

ON BELIEVING AND LEAVING

I

IN ANCIENT times there was a widespread belief that the Earth was flat; that day accompanied the sun on its journey across the heavens from its emergence, fresh and dripping, from the Eastern Seas to its dip, worn out and weary, into the Seas in the West. Darkness lay upon the Earth until the sun, all refreshed, arose again from its nocturnal bath. Some even had it that the sun died each night in the West and that a new sun was born in the East each morning. But Astronomy (and, as we like to believe, common sense as well) teaches us that we see the same sun appearing in the morning, if we are up and about, that we saw disappear in the West at nightfall. We, you and I, bend a sort of superior smile, perhaps a bit derisive, on those who held this old belief; for science has taught us that "the Earth is round like an orange;" that it is not a stationary, flat plane over and under which the "sun moves," but that it is a spherical object itself moving around a fixed sun — fixed, that is, in relation to the Earth; an object turning on its own axis,

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segments of the surface successively coming into the light and receding into the shade, causing the phenomenon of day and night.

I said that you and I bend a sort of superior smile on those who held this ancient belief; though what lies behind the smile is, in reality, more akin to pity; not, perhaps, so much for those who in times of ignorance held the belief as for those who, today, with knowledge laying its treasures at their doors, spurn its offerings and hug their delusions. I may say that, as for me, this feeling of pity towards the entertainers of this particular belief extends to those who have entertained and still entertain other of the world's great superstitions and delusions; delusions which once held mighty sway, and still in a way are potent, in the domains of human thought, aspiration and endeavor.

I would not wish to seem blindly intolerant of certain beliefs which have been, and certain others which now are, held by mankind. On the whole, as these unfold themselves before my inner vision, I find them in a way pathetic and, frequently, amusing. They become intolerable, and I intolerant, only as their devotees present them, each as the sole channel of individual and social salvation. Beliefs, in general, are conditioned by mental and spiritual factors rooted deep in the far distant past. Differing in character, like the onions, the turnips and the

lilies in the garden, some men are born to believe, some to doubt, others to reject all belief. All draw their belief-life from the soil of the past. The free man is he who can rise superior to background — to the vapors of the soil — and breathe the pure air above. As for that belief in the flatness of the Earth, a few misguided and not-to-be-informed mortals still hold to it. But, in spite of a few individual and sporadic cases, a world which once held pretty generally to the belief has left it flat.

Now, that particular belief probably antedated religion and the gods. It arose from primitive observations of physical phenomena by primitive minds. But even the primitive mind — possibly because it is primitive — is not satisfied for long with the seemingly obvious explanation of externalities. There must be a mystical interpretation to satisfy the mind which, through evolution out of seeming nothingness, is becoming spiritualized even primitively; which is entering the first stages of a spiritual consciousness. The flat Earth, with the air above and the waters underneath and the all-penetrating ether, was soon to be peopled in men's minds with beings celestial and demoniac; spirits or sprites soon were to inhabit every physical form and manifestation. Phoebus Apollo drove his chariot athwart the sky. Heracles cleaned up some dirty messes; and he, too, being a sun god, in conjunction with the

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corn gods, the gods of the vine, the gods of the sowing and of the harvest, the river and innumerable other gods of mental and physical states, made the Earth a safe, wholesome, productive and altogether interesting place in which to dwell. Ancient man at one time or another believed in all these gods; and the various and varied forms of religion grew out of a desire to propitiate them. These gods were just as big and potent, as moral and divine, as the men who made them — and no more so. The gods of the tribe were greater, more complex and more powerful only in so far as the tribal composite excelled the individual's portrait. For man makes his gods; and in my way of thinking, there is no god interested in man personally which man himself did not create.

However, man did not create that active and external principle, that creative energy which had no beginning and will have no end, which we may call the spirit of life. The spirit of life is just as personal to — just as jealous of — the amoeba as of man; of the dog as of the Doge; of the insect worker in the coral grove as of the prophets of the Almighty themselves.

The authors of the stories of the Creation in the Biblical Book of Genesis knew of these mystical beings with which the ancients had peopled the Earth and of the gods which had been set up. These

story writers, however, belonged to a spiritually advanced race whose own god was single, indivisible and undying. To this race its god was the One god. He had all the powers, attributes, qualities and characteristics of all the other gods put together; all the other gods and demons. He was compassionate, cruel, merciful, malicious, gentle, jealous, loving, vindictive all in one. He had to fight for his own against all the other gods of all the other races; not denying their existence but placing them in a lesser category. It was simpler and more satisfactory for the race which conceived the notion of a single god-head to worship and to propitiate one god than a dozen. It was a step in the direction of an orderly theistic evolution; a conservation of the energy of worship, quite in line with that genius for organization and consolidation which is characteristic of this race. And this step was taken long before the story of creation was written down. It supplied the material for that story. These other gods ministered but narrowly to the processes of life — the god of the vine for drink, the god of the corn for food; the god of the flocks for food and raiment and shelter. You may readily discern how important to the shepherd tribes was the god of the lamb — the tribes which repudiated the "Lamb" of god. The god of the sun ministered to health and fertility, as when the life creating rays entered the womb of the Virgin

Earth and encountered the fructifying influence of the gods of the rain and the dew. Belief in the multiplicity of gods waned and the one god stood for a time in the ascendant. The story in Genesis indicates quite clearly that that which was translated or perverted into the One God was in reality the spirit of life — the spirit of creation. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." He divided the land from the seas. He filled the sea with fishes and told them to multiply. He covered the earth with grass and told it to grow. He set in the heaven (the Sun) a greater and (the Moon) a lesser light. He told the earth to bring forth plant and animal and told them both to fructify and replenish the earth. He created man — male and female created he them. And he blessed them and said unto them: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over every living thing." Up to the word "subdue" the spirit of life was speaking — there god took up the strain: and man, whether he would or no, has followed the injunctions. Indeed man has gone so far in subduing the earth, and in subduing the heaven also, although that was not "nominated in the bond," that he has discovered laws and natural principles that have led him to question the scientific accuracy of the story and the processes set down therein; but have not led him to question the exist-

ence of the eternal spirit of life and its instrumentality in the process of creation and maintenance, not only of the heaven and the earth and the sun and moon and stars of the story, but of the great cosmic universe in which the Sun in Genesis and the earth upon which it was told to shine are but as a filmy speck of dust upon the garment of infinity. The Earth in Genesis had not acquired the dignity of a planet; it was just the earth! One can leave without regret a belief in the story in Genesis as a recital of time and space actualities and leave it without dimming the splendor which envelops one's glorious vision of the spirit of life.

Although the Hebraic story of the Creation is an integral part of the Christian Bible and its acceptance is regarded by the majority of true believers as fundamental to Christian belief, yet all types of Christian believers repudiate the One god idea as set forth therein and uncompromisingly stressed throughout the Old Testament. The monotheistic idea was good enough for the Hebrews of the old dispensation; but to suit their own purposes the Jewish founders of the Christian religion cut up their god into three equal parts with inter-relations so involved as to lead to inextricable confusion in the minds of such Christian believers as have minds capable of normal functioning. So that the monotheistic idea, worked out by the Jews with so much of

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love, poetry and human understanding in a world sunken in the mire of pantheism, is left behind by a Christianity under the domination of a church which began almost immediately upon its establishment to lapse back into paganism and into unadulterated polytheism in its worship of Saints and such like minor deities. And now in this enlightened age, if such it may be called, comes Christian Science nursing the hope that there may be another entity added to the Great God Triune; a fifth part it would really be for Roman Catholicism already has added a fourth — The Queen of Heaven. And would it not seem that the Romanists have reason on their side? The mother of a god must of a surety be a god; and the wife of a god must be one in substance with him if gods are to be examples to men; and, too, if the doctrines of the Church are valid both as regards the immaculate conception of the Virgin and the Holy state of Matrimony.

Now, while in contemplating the effect of all this on human mentality a sense of deep tragedy forces itself upon us, yet the divine element of comedy is not absent; and this element invests the atmosphere which surrounds the conception and development of dogmatic religion from the beginning. The progress of the concept is intensely interesting and altogether logical from the unreasoned and primitive idea of fending against the distressful acts of the

elements to the great modern engines of moral force; for every believer in every cult today considers his religion to be a power for good — an engine of moral force. What basis can there be for such belief! Indeed what use is there for morals in any religion which embraces a scheme of salvation! Creeds save — not morals! It must come as an awful shock to many a believer in many a scheme of redemption to be told that salvation does not rest entirely in his fold; and it would be difficult indeed to convince many a follower of the Christian faith that untold millions of sincere human beings were morally and spiritually saved ere the Christian Church came into existence and that millions now are leading moral and spiritual lives without the benefit of Clergy!

II

To know something of religious belief one must look in on the beginnings of the gods. There were and are as many religions, really, as there are gods; and, as we have seen, as many gods as there are people who make them. In popular estimation religion has somewhat to do with man's relationship to god; or a man's relationship to his god. In matter of definition the Bible gives little to lay hold upon. This is all: In James 1, 27, we read, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To

visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself [whoever "himself" may be!] unspotted from the world." Now the really interesting thing about this passage is not the definition of religion but that the idea of duality is present; before God and the Father — not God, the Father.

Primitive man found nature unfriendly, even hostile. The elements, animals and, worse than either, other men were his enemies to be repulsed, battled and guarded against. Man was puny in the presence of nature, and he knew it. (Men know it now in the presence of earthquake, fire and flood.) He must get these things on his side. He used then the same argument, the same process of reasoning that the deist uses now; in fact the deistic idea is a development from the primitive. The very existence of a universe, says the deist, proclaims the presence of a controlling mind within. (God is all and in all!) The existence of objects, animate and inanimate, in nature, said primeval man, being unable as yet to grasp the broader concept, proclaims in each the presence of a special demon or controlling spirit. A stone falls and kills or injures a man; an evil spirit within the stone actuated the deed. The spirit must be appeased; must be propitiated. A tree falls breaking a man's limbs (in any connection but this I would say legs); an evil spirit has impelled the

tree to this action. The man has no conception of the accidental. It is nothing to him that the tree broke its own limbs too. That may have been in part punishment for its meanness to the man. The spirit of the tree must be reconciled to man and appeased so that no other tree shall cut a similar caper. And so down the line through objects animate and inanimate, beings sensate and insensate. Life was just one grand struggle to reconcile all these gods and sprites and demons of earth, water and air to the presence of puny man. That was religion; and in essence still is. This phase had to do mainly with man's physical status and his need for bodily protection; but now another element enters. The belly has to be filled — for a race, like an army, travels on its stomach — and the malign influences which are exerting themselves to thwart man in the exercise of that pleasing though necessary formality have to be met and overcome. Puny man distrusts his own powers, so he invents gods. The hawk-headed god will be his friend in the air; the fox-headed god will aid with his wiles on the land; the crocodile god will keep things going swimmingly in the water. So the gods came into being, invented by man to minister to man's needs. And the god of the corn — his body was broken and eaten; and the god of the vine — he was bruised and his life blood drunk; both that man

might have his belly filled and himself saved — to a life prolonged and full of trouble! So the Sacrament of the Eucharist came into vogue and has been a symbol of man's salvation and regeneration from the dawn of religious consciousness to this day. That was religion; and in essence still is.

And now a third element enters; a third galaxy of gods is to be invented and propitiated; and supernatural aid is to be invoked through magic, through application of formulae, through prayer and incantation. The falling stone has not always killed its victim — it may only sorely have bruised him. The overgenerous gods of the corn and vine may have permitted their devotee to overtax his stomach, and there is a pain in his little inside. To whom is one to go for relief — why to the gods of course; and so man makes more gods; Aesculapius — the fiery serpent in the wilderness — Mr. Dowie — Mrs. Eddy; and men's bodies are healed. This was religion and in essence still is. Somehow it never seemed to occur to primitive man to be cautious, to avoid danger; to irrigate or to sprinkle when moisture was not forthcoming from the skies; to avoid overeating when the gods had too bountifully spread his table. He was not to exercise self-restraint or self-control but was to seek relief from the gods; even if he had to make them for that purpose.

Now comes the fourth element in religion. This has to do with conscious life beyond the grave and appears in two phases; that of a spiritual continuance and that of bodily resurrection. Here again man is impotent within himself, and must seek the aid of the gods. Not only must he importune the old gods, but again, in the matter of bodily resurrection, he must invent new ones. I think the idea of a life beyond life — I prefer that form for if life continues into the beyond there really is no such thing as death, and "grave" is but an empty word, however gorged it may be with dead men's bones — I think that the idea of conscious life beyond life arose in the minds of men of extended ego (who, perhaps, after all constitute a majority of mankind) men who think they have been of so great importance to their fellow-men in this world that their non-appearance in the world to come (which, too, they have invented for their own self-satisfaction) would be a serious, indeed an inestimable loss to the infinite host of the redeemed. These are those who crave future existence in some sort. Those who crave a bodily resurrection must be those who have exhausted in this life all the possibilities of the body along at least one line of human accomplishment and wish an infinitude of time in which to perfect the body in other and an infinitude of arts; or they are those who "stuck on their shapes" wish to disport their figures on the

shining sands of the golden sea of Eternity. There must be some reason why one should crave a conscious existence which shall endure — and be endured — throughout everlasting infinitudes of time; but I cannot divine the reason and the merest imaginative contemplation of such possibility stuns me quite. But we were speaking of the gods through whose intervention this, to me, highly tragic end is to be attained. It is the life and death of the gods which give man hope and furnish example. There were pre-Christian gods a-plenty who were raised from the dead. A noteworthy case was that of the Egyptian god, Osiris. He was slain and his body hacked to pieces by the powers of Evil in the person of a wicked brother who scattered the fragments in widely separated localities throughout the then known world where they were assiduously sought, especially by the women, and reassembled for resurrection. It is interesting to note the prominence of women in the stories of resurrections. Is it because women are the more credulous as well as the more emotional? A tomb was erected on the spot where each individual part of the dismembered body of Osiris was found (thirteen in all if my memory serves). But one part (the fourteenth or the first — depending upon one's attitude towards a certain philosophy of life, or upon which end of the series one reckons from) one part, much to the distress of

the women, never was recovered; and a wooden image of that part had to be substituted when the body of the god finally was resurrected.

The belief in the resurrection of Osiris may be called obsolete; but the story was influential in shaping the Christian doctrine of the resurrection and its implications as regards the future life of men. The major differences serve to connect the two notions the more closely. It was through the faithful ministrations of his son, Horus, that the body of Osiris was resurrected; and it was only through the repetition, in the presence of Osiris, the judge and king of the dead, of a magic formula transmitted to a dead father by a faithful living son, to whom Horus had imparted the knowledge, that the dead father could be raised into eternal life. The painful efforts of countless millions of faithful sons, emulating the deed of one living son of a slain and resurrected god, were necessary to the future existence of countless millions of fathers. This must have seemed like prodigious waste of energy to the simple inventors of the Christian theology who made the one and only slain and resurrected Son of a god do the arduous work with which the followers of Osiris had burdened the countless sons of men. The Christian way is so much easier! While still alive just to say "I believe" to mumbled words in an unknown tongue on the lips of a priest — and,

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in due course, the body is resurrected into eternal life. The "Son of man" replaces the sons of men!

That romantic cycle, the life, death and resurrection of the Corn god, does not contribute much of hope to him who would have the identical physical body resurrected. The old body dies, rots in the earth, and a new body springs up — in fact, many bodies spring up from the seed of the old. What that would signify in populating Paradise I leave to minds endowed with a mathematical imagination. Today we regard the stories of the life, death, burial and resurrection of these ancient gods as symbolic and as in the realm of poetical and legendary romance. It remained for the Christian Church, within historic times, to produce a god whose bodily resurrection was made actual, that is, was testified to as in the realm of historical fact; and the doctrine established that because the body of one member of the Triune god was resurrected, the man who expresses a belief in that triple god through certain prescribed orthodox practices and along established orthodox lines, and no others, that man shall be received into glory in his natural body — resurrected or translated as the case may be. It is all in the Apostles' Creed which stared down from the church walls into my infant eyes and later into the eyes of a youth who saw in it only a fairy tale for half grown-ups. To the youth there lay more of human

interest and adventure in the story of Jack and the Beanstalk. The story of the "nativity" amid lowly surroundings, against a deeply emotional background, was genuinely human and appealing. Being myself a child in a beautiful home I knew that the home, to be really a home, needed children; but having no experience of the world I did not know how frantically (and as I now believe, with what little reason) the world craved gods. On a wave of religious enthusiasm which inundated our community when I was under ten years of age, I was floated into probationary membership in the Methodist Episcopal church, but something within me warned me to slow up and to accept no creed irrevocably. Some time thereafter I learned of numerous major gods who had been born in a stable or cave or underground, which mean one and the same thing; and who having tried to save mankind had, "from the foundation of the world," been slain for their pains. Because these gods had died that men might live I have read their stories with reverence. Perhaps with deeper reverence and fuller understanding have I read the story of Jesus of Nazareth for I could visualize him very clearly, it seemed to me, against the background which was painted for me in childhood. I have studied the genealogy of his male progenitor — not in this connection the Father with the capital "F" but Joseph,

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who is entirely lower case agate in the eyes of the church, and in its light stands a vivid picture of the idealism, of the poetical and human side of the Nazarene. The magical deeds and words which were incorporated into the story of his life and death, by people interested in proving him a god, impress me not.

Fundamental facts in nature and human nature persist and are permanent. It is only the forms of belief grown up around them which change or are discarded. Thus, belief in the personality of Ceres has died, but the fact that nature is bountiful, and that mankind depends for its continued subsistence on that bounty, still remains. The continuing existence of life depends on the continuing processes of production and reproduction, through participation in which sentient life finds joy. But the belief that a worshipful recognition of the god Apollo or the goddess Aphrodite is necessary to the consummation of that joy in man, any more than in the dog, has long since vanished. Our present day orgies and intimacies are not participated in in the name of any god other than our own personal selves. In this phase at least, that of possible indulgence in joy, man is sufficient unto himself and no longer dependent upon the gods. This present day attitude may presage a new era in which man shall be free. The free man in his strength relies on himself. The

slave and the weakling look for salvation from without. Weakness and fear are the parents of the gods.

III

There are beliefs which might be divorced from religion in the narrow sense of appertaining to man's physical and spiritual dependence upon the gods, or upon god, although some minds may, indeed will, be inclined, as in everything else, to read religion into them. These beliefs are changing and taking on new aspects as the universe opens its heart to the loving inspection of the sincere scientist. One of these is the belief that the universe, being an orderly affair, must therefore of necessity be the product of a single orderly mind. This belief is in one aspect a "hang-over" from the story of creation in Genesis; in another aspect it is comparatively new and is acceptable to men who, having rejected the idea of a personal god, yet have not allowed their minds to travel the course to its logical end. The mystic ingredient is potent in their natures and a mechanistic or materialistic conception of the universe is abhorrent to them. Of course any belief, at any time, might easily be held by one to whose mind the extent and character of the Universe was as limited as that in the Bible story, and who could ascribe to the Creator absolutely fantastic attributes such, for instance, as omnipotence transcending the

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limitations of time and space — elements co-existent with energy. But these men are not such.

Said the kindergarten boy to his amazed, and possibly amused, parent who had been trying to instill into the mind of the child some idea of the greatness of god and evidently had overstressed one point: "Papa, I bet there's one thing god couldn't do. He couldn't make a four year old colt in one minute." This was sincerely uttered with no attempt at "smarty-ness" for the clear seeing mind of the child was not to be lost in the metaphysical dust kicked up by and befuddling to his elders.

Have those who believe in the orderly creative mind even slight conception of the bearing of time and space upon the problem, time and space in terms of Eternity and Infinity? Have they projected their minds back into primeval chaos billions upon billions of years ere the suns had begun an orderly swing in their orbits? They might have found that everything then was movement, helter-skelter movement perhaps within that point of energy now known as the electron. It is easy for me to believe that the spirit of life was active, yes! but where dwelt the detached mind which should bring order out of chaos? Not in chaos, surely! Order began when two points of energy fell into step and, finding themselves congenial, that is that their fundamental vibrations coincided, moved side by side with the same rhythm;

or rhythmically opposed themselves to each other. Were these points of energy conscious of the rhythms in which they moved, were they mutually conscious? We may never know. But we do know that in all that infinite chaos two particles did unite and attracted, or were attracted to, another, to others, to billions of like-minded, that is, similarly constituted; and matter, which is order, appeared. There were an infinity of other particles vibrating in an infinity of rhythms, undergoing similar processes and — one day — “violets were born!” Rhythms had tried to harmonize — offspring came, but because of some lack of compatibility or of co-ordination in the parental rhythms were still-born, or worse, were abortions, if any living thing can be abortive in the eyes of the spirit of life. Only sterility would seem to be anathema to that spirit.

But this is a moral as well as a rhythmic universe, as spiritual as it is material. Whence came morals and spirituality? Morals may well have entered into the scheme when rhythms flowed together and kept together and begat sun, satellites and stellar systems. After all these eternal ages of a striving of like to find like, to beget like, to develop like to its supreme stature, is it not quite conceivable, quite within the bounds of reason, that there should be concord within the species of at least the sentient product of the spirit life; a definitely and possibly

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consciously held and enacted code of morals; and is it not quite conceivable, quite within the bounds of reason, that when man came with power of articulate speech and a hand which could grasp a tool and make an implement — is it not quite conceivable, I ask, quite within the bounds of reason, that man, rising out of animal consciousness into the realm of self-consciousness should, within the processes of nature, be able to create distinctions between right and wrong, to argue about morals, establish premises and to draw conclusions and consciously to enact laws for the rest of mankind to break? — and this without the intervention of some extraneous mystical being whom the generality call god, the inferiority complexed call king, the trustingly expectant call father, and around whom the credulous build wondrous stories of power and might and wisdom; of jealousy, love and hatred, and all the other attributes of the gods of all the ages and races! Man has passed in a measure the self-conscious period and is entering into that of social consciousness; when, at some distant day, he enters into the domain of cosmic consciousness and becomes a citizen of the cosmic universe as well as of the world, he will not need for individual safety or self-satisfaction to pin his beliefs on the gods; on the god of the sowing and the reaping; of the killing and resurrecting; for he will vibrate in the harmonies of the universal rhythms and

his spirit will be free; and being life and seeing life he shall know the spirit of life as it is.

When man reaches that beatific stage his mind may entertain the possibility of a spirit inherent in the electron, the ion, the atom, the molecule — hence in matter; a power of active choice which, when conditions are propitious, as they plainly appear to have been in the case of man (and in certain other of the animals), shall express itself in terms of conscious spirituality.

IV

A wise man does not dogmatize too narrowly concerning belief. But one is safe in saying that, in general, a capacity for believing is the concomitant of a type of mind which is very widespread over the habitable portions of the globe. It is a type of mind which easily forms attachments but which, seemingly, is incapable of detachment. Years alone do not bring the philosophic mind. An innate love of truth will start what the years will strengthen in minds naturally free from obsessions. An obsession of any sort is a horrible thing to contemplate; whether it be the religious obsession that the holder is on the one divinely appointed track to salvation, or the mechanical obsession, quite as divine in its essence, that the holder has mastered the mechanics of perpetual motion; each proclaims a closed mind and

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forestalls the possibility of sane argumentation; each precludes the possibility of a sane detachment from the vantage point of which things may be viewed in their right relationships. Detachment is not to be confused with superiority or aloofness, but may be regarded as a rock upon which the sane mind can stand calm and serene and, with broad sympathy and in humility and sincerity, watch the swirling tides of eternity sweep by. From this lofty eminence the philosophic mind views in its completeness the eternal scene; "Sees life steadily and sees it whole" and in quiet humor evaluates the local disturbance which at the critical historical moment creates a particular wave which forms, swells, spends itself and, breaking into misty spray, loses itself, not in tranquil depths, but on the restless wandering surface of the infinite main. It requires a sense of humor in one, who, even from this serene height, contemplates the cosmic scene in its entirety, that he be not overcome with nausea, with a sort of cosmic seasickness, as he views the antics and reads the minds of the petty creatures whose cockle-shells move without guidance with the current upon which, through time and circumstance, they find themselves cast.

As for these mariners (I speak of them as mariners for that is how they sing of themselves in their hymn-tunes) low visibility prevents them generally from seeing the waves and movement about them.

Each, therefore, deems his own particular wave to be the one great beneficent sea which is bearing him mercifully and surely to some snug harbor, to some blest haven, where he shall dwell eternally in the divine presence of him who so benignantly stirred up, or even created, the sea in the individual traveler's own special behalf. The philosopher on the heights sees what is not apparent to these cockle-shell mariners, who, wrapped in the mantle of dogmatic cocksureness, scout beneficence in the movement of any tide except the one which is bearing them whither they think they wish, or are destined, to go. Some of these voyagers do sense the fact that, bordering their own particular sea, are surfaces upon which others, not of their kind, of course, have been or are afloat. But these, our wise ones think, are the still surfaces of stagnant pools or the turbulently swirling, landlocked eddies upon which one rests in stupid content, or is buffeted about in futile attempts to make a landing. The observer on the heights sees that they all — the actively cocksure, the stagnantly content, the brutally buffeted, all, man, animal and atom — all are out on the one great flowing, swirling, eddying, weaving and surging cosmic sea of life, of action, passion and emotion, with each and all destined to find the same fate; and each just as apt as any or all the others to find in that fate the blissful fruition of all desire.

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It really does predicate a sense of humor on the part of the cosmic observer, and a charitable spirit, too, if he can view with equanimity the attitude of the human freight in one of these cockle-shells towards that in another up-borne even by the same wave and drifting willy-nilly to the same destination. Because a cockle-shell differs from the conventional in size, shape or color its passenger, therefore, must be a heretic and destined to be swamped and eternally lost through the goodness of god! This attitude extends also towards those other voyagers on life's ocean who have been caught in a totally different eddy. God in his goodness will destroy them!

In not too humorous a mood, — for pathos, even tragedy, as well as humor, lingers near, — let us view a little more intimately the status of the human freight stowed in the holds of these cockle-shells which move without guidance from within and whose external guiding force is the momentary turn of the current upon which they find themselves cast or upon which they wilfully have cast themselves. From the philosophic vantage point and in wide perspective one may see the finger of the zeitgeist, of each particular zeitgeist, touching the waters and producing the currents which determine the course of the cockle-shell. Within that cockle-shell is a

human soul with a will which the truth would set free. Not far away, at any moment, is the mountain of serene detachment rising above the waters; the mount from which the whole scene may be viewed and where truth may be known. There are many dwellers on this mountain, choice spirits of the ages; but there is room for many more. Some happy ones were born on the shore at the base and achieved the summit merely by climbing. Others (are they not even happier?) sensing reality near, threw themselves into the sea, penetrated the mists and through struggle gained the shore and the heights. Mists veil thinly the base of the mountain, hiding it from the sight of the self-satisfied, the indifferent and the fearful; but even through the mists its presence is made known to the soul which craves reality. The humorous thing, the pathetic thing, to him whose vision pierces the veil, is not only that human souls should be content to ride the restless waves in these cockle-shells, but that one should wittingly leave one cockle-shell to cast his lot in another. The humorous thing, the pathetic thing, is that these human souls are not mariners directing their own course, not even voyagers out for discovery, but just freight to be dumped where time, tide and circumstance may dictate. To jump from the mountain of serenity into a cockle-shell, were such a thing conceivable,

would be tragedy; to jump from one cockle-shell into another is just low comedy. It is quite comprehensible that one should tire of bobbing about and fitfully floating and — sensing that he was getting nowhere, and not enjoying the company anyway — should seek a craft with a supposedly different destination and a more congenial society. But why, except that one is aweary, mind and body, and plumb tired of wrestling with the spirit, should one jump from the cockle-shell of Occidentalism into Hinduism, for example. Except to free himself from the blessing of being able to think for himself and talk directly, if so inclined, with a personal god of his own contriving, why should one jump into drab Protestantism or into the gaudily draped cockle-shell of Roman Catholicism and place himself under the domination of a priesthood behind which he is permitted now and then to peep at a remote god which the church has set up to scare the weakling into being good, if for no more sordid motives. Except to experience the mild intoxication of losing himself in a maze of vague conceits and distorted meanings and to make himself believe that he can at all times gratify an appetite for all things material and immaterial without shattering constitution or disquieting conscience; and except to fool himself into the idea that he is well or living, when the world knows that he is sick or dead, why should

one jump from anywhere into the cockle-shell of Christian Science!

As one watches this futile jumping from cockle-shell to cockle-shell, this shifting of beliefs, one becomes keenly aware that a belief discarded is not always discarded in favor of unbelief; but that for some supposed or real compensation, such as lucrative employment, social prestige, the elimination of gas from the stomach, or from some sincere reaction against environmental conditions, beliefs once more or less sincerely cherished are often left and other beliefs adopted.

The restless human soul craves certainty in a world in which all at times seems uncertain and seeks that certainty in belief or again in negation. But the dwellers on the mount of detachment watch in serenity a world in which, be the moods of certainty or uncertainty, the spirit of life moves, resistlessly and inexorably, whether beliefs exist or not. As I am an emanation from that spirit I may with propriety set forth my reaction to its movement. I believe that the spirit of life moves as mysteriously as inexorably. That it moves consciously with and within and as a concomitant of the physical structure of the universe, as, let us say, my spirit moves with and within my body, has been suggested by would-be scientists whose natures impel toward mysticism. I do not imagine that such is the case, but I do not

know — I have as yet no means of knowing. None of the gods or messiahs of legend or history seems to have known more about that than you or I do — at least none of them has told us. (Some such possibility may have been sensed by him who wrote of the “god in whom we live and move and have our being.”) It may be that the spirit of life is reaching outward and upward to achieve that state which we call perfection. Sometimes it would seem so and it would be a pleasant theory to believe; but that it cares for me individually or for my person and would or could go out of its way to save me, any more than would or could an onrushing locomotive were I to step, inadvertently or otherwise, in the path of its progress, I do not believe; that it would do it for anybody else I do not believe. I should be a fool or worse, — I should qualify with the criminally insane, — could I believe that the spirit of life — right here let us be conventional and say god — could I believe that god, because of my belief, would deliberately and consciously save me in a petty emergency and just as consciously and deliberately condemn to death with slow lingering disease my best friend or worst enemy — no matter what I believed. And yet many religions, the Christian religion among them, are based on that hypothesis; the hypothesis that a certain formulated belief will bring to one individual safety and salvation through the

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conscious act of god, while, by the conscious act of the same god, countless other and purer souls are eternally damned. I don't believe it — the human race doesn't believe it — only a few woefully selfish individuals, beyond the reach of spiritual grace, believe it; though multitudes through silence, indifference or timidity would seem to subscribe to the doctrine. There are some things in religion, in science and in art which a sane man may well believe; there are other things which a man may as sanely leave. Life has blessed each of us with some quantity of choice. Some do, and the others should, have within themselves the will and power to exercise that choice and to exercise it without fear — asking no favors of the gods.