

A DOCTOR'S EXAMINATION OF CHRISTIAN SCIENCE.

DR. JOHN W. CHURCHMAN, of the Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, contributes to The Atlantic Monthly (April) a searching analysis of Christian Science. His article, while in course of preparation, was submitted to the criticism of some of the foremost authorities both in philosophy and medical science that the country contains, and it is regarded by the Boston Transcript as "perhaps the most thorough and reliable examination which has yet been made of the basis of Christian Science."

The fundamental propositions upon which Christian Science may be wrought into a system, and at which any criticism of that system must be directed, are stated, at the outset of the article, in these terms:

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"1. **God**, the Ego, is All in All, the only Life, Substance and Soul, the only Intelligence of the Universe. He is Mind, and fills all space.

"2. **Man** is the true image of God; he has no consciousness of material life or death; his material body is a mortal belief; he was, is, and ever shall be perfect.

"3. **Knowledge**. Knowledge gained from the material senses is a tree whose fruits are sin, sickness and death. The evidence of the senses is not to be accepted in the case of sickness any more than it is in the case of sin. The physical senses are simply beliefs of mortal mind.

"4. **Matter** cannot be actual. God being all, matter is nothing.

"5. **Evil**. (a) Sin. Error is unreal. All that God made is good; hence there is no evil. (b) Sickness. Health is not a condition of matter.

Human [R3423 : page 266] mind produces organic disease as certainly as it produces hysteria. (c) Death is an illusion. (d) Cure. The cure for sin, sickness and death – since all are illusions – is the destruction of the illusion.

"*Christianity* is a demonstration of divine principle casting out error and healing the sick. Soul cannot sin nor being be lost. Scripture must be interpreted spiritually."

Four great highways of evidence, according to Dr. Churchman's view, lead to a demonstration of the "essential unsoundness" of Christian Science. In the first place, he says, it defies the canons of history, when it comes to us claiming a revealed origin. "Men who have read history have learned to suspect such claims. They know that thousands like it have been made before." Moreover: –

"Only in rare instances has any new Truth been brought to light by a flash; the rule that history teaches is – a slow stumbling in the dark until the light is reached. The presumptive evidence, as the great laws of life working themselves out in history have made it of value to us, is against Christian Science. The system fails to align itself with the past. It fails emphatically to exhibit the premonitory symptoms of truth. And, apart from all other considerations, these are strong counts against it."

Dr. Churchman proceeds to a consideration of Christian Science as a system of philosophy: –

"The uncompromising idealism which Mrs. Eddy offers us...poses as an explanation, and is in reality a total evasion. To deny that matter exists, and assert that it is an illusion, is only another way of asserting its existence; you are freed by your suggestion from explaining the fact, but forced by it to explain the illusion...I smell a rose, and that night I dream of what I have done. Both acts, says Mrs. Eddy, are dreams. Then, I answer, how do you account for my recognition of the two activities as different in kind? If *all* psychic

phenomena are dreams, why do I recognize only certain psychic phenomena as dreams? To equate illusion and sensation is to balance inches with pounds; and it explains neither. The great ideal philosophers recognized this inadequacy; though it was Berkeley's weakness that he failed to recognize it clearly. Kant, Leibnitz, Fichte and Hegel were idealists with a qualification; and this qualification was their salvation. But Mrs. Eddy has strengthened her position in no such way. For the testimony of the senses is, to her, absolutely unacceptable: not because it fails to be final, but because it is, essentially false. She quite ignores the fact that while, so long as we have no extrinsic standard, it may be impossible to demonstrate the reliability of the senses' reports, it is equally, and for the same reason, impossible to prove their unreliability."

If Christian Science is unconvincing as philosophy, it is even more so, declares Dr. Churchman, as science. He writes on this point:

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"To deplorable inaccuracy is added a looseness of statement and of argument that is simply laughable. [R3423 : page 267] 'Longevity is increasing,' Mrs. Eddy tells us, 'for the world feels the alternative effect of truth.' Is this guessing or statistics? Does she seriously mean to tell us that since 1865, or thereabouts, the slight hold that Christian Science has had on the world has really lengthened life? Could statistics culled in a period covering only thirty-eight years really prove anything as to longevity and its cause? Has she any scientific understanding of the meaning of statistics and of the tremendous periods they must cover in order to be of any value?...

"Again, notice the absurd explanation of the action of drugs. 'When the sick recover,' we are told, 'by the use of drugs, it is the law of general belief, culminating in individual faith, which heals; even if you take away the individual confidence in a drug ...the chemist...the doctor and the nurse equip the medicine with their faith, and the majority of beliefs rules.' Acetanilid, then, reduces temperature, by

action on the heat-coordinating nerve-centre, because the majority of men, or the patient himself, believes this to be the case. Well, the fact is that the majority of men have never heard of acetanilid, or the heat-centre...and that its action, so far from being dependent on the patient's belief, is observed in animals, which may reasonably be assumed to have no belief on the subject whatever!"

The last item in the indictment is that Christian Science is "fundamentally unchristian:" –

"Mrs. Eddy's philosophy is more blasphemous than her exegetical mutilation. The Bible has little or nothing to say as to the origin of evil; for the account of the fall is, after all, not an explanation, but a description. But it has a great deal to say on man's attitude toward the problem....From Genesis to Revelation the word is, Endure; and Christ himself never attempted to treat as anything less than fact the sorrow of the world, before his share of which even his own bravery almost flinched. There is nowhere the slightest Scriptural warrant for expecting immunity from pain. No rosy picture is anywhere drawn. The only solution of the problem from first to last is the old-fashioned trust of intelligent resignation. But for Christian Science the opposite is the truth. With a flare of bravery that is nothing more than bravado, a foolish claim of certainty is substituted for a majestic and triumphant faith. Suffering is no longer a mystery, and trust is impossible. The grim philosophy of Job, which has seldom failed in history to lead to the sturdy faith that makes men, is swept away at a blow; and in its place we have the effeminate bravery of a vulgar creed of certainty. Essentially it lacks nobility. If it had been regarded as truth from the first, history would have lost its chapter of heroes. It stands condemned by rational philosophy and shamed by Christian faith; and by its fundamental opposition to the Scriptural theory of the solution of the problem of evil, it brands itself as criminally inconsistent. It is nothing less than blasphemy

– *and blasphemy of the most insidious kind* –

to distort the plain philosophy of the Bible, until it offers men the pathetic delusion that they are to escape completely the suffering, without a relatively large share of which no human being has been known to pass his three score and ten. The essential unsoundness of practical Christian Science lies here; that a philosophy is proposed which assumes man made purposely for perfect happiness in this dispensation, – an assumption at once gratuitous if observation base philosophy, and groundless if Holy Writ be the standard."

– *Literary Digest.*

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