

THE NEW MYSTICISM.

BY CURTIS W. REESE.

THERE is a spiritual flame in modern thought and life which, while differing radically from the old mysticism, may rightly be called highly mystical. In content this new mysticism is natural, in motive human, in goal worldly. It finds fuel in all human instincts, impulses, and emotions; in all worthy motives, causes, and goals; in all noble thinking, social living, and high aspiration. It sanctifies the sense, glorifies natural faculties, and identifies man with deific creative processes. It may be fanned into a brilliancy that will light and warm the world with a glow greater than any yet known.

Intensity and depth of feeling in regard to what is believed about the universe is the essence and the heart of the old mysticism. But depth and intensity of feeling in regard to what is believed are made deeper and more intense by applying and testing the belief in actual conduct. The exultant thrill of enlistment and service in the nurture of abiding desires, in the struggle for the common good, in the constant renewal of idea motives and goals is the essence and the heart of the new mysticism.

From this viewpoint valid mystical experience inheres in free, experimental, purposeful living. It is only in such living that the greatest interest can be taken. It is only such living which produces the fine emotional thrill that satisfies and ennobles. If life is dull it is because it is only imitative of what has been done, or of what others are doing. When life is intelligently original, venturesome, and creative it is full of satisfaction and exultant aspiration.

The condition of the new mysticism is freedom. In all mystical writings is stressed the thought of freedom from everything except the super-spiritual order in which the individual seeks submergence. The new mysticism proclaims freedom of mankind from super-orders as well, and declares that the consciousness of such freedom is prerequisite to mystical experience of the finer sort. The con-

consciousness of intrinsic worth and of freedom in its nurture is conducive to soul serenity and spiritual poise. There is no true and abiding satisfaction apart from free experience. Coercion whether by associates, governments, or gods is depressing and devitalizing. Coercive measures in connection with sub-normals and ab-normals have a protective function, but with normal persons coercion has no spiritual value. Whether coercion be of a legal or a credal nature, physical or psychological, it is to be regarded as only an emergency measure.

Only between persons who are equally free can true reverence exist. Where subservience and fear are there is no true reverence. The sense of reverence is of the essence of mysticism. Reverential mystical experience is to be found in the democracy of those who are equally free. I may fear a monarch, but I revere and love a brother. I may stand in awe before the unknown, but I revere and love the known. I may tremble before the thought of universal forces swinging and crashing through time, but I find rest and peace in the approval of the brethren and in the consciousness of work well done.

Two ministers spoke on kindred subjects on the same evening from the same platform. In their ecclesiastical associations one of them dwelt in a conservative, orthodox atmosphere, the other in a free and vital atmosphere. The one found it necessary constantly to modify and moderate his thought and his statements in order to meet beforehand the charge of liberality. The other was under no such compulsion. After due allowance was made for natural differences in temperament it was perfectly evident that the subserviency of the one had left its mark on both body and soul. The other gentleman, who had extraordinary physical difficulties which might well have led to depression, was the very incarnation of the spirit of freedom. The exultation and confidence of an unfettered experience was evident in every feature of his being. With masterly bearing he stepped out before the audience; and into my mind came the picture of a lion emerging from his native forest, head erect, sweeping his eye over the surrounding landscape.

Purpose is the dynamic of the new mysticism. Concentration and directness of purpose are conducive to spiritual serenity and power. A brilliant but unpolarized person is one of the most ineffective and pitiful of creatures. Many of the mystics of the old order seem to me to be without genuine purpose, unless the somewhat hazy desire to be absorbed in undifferentiated ultimate reality

can be called purpose. I do not see a sufficient amount of well-directed, worldly, practical, democratic purpose in the old mysticism to justify its existence. But wherever a person intelligently conceives and deliberately plans a long-run program in the direction of a goal regarded as attainable, in him is found ease and comfort and power. It is not distance from a goal but lack of a goal that utterly distracts a person. There is no doubt of Abraham Lincoln's desire to free the negro, but his definite purpose of preserving the union was a clear-cut goal that strengthened him through the awful days of the civil war. Purposes are the dynamic of personality.

Creative action is the method of the new mysticism. The consciousness of godhood inheres in creative action. Actually to bring into being a new thing or a new idea, or a new emotion is to demonstrate one's divinity. Unmeasured happiness surrounds new things. Witness the enthusiasm of a child over any one of its simple creations. Imitative religion not only is unmystical, it is positively deadening to all spiritual faculties. The devotees of ancient faiths who constantly repeat the sayings of the fathers and who go through mechanical religious exercises are administering an anesthetic to native spiritual potentialities. Religious forms and ceremonies should be constructed with the avowed purpose of providing facilities and tools of creative experience. This applies with especial force to schools of religious education. If youth be unhindered by the withered hand of the past it naturally tends to join forces with all positive processes in the attempt to create a new heaven and a new earth. As old things pass away, as all things become new, he who is conscious of having a part in bringing about this change shares in the universal elation.

The new mysticism is at its best in conscious committal and loyalty to worthwhile causes and goals. How the mind and heart and soul respond to committal and loyalty! Nothing is more regenerating and rejuvenating! A genuine committal loyalty followed in actual experience thrills every fiber of one's being. It lifts one out of narrowness and selfishness. We hardly know our friends after their committal to a great cause. No longer weak, they are flaming evangelists. It is not my purpose to designate specific causes and goals which have magic power. In fact any worthwhile goal has magic power. Such goals are numerous and are capable of multiplying infinitely. One's cause may be temperamentally or rationally chosen. It may be the quest of God or of God's will. It may be the search for ultimate truth of empirical values. It may be the quest

of life's laws and methods, or of happiness for the human race, or of freedom and fraternity. It may be the building of the best little home that the world ever knew. But whatever it is the most valid of all mystical experience is committal and loyalty to it.

In a hospital in France a soldier boy beckoned for a physician. As the physician approached the boy said, "Doctor, did I make good for democracy?" "Yes," said the Doctor, "you made good." "But, Doctor, did I do my dead level best?" "Yes, you did your dead level best." And in the consciousness of having made good in his great committal, of having done his best, the soldier smiled serenely as he passed away. In noble living is a flame which not only lights the way of life but which also throws a radiance over the gate of death.