

## WHENCE AND WHITHER.

IN REPLY TO MY CRITICS.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE book *Whence and Whither*<sup>1</sup> was written for those only who have had in their lives the unpleasant experience of being beset with doubts, because confronted with problems which come to us, not by our own desire, but in the natural course of our mental growth.

The soul-problem is a religious problem, and our conception of the soul decidedly affects our religious attitude. The traditional religion does not enter at all into the theoretical difficulties of modern psychology and inculcates only some practical results, expressed in moral rules of an altruistic ethics, which in their main sentiments no one seriously thinks of controverting. Some popular notions of the soul fill the gap, and thus it happens that those who are grounded in their faith are not in need of the explanation and arguments here set forth; they possess a surrogate of the truth which most likely will prove sufficient for them, because adapted to their special wants; and the truth may positively hurt them. They need milk and cannot as yet stand stronger diet.

The book has been written for those who are about to reach the age of mental maturity and suffer from doubt and other maladies that accompany the period of transition. It is destined for the sick who need medicine, for the poor in spirit who want information, for those astray who are seeking the light—who want the truth and nothing but the truth,—those who have outgrown the infantile stage of being satisfied with creeds and have ceased to accept a statement because it is made on the authority of a book or a bishop, of a father or a teacher, or any other venerable person or body of persons, churches, or councils.

<sup>1</sup> *Whence and Whither. An Inquiry Into the Nature of the Soul, Its Origin and Destiny.* By Dr. Paul Carus. Chicago: The Open Court Pub. Co. 1900.

The author cherishes the conviction that the old dogmatic formulations of religion contain the truth and are a natural and necessary phase in the religious evolution of mankind. They contain the truth, but they are not the truth. Creeds are symbols and are called so by the Church. They are formulations of the truth in allegorical terms. God is not a father; he is comparable to a father. It is the best simile we can find. The Logos or world-order, which is revealed in the realisation of the morally perfect man, is not God's physically begotten son, but there is no better expression than the relation between father and son to denote the significance of the Christ-idea. There are no angels with wings flitting between heaven and earth as messengers of God to men; but we are surrounded by helpful influences more efficient and more real than the beings of our own fancy. Last but not least, man's soul-life and immortality are as real on the basis of the doctrines of a genuine psychonomy with its exacter determinations as on the simple and plain assumptions of the old-fashioned psychology.

The traditional conception of the soul may be characterised as a materialistic spiritualism, because it materialises the soul as an entity and regards it as a concrete being consisting of a sublimated substance. The theory is exploded, but the hearts of those who have no knowledge of the present state of science still hunger after the flesh-pots of the old psychological Egypt with its naïve mythology and all the crude notions implied in it.

Materialistic spiritualism is a natural and necessary phase in the history of psychological science; its most classical expression has been worked out by the Vedanta philosophy of the ancient Brahmans in essays called Upanishads which prepared the way to Buddhism.<sup>1</sup>

The Upanishads are beautiful in thought and elegant in style. But their underlying idea is an error. The Upanishads materialise the soul, making it now no larger than the end of the thumb, now smaller than a grain of rice or a mustard-seed. There are modern thinkers who outdo the ancient Brahmans.

Some, following Leibnitz, would have the soul be a monad or an atom; others, following Herbart, would reduce it to a mathematical point, assuming it to be a center of forces or *Kraftcentrum*.

<sup>1</sup> The Upanishads in the form in which we now have them may have been written later and may have to be assigned to the early centuries after Buddha, but the problems themselves and the method of discussing them is pre-Buddhistic, for Buddhism is an answer to the problem, negating the existence of a soul in itself, a self-soul, an ego-entity, an *âtman*.

We need not say that a dynamical conception of the soul is as much materialistic as one that makes of it a substance.

Buddhism denied the existence of the âtman, but Buddhism, if it were assumed to deny the existence of the soul, would be as wrong as Brahman Vedantism. The truth is that the soul exists. Our soul is our feeling, our thinking, and our willing. But there is no soul-being, no substance or material entity, which does the feeling, thinking, and willing. The realities of life remain as real on the theory of being the phenomenal appearances of metaphysical entities, as they are on the theory that the metaphysical ideas are fictitious notions invented for the special purpose of comprehending the realities of life. Metaphysics in the traditional sense of the term is now regarded as nothing but an hypostatisation of words coined for thinking certain groups of events and especially all the impalpable spiritualities more easily, for manipulating them with facility, for rendering them concrete and tangible. While metaphysical notions are fictitious, they are not quite useless; they have been invented for a purpose, and they hold good if limited to that purpose.

The problem of the metaphysical existence of the soul is the old problem of unity. Unity is imposed by the thinking mind upon a conglomeration of qualities, upon a complex of forces, upon a heap of material particles. Some concrete bit of reality is severed in thought from the rest of the world and called a crystal, a tree, a chair, a planet, a mammal, a soul. In reality these concrete things are not stable entities; they are interrelated with the conditions under which they exist and continue to exist so long as these conditions remain. In reality everything is a part of the surrounding world, and *vice versa* the surrounding world is a part of everything. The nature of a planet is determined by the character of the solar system of which it is a part. A mammal is such because the planet on which its ancestors have lived shaped its constitution. It is moulded by its surroundings and represents the sum total of all the inherited reactions toward them of its ancestral life.

The unity of things is never a concrete reality, yet it is real. It is a fiction of the thinking mind, but it is neither an illusion nor an error. It is justified for the purpose for which it has been invented. The invention of names and the imposition of unity upon the things named is not arbitrary. Though things are in a constant flux coming into existence, changing while they exist, and passing out of existence again, the combination of certain parts or forces

produces a new thing, and we can very well temporarily treat their combination as if it were stable, for it possesses certain new features which are not contained in any one of its parts. As soon as the combination is realised the thing appears.

The clock is not in the pendulum, nor in the weight, nor in cogs and wheels, but originates by a complete and proper combination of all parts. The same is true of the steam-engine and the dynamo, as well as organisms.

The type of the thing (its idea) is eternal but the realised thing is a fleeting event. The idea is perfect, it is the eternal thought of God, of the creator, of the factors that shape the world. The fleeting realisation remains insufficient. Says Goethe speaking of Faust attaining to heaven :

“Alles Vergängliche  
Ist nur ein Gleichniss.  
Das Unzulängliche,<sup>1</sup>  
Hier wird's Ereigniss.”

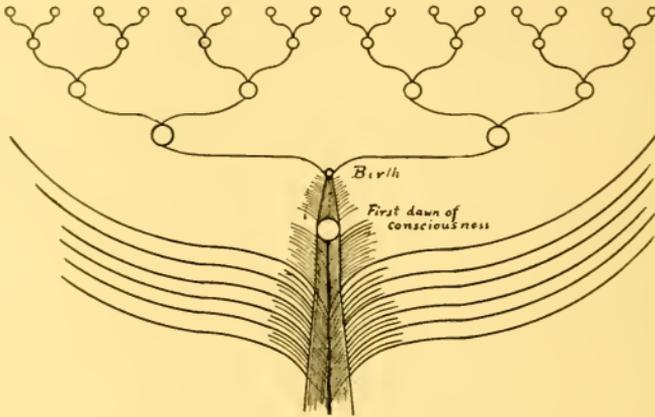
“All transiency  
But as a symbol is meant.  
Earth's insufficiency  
Here grows to event.”

The unity of man's spiritual being, his soul, is just as much a product of nature as another event or thing in the world. We are built up of many souls and our souls in turn will be used for building up future souls.

We might depict the origin of a soul as the conflux of events by strands of lines, representing first at the moment of birth an organism endowed with dispositions which are inherited from parents, grandparents, great-grandparents, and all the other more remote ancestors. They are slightly, and more or less, modified by parental influences during the time of the mother's pregnancy. With the moment of birth new sets of lines set in, producing not mere dispositions, but well-defined and definite impressions, concrete structures, not only aptitudes for receiving impressions. There are simple lines indicating the simple influences during the period of babyhood, hunger and satiation, sensations of sound, of light, of touch, of smell, of taste, of pain, now caused by injuries, now by wants, the mother's soothing voice, the satisfaction of wants,—then again a renewal of the want and the expectation of its satisfaction by like means. All these events leave memory-traces reawakened, when the occasion arises, by sense-impressions the same or similar in kind.

<sup>1</sup> *Unzulängliche* is Goethe's own word. Bayard Taylor is justified in translating it by “insufficient,” for *zulangen* means “to suffice.” But Goethe obviously did not mean that “the insufficiency of life, of the transient phenomena of material existence, are actualised in the realm of the eternal.” He meant that the insufficiencies become complete, that we have here in heaven the reality that heretofore appeared incomplete and insufficient on earth. It is not impossible that Goethe, when speaking of *das Unzulängliche*, had in mind the notion of *das Unerlängliche*.

In the second year a new factor tells on the young life—language. Beginning to understand and repeat words, the infant enters upon an inheritance that comes down to him from the remote ages of the dawn of human aspirations. The civilisation of the century is instilled into his soul by means of expressions and by the example of manners. The child's spirit unfolds according to the pattern set by his surroundings. He now begins to distinguish himself from others and calls himself "I." It is the first dawn of consciousness. What spiritual treasures are showered upon him when fairy-tales are read to him, when he becomes acquainted with brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents, cousins, friends! and what a vista of important considerations opens to him when he encounters hostile elements, worries, sorrows, difficulties, cares,



testing his mettle and developing courage! The school days widen the horizon and intensify the troubles of life. The lines representing the influences of this period grow extremely complex and represent the quintessence of the souls of the greatest sages, the best teachers, the boldest heroes of mankind. Foreign languages impart a great deal of the spirit of foreign nations and a comprehension of their noblest minds. Mathematics incorporates in the mental system the maturest thoughts of the unknown masters to whom Euclid owed his education, to Egyptian and Babylonian geometricians, to Pascal, Vega, Napier, Newton, Euler, etc. Historical lessons set before his eyes the example of the noble, the strong, the powerful. Sermons in church awaken religious reflexions, and the egotistic tendency which has naturally developed with the origin of the ego-conception receives a check by the teachings of self-surrender, altruistic love, sacrifice, etc. The Christ-idea

comes and the God-problem, the notion of the mysterious powers that produce the world and regulate its course.

So far the receptive function was predominant, but soon when the period of growth is complete the tables are turned. Seed-time is over and the first fruits are being harvested. The most important period begins with maturity, when the boy has become a man, the girl a woman. New longings arise with puberty and life becomes serious. The young man must make a living, and the way in which he responds to the needs of life continues to mould his character and influence his soul. He marries and takes care of his family; he educates his children and plans for their future, until the day comes that he breaks down and dies.

We have so far only considered a diagram of lines entering into the combination of strands representing the growth of a human life; we must also contemplate the reverse of the medal. A human individual is like a living knot of strands in a large net. As many threads as are gathered up in its make-up, so many and a few more (for the fibres live and grow and multiply) emerge from it. Every action has its reaction; and all the influences here at work are spiritual factors.

Every single soul is a unity which possesses a character of its own; it is a product of the past, having at its command the span of a life to modify the past, to correct its faults, to work out its blessings, to add to and increase transmitted knowledge, to accomplish useful deeds and work out its own salvation in its own way. While living out its own individuality, it shapes the future and establishes itself as a new factor of life which will remain an indelible present for good or for evil, or for both, in all the generations to come. We live in our children, we live in our words, we live in our works, we live wherever we leave a trace of our being. And the spirit which animates our words, our works, and all other traces of our being, is not merely the result of our life, or the influence of our soul, but our soul itself.

The reality of the soul is not annihilated when we understand that the soul is not a substance but a spiritual presence. The religions of mankind inculcate the moral applications of the truth that man's life does not cease with death, and if the allegories in which their doctrines are popularly understood cannot be accepted in the letter, they still remain true in the spirit. There is a hell of the results of evil deeds, though it be not located underground, and there is a heaven of the blessings of righteousness and moral endeavor, though it must not be sought beyond the skies.

The same is true of the God-idea. There is a power that shapes our ends, roughhew them as we may. That power cannot be an individuality such as are human beings, not an ideal creature, not a world-monarch, delighting in the flattery of adoration, not a physical begetter of the universe; it is more than all that. But while God is not a concrete being, he is yet possessed of a distinct character. He is not the vague idea of existence in general nor the sum total of reality (as Pantheism represents him to be); God, being the norm of existence and the ultimate authority for conduct, is definite and his qualities can be ascertained. The conduct prescribed by God cannot be mistaken, for his dispensation is everywhere the same. We need not call by the name of God the factors that shape the world, that create order, and regulate human society; they remain real by whatever name we may be pleased to call them. Our scientists catch glimpses of it when they formulate natural laws and our moralists when they preach righteousness and good will. Even the atheist helps to understand God better by forcing the unthinking believer to revise his notion of God and eliminate mythological features. The unity of the world-order is real, its wholesomeness and goodness are true; why not call it God? True, it differs in many respects from the popular God-conception, but at bottom it is the same idea purified of popular misconceptions in the furnace of science. It changes a mythological God into the true God, recognising him as the superpersonal divinity of the cosmic world-order, the Eternal, the Everlasting, the Omnipresent, the All-embracing, the Supreme Norm of Existence in whom we all live and move and have our being.

Now, it is a fact that scientific progress is not at all welcome in religious fields. Our religious sentiments are so intimately interwoven with the symbolism of our creeds that we hate to see them touched. We cling to the word, not to the sense, we quarrel over letters and ignore their significance, and it is perhaps good (or at least inevitable) that in the dogmatic period we exaggerate the importance of the symbol, for we do not as yet understand its meaning. The symbol in that period is all we possess of truth, and with the symbol we would have lost its meaning.

Science always appears to the religious believer as a power of destruction. The language of science is dry and cold and purely spiritual, the style of religious symbolism is poetic and sensual. It appeals to our imagination and pleases childlike natures. No wonder that the mass of mankind, being sensual and being in need of sensual imagery, shrink from the serene grandeur of science

and condemn its truths as empty abstractions. It is a sign of mental immaturity to be blind to the beauty and reality of truth in the stern formulation of abstract statements, but it is not a fault of science to be rebuked or censured.

Those of my critics who take this position I should vituperate as little as I would blame children who prefer fairy-tales to mathematical theorems. The value of the latter will dawn upon some of them, by no means upon all of them, in later life; and the beauty of the former, of fairy-tales, will not fade, though their importance may be eclipsed by the brighter light of genuine truth. Their all-sufficiency only will be lost in the breadth of a scientific comprehension of the situation.

What then would be the use of quarrelling with critics from the ranks of orthodox Christianity? From their own standpoint they are right, and that another standpoint may be forced upon them in due time they are incapable of comprehending. God bless them in their faith. Their faith is the best surrogate of truth they can have. They have the religion to which their mental size is adapted, and (though I believe in progress and mental growth) I have come to the conviction that every one's religion is shaped by his needs on the basis of his insight. Accordingly every one has the religion he deserves to have.

There are critics outside the pale of churches who find fault with my book on other grounds. They speak of it as disappointing and contradictory. On the one side the materialists, who deny the reality of ideas and everything ideal, think that I merely play with words when I insist on the truth of immortality. Because I reject the letter of the traditional dogma and the popular conception of the soul, they would prefer to have me say bluntly that there is no soul and consequently no immortality worth talking about. On the other hand there are believers in spiritual substances who think that I overlook important considerations which are apt to indicate the existence of a soul-entity. The existence of the soul as form means nothing to them, and a purely spiritual immortality is branded as the denial of any immortality, as much so as the worship in spirit and in truth appeared to be an abolition of all true worship to those who still believed in sacrifices upon an altar reeking with blood.

With critics of this stamp I find no fault either. They are right from their standpoint, but I have to add, they are wrong as to facts. The materialists are wrong in identifying man with the

heap of material atoms of which he happens to consist at a given moment.

Man is the form of his life, the suchness of his existence, the character of his being. At the moment of death man's body ceases to be himself and turns into his remains,—a corpse, lifeless, void of sentiment, stark and cold like a clod, with nothing human except a reminiscence of his external shape which only serves to render it more awful and offensive to behold. The carcass is no longer the man, it is offal, it is that which has been rejected, corresponding to the slough of the snake, being the waste products of life. But, says the materialist, if the corpse is not the man, then he has disappeared and nothing is left. I agree with the materialist on his own standpoint: nothing material, no bodily corporeality, is left of the man that has died. But I add, the main part of the man remains. It is not as if the man had never been. The essential features of his life continue and act as a real and indelible presence, a formative factor of a definite description, in the general evolution of life, helping in its own way to shape the affairs of the world.

So materialistic is man by nature, having received his first education in the school of the senses, that he wants substance not form, quantity not quality, amounts and masses not character.

Hâji Abdû Al-Yasdi,<sup>1</sup> the agnostic poet, exclaims in the *Kâsi-dah*, a *Lay of the Higher Life*:

"What see we here? Forms, nothing more!  
Forms fill the brightest, strongest eye.  
We know not substance; 'mid the shades,  
Shadows ourselves we live and die."

He takes substance as real and form as a mere shade, while in fact substance is nothing but material, and there is nothing of value that is not constituted by form.

Forms are the realities of life; forms alone possess significance. Character, morality, ideals, have their conditions in the domain of form; all work, all aspiration, all endeavor, is in its very nature formative. Let us rejoice then that forms are real and that the forms of our own being are preserved in the evolution of life.

Spiritualists, on the other hand, as the name is usually understood, are the exact inverse of the materialists. While materialists deny the reality of the spiritual, because it is not material but finds expression in form, the spiritualists, convinced of the reality of the spiritual, imagine that it must or ought to have a material exist-

<sup>1</sup> A *nom de plume* of Sir Richard F. Burton.

ence. They are, in this respect, like the materialists that think whatever is real must be a substance of some kind. Spiritual substances may be as much more refined and sublimated as air is thinner than clods of clay, but they are after all assumed to be substances or entities. They have not as yet seriously investigated the nature of the spiritual and think of it in terms of gaseous bodies or ethereal action. Hence the important rôle that, as a rule, electricity plays in the minds of spiritualists. They speak of thought-waves and conceive them after the analogy of electric phenomena as being transmitted through the ether in the form of undulations. Such theories in explaining mind-reading and thought-transference are quite ingenious, but they are based upon a conception of spirit which materialises the spiritual.

Materialistic and spiritualistic critics agree in this, that they regard my terms and expressions as misleading or even contradictory. They think that I should consistently deny the existence of the soul and its immortality. They only prove that they have not understood the author's meaning, for the comprehension of which a certain mental and psychical maturity is indispensable. Those who have not as yet faced the difficulty (or better, the impossibility) of thinking the soul as a substance or an entity, as a concrete being, who naïvely take seriously the religious symbols in which artists represent the impalpable spirit, will naturally think that all the trouble is vain which I take to prove that the soul (though not an entity) does truly and really exist. They think that I have overlooked certain considerations which in their opinion are apt to prove the existence of a soul-entity, and claim that there is much more to be accounted for than is dreamt of in my philosophy. Certainly, my booklet does not exhaust the subject: there are additional problems to be investigated and the solution of the problem of the nature of the soul leads to other problems which I have not ventured to touch; but for that reason, my critics may be assured that I have considered all the arguments which they refer to.

One of these sages, for instance, referring to the passage in the preface (p. v) that "there is as little need for the psychologist to assume a separate soul-being . . . as there is for the meteorologist to assume a wind-entity which by blowing produces a commotion in the air," adds:

"Obviously the cases are not parallel. The true argument would be that just as there can be no air functions (or commotions of air) without the air which moves, so there can be no soul-functions without the soul."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Published in *The Guardian*, May 15, 1901, p. 658.

To be sure there are conditions in which the soul manifests itself; there is a material world of action and reaction, there is a bodily substratum for the display of mental activities. But as the air is not the wind, so the bodily conditions and also the more sublimated and hypothetical substratum cannot be called the soul. Wind is a commotion of air, so soul is the character of feeling, of thinking, of willing, of doing. Our soul is a complex organism produced by definite conditions and the sum total of its functions is the soul itself. If that statement is, as my sapient critic claims, "equivalent to the denial of the existence of the soul," he ought to say that a mechanic who explains the mechanism of a watch as a certain combination of its parts so as to make it perform the work of indicating the time, practically denies the existence of the watch.

My critic of course still cherishes the ideas of a materialistic spiritualism which compares the soul to a body and its manifestations to physical functions, only that the soul-body is supposed to consist of a sublimated spiritual substance, the nature of which is and will ever remain a profound mystery. Obviously he has never in his life faced the difficulties of the soul-problem; he is fed on the husks of mythology and is satisfied with the food adapted to his stomach. He has nothing to learn from me. No wonder that he "cannot conceive of the person who would be wiser for the perusal of the book."

I grant to my critic that I frequently attach to terms and words a new meaning which departs from the traditional definition; but I do so on purpose and because I believe myself entitled to do so. I follow in this practice the common method of all thinkers, only I avoid equivocation by carefully indicating the new significance of the old terms. I might as well have discarded the entire old nomenclature and invented a new one, but I fear that no one will take the trouble to study a new conception of the soul if he has to forget the history of psychology and turn over a new leaf. Scientists never discard the old terms, but pour new wine into old bottles by giving a new interpretation to the traditional expressions.

Just as the soul was conceived by former psychologists as a soul-being, so the fire was said to be a fire-entity, a phlogiston, which manifested itself in certain functions such as heat and light. But the idea of fire as a phlogiston has been surrendered, and yet our physicists do not say that fire does not exist. They believe as much as ever that fire burns; then, why shall I not be entitled to continue to say that the soul is real, and that the soul-functions constitute the soul, although I have reached the point in my mental

development in which I have learned to understand that there is as little a soul-entity as there is a fire-stuff or phlogiston. I gladly forgive my astute critic the severity and the high-handed self-sufficiency with which he disposes of me, for he knows no better, and to judge of a scientific conception of the soul is not given him. Privately he may be, and in fact I trust that he is, a dear old soul of a theologian who has preached many a good sermon to the edification of his parishioners. I have too much of the theologian in me, having myself passed through the phase in which he tarries now, not to appreciate his zeal for the truth, i. e., for the truth as he sees it.

Theology has become progressive of late. It has become an historical science in its biblical studies and it will become philosophy in its dogmatology, and a branch of natural science in psychology and ethics. I confess that I am a theologian and my endeavor is to dig down to the bedrock of fact upon which theology as a science can find a safe foundation.

The immortality-conception advocated in *Whence and Whither* has one advantage which cannot be underrated. It is true and can be proved upon strict scientific evidence. It may not be satisfactory to those who believe they are in need of a soul-entity, who think that if their soul does not consist of a substance, they can have no soul at all and their immortality would be a flimsy makeshift: but they cannot say that it is untrue. They cannot deny that our soul is actually formed first by the inheritance of dispositions and then through education under the formative influence of other souls. Nor can anything be gainsaid that in our recollections and reminiscences the souls of the dead remain living presences exercising a powerful influence upon our lives. In this sense they become angels, i. e., spiritual guides, whose inspirations have proved to be of the greatest importance. The dead have finished their career; their course is run and all their troubles are over. Theirs is a condition of Paradisian bliss and peace. Yet their usefulness is not gone: they continue to surround us and to comfort us, and we deem the sentiment as expressed in many Church hymns and poems, full of assurance of an immortality, not only legitimate but even perfectly tenable from our own radical standpoint; for instance, the consolation which Mr. Bonney offers in the following words to a friend on the death of his wife:

" And thy remaining days  
Shall not be darker for her absence here,  
But brighter for her smile from paradise."