common to all systems—theistic, pantheistic, or theosophic ; and therefore it does not count. Given God and creatures, God does not in Himself become limited. Yet all His activity towards finite things terminates in a limited effect ; and hence we are able to estimate God's character, infinite though it be, as expressible in finite acts. Hence we insist that the actions of God towards man and the universe can be interpreted in the terms of human action, and the character of God interpreted in terms of human character—recognizing always that the limits are on the part of the effect, not on the part of the cause ; in short, that *infinite* wisdom, power, goodness, justice, and the rest lie behind.

The consequence is, we can conceive and believe in a personal God, on the analogy of the human person freed from defects. We are not here using terms in any technical sense. In the language of the common man, a personal God means a living being, conscious, endowed with intelligence and thought, knowing the true and the good, and with a free will capable of acting in the light of truth and goodness. God we say is that ; only infinitely that ; and this addition saves us from the charge of anthropomorphism. What anthropomorphism exists is inevitable ; and yet, with the proviso added, is neither un-

worthy nor degrading—not unworthy of God, not degrading to man, just because it is the highest and noblest idea of God we are capable of conceiving.

This concept, let us add, induces a certain modesty of mind. Recognizing the limits of our intellect, we are not surprised to find that God has furnished us with a revelation of the leading truths of religion—partly because few minds are capable of philosophizing; partly because those who are capable of philosophizing are wonderfully capable of getting lost outside the margins of their proper scope; partly because religion is a practical thing, and must be clothed in a concrete and living form. In analyzing God's dealings with mankind we are not too cock-sure of our interpretation. We may not be able to see the wisdom or power or goodness or justice in each act or kind of act. But we are confident, on deeper grounds, that each act taken in itself, its antecedents and consequences, is both wise and good and just; and with the least good-will, we can find a line of thought which will put us on the right way of recognizing this wisdom, goodness, and justice, though it will not carry us all the way.

Such is the Christian idea of God. Its claims are modest enough—our idea of God is imperfect and inadequate, being as it is a finite idea of an infinite being. Still we hold two things about it. First that it is *knowledge*, because it is on the right lines, not on the wrong ones. Secondly, that it gives a *real relation* between ourselves and God, because it places Him in the light of a personal being who is interested in us and towards whom it concerns us to stand in a right attitude of reverence and obedience, &c.

We can now turn from the Christian to the Theosophic conception of God.



**The Theosophic God**

The Theosophic God as expounded by Mr. Beaman is not a personal God. In dealing with the problem of evil in the world, he tells us that: "On the assumption of a personal God, the father of us all, among whose attributes are perfect love and omnipotence, it is impossible to explain the miseries which the aggregate life of humanity every day thrusts under our eyes. Christianity," he says, "has still to reconcile the awful and unmerited sufferings of mankind . . . with the belief that the whole is controlled by a God of infinite love and infinite power. No human reason," he continues, "has ever succeeded nor ever will succeed in making that reconciliation. The difficulty is fundamental and insuperable, lying in the detachment of God from men, and positing in him precisely the same kind of love we bear our children, precisely the same kind of power we exercise over them, but extending that love and power to infinity. . . . From this dilemma there is no escape. Either the Christian God is not omnipotent or he is not all-loving."

Mr. Beaman then refutes what he considers to be the Christian evasion that "God's ways are not as our ways," &c. We may beg to acknowledge at once that any Christian who uses this text as a refuge in a difficulty is handling a two-edged weapon. In the first place, the text does not give this meaning; in the second place, it is no answer. God's ways are not as our ways only in the sense that they are noble while ours are mean, just while ours are unjust, and so on; that we judge superficially while God goes to the heart of the matter; and perhaps also in this sense, that God sees the whole case while we see only a part of it. But we must insist that God's justice corresponds to our justice, His love to our love, otherwise we shall give the case away.

But to resume. Mr. Beaman proceeds to say that Theosophy wipes away the whole difficulty by putting human life under the inexorable law and justice of Karma ; and maintaining that God correctly viewed is no longer a person like ourselves. What God is if not a person he proceeds to say. He [or *it*] is a power, whom for convenience and brevity we call God. In other places God is called the "over-soul" ; and the "Mind" which produces the universe and involves parts of the divine essence [souls] in matter. He finally concludes by telling us that "for the needs of our earthly pilgrimage what is meant by God is practically the aggregate of man's spiritual virtue and efficiency. In that sense Man is his own God ; and each man has it in his power, by conscious efforts upward, to enrich not only his own spiritual nature, but the total fund on which he draws for consolation, guidance and support." It must not be forgotten, of course, that the reason why he argues that this collectivism of virtue can be called God lies in his theory of the identity between the divine essence and souls, which are parts or sparks of the Supreme.

### Some Criticism

Mr. Beaman does not treat us to the metaphysics of this theology. That is perhaps well ; and we shall avail ourselves of the like privilege. We shall dismiss the whole abstruse speculation in a few short remarks.

In the first place the Supreme is primarily conceived as Mind. How must we imagine this mind ? Is mind here anything more than a synonym for vital force ? Is it conscious mind analogous to ours, or is it that vague and unintelligible thing called unconscious or indeterminate mind, which is a blank till it can by some sort of projective power produce something to think about ? We gather that the divine mind

has to undergo some change or development before being capable of actual consciousness ; and it is to our mind utterly unthinkable how such a process could possibly take place in an infinite being. If Theosophists glory in reasoned belief and are asked to believe nothing which they cannot understand, then we fancy the world will count very few adherents on this first point.

Then in the next place we ask, what is the process of producing the universe? Is the universe an internal complement of the divine being? Is multiplication of souls in matter a sort of climax of divine perfection, analogous to the triplicity of *supposita* or hypostases in the revealed doctrine of the Trinity? As far as we can see it is just the reverse. The Theosophic God according to Mr. Beaman is some primary kind of being which undergoes a change. This change consists of an emanative process by which the primary divine essence blossoms out as it were into souls and matter. Apparently this blossoming out is a kind of imperfection. The mixture of souls with matter is a work to be undone ; and the undoing is a return to a higher and purer state. God plus souls—we may say, using concrete terms—is worse than God alone ; and the consummation of things lies in obliterating souls and matter, and restoring the *status quo* of God plus nothing. This may seem a rather crude way of stating the case. But it is at least definite, and we challenge the Theosophist to state it more correctly, without taking refuge in vague and shifting abstractions. Mr. Beaman seems to be as definite as we could wish. “At the root of Theosophical metaphysics,” he says, “lies involution of mind in matter—with an irresistible tendency on the part of mind to evolve through matter to its former purity. Human souls,” he tells us, “are parts of the divine essence involved in matter ; and the duty of each soul is to oppose the tendencies of his

material envelope, and work out its own purification." This is saying nothing if not saying that the divine essence lowers itself by involution with matter, and has to raise itself again from that temporary degradation.

We are sorry that we cannot, in absence of explanation, put any better construction on the doctrine than this. Infinite being cannot be thought of as degenerating into a multiplicity of finite particles of essence called souls, mixed up in a degrading manner with other finite particles of essence called matter. In short it seems to us that the whole cyclic process or fluctuation in the state of God's essence is utterly unthinkable. Admitting that the whole question of God's being is in its way unthinkable in any clearly coherent manner by our minds, still of the two it seems to us that, whereas the Christian theology of the divine unchangeability is only *negatively* unthinkable, the view above delineated is *positively* self-contradictory when analyzed. If Theosophists glory in reasoned belief, they must at least acknowledge that they fail to secure it here.

Then again let us turn to the souls of men, regarded as parts of the divine essence and retaining identity with it ; yet each possessing its own personality and consciousness, to which all other souls, matter, and the divine essence are objective. What can I—one of these souls involved in matter—say of myself? According to the Theosophist I can say, "I am part of the divine substance as regards the *spirit-stuff* of which I am composed. I am also another part of the divine substance as regards the *matter-stuff* in which I am involved. I am a bit of divinity thrown out and boxed up in another bit of the divinity." The spirit-bit ought to get out of the matter-prison ; and the matter-prison holds the spirit-bit back. Hence a struggle and conflict among the bits. The one pulls upwards and seeks well-being, the other pulls down

and results in ill-being. Why should my divine soul thus be enthralled in the mischievous slavery of divine matter? Why this schism in the All? If I resist the downward tendency of matter I resist divinity. If I yield to that downward tendency I yield to divinity. Divinity then has a good and a bad tendency; divinity has virtuous and vicious propensities; divinity is the mover of crimes and vices, and induces acts which result in misery! This again does not look like reasoned belief.

### The Unknown God

By these desultory remarks, all we wish to point out is that the Theosophical concept of the Supreme, whatever else it be, is not thinkable and cannot be expressed in any analytical form which does not involve us in inextricable confusion. Perhaps, however, the Theosophist will escape these strictures by disclaiming all power to form a coherent concept of the Supreme. Leaving Mr. Beaman for a moment, we turn to an article in the number of *East and West* for January, 1904, by Mr. Vimadalal, where the principles of Theosophy are stated in a more formal manner. This is what we read there about our knowledge of God:—

“Theosophy postulates one eternal principle as the root and the source of all that is existent. That principle is spoken of as the Causeless Cause, the Rootless Root of all, the One that knows no second; IT is that wherefrom both Spirit or Life or consciousness on the one hand, and matter, form of body on the other, proceed. Within IT consciousness and the vehicles wherein it works, subject and object, knower, known and knowledge all are one. Hence is IT also called the Great Unknown, for it is not possible to form any conception of what this one eternal principle in its essence is, every act of thinking implying the duality of the knower and the known and a relation between the two, while in the One, duality hath no place. All our knowledge is relative, hence is that One which is the Absolute, beyond our knowing, nothing

positive being predicable of the essence of that which is the Boundless All. It can only be described by negatives. It is not consciousness (as we know consciousness) nor is IT unconsciousness; IT is not ego, nor is IT non-ego. It is neither spirit nor matter, neither existence nor non-existence—IT is not any one of these pairs of opposites but their Eternal Root. It constitutes the limit reached by our thought in all directions, whether it run along the line of science or flow along the currents either of Philosophy or of Religion. It is the mighty Unknown, revered by sages in silence, and it is well always to bear in mind this ultimate limit of our thinking, for since it is not possible to form any positive idea of IT, every attempt to have any conception of the great world-process from the standpoint of that One which is the All, either as to its beginning or as to its end, as to its why or its wherefore, is bound to be futile.”

This passage brings out in strong relief the antithesis between the Christian and the Theosophic idea. The Theosophist's concept of the Supreme is *purely negative*, or a denial of any predicate which we can make of other things. “It is not consciousness and it is not unconsciousness,” &c. Nothing which we can predicate about other things can be predicated about God. On the other hand the Christian concept is *positive*, with only the negation of limits and imperfections. Hence we can predicate of God what we predicate of other things—always with the proviso that our predication, though on the right lines, goes not far enough. The Christian God is thinkable in an imperfect manner; the Theosophical God is not thinkable at all.

Yet even so, the Theosophist cannot evade the question. He will persist in thinking about God. He calls it the causeless cause, the rootless root, the one, the eternal, the all. He tells us that the Supreme blossoms out into a self-conscious logos; that in it appears a self-conscious centre, &c. To be consistent he must go on to say that all these predications are likewise futile—that it is just as true to say that It is *not* a root, and *not* a principle, and *not* a cause, and that it does *not*

blossom out into self-consciousness, &c. In short, properly speaking, the only thing for the Theosophist to do is to define the Supreme as zero=infinity, and there let the matter drop without another word.

There will not be much profit in pursuing the subject further. It will be sufficient to have shown one thing. Theosophy professes to provide a more thinkable theory of the universe than, say, the Christian system—one more satisfying to the mind, and one which explains better the facts of the case. Now one of the most important problems of the universe is the nature of God and his relations to the world ; and as far as we can see, on this point Theosophy is absolutely unsatisfying to the mind and utterly void as regards explaining the facts. It is confessedly unthinkable and explains nothing. Instead of that, it robs us of the whatever thinkability we enjoyed or imagined ourselves to enjoy before, and takes away from us whatever explanation of facts we hitherto fancied ourselves to possess.

There is only one case in which the Theosophical theory of the unknowability of God can be satisfactory ; viz., *if it is true*. If God is really unknowable, and if the Christian knowledge is so much delusion—then it would be a satisfaction to get rid of that delusion, and to recognize that God must be to us a blank. But no man in the world has hitherto made even a show of proving this to be the case on any lines of demonstration. Theosophy simply confronts us with a hypothesis on the subject, which men can take or leave as it appeals or not to their individual minds. The only really concrete argument we have come across is that provided by Mr. Beaman ; viz., that the problem of evil cannot be solved on the hypothesis of a personal God ; and that, given the law of Karma as the solution of the problem of evil, there is nothing left to us except to reduce God to the unknowable abstraction which Theosophy

advocates. We feel sure that if Theosophy is to make way amongst thinking men, it will not be through its amazingly negative theory of God, but through its attempted explanation of the problem of evil. In short, Theosophy will stand or fall with the law of Karma, which therefore we shall have to examine presently.



## VI

### THE BASIS OF RELIGION

BEFORE passing on to discuss the doctrine of Karma and re-incarnation which will complete our subject, we shall do well to devote a chapter to a very practical consideration suggested by the Theosophical conception of God. We can introduce this practical subject by repeating that Theosophy claims to be not only a philosophy but a religion; that its adherents often assure us that a person can become a Theosophist and yet retain his former religion; and even that each religion is best for those who are born in it. Leaving Mr Beaman for a moment, we may say that all these three statements have appeared in print from the mouth or pen of Mrs. Besant. And yet Mrs. Besant lately declared that Theosophy is only Hinduism in a modern dress. Of the consistency of Mrs. Besant's utterances we have long since despaired; and if there is any sense in her hearers they will not be long in despairing too. But here we wish to go to the root of the matter, and ask the question:—How does religion stand after accepting the Theosophist's first dogma—which, as we have seen, abolishes a personal or in any way *known* God, and substitutes a God who is unknowable and unknown—a God of whom we know only one thing, viz., that he is not anything in touch with us or with our ideas of personality?

### Christianity

One thing is evident at the outset. The antagonism between Christian theology (even in its most diluted form) and Theosophy, on the subject of Theosophy's first dogma, is manifest to the meanest intelligence. The idea of a personal God is bound up not only with Catholic belief, but with every form of Protestant belief. It is almost too absurd to have to state that Christ Himself believed in and taught a personal and a knowable God. Even putting aside His own claims to divinity, His chief teaching-work was to lead men to a knowledge of the Father. "This," He tells us, "is eternal life ; to know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent." The fatherly providence of God was the constant theme of His teaching. In every respect God is represented as a person who can be known by the analogy of human personality.

No man can call himself a follower of Christ who accepts in its fulness the first dogma of Theosophy. Nothing could be clearer than the inconsistency of Theosophists in this matter. The Theosophist declares that he looks with sympathy on every religion for what is good in it. Yet he can only look on Christianity as contradicting the basal principles of Theosophy. How then can he go on to say that any one can be a Theosophist and yet retain his former religion ? How can he say that the Christian religion is the best for those born in it, unless by so saying he means that those born in radical error will do well to remain in that error ? What Mr. Beaman would say to this we do not know. Mrs. Besant at least has made her position clear in saying that Theosophy is Hinduism in modern dress. If no man can become a Hindu and yet retain his Christian belief, how can a man retain his Christianity and yet become a Theosophist ?

### Other Religions

But we can go further. Mahomedanism and Zoroastrianism, no less than Christianity, maintain the existence and knowledge of a personal God in personal relation with mankind. To these two religions the same conclusions apply. No Mahomedan, no Zoroastrian can retain the fundamentals of his old religion and at the same time be a Theosophist. The same applies to the simplest forms of Theism and Deism. The same applies even to most lower forms of religion, in which a debased idea of God prevails, but still always in a personal form. The God of the low savage may be a brute, or a monster, or a tyrant ; but still he is a personal being—one who knows and wills ; one who can be pleased and displeased, obeyed and disobeyed ; one who can reward and punish.

There are two types of religion which might seem to afford an exception :—Hinduism, and Buddhism. A Pantheistic creed like Hinduism, though theoretically resting on an impersonal or indeterminate conception of God, seems in practice to contradict itself and yield to the general instinct of mankind by some hazy kind of impersonation, eked out by incarnations, and the special presence of the divinity in consecrated stones, &c. In some respects this popular religion may be called a debased form of Hinduism ; but, debased or not, it indicates the same idea of personality in the divine—the idea of some one who knows and wills ; who can be pleased, and displeased ; who can be favourable and unfavourable ; who can appreciate service and reverence paid to him, &c. Turning to the second type, it would seem that pure Buddhism gives the nearest approach to a religion without a personal God ; but then pure Buddhism is consequently godless. Self, and self-emancipation by a code of asceticism, comprise the system in a sentence ; the ultimate well-being of self as a thing *absolute*,

without relation to any divine being. But this pure Buddhism is, we fancy, a rarity ; and where Buddhism prevails it seems, in its quest for a personal element, to have sunk down into a cultus of Buddha, saints and demons.

### The Personal Relation

All this points to a common conclusion, viz., that religion (however men may discourse subtly about its definition) is essentially a personal relation, and cannot subsist without a personal being as its basis and term. Some religions are noble, and some are debased. But as the nobler religions are such because of the nobility of their concept of the divine personality, so the debased religions are such, not because they conceive God as a person, but only on account of the degraded form in which that personality is conceived.

Abolish the personal element and religion ceases. The pure materialist, who believes in nothing but matter and force and the laws of matter and force, cannot have a religion. He may feel awe at the vastness of the universe, or admiration of its complexity ; but religion can he have none. An Agnostic like Spencer can call these sentiments a "worship of the silent sort before the unknowable and the unknown." But it is only religion so far as there lurks in his mind a vague sense of personality in this unknowable and unknown. The poetic yearnings of a William Watson, which embody the Agnostic creed or non-creed, can be called religious ; but they are religious only because they are striving after a personal relation to the All, baffled only by the inability to conceive the All as a person. If we turn to the Pantheistic creeds the same applies. The Pantheist can claim a religion only so far as he regards the Supreme or the All as a person, and thus introduces into his mind a being who knows and acts from knowledge, who

can be pleased or displeased with men, who can be offended and propitiated.

Abolish this personal element and what remains? Religion does *not* remain. There still can remain a code of conduct—what we call a right and wrong. The Positivist can maintain such a code in the form of an aspiration towards the noblest and best, out of a motive which we call “virtue for its own sake” or for its intrinsic or conventional beauty and excellence. The Utilitarian can profess a code of conduct based on its personal advantages. The Hedonist can do the same on the ground of pleasure and pain. The Evolutionist can do the same on the grounds of tendency and adjustment to environment. The believer in Karma can do the same on the ground that every act has its inalienable issue in well-being or ill-being. The Buddhist can do the same out of pessimism and the prospect of Nirvana—and so with the rest. But none of these can possess a religion—except so far as they ignore the logical effects of their creed, and cling to the habit implanted by heredity, of still regarding themselves as in relation with a personal Supreme, or with some substitute for the same.

### Theosophy and Atheism

These considerations, if correct, lead us to a startling conclusion. This conclusion is, that the consistent Theosophist must perforce be an Atheist. The name “Atheist” has a bad sound in the ears of believers. But it is the only possible word, if the matter is to be made clear to the ordinary reader. The Theosophist, in depriving us of our relations to a personal God, makes us morally as if no God exists; and what is an Atheist but one who is as if no God existed?

Mr. Beaman argues at length to prove that the idea of a personal God is at the root of all our difficulties regarding the

problem of evil—which problem he solves by abolishing a personal God altogether. The power which is at the back of the universe, as we know it, is only for convenience and brevity called God. God, in any accepted sense, is only the sum total of all men's virtue in the world. For the purpose of life, man taken collectively in his better aspects is each individual's God and his only God. According to this, a man who crosses the threshold of Theosophy must abandon the idea of a personal God. He must consequently become in effect an Atheist. Hence Theosophy, taken in its first fundamental dogma, is absolutely antagonistic and destructive, not merely to Christianity, but also to Mahomedanism, to Zoroastrianism, and to every form of Theism and even to Hinduism as popularly conceived. To say that Theosophy embraces every religious endeavour and tolerates every creed is an absolute absurdity and delusion. No man who retains the fundamental ideas of Christianity, of Mahomedanism, of practical Hinduism, of Zoroastrianism, of Theism, can become a Theosophist. Those who profess any of the great religions of the world, as religions, are *ipso facto* not Theosophists; for whereas religion means a personal God, Theosophy means the absolute exclusion of a personal God. Retain the least vestige of a personal God and you are the declared enemy of Theosophy. Embrace Theosophy, and by virtue of your fundamental tenet you are a declared enemy of all religions. Religion and Theosophy by virtue of their very essential principles, so far as we understand Mr. Beaman, are as mutually contradictory as a *plenum* and a *vacuum*, as black and white.

### III.—EVIL

#### VII

#### THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

THE theory of Karma is an attempt to explain the inequality of human life in respect to well-being and ill-being. The stock example is that of two babies, one born in the most favourable circumstances of character and surroundings, the other born with inherited vicious dispositions and degrading surroundings—or again, one born to perfect health, the other doomed to be a life-long sufferer. To explain the difference on Christian lines is admittedly difficult. To explain it by the theory of Karma is simple. The one child is reaping the reward of its virtues, the other is reaping the punishment of its vices in a previous life. On this theory not only is everything strictly just, but everything is *seen to be* just. It must be allowed that, so far as giving a surface solution to the problem, the theory is perfect. But, as we shall see in the sequel, the theory is a mere hypothesis without proof; and secondly, it bristles with difficulties as soon as we dive beneath the surface.

But it will not be enough to pick holes in the doctrine. Destructive criticism is comparatively easy. Our most important and serviceable work will lie in the way of construc-

tion. We have to consider the Christian position too, and try to represent that system in the light of an answer to the problem which Theosophy claims to solve so well. This will involve working down to the root of the question of evil in the world, in order to find the key which will solve the problem. It is a subject on which any thinking man must feel diffident. But it seems to us that by means of this preliminary consideration something of a key can be found.

### Two Preliminary Remarks

Our scheme is for the present to leave man out of the question, and consider the existence of evil in the lower creation alone. But in doing so we start with a large supposition. We assume, in short, that the law of Karma in its moral sense does not apply to animals; that animals are not endowed with reason, free will and moral responsibility; that consequently, although their ill-being and well-being is worked out by laws of causality, the absence of moral personality and responsibility prevents their sufferings from bearing the character of a *punishment for sin*. How far our Hindu readers will agree with this postulate we are not clear. Perhaps some of them may be kind enough to communicate with us on the subject. If their doctrine of transmigration and Karma includes the brute creation, our argument will not appeal to them. But we suppose that men of the class of Mr. Beaman can admit our postulate as a basis of argument.

One other preliminary remark. Mr. Beaman and other Theosophists show a certain hesitation in admitting the existence of evil in any exact sense of the word. They prefer to speak of "opposing tendencies." There is a certain inconsistency in this. If there is no evil, properly so-called, why do they make so much ado in trying to explain its



existence? However, we need not haggle about words in a matter where things are clear. At least in the language of humanity, pain is evil, the crippling of faculties is evil, the thwarting of innate tendencies is evil. Call them by whatever name you like, these are the things for whose existence the mind demands an explanation, and it is in their existence that the so-called "problem of evil" consists.

### **Evil in Creation**

With these points cleared up, we can set to work on the existence of evil in the lower order of creation.

We find in nature generally a mixture of pleasure and pain, of thwarted tendencies, of destructive processes. That a large part of living beings should feed on other living beings is regarded as evil, because it involves pain and thwarts the development of the individual. This is, as it seems, a primary law of life. Science asserts this, and theology does not deny it. There has existed a floating idea that in the first instance (before the Fall) there was no slaughter among animals; but such an idea is no part of Christian doctrine. Without postulating a universal miracle or a change of nature, we must believe on physiological grounds that the first lion was a beast of prey; and so of the rest.

Already in the brute order we are confronted with the mystery of pain. We may dilate as we like on the thought that the pain of animals is not so great as human pain; but diminish it as we will, enough pain still remains to create a problem. We may point out that pain has its important function as a symptom of disease or danger, or as the indication of a need, or as a stimulus to action in pursuit of safety, well-being or health. As pleasure attracts, so pain repels living beings in directions suitable for their safety, development and propagation. But when all is said, the problem remains.

This problem is, why should pain exist? Why is not the world one system of unmixed well-being, pleasure, and happiness?

### The Triple Answer

Facing the facts as they are, three answers can be formulated—answers of different degrees of complexity. We may call them the Materialist, the Theosophist, and the Christian answer. The Materialist answer is simplest of all. The essential laws of matter and force with their developments have resulted thus; and that is an end of the question. Observe the completeness of the answer—just because the suppositions of the system are so simple. There is no God in the question, no need to explain how evil can proceed from the divine nature, no question of squaring with justice or goodness or wisdom. The Materialist owns no God. Matter and force account for everything.

Before passing on, let us draw a moral from this. The moral is that the simplicity of a hypothesis is no real criterion of its truth. A bold, sweeping assumption which gets rid of a God, gets rid of all the difficulties involved in a belief in God. If simplicity is a criterion of truth, the Materialist wins the prize.

The second answer is that of the Theosophist. The world is a product of the divine essence acting by necessary energy. But the product is in some way identified with the divine essence, and therefore in some sense part of it. The implication is that the Supreme, who is identified with the all, includes evil mixed with good. Why should this be? It is no answer to fight shy of the world "evil" and to speak of opposite and conflicting tendencies. Why should there be these opposite and conflicting tendencies in the divine? Why should the divine, acting by the essential laws of divine being,

issue in an admixture of pleasure and pain, good and evil? Juggle with words as you like, it still remains that we must look upon the conflict of tendencies as an evil, for it means a thwarting of one by the other. Theosophy has given its answer. But beyond a certain point, it is no answer—or one which is singularly unsatisfying.

The Christian answer is that the world is a product of a personal God, and is something which, though pervaded by His presence, is not part of the divine. The evil which enters into the world's composition is not a mixture of evil and good in the divine essence but outside it. Hence the Christian avoids the difficulty special to the Theosophist, whose theory of emanation makes the world enter in some way into the constitution of the divinity. But in exchange for emancipation from this difficulty, the Christian brings another upon himself. How can a personal God, who is all good, acting freely, produce a world mixed up of good and evil? The Christian has the advantage in that his view involves no imperfection internal to the divine being. But he has to face the compensating difficulty that God, being free, is morally responsible for what he has done.

Thus the Materialist can laugh at the Theosophist and the Christian as they pit one difficulty against the other, for by abolishing a God he escapes both. But right at the back of his system lies the insoluble crux—Whence the origin of the world? The Theosophist can laugh at the Christian as he struggles against his moral difficulty, which Theosophy avoids by making God act under a necessity of His nature. But right at the back of his system lies the unanswerable difficulty—How account for an admixture of evil in the divine? The Christian can laugh at the Theosophist as he struggles with this crux of evil in the divine, which Christianity places outside the divine. But right at the back of his system lies the diffi-

culty—How to account for a free and good God creating a world mixed with pain?

We are stating the case with the coldest impartiality. Personally we hold that, in point of difficulty, that of the Materialist is fundamental, that of the Christian is comparatively on the surface, while the Theosophist's difficulty is perhaps the deepest of the three.

### The Final Agreement

From this point there are two ways of proceeding. One is to fight the matter out in detail. Such fighting is not likely to convert any party to the views of the other; and the only use of it will be to remove misunderstanding, and thus to narrow down the ground of dispute. And the reason is that each party approaches the question with a different set of assumptions, which he may or may not be able to prove, but which at any rate he takes for granted as first principles. There is in fact only one point of agreement among all who have from their respective standpoints really thought the matter out. This common ground is that, *ultimately*, the question of evil is unsoluble. We do not possess the data or the mental capacity to push our reasonings to demonstration-point, and we simply cannot work out any theory into full detail. The outcome seems a most paradoxical one, and it is, *to agree to differ* in the explanation; but, curiously enough, all come at last to a unanimous conclusion.

But let us hasten to explain this stark paradox. We picture the three disputants finding their discussion hopeless, and winding up each his own position as follows:—

The Materialist says: I may not be able to explain why or how primal matter and force should issue as they do or why pain should be part of their result. But one thing I am certain

of. According to my principles *causality* must have prevailed, and whatever is, consequently must be right.

The Theosophist says : I may not be able to explain why or how the divine by a necessity of its nature issues in such a world as ours, or how and why evil should be mixed up in the divine. But of this I am certain. The divine is the only standard of right, and the world is a product of the divine ; and whatever the divine produces must be in accordance with the eternal nature of things, and consequently must be right.

The Christian says : I may not be able to explain how a free and good God could produce a world mixed up with pain. But, as you also say, the divine is the standard of right, and therefore, whether acting freely or by necessity, He must act rightly. Consequently the world as produced by Him must be right.

To sum up the three positions briefly :—

The Materialist says that the world could not according to force and matter be otherwise than it is, and therefore must be right.

The Theosophist says that the divine acting according to the laws of its nature could not have acted otherwise than it has acted, and therefore the world necessarily must be right.

The Christian says that God, being free, could have created or not created ; could have created worlds other than this, even possibly a world of sentient beings without pain. But seeing that God, whether acting freely or of necessity, cannot act wrong, the world, as it is, must necessarily be right.

This will seem to be a bald and hopeless result. And yet—mark what we say, and we say it with diffidence and under correction—if there exists anywhere within the reach of human

minds a solution of the problem of evil, it lies in this seemingly hopeless agreement of all parties in the conclusion that, whatever difficulties we may feel, and whatever solutions we may suggest, the order of creation which actually exists before our eyes must be right.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In order to obviate all possibility of any Catholic reader misunderstanding our drift, we repeat—First, that the foregoing chapter eliminates man and moral evil from the question, and is confined to evil existing in the animal creation. Secondly, the extremely obscure question, whether the evil existing in the lower creation has any antecedent or consequent connection with the fall of man, is left entirely untouched one way or the other. The point is—*Whatever the explanation given*, the world as it is actually constituted is as God *de facto* wills it to be; and it cannot be defective or in any sense derogatory to the goodness of God.

## VIII

### EVIL AND GOD'S FREE WILL

To summarise again the conclusion of the last chapter. However the Materialist, the Theosophist, and the Christian may differ in the difficulties they feel and the explanations they give, all three must perforce agree in one conclusion, viz., that the world must be right as it is constituted, no matter what our minds may think of it. To the Materialist it must be right, because it is the necessary outcome of the laws of matter and force. To the Theosophist it must be right, because it is the product of the divine nature acting by necessary volition. To the Christian it must be right, because it proceeds from the will of a good and just God.

This time we want to go a step further. Putting the Materialist aside as irrelevant to our subject, we want to make the Theosophist and the Christian come to a still closer agreement.

The Christian objection to the Theosophist's theory of the universe is this: "If the world is a product of the divine mind and will, acting by a necessary law of the divine being, then how do you explain the mixture of good and evil in the world?" The Theosophist must answer by saying that "what looks to us evil is not really evil, but only the conflict of opposing tendencies." To this the Christian replies that "it is a quibble to dispose of the question in this way, since pain and thwarted tendencies are evil in the strict sense; and if the world is in some way identified with the Supreme, there

must be a mixture of evil in the divine nature—otherwise he would not be under the necessity of producing evil. The Theosophist will then be driven to one of two alternatives. Either he must say that “the admixture of good and evil in the world is not incompatible with the perfection of the divine being,” or else that “our mind, in judging evil to exist in the world, is under a delusion.”

The Christian and the Theosophist must both agree in maintaining that the divine nature must be perfection—if only because there exists no other standard of perfection except the divine nature itself. In this all philosophers agree. If, then, the world is a product of the divine mind and divine will by a necessary process, it follows that the world must be right—that is to say, it cannot be a reproach to its divine producer. God cannot by His necessary volition do what is wrong. The divine mind, so far as it is conscious, must approve what the divine will is necessitated to do. Therefore the divine mind looking on the world as it is—putting aside the case of man for the present—must judge the world to be just, right, wise in its constitution. And if the world seems wrong to us, our judgement must be false—seeing that the divine mind disagrees with ours, and judges the world to be right.

So far there is common ground of agreement—the world must be right, whatever it appears to us. Now we go a step further.

### **Free Will makes no Difference**

We put forward the following proposition: Given that the world is right, it does not matter whether it is the product of the divine will acting of necessity or a product of the divine will acting freely. To take an illustration. If eight annas a day is a just and right wage for a coolie, it does not matter



whether I give him his wages freely or of necessity. The kind of will by which it is done makes no difference. What is right in itself must be right whether it is done freely or of necessity.

Weigh well this thought, for it has far-reaching consequences. If the Theosophist gets rid of his difficulties about apparent evil in the world by saying that the world must be right because it is the *necessary* output of the divine nature, he must go further and admit that, even if the world is a product of the divine *free will*, it must equally be right; and this for the reason given, viz., that whatever the divine will produces, the divine mind must approve; and whatever the divine mind approves must be right in itself because there is no other standard of right except the divine mind. Hence the problem of evil gives no ground for denying the freedom of the divine will. And the Theosophist, in resorting to a necessary will, is only increasing instead of diminishing his difficulties.

We go further and say that the theory of God's free will solves a difficulty which the Theosophist cannot solve at all. This difficulty lies in the fact that, if we honestly face the case, we must feel that evil in the world is a reality, and that even *we* can conceive a better world than this. We can conceive a world free from pain and thwarted tendencies; a world in which everything would work out in terms of pleasure, and in which there should be no mutual destruction, no ravin and bloodshed, no conflict or discord, no disease; a world in which the rate of propagation should be proportioned to nutritive resources, and death should be without pain or suffering. If we were endowed with omniscience and omnipotence we can conceive ourselves producing such a world. Moreover, we cannot regard these conceptions as a pure delusion. But if *we* can conceive such a better world, the divine mind must also be capable of conceiving it.

**Not the Best Possible World**

Here comes the point. If God produces the world by necessity, He must produce His best. This is an axiom—that the divine, acting by a necessity of its nature, must necessarily produce the best. It is only when we assume free-will that it becomes possible for God to produce something short of His best. Among all possibilities there will be a good, a better, and a best. And it is the prerogative of a free-will to be able to choose the good, and to leave aside the better and the best.

Starting, then, from the conviction of the human mind that the world as it is is not the best possible world, Catholic philosophers unanimously hold that God in creating the world did not do His best—that He could produce worlds indefinitely better than this one. Finally, the Christian holds that the imperfection of the world is in itself a proof that God produced it of His free will and not of necessity. There seems no way of evading this result, unless by placing the human mind under a radical delusion.

But it will be objected that if God could do better He ought to have done so. The answer is as follows: If God had nothing in view but to produce a *physical* world, the objection might have some force. But we hold that God in creating the world had a higher—that is, a moral purpose. The world was made to serve as a training-ground for man. God might have made man otherwise than he is—an ideal sort of being, free from pain and infirmity and from moral struggle. But what God wanted was precisely to make this world a probation for a future world, and to give man every scope for moral development. He gave man something to struggle with, and gave him the powers with which to carry on the struggle. Leaving out of count all theology concerning

the fall of man, the supernatural system, and the rest, and confining ourselves to what we can see by unaided reason, it is clear that life is a great system for this sort of probation. On every side there is something to test what sort of stuff a man is made of, and what he will get out of his faculties and his environment; and the existence of pain, of sufferings, of lower impulse and higher aspiration, of mysteries, and problems for the mind—the existence of all these things has for its end the probation of man.

With this the Theosophist will perhaps easily agree. But mark its consequences. Such being God's great design and end, He has chosen the sort of world which will best serve to that end—not the most comfortable world, not the most intelligible world, not the easiest world, not the most perfectly constituted and harmonized world—but a world mixed up with good and evil, perfection and imperfection, in just the best way to promote that end. Hence the world is the best, the wisest and the most just, regarded from the end in view. To use scholastic terms, the world is not *absolutely* but *relatively* the best.

### Advantages of this View

We are not ignoring a crop of difficulties which spring up round this theory. These we may discuss in detail later on. At present we are concerned with giving an intelligible answer to the general problem; and we maintain that, as a general solution, this one given by Christian philosophers has distinct advantages over that of the Theosophist.

In the first place it leaves all imperfection outside the divine nature, and relegates it all to the finite outcome of his energy. It is inconceivable how a necessary product of the divine nature, and a product which is identified with it, should be

imperfect or mixed with evil. Once place the world outside the divine nature as a finite and distinct product, and this difficulty is dissolved. Secondly, it restores free will to the supreme, and thus gives us back our personal God ; for, whatever subtleties may perplex us about the concept of an infinite personality, at least this much is clear—that if God is intelligent and free, He falls into strict analogy with our idea of a personal being. Thirdly, the judgement of the human mind, to the effect that the world is imperfect, and that we can conceive a better, is explained. There is no need to regard such a judgement as a delusion ; and at the same time we can understand why a perfect God can rightly produce something short of the best possible world. Lastly, the moral significance of the world is made clear, and a key found for explaining the hidden wisdom and harmony which underlies the surface discord and imperfection of the world.

### The Case of Man

If what we have said carries weight with any of our Theosophical readers, we shall have secured the right to proceed a step further, from the lower world to man. Man is a compound of animal and rational life. He shares with the lower creation the physical evils of pain and thwarted tendencies. But since man is a rational being endowed with intelligence and free will, a new element is added to the problem. As being intelligent, man becomes capable of suffering a new kind of physical evil due to the reflex realization of it. Of this reflex realization the animals, so far as we know, are incapable. For the animal lives from moment to moment, from sensation to sensation, while man (in the words of the Greek poet) is the wonderful creature "who looks before and behind." Consequently he can mentally accumulate past

miseries and anticipate future ones as well as derive experience from them. But besides this, man, through the agency of free will, becomes the creator of *moral evil*—sin, vice or crime ; the reason being that his mind grasps the notion of law and responsibility, and his will and action can run counter to his duty.

Taking the physical aspect of evil (whether mental or bodily) in human life, the same argument recurs as that we have just been threshing out. So far as the evil in human life is not a punishment for sin, so far does it form part of the system of the world as produced and sanctioned by God. Both Theosophist and Christian must therefore agree that apart from punishment for sin the conditions of human life must be right—no matter whether they proceed from the necessary or from the free will of God. It is needless to repeat the argument. Again, the fact that the conditions of human life are not the best possible conditions we can conceive, proves (as before) that they are the product of the free and not of the necessary will of God. We can go on to explain that the end of human life being pre-eminently moral, the world as it is must be admirably suited to secure the probation of man—no matter what difficulties we find in realizing this in detail.

The question of human life is in some respects easier than that of animal life. In human life the existence of sin and virtue enables us to consider pleasure and pain both in the light of reward and punishment, and also as medicinal and preventative of sin, and as a help and encouragement to virtue. With the animals this is not the case. Pain cannot be a moral instrument to the beasts who are guided by instinct, and have no morality or immorality. But this point is to be observed : that if on seeing the animals suffer without guilt we can declare that God's goodness is not really compromised.

thereby, we ought on seeing man suffer pain without guilt to be able to allow that this also must be right. Here is a line of demarcation between the Christian and the Theosophist. The Christian holds that *there can be suffering which is not punishment*, but which has salutary offices in other ways; the Theosophist, on the contrary, seems to hold that *all suffering is punitive*, and he resorts to re-incarnation and Karma in order to be able to locate the guilt in a previous life. The Theosophist, however, ought to be prepared to make a concession here, and to allow that there may be suffering which is useful without being punitive—a concession he will be all the more ready to make in view of the existence of unmerited suffering in the lower creation.

· Before we actually proceed to discuss Karma, however, we must still clear the ground a little more. We must ask and answer the question: Does the problem of evil, as Mr. Beaman supposes, really abolish the idea of God as a Father? We believe that when once the idea of the Fatherhood of God is correctly stated, and when evil is looked at in the light of the above arguments, the existence of evil need not deprive any man of belief in the divine Fatherhood. To this subject we shall address ourselves in the next chapter.

## IX

### THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

ACCORDING to Mr. Beaman the problem of evil, when considered in connection with the unequal and sometimes the "cruel" distribution of suffering in human life, must drive the mind to reject the idea of a personal God. "The difficulty," he writes, "is fundamental and inseparable, lying in the detachment of God from men, positing in Him precisely the same kind of love we bear our children, precisely the same kind of power we exercise over them, but extending that love and power to infinity. No human, much less a divine parent, would dream of inflicting such punishments as upon this hypothesis God daily inflicts upon His children for the gravest imaginable faults; how much less, then, upon children who had committed no fault at all! From this dilemma there is no escape. Either the Christian God is not omnipotent or He is not all-loving." Actuated by this consideration, Mr. Beaman rejects the Christian idea, and resorts to Karma, according to which the sufferings of life are all in punishment of former sin in the same individual; and all is thus seen to be just though without mercy.

#### The Personal God

The difficulty thus stated does not tell against a personal God in the sense of a being who is intelligent, conscious, and free. This the foregoing chapters have shown. Moreover, the difficulty does not militate against the essential rightness of

the world, since we have seen that on any hypothesis the world must be right, whatever difficulties our minds may feel concerning it. We go further and say that, even if for argument's sake the doctrine of Karma is assumed, this would not necessitate the rejection of a personal God—always supposing that by a personal God we mean a God who is conscious and free. A Catholic theologian would find no difficulty in admitting that among other possible schemes of creation there might be found the scheme of a world ruled solely by the mathematical *régime* of Karma. He might go further and admit, or even maintain, that if Karma is taken in its essential justice the Christian theology would claim a much closer likeness to Karma than is usually supposed. We maintain that God's mercy does not encroach on His justice. The maxim "As a man sows, so shall he reap"—the epitome of Karma—is a saying of St. Paul; as is also the pronouncement that "Every man shall be judged according to his works." The difference comes in when we try to explain the method by which this essential justice is put into execution. The Christian places it at the end of the present life; the Theosophist makes it run through an indefinite series of lives. The Christian gives a finality to the result of this life whether for well or for ill; the Theosophist gives no finality to the result of any life until Nirvana or well-being is reached. Still, with all this difference, both agree that essential justice is preserved intact. And if the Christian introduces the idea of mercy, this must be exhibited in such a way as not to interfere with this equality of justice.

We are stating the case, not explaining it, the object being to establish common ground and narrow down the ground of debate. But what we maintain is that, even if Karma were admitted, its acceptance would not necessarily involve the rejection of a personal God in the sense defined.



**The Christian System**

If, however, the law of Karma were accepted as the *whole* explanation of the unequal distribution of suffering in human life, it might at least militate against the idea of God as a loving Father in the Christian sense. Let us, however, hasten to explain that the Christian idea of the Fatherhood of God is not what Theosophists seem to imagine it to be. This point is of such importance that we must treat of it at some length. The subject, however, is a large one, and we must content ourselves with expounding it in the barest outlines—stating the doctrine somewhat crudely, and avoiding side issues and qualifications.

At the root of the Christian system lies the distinction between the natural and the supernatural order. Described roughly, the natural order means what is inherent in man according to his essential constitution, while the supernatural means an additional, superior, and more intimate relation between God and man—a relation which we describe as a gratuitous favour superadded to what is inherent to human nature.

It is not as if man was first created in a state of nature, and then the higher supernatural privilege was added as an afterthought. On the contrary, we maintain that man was created in this higher relation; and, but for a certain occurrence in history, there would have been no need to distinguish between the natural and the supernatural at all. The distinction, however, would still have existed, and it would have been made in this way: Whatever is inseparable from a man's being is called natural; and whatever above this can be separated or lost is called supernatural. As a matter of fact, however, the fall of man into deadly sin brought with it as a punishment the loss of the supernatural privilege and left man with that only which was inherent to his nature.

To be definite. Taking man in his nature, we find that by creation he is dependent on God as on his maker ; and as a rational and free being he owes to God the service of obedience to the law of right conduct. On the other hand, God stands to him reciprocally in the relation of a creator and a master. By this relation we are not as yet *sons* of God, and He is not a *father* to us. The relation is that of master and servant, not that of father and son.

Man was not, however, created in this lower relation, but by an added privilege was elevated to the closer relation of sonship—a sonship, however, which was not natural and inherent, but adoptive, and therefore a privilege capable of being forfeited by sin. As a matter of fact, that relation was forfeited by the fall of the head of the race ; and—according to the analogy of human family-disgrace—the loss was inherited by the whole family. Then as the central fact in the great drama of the world’s history came the means of reconciliation and restoration. This reconciliation was wrought on Calvary. This restoration was achieved by the Incarnation of the Son of God, who thereby became the “first born among many brethren.” By Christ’s brotherhood with man we recovered the privilege of our adopted sonship—Christ being the first-born and head of what may be called the human family of God. This is why the Fatherhood of God is the very essence of the Christian system. The whole Christian creed is enucleated in the Incarnation. Any view of Christianity which regards Christ merely as a great teacher and example is absolutely inadequate. Any idea which regards Christianity merely as a system of atonement for sin is also inadequate. Christianity is essentially more than this. It is the re-establishment of the Fatherhood of God and the adopted sonship of men through the medium of the Word made flesh.

**God as a Master**

Now, if this conception of the true meaning of Christianity is ignored, the Fatherhood of God must be ignored with it. An outsider facing the problem of evil in the natural order has to reconcile the inequalities of life with the divine justice, but not with the divine mercy. To him God is a creator and master, lawgiver, rewarder, and punisher. But though in a certain sense he must attribute love to Him, it will be the comparatively dry love of the just master, not the tender love of a father. The master does not spare his servants. He gives them tasks and toils to do—hard tasks, it may be. His love is shown, not in letting his servants have an easy life, but in seeing that their burdens are not beyond their strength and in paying their wages when due. His servants must work first and then enter into their reward, and the work given must consist in some burden to bear through the heat of the day, to be rewarded by a just wage in the evening. We do not say that on this analogy the problem of evil in the natural order can be wholly solved. But what we say is that in trying to solve it there is no need to increase the problem by inducing the idea of God as a loving Father—in fact, such an idea ought not to be introduced. A just equation between work and wages is the only solution to be sought.

There is another point of importance to be noted, and it is this: Suppose for argument's sake that the Christian account of the world's history is the correct one. Then a part of that system is the doctrine that sin has had its disordering effects on human life and has induced on the collective race a collective penalty of suffering—with this consolation only, that suffering, besides being a punishment, is a deterrent and a medicine and a stimulus to good. Does it not follow that the existence of evil in the world can have only one explana-

tion ; and that explanation will be found in a knowledge of its cause ? According to Christian theology that cause is "original" as well as personal sin. Hence it may well be that the problem of evil remains always insoluble in the natural order, just because its only key is to be found in the dogmas of the supernatural order. Hence the problem refuses to be solved except by accepting the Christian faith.

### God as a Father

We suggest the thought and pass on. Turning, therefore, to the supernatural theology of the Christian revelation, we acknowledge the Fatherhood of God. But it is the Fatherhood of one whose children's character and lives have been marred by sin. The world as it stands, with its heritage of sin and the consequences of sin, becomes the house of God inhabited by a family of former outcasts newly restored to a privilege which had been lost.

In what effective relation does the Fatherhood of God stand to this state of human life ? In the first place, we must not regard God's rulership of the world as one which is perpetually interfering with or adjusting the currents of physical causation. Whether we are Materialists or Theosophists or Christians, we all agree in this—that cause and effect determine the order of physical events. And if there is any modification of the lines of sequence by the special intervention of God, that is the exception, and not the rule. Though the moral order is the higher end to which the physical is subordinated, nevertheless the moral order is conditioned in its working by the physical. In human thought we can imagine the divine mind prospecting a certain scheme of the world, finding it suitable for His moral purpose, then decreeing its existence. This gives the circumstances under which the moral purpose is to

be worked out. The natural course of causality results in a certain inequality of physical conditions for each individual; and the outcome of human action again results in certain other inequalities. This inequality the divine will sanctions as a basis of moral government; and from it as a starting-point comes a spiritual adjustment which makes every human life different, yet which secures essential justice and equality—so that each individual, knowing his own case from beginning to end, would recognize the rightness of the divine dealings in his regard. Even in those cases which seem to us to defy explanation the same essential rightness is preserved, though we fail to discover how. Nevertheless we can suggest certain lines on which this essential justice may be worked out.

### **Moral Probation**

The first line is that of moral probation. Moral probation is the key to life. Every individual is furnished with such and such faculties and opportunities, great or small. The question is, What use will he make of them? The result depends on the use of free will under the direction of conscience. Each life is judged, not according to concrete results, but according to the equation between conscience and conduct. To put it mathematically: X receives one unit of light and power; nothing but a unit can be the result. Take the street arab who has the least possible knowledge and is handicapped by every possible limitation—strong inherited passions, strong temptations, little inducement to good. Still there is some glimmering of right and wrong; and his life is estimated by his fidelity to that glimmering. More is not expected. If he follows that spark of light in the few particulars in which he can he has achieved a moral success, no matter how unlovely his actions apart from that

one light. From another to whom a hundred units of light and power are vouchsafed, a hundred will be required for success in the moral sphere. Between the two there is an immense material and surface difference ; but morally and in point of probation the first with his one unit and the second with his hundred units are at par. Morally speaking, the case is just for each and all—just, because men are not judged by concrete results, but by the equation between units of opportunity and units of co-operation with opportunity. The man who possesses the minimum attains his end in life by obedience to that minimum. The one who possesses the maximum attains his end by co-operation with that maximum.

No matter how things look externally, the essential justice of God's dealings is realized in this. The spectacle is perplexing to our eyes ; but to our reason the question is one of proportion. Those who have done religious work among the rough and vicious classes of the submerged tenth come to love them for the good there is among them. The drunken sot, who in his better moments is sorry and in his worse moments subsides again, sometimes edifies the worker for souls more than the dowager in satin who has no vices. Priests tell us that some of the most edifying deaths they have witnessed are those on the gallows. We are sure that workers in the slums often find the grace of God more manifestly there than under the seemingly superior circumstances of aristocratic life, just because the worse conditions bring out the better traits more emphatically where they exist.

### **The Key to the Problem**

Without going into the subject more deeply, it is enough to indicate the key which opens the door to the meaning of life regarded from the point of view of moral probation. And the

result is to distrust all those estimates of life which are made according to standards of culture, refinement, and instruction. This thought cuts at the root of all objections to the inequality of men's lives. It does not solve the problem in detail. It leaves difficulties which almost overwhelm the mind. But it gives a clear principle which shows how essential justice can underlie the most glaring surface discrepancy ; and then we fall back on first principles for the rest. We make an act of faith in the essential rightness of the divine dispensation, and are saved from rejecting our theological belief because we recognize that the detailed solution of the problem has not been given us.

Then, again, if we take the physical aspect of suffering, here also we can remove the edges from the difficulty, though we cannot intelligibly dispel it. A Theosophist, who dislikes the name evil and prefers to talk of opposing tendencies, must agree with us in saying that, speaking in general, pain has its valuable functions in the world. In most cases the pleasures of life outweigh the pains, and the pains themselves are more intolerable in the sympathetic imagination than in the reality. At the same time it is necessary to make the candid acknowledgement that the suggestions we are able to supply are far from satisfactory when applied to details. They serve as a general explanation, especially if the truth of the Christian theology is accepted. But even then there still remain certain cases—such as that of a child who dies early of convulsions and without baptism, or again that of the street arab whose spiritual chances are to all appearances worse than his physical ones. It must be admitted as self-evident that the theory of Karma affords in these cases at least a surface solution such as no other theory provides. But, as we previously observed, the simplicity of a solution is no criterion of its truth. The Materialist has a simpler solution still.

**Mistakes about Fatherhood**

But now let us turn to the supernatural Fatherhood of God and ask what its qualities will be.

As soon as the idea of a "loving father" is introduced the imagination comes into play. Let us at once dispel certain misapprehensions. The loving father some people seem to imagine is usually a rather soft-hearted, weak-minded papa who lets his children do what they like—threatens them if they do wrong, but has not the heart to whip them soundly—who shrinks from all pain; is entirely out of balance as soon as the children cry, and kisses their hurts till they are well. Naturally a father in whom the sentimentality of soft-heartedness runs riot in this way is no type of the divine. But by emphasizing the tenderness of divine love one is apt to fall into such a degraded idea. With Mr. Beaman's protests against this sort of thing we heartily join. Any such notion is false and misleading. If human fatherhood is to be taken as a basis of our concept of the divine, we must banish all this sort of nonsense. We must picture the ideal father whose feelings do not smother his reason; who has in view not so much the comfort and pleasure of his children as their training and highest well-being. He purposely allows his children to meet hardships and to feel wants lest they grow up muffs. He practises their self-control by imposing orders and restraints not really necessary in themselves. He lays down laws which the children do not yet understand, but which they can carry out. He whips them even before they come to the age of reason, in order that their instincts shall be subject to will when the time of reason arrives. He is kind but stern; gentle and yet severe. There is nothing of the maudlin about him. He is a ruler with backbone, and intends to put some backbone into his children too. The



problem before him is to get the best result out of pain as well as pleasure, and to turn out men who shall be a credit to the race.

So far to correct the maudlin idea of the divine tenderness. Then, again, the human father is after all a creature of limitations, groping his way and making mistakes—afraid to punish and afraid not to punish ; afraid to put too strong a trial, and afraid to leave the child without trial. But God is all-seeing and all-wise, and can arrange with absolute accuracy for the attainment of a certain result, and, to speak in a human way, can try the boldest experiments without risk as to their consequences. Whatever the evil plight in which natural causality has involved the individual, the issue will ultimately be right.

### The Scope of Justice

Then, again, there is the question of justice. When once we start with the assumption that the divine mercy does not encroach on the divine justice, we recognize that mercy and justice must be exercised in different direction and not in the same. Speaking broadly, essential justice lies in this: that virtue and vice shall have their proportionate and unerring reward and punishment meted out at the end of this life of probation. This we believe in spite of the many objections which may suggest themselves to the mind. As we have already observed, the Christian system embodies the essential note of Karma in a much fuller way than is usually understood. The essential note we refer to is the just distribution of well-being and ill-being according to the measure of each individual's deserts. That principle is not marred by the introduction of mercy, or by an unequal distribution of gifts in this life. The time of balancing alone is different. The stock objection will of course be taken from the efficacy of

repentance to secure forgiveness. But when analyzed this only means what Karma means in teaching that virtue can cancel vice. The Christian theology gives a high cancelling power to the virtue of repentance ; that is all. But more than this. The Catholic doctrine of purgatory has for its object the exact balancing of sin and punishment. Again, a difficulty is urged on the ground that man's eternal state is fixed at the end of this life in one of the two extremes of well-being or ill-being—nothing but an act of final penitence or impenitence deciding the difference. Here again the essential justice of God is still maintained. The difference between a soul passing from life as a friend of God and one passing from life as His enemy is absolute, and proportionate to the extreme difference of results.

It may, however, seem an objection that so momentous a change should be made in an instant. This only brings out the fact that virtue and vice, when reduced to their roots, are internal acts of a spiritual being, which are not measured by bulk or time, but which lie simply in the attitude of the free will in relation to right and wrong. Such a theory cuts at the root of the fallacy of measuring moral goodness or badness as we would measure beer by the gallon or gas by the hour. It brings out in startling prominence the fact that though sin in its consummation involves external actions, its essential malice lies in the internal will—that sin in its essence can be perpetrated by thought in an instant, and can with the same instantaneousness be rescinded by a change of the attitude of the will—even though its external utterance cannot be undone. It is precisely by forgetting this Christian truth that our judgments of men are usually so wrong. We forget that the death on the gallows can be holy, while the death in the palace can be vile ; that the benighted burglar may die in a better moral condition than the enlightened courtier ; that the

life of inherited degradation may compare favourably with the life of the smirking and proper churchwarden, when viewed not in its material output exhibited on the stage of the world, but in its true inwardness. Baffled as we may be by detailed questions, we can at least stick to the fundamental principle that if Karma maintains the essential justice of the universe, so does the Christian revelation—less obviously perhaps, but not the less surely.

### **The Scope of Mercy**

It being therefore a first principle that mercy cannot be exercised in such a way as to interfere with this law of ultimate retribution, we must suggest some other way; and this is the way we suggest. Mercy lies in providing that during life there should be every facility for reconciliation and for the cancelling of sin and its effect. Justice taken alone would find no place for repentance and forgiveness. It is not in the nature of things that virtue should cancel vice. Virtue after all is a duty. It is only what is owing to God as part of our service. Vice, on the contrary, is a desertion of duty; and to do what we ought, to-morrow, is really no compensation for having done what we ought not to-day. The mercy of God exercises itself in accepting repentance for sin as something which shall cancel sin, and in accepting acts of duty as something which shall cancel breaches of duty. Mercy consists in accepting the vicarious goodness of Christ as a reason why our contrition should have the high value and efficacy it actually possesses. In a word, the mercy of God is embodied in the ministry of reconciliation inaugurated by Christ—by reason of which human transgressions can be blotted out.

Thus it will be seen that the personality of God is not a mere theological fact concerning the nature of God, but is one

involving the highest moral relations between God and man. If in human affairs the principle of forgiveness for repentance holds a noble place, it cannot be unworthy of the divine being, —who in some ineffable manner is believed to be the prototype of the highest perfections of the human character. And a theology which harmonizes with the highest and best of human ideals must be a closer representation of the divine than a mathematical justice without heart or soul, which would be unlovely in humanity, and which, we not only hope but believe, is not an adequate account of the divine governance of the world.

If the gentlemen who are so assiduous in finding objections to the Christian idea of the Fatherhood of God would only take to studying that idea in connection with the whole Christian system, they would, we believe, recognize how infinitely more satisfactory is a system which establishes personal relations between God and man than the system of an impersonal Supreme whose only tangible relation to the world lies in a heartless and soulless law of mechanical retribution such as is embodied in the theory of Karma.

## X

### A PARSI'S LETTER AND A COMMENT

WE have received the following communication from a Parsi contributor :—

SIR,—I have read all your articles on Theosophy and Christianity with great attention. The one specially which treats of "Evil and God's Free Will" has interested me very much, and to my mind it is the most important so far. You certainly deserve the best thanks of non-Christians as well as Christians, since in this series of articles you are not only defending the Christian cause but also that of the non-Christian against this new monster of evil which has crept into our midst of late and is working havoc all around. In perusing this article, however, I encountered several difficulties which made me stop and reflect more than once, and failing to satisfy myself I am obliged to trouble you a little with this letter. The first thing that puzzles me is the question about the origin of Evil. You have told us that Almighty God is fulness of love and perfection, and consequently Evil, the existence of which is a stern reality, could not have come from Him. I have nothing to urge against this, except that you make no attempt to tell us how this Evil outside God came into existence, and whence it first came into this world. You write : "It is only when we assume free will that it becomes possible for God to produce *something short of His best.*" Here again the words "something short of His best" puzzle me, for I cannot conceive of a world created by God, who is the highest *perfection*, containing even relatively the slightest *imperfection* in it. If the Almighty God is nothing less than fulness of perfection, then how can imperfection come into a world from Him, no matter whether He creates it from necessity or free will? The creation of a "good" world with some proportion of imperfection in it, no matter for what end it may be introduced, would necessitate a belief that either materials for imperfection came direct from God Himself or lay close by His hand and outside Him. If we accept the former, we are making a statement philo-

sophically absurd ; if the latter, then the imperfection comes from a source outside Him, and He is therefore not directly responsible for it. To say that it was open to God to do His best, but that He chose for some reason or other not to do His best, would be to assign to Him the power of exercising free will as we finite creatures exercise it, and I am afraid is likely to open up grave difficulties with regard to the inner essence of "His Divine Majesty" and the way of working of His divine Will.

You also write : "But what God wanted was precisely to make this world a probation for a future world, and to give man every scope for moral development." I would be very curious to know whether you can reconcile this statement with the history of the sixth day of the Creation immediately before the Fall, when Adam, full of godliness, innocence, and manly beauty, stood in the Garden of Eden as lord of the creation, and when pain and death were equally unknown.

It is also difficult for me to understand what you mean by saying that this world of ours is a *finite* one, especially in the strict sense of the word, since we know for certain that the Being who created it is an *Infinite* Being.

One word more and I have done. You say that we can conceive a better world, "a world in which everything would work out in terms of pleasure, and in which there should be no mutual destruction, no ravin and bloodshed, no conflict or discord, no disease ;" . . . that "if we were endowed with omniscience and omnipotence we can conceive ourselves producing such a world." To say the least, was not Paradise on this fresh-made Earth in which the first Man was placed blessed with all these gifts from its divine Creator? I am told by authors of renown that the Garden of Eden, in which the great father of mankind was located in order that he might look after it, was not much inferior to the heaven in which the blessed servants of God reside for ever.

Now, sir, I shall be highly obliged if you can see your way to insert this letter in your valued journal, and clear up the difficulties I have humbly laid before you.

A PARSII.

### Our Comment

Some of our correspondent's questions concern purely theistic doctrine, while others call for explanations of Christian

belief. Our Chapter ix, which appeared after his letter was written, will to some extent have met him half-way. But it is important to keep an exact line drawn between purely theistic philosophy and Christian revelation. In order to meet our correspondent as far as possible on common ground the best thing will be first to discuss his points theistically, and where this fails to resort to Christian theology for the rest, making it clear where the transition is made.

The first question is to explain the origin of evil.

(1) *A perfect and an infinite God produces a finite and imperfect world. This is the thesis to be explained. Hence the double question—*

(a) *Can the infinite produce the finite?*

(b) *Can the perfect produce the imperfect?*

Let us deal with these purely theistic questions in a purely theistic manner.

The answer is absolute, conclusive, and yet unsatisfying—*Ab esse ad posse valet elatio*. God is infinite and perfect. The world is finite and imperfect. The one has produced the other. What God *has* done He *can* do—that is the end of the matter. How, we do not know.

Our correspondent, if a theist, will admit that God is infinite and perfect, and also that the world is the product of Him. He must also admit that the world is finite and imperfect. Those who hanker after making the world infinite must still admit that the world is made up of parts—parts of matter and force and life and souls and bodies—which may extend indefinitely through space beyond the known star-system, but which are still finite in all their extension. We certainly fail to attach any intelligible meaning to a world which is *actually infinite*; and if it consists of finite parts measurable by numbers it is useless to complicate the problem by what, as far as we can see, would be a figment of the brain.

Unless we are going to talk nonsense we must conceive the world as a finite product of an infinite being.

Then, again, that the world is imperfect is the fundamental supposition of the argument. We cannot think of the world as perfect and at the same time puzzle our heads with the problem of evil. Therefore we conclude that the finite and imperfect world, the product of the infinite and perfect God, must be taken as an ultimate fact; and our inability to add anything like an intelligible explanation simply shows that we ought to recognize the limits of our faculties and rest content with what we have got. In this matter the Pantheist, the Theosophist, and the Theist are all in the same box as regards ultimate insolubility, as we have shown at some length in our previous essays.

The second point can be enunciated thus:—

(2) *Must not God in creating the world have done His best?*

The answer is clinching though paradoxical. An infinite being producing a finite world simply *cannot* do his best. God's best must be infinite; and yet an infinite world is impossible—seeing that an infinite world would be nothing less than God Himself. An infinite world would mean infinite being, infinite perfection, and infinite attributes. Unless God can produce Himself—another self—He cannot produce such a world. If God creates He must create something *not Himself* and *not equal to Himself*—and therefore, something finite. Now take the idea of finite being, and what do you find? You find indefinite grades of perfection, one higher than another. Take any grade of finite being you like. Since it is finite, you can double its perfection, and double that, and double that, indefinitely; and you will never reach infinite perfection—just because the finite multiplied by anything except infinity will still remain finite and capable of further



multiplication; while to multiply the finite by infinity is a mathematical figment and nothing else.

Given therefore that God in creating must create a finite world, the world must always be short of His best. One concession, however, must be made. Each grade of finite being can be perfect in a sense; that is, in its own order. You can have a perfect horse as regards all qualities which the type involves, and a horse is an imperfect being only in a *negative sense*; viz., that it has limits—that it has not for instance the higher perfections which are proper to man. But this does not interfere with the general proposition, which is rigidly logical; viz., that, however perfect the world is in its own order, there are indefinite grades of higher and therefore more perfect worlds which God could have chosen to create instead of this one. In other words:—Whatever God creates must be short of His best.

This abstract reasoning, however, still leaves the question:—

(3) *Given that no world can be absolutely God's best—still must not God, in choosing to create a certain grade of world, make that world perfect in its own line?*

The answer is again clear and simple:—It must be best for the purpose for which it is intended by its creator. If that purpose is to produce merely a physical order, then (as we admitted before) we should expect God to make that physical order perfect as such. But if His purpose is to produce a moral one—to which the physical order is subordinated as an instrument—then it may be that a world which physically is less perfect will serve that moral purpose better than one which is physically more perfect. Now seeing that the present world is physically imperfect, we can—without resorting to any Christian revelation explanatory of the cause—argue fairly that, taking the world as it is, it is clearly well adapted to the moral probation of mankind through the very defects which we

see in it. It proves our character by furnishing us with high ideals, and with obstacles to attaining those ideals; it proves us by furnishing us with an inquisitive intellect, and yet putting obstacles to knowledge. It makes us suffer for our follies, and teaches us to learn wisdom from consequences. It makes us suffer for the follies of others, and so teaches us to refrain from involving others in our own follies. It shows us others suffering, that we may compassionate them and alleviate their needs. It imposes suffering on ourselves, in order that we may experience the like kindly ministrations from others. It is a splendid school for humanity; testing and trying men in every way. It gives us enough light to live by, but not enough to revel in. It teaches us our limitations and our dependence on God at every turn. We might go on enlarging on this theme. But let this suffice. Even though we cannot see the divine purpose working itself out in every detail; at least the general scheme is clear enough to show us that the world, even as it is, can be the best possible world for attaining the moral purpose which God has in view. And the admixture of evil and imperfection we find in it, is just that which brings this purpose most prominently before our eyes. In this relative sense, therefore, the world is God's best; and its limits and imperfections cannot be turned to His reproach.

So far without introducing Christian revelation. When once this latter is resorted to, the light of Theism is immensely increased by the light of revelation. Our correspondent proposes a question which carries us on to this revelation. He asks in effect:—

(4) *Did God originally make the world a mixture of good and evil such as we find it now; or was the world first made good, and then spoiled afterwards? If the latter, whence did the spoiling originate?*

Answering this question first from a theistic standpoint, we

can easily see that a large amount of the evil in the world is of man's own making. Various follies, want of careful foresight, neglect of reasonable precautions, bring men into evil plights which could be avoided. But more than this. A large number of diseases are the direct product of vice, which not only injures the guilty individual but produces an inheritance of disorder for posterity. Men suffer also from the violence, the fraud, and the malice of their fellow men. And in fact it may well be surmised that, if everybody had behaved himself reasonably at all times, the wretchedness existing in the world would be very small indeed. Even the very progress of civilization, by contravening the rules of healthy existence, has created evils which a more simple and primitive mode of life would have escaped. So that, even without appealing to revelation in the least, we can see that the problem of evil is for the most part the product of various kinds of unreasonableness and sin.

This is why in our former chapters we laid so much stress on the existence of pain and thwarted tendencies in the *animal* world. The existence of evil in human life is, comparatively speaking, no problem at all. It affords difficulties in detail, but not on the whole. Once grant the power of free will and the choice between right and wrong; and then disorder in human life is broadly explained—the only difficulty being to see why the innocent should be allowed to share in the punishment of the guilty. For moral evil and its consequences an intelligible explanation can therefore be found. What we cannot explain is why *animal life*, which is not capable of guilt, should be so organized as to include carnage, ravin, suffering, and the rest. And it is here that we have to fall back on the *à priori* principle that what the divine *de facto* has produced must be right whatever it may seem to us. When we have once made this discovery that the lower world must be right

whatever we think of it, we have bridged over the real difficulty, and shall find the problem of human life half solved thereby.

Another point. Still keeping to theism, let us imagine what the world would be like as first constituted by God. We suppose that the theist would take up some line of evolutionism—the struggle for existence, the survival of the fittest, and so on. Let us for argument's sake take this line too. Then we remark that a sick or damaged animal would naturally breed sick and damaged offspring, with the tendency for the line to die out. Again, the pain which accompanies ill-being would be a stimulus to seeking means of relief and better health. Whether we suppose creation to have involved a sudden production of types of life, or a gradual development of varieties, makes no difference to the case. Natural causality, working itself out, involves always this consequence:—that the children inherit in some degree alike the advantages and the disadvantages of their parents, without having done anything themselves to incur those effects of heredity. And we must hold that it is right for God to have produced a world worked on these lines—from the simple fact that He has done so.

But now turning to the case of man, we shall find the same principle at work. The saying that “the children suffer for the sins of their parents” is not so much a penal law instituted by God's arbitrary will, as a principle seated deeply in nature itself. We are still arguing solely on theistic lines; and we say that, however man came to exist—it makes no difference to the case. As man he was differentiated from the animals by this:—that, whereas animals can desire and seek only the things they feel a natural craving and bodily need for, man can by his intellect create ideas and desires independently of such appetite and bodily need. To be clear:—

an animal eats because it feels an appetite for food, and when the appetite is sated it wants to eat no more. Man, on the contrary, by brooding on pleasures of food, can create desires beyond appetite, and thus can become a glutton. The same applies to other and still stronger passions which need not be detailed. These reflex longings (which Fr. Joseph Rickaby so aptly calls *psychical* desires) are the basis of a large part of the excesses of life. By indulgence in them a man can ruin himself body and soul. By the absorbing pursuit of an idea or object of ambition he can ruin his health and unbalance his faculties. By irregular and unnatural indulgences he can weaken his constitution and victimize himself to the worst diseases. And as the law of nature is that the strength and weakness of parents descends to posterity, we can easily imagine how man might have begun to exist as a healthy and happy being, and gradually, by indulgence in vicious and irrational courses, have introduced a degeneracy into the race, with all its attendant pains, disorders, and miseries. So that, practically speaking, the evils of human life which exist in the world were not inserted therein by God (who at the beginning pronounced His work "very good"), but by man himself abusing his intellect, imagination, and free-will. Hence, even on theistic lines, it seems reasonable to accept the idea of a primitive state of well-being—a sort of Eden—followed by a fall of men into sin, and the inheritance of the penalties of sin by the individual and the race. In short, without appealing solely to revelation, the poet could sing :—

“Or man's first disobedience and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world and all our woe.”

This being so, the Bible story of the primitive innocence of man, of Eden, the Fall and its consequences, is but a divinely

furnished and amplified representation of what reason suggests—adding in greater relief the moral aspects of the case.

Our correspondent, however, finds a difficulty in our statement that *what God wanted was precisely to make this world a probation for a future world*. He asks:—

(5) *How can this be reconciled with the teachings of Genesis about the primitive well-being of man and his freedom from death? If this primitive condition was what God intended the world to be, how could He have at the same time meant the world to be a probation for another life?*

The theological answer is again simple. Though death (in its aspect known to us by sad experience) was not originally designed, we do not teach that man was to live for ever in the present life. Even Adam's life was a probation for another life, higher and nobler than this—viz., the absorption into the beatific vision of God—or what we call "heaven." His term of probation being ended, he would, without suffering the pangs and decay of death, have been translated into that nobler sphere—etherealized, if you like, into a higher condition of being, for which this life was a preparation and an apprenticeship.

Again, even in Eden life was a probation for our first parents. This is obvious from the fact that, even in those favourable circumstances, Adam failed miserably to stand the tests it afforded. When we say that "the world God wanted was one suited for a probation," we do not mean that its probationary character lies only in its pains and sufferings. Even now, the pleasures of life are as strong a test as its pains, though in another way. Prosperity tries a man as much as adversity. In fact, it is usually supposed that men who would lose their souls by too much success can and may often save them by the discipline of failure. If suffering tries our patience and courage, comfort tries self-control no less in other ways.

If poverty is a temptation, riches are a temptation too. What we maintain is that the world is designed by God to be a probation of moral character, *no matter what may happen*. Before the Fall it tested men one way; after the Fall it tests men another way. In well-being it provides one sort of test, by ill-being it provides another sort of test. Turn where you will; select any of the different conditions in which a man may find himself; and in no case can you escape from the fact that life is a probation in large things and in small. This, the great divine purpose, is written large in every circumstance of life. And this is why we call moral probation "the key of the problem of life."

Finally our correspondent writes:—

(6) *You say that we can conceive a better world—a world in which everything would work itself out in terms of pleasure, and in which there should be no mutual destruction, no ravin and bloodshed, no conflict or discord, no disease. And he asks:— Was not paradise, in which the first man was placed, blessed with these gifts?*

We answer—as regards animal life, science seems to point to the fact that if a lion existed in paradise that lion must have been a carnivorous beast then as now—and if Adam had dropped a stone on his toe, he would certainly have felt the consequences. As far as we know there is no theological objection to accepting this, since we are not told much in detail of the primitive condition of the world in such matters. But waiving this point, and conceding that general well-being then prevailed in such a way as to obviate the existence of a "problem of evil," three things are to be noted by way of answer; and they are these:—

(1) In making that remark we were dealing with the world *as it is*, and the problem of evil as presented by the world *as it is*,

(2) We were expressly omitting all use of revealed doctrine, and confining ourselves to the ground of reason common to the Materialist, the Theosophist, and the Christian.

(3) We were bent on showing that, however evil the world looks to our minds, it still must be right—even though we could conceive a much better world than this is.

These remarks will show the importance of bearing in mind the exact scope of each of our chapters. And, in fact, it was to avoid this sort of misapprehension that we added a footnote, cautioning our Catholic readers that we were waiving the question whether the present state of the lower creation was connected with the fall of man. To introduce such questions in such an argument would have been to confuse an otherwise clear issue. We have tried, however, to do justice to the question, both from a theistic and from a Christian point of view.



## IV.—KARMA

### XI

#### KARMA IN GENERAL

AND now at last for Karma. By Karma we do not merely mean the abstract law that "As a man sows, so shall he reap." This is a maxim of Christianity, and needs no disputing about. By Karma we do not mean merely the general theory that every act of virtue or of vice has its proper effects in well-being or ill-being, in reward and punishment. In so far as Karma means merely this, it is a doctrine common to the Theosophist and the Christian. The Christian holds that everything in life has its eternal consequences either in the grade of reward or in the grade of punishment—even down to the cup of cold water given out of a virtuous motive. If in the final results there is only one step between eternal reward and eternal punishment, this, we have shown, is because there is between dying a friend of God and dying His enemy a transcendent polarity proportional to the result. If a moment's repentance can evade the consequences of long-accumulated sin, this is only because of the enormous value placed on repentance by a God who wills not the death of a sinner but rather that he may repent and save his soul alive. But even in case of repentance and consequent reconciliation, Catholic theology still maintains that the temporal consequences of every sin remain, and have to be paid down to the uttermost

farthing. Hence the state of Purgatory for those who, being substantially in a right relation to God, have still to face the consequences of their forgiven misdeeds by a purgative process. It is true that certain objections can be formulated against the Christian system. The exercise of mercy seems to modify the effects of justice. The power of vicarious merit and of intercessory prayer seem to do the same—seem to *let people off cheaper*, as we may say, than the mathematical conception of retributive justice (Karma) would require. But if we cannot solve these difficulties to the bottom, this is rather from want of complete knowledge than from the existence of any positive inconsistency. Our explanations are tentative suggestions and nothing more; and in the end we have to fall back into this position:—it is not transparently clear how these doctrines—the value of repentance, vicarious merit, divine mercy, unequal distribution of graces, intercessory prayer, &c.—are worked so as not to interfere with the law of retributive justice. But at least that law (what we may call the “Christian doctrine of Karma”) is certainly revealed. We hold to the law of retributive justice as to a firm principle. And since mercy, and the other doctrines which seem to interfere with the course of divine justice, are revealed truths also, they must all be understood on the basis of the fundamental principle, viz., that mercy in God must be so exercised as not to interfere with justice—a harmony which may be difficult in our limited human minds, but which is not only easy but inevitable in the Infinite being. No attribute of God can suffer by the existence of another. God’s infinity cannot be a disadvantage to Him. And as a man who exercises justice with mercy is better than a man who exercises justice alone, so is it with God. But while finite justice sometimes requires to be modified in order to exercise mercy, infinite justice, which cannot be modified, must not be allowed to deprive God of

the attribute of mercy too. In other words, Infinity must be regarded as an advantage, not as a disadvantage, to a being possessing it—as not limiting but amplifying his perfections, and increasing the harmony of their co-existence.

### The Two Positions

We therefore assume Karma, in this general and abstract sense, as a principle common to Christianity and Theosophy. The Theosophist cannot accuse the Christian of repudiating or abandoning this principle of perfect retributive justice in the cosmic scheme. Therefore, beginning from this principle as common ground, the dispute falls on the actual method by which the principle is carried out. And this, in a nutshell, is the difference between the two positions:—

The Christian holds that the whole system is worked out by one earthly life of probation, with a final reckoning and adjustment made at and after the close of this one life. The Theosophist on the contrary holds that the whole system is worked out by an indefinite series of lives similar to this one, and that the reckoning and adjustment made at the end of one life determines a fresh starting-point for the next, and so *ad indefinitum*. The ethical difference is enormous. In the Christian system, all man's eternal destiny is concentrated in one term of years; and the ultimate consequences of the use made of this one life are final, eternal, and irrevocable. In the Theosophical system, our one present life has no such final, eternal, or irrevocable significance. This present life is but one link in a chain of indefinite length; one step in an indefinitely long journey. It is true that every false step carries with it its consequences; but they are reversible consequences, and the step can be retraced at any time—not merely during this present life, but during any of the indefinitely numerous

lives which are to follow this. "As a man sows, so shall he reap." Thus say both parties. "Yes," adds the Christian, "but there is only one sowing-time, and the agricultural work you do during this one season will settle your harvest once for all. Mind then that you take your short spell seriously to heart, and do what you ought to do in good time—otherwise you are a ruined man." The Theosophist on the other hand must say: "A bad crop this year will handicap me next season—that is true. But the effects of this season's neglect can at least be undone next season by giving to the work the extra energy which this year I prefer to devote to flying kites. It is true I shall have to pay for every jot and tittle of my present neglect; but at least the results will not be final or eternal. Viewed in the light of eternity, life is not after all the same thing as it would be if this present life were my only chance."

We do not mean to assert anything as to the actual seriousness of Theosophists in their view of life. We are only emphasizing the points of difference in the systems under comparison. It will be seen at once that the point of discussion is reduced simply to a question of fact:—Have we only one earthly life? Or do we pass through a series of lives? That we have this one life is obvious. That we have no other earthly life after this, is asserted by Christians on the grounds of revelation. Those who assert a series of lives are asked to prove their positive assertion. We are not called upon controversially to prove the negative. Those who assert the series have the whole burden of proving the actual existence of such a series—of proving to me that I lived another life before this and shall live another after this. We cannot accept a statement of such magnitude without evidence. A Theosophist may accept the belief simply because it appeals to him as an attractive idea. But so long as it is a mere attrac-

tive idea it would be folly for him to pin faith on it and act on it—seeing that in the end he may find out that the idea of a series of lives is a delusion, and that this life alone was his total chance.

### Arguments for Re-birth

If we examine the grounds on which the Theosophist maintains a series of lives, we find them reducible to two. First that belief in re-birth has held possession in the minds of a large percentage of the human race for a long series of centuries. No one, however, would claim this argument to be conclusive. It merely shows that the idea is not intrinsically absurd—since otherwise it would not have lasted so long. It does not show that it is correct in fact. A still larger percentage of the human race seems to have believed that this is the only life on earth, to be followed by some sort of future existence which is final ; but it would be impossible as well as useless to deal with the matter in a statistical manner. At the most, the large following which the idea of re-birth has received argues for its reasonableness *as an idea*, but not for its actual reality as part of the cosmic scheme. We therefore pass the argument over with a bare mention.

The other ground for belief in re-birth is that it works out successfully as an hypothesis explanatory of the problem of human life, and that it gives an intelligible account of certain difficulties concerning the inequality of men's gifts and sufferings in relation to the justice of the divine scheme. In this point lies its appeal to the mind.

Let us dispense with unnecessary discussion by conceding what can be conceded, so as to concentrate on what cannot be conceded. We admit that the workability of a hypothesis and its explanatory power is, according to modern methods of

research, taken as an argument for its truth. Speaking strictly, the heliocentric system of astronomy stands on this ground—that it is a hypothesis which explains all the known facts, and (better still) enables new and unknown facts to be discovered by its application. Thus our knowledge of two of the planets is due simply to an inference drawn from the general theory of gravitation and elliptical orbits, which form the basis of the heliocentric system ; and other instances of scientific anticipation could be mentioned. A hypothesis verified in this way passes out of the region of reasonable doubt. But it will not be contended that the theory of re-birth has secured such a verification, or anything approaching to it. Yet at the same time a probable argument can be drawn up in its favour if only the assumption of the hypothesis of Karma does serve to explain the facts as a whole.

The question therefore is this :—Does the theory of re-birth explain the facts? In some degree this may be conceded. The re-birth theory does wipe away certain particular difficulties which no other system can get rid of. Take the standard case of the two children born in two extremes of ill-being and well-being—neither having in the present life done anything to merit punishment or reward respectively. The Christian explanation will satisfy one who already believes in Christianity. But it is not very much of an explanation. It rather assumes that the case *must be* all right, and merely suggests some considerations showing how the justice and goodness of God may work themselves out to equality in the final results. That is all. The Re-incarnationist has the advantage here. He says :—“The matter is as simple as the multiplication table. The condition of these two children is the mathematical outcome of a former life. The one is born thus in proportional reward for virtue. The other is born thus in proportional punishment for vice. What could be simpler ?”

No thinking Theosophist would dare to claim that this facility of explanation amounts to a demonstration. All he will reasonably claim is that since with his theory the case can be intelligibly explained, it furnishes an argument in favour of his belief.

### Value of Hypothesis

This we might concede—adding, however, that the value of the test is precarious. It is not always a good sign that a theory should sweep difficulties away. As we saw in a former chapter, the Materialistic theory of the universe sweeps away the difficulties both of the Christian and the Theosophist. If everything is the product of matter and force—if there is no God, no providence, no moral ordinance in the world, no eternal laws of justice and right, no moral reward and punishment—nothing but hurtful effects following from hurtful causes—then everything is explained. Whatever happens is the outcome of material causation; and there is an end of the matter.

Are we all to become Materialists because Theistic, Theosophic, and Christian problems are thus cleared away? If this were the whole case we might reasonably become Atheists and Materialists on the spot. But this is not the whole case. It is not even half the case. Those who simply look at the disappearance of the old difficulties will be all enthusiasm for the theory which has removed them so expeditiously. But when they have taken up their standpoint on the new theory, and begin to review the general situation, they will find a host of other difficulties cropping up from places where they never found difficulties before. The fact is that their old belief, which was beset with knotty problems in some points, and found difficulty in explaining them, really did explain a great deal of the meaning of life which now, they find to their

surprise, becomes inexplicable. This is really the whole gist of the arguments against Materialistic theories of life which is put forward by Mr. Mallock in his book—*Is Life worth Living?* and afterwards by Mr. Balfour in his *Foundations of Belief*. In both works the first task essayed is, not to answer the difficulties involved in belief—they do not attempt this—but to expose the difficulties from which belief is free and which arise from unbelief. Both writers show the inexplicability, on a naturalistic basis, of the best and noblest that belongs to human life. And they proceed to argue that, in order to explain these things, we are driven back to belief. “Unbelief empties life of its eternal meaning,” such in substance is the argument—“We cannot with our best instincts allow life to be thus emptied. A theory which thus empties life must be wrong; and only a theory which leaves life with its full meaning and amplifies that meaning can be true. Belief in God, the soul, free-will and a future life must be true, because without them life itself loses its meaning in all that is noblest and best in it.”

### Our Method of Argument

This rough sketch, written from memory of long past reading, will serve to show how we intend to deal with the Theosophical theory of re-birth. Admitting that it removes certain difficulties incidental to our old belief [the one present life plus a future final state], we turn to the other side of the question and ask :—But what are the new difficulties in which the re-birth theory involves us? If we can show that these new difficulties are at least as momentous as the old ones, we shall have succeeded in proving the utter worthlessness of the advantages which re-birth claims from solving *some* problems—seeing that it only gets rid of these in order to plunge us into others.



More than this we hardly mean to attempt. We do not think that a demonstration in the strict sense is possible. Apart from the aid of revelation, we doubt whether reason possesses the data for settling such a question. The re-birth theory is abstractly possible. The only question is one of fact:—"Is re-birth actually part of the working of the world scheme?"

Our task therefore is twofold—first to show that re-birth either fails to solve the crux it professes to solve, or solves it only by creating other difficulties, as great, or greater. Secondly, that the only serious argument for re-birth—viz., the power of explaining the problems of life—breaks down; hence the utter absence of any argument whatever for believing in it (even provisionally) as a fact. We can anticipate our line of argument thus:—

(1) Re-birth does not really explain the inequality of human conditions except in a few selected and individual cases. In other cases it utterly fails to give an intelligible explanation.

(2) Re-birth, even if it explained the inequality of human conditions regarded as punishment or reward, deprives punishments and rewards of their moral significance.

(3) Re-birth, instead of providing incentives to virtue and deterrents from vice, removes such incentives and deterrents, and rather gives sanction to utter recklessness of conduct.

(4) Re-birth is fatal to responsibility; and instead of tending to the evolution of ordinary humanity, tends rather to wholesale degeneracy.

(5) The failure of re-birth as explanatory of life, added to the utter absence of any verifiable consciousness of former lives, leaves the theory without the smallest rational basis for acceptance.

## XII

### OBJECTIONS TO KARMA

THE explanation provided by the re-birth theory shows up at its best when applied to the standard case of two children who are born, live, and die in extreme well-being and ill-being respectively. But as soon as we take other cases the explanation is at least as unsatisfactory as any other.

#### Fluctuations of Life

There are souls born in the most favourable conditions who, without any known demerit of their own, fall in later life into frightful calamities, and, in spite of conduct full of merit, have still to suffer misfortune in a notable degree. There are others born in the worst of conditions who, through no apparent merit of their own, rise by good fortune to high well-being. There are catastrophes, such as the earthquake of Lisbon, or the failure of the Glasgow Bank, or the fall of the Tay Bridge, which involve in ruin a miscellaneous collection of people, good, bad, and indifferent, of all ages, and under all conditions. By such sudden catastrophes the bride is taken and the sorrowing bridegroom left; the guilty mother sees her innocent child perish miserably before her eyes; the noblest lives are poured out like water, and the basest escape scot-free. All these things work themselves out by a course of natural causation, which seems to exercise no discrimination amongst individuals. What light does Karma throw on this compli-

cated problem? Certainly not more than Christian theology does—perhaps less.

The Christian theory admits the rule of material causation in the lives of men; it allows that God does not settle men's lives on the lines of exact and immediate retribution here and now; but that, while placing men under the natural vicissitudes of life, He makes a final adjustment of retribution when this life is over. Every kind of prosperity and every kind of adversity has its eternal value. Every talent and opportunity carries with it a proportionate duty, and every deprivation carries with it some compensation. By this theory we can account for life as a whole. And if the Christian must perforce confess the detailed working out of the divine goodness and justice to be an insoluble mystery, the Theosophist must perforce do the same. If the Christian falls back on the general principle that whatever takes place *must* proceed from the divine goodness and justice, the Re-incarnationist must do the same. If the Christian cannot discern the workings of divine love and justice in the accidental breaking of my leg, the Theosophist must confess himself equally at a loss. The Christian and the Theosophist will both agree that the accident was the immediate outcome of material causation. But in explaining its moral significance the Christian will say that is for my good in some hidden way, and if borne well will have its reward; while the Theosophist will say that it must be a punishment for some sin in this or in a past existence, otherwise it would not have happened. The Christian assumes divine goodness and justice, and therefore concludes that all is right. The Theosophist assumes the inexorable Karma, and therefore concludes that all is right. Both of us stand before a problem unsolved except on the most general *à priori* lines. In short, as regards explanatory power, Theosophy and Christianity thus far stand at par.

**A Case in Point**

To enforce this point, let us take a supposed case which every one will allow true to life. "A" is born under the most favourable conditions, morally, mentally, and circumstantially. He lives up to a high standard of virtue. You would say that Karma had fixed this connatal condition out of the results of former lives, and that the life of virtue which follows ought to confirm the well-being of that man. Yet in middle age he accidentally cripples himself or contracts cancer, and passes years in acute suffering, to die at last in the greatest misery. How does the Theosophist explain such a case. We can think of three expedients :—

Either (1) the Karma settlement at birth was delusive—his punishment was suspended for forty-five years, and then was unexpectedly visited upon him. For half his life he has enjoyed all the pledges of possessing a good balance of virtue and reward for his past career, and is now disappointed to find that after all his true karmic reckoning had been postponed.

Or (2) whatever we may fancy about the virtuousness of his life, the punishment falling on him in middle age he had really brought upon himself by secret sins. In that case we can always regard a misfortune in life as a sign of actual wickedness. This is a thesis which no one can reasonably maintain.

Or (3) the misfortune falling on him is really a blessing in disguise, which affords him an opportunity for patience and heroism, and which will be rewarded in the next life. This is the Christian answer, and one which, if accepted by the Theosophist, involves the giving up of Karma as an intelligible explanation in any sense which the Christian theory cannot also claim.

The first explanation is the only feasible one from the Theosophic point of view. Yet see what it involves. It means that Karma baffles our calculations—plays us tricks, and creates delusions as to our state in the scale of moral being. The wretch of the slums who is supposed to be punished for his past career may, after all, be only passing through a short purgatory, to emerge in later life as a being high in the grade of merit. The brilliant early career which is supposed to be the reward and seal of a virtuous past may, after all, be only a spell of delusive well-being lasting till the karmic retribution bursts out like a storm after half a lifetime's delay. If Karma is to afford an intelligible explanation of our states of life, it must work with mathematical regularity in a way which enables us to infer the karmic state of the individual from his condition of well-being or ill-being. An erratic fluctuation of good and bad fortune, such as is so common in life, simply throws such calculations to the winds. If there is no ascertained uniform relation between the actual distribution of well-being and ill-being and the actual merits and demerits of the individual, then Karma fails to stand the test as a detailed explanation of life.

### Second Objection

But it is not only in a negative manner that Karma fails. The greater failure is yet to be considered. Even suppose that the first difficulty were met, and Karma were able to explain the actual fluctuations of life, in terms of reward and punishment, it still manages to deprive reward and punishment of their proper meaning and value. In order to see why this is so, we shall have to go somewhat afield.

**The Revelations of Yog**

It must be acknowledged by the Theosophists that ordinary people possess not the slightest consciousness of their former existences. Some of them claim that by the practice of Yog, or some other peculiar exercise, individuals can arrive at some conscious memory of their past career and identity in previous lives. For instance, suppose that I worked at Yog hard enough, the present range of my personal consciousness, which goes back only to the time when I was a little toddling child in petticoats, would gradually widen and open out to my consciousness long vistas of previous lives. I might then find that instead of being an insignificant unit belonging to the twentieth century, I had really been in turn many of the biggest men that have swayed the world. First I was Seth, then Nimrod, then Abraham, then Noah. After that I remember the time when I was Saul; and having misbehaved myself, I fell in the ranks and became a stonemason at Tyre, with cross-eyes and a tendency to dropsy, of which I died. Then, through my humility and other virtues, I worked upwards again, and found myself Thucydides. I remember, in fact, writing my history as well as I remember writing last week's leader—only, of course, I forget much of what I wrote. Then, by further growth in virtue, I became Pliny; and afterwards found myself a Roman Pontiff under the name of Gregory the Great—in fact, it was I who sent St. Augustine to England. The next life I remember was that of Cranmer. How I had degenerated to that I really do not remember. Then I became Richelieu, and, last of all, Napoleon. As Napoleon I did some things which I ought to have left undone, and, as a due punishment for my sins, I was born to a fate which has reached its highest punitive intensity in making me the editor of a local Catholic weekly in Bombay.

Fancy Thucydides, and Pliny, and Gregory, and Napoleon, coming down at length to that ! However, by working hard in my present arduous avocation I hope by degrees to rescue myself from this indignity, and—Karma knows—why should I not in half a century find myself Emperor of Russia ?

This, they say, is what one may come to by the persevering practice of Yog. However, it looks as if Yog requires a deal of practising before one even begins to get a glimmering of consciousness of any previous life at all. Mrs. Besant—so we have at least been told—has at last discovered that she was formerly a Brahmin of Benares. But she has not provided any data of a biographical nature regarding her Brahminical life. Nor has she communicated to us her other successive personalities in the roll of history, nor told us how from a Brahmin she lost caste and became a Western—I suppose the Hindu might say—*Pariah*.

### Karma without Yog

Now, whatever one may think of the efficacy of Yog to revive the memory of previous lives, this much is certain—that it requires a tremendous horse-power of Yog to get even the first glimmerings of pre-existence at all. And it is certain that the overwhelming bulk of humanity have never practised Yog, and never will practise it ; and that, in consequence, the human race on the whole has been, and is, and will remain, absolutely devoid of consciousness of any previous existence at all. And, moreover, they will continue, as in the past, to laugh at those who claim to have attained the privilege consequent on Yog, and refuse to believe that any one does become conscious of past lives at all. It is useless to say that everybody *ought* to practise Yog. You may preach Yog till you get blue in the face and fall down in a fit, and it will have no

practical effect at all on the overwhelming mass of the human race.

Therefore, as a practical fact, supposing that we have had a series of past lives before this one, they are at least an entire blank to us; and as far as consciousness is concerned, they are just as if they had never been. I *may* have been Julius Cæsar. Good! But in my present state of consciousness Julius Cæsar is just simply not me, but some one else altogether. He is just as much another man as Lord Curzon is another man—the only difference being that Cæsar is a figure in ancient history and Lord Curzon is a contemporary. Opinion may be divided as to the virtues of Lord Curzon's administration of India. Some may think his Karma ought to issue in punishment; others may think it ought to issue in reward. But, reward or punishment, it is all the same. I cannot feel the least claim to be rewarded for Lord Curzon's administration, and should think it grossly unfair if I were punished for it. The man who does the deed ought to take the consequences, not me. But Julius Cæsar, who was my former self, is to me just as much another man as is Lord Curzon; and as I should feel it gratuitous to reward me for Julius Cæsar's good deeds, it would be to me the height of injustice to punish me for his misdeeds.

### Limits of Responsibility

The Theosophist will reply that, if Julius Cæsar was really myself, then his deeds were really my deeds; and in punishing me for them Karma is only punishing the person who committed them. This common sense utterly repudiates. Morally speaking, a man's personality does not transcend his consciousness; and it is the continuity and unity of a man's



consciousness which measures his moral responsibility. Suppose that I spent a week in delirium, and in that condition committed some crime. In that state I was still the same being, body and soul. But the continuity and unity of my consciousness were interrupted; and for all moral purposes I was, during that spell of disorder, another being. To punish me *while myself*, for something done while I was *not myself*, is no longer punishment in its moral sense. It is essential that the deed and the punishment shall belong to the same *conscious* being. The Ego which is conscious of having gone against my better nature and the dictates of my conscience, is alone the Ego which shall receive the punishment. The mere identity of substance goes for nothing. I—the *present living Ego*—is the only Ego which I can call my own; and I repudiate as *not mine* all those acts which you Theosophists tell me were done by me in a previous life. I say those lives were *others' lives* and are not *my* life, in any psychological sense of the word. I consider it equally unjust that I should be born crippled as a punishment for past acts apart from my present conscious life, as it would be unjust to punish me for acts performed by a totally different being. Call it a matter of *physical consequence* that the harm done in another life should induce on me penalties in this present life, and I agree. But I refuse to call it "punishment," because I—the only Ego which I acknowledge as mine—did not do those deeds. Why, then, should I suffer for them?

Thus it is that the theory of Karma—when viewed in the light of the fact that life is separated from life by a blank of consciousness—deprives punishment and reward of its moral significance. It is repugnant to reason and common sense to transfer merit and demerit from one life to another, unless those lives have between them a full continuity and unity of consciousness. In short, Theosophy, in admitting (as

it is forced to admit) that the "individual" but *not the person*<sup>1</sup> survives through the series, places a gulf of utter unconsciousness between the deed and its punishment, and visits a punitive penalty on one who cannot acknowledge responsibility for the act which is being punished. Call it "cruel fatality" if you will. But Justice, in any moral sense, it is not.

Our next point follows immediately from the foregoing. We have seen that the moral isolation of one life from another in the series makes it irreconcilable with our idea of justice that the present Ego should suffer for the misdeeds of a past Ego, seeing that the two Egos are unconnected with each other by continuity or unity of consciousness. Hence the moral significance of reward and punishment is destroyed, since the very notion of punishment, morally considered, lies in the fact that the same conscious Ego which performed the crime suffers also the penalty. We can now change the point of view, and instead of looking at the past look at the future.

According to Karma, every misdeed which I perform in this life will be visited upon me in my next life. But unfortunately the present "me" does not survive the transition. The consciousness which began with infancy in this present life will lose its continuity at death; and in its place

<sup>1</sup> "Person" here is used, not in its *ontological* but in its *psychological* sense. The scholastic idea of a person means "a subsisting being, standing complete in itself;" and in this sense the re-born would be the same person. But person considered psychologically is "a self-conscious Ego possessing continuity and unity of consciousness and moral responsibility," and in this sense the personality can only extend to that spell of life which is consciously mine. Apart from the alleged effects of Yog, Theosophists are bound to acknowledge that our conscious unity extends only from the infancy of our present life. We follow the terminology usual in modern English literature on the subject.

another spell of consciousness, unconnected with this, will succeed. As the past Ego does not survive to experience the penalty of its sins, so also the present Ego, holding in consciousness all the misdeeds performed in this present life, can rest in the full assurance that it will never feel the punishment for them. That penalty will be borne by a different Ego, one which did not perform these deeds of mine, but will have to suffer for them, as I have had to suffer for another Ego previous to mine. Clearly, then, as far as incentives to virtue and deterrents from vice are concerned, the law of Karma is entirely inefficacious. People sometimes imagine that Karma ought to make a man serious, seeing that every deed will have its infallible consequence in punishment. But this idea is exploded when once we realize that the doer of the deed never feels the consequences of it. One individual being—one bit of spirit stuff—lives successively as Peter, James, and John. Each of them are separate beings morally and psychologically, though physically the same. James, the middle one of the three, reads the "Life of Peter" his predecessor, and finds it as objective to him as the life of Lord Kitchener would be. He can no more identify himself morally with Peter than I can identify myself with Frederick the Great. Yet the re-incarnationist tells us that James is suffering all his life from the misdeeds of Peter, or reaping the reward of Peter's virtues. James rejects that idea in the name of reason.

"What is this topsy-turvy system you are trying to foist on me?" he exclaims. "Do you think it right for me to suffer for another man's sins?"

The Theosophist answers: "But, my good fellow, Peter is not another man. He is yourself in a previous life."

"Stuff and nonsense," replies James. "Do you think me a fool? Peter is no more myself than you are. I did

not do Peter's deeds, and ought not to be punished for them."

The Theosophist replies: "You are wrong. You did Peter's deeds; but in another consciousness separate from this. You simply do not remember; that is all."

"Don't remember! That's a nice system. Would you think it right to let a child go on in wickedness till he has forgotten that he ever did anything of the sort, and then drop on him and punish him for things he knows nothing about? Besides, where is your proof that I ever was Peter?"

Theosophist: "Well, it is only a hypothesis to explain the sufferings of life." James gets peppery.

"Hypothesis be dashed. A pretty explanation it provides! Don't you see what it means? It means this: that instead of each man bearing the punishment of his own sins, each man has to bear the punishment of some other man's sins and escapes scot-free of his own—at least as far as the practice goes. Why should I suffer Peter's penalty when I do not incur Peter's guilt? That is a far bigger problem than any you want to solve. And here is another: Why should my successor, John, bear my penalty when he cannot incur my guilt? No, your Karma, which pretends to make punishment the other half of crime, really separates the punishment from the crime and gives it to another man. Instead of making every man bear his own burden, it makes every man bear somebody else's burden and escape his own. You Theosophists reject the ideas of vicarious punishment as a failure of justice; but as far as I can see, your Karma is one universal system of vicarious punishment and reward, and that, too, of the most objectionable kind. It ought to set every man grumbling at the unfairness of it. Another thing: it simply gives a man a positive inducement to be careless and vicious if he wants to ——"

Theosophist: "How so?"

"Why, this way. What is to stop me from indulging in every kind of vice, when I know that I shall never experience the penalty? Poor John will have to pay for it all, of course. But why should he not? Am not I suffering now for Peter's sins? Peter had his fling and escaped his punishment. I too can have my fling and shall escape the punishment. If I must suffer for some one else, why should I not take compensation by getting the most enjoyment out of life as a set-off? Why should I practise heroic virtue, and patience, and self-denial, when I am not to experience the benefits of it? Why should John profit by my good life, while I am suffering for Peter's sins and gaining nothing by my own virtues?"

"But, my dear good man," interrupts the Theosophist; "don't you see the nobility of virtue? Do you wish another to suffer for your misdeeds? Where is your altruism—your love of the race? Of course I don't admit your position. I am only arguing on your own lines."

"Virtue for its own sake is all very well," replies James; "and no doubt self-sacrifice is a noble thing. But I call it a topsy-turvy system for a man to suffer for another, and to escape his own burden; and the existence of such a preposterous dispensation invites preposterousness in return. You must take humanity as you find it. And taking the average man, you can hardly expect him to slave away at his business in order that others shall reap all the benefit of his industry. I don't want to take a mere mercenary view of the matter, but if all one's efforts are to be fruitless to oneself, there is not much incentive to work. It is a hard affair to struggle with one's lower inclinations even when one feels sure of reaping the reward. But Karma is a system which gives the reward to other people and not to oneself—just as it gives the punishment to other people and not to oneself. Imagine a

school in which the second pupil is thrashed for the faults of the first pupil, and the third pupil receives the prize won by the second pupil—and then you will see what practically the system of Karma means. Do you think there would be much work or good conduct in a school organized like that? Every boy would be grumbling because punished for other boys' faults. And every boy would take his fling because the canings he incurred would all fall on other boys' shoulders. The result, taking human nature at a practical aggregate standard, would be utter degeneracy for the race."

The Theosophist can only make one monotonous and ever repeated reply: "I grant that it seems on the surface as you say. It does look as if one man's sins are all visited on another man, and one man's rewards are all enjoyed by another. Peter, James, and John do really seem to be different beings, but this is only because of the want of memory. With proper enlightenment, James would distinctly remember himself as Peter, and would be conscious of the guilt of Peter, and of the justice of his present sufferings consequent on his sins committed while he was Peter. He would also see that the virtues or vices he practises as James, and which are to be visited on John, will really be visited on himself—because John will be his own self under another name and in another life. Hence everything in Karma is just and fair, appearances notwithstanding."

This is all very unsatisfactory. If Karma claimed to be a mysterious and puzzling system, to be believed on faith in spite of the insoluble mental difficulties it involves and the moral perplexities it induces—then there would be something in the answer. But Theosophy claims for Karma more than this. Theosophy claims that Karma is an intelligible answer to the problems of life—and a clearer and more intelligible and satisfying solution than that of any other system. And

so it appears to be at first sight, when tested merely by the single case of the two babies and their discrepancy of fortune in life. But as soon as we begin to think a little deeper about it, Karma, instead of proving intelligible, proves utterly unintelligible ; instead of being clear it is hopelessly incoherent ; instead of explaining the problem of life, it utterly befogs it and deepens it ; instead of being a system of retribution, it becomes a system of vicarious punishment of the most extreme type ; instead of stimulating earnestness of life and upward effort it destroys in great part the stimulus already existing in other systems ; instead of putting life on a rational basis it turns the meaning of life upside down ; instead of explaining everything it explains nothing, and involves what was otherwise explained in fresh confusion. As an attempt to furnish a satisfactory solution to the problems of life and human destiny, it is our mature conviction, after prolonged examination from all points of view, that of all attempts hitherto made by the human mind, it is the most preposterous, the most perverse the most demoralizing, and the most unredeemable we have ever met.

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12











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