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JUNE, 1913

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The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER



The Open Court Publishing Company

CHICAGO

Per copy, 10 cents (sixpence). Yearly, \$1.00 (in the U.P.U., 5s. 6d.).

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"Reason is empty but its use is inexhaustible."--Lao-tze.

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ST. NICHIREN IN HIS HERMITAGE ON MT. MINOBU.
Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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THE GOSPEL OF ILLUSION—BEYOND TRUTH.

BY F. W. ORDE WARD.

WHEN we feel ourselves in the presence of some great idea or ideal the very last question we ask ourselves is about its truth, because this term has so many different meanings, according to the time or place or person. That which seems truth to one man, seems false to another. Temper or temperament, the subjective and the objective, the merely relative and the utterly absolute, all of these offer us materials that must be weighed well in the balances of consideration before we can even begin to state the problem—much more before we can decide upon it.

The hegemonic idea or ideal appears to capture almost everybody at once, nor do we dream for a moment of doubting its truth. If a captious critic ventured to assert a misgiving, we should reply in some such way as this: "If it is not what you think true, it ought to be, it must be, it shall be—my belief will make it true." We might proceed to add, "anyhow it is true to me and my wants in particular, and to human nature in general, and I ask for nothing more than this. I recognize in it a propriety of its own, and indeed something vaster still, something like the thoughts of things *ἐπέκεινα τῶν ὄντων*—'at the back o' beyond.'" We hear, so to speak, the challenge of an eternal verity, which assumes varying forms with varying conditions or modes of thought and feeling.

The driving force—paradoxical as it may sound—behind the dynamic ideas of miracle and science, portent and proof, which to the superficial observer are so diametrically opposed, is practically one and the same, namely a revelation of the unknown. God in

both, from behind his cloud, says, "Come and find me." The sole difference between the two consists in this, that the former appeals rather to faith and imagination and the latter to logic or reason and research, though most philosophers now would probably agree that faith cannot be separated entirely from reason, and, as Pascal said, has reasons of its own.

The human mind, in the course of its evolution and culture, simply exchanges one set of wonders for another. And so, when our contemporary theologians persist in asking if miracles are true, they completely misapprehend the vital point at issue. *Non tali auxilio, non defensoribus istis*. Truth, whatever it may be, and it has a thousand meanings, does not enter in here at all. The question is rather, "Did God reveal himself through miracles in an age of miracles, and did he work them as he has worked since and does now and always must, owing to our imperfections and infirmities, by the instrumentality of illusion?" And the discussion on the subject, at the last church congress, really added nothing to our knowledge, nothing to any sort of solution, and left the case exactly where it was before.

Of all arguments or methods, the dilemma is often the most useless and the most stupid. We can hardly ever, perhaps never, urge either—or. Realities cannot be disemboweled in this short and easy way, and sharply divided into this or that. Many things may be both true and false, or neither. The passion for labeling and so frequently libeling matters, the lust for pigeon-holing vast propositions that refuse to be pigeon-holed or quantified, the spatial analysis, these crude and coarse methods, have done an infinity of harm. The deepest things and thoughts cannot be reduced to categories, or confined in strait waistcoats, or pared down to fit a Procrustean bed. We might as fairly put the question thus: Is chivalry true? Is Homer or Virgil or Dante or Shakespeare true? Of course they are both true and false or neither. They were something different, something larger, something better than true. They proved adequate, dynamic, seminal centers of inexhaustible energy for all time. The whole matter as to the truth of miracles, as represented by the theological (yes, and scientific) thought of to-day, is a gigantic *ignoratio elenchi*. It is impertinent and monstrous to ask such a question, at this stage of intellectual progress.

Truth has nothing to do with miracles. Whether real or imaginary, they did their duty, they attracted attention, they excited debate, they stimulated the mind, they engaged interest, they aroused dead or dying souls, and they rightly obtained universal belief. They

played a magnificent part in the expansion of the intellect and in the stirring of the dry bones. Nothing else could possibly at that age have produced the same result. People wanted them, the human heart craved for the marvels that were its congenial food, and it got them. The credit that miracles then received inspired great words and deeds, and supported great lives. Churches and states, whole civilizations, lived in them and breathed through them. It is not of the slightest importance whether they were true or false. They gave the growing world the needed and appropriate push; they pulled with a gravitative power that helped the infant race onward and upward. If objectively untrue from a modern, and therefore an erroneous, standpoint, they were subjectively true. They energized in larger life and action, they compelled and impelled alike the educated and the uneducated, the ruler and the ruled, the priest and the prophets. What more can we conceivably demand? Wonder, as Bacon finely said, is broken knowledge, and always will be. And to lose this divine faculty, is to lose the chief thing that makes life worth living. "He who wonders shall reign, and he who reigns shall find rest."

"Our little systems have their day—
They are but broken lights of Thee."

Wonder prepares the way, it creates the atmosphere of receptive and impressionable faith, with which science itself cannot dispense—science which begins with postulates and ends with hypotheses, and is too often a mixture of assumption and presumption, but is nevertheless the last and not the least heavenly revelation, with all its consecrated errors.

God, if we may beg the question and allow his existence as something more than a pious theological expression, can be of no use to us and is no God at all, unless he manifests himself as a working God. Christ saw and proclaimed this truth—"My Father worketh hitherto and I work." And thus throughout the pages of history, so far back as we can return, we discover in the very earliest times traces of this fact, that God works through illusion, by a kind of wise and beautiful and divine series of deceptions. Realities cannot be entirely unveiled immediately. "I have many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now." Accordingly they come to us wrapped up in various forms and figures, mythical machinery, bright or terrible shadows, allegories, poetry, theogonies and cosmogonies. Nature's forces and resources are ransacked to bestow the particular instruction vitally needed by some particular people,

at the various crises of its development. These veiled visions seem always at the most but suggestions of, and approximations to, unspeakable certitudes and verities behind and beyond the passing vehicles of a temporary expression. "*God, having of old times spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of the days spoken unto us in His Son.*" From the first governing illusion, whatever it was, whether of dreams or ghosts or the pathetic fallacy, as old as man and Nature, down to the illusion of the last ultimatum in metaphysics or theology, history has reported but guesses and glimpses. We must go beyond the truth, in order to arrive at truth.

We begin with a dreamland of mixed magic and religion, unindividualized groups of men, animism, totemism, legends or history at its birth, myths or philosophy in its cradle, combinations of both when there were no insuperable barriers between gods and human beings, or the visible and the invisible. It was all more or less illusion. Stones, plants, trees, woods and waters, animals, fetichism, theriolatry, went to the making of man and his relations with God. They were all illusions, but not delusions. They constituted energizing factors in the development of souls and civilizations. They precluded a fuller harmony.

All religions at the outset were enormous illusions, though never without some divine spark, some *divinæ particula auræ*. And the *error* was *splendidus*, simply because it contained some admixture of the *verum* or the *ultraverum*. The human mind had to be taught through the medium of pictures and signs and symbols and object lessons. Through no other channel could the intelligence of children (as we are still) be instructed in spiritual subjects, which were necessarily materialized, localized and adjusted to them. These allegories or parables or visionary representations made people think. "And God fulfils Himself in many ways."

If history has shown us one incontrovertible fact, surely it is this, that processes are necessary and processes are long, and the more protracted the discipline of evolution the more satisfactory and permanent the results. God, having all eternity in which to work, makes no measure of time. *Deus patiens quia æternus*. But we observe also,—and here we have the vital point—he operates, he communicates through a veil. Maya is universal. Conveyance for the light needed for the period, must be and persistently proves to be just a matter of accommodation. We see through a glass darkly, and the veil imperatively required cannot but often blur and distort and deceive our vision. We could not endure the full

light, the blaze of perfect truth—nay, we should not even understand it. The totality would address us in an unknown tongue. And therefore the message comes to us dimly and tardily filtered through some parabolic medium. For "precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little. For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to his people."

It all must be illusive and slowly prelusive, but ever divine. We are yet, even now, infants in school, laboriously spelling out fragments of the spacious mystery behind the veil. But still, *some on boards and some on broken pieces, we shall escape at last all safe to land.* So far as we are able to apprehend at present, God allows us to see. But, let us never forget that every illusion must be also an illusion of the truth or the over-truth, for gnosis leads on to epignosis and that to hypergnosis. Else it could not and would not be an illusion at all, for the bright or dark shadow is thrown by a reality behind or above—"coming events cast their shadows before." Otherwise, the illusion would be fruitless and could not achieve anything practical and permanent, as it invariably does.

The light reflected may be darkness, but at the same time it is light—light at any rate for the blind. And every idea or ideal, however transitory, bequeathes something that lives and lasts out of the eternal core which constitutes the soul of its contents. Here too many readers, studying history or philosophy teaching by example, have gone astray. Racial antipathies and ethnic enmities, no less than tribal solidarities in which the sin of the individual tainted the whole of the community or his suffering involved all his fellow tribesmen; slavery and the subordination of women; the predatory and militant stage; the city, state and empire; fixed and fluid civilizations, even feudalism—all of these states or stages had and have a meaning of indispensableness and some useful purpose in the formation and deepening of character or life, in the eternal progress by antagonism. And patriotism itself, so much out of fashion for the aggrandisement of so-called cosmopolitanism—patriotism, "the last refuge of a scoundrel," possesses a majesty of its own. They were, they are, all illusions, because imperfect and inadequate and mere promises of propaedeutics or accommodations, but notwithstanding this they were (those that have passed) and they are (those that remain) inevitable. They represent or represented dominant ideas or ideals, and translate or translated themselves into shape and action to deposit some day valuable knowledge and instructions for future advances. No hegemonic

illusion can die without adding something to cosmic wealth. But none of them really die, though they pass away. They rather assume fresh forms, and enter into new disguises and operate dynamically through altered conditions, in the pomp and circumstance of the moment or period. .

For instance, we (most of us) believe in a soul, but we know little or nothing about it, except that we adopt the name as a symbol of something that may be at once a personal and an everlasting possession. But, if we could localize it or visualize it under the microscope in the pineal gland or some tangle of ether, it would not in the least degree resemble our ideas of it. We are obliged to conceive it in terms of matter and space, we have no spiritual language with which to describe it. And so it endures as an illusion, but an illusion far more real to us than a thousand beggarly facts, which can be analyzed to the bottom, quantified to the very last atom of insignificance. Whether the body possesses the soul, or the soul possesses the body—a much more philosophical conception—nothing can shake our belief, though we never reason out our faith, we merely symbolize. And, in the same manner, were we to go through all our most cherished convictions and make an inventory of the articles classified as the dearest treasures of our heart's firmest creed, we should find them not by any means demonstrable truths, but more precious and inspiring still—namely, dynamic illusions. We ask for no proof, because proof appears unnecessary, superfluous, even an insult to faith which we accept as elemental, both primary and ultimate. The solid earth does not seem half so substantial as these.

When we once have accepted this principle (as we must, if only to understand something of the incessant transformation of appearance and the flux of things) we discover a cosmic key to the universe, always changing and yet always the same. We have no more hungry gods or theories to feed with perpetual sacrifices, and a revaluation of all values, especially spiritual values, becomes a necessity. The Baganda say that the priest, when possessed by a god, is "married to the god." So the philosopher, anxious to ascertain the right path must be wedded to his method of inquiry, treating it as a permanent wife and not a mere passing mistress just when it happens to suit a preconceived system.

Now in illusion we have the master key and the chief of all the *idées forces*; but, from this point of view, we need not make truth our goal. Everybody knows now, or should know, that the gospel of eudaemonism has proved a failure, and satisfies no one.

If we put this before us as our main pursuit, as our final object, we inexorably miss it. Happiness comes by the way or not at all. It is not an end, but like heaven itself a temper, and only arises out of a proper balance between the worker and his work. And such the many competitive schools of philosophy have abundantly shown to be the case with truth. The rival teachers and preachers claim it as their own. But when we have examined the message of prophet after prophet down to Eucken and Bergson, we see not truth, but illusion upon illusion.

If inquirers had resolved simply to decipher the dialectic of life with no foregone conclusions, and honestly to interrogate the powers and processes all around them, they would have obtained better if not infallible results. Most philosophers seem to seek not what is consistent with itself but what is consistent with their cast-iron views, and have already begged the question they profess to ask. If we troubled less about truth and more about the meaning of life or mystery, we might be infinitely less learned, but we should be infinitely more wise and infinitely more near to the center. Fooling with abstractions, and wild cat *petitiones principii*, will inevitably end as it began in a fool's paradise of idle negations and empty generalities. We must put the matter of truth aside, because we are unable to state at first any problem dispassionately or without prejudices. Our initial steps take the color and taint of obstinate partiality and predetermination. The thing must be conformed to the thought, and not the thought adapted to the thing. And, as Pilate said, "What is Truth?" An ignorant and uneducated and stupid man, who knew nothing whatever about anything, might nevertheless lead a noble and true life, though all his ideas were false. Life, character, a good working unstable equilibrium between the man and his environment, more sweetness and more light, as Swift preached long before Matthew Arnold, will give us far more peace and strength, and enrich far more the contents of the spiritual personality, than all the so-called truths in the world.

The alleged truths of science and laws of science, and facts of science, keep perpetually passing to enter into new and broader combinations. What are they at the best but symbols useful for a time? What are they but illusions? Even with mathematical truths, the position (or imposition) looks no better. The new school of mathematics has shattered a host of ancient and venerable idols. Euclid has gone at last into the dust-bin. We have infinites upon infinites, and within infinites. Parallel straight lines may meet at last, if sufficiently produced. The part may be greater than the

whole and two and two might conceivably make five and not four. Old landmarks have gone forever, and old boundaries no longer divide but bridge over impassable gulfs, and insuperable mountains. Nothing remains fixed or final, *panta rhei*. All is illusion, that sternly orders us to keep moving on. Truth has become a bugbear, fascinating, flying, Protean. Creation did not once happen, and then cease forever, it continues now and is an eternal process. The Incarnation did not begin or end with Jesus Christ, at a particular epoch in history. He was from the outset of all, embodied as a principle of life, the predominating principle of life in every man. And the Crucifixion has ever been enacted and operative in every creature's act of vicarious suffering, whether voluntary or involuntary. The real ultimate significance of such tremendous mysteries and processes, we do not know. They are illusions, they baffle our vision and our intellectual faculties, but they are also life and leading. We can steer our every course by them, as by the stars. They lavish upon us their bounty, light and strength and beauty, and above all they compel us to go on and on and work and assist in the birth of fairer creations still.

We must endeavor to reach beyond truth, and receive humbly and thankfully the government of illusion. No more barbarous and blundering frontal attacks. Realities must be, so to speak, outflanked and circumvented. The pathway must be treated as the goal, or the goal given up entirely as a fallacy, a siren, luring us to shipwreck on the rocks of despair.

And why all this agitation about miracles? If we want to believe in them we can, and if we do not want to believe we need not. But, in spite of Matthew Arnold, miracles have always happened and always will, whether true or false. They constitute an integral part of the grand general cosmic Illusion. They act and react in an appropriate medium, edify millions rightly or wrongly, and irritate university professors in their academic milieu with their academic souls. And it would be the greatest miracle of all, if there were no miracles. Were they but vendible goods, they would flutter the markets of the world. "*Mes enfants,*" said Renan, "*tout n'est ici bas que symbole et que songe.*" And when one reads the elaborate imbecilities expended on discussing insoluble questions, we feel tempted to say with Mark Twain, "Man was made at the end of the week's work, when God felt tired!"

But, in the acceptance of illusion, we imply at the same time all we need desire. It must have some substratum, some marvelous reality, some infinite over-truth, beyond its kaleidoscopic per-

mutations and combinations. There cannot fail to be a ground work, a vital and vitalizing basis, for this universal phantasmagoria. These symbolisms are God speaking to us, warning, encouraging, chastening, cheering, pulling down only to lift up again higher than before, and even slaying at the last just to save so as by fire, and sowing the seed of future countless harvest fields in every grave. *L'homme* (as well as *Dieu*) *se retrouve à la fin de tout*. And nothing reveals God and ourselves like illusion.