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A Psychological Interpretation of Mysticism

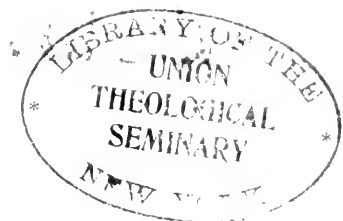
A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS
AND LITERATURE IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
(DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY)

BY

CLARENCE HERBERT HAMILTON

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PREFACE

The aim of this study is an interpretation of mysticism rather than the presentation of fresh facts of mystical experience. The examples analysed are well known and there is a frank reliance at certain points upon the interpretations of leading thinkers in the field. The special student will be able to trace the ideas of James and Leuba and Coe in various places.

For the writer the preparation of this thesis has been more than the mere mechanical fulfillment of an academic requirement. It represents an attempt on his part, whatever may be its success, to draw together in a more or less systematic conspectus, for the purpose of clarifying his own thought, ideas gathered from various sources on a subject in which he is genuinely interested. Although the facts are not new it is hoped that the perspective in which they are viewed may not be without some fresh suggestion to the reader who is patient enough to follow through to the end.

For the psychological angle of approach the writer is indebted to Professor E. S. Ames, honored friend and teacher, whose unflinching sympathy and encouragement have been a constant stimulus in the task. Gratitude is further due to Professor James H. Tufts for wise counsel in the mechanics of construction, and for kindly and helpful criticism. Ideas suggested by courses with Professors G. H. Mead and A. W. Moore have aided materially in the development of certain points.

C. H. HAMILTON.

Nanking, China, 1915.

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A PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF MYSTICISM

INTRODUCTION

It is not extraordinary that our time should witness a marked revival of interest in the whole subject of mysticism. Of recent years there has been a growing tendency in religious literature to stress with increasing insistency the world of the "inner" or the "heart" life. Much of modern apologetic takes its stand upon the authority of personal, immediate experience of religious values, as Professor Leuba especially points out.¹ There is an astonishing popularity in such movements as Christian Science, New Thought and Theosophy—movements which, while differing in detail of teaching and practice, are yet alike in that they all endeavor to bring about concrete results by the conscious control, in some way or other, of the mental processes. Again, in the established, historical, religious institutions there is noticeably less of an appeal to external authority, in favor of a presentation of religion as a ministrant to fundamental interior needs. The call for directness and immediacy in religious experience is sounded on every hand. It is in accord with the tendency of the time, therefore, that within the last few years the literature on mysticism should increase in volume. On the shelves of booksellers we see an unusual number of volumes devoted to mystical subjects. These have not been confined alone to scholarly treatises, of which there are always a few coming off the press, but have comprised as well popular historical accounts of the great mystics, reprints and excerpts from their writings, and popular expositions of mystic doctrine, seeking to make it especially applicable to our "over-materialistic," "over-scientific" time. Nor have articles been wanting in the common periodicals, varying from examples of extravagant fantasy to really thoughtful attempts at just estimation and appraisal of the worth of mysticism. All of this increased talking and thinking about mysticism comes about undoubtedly because the mystic is so thorough-going an example of devotion to the well-being of the "inner life." He, if any one, has striven whole-heartedly to control his psychic processes with a view to the attainment of a superior state of consciousness.

But along with the revival of interest in mysticism there is revived also much of the older method of interpretation of mysticism which separates it in kind from the rest of human experience. We find that

¹ Leuba, J. H., *A Psychological Study of Religion*, Chap. XI.

the experience of the mystic is not infrequently considered to be of so unique a character that its explanation must involve the assumption of some supernormal power or faculty, the understanding and appreciation of which cannot be attained by the nonmystical person unless he turns mystic and goes through the mystical experience himself. This interpretation has been uniformly the view of the mystics themselves and has often been repeated by those who in one way or another have come under the spell of mystical ideas. But it is a view which has come down to us from a time when categories were lacking by means of which to link the mystical to other experience. With the aid of the biological and psychological conceptions of recent years the modern mind is inclined to feel that the phenomenon in question may be brought within the pale of understood processes. Psychology particularly has been at much pains to develop a conceptual technique with which to understand and deal with the phenomena of the mental life and is not willing to fall back upon transcendental explanations of mysticism without first exhausting every resource available in the attempt to see it in terms of understood functions. It is in sympathy with the psychological view that the present study has been undertaken. It is not feared that the assimilation of the mystic experience to the more commonly appreciated phases of human conduct will lessen reverence or rob us necessarily of a sense of the mystery and wonder of the universe. But it is believed that a psychological understanding of the phenomenon will enable us to shift our wonder from the merely exceptional to the marvelousness of the whole structure of things where it really belongs. We shall therefore try to escape all such terms as "instinct for transcendence" or "mystical faculty" or "mystical element" in human nature and shall make use of terminology with which we are familiar in other than mystical considerations.

Apropos of the contention that one must first be a mystic before he can talk intelligently about mysticism, a few words may be said. We venture to believe that a mystic is not necessarily in a better position to understand his experience theoretically because he is closer to it than any one else. The psychology of our more complex situations cannot be really understood by any of us when we are in the midst of them. In the height of anger or great joy or overwhelming sorrow we are too much occupied with the experience itself to put ourselves in an analytical frame of mind. So it often happens under such circumstances that the advice and understanding of our onlooking friends serve us better than our own judgment. Further, if there is present a person who has ob-

served many people under a stress similar to our own, his understanding of the situation is apt to surpass both our own understanding and that of our friends. Similarly the significance of a whole life or career can be better interpreted by an outsider than by him who lives it. In the case of the mystic it is not at all unthinkable that the study of many cases of mystical experience and their comparison with similar experiences, normal and abnormal, in other phases of human conduct may yield a real explanation which it is quite beyond the capacity of the mystic to formulate. The modern psychologist has at his hand a large body of cases of mystical experience, accumulated through the centuries, which can be subjected to modern methods of investigation. He has also the benefit of those studies which have been directed of recent years upon the obscurer phases of the mental life—the operations of the subconscious—the study of which has thrown light upon a great variety of hitherto inexplicable phenomena, normal as well as abnormal. Thus equipped, he is certainly in a much more advantageous position to give a rational account of the mystic's experience than the latter is himself, even though he has not gone the lengths of the mystic career. As Leuba has remarked concerning the scientific investigator of religious phenomena generally, "If the psychologist has passed through the experiences he discusses, so much the better for him. If he has not, he is no more disqualified for religious studies than for the psychological analysis of nonreligious experiences which have never been his—a crime of passion, the mental state of a captain of industry struggling with his rivals, or any form whatever of mental disorder."

The psychological viewpoint from which this interpretation of mysticism is undertaken is the functional one, the essential idea of which is that all mental processes are means by which the organism interacts with its environment in a way to further the total ongoing of life both individual and social. In accordance with this conception we shall, throughout, be speaking of the mystic experience as a mode of adjustment and reaction under the stimulus of varying kinds of social environment. More particularly we shall study the operations of three great factors which seem to us sufficiently important to be the carrying categories of the discussion. These are the human instincts, sensitivity of temperament, and social environment. A general exposition of these in relation to the development of the mystical experience is given in the first chapter.

In the second, third and fourth chapters an illustrative analysis is made of these factors as they operate in three cases of mystical experi-

ence, 1. in Neo-Platonic mysticism, 2. in the life of St. Teresa, and 3. in the life of Pascal. In the two latter cases we shall see the interaction of all the three factors. Neo-Platonism will reveal chiefly the influence of the social environment. In a fifth chapter we shall return again to the discussion of the general theory with further amplification and conclusions.

CHAPTER I

THE FACTORS INVOLVED IN MYSTICAL DEVELOPMENT

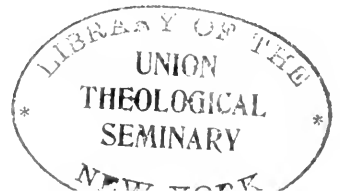
Taking up individually the factors which we consider salient in mystical development we recognize, in the first place, that the mystic comes into the world with the same dower of instincts which has been the heritage of man at all times. The very influence which he exerts over others is evidence of the fact that his psychic constitution comprises those universal impulses which can be sympathetically appreciated by the ordinary individual. And not only do others sense the presence of these tendencies in the mystic but there is reason to believe that he himself is unusually conscious of them because of his attempt to inhibit most of them. St. John of the Cross tells us that the mystic way at certain junctures "is attended with heavy trials and temptations of sense of long continuance, in some longer than in others: for to some is sent the angel of Satan, the spirit of impurity, to buffet them with horrible temptations of the flesh, to trouble their minds with filthy thoughts, and their imaginations with representations of sin most vividly depicted: which, at times, becomes an affliction more grievous than death."² The same author remarks in another work that "one only desire doth God allow, and suffer, in His presence, that of perfectly observing His law and of carrying the cross of Christ."³ But the effort to purge the soul of all other desires in favor of this one has the natural psychological tendency to strengthen the desires in the very thwarting of them. Hence we find the mystics in certain stages of their experience struggling with evils that represent almost the entire list, generally received, of human instincts. Curiosity is combated as a prying into things unlawful. Acquisitiveness appears as avarice and covetousness.⁴ St. Teresa found it necessary to check her sociability. Al Ghazzali quitted his professorial post in Bagdad because he found in his work only the motive of self-assertion. John of the Cross gives a series of rules for the "mortifying" and "calming" of the four "natural passions, joy, hope, fear and grief."⁵ St. Catherine of Genoa checked affection for relatives. "By nature courteous and affable," writes Baron von Hügel, "she would do great

² John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, Bk. I, Chap. XIV, par. 2.

³ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. I, Chap. V, par. 8.

⁴ Witness the necessity of giving up little things such as a pretty rosary, a book, some special articles of clothing, etc., which is not infrequently felt.

⁵ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. I, Chap. XIII, par. 5.



violence to herself by conversing as little as possible with her relatives when they visited her, and, as to anything further, paying heed neither to herself nor to them: and she acted thus for the purpose of self-conquest."⁶ Of St. Francis of Assisi it is said that in combating sensual desire he plunged his naked body into a snow-heap.⁷

We might multiply indefinitely these examples of the keen awareness, on the part of the mystics, of the various human instincts. But it is not necessary to go into detail to prove that the same equipment of tendencies to act serves the mystic in solving his problems no less than it serves other people. That these tendencies play a great rôle in his adjustment of himself to his universe no one is apt to dispute. But it is essential to state further that if the mystic has no less than the ordinary group of fundamental instincts on which to develop an organized mode of reaction to his environment he yet has no more than the usual set. Neither does he have peculiar access to some special instinct or faculty for transcendent insight which lies dormant in all persons but discoverable only by a few. We are told frequently that the mystic has some sense beyond the normal instincts which is his unique instrument for entering a range of experience of supreme value. It is an "instinct for transcendence."⁸ But such a conception harks back to the older psychology which considered the mind to be made up of several faculties working more or less independently of each other. It makes the mistake of reading back into the organism qualities of the object with which the organism is related. On this basis a special instinct would have to be postulated for every form of unusual activity. There would have to be an artistic instinct to account for the artistic genius, an especially developed business instinct for the business genius, a billiard instinct for the expert billiard player, a military instinct for the great general, in fact, a special instinct for every highly specialized activity which man exhibits. Then if we further make the assumption that each one of these numerous instincts is latent in every individual it will readily be seen that we have here a mode of explanation that is both cumbersome and unilluminating. From the point of view of functional psychology the more helpful procedure is to recognize that each of these activities,

⁶ *Mystical Element of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 131.

⁷ See Bonaventura's *Life of St. Francis*, Chap. V, par. 4.

⁸ See Evelyn Underhill's *Mysticism*, p. 59. "The history of mysticism demonstrates plainly enough that there is developed in some men another sort of consciousness, another 'sense', beyond the normal qualities of the self." Also see her *The Mystic way*, Chap. I, pp. 3-14 on "The Instinct for Transcendence."

art, business, billiard playing, military activity, as well as the dealings of the mystic with his absolute or transcendent, evokes its characteristic attitude: which attitude, in turn, is to be considered as involving *all* the psychological functions and not as being the product of any one of them alone. That is to say, the native instincts, in the case of the artist, through the character of their combination and through the training he has given them, all function most efficiently in relation to his art. Similarly with regard to the mystic, the particular quality of his experience is the product of the special organization of the ordinary instincts combined with the training which he gives them either consciously or unconsciously in acting under the influence of his environment. There is, therefore, no need to assume a unique instinct for mystical apprehension, either as the special gift to particular individuals or as a latent possession of all persons.

But if we do not ascribe the mystic experience to the operation of some secret mystic sense, we must yet recognize one native factor which cannot be left out of account, the factor, namely, of temperament. The mystic, wherever we have been able to learn of his personal life, has always shown an enhanced sensitivity which eventuates in the traits of strong subjectivity and richness of subconscious processes. We do not mean to say that the mystic is born with a subjective attitude and an active subconsciousness, but that both of these develop more readily in response to the environment because of the enhanced sensitiveness which the mystic has. These two traits are so often manifest in the adult life of the mystic that they are worthy of some discussion on their own account.

No one can read far in a volume of mystical writings without soon becoming aware of the fact that the predominant interest of the author is in his mental processes with all their varying forms of ideas, feelings, imaginations, hopes, fears, etc. The state of the soul is the constant subject of examination for the mystic. He dreads his impulses, analyses his motives, suffers under interior drynesses, questions even his devotional sweetnesses, strives to empty his mind of all images or tries to fill it with some religious symbol. The stimuli of the outer world are mistrusted and shunned because of the distracting influence which they have upon the episodes of his inner life. His attitude toward his inner experience is not that of the scientific psychologist who analyses its nature with a view to getting a clear picture of the processes of which it is composed: but he looks upon the quality of his inner states as of infinite moment to his personal destiny. He scrutinizes his sensations,

ideas and feelings in order to control them, to manipulate them, to change them and to get forward in the world which they compose. The effect of this intense interior interest is pictured in the "mystic path" or "way" which has been described by mystics of every creed and race. To represent his progress under the similitude of a spiritual journey has been a favorite device of the mystic. The adventures along that pilgrimage are more tragically real for him than any of the events of the mere external physical world. Being wholly subjective they enlist the feelings to an exceptional degree. It is probable that few persons who are not pathological experience such emotional extremes as does the mystic. The same individual experiences inexpressible raptures and the miseries of heaviest despairs.

It is natural that this constant inward scrutiny directed upon the mental processes, not in their relation to things but to the self should profoundly affect the mystic's problem of adjustment. For him the organization of his inner life is paramount to adaptation to any material environment, however large. He cannot, of course, escape the influence of his environment, as we shall see later, but his strong introspective tendency greatly affects the significance of that environment for him. It becomes for him, not an object of conquest, but a means or a hindrance to the establishment of a satisfactory inward order. So Leuba well says that one of the profoundest needs of the mystic is mental peace. To the attainment of that goal he subordinates every other life interest. We find, therefore, that the mystic reacts to his surroundings, at least in the earlier period of his development, after a fashion almost wholly negative. His attitude is, in the words of Baron von Hügel, "a careful turning away from all multiplicity and contingency, from the visible and successive, from all that does or can distract and dissipate." In other words the mystic's mode of unifying his experience is not that either of vigorously exploiting his environment in the interests of some central purpose or of grasping its myriad manifestations into some sort of reasoned system, but that of holding off as much of it as possible, of reducing the mental content to the minimum. The logical result is a state of oblivion to the entire external order. Where the mystics have been able to follow this movement of negation to its limit they have arrived at a state of ecstasy or trance in which they have had the sense of an absolute unification of their mental life.

It is probable that the second trait in the developed mystic which has its root in enhanced sensitivity of temperament, viz., richness of subconscious processes, is related to the foregoing trait of subjectivity.

Since the mystic seeks in the interest of internal order to repress the influence of his outer world through the focus of consciousness, it is not surprising that the environment should affect him mostly through the margin. The various stimuli play upon him, despite his indifference to them and, organizing below the threshold of clearest consciousness, rise above that threshold from time to time in intuitions of exceptional vividness. Hence we find a St. Teresa sometimes having visions in which definite commands were laid upon her, which when obeyed led to a successful mastery of the situation in which she then was.

When we refer to the subconscious we are not dealing with an aspect of the mystic's life which is qualitatively different from anything found in our own. Modern research into the obscurer phases of our consciousness has made it increasingly clearer that every person is subject to operations going on outside the field of immediate attention and conscious effort, which make material contributions to the sum total of his experience. The great mass of our past impressions does not lie passively idle somewhere in the background of our mental life. It moves, changes, disintegrates and recombines, from time to time sending forth its results into the clear center of our awareness in a fashion that often surprises us. The problem that gets itself solved over night, the "bright idea" that flashes upon us seemingly from the void, the unexpected intuition of a truth before hidden, in fact, all the knowledge which, as we say, "comes to us," illustrates the procedure in question. We are always aware that these experiences are not the immediate result of conscious effort on our part. We may, indeed, recognize that fragments of them were at one time or another the objects of direct attention; but their structure and arrangement seem to be none of ours. Furthermore they often contain elements for which we cannot account. These novel components are explained most rationally as resulting from impressions made upon us unconsciously. For, after all, we are vividly cognizant of but a small portion of the numberless stimuli that play upon us throughout a day. There are a thousand details which impart a flavor to our experience which we would be utterly incapable of analysing with precision from our environment. The delicate task of receiving these impressions, merging them, and creating our more intuitive, unreasoned, adjustment to them falls to the lot of those processes which we call subconscious, or, to speak more accurately, that whole aspect of behaviour whereby we react to our obscurer impressions is the subconscious. Now this phase of mental process seems to develop to a greater degree in persons of especially sensitive temperament. The genius with his

“inspirations” exhibits the happier effects possible from it. The hysterical with his “attacks” shows its aberrations under pathological conditions. We may leave to the specialists the decision as to the precise reason why some persons are more heavily predisposed to subconscious operations than the average. It really depends upon the ultimate explanation of temperament; and, as we shall later see, the tendency of recent explanation is to connect the whole matter of temperament with the bodily constitution. But we are not concerned in this study with pushing our investigation back into the domain of physiology. Whatever the ultimate basis may there be found to be, the significant fact for us is that the mystic falls within the class of those who are apt to develop, because of their enhanced sensitiveness, a higher degree of subconscious activity than the average. He represents, nevertheless, only an enhancement of a phase of our mental life familiar on a modest scale to us all.

The richer activity of the subconscious in the mystic expresses itself in bursts of special insight, visions, interior voices, sudden solution of mental difficulties after a period of anxiety and scruple, sometimes even in automatic writing. These phenomena are felt by the mystic to originate objectively and externally and have been uniformly ascribed by him to the direct operation of supernatural force, either divine or diabolic according as the outcome of such irruptions seemed to be desirable or otherwise. This strong sense of objectivity is shared by the mystic with the musician and the poet whose inspirations break upon them with a seeming capriciousness that belies their more conscious efforts.⁹ The ancient ascription of artistic power to the influence of the muse sprang undoubtedly from the fact that the ready flow of musical or poetical ideas is not in direct ratio to voluntary effort. Ideas seem to be given, not manufactured. The keenest form of this sense of objectivity is doubtless found in the hallucinations of the hysterical and the insane: in these folk the products of a disordered working of subconscious processes are confused with the actual, external world. But, striking as all these phenomena may be, they are yet no different in kind from certain experiences of our own suggested above. It is characteristic of subconscious operations that the contributions which they make always seem external to the main consciousness. But whereas the ordinary subconsciousness does not make such extreme changes in its material as to cover up all traces of dependence upon the center of clearest activity, these especially

⁹ See Stevenson's account of his experiences in literary composition. Quoted in Jastrow's *The Subconscious*, pp. 70-72.

developed types of subconsciousness mature their impressions to so remarkable a degree that the results, when they arise before the focus of consciousness, seem practically unrelated to the personal effort of the subject. We hope to show, however, that in the case of the mystics at least, the revelations are not so far removed from the personal energizings of the subject as he is inclined to feel. The supernaturalistic interpretation has arisen largely from a failure to recognize that our hidden activities are as much a part of ourselves as those which we perform with our conscious effort.

But aside from the inner factors of instincts and sensitivity of temperament there is yet another great contributor to mystical development which must not be disregarded in any attempt at a rounded view of the experience. An individual might be equipped with all the usual instincts and with an unusually responsive temperament but without a favoring environment would not develop into a mystic. It is not at all unthinkable that a mystic like Suso might have become known primarily as an artist or a poet had his surroundings been predominantly æsthetic rather than religious. On the other hand we can well imagine that Dante would have made a mystic of the first water had his early training been wholly restricted to religious subjects. We mean to say that temperamental qualifications need to be supplemented by the direction of circumstances before the individual will become either mystic or poet. He may have enhanced sensitivity but this sensitivity needs to be exposed to stimuli of a certain order if a life with a characteristic content is to develop.

Now in considering the part played by environment in mystical experience it is necessary to bear certain fundamental facts of our human nature in mind. We may say that the deepest tendency in our being is to adjust to the milieu in which we find ourselves. The development of this tendency was an absolute necessity if man or any other organism was to persist long in its proper form. Lack of adjustment meant death. In the lower organisms adjustments are made instinctively without the aid of reflective consciousness. Consequently the environment to which it is possible for them to adapt themselves is small. But man has developed a means to aid him in the ever-present problem of life by which he can interact with a far wider and more complex set of surroundings than the simple physical environment. By means of ideas he is able to prepare himself to encounter the distant, both in time and space. Modern thought is coming gradually to recognize that the intellect is a tool which man uses to help himself onward. Now, by this tool man is con-

stantly projecting his world before him in some fashion or other in order to better guide his actions. He reads meaning into the complex crowd of stimuli constantly playing upon him. But this task of reading meaning into the world is far from being an independent task of each separate individual. If it were such there would be no advance over the most meager beginnings. Each generation would be compelled to start all over again. Instead of this individuals cooperate in the matter. Through the power of language communication they compare and share experiences and through the centuries build up a world of meanings which is preëminently a social product. This means that after the process of building up the mental world has gone on for centuries each child as he comes into the world of human experience is no longer free to see things merely in his own terms. Indeed that would be undesirable since he would see but little. But he comes to take his experiences as they are interpreted for him by society at large. He uses the language of the social group into which he is born and by that very fact comes under the dominance of the concepts which the long experience of the group has built up. This conceptual world which is a social product becomes for him the real world to which he must make his adjustment. Or, to state it differently, he adjusts himself to the world by taking it in the terms of his social group. The group conceptions, in turn, depend upon those things which are of supreme value to the group and which serve as the unifying center around which the group is organized. In an article on "Social Consciousness and its Object"¹⁰ Professor Ames has pointed out that the highest social concerns of a group are idealized in the group consciousness in the conception of a Supreme Being which takes its character from them. If the group is a pastoral people, the center of its consciousness is its flocks and herds. The Supreme Being becomes symbolized therefore as a sheep or bull, as was the case in ancient Israel. When, however, the group is organized about the person of a monarch the Supreme Being is endowed with the personal attributes of royalty. It was this latter conception of what is Supreme Being or Supreme Reality which overshadowed the consciousness of the Western World in the Middle Ages. The church with its imperial organization centering in the Pontiff at Rome was the source and guardian of the highest values of life. Thus the sum of all worth was conceived as a transcendent Being of more than regal splendor. This view which arose naturally out of the social organization was reinforced in the minds of thinking people by the Aristotelian doctrine of the transcendency of the unmoved

¹⁰ *Psychological Bulletin* for December 15, 1911.

mover which received enormous emphasis at the hands of Plotinus and other Neo-Platonic writers and was a dominant force in the Medieval theology.

The significance of all this for mysticism is that the great mystics of history received in childhood from their environment, almost as readily as the air which they breathed, an idea of reality which could not but call for an unusual kind of reaction. God, the quintessence of all value, was exalted far above the limited things of time and sense. Beyond all things human and terrestrial, above all particularity, he remains eternal Spirit as over against the temporal fleshliness of the world of common experience. This was the profoundest world which the sensitive spirits of the Middle Ages found presented to them by their social *milieu*. To this, if they were in earnest, must they make their adjustment. All else was but shadow and unreality or at best but symbol of the transcendent value.

But not only was the object of adjustment suggested by the social environment, but also the means of attaining it. Doubtless the method of asceticism was the outcome of the accumulated reflections of the earliest mystics upon the implication of a transcendent object. If God is other than all known things he must be reached by going out beyond them. But as generation after generation thought upon this problem through the course of the Medieval period, practices arose which were passed on, becoming suggestions to later inheritors of these ideas of the proper ways of passing out of the influence of temporal and particular things. When we reach the time of St. John of the Cross (1542-1591) it has become possible to formulate the various kinds of purgation necessary in order to rid oneself wholly of the influence of sense, desire, memories and imaginations. Thus a technique of mysticism was developed which became also part of the environment for susceptible youth, particularly if that youth was enclosed in monastic walls. It is interesting to notice in the lives of the great mystics how they are influenced early, either through persons or books, by the conceptions of the transcendence of God and the "via negativa" method of attaining to him. St. Catherine of Genoa was "certainly and deeply drawn to the conventual life" by the example of her elder sister, Limbania, who was an Augustinian nun.¹¹ St. Teresa, as we shall see later, was born in a religious household and tells of the longing for martyrdom inspired by her early reading of the Lives of the Saints.¹² Al Ghazzali, the noted

¹¹ Baron von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, Vol. I, p. 100.

¹² See *Life*, Chap. I, par. 4.

Mohammedan mystic, was confided to the care of a Sufi in early life and the influence of the thought thereby imbibed followed him throughout his career until after long wandering in the fields of Moslem theology and philosophy he was finally drawn well within the circle of Sufi mysticism in about his fortieth year.¹³ Madame Guyon was a reader of St. Francis de Sales and St. Jeanne Francoise de Chantal at the age of twelve.¹⁴ Suso as a youth was a diligent student of Eckhart, Dionysius and Thomas Aquinas. The German mystics of the fourteenth century all took religious orders at an early age. All of these representatives of mysticism, whether Mohammedan or Christian, were taught the doctrine of the antagonism of the flesh and spirit, mind and body, the world and God. And along with this, through personal ensample or direct teaching, they learned the way of asceticism and self-denial.

We have now observed the three great conditioning factors in the development of the mystic as history has shown it. In accordance with our analysis the mystic appears as an individual who is especially sensitive and responsive to his environment, i. e., the socially produced world of meanings, and who strives to come into immediate relationship with the highest values which that environment affords. In the past the mystic has been especially associated with an interpretation of the world which has made value or the highest reality transcendent. This has had the effect of influencing him to unify his tendencies about the single purpose of attaining to immediate communion with a Being which is beyond all finitude and multiplicity. So much for the chief factors in the development of the historical mystic. How can we describe the outcome of the process?

To the modern psychologist the procedure of the mystic in his adjustment to the demands of the highest ideals of his time appears as an elaborate species of auto-hypnosis. The final state at which the mystic arrives is distinctly comparable to the hypnotic state which is otherwise induced. The mystic strives to empty his consciousness of all forms in order that he may arrive at that which is above form. The following from a dialog of Boehme is a typical expression by the mystic of his method. "When both thy intellect and will are quiet, and passive to the impressions of the Eternal Word and Spirit; and when thy soul is winged up, and above that which is temporal, the outward senses, and the imagination being locked up in holy abstraction, then the eternal

¹³ See the *Confessions of Al Ghazzali*, Wisdom of the East Series, New York, 1909.

¹⁴ Underhill, Evelyn, *Mysticism*, p. 221.

hearing, seeing and speaking will be revealed in thee. . . . Blessed art thou therefore if that thou canst stand still from self-thinking and self-willing, and canst stop the wheel of thy imagination and senses."

The holy abstraction here indicated was cultivated by the mystic through prayer, contemplation, fixation of the attention upon some single idea, or when possible, by making the mind blank in order that the Spirit of God might have its way. The control of the contents of consciousness in this way is no simple matter and the degree to which it was successfully attained varied considerably according to the temperamental sensitivity of the individual who performed the necessary practice. Miss Underhill in making her division of the mystic progress (awakening, purgation, illumination, mystic death, and union) points out that there are but few who traverse the entire experience. There are many who halt at each stage and get no farther. The number of seekers diminishes as we pass from each lower to a higher level. There are some persons, however, whose psychical organization is so sensitive that these practices and their results are acquired with less difficulty than is experienced by others. They push on to a stage in which all cognitive content is banished entirely and nothing remains but a profound sense of joy and well-being. The state is so decidedly one of union, so devoid of any sense of differentiation that it is not surprising that the mystics should have hailed it as the point of contact with the unitary undifferentiated reality which they, along with the whole religious world, had conceived. The conviction was doubtless strengthened by the intensity of the pleasurable affective tone of the experience. A joy so unique, so intense surely must be evidence, so thinks the mystic, that the goal of all desire is at last reached.

As a result of modern research it appears that the state reached by the mystic is not so unique as he was led to believe. We should remember that the great historical mystics lived in the days when the laws of suggestion were not understood. It happens that the mystic following out his ideas of escaping the world of sense desire and imagination unwittingly stumbled upon the correct conditions for the hypnotic state. To the mystic himself the practices which he followed were but the negative means to create within himself a condition of passivity so that the divine power might work its will through him. But in reality they were positive efforts which resulted in self-hypnosis. This comes out clearly if we make a comparison of the conditions resulting from the practices of the mystics with the regular conditions of hypnosis.

Boris Sidis has analysed the conditions of hypnosis as follows.¹⁵

1. Fixation of attention.
2. Monotony.
3. Limitation of voluntary movements.
4. Limitation of the field of consciousness.
5. Inhibition.

All of these factors can be found in the mystic experience. We illustrate them in order.

1. *Fixation of attention.* In the writings of the mystics there is constant reference to continual occupation of the mind with the thought of God or Christ. "The soul," says St. Teresa commenting on ways in which the beginner in devotion may help himself, "may also place itself in the presence of Christ, and accustom itself to many acts of love directed to his sacred humanity, and remain in his presence continually, and speak to him, pray to him in its necessities and complain to him of its troubles: be merry with him in its joys, and yet not forget him because of its joys. . . . This practice of the presence of Christ is profitable in all states of prayer."¹⁶ Likewise St. John of the Cross advising those for whom meditation is no longer a help says, "They should keep patience, . . . contenting themselves simply with directing their attention lovingly and calmly towards God." This is the simple beginning of the practice which when steadily persisted in leads to an intense monoideism at a more advanced period of mystical experience. The constant reversion of the thoughts to God, the One which is beyond all, passes over into more and more intense, more and more prolonged concentration of the whole mind upon that one idea. At the stage of closest fixation the attention is wholly withdrawn from external objects and the body is unresponsive to ordinary stimuli. The Christian Mystics seem to have built up their power of fixation rather slowly and unconsciously. This is no doubt due to a certain abhorrence which they felt for a voluntary and deliberate attempt to bring on the trance state through arbitrary recollection (i. e., concentration). Such a procedure seemed but a reliance upon their own efforts. They usually speak of the more advanced state as coming of itself, or better, being given to them. But in psychological terms this means the hidden subconscious maturing of tendencies started in the main consciousness. That is to say, the mystic in the very act of fixing his thoughts on God for God's own sake was really, without being aware of it, cultivating an

¹⁵ See Sidis, Boris, *Psychology of Suggestion*, Chap. VI.

¹⁶ *Life*, Chap. XII, pars. 3-4.

ability for fixation which is one of the most fruitful means for the production of an abnormal state. The Oriental mystics, on the other hand, had less scruple about the conscious production of their ecstasies. They therefore furnish some of the clearest instances of the part played by the condition of fixation of attention. The following is very illuminating in this connection. It is summarized from the statement of Al Ghazzali.

"Let him reduce his heart to a state in which the existence of anything and its nonexistence are the same to him. Then let him sit alone in some corner, limiting his religious duties to what is absolutely necessary, and not occupying himself either with reciting the Koran or considering its meaning or with books or religious traditions or with anything of the sort. And let him see to it that nothing save God most high enters his mind. Then as he sits in solitude, let him not cease saying continuously with his tongue, 'Allah, Allah' keeping his thoughts upon it. . . . Let him still persevere until the form of the word, its letters and shape, is removed from his heart, and there remains the idea alone clinging to his heart, inseparable from it."¹⁷

This evidences a more conscious striving for the state of recollectedness than the Christian mystics manifest. But Al Ghazzali is aware of the fact no less than are the mystics of the West that the climax of the striving is beyond the voluntary wish of the individual. For he goes on to say, "So far, all is dependent on his (i. e., the devotee's) will and choice; but to bring the mercy of God does not stand in his will or choice. . . . If he follows the above course, he may be sure that the light of the real will shine out in his heart. At first unstable, like a flash of lightning, it turns and returns; though sometimes it hangs back. And if it returns sometimes it abides and sometimes it is momentary. And if it abides, sometimes its abiding is long and sometimes short."¹⁸ Psychologically this sense of the working of a power not ourselves indicates the product of subconscious operations set going by the conscious efforts of the individual. It is incalculable, being sometimes long and sometimes short, because all our subconscious proceedings are outside of any but the most indirect influence of our clear volitions.

The mystic fixation of attention differs from that of ordinary hypnotic fixation in being always directed upon a religious object and in being self-suggested, and, in the case of the Christian mystics at least, in being built up gradually through not being sought directly. In the

¹⁷ Nicholson's *Mystics of Islam*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

ordinary hypnosis the principle is clearly recognized. So the precise object of fixation does not matter particularly. Attention may be directed upon a bright object, the expectation of some signal such as a ray of light meant to induce hypnosis, the idea of sleep—in fact anything which will further the concentration of attention. The most skilled hypnotists have made use of many things for their purpose. Further, hypnotic fixation follows upon the suggestion of a second person in whom the subject has confidence that he can produce the effect of hypnosis. And lastly, because the principle involved is definitely known, the fixation is sought directly and so developed in a much shorter time that it takes the mystic to acquire it. In the case of the mystic it is entangled with the growth of moral and religious attitudes and so dependent upon them.

2. *Monotony.* The part played by monotony is already suggested in the foregoing. When the mind is directed upon one idea its very uniformity has an entrancing effect. The repeated utterance of the word God to oneself with or without context is something akin to the hypnotic suggestion “sleep, sleep, sleep.” The undifferentiated unity of the Neo-Platonists is a monotonous concept to hold in mind. We see in the quotation from Al Ghazzali to what a state of utter sameness the mind would be reduced which followed his directions for devotion. The monotony of auto-hypnosis may be of two kinds; either monotony of thought, such as the meditation on the eternal, unchanging Godhead, or monotony of sense impression, such as the beating of a gong or hollow piece of wood which resounds uniformly. Or the monotony may be a combination of these two, such as the incessant repetition of the word “Allah” used by the Mohammedan mystics. This latter and the monotony of sense impression are used by Oriental mystics particularly. The Christian mystics have practiced rather the monotony of thought. And this again reveals the unconscious nature of their auto-hypnotic practice. They had no realization of monotony as a means to their end but they unintentionally achieved a monotony in their striving for absolute purity of thought. But, as is true of their entire practice, since this monotony was not aimed at directly, its mastery took a far longer time than it does in ordinary hypnosis.

3. *Limitation of voluntary movements.* This takes place in the practice of prayer or meditation. Outward movements are checked while the mystic concentrates his thought upon his central theme. When the ecstasy or trance is on, the body is fixed into a cataleptic position. “During rapture,” says St. Teresa, “the body is very often as if it were

dead, perfectly powerless.”¹⁹ This condition, again, comes gradually upon the Christian mystic as does the fixation of attention. In fact it seems to be bound up with the act of fixation. Voluntary movement is a condition for changing attention through the increase of sensations which it naturally produces. Accordingly, when we wish to hold our attention upon some one thing we keep our bodily position fixed in order to prevent the entrance into consciousness of disturbing sensations. Naturally in his hours of devotional striving the mystic quiets all outward movement in order to better direct his thought inwardly. As we saw, Al Ghazzali counsels the devotee to “sit alone in some corner, limiting his religious duties to what is absolutely necessary,” not occupying himself with anything. The art of sitting thus quietly is something which the mystic cultivates with increasing proficiency until it culminates at last in the rigidity of the trance state itself.

4. *Limitation of the field of consciousness.* The limitation of the field of consciousness is very clearly implied in the conditions stated above. The concentration of the attention upon some single concept necessarily involves ignoring other claimants for consciousness. This is one of the most consciously practiced of the conditions of the peculiar sort of hypnosis we are considering. We can readily see why this is so. The mystic definitely seeks to pass beyond the world of particular and multiple phenomena. Therefore, in his devotions he deliberately excludes all distracting stimuli, narrows his thought to his conception of the Divine and prizes the purity in which he can maintain it. “Cease but from thine own activity,” says the master in one of Boehem’s dialogues, “Steadfastly fixing thine eye upon one point. . . . For this end gather in all thy thoughts and by faith press in to the center.”²⁰ A deliberate practice such as this though difficult may pass gradually to a stage of skill or, perhaps we should say, of facility in which the mystic goes easily, sometimes spontaneously, into a condition of limitation of the field of consciousness. The technique becomes so developed that it needs but a slight stimulus to set it working with all its thoroughness and with the utmost ease. In advanced experience the mystic limits his conscious scope through the simple act of dwelling on some familiar concept of the transcendent reality or its symbol in the form of music, the crucifix, the sacred host, words from the Bible, or other significant object which suggests or calls forth his mystical reaction. This

¹⁹ *Life*, Chap. XX, par. 23.

²⁰ Boehme, Jacob, *Second Dialog on the Supersensual Life*, bound with the “Signature of All Things,” p. 248, Everyman’s Library.

fact is paralleled in ordinary hypnotism by the increasing ease with which the person frequently hypnotized responds to the suggestion of his director. A simple wave of the hand, a word, a glance even, is sufficient for the hypnotic sleep in a familiar patient at the hand of the practiced physician.

5. *Inhibition.* The reference here is to the checking and exclusion of irrelevant mental content—ideas, imaginations, memories, desires, etc. St. John of the Cross repeatedly insists that the very thought of apprehensible things must be suppressed if one is to attain to mystic union. “The understanding must be pure and empty of all sensible objects, disengaged from all clear intellectual perceptions, inwardly tranquil and still.”²¹ It is sufficient for us to put alongside of this the following from Dr. Sidis: “The hypnotic trance cannot be induced without the condition of inhibition. The subject must inhibit all ideas, all images, that come up before the mind. He must think only of the brilliant point, of the tips of the hypnotizer’s fingers, of the passes, of the idea of going to sleep. ‘Make your mind a blank,’ is one of the conditions required by the hypnotizer of his subjects.”²² So also, we add, is it the condition required by the mystic of himself.

It is impossible, when we see the mystic thus fulfilling, even if unconsciously, all the conditions leading to abnormal suggestibility, that the result, so comparable in its external features to the hypnotic state, should not be classed in our thinking with this latter state.

We have noted now the three factors which are ultimately responsible for the mystical experience and have shown roughly how, under the influence of the Medieval consciousness, the final state induced was a species of auto-hypnosis. We turn now to examine three cases of mystic experience in detail. Neo-Platonism will show us how the mystical experience, before the mystical technique and tradition had been developed, arose from an environment in which two sorts of social consciousness were struggling for supremacy. St. Teresa’s case will show us a mysticism arising from an environment whose highest social ideal was the conception of absolute transcendency. From the career of Pascal we shall learn how a complex environment acting on a sensitive soul may give rise to a mysticism which may justly be called a defense reaction.

²¹ *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II, Chap. 9.

²² *Psychology of Suggestion*, p. 61.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEO-PLATONIC MYSTICISM

One of the never-failing traits in the rise of the mystical consciousness is a poignant sense of need of immediate contact with a reality which is felt as being somehow removed from direct experience. Mystical literature abounds with utterances expressive of a feeling of lack, of estrangement, of having lost one's way. The world of everyday experiences becomes a foreign land, a desert of valuelessness, dust and ashes. This needy state of consciousness is psychologically an indication of lack of adjustment, a failure of ideas to function efficiently in guiding one's reaction to his environment. So long as the conceptions by which actions are guided actually enable the individual to apprehend value there is no feeling that reality is afar off. It is in the very structure of steady, ongoing, successful experience. The distinction between appearance and reality is not necessary because things turn out to be what they seem. That is to say, the conceptions which are framed to meet the situation actually function. But when there is failure in the attempted adjustment, when ideas do not work successfully and value is not found, there arises the consciousness that somehow reality has been missed. The distinction between appearance and reality appears and the felt need of bridging the gap between the two.

Of course, this feeling of lack is not a peculiar possession of the mystic consciousness. It belongs to any problematic situation. It is the summons to further adjustive effort. It is the warning signal that the organized impulses are not fulfilling themselves. In so far as breakdown may occur in any career the mystic is not unique in this phase of experience.

But the mystic is distinct in the attitude which he takes toward this problematic situation. We can lay hold of this fact if we contrast his attitude with another attitude which we may call the scientific. When the problematic situation occurs a definite discrepancy yawns between the idea and the actual circumstances. A choice is demanded between allegiance to one or allegiance to the other. One of two courses can be taken. One may desert his idea and realize that he must reconstruct his object of knowledge in the light of this new experience. Or he may cling to his idea and insist that value still exists there while experience itself is worthless. The former course is expressed in the scientific attitude which continually stresses experience and is willing

to revise its concepts in the light of experience. The other is the mystical attitude which refuses to change its concept and finds the world of actual experience to be only illusion. The scientific attitude seeks the sense of reality in a new conception which better mediates action through grappling with the details of the situation. The mystical attitude insists that reality lies in the old idea which, since it is not found in experience, must be sought beyond experience. The scientific attitude turns toward the world of particular phenomena in order to learn of them. The mystical attitude turns away from particulars in order to be free from them. The former solves the problem by taking full account of the outer facts: the latter by an indifference to them.

The mystics of the Middle Ages all found this split between their world of values and the world of common experience. But in their case the situation was created because the social consciousness was saturated throughout with the idea of the transcendency of God as well as with the idea of world-renunciation. We shall see how this pervasive view operated upon the sensitive soul of St. Teresa in our next chapter. In Neo-Platonism we find the split being caused directly, not so much by the suggestion from the entire social consciousness of the time, as by the attempt to cling to the ideals of a passing social order in the midst of the coming of a new one. It is interesting as indicating a situation out of which the mystical consciousness arose, to be reinforced by the later social order and passed on down the centuries in ever-widening circles of influence.

Neo-Platonism is one phase of the projection of an old culture into times and conditions different from those which gave it birth. Outwardly the old social order was crumbling. The Roman Empire, still pushed on by the momentum of the past, strove to maintain itself against the encroachments of its enemies, but the continual resurgence of Barbarian effort was gradually loosening the foundations of its structure. During the three centuries of the history of the Neo-Platonic philosophy there occurred the staggering times of the age of the thirty tyrants, the attempt of Odenatus and Zenobia to build up a great Palmyrian kingdom upon the ruins of the imperial possessions in the East, the desperate defense of the Empire by Valentinian against enemies swarming on all frontiers, the invasion of the Goths, the ravaging activities of Alaric and Attila, and the double sack of Rome herself. As these events were marking the close of the outer social order, the corresponding inner spiritual order of old Hellenic thought and speculation was making its last stand against new intellectual tendencies represented by Christianity.

Neo-Platonism is really the last effort of the philosophic side of Hellenic culture to maintain itself against the influx of ideas and tendencies coming from the Orient.

Under circumstances such as these there was bound to occur a diremption between the conceived world of values and the world of immediate experience. The former no longer mediated effective adjustment to the latter. In the crisis one of two ways might be taken by an individual sensitive to the problem. If one's feelings inclined to the new tendencies of the time he could turn away from the conceptions belonging to the former order and find in those which arose with the new time a fresh means of manipulating experience. Or, if his sympathies were with the past, as was the case with the Neo-Platonists, he might insist upon the old symbols: which since they could no longer mediate an experience of reality in the present would become a mystery, to be understood only by some rare and occult means. Thus would arise a type of mysticism, due to a craving to make real to oneself intellectual formulations which are taken for granted but which do not really fit one's experience. This motive which was doubtless primal with the Neo-Platonists was operative all through the Middle Ages. Reverence for authority led to a saddling of the human mind with Aristotelian ideas which could be appropriated only mystically, if at all. We must now show in more detail how Neo-Platonic mysticism arose from the adherence to ideas which could no longer function.

The mysticism of Neo-Platonism centers about the conception of the One, which is the highest reality, the source of all being, absolute, unchangeable, eternal. It is beyond all determination, all manifoldness. Therefore it cannot be apprehended by the intellect. For to think is to limit and to apprehend multiplicity. The experience of thinking even the One still contains the duality of subject and object. Failing the power of the intellect to lay hold of the first principle of all things we must recognize some other and peculiar mode of apprehending. So long as there is duality or multiplicity in ourselves we evidently cannot experience unity. "The principle of all things not having any difference, is always present, but we are present with it when we have no difference."¹ Such reflections as this led Plotinus to find in ecstasy, or a state of consciousness utterly devoid of all cognitive content and volitional striving, the actual experience of contact with his unitary reality.

¹ Plotinus, *Ennead*, VI, ix, 8.

Now the doctrine of the One had originally crept into the philosophy of Plato because of the need which Plato felt of bringing some sort of organization into his world of ideas. The philosophy of Plato arose originally from the practical motive of finding a sure basis for ethical conduct. The Sophists, and notably Protagoras had assumed that perception is the only source of knowledge. Through showing that perception is relativistic and subjective they had arrived at the conclusion that knowledge can have no universal validity. Nothing can be apprehended by the individual but phenomena. Things are to the individual only as they appear to him and not as they are in themselves. To Socrates and Plato the scepticism and laxity thus introduced into the world of knowledge were repugnant. They worked out in opposition to the Sophistic doctrine a distinction between perception and conception, admitting with the Sophists that perception is fallacious, but insisting that conception alone can give us valid knowledge. For conception selects from the multitude of opinions the common element, that in which they all agree, and thus gives us ideas of an abiding nature as over against shifting opinions. Through the framing of these general ideas or concepts it was expected that a sure basis for conduct would be discovered. But this emphasis upon a surer type of knowledge brought with it implications which went beyond the simple ethical end which it was created to subserve. For Plato, conception revealed a world of incorporeal reality existing side by side with the corporeal world which was subject to opinion only. The ideas which we reach by conception are, according to him, just that system of immaterial Being. Furthermore, not only ethical ideas exist in that world, but ideas of every class of perceptions of which we are cognizant. The problem arose for Plato as to the relation of the various denizens of this world with one another. In attempting to determine this relation he goes beyond his original ethical interests and manifests logical and metaphysical interests as well. At first he was inclined to look upon the relation as the purely logical one of class concept to its particulars. The ideas were to be arranged according to their degree of generality. The world of ideas would thus resemble a pyramid with the least general ideas at its base and the one widest generalization at its apex. But this plan does not seem to have been carried out by Plato, doubtless because it would involve the presence of all kinds of things in his eternal world—ideas of things undesirable as well as desirable. A second form of organization for the ideas, more favored by him, grouped the subordinate ideas about the Idea of the Good as the absolute end of all reality. This form of solution of his

problem is teleological rather than logical. Yet there is evidence that Plato was not entirely satisfied with thus leaving aside the logical question. For in his latest period he made use of the Pythagorean number-theory to express the relation of the ideas and called his first principle "The One." To this One was ascribed the highest absolute reality. The subordinate ideas were then thought of as being arranged in a scale of constantly decreasing worth according to their distance from the One in the scale of numbers. Thus did he effect a certain amalgamation of attributes of worth with varying degrees of reality, so uniting, to some extent, his metaphysical, logical and ethical interests.

But this Pythagorean conception was not foundational with Plato and he did not deduce from it the conclusion that since the highest reality is one, therefore, it cannot be experienced outside of a state of consciousness which is unique in being a state of unity and nothing else. It is true that there are poetical and figurative passages in the dialogues which have a mystical ring but he seems nowhere to declare explicitly that the highest Idea is beyond intellect. Indeed he always represents intellect as that which leads to the Idea. The Idea is an idea to the last; and intellectual insight is the means which we must exercise to apprehend it.

Upon this conception of the One, which was really something of a theoretical stop-gap in Plato's philosophy the Neo-Platonists centered their whole system. "All beings are beings through the One," begins the sixth *Ennead* of Plotinus which treats of his prime principle. The One is taken for granted. It is the starting point, not an inductively established conclusion. The task which Plotinus feels incumbent on him is to show how all things depend upon and are to be derived from the One. And likewise since the One is the center and source of all worth the way must be shown of attaining to it. For estrangement from worth is not congenial to the soul of man. The way of attaining it, as we have already indicated, was the way of ecstasy. But this mode of attaining to highest value was resorted to because, as we now proceed to show, the conception of the One could not function in the social situation of the time of Plotinus.

The doctrine of the One could not minister to the times in which it was elaborated. In its conception of transcendence, to be sure, in its notion of the removedness of the human soul from the One, it reflects the great problem of the age, the feeling of a split between value and experience. But this way of formulating the problem in terms of a self-contained One eternally and indifferently radiating its derivations in ever-expanding circles of diminishing worth could not satisfy the funda-

mental need of the time; and neither could it function in furthering man in his immediate social environment. For it did not have regard for the growing sense of the importance of personality which characterized the age and for the longing for a new and more vital social relationship arising from the general breakup and decay of institutions throughout the Empire.

Let us look into these short-comings in more detail. In regard to the deeper reverence for personality Neo-Platonism is not wholly indifferent. In the boundless respect of the disciples for their several masters, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus, we catch a manifestation of the spirit of the time. And Plotinus says that the greatness of their origin should be explained to those souls who are in bondage to particular things, i. e., their origin in the One. But these touches of appreciation of the worth of personality cannot make up for the omission of personality from their central source of Being. As a matter of fact, the Neo-Platonists looked upon personality as a limiting attribute which could not properly be ascribed to their unlimited first principle. The One must be beyond personality as it is beyond everything else. It is self-contained unregardful of its irradiations as the flower is heedless of its fragrance. "It does not aspire after us, in order that it may be conversant with us."² Hence the movement of the One toward us cannot be spoken of in such a personal term as love. *We*, indeed, must learn how to ascend to the divine love which is the love of (i. e., toward) the One, but the One sends forth its effulgence as lovelessly as the fountain pours forth its waters. But if the element of personality is left out of the principle which stands for the highest values we have a conception which can function only in certain of our moods. Modern psychology has shown us that the human consciousness has been built up in terms of the interaction of personalities with one another. Its values, therefore, are fundamentally conceived in social terms. But this social basis of life seems to be ignored by the Neo-Platonists in their effort to pack all value within a concept which they retained from the past. Practically they are characterized by an indifference to social and political interests. Plotinus indeed recognizes in the political virtues a means to the end of the completest development of the sage, for they "make the soul orderly in the world of mixture."³ But "the perfect life of the sage is not in community but in detachment. If he undertakes practical activity, it must be from some plain obligation, and the attitude of detachment ought still to be

² *Ennead VI*, ix, 8.

³ Whittaker, T., *The Neo-Platonists*, p. 94.

maintained internally. Neither with Plotinus nor with any of his successors is there the least doubt that the contemplative life is in itself superior to the life of action."⁴ This really means that the Neo-Platonic One functions only for the philosopher whose chief business is the attitude of contemplation, or for others only in their contemplative moods. As for guidance in our actual world of social relationships the Neo-Platonists have no word of encouragement to offer, except that we become detached from those relationships, as the One is detached from its dependents, so that we fulfill our duties with a certain sublime indifference to them, utterly without the show of anxious personal interest.

But this impersonal nonsocial attitude could not satisfy the needs of that age. It is an attitude of turning away from the decaying social order of the present without making any attempt to contribute to a new one. A new social consciousness had to be developed, one that would mediate successful relations between peoples drawn from all over the then-known world and brought into contact by the Roman conquests. It is evident from the later history of Neo-Platonism with its astounding eclecticism of deities from every source that the school was not unaware of the need and tried to bring about a reconciliation between peoples by finding room within their scheme for every sort of a religion as a particular form of manifestation of the One. But this external amalgam of the value-symbols of limited social groups could not serve for a new conception truly symbolic of the new social order. And as to the One itself it was powerless to create helpful social attitudes because its very impersonalism made it nonsocial. It has been shown by Professor Ames⁵ that those concepts which serve as the fundamental and truly effective symbols of religion are really representative of the highest social values of the group in which they are developed. The same author points out elsewhere⁶ that being such embodiments these concepts must be "in the highest degree personal." Especially will they be personal in character in a highly organized society. "If our conscious experience is through and through a social affair so that the very objects of physical nature are determined by it, it is inevitable that the object of the group consciousness should be personal and social."⁷ These considerations show at once why the fundamental conception of Neo-Platonism could not function in mediating an actual experience of reality. It did not symbo-

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁵ The Psychology of Religious Experience.

⁶ Social Consciousness and its Object, *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. VIII, p. 414.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

lize social values at all, at least not the values of the social order of that period. There was no reciprocity of social attitudes between the One and the individual.

We are able to bring out the insufficiency of the Neo-Platonic conception by comparison with the chief conception of another kind of thought which proved its greater effectiveness in the actual course of history. Christianity, from the start, emphasized the personality of God. "Christianity, as a living religion, demands a personal relation of man to the ground of the world conceived of as supreme personality, and it expresses this demand in the thought of the divine sonship of man."⁸ The conception of God as Father and the cognate conception of Love as the bond of connection between the Father and the children as well as between the children with one another served effectually to bring the experience of reality right into the social relationships of the church community. It was undoubtedly because it enabled individuals to realize within the church itself an actual experience of the unity of humanity in one brotherhood that the idea showed itself to be dynamic. The spirit of love within the group made real to the believer the presence of the Father. Neo-Platonism had nothing to correspond to this experience. The School was not a company of children bound together by a consciousness of relation to a common Father, but rather a group of individuals, emanations from a single metaphysical source, seeking each for himself to return singly to metaphysical union with the One "a flight of the alone to the alone," as Plotinus calls it at the close of the sixth *Ennead*. The Unity of Plotinus was thus an abstract idea without definite living attachments and as such failed to reach the actual social needs of the time.

As a result of the separation of the One from the social process itself, it followed that the only way to attain to it and to its unpicturable highest values was to rise above the distractions of social relationships. Plotinus allowed, as we have mentioned before, a certain efficacy to the exercise of the civic virtues on the lowest stage of aspiration toward the Good which is the One. But these as well as the higher toil of intellectual formulation which was next to be followed were to be superseded by a contemplation in which the soul was to become detached and alone. "He will not behold this light, who attempts to ascend to the vision of the supreme while he is drawn downwards by those things which are an impediment to the vision. He will likewise not ascend by himself alone, but will be accompanied by that which will divulse him from the One,

⁸ Windelband, W., *History of Philosophy*, Tufts' translation, p. 238.

or rather he will not be himself collected into a one. . . . He, therefore, who has not yet arrived thither, but either on account of the above-mentioned obstacle is deprived of this vision, or through the want of reason which may conduct him to it, and impart faith respecting it; such a one may consider himself as the cause of his disappointment through these impediments, and should endeavour by separating himself from all things to be alone."⁹ It is very evident that the value to which Plotinus here points is not something to be found in the give and take of human relationships but something esoteric and private. As a peculiar experience it is attained only after considerable effort. The actual historical facts in regard to it indicate that it was no frequent phenomenon. "Porphyry has something to tell us on this subject. Four times while he was with him, he relates, Plotinus attained the end of union with God, who is over all, without form, above intellect, and all the intelligible. Porphyry himself attained this union once, in his sixty-eighth year. The mystical 'ecstasy' was not found by the later teachers of the school easier to attain, but more difficult; and the tendency became more and more to regard it as all but unattainable on earth."¹⁰ The increasing difficulty of reaching the ecstatic experience shows how widely the first principle had been removed from the actual human experience in which it should have functioned. The conceived highest good was set so far above the normal channels for receiving good that it was to be apprehended, if at all, only by highly unusual methods and moods.

So far we have attempted to indicate the influence of environment in evoking Neo-Platonic mysticism, or, more precisely, the influence of the conflict of the immediate environment with the thought environment derived from the past Hellenic philosophy. The projection of the latter into the former caused a split between value and experience which Plotinus sought to overcome by the mystical solution. Incidentally we may say that the thought of Philo manifests the same combination of things—a mysticism arising from maintaining earlier formulations of value in the midst of a social order which called for a restatement in terms of newly developing values. It would seem that this mysticism has its roots primarily in intellectual sources. In both cases it is pressed out by the strain endured by a certain class of thinkers in clinging to the intellectual formulations of value which the ongoing social process was slowly but surely out-growing and pushing aside.

⁹ *Ennead VI*, ix, 4.

¹⁰ Whittaker, *The Neo-Platonists*, p. 101.

The environmental situation then, the expanding social consciousness is the great factor which we have tried to see in the production of Neo-Platonic mysticism. We must suppose that the other factors were at work likewise. But we do not have sufficient detailed information in regard to the personal lives of the Neo-Platonists to trace the contribution made by temperamental sensitivity and the instinct complexes with any degree of thoroughness. We have some hints, however, to show us that in the case of Plotinus the temperamental factor played its role. It is through Plotinus that Neo-Platonism has been connected with mysticism. He was the real founder of the movement. Few, therefore, as our facts are at this juncture they are yet worth considering. As Rufus Jones remarks, "Popular anecdotes about him give the impression that he was a man of unusual psychical disposition."¹¹ It is told of him that in composition "when he had once conceived the whole disposition of his thoughts from the beginning to the end, and had afterwards committed them to writing, his composition was so connected that he seemed to be merely transcribing from a book." He seemed to be able to carry on a strain of abstract thought while discharging the matters of daily business. He was supposed to have a God for a guardian spirit and at times seems to have spoken as under a kind of inspiration.¹² Whatever the actual facts may have been back of these tales that have come down to us they indicate that Plotinus made an impression on those surrounding him of having unique powers. We cannot be far wrong if we conclude that Plotinus belonged that enhanced sensitivity which we noted in the last chapter as one of the factors which contribute to a ready development of the mystical attitude. Such a sensitivity would account for the fact that the meditation of Plotinus passed more readily to the stage of mystical concentration than did the devotional practices of his followers.

Neo-Platonism nowhere offers an explicit technique of mystical practice such as we find later in the Middle Ages. This was due to the fact that the experience was yet in an experimental stage. The factors of concentration, monoideism, monotony, etc., which we have indicated in the last chapter were but dimly and gropingly sensed. But they were undoubtedly involved in the attempt to apprehend the One, first by getting the most perfect conceptual image of it and then realizing that it transcends even conception. One would have to go into a trance state to attain to so undifferentiated a state of consciousness as is implied in

¹¹ *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 71.

¹² See the condensation of Porphyry's Life of Plotinus, by Thomas Taylor in his *Select Works of Plotinus*.

Plotinus's descriptions of union with the One. The concentration of attention upon the One, the quieting of the soul of all desire, the exclusion of all corporeal impressions, the monotonous unitariness of the One—all these suggestions imply the conditions of auto-hypnosis which we set forth earlier.

Neo-Platonism has shown us a mysticism arising from a conflict within the enviroing social consciousness. To illustrate a mysticism arising more directly from unopposed social suggestion and one which reveals well the power of instinctive and temperamental forces as well as of the environment we turn to the case of St. Teresa.

CHAPTER III

THE CASE OF ST. TERESA

We have said in Chapter I that there are three cardinal factors involved in the development of the mystical consciousness: the human instincts, a temperament of enhanced sensitivity and an environment which fosters a sense of separation between ordinary everyday experience and the world of values. We have tried to show how important a role was played by the third factor in Neo-Platonic mysticism. Turning now to a later time in the history of mysticism we find St. Teresa a fitting illustration of the workings of the whole trio of factors. The autobiography of this famous character, remarkable from more than one standpoint, has long been and will doubtless continue to be one of the classic documents of mysticism. We here find mystical tendencies developed to the extremest point compatible with sanity and the effective discharge of duty; a keenness of introspection and self-analysis seldom equaled; and the ingenuousness of a spirit not particularly learned in books. It has the further advantage of being voluminous and detailed even to the point of tediousness. St. Teresa's scrupulous care in recounting her experiences is evidenced by the fact that although she wrote her biography at the dictate of her superiors she did not hesitate to differ with conventional ideas of devotional practice when her own experiences seemed to contradict them.

The outstanding facts of the life of St. Teresa are too familiar to need more than a brief statement. St. Teresa (1515-1582) was born in Avila, Spain. Reared in a household imbued with the religious ideas of the time, she early became acquainted with the Lives of the Saints and at the age of seven tried to run away with one of her brothers, the intent of the children being to suffer martyrdom among the Moors. A year and a half of her girlhood was spent in an Augustinian monastery and somewhere near her twentieth year she became a nun in the Monastery of the Incarnation in Avila. Her devotional life was marked by various unusual psychic manifestations such as visions, trances, and ecstasies as well as much suffering due in part to her psychological make-up and in part to misapprehension of her experiences by her spiritual directors. In her forty-seventh year, dissatisfied with the laxity which prevailed throughout the Carmelite order and encouraged by some persons around her she undertook the founding of a new monastery which should be conducted in accordance with the earlier and stricter rules of the Order. From this time to the end of her life she devoted her efforts to founding the reformed order of the Barefooted Carmelites. During her lifetime she

saw the founding of fifteen monasteries for friars and seventeen monasteries for nuns as a result of her reform.

That St. Teresa possesses the finer sensitivity which furnishes the soil for the development of the mystical consciousness, there can be no doubt. The story of that part of her life before her entrance into the monastery as a professed nun gives the impression of a bright, vivacious soul, social even to a fault—according to her own estimation—and readily influenced by those for whom she felt regard and affection. Physically she was not strong and may have inherited her physical condition from her mother, whose life, she says, “was spent in great infirmities,” and who died young, in Teresa’s twelfth year. It seems that after her mother’s death Teresa was placed in an Augustinian monastery because her father and elder sister wished to place her beyond the influence of certain friendships which were not for her good. Teresa speaks of a relative “who was so light and frivolous, that my mother took great pains to keep her out of the house, as if she foresaw the evil I should learn from her; but she could not succeed, there being so many reasons for her coming.”¹ After mentioning the later distress of her father and sister over the matter she adds, “The conversation of this person so changed me, that no trace was left of my soul’s natural disposition to virtue, and I became a reflection of her and of another who was given to the same kind of amusements.”² The quick sensitiveness of Teresa which made her thus susceptible to the influence of her friends also enabled her to penetrate the design of her father and sister, so that she saw at once that she could not quite be trusted with her own ways in her father’s house. She was much mortified and remarks that “for the first eight days I suffered much; but more from the suspicion that my vanity was known, than from being in the monastery.” She soon found, however, a new friend in the person of the nun who was mistress of the secular children who were in the monastery. Straightway, the ready sympathy and appreciation of the saint-to-be turned into the new channels thus afforded. “This good companionship began to root out the habits which bad companionship had formed, and to bring my thoughts back to the desire of eternal things. . . . : if I saw any one weep in prayer, or devout in any other way, I envied her very much.”³ These incidents, simple as they are, indicate the responsiveness of the saint to her environment. It was this delicate sensitiveness and impressionability which facilitated the development of

¹ *Life of St. Teresa*, written by herself, Chap. II, par. 4.

² *Life*, Chap. II, 5.

³ *Life*, Chap. III, 1.

the rich and deep subconscious store whence issued the surprising experiences which were so puzzling to St. Teresa's directors in later life and at times even to the saint herself.

In thus admitting a foundational sensitivity which favors the development of the mystical consciousness we are not implying an inherent bias in the direction of mystical experiences. The illustrations show that Teresa's susceptibility was ready to be influenced by any environment. But it so happened that her most persistent environment was the essentially religious one. Upon this point we shall enlarge below.

Just why St. Teresa should have a temperament of enhanced sensitivity we are unable to say. The psychology of temperament has not yet been sufficiently worked out to afford us much help in the explanation of this fact. The modern conjecture is that the general constitution of the nervous system and the mode of functioning of the bodily organs have considerable to do with temperament. McDougall points out that "of recent years some light has been thrown upon temperament by the discovery of the great influence exerted on mental life by certain organs whose functions had been, and in many respects still are, obscure. "The most notable example is perhaps the thyroid body, a small mass of soft cellular tissue in the neck. We know now that defect of the functions of this organ may reduce any one of us to a state of mental apathy bordering on idiocy, and that its excessive activity produces the opposite effect and may throw the mind into an over-excitability condition verging on maniacal excitement. Again we know that certain diseases tend to produce specific changes of temperament, that phthisis often gives it a bright and hopeful turn, diabetes a dissatisfied and cantankerous turn. It is clear that, in some cases of profound alteration of temperament by bodily disorder, the effects are produced by means of the chemical products of metabolism, which, being thrown out of the disordered tissues into the blood and reaching the nervous system by way of the blood stream, chemically modify its processes. It is probable that every organ in the body exerts in this way some influence upon our mental life, and that temperament is in a large measure the balance or resultant of all these many contributory chemical influences."⁴

We have, of course, no adequate description of the physiological constitution of St. Teresa which would enable us to trace her hyper-sensitivity to a definite cause either in her nervous system or the exceptional functioning of specific bodily organs. Attempts have been made to classify her as an hysterical or an epileptic or an hysterico-epileptic on the

⁴ *Social Psychology*, p. 117.

basis of symptoms described in her autobiography. But it is a question whether any of these are entirely satisfactory. Even so great an authority as Janet, who calls St. Teresa the "patron saint of hystericals" in his earlier work, *The Mental State of Hystericals*, finds his judgment shaken after having studied minutely the case of a live ecstatic in his own hospital.⁵ But waiving the attempt to locate an exact physiological or pathological basis for her sensitivity, we may feel sure that ill-health played no small part in enhancing it by producing an inward-looking attitude. For, to quote McDougall again, "perfect functioning of all bodily organs not only favors mental activity in general, but tends to an objective habit of mind; whereas imperfection of organic functions tends to produce an undue prominence in consciousness of the bodily self and therefore, an introspective and brooding habit of mind."⁶ This principle is seen early at work in the life of St. Teresa. The rigorous life of the Augustinian monastery proved too much for the delicately-reared young girl and at the end of a year and a half her stay was ended by a "serious illness." Of the nature of this illness we are not told, but Teresa seemed to regard it as influential in turning her thoughts more definitely to graver matters. "At this time," she writes, "though I was not careless about my own good, Our Lord was much more careful to dispose me for that state of life which was best for me. He sent me a serious illness, so that I was obliged to return to my father's house."⁷ It was during the three months following this illness that she resolved to become a nun. The decision was gradual and not without considerable inward debate. Her health was never entirely restored. She speaks of fainting fits attended with fever as coming at this time: and her first year at the Monastery of the Incarnation which she entered a few months later was one of definite ill-health. "The fainting fits began to be more; and my heart was so seriously affected, that every one who saw it was alarmed; and I also had many other ailments. . . . I was almost insensible at times."⁸ Certainly if physical disturbance has the effect of turning our attention inward upon our feelings St. Teresa had enough experience of the kind in those days to lead her into that habit of profound internal scrutiny which we have noted as characteristic of the mystics generally.⁹

⁵ See *The Mental State of Hystericals*, Eng. tr. p. 128, and his article "Une Extatique" in the *Bulletin de L'Institut Psychologique*, 1901, p. 209.

⁶ *Social Psychology*, p. 119.

⁷ *Life*, Chap. III, 1.

⁸ *Life*, Chap. IV, 6.

⁹ See above Chap. I, p. 11 ff.

As further evidence along the same line we may cite the fact that it was in the midst of these infirmities that she began to find certain forms of prayer easy for her. After reading a certain book which treated of the prayer of recollection she began to use it as a guide. "Our Lord began to comfort me so much in this way of prayer, as in his mercy to raise me to the prayer of quiet, and now and then to that of union, though I understood not what either the one or the other was, nor the great esteem I ought to have had of them." It is not impossible that the facilitation which she experienced with reference to this prayer of recollection was due to a growing power of inner discernment hastened by her illness. But whether or not we can trace St. Teresa's sensitiveness to a physiological base either in her early illnesses or in a constitution weak from the beginning we must recognize it as a factor—a delicate appreciativeness and responsiveness which is manifested in the artist and poet as well as the saint. The significance of this factor in a functional interpretation is that while the living social environment shapes and directs the attention of the individual, thus ultimately determining the type of consciousness, the *degree* of receptiveness and responsiveness which characterizes him plays a by no means negligible part in determining the fullness with which the social order expresses itself through the individual. It is the contribution which the individual himself makes. This capacity for reaction to the finer, more subtle, more ideal aspects of the environment is no doubt further stimulated and developed by the persistence of certain features of the environment. That is to say, a constant kind of stimulation is afforded which in time calls forth an habitual response. Thus in the case of St. Teresa the constant presence of the conception of the transcendence of God and the nothingness of this world, which filled the religious thinking of her day must have fostered in her the reaction of striving to get beyond this world of secular experience, a reaction which refined itself with increasingly delicate nuances of adjustment. Yet this continual stimulation cannot be the entire explanation. For many others who were subjected to the same stimulation failed of an equal degree of reaction. We cannot avoid, therefore, the postulation of an initial sensitivity in her case, which contributed materially to the degree of her mystical development. We repeat once more that this view does not commit us to the assumption of a mystical instinct or instinct for transcendence. For the same responsiveness would have developed a notably different kind of consciousness in surroundings of a different quality.

Turning now from the factor of temperament, which we have considered first in order, we pass next to the part played by the instincts in

the development of the mystical life of St. Teresa. Here we may watch the struggle for organization, the gradual modification and integration of the fundamental human tendencies into a unified and consistent self. In this matter of developing a unified personality Teresa, with all the mystics, simply shares the general problem of the race. We all of us, even as they, feel the imperative need of moulding the sum total of our tendencies into a working harmony with reference to some chosen end. But their specific distinction lies in the fact that the end striven for is the sense of unification grasped as an experience in itself. That is, the end is not organization with reference to this or that objective attainment, but absolute union, absolute simplification for its own sake.¹⁰ The mystic, to be sure, represents this union to himself under the symbolism of a direct contact with deity, so that at first he seems to have an objective end in the conception of God. But we must not lose sight of the significant fact that he tests his attainment of his idea solely by the experience of unification itself. The ordinary work-a-day person tests his success in achieving an organized personality by his actual efficiency in effecting his external object. We shall discuss, as far as we are able, the great tendencies at work in the life of St. Teresa and her means of harmonizing them.

The early years of St. Teresa show her to have been an affectionate child with a taste for the picturesque and the romantic. Her childhood was very like that of any normal child. She liked stories and at a very early age used to read the Lives of the Saints with one of her brothers. The two children once set off to find martyrdom somehow at the hands of the Moors but were espied and brought home by their uncle. They then had to find other outlet for their interest. "As soon as I saw that it was impossible to go to any place where people would put me to death for the sake of God, my brother and I set about becoming hermits; and in an orchard belonging to the house we contrived, as well as we could, to build hermitages, by piling up small stones one on the other, which fell down immediately; and so it came to pass that we found no means of accomplishing our wish. . . . I gave alms as I could—and I could but little. I contrived to be alone, for the sake of saying my prayers—and they were many—especially the Rosary. . . . I used to delight exceedingly, when playing with other children, in the building of monasteries, as if they were nuns; and I think I wished to be a nun though not so much as I did to be a martyr or a hermit."¹¹ All of this

¹⁰ See p. 12.

¹¹ *Life*, Chap. I, 6.

reveals nothing more than the playful spirit of childhood imitating what models the environment afforded. Years afterward, the saint looked back with approval upon these simple-hearted expressions of the instincts of childhood?

But as adolescence came on Teresa began to show tendencies which became later the cause of eloquent regret. She fell to reading books of chivalry and romance, to giving elaborate care to her personal appearance, to conversing with her cousins about their "affections and childish follies," to spending time with the light and frivolous relative, before mentioned.¹² To the modern reader these interests seem normal enough and, in fact characteristic of almost any child of her years. He sees here the usual budding of the self-consciousness, the vanity, the affectation and the widening social feeling which mark the maturing of the sex impulse. But to St. Teresa, reared in an atmosphere in which the ascetic ideals of the Middle Ages were still vital, these unfoldings of her nature appeared wicked and perverse. Such was her later definite interpretation and such was her dim feeling about them even at that early period whenever her thoughts were turned to religious ideals. To her the religious life meant, even in childhood, the attainment of the "vision of God," and reading romances, talking of light matters, and using perfumery meant "the world."¹³ To a sensitive child such as she was, keenly apprehensive of those ideals which were accounted highest by the society in which she moved, it is not surprising that there should come early that feeling of division in her inner life between the ideal on the one hand and the world of actual experience on the other. The feeling was enhanced later when she entered the conventual life in earnest. For there she looked upon herself as bound to aspire after a state of soul of the utmost purity—which, of course, meant the striving for an absolute inner unity and calm.

But in the monastery the conflict between tendencies thus set over against one another went on in subtle ways. The Monastery of the Incarnation was following a mitigated rule and the inmates were allowed considerable liberty in some matters. The young Teresa because of her exemplary life was allowed the privileges of the older nuns and received visits from some of her female friends in the city. But social conversation had the usual effect of turning the attention to miscellaneous matters, as well as fostering in the nun a self-consciousness which was not in keeping with the sort of religious life which she professed.

¹² *Life*, Chap. III.

¹³ *Life*, Chap. I, 4 and Chap. III, 5.

She found her sociability an injury and a dissipation. She calls it a pestilent amusement and a distraction. Especially was her inner life disintegrated by the visits of one person in particular. "No one caused me the same distraction which that person did of whom I am speaking; and that was because I had a great affection for her."¹⁴

After some eight years of oscillation between the tendencies which pertained to the monastic life and those which yet reached out to the more varied world outside, the saint found her energies so scattered that she gave up for a time the attempt to unify her interior life; that is, she gave up the practice of mental prayer. But on occasion of the death of her father three years later she placed herself under the direction of her father's confessor. This director charged her to resume her prayer and never to omit it. This was the beginning of a keener struggle, for the influences from outside militated against the concentration necessary for the practice. The saint's own language runs as follows: "I suffered much in prayer; for the spirit was slave, and not master; and so I was not able to shut myself up within myself—that was my whole method of prayer—without shutting up with me a thousand vanities at the same time. I spent many years in this way; and I am now astonished that any one could have borne it without abandoning either the one or the other."¹⁵ The duplicity of the situation robbed both interests of their satisfaction for the saint. "It was the most painful life that can be imagined, because I had no sweetness in God, and no pleasure in the world. When I was in the midst of the pleasures of the world, the remembrance of what I owed to God made me sad: and when I was praying to God, my worldly affections disturbed me. This is so painful a struggle, that I know not how I could have borne it for a month, let alone so many years."¹⁶ Owing to the failure of her confessors to understand that the inner life was being held asunder by things which, although intrinsically of a trivial character, could nevertheless in a delicate, sensitive nature such as hers work no inconsiderable havoc, this "divided self" continued its unsatisfactory existence for eleven years after her resumption of mental prayer. For she was not bidden to give up her secular companionships, and although she felt that they were wrong for her, her feelings and judgments against them did but slowly accumulate enough dynamic power to enable her to forsake them herself. However, her conventual attitude gradually gained the ascendancy over her worldly

¹⁴ *Life*, Chap. VII, 12.

¹⁵ *Life*, Chap. VII, 28.

¹⁶ *Life*, Chap. VIII, 1-2.

interest as the years passed by and finally her problem was solved by the occurrence of her first ecstasy. She fell into a trance in which she heard the words, "I will not have thee converse with men but with angels." From that day, about twenty years after her entrance into the monastery, St. Teresa was free from the affections of the world. "God be blessed forever," she exclaims in the autobiography, "who in one moment set me free, while I had been for many years making many efforts, and had never succeeded, very often also doing such violence to myself as injured my health; but, as it was done by Him who is almighty, and the true Lord of all, it gave me no pain whatever."¹⁷ Another and a new life seemed to dawn, in which although there were troubles enough, due to fear lest the many unusual psychic experiences which marked it were the work of diabolical influences, as her confessors said they were, there was yet no more of her old duality. Her life had at last become one.

Looking now at this development in more psychological terms we see that the center about which St. Teresa tended to organize all the tendencies of her life was the idea of God. She sought to bring all her instincts and sentiments into relation with this one idea. Her early childish curiosity was directed upon religious themes. Speaking of her reading the Lives of the Saints with her brother she says, "It astonished us greatly to find it said in what we were reading that pain and bliss were everlasting. We happened very often to talk of this; and we had pleasure in repeating frequently, 'For ever, ever, ever.'" Her fear seems almost never to have been aroused except in regard to the question of her relation to God; in her younger days it was fear lest sin might keep her away from God and in later life it was fear lest she were doing injustice to God through yielding to what might be the wiles of Satan. The thought of God called forth an attitude of the profoundest self-abasement; while the conviction that she was serving Him, especially in the later years when she was founding religious houses, gave her the power of a most vigorous self-assertion toward opposing difficulties. Her pugnacity seems never to have revealed itself except against those forms of religious laxity which she felt to be hindrances to the soul's attainment of the vision of God. And if, following McDougall, we call sympathetic interest in the welfare of others a manifestation of the parental instinct, we find this instinct too expressed as a desire that those with whom she came in contact should also be aided in their relation to God. The never-failing gregarious instinct appears in her great delight in the pres-

¹⁷ *Life*, XXIV, 9.

ence of other devout individuals. Acquisitiveness manifests itself in the accumulation of experiences of especial nearness to God. And construction, lastly, was all in the service of God, both in the childhood days of building hermitages in the orchard, and in the mature years of founding monasteries.

It is significant for our purpose to point out that in this idea which was the organizing center for her tendencies was included her conception of Christ. God and Christ are used almost interchangeably by her. A little further on we shall give some quotations to show that one of her devotional practices was the attempt to picture as clearly as possible to herself the human figure of Christ. This decidedly human aspect of her conception was a profound aid in her eventual attachment of all her love along with her other tendencies to this one idea. For we must recognize the fact that so absolute a unification of the personality as St. Teresa sought involved the control of the sex impulse as well as the others.

For, even with St. Teresa as with many another saint the most refractory impulse to implicate with the rest in unifying her life about her highest ideal was the sex impulse. Although she deplores her vanity and the desire to be well thought of in regard to religious matters during her earlier years in the Monastery of the Incarnation, these tendencies seem never to have given her the trouble that the sexual tendency did. This may seem astonishing at first in view of the fact that the autobiography nowhere speaks of those battles with the flesh which other saints such as St. Francis and St. John of the Cross describe. But this fact is evidence not that the instinct was inoperative, but that it was working in ways which obscured its immediate character. For "this instinct, more than any other, is apt in mankind to lend the immense energy of its impulse to the sentiments and complex impulses into which it enters, while its specific character remains submerged and unconscious."¹⁸ In a woman of St. Teresa's fine sensitivity we can well imagine that the instinct would not come to the surface in its own crudity, but rather fused and interpenetrated with some sentiment. And, indeed, such seemed to be precisely what happened. Shut away from the world of ordinary attachments the deep instinct to love insinuated itself into those friendships of Teresa with persons who visited her from the city. This seems to be the true explanation of the agitation and disintegration within her inner life occasioned by the conversations with her friends from the world. It was not that the conversations were frivolous, but

¹⁸ McDougall, *Social Psychology*, p. 82.

that the presence of those friends divided the affections of the saint between earthly persons and the central conception about which she was striving to organize her whole set of instincts. As a newcomer in the monastery, the young woman had not yet learned how to direct her whole affection upon God: consequently it flowed out through those distracting channels. During those twenty years of struggle which followed she gradually learned how to guide it through prayer and meditation on the Sacred Humanity of Christ. But the continual visits of her friends retarded the process. Had it not been for them she doubtless would have chieved her unification much sooner. That she was really dealing with the sex instinct in one of its secondary manifestations of affectionate friendship, St. Teresa did not understand, though she often felt that these friendships were somehow hindrances to her main purpose. There are only two passages which vaguely suggest that she accounted such ties in later life as belonging to the interests of the "flesh." Exclaiming against the dangers to young nuns in uninclosed monasteries she says, "Many of them (the nuns) are to be pitied; for they wished to withdraw from the world, and, thinking to escape from the dangers of it, and that they are going to serve our Lord, have found themselves in ten worlds at once, without knowing what to do, or how to help themselves. Youth and sensuality and the devil invite them and incline them to follow certain ways which are of the essence of worldliness."¹⁹ Again she says that in such lax institutions the sincere friar or nun "must be more cautious, and dissemble more, when they would speak of that friendship with God which they desire to have, than they would when they would speak of those friendships and affections which the devil arranges in monasteries."²⁰ In other places she speaks of these conversations as belonging to the pleasures of sense. These indirect references show that St. Teresa although by no means clearly aware of the fundamental origin of her inner troubles yet felt that these relationships, based on instinctive personal liking, were inferior in quality to those which were rooted in a mutual love of God. It is interesting to note that her friendships after the crisis which solved her problem of unification, were all of the latter sort. Whenever she speaks of later affections she explains that they are due to the piety and love of God which she perceived in the persons who inspired them.

¹⁹ *Life*, Chap. VII, 2.

²⁰ *Life*, Chap. VII, 9.

But one of the most striking indications that St. Teresa's struggle for unification was at bottom the attempt to enlist the sex impulse in the organization with the other tendencies about her central interest is the fact that ecstasies, raptures, interior comforts, etc., begin to multiply after her definite break with the ties that so long bound her to the love of particular persons. The great instinct once integrated with the rest in the service of her religious interest wrought all its emotional effects in her religious life. Professor Leuba has pointed out the sexual aspect of these enhanced mystic states. Their great emotional intensity, he thinks, is the outcome of the deeply rooted tendency of the organism to organic enjoyment, which, denied its ordinary expression, manifests itself in the experience of the mystic who is striving intensely for a complete devotion to God as an "erotomania with the idea of Jesus, the Virgin Mary or God as respondent." The profound affective experience of the mystic always involves, on this view, the excitation of "at least some of the organs of the sexual life, to an extent varying with each person, and always without his knowledge." The fact then that these extreme states did not set in for St. Teresa until after her sense of unification became established seems to suggest that the heart of her problem was really the subjugation of the wayward sex impulse to her ultimate aim. With the other instincts she had very little trouble in comparison with this one. This impulse was by far the most difficult to direct and undoubtedly because it did not manifest itself in its own specific form.

In this interpretation of St. Teresa's problem we are by no means intending to discount the pure and lofty aspirations of the saint. The sex instinct plays a profound and important role in a wide range of human reactions and when, in psychological analysis, we indicate its presence in unexpected phases we are far from implying that these phases are thereby debased. To do so would be to depreciate some of the finest values we know. For, as Professor Ames remarks, "The same impulse which impels to the union of individuals in courtship is carried over into the comradeship and brotherhood of families, clans, nations and races."²¹ Leuba himself, who uses so strong a word as "erotomania" in connection with the mystics, is careful to insist that this need by no means lessen our respect for them. "Erotomania," he says, "we need not shrink from using the term—is here in the service of lofty, ideal ends. As the enjoyment does not come from practices guilty in their eyes, but, on the contrary, from the vivid realization of the surpassingly great love to them

²¹ *Psychology of Religious Experience*, p. 235.

of an absolutely good God, its effect is elevating rather than debasing: it becomes the strengthener of holy resolves; it cements together the tendencies according to the will of God and increases their power. Allow me to recall in this connection the opinion held by many among those who have paid serious attention to the relation of the sexual function to the psychic life, that the irradiation of sexual energy when deviated from its ordinary channels of discharge accounts for much of the growth of the higher mental life."²² As a matter of fact it was the very purity of St. Teresa's aspirations which made the solution of her problem an unwitting mastery, in behalf of her highest ideal, of an impulse whose real nature she did not recognize. Paradoxical as it may seem we have here an unconscious resolution of an unconscious problem.

When we ask why St. Teresa's problem should have taken the form it did we come to the third factor at work in the development of her mysticism. In the modern thought environment where the emphasis is laid upon a divinity in our ordinary life and not beyond it, where our highest values are found within the world of human relationships rather than in some superhuman realm, the need is not felt to abstract our tendencies from their normal functioning in the give and take of normal human experience in order to apply them to a world of supra-mundane experience. In St. Teresa's time things were different. We have seen how early she was introduced to the Medieval ideals of accounting this world as naught and of striving for the vision of God as something apart from it. Her earliest recollections are of the prayers which her mother taught her—all with their Medieval sentiment, we may be sure—of reading eagerly the *Lives of the Saints*, and of imitating the religious life in childish games. Her father surrounded his children with "good books" which helped her to "think seriously" when she was six or seven years old. As a girl in the Augustinian monastery she learned of giving up all things for God. While convalescing from the illness which took her from that place she visited an uncle who "in his old age had left all his possessions and become a religious. . . . His practice was to read good books in Spanish; and his ordinary conversation was about God and the vanity of the world. These books he made me read to him. . . . By the good conversation of my uncle I came to understand the truth I had heard in my childhood, that all things are as noth-

²² For Leuba's theory see his article on "The Psychology of a Group of Christian Mystics," from which the above quotations are taken, in *Mind*, 1905, New Series, Vol. 14, p. 18; also two articles in the *Revue Philosophique*, Juillet, 1902.

ing, the world vanity, and passing rapidly away."²³ Later, when she had become a real nun in the Monastery of the Incarnation these impressions were deepened. In the days of her noviciate she began to read a book on the prayer of recollection. This set her in the way of truly mystical practices. "I was much pleased with the book and resolved to follow the way of prayer it described with all my might. . . . I began to spend a certain time in solitude, to go frequently to confession, and make a beginning of that way of prayer, with this book for my guide. . . . I spent nearly nine months in the practice of solitude."²⁴ In these beginnings of St. Teresa's religious life we see the illustration of the fact which we mentioned in Chapter I, namely, that the mystic of the later Middle Ages gained suggestions both of the ultimate value to be striven for, and of the means of attaining it, from their social environment. The sensitive spirit of St. Teresa came early into the heritage of the mystic goal as well as of the mystic technique. The book on prayer which she followed was the "Tercer Abecedario," the work of one Fray Francisco de Osuna of the Order of St. Francis. The Franciscan Order was deeply imbued with the tradition of shunning the claims of the world and striving for a unique experience of God in the advanced stages of the prayer state, as one may see by reading the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*.

The effect of acting upon these environmental suggestions was to develop in St. Teresa a wide range of subconscious activity. Whether her keen sensitivity would have resulted in visions, locutions and other automatisms in reaction to a modern twentieth century environment we cannot say. But certainly her intense striving for the Vision of God—and this meant for her not necessarily a visual apprehension, but the closest and most complete immediate contact—was a type of procedure which, particularly in days when miraculous revelations were commonly believed in and sought for, was well adapted to excite subconscious activity. She strove to "recollect" herself through mental prayer in quiet, and practiced in prayer "the presence of Christ." The prayer of recollection involved those factors of narrowing of the field of consciousness, limitation of voluntary movement, exclusion of irrelevant mental material, etc., which lay the individual open to the manifestations of subconscious activity by bringing on an abnormal mental state. William James has indicated in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* that prayer is an act

²³ *Life*, Chap. III, 5-6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Chap. IV, 8-9.

whereby the individual makes some kind of a draught upon his subconscious resources. We need not here go into the various theories and analyses of the contents of the subconscious. It is enough for our purpose to understand by it "any conserved experience or process outside of consciousness," to borrow a phrase from Morton Prince.²⁵ In the well-known description of James it is "the abode of everything that is latent and the reservoir of everything that passes unrecorded or unobserved. It contains, for example, such things as all our momentarily inactive memories, and it harbors the springs of all our obscurely motivated passions, impulses, likes, dislikes and prejudices. Our intuitions, hypotheses, fancies, superstitions, persuasions, convictions, and in general all our nonrational operations come from it. It is the source of our dreams, and apparently they may return into it. In it may arise whatever mystical experiences we may have, and our automatisms, sensory or motor: our life in hypnotic and "hypnoid" conditions, if we are subject to such conditions; our delusions, fixed ideas, and hysterical accidents, if we are hysteric subjects; our supra-normal cognitions if such there be, and if we are telepathic subjects."²⁶ Students of Abnormal Psychology are well aware of the fact that the human organism is much more sensitive to the environment and apprehensive of a far greater range of minutia and detail than our merely conscious experiences would lead us to believe. This has been demonstrated time out of mind by the recovery in hypnosis of precise details of experiences of which the subject's normal consciousness retained only the vaguest impression or perhaps no impression at all. This being so, we see that among the subconscious contents is an enormous number of quite precise impressions received from the environment which are ordinarily not available to the main consciousness because they were received surreptitiously, so to speak, when the attention was directed elsewhere.

But these subconscious contents may become available under conditions of deep abstraction and limitation of the field of clear consciousness to the smallest possible scope. Such concentration we find in the hysterical, the hypnotic subject, and the mystic. It occurs spontaneously in the hysterical, because, as Janet has labored to prove, there is in this case a pathological weakness of the power to attend to a wide range of stimuli at once.²⁷ It is brought about in the hypnotic subject

²⁵ *The Unconscious*, p. 252.

²⁶ *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 483.

²⁷ See Janet, Pierre, "The Major Symptoms of Hysteria" and "The Mental State of Hystericals."

by his effort to concentrate under the direction and with the aid of the suggestions of his physician. It is produced in the mystic by himself in the prolonged practice of recollecting himself in prayer, as we have indicated in our first chapter.

A characteristic of the subconscious contents is their power to change and combine into novel forms. Especially is this evident in dreams. Sometimes the combinations seem to be haphazard without guiding principle. Sometimes when the main consciousness is disturbed or worried over some specific matter or under the domination of some strong desire the combination is with reference to that particular thing. Thus in dreams we are not infrequently impressed with a certain relevancy between the dream imagery and our waking concerns. An especially interesting instance of the ministrations of the subconscious processes to the conscious self is given in the famous case of Miss Beauchamp by Morton Prince. Miss Beauchamp was a profound hysterical.

“Miss B. as a child frequently had visions of the Madonna and Christ, and used to believe that she had actually seen them. It was her custom when in trouble, if it was only a matter of her school lessons, or something that she had lost, to resort to prayer. Then she would be apt to have a vision of Christ. The vision never spoke, but sometimes made signs to her, and the expression of his face made her feel that all was well. After the vision passed she felt that her difficulties were removed, and if it was a bothersome lesson which she had been unable to understand, it all became intelligible at once. Or, if it was something that she had lost, she at once went to the spot where it was”.
“Miss B. had lost a bank check and was much troubled concerning it. For five days she had made an unsuccessful hunt for it, systematically going through everything in her room. She remembered distinctly placing the check between the leaves of a book, when some one knocked at the door and this was the last she saw of the check. She had become very much troubled about the matter, and in consequence, after going to bed that night she was unable to sleep, and rose several times to make a further hunt. Finally at three o'clock in the morning, she went to bed and fell asleep. At four o'clock she woke with the consciousness of a presence in the room. She arose and in a moment saw a vision of Christ, which did not speak, but smiled. She at once felt, as she used to, that everything was well, and that the vision foretold that she would find the check. All her anxiety left her at once. The figure retreated toward the bureau, but the thought flashed into

her mind that the lost check was in the drawer of her desk. A search, however, showed that it was not there. She then walked automatically to the bureau, opened the top drawer, took out some stuff on which she had been sewing, unfolded it, and there was the check along with one or two other papers."²⁸

In this description of Miss B's hunt for her money we have an illustration of the way in which an anxious desire can set subconscious processes going in a way that has pertinence to our troubled situation. As the case of Miss B. is that of an hysterical we have here the more elaborate working of the subconscious processes into a vision and automatic acts. But the significant fact is that the absent-minded act of Miss B. in putting the money where she did made its definite impression on some part of her organism, and when summoned in response to her need and her special effort in prayer, somehow connected itself with the idea of Christ as the symbol of well-being and arose in her main consciousness to give symbolic direction to her search.

Now in view of the foregoing we have a psychological angle from which to interpret the hallucinatory experiences of St. Teresa. She was surrounded from childhood with religious objects. They filled her life. She was a constant reader of religious books. In her noviciate she liked to be surrounded with images and to look at pictures. She sought to imagine the humanity of Christ early in her practice of prayer. Naturally after she achieved her goal of unity of self, so that she was able to enter into the deepest concentration in prayer it is quite to be expected that the subconscious contents, stored up through years of impressions from religious things received both consciously and through the countless channels that feed the subconscious, should emerge into that main consciousness both as objects of contemplation and, in times of stress, to furnish what aid their more minute acquaintance with things afforded. Through all those twenty years of struggle before the saint had subdued the distractions of personal affection she had been practicing recollection and concentration, striving, unconsciously indeed, to create the very conditions most favorable to the dumping of subconscious results into the main consciousness. It is not surprising, therefore, that visions of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the Devil and Saints, Heaven and Hell came trooping in with great facility when once she had mastered the technique of concentration. For these ideas had made up her world of values since the days of her childhood.

²⁸ Prince, Morton, *The Dissociation of a Personality*. Appendix L, p. 548. Also quoted in *The Unconscious*, pp. 188-89.

We see evidences of the subconscious maturing of tendencies in the experience which we have already noted of her hearing the words, "I will not have thee converse with men, but with angels." For the years preceding this revelation, which marked the sundering of the earthly friendships, had been filled with the increasing desire on the part of the saint to devote her all to God. This yearning, started in her main consciousness, matured gradually in the subconscious region, until ripe enough to conquer the divided condition of her inner life, when it sent in its report to the main consciousness in the form of a divine command. Similarly her vision of Christ which continued before her for several days is another example of the same thing. For years she had striven to picture to herself the Sacred Humanity. Even in her earliest nunhood she began this effort. "I used to labor with all my might to imagine Jesus Christ, our God and our Lord, present within me. And this was the way I prayed."²⁹ Only for a time when influenced by the opinions of certain books did the saint give up this practice. But she hastens to tell us, "I did not continue long of this opinion, and so I returned to my habit of delighting in the Lord, particularly at Communion. I wish I could have his picture and image always before my eyes, since I cannot have Him graven in my soul as deeply as I wish."³⁰ An interesting aspect of this effort of Teresa's is that she did not succeed very well because her imagination was "sluggish," as she calls it. But this sluggishness was more than made up by the subconscious elaboration following the effort. For when her period of visions arrived, that of the Sacred Humanity surpassed anything that she had been able to dream of or see painted. It clearly had had a longer and more persistent subconscious incubation than any of her other impressions. Incidentally we perceive in the above quotation the method by which St. Teresa managed to direct her affection upon the divine Object by means of the imaging of Christ. After the control of the sex instinct was accomplished the idea so long striven for was translated into a vision.

It is not possible to analyse all of her automatisms in detail because the entire setting is but rarely given. But instances are not lacking in which we see subconscious responses to problems or suggestions arising in the main consciousness. The vision directing her to found the Monastery of St. Joseph is of this type. It was after she had discussed the possibility of founding a house of stricter conventual discipline, but was yet holding back because of liking for the condition in which she then was,

²⁹ *Life*, Chap. IV, 10.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

that the suggestion worked itself out into the command to work for that end with her whole might. Sometimes questions were answered as in the following: "Once when I was thinking how much more purely they live who withdraw themselves from all business, and how ill it goes with me, and how many faults I must be guilty of when I have business to transact, I heard this; 'It cannot be otherwise, My daughter; but strive thou always after a good intention in all things, and detachment; lift up thine eyes to Me, and see that all thine actions may resemble Mine.'"³¹ Again we have instances of subconscious reproach and commendation when the Lord chided her for short-comings or praised her for some particular service.

To St. Teresa herself these various revelations seemed to have a foreign origination. Although she was well aware that they really were not outside herself she yet had the firm conviction that they did not arise *from* herself. The utterances were too profound and the scenes too inconceivably great in her estimation to arise from her own intelligence. "The human locution," she says—and she seems to mean here chance words arising in the midst of mystical devotions which are akin to the verbal hypnogogic hallucinations of normal sleep experience—"is as something which we cannot well make out, as if we were half asleep; but the divine locution is a voice so clear that not a syllable of its utterance is lost. It may occur, too, when the understanding and the soul are so troubled and distracted that they cannot form one sentence correctly; and yet grand sentences, perfectly arranged, such as the soul in its most recollected state never could have formed, are uttered. . . . The divine locutions instruct us without loss of time, and we understand matters which seem to require a month on our part to arrange. The understanding, and the soul, stand amazed at some of the things we understand."³² The inspiring power of these "grand sentences" she takes as further evidence of their derivation from a source beyond herself. Again she points to the fact that these visitations both of locutions and visions come at incalculable times and not as the result of her own volition. In other words they are entirely automatic. To the modern psychologist, such experiences suggest not necessarily a supernatural power but the workings of an unusually rich and busy subconsciousness. The mystic is right in feeling that the voices and visions are not the expression of his immediate waking consciousness, but they are none the less the outcome of that part of his own mental makeup

³¹ Relation III, sec. 4.

³² *Life*, Chap. XXV, secs. 6 and 12.

which we call the subconscious. In the sensitive temperament of the mystic the profound energizing in devotional practice sets going a considerable ferment in the fringe of his mental life, an organizing of ideas, as in the artistic consciousness with the difference that the ideas are chiefly religious. From time to time the products of this hidden, organizing process emerge into the dominant waking consciousness as intruders, taking the form of extra-originated words and visions. The voices and visions of the mystic are after all very much akin to the inspirations of the artist.³³ They represent coördinations for which he has striven but which are completed in the margin of his mental activity, with the result that they are not recognized as products of the focal center when they appear therein.

Drawing together now the main features of our analysis of the case of St. Teresa we see that her mysticism is rooted in the three factors which we stated in the beginning. An initial sensitivity which was enhanced by much bodily illness made her especially impressionable with reference to the ideals of her social group, which means really the whole Medieval consciousness, dominated by the conceptions of a transcendent Deity, contact with whom is to be attained by turning away from the world of ordinary relations. In attempting to bring her life into harmony with the conceptual elements of her environment St. Teresa found her chief difficulty with the sex impulse. Her long struggle for perfection is really an expression of her effort to master this instinct, whose character she did not recognize, in the interests of the socially-conceived highest ideal. Her profound affective experiences—raptures, ecstasies, etc.—are the outcome of her final victory in the struggle; while her visions, locutions, and other automatisms are the products of the subconscious maturing of the strenuous inner striving involved in the conflict. In a word, the mysticism of St. Teresa is the outcome of a highly sensitive nature endeavoring to reconcile the conflicting claims of the normal human instincts and a particularly exacting social environment.

³³ See Chapter I.

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTICISM OF BLAISE PASCAL

In the life of St. Teresa we saw a mysticism which arose in an environment distinctly Medieval. Although the modern history of Spain is said to date from the accession of Charles the Fifth in 1516, one year after the birth of St. Teresa, this by no means signifies that the sixteenth century witnessed a decline of the civilization of the past. The spirit of the Inquisition and the Counter-Reformation upheld too powerfully the sanctions and traditions of the Church to allow the rapid entrance of such influences as were affecting Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. It is true that this century was taught of Spain in the exploits of Columbus, Vasco da Gama, Magellan, Cortez, and Pizarro, but the reflex effects of such events had not yet begun to make themselves powerfully felt in the world of religious thought; still less in the seclusion of monasteries and nunneries where St. Teresa moved. Accordingly there breathes about her life the atmosphere of Medieval devotion, harking back to the world-sacrificing struggle after the vision of God through prayer and self-mortification in the isolation of the private cell. The influences playing upon her life were thus uniform rather than complex. The organized structure of Medieval religious culture had no rival in her consciousness.

But turning to the following century and to another country we find a more complex milieu giving rise to a different type of mystic. France in the seventeenth century, though still well acquainted with monastic ideals and practices was feeling the effects of a new stream of thought and a new spirit. The Renaissance with all that it implied had already by 1623, when Pascal was born, ushered in the mood of modern science. The work of Copernicus, Tycho Brahe and Kepler had marked the rise of interest in physics and astronomy. The major part of Galileo's empirical investigations had been completed. Bacon had set up the ideal of the inductive method. Descartes had hit upon the fundamental principle of his revolutionary philosophy which he was ere long to put into print. Torricelli, Huyghens, and Boyle were soon to become well-known names even in Pascal's lifetime. The birth of Sir Isaac Newton was but twenty years away. To the scientific thought of the age Pascal himself was to make no insignificant contribution. The trend of the thought which flowed through the minds of all these thinkers was in the direction of exalting once more the human reason which had for cen-

turies been subjected in obedience to authorities of the past. This awakened in those who caught the breath of the new time a confidence in the direct interrogation of nature by observation and experiment. Naturally the new conception collided with the traditional conception of the Church, according to which man was to accept all his knowledge in terms sanctioned by the Church and to use his reason only in justification of churchly formulations. Thus there was a complexity which the sensitive young mind of the day would find in his thought environment, particularly if he lived in Paris where all views found able representatives. And it was in such an environment that the sensitive consciousness of Blaise Pascal appeared and developed.

He was born at Clermont Ferrand in Auvergne on July 17, 1623. His father was a judge, who combined with his professional interests an attention to science, especially to mathematics in which he possessed a considerable ability. His mother died when Pascal was but three years of age. Her influence upon his life, so far as personality is concerned, was therefore very slight: but physically it was very great, for it was from his mother's stock that Blaise inherited the weak constitution which troubled him all his life. In Paris, whither the family moved after the mother's death, Stephen Pascal sought to bring up his children according to a scheme of his own. He played the part of schoolmaster himself. He believed in reasoning and observation and was pleased to find a ready eagerness on the part of his son to question the how and why of everything. The boy did not stop merely with the things which his father taught him. He became interested in some of Nature's manifestations by himself. His sister tells of his puzzling over the fact that a plate set ringing by a rap from a knife ceases to sound when touched. Again, when withheld from the study of geometry because his father thought him too young to be occupied with its fascinations, he set to work with what few hints he had to discover geometry for himself, and was only apprehended at his secret play by his father when he was trying to prove that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. The astonished father of course could only meet this irrepressible appreciativeness on the part of the son by giving him the books erstwhile denied and letting him master them in his own way.

It is quite to be expected that so keen and inquisitive a mind as these early anecdotes reveal would readily become interested in the intellectual pursuits which were the avocation and re-creation of his father. Blaise became the youngest member of a scientific club to which his father belonged and which, a few years after Blaise's death, became the Acade-

mie des Sciences. The club had a varied membership; men of fashion, professors, lawyers, engineers and friars listened and contributed to its discussions. Here he heard many a learned theory propounded and doubtless many a learned altercation as well. Although he himself had to leave Paris with the rest of the family when his father was appointed to the Intendantcy of Normandy by Cardinal Richelieu, it was not before he had sent to press the advertisement of his work on conic sections. Thus early as a youth of sixteen he showed himself appreciative to the scientific element in his environment.

The high degree of impressionability so soon manifested in the life of Pascal was doubtless rooted in a nervous instability. Along with stories of precocity which have come down to us from his boyhood days to excite our wonder and admiration there is another which causes us to ponder. "Entre un et deux ans," writes his biographer, "Blaise a une maladie inexplicable qui dure onze à douze mois; il ne pouvait souffrir la vue de l'eau; l'approche de son père et de sa mère lui donnait des convulsions."¹ These peculiar phobias in themselves suggest nervous trouble. And if there is some grain of truth in the story that Blaise was brought out of this condition by an old woman who professed to undo a spell which she admitted to have cast upon him, we have evidence of an unusual degree of suggestibility in the infant. The numerous illnesses and breakdowns in Pascal's life attendant upon his intellectual labors carry out this first impression of a highly strung nervous organization. It is not too difficult to believe also the story that after a carriage accident in which Pascal narrowly escaped being precipitated from the Bridge of Neuilly into the Seine he was thereafter haunted in his sleepless nights and moments of depression by the vision of a precipice at his bedside the sense of whose reality could be dispelled only by placing a chair between his bed and the visionary gulf.

But turning from these anecdotal evidences of the close relationship between the delicate nervous constitution of Pascal and his high sensitivity, we may observe the latter writ large in the remarkably diverse interests which occupied successive periods of his intense, even feverish, career. Pascal combined such divergent worlds as those of science, fashionable society and religion. Or perhaps we should say that he was claimed by each in turn, but wholly surrendered himself to the last alone. For the three worlds did not harmonize in his own mind and his reaction to each built up within him a trio of contradictory selves. Thus we find him learning that geometry and reason availed but little when he was

¹ Strowski, Fortunat, *Pascal et son Temps*, Vol. II, p. 3.

absorbed in the concerns of the drawing room; while in his early scientific period he had been content to estimate people solely according to their intellectual calibre; and in his later religious mood was to pour contempt upon both science and the world. Apropos of this heterogeneity of tendency in Pascal a writer in the *Edinburgh Review* has remarked suggestively, "In highly organized natures the psychical elements are sometimes dissociated—the machinery, too delicate, too complex, is often out of gear. It is the abundance and importance of these elements that make Pascal's case unique, and his character full of apparent contradictions—so many selves, each animated by a different purpose and activity of its own. His state of mind was never, at any given moment, the sole and stable result of all his moral life: it was the image of one face in a many-figured soul."² These words appear in a popular magazine article and were not meant to be subjected to a minute psychological scrutiny. It would be better, however, instead of accounting for the various phases of Pascal's career as the several expressions of different mental elements, to say that Pascal, in reacting to three distinctly different types of environment, organized within himself three different systems of response which he never quite coördinated. But the fundamental point is clear. The quick responsiveness of Pascal laid him open to diverse influences which called forth tendencies hard to reconcile. From the point of view of our explanatory categories his case is especially significant for we see their operation under other than religious circumstances.

Following M. Michaut,³ we distinguish four periods in the life of Pascal. The first extending from 1623 to 1646 includes the events of his childhood and his earliest scientific efforts. The second, from 1646 to 1649, is notable for the first serious direction of his attention to religious matters as interpreted for him by the Jansenists. The third, 1649-1654, is his worldly period, ending however with a return to his scientific interests. The fourth, 1654-1662, marks his final conversion and retreat to the religious house of Port Royal, in loyalty to whose religious ideals he remained for the rest of his years.

We have already said something concerning the first period. The efforts and ambitions of the lad were then all of a scientific bent. The father, believing that faith and reason have nothing to do with one another, by which he meant that "Catholicism need not be suffered to

² *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 214, p. 53.

³ *Les Epoques de la Pensée de Pascal*.

enter the sphere of daily life,"⁴ did not teach more than a conventional religious practice to Blaise and his two sisters, Gilberte and Jacqueline. The result was that Blaise's first intellectual environment was cast almost wholly in terms of the conceptions which were in the air at the Paris Club, and, when he had gone to Rouen with the rest of the family on occasion of his father's administrative appointment, in terms of the practical problems in which his father was involved. His reactions to the interests of the Club was the *Traite des Sections Coniques* before mentioned, and to the clerical necessities of his father's office the invention of an arithmetical machine. The progress of the latter performance was well-nigh stopped by the appearance of a similar device from the rival hand of a Rouen watchmaker. The resentment manifested by the young Pascal evidences at once a jealousy for his good name and the disgust which he felt at the idea of such an invention coming from the hand of one not skilled in the theory of the matter. It reveals the motivation of certain sentiments of scientific excellence and of personal fame. From the point of view of the Pascal of the Pensees he was sadly astray amid the vanities of the world.

But the process, thus started, of building up a scientific self was not to go on uninterrupted. In the year 1646 an event occurred which placed a new set of considerations before the mind of Blaise. His father, one January morning, dislocated his thigh by a fall on the ice. To aid him in his recovery he had recourse to the services of two gentlemen, landowners near Rouen, who had considerable skill in bone-setting. But these men had other interests than their land and their bone-setting. During the three months they were present in Stephen's household they improved the time by talking of religious matters to Jaqueline and Blaise. Gilberte, the older sister, was married by this time, and so did not partake of this experience. The kind of religious thought which imbued the two guests was what was known as Jansenism. The Jansenist movement had its doctrinal origin in the theories of a Dutch theologian who composed a ponderous work on the theology of St. Augustine in 1640. The chief ideas of the "Augustinus" were the helplessness, misery and weakness of man; the non-indigenous character of his present evil state; and the necessity of some heaven-sent remedy to redeem him therefrom.⁵ To the young Pascal these ideas made a strong appeal. The logical manner in which they were set forth in the Jansenist writings attracted his geometrically-trained intellect while

⁴ St. Cyres, Viscount, *Pascal*, p. 70.

⁵ See St. Cyres, *Pascal*, Chap. 6.

his own physical sufferings lent color to the doctrine of man's wretchedness. His acceptance of these teachings is known as his first conversion, but the experience seems to have been a wholly theoretical affair. Its immediate fruit was his induction of the whole family into the same views, Jacqueline first, this father second, and Gilberte and her husband later. Not long after this a nervous breakdown, accompanied by "violent and prolonged neuralgia, partial paralysis of the lower limbs, inability to swallow," etc., gave him an opportunity to practice resignation to the will of God under trying circumstances. But the time was not yet for the ideas implanted in these days to bear their ripe fruit. They were yet to undergo incubation while Pascal busied himself still with science and later with the affairs of the salon. Although he knew the doctrine he was not yet moved to surrender his scientific pride and ambition to ends solely religious. His religious system of reactions was not sufficiently developed to become the full bearer of his personality. The scientific self was still to the fore and underwent yet greater expansion during this second period.

For in the autumn of 1646 all of Pascal's scientific tendencies were stimulated by the news of an experiment by Torricelli which, it was said, would throw light on the question as to whether nature really could endure a vacuum. Blaise and his father were aroused to repeat the experiment, for one of the best glass factories in France was situated at Rouen and made the securing of the proper tubes easy. They inverted a tube filled with mercury with its open end submerged in a cup of mercury and found that instead of running out, the mercury remained high in the tube, though withdrawing a few inches from the upper end. The experiment was also tried with wine and water by using gigantic tubes forty feet long. The same principle held. The work of the Pascals stirred up a huge deal of discussion—opposition from upholders of old Aristotelian notions, and defenders among sympathetic members of the Paris Club. Even the great Descartes was interested and paid young Pascal a visit while the latter was on his sick bed as a result of the intensity of those days of scientific application. In November of 1647 at the request of Pascal, who was too ill to carry out the test himself, Florin Perier, his brother-in-law, performed the experiment with mercury, both at the foot and at the top of the Puy-de-dome, a high mountain near Clermont. This clinched Torricelli's conjecture that the mercury which remains in the inverted tube is held in place by the pressure of the earth's atmosphere. In the writing of explanations, interpretations, and defences of his work Pascal experienced the pride and

satisfaction of seeing himself in the center of the attention of his scientific world. While all the flush of this was upon him, an event occurred which for a time pushed his religious self yet further into the background. In 1648 Pascal paid a visit to Port Royal de Paris, the chief religious house of the Jansenists. In conversation with the chaplain the latter gently rebuked him for a certain vanity and confidence in reason which he displayed. This brought clearly to the consciousness of Pascal the fact that behind the sober logic which had been one of the attractive features of Jansenism as he first saw it there was really an emphasis upon a supernaturalism which held the wisdom of reason of but little account in the question of man's ultimate destiny. But Pascal was still in the ardor of his love for geometry and the method for which geometry stands. Back among his friends of the Paris Club also, all his earlier attitudes were revived, and his religious mood at Rouen doubtless became pale and remote in his imagination. At any rate, although he sympathized with the wish of his sister Jacqueline to become a nun at Port Royal, he began to drift away from the ideas of Jansenism in the direction of Cartesian conceptions of God—conceptions developed in a truly geometrical spirit. In other words the scientific self bade fair to assimilate the religious self. In fact he had gotten so far by 1651, when his father died, that his sympathy with Jacqueline's project vanished and he reproached her bitterly for taking the veil and leaving him, even though she could reply that her father's death was the event which made her free to carry out her own purpose.

But now the third period dawned evoking in Pascal yet a third system of reactions. About the year before Stephen Pascal died Blaise had fallen in with the young Duke of Roannez, "an aristocrat of scientific tastes and fond of the society of learned men."⁶ This friendship drew him into the life of the Paris drawing rooms. Here Pascal found that his scientific self had but scant respect. Such an arbiter elegantiarum as the Chevalier de Mere soon taught him that science does not give one either polite behaviour or taste or feeling. The axioms and definitions of mathematics only make the geometer ridiculous when he endeavors to apply them to matters so foreign to their domain as the manners of polite society. These latter must be judged otherwise than by reason. For a time Pascal submitted himself to the rules of the game, studied to acquire an intuitive perception of the proper needs of each social situation, smoothed out his literary style, and even wrote a discourse on love. The philosophy of polite circles being that of Epictetus and Montaigne,

⁶ St. Cyres, *Pascal*, p. 133.

he devoted himself assiduously to these authors. By the latter he was taught that there is nothing so fallible as the human reason. Geometry, physics, medicine, history, ethics, politics, jurisprudence—all these in the eyes of the great sceptic were open to grave doubt. Pascal who was fresh from learning the lesson of the limitations of his mathematical applications found these ideas not unpalatable. He had puzzled over the validity of the axioms himself. Curiously enough this learning of the world had the effect of opening the way for the return of ideas which Pascal had laid aside after his conversation with the chaplain at Port Royal. For with the doubt of the reliability of mathematics came a doubt of the geometrically founded God of Descartes. How could one rest satisfied with a God which had no surer basis than the one furnished by the limited method of mathematics? The insufficiency of the human reason to attain to God, which Jansenism had taught, began to seem more acceptable doctrine. Furthermore did not Montaigne reënforce the first thesis of Jansen, though with much wider wealth of illustration, that man with his useless speculation and ill-directed moral efforts is in a sorry state? The difference was that Montaigne had no further thesis of a divine grace to help one out. "I should have loved with all my heart the minister of so great a vengeance," Pascal remarked later in his Conversation with M. de Saci, "if being a disciple of the Church by faith, he had followed the rules of ethics, in bringing men whom he had so usefully humiliated, not to irritate by new crimes him who alone can draw them from the crimes which he has convicted them of not being able even to know."

However, although usages and the philosophy of polite society might recall the thoughts of his first Jansenic period as to the limitations of scientific reasoning, he was by no means negligent of scientific activity during this worldly period. "The years 1653-1654 were those of his principle mathematical discoveries."⁷ At this time he wrote his treatises on the arithmetical triangle and the theory of number as well as numerous other pamphlets. But there are evidences that beneath all this activity, social as well as scientific, the soul of Pascal was not at rest. From the month of December 1653, as he afterward confessed to his sister, the world had palled upon him. "Il se sentit tout d'un coup 'un grand mépris du monde,' et 'un dégoût insupportable pour les personnes qui en sont.'"⁸ As Strowski points out the very number of the scientific pamphlets indicates a feverish activity. Perhaps Pascal

⁷ Boutroux, Emile, *Pascal*, p. 65.

⁸ Strowski, *Pascal et Son Temps*, p. 280.

absorbed himself in mathematics in order to divert his mind. It is not unlikely that at this time some of the questions began to haunt him which he afterward formulated with such poignancy in the *Pensees*. What is the lot of man after death? Will he fall into nothingness or into the hands of an angry God? What avails knowledge, glory or power in the question of man's eternal destiny? However it was, there must have been some elaboration and development among the system of tendencies which made up his religious self, for he was soon to meet the great crisis which ushered in the last great period of his life.

Toward the autumn of 1654 the need of discussing the turmoil which he found within him led Pascal to visit his sister Jacqueline at Port Royal. The account which she gives of his attitude in a letter to her sister indicates the profound dissatisfaction of the ununified self. "It grieved me much to see how wretched he was. He told me how he longed to be free of all his occupations, and to cut adrift from the world, Between his detestations of its follies and the reproaches of his conscience. he feels very much more detached from it than ever he was before. On the other hand, he feels himself wholly forsaken by the grace of God. He has striven hard to regain it, although all the while he felt that the impulse to do so came from his own heart and conscience and not from above."⁹ This was but the first of many visits. His sister listened sympathetically "without trying to put any kind of pressure on him." The inner struggle continued for at least a month longer when suddenly, on the night of November 23, 1654, it reached its resolution. Just what happened is still the subject of conjecture, as Pascal never talked of the experience with anyone, at least not so that any report has come down to us. After his death a slip of parchment was found in the lining of his coat on which was written a number of disconnected sentences, expressive of a sense of profound rapture and renunciation. It runs as follows:

In the year of Grace, 1654.

On Monday, 23rd of November, Feast of St. Clement, Pope and Martyr, and of the other Saints in the Martyrology.
Vigil of St. Chrysogonus, Martyr, and others.
Between about half-past ten in the evening until
half-past twelve.

Fire.

God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob.
Not the God of the philosophers and the wise.

⁹ St. Cyres, *Pascal*, p. 193.

Certainty, certainty.
 God of Jesus Christ.
 'My God and thy God'
 'Thy God shall be my God.'
 Forgetfulness of the world and all but God.
 He is found only in the ways shown by the Gospel.
 Greatness of the soul of man.
 'O righteous Father, the world, hath not known Thee,
 but I have known Thee.'
 Joy, joy, joy, tears of joy.
 I have fallen away from Him.
 'They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters.'
 'My God, forsakest Thou me?'
 May I not fall from him forever.
 'This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only
 God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou has sent.'
 Jesus Christ.
 Jesus Christ.
 I have fallen away; I have fled from Him, denied Him,
 crucified Him.
 May I not fall from Him forever.
 We keep hold of Him only in the way shown by the gospel.
 How sweet is utter renunciation.
 Absolute submission to Jesus Christ and to my director.
 'I will not forget thy word.' Amen.

That we have in these lines the record of some mystical experience there can be no doubt. Of its precise nature, whether vision or ecstasy, we may be uncertain. It may have been a combination of both. In any case it was a unique experience for Pascal and marks the complete identification of his personality with his religious tendencies. For it was a matter of but a few weeks before he left his worldly environment and took up his residence at Port Royal. "Thenceforward, although he was never officially enrolled in their community, a great part of his time was spent among the Port Royal 'Hermits'—a group of laymen, who led an austere, semi-monastic existence at the abbey-gates."¹⁰ There, he became known, first as a distinguished penitent, and later as a defender of Jansenist views against Jesuitical casuistry and laxity, in his famous Provincial Letters. The last three years of his life were full of physical

¹⁰ St. Cyres, *Pascal*, p. 197.

suffering. He had in mind to write an Apology for Christianity. But his ill-health prevented this from getting beyond the stage of disconnected observations which we now read as his "Thoughts." His closing days were marked by an asceticism which has led some to think that he died insane. Only once did he revert to mathematics in this fourth period, when he sought to distract his attention from violent pains in his head by occupying his thoughts with the problem of the cycloid. He died in 1662.

In this case of Pascal we see how a complex environment acting upon an over-sensitive soul may so divide the tendencies among heterogeneous interests that the sense of unification, if achieved at all, must come through some cataclysmic identification of the whole personality with one or the other of these interests to the subordination, if not exclusion, of the rest. A temperament more phlegmatic than Pascal's would doubtless not have responded so readily to three such different environments, to begin with. Certainly it would not have reacted to them as vehemently as did Pascal. But Pascal, with a keen awareness, sharpened by his nervous troubles to an almost intuitive insight, gave himself profoundly to whatever engaged his attention. The result was that his scientific environment called out one system of reactions, organized about the sentiments of pride and ambition; his social environment called out another based on vanity and perhaps romantic love; while Port Royal summoned yet another system in opposition to both of these, centering about the sentiments of absolute self-surrender and renunciation.

The attitude which Jansenism fostered was started in its formation early in his young manhood, before adolescence had passed. He was twenty-three when the accident of his father brought the two Jansenist representatives to the home at Rouen. The impulse toward self-surrender was aroused at that time, and Pascal learned that one might expect some extraordinary visitation of God at least once in a lifetime. But this impulse did not expand to dominating power until it had time for subconscious elaboration and had received reënforcement from some of Pascal's later experiences. For there can be no doubt that Pascal's ill-health deepened his sense of insufficiency and weakness. Further, his confidence in his mathematical and scientific intellect, which was his chief source of personal pride and power, was shaken by his salon experiences and the teachings of Montaigne. So even his most worldly activities aided his mystical development in a negative way by running counter to his science. That is, the attitudes aroused by fashion con-

flicted with the reactions stirred by science thus releasing more fully the tendencies evoked by Jansenism. Ultimately a line of division was drawn between this last and the other two, which together became the self which must be surrendered. In the crisis of November 23, 1654, there took place a rearrangement of all the tendencies. The system of religious attitudes became paramount, and henceforth Pascal's whole life was organized about them as a center. His fundamental self was thereafter religious. If ever the old attitude functioned after that it was in the service of the religious self. The old self or selves were gone. Two years before his death Pascal wrote to a friend that while he considered geometry a most beautiful occupation he yet felt it to be so useless that he would not take two steps in its behalf.

A comparison of Pascal's mysticism with that of St. Teresa shows how influential surrounding conditions are in determining the character of the mystical experience. Both of these individuals were possessed of a rare sensitiveness and responsiveness to the influences which played about them. In both the normal human instincts organized into sentiments and attitudes in their adjustive reactions to their social environment. Both experienced a division of their tendencies which was eventually overcome. But the line of division and its cause differed in the two cases.

St. Teresa's environment had been a simple one. From childhood she had felt its pull upon those tendencies which go to make up the character of the Medieval nun. Its ideal of the life absolutely devoted to the vision of God was held steadily before her. Her life was, therefore, a continuous striving after a constantly purer and finer realization of that vision. Her struggle was to keep all of her tendencies from finding their realization in any object not immediately related to this. Her problem seemed to be, not so much the reconciliation of conflicting systems of reaction—for her religious self was foremost, though not in absolute control, from the time she entered the monastery—as it was to conquer one or two wayward impulses which were hard to control in behalf of her single ideal. Her chief trouble was with the sex impulse. When that was finally conquered, through the subconscious maturing of her striving during many years, her response to the steady pull of her environment was an almost continuous series of mystical experiences.

Pascal's environment made a different demand upon him. For one thing it was complex. Instead of drawing him in a single direction, it drew him in three. Each phase called out a system of reactions more or less contradictory to the others. This fact in itself would doubtless

have resulted in some sort of psychological crisis. And when we add that the religious teaching which began the development of the religious system of reactions stressed the necessity of a cataclysmic reception of Grace, we can see how the mystical exaltation of Pascal would tend to be compressed into a few hours of intense experience rather than be spread over the years indefinitely. In other words, the suggestion implanted by the Jansenists, although taking some years to mature, was of the kind to find its fulfillment in one short explosive experience. That was what the young Pascal was taught to expect and that was what happened. Not but that there was growth in his religious life after the crisis, but this did not partake of the character of ecstatic exaltation so far as can be made out. The one outstanding experience of a sense of immediate contact with his religious object occurred on that November night. We have no record of any other.

Pascal, like St. Teresa, did not look upon his remarkable experience as called out by his environment. It was nothing short of a miracle, a revelation from a world invisible. "If you are united to God," he writes in the *Pensees*, "it must be by grace, not by nature." Again in defining a miracle he says, "It is an effect which exceeds the natural force of the means employed for it: and a non-miracle is an effect which does not exceed the natural force of the means employed for it."¹¹ But Pascal could not estimate the astounding possibilities of the reactions of a highly sensitive nervous organism; nor did he know anything of such things as subconscious maturing of impressions and tendencies. His concept of the natural was based solely on his understanding of physical and mathematical laws. Biology had not yet arisen, and the greatest thinker of the time, Descartes, had been obliged to explain animals as marvelous machines. Consequently Pascal could not be familiar with the notion that a stimulus may evoke from a sensitive organism a response quite out of proportion to its own character. Abnormal Psychology shows us that the effect upon an organism sometimes quite astonishingly "exceeds the natural force of the means employed for it," without at all lifting the phenomenon in question out of the realm of understood natural processes. A physician once told the writer of a hysterical case which came under his observation, in which a young girl suddenly lost the use of her lower limbs at happening to see her pet dog shot by an irate postman. Here we have an effect—familiar enough to the specialist in nervous diseases and to the student of Abnormal Psychology—which is totally disproportionate to the means which produced it. In the Middle

¹¹ *Thoughts*, Eng. tr. by Wight, 1859, Chap. XXIII, p. 341.

Ages such an accident might have gotten the postman hanged on the charge of being in league with evil spirits. But today we recognize that the effect had most of its cause, not in a world of malign spirits, but in the hysterical instability of the girl. Similarly we recognize today, in such remarkable experiences as those of Pascal and St. Teresa, how great a part is played by the enhanced sensitivity of such persons. Pascal, of course, would have been the last person in the world to look for the cause of his experience in his own self in its reactions upon its environment. But that is because he identified self with the processes of clearest consciousness. He knew that he had received an impetus from the teachings of Jansen. He knew also that he had by experience and study seen certain elements of these teachings corroborated elsewhere. He knew, as his pre-conversion confession to his sister shows, that he had made futile attempts to attain to the ideal of these teachings. All these matters had passed through his alert consciousness. Comparing them separately or all together with the climax which came on that November night, he could find nothing in them equal to its profundity and satisfying character. What happened, therefore, must have been a miracle of Grace. It did not come "by nature." But this reasoning leaves one thing out of count, his own sensitive temperament, with its capacity for subconscious rumination, and its responsibility for the depth of the cleft which he found within him. His biographers have not hesitated to say frankly that he suffered from neurasthenia and have pointed to his almost continuous illness as a factor in the interpretation of his career. But Pascal himself never seems to have realized that one's bodily state may have a vast deal to do with the reception one gives to different ideas, and may even play its part in the higher experiences of religion. There are plaintive passages in the *Thoughts* which show that other people puzzled him by an indifference to some ideas which were of the utmost moment to himself. One matter that never ceased to excite his wonder was the fact that many individuals seem never to exercise themselves over the problem of the immortality of the soul. "This negligence, in an affair wherein the question is concerning themselves, their eternity, and their all, irritates me much more than it excites my pity: it astonishes and overwhelms me; it is for me something monstrous."¹² To us today Pascal's irritation simply serves to show how different was his temperament from that of the common run of humanity—how enhanced in its sensitivity. We must take account of the fact that he was an invalid when he wrote his *Pensees* and that some of his

¹² *Thoughts*, Wight's tr. Chap. I, p. 151.

sentiments—the extolling of sickness, e. g.—are but the expression of a sick man's fancies. And knowing what we do of the richness of subconscious operations in such natures as his we are more ready to believe that his great experience was not *contra naturam*, but fully in accord with understood processes. To use his own terms we would prefer to say that Grace operated through nature instead of in opposition to it. His experience of objectivity on that night arose from his own inner depths.

Thus we see that Pascal's mysticism may be traced to the interplay of the same three factors operative in the case of St. Teresa. A sensitive temperament furnished the ground for intense reaction. The environment furnished the basis for diversification of tendencies as well as the special suggestion of a psychological crisis. And the instincts in response to the environment organized into systems of contradictory sentiment, the problem of whose unification gave especial pertinence to the environmental suggestion. The result, after a period of subconscious elaboration, was an experience of division and strain issuing in a climax of unification, manifested in a profound affective experience which centered about the sentiment of utter self-renunciation.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

We have analysed the workings of our three factors in three cases of mystical development; and we have found that it is possible to discuss mystical experiences in terms of processes which we already understand. With our specific cases in mind we may profitably return to a more general discussion of the three factors with some few additional illustrations in order to deepen our impression of their persistence in the mystical experience. We shall then set down what conclusions have arisen from the course of our study.

It will be observed that we have not used with the word temperament any suggestion of objective content. We have avoided such phrases as mystical temperament, philosophical temperament, artistic temperament, etc. For these phrases name the temperament from the object through which it finds expression. Such language while convenient, perhaps, for popular speech is nevertheless misleading in that it implies within the organism a tendency toward specific objects even before it has had experience of those objects. We have sought rather to uphold the view throughout our discussion that temperament is, for the most part, a matter of degree of sensitivity, of quickness and thoroughness of reaction and response. It may indeed involve varying degrees of emphasis upon the cognitive, affectional and volitional phases of consciousness. But the specific materials upon which it operates are afforded by the environment. Thus we do not believe that the mystics were born with an irresistible bias in the direction of mystical experiences. Rather they were especially sensitive natures whose environments were such as to lead them to react in ways which produced mystical experiences. Neither do we find it necessary to assume that their sensitiveness made them aware of a transcendent reality seen through the interstices of our common world. For, as Professor Coe and others have pointed out, the revelation which the mystic claims is always found to be in accordance with the current teachings as to what the transcendent world ought to be.¹ The sensitiveness of the mystic simply made him unusually responsive to his environment, and as he always finds estimations of value among the environmental influences, to the formulations of the highest values of the social group.

¹ See his article in the *Hibbert Journal*, Vol. VI, 1908-9, p. 359, "The Sources of the Mystical Revelation." Also see Sir Frederick Pollock's article "The Relation of the Mystic Experience to Philosophy," *Hibbert Journal* for October 1913.

We have not concerned ourselves in this study to trace the sensitiveness of the mystic to its sources. We have been content to point it out as simply there as something to be reckoned with. However, as we had occasion to observe in connection with St. Teresa's case, there is some foundation for thinking that in general its origin is physiological. The history of mysticism tends to support this conception. We may in this final rounding out of our thought indicate the evidences which show this. The frequency with which the sensitive temperament of the mystic is conjoined with actual ill-health is remarkable. We have noted the instances of Teresa and Pascal in detail. These are but two out of the many that the history of mysticism affords. Catherine of Genoa exhibited a number of nervous disturbances—paralysis of a mobile and localized sort, anesthetics, hyperesthesia, localized automatic movements, shifting emotional moods, etc.² Al Ghazzali suffered a loss of speech, of all appetite for food, and of the ability to swallow either bread or water, just before his entrance into Sufism.³ The religious development of St. Francis did not begin until after he had had a protracted sickness, "because," says one of his early biographers quaintly, "the infliction of tribulation giveth understanding to the spirit." In later life he was greatly perturbed over the fact that his frequent illnesses compelled him to be more lenient to his body than he wished to be.⁴ Of Madame Guyon we are told that she was born "un mois avant le terme ordinaire, à la suite d'une frayeur que sa mère avait éprouvée. Pendant longtemps on la crut morte; et ce n'est guère qu'au bout cinq semaines que l'on put avoir quelque espérance de la conserver. Son enfance ne fut qu'une suite d'infirmités et de douleurs et toute sa vie ressentit de la frele organization qu'elle avait apportée en venant au monde."⁵ Plotinus was frequently troubled with colic.⁶ Suso shows signs of nervous instability before what he considers his definitely religious life began. While but a schoolboy in Cologne when his mother died he had a vision of her in which she told him that she was not really dead but gone from the world, and "kissed him on the mouth, blessed him, and vanished."⁷ Again as a lad from thirteen to eighteen years of age he experienced "spiritual

² Baron von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, Vol. II, Chap. IX.

³ Confessions of Al Ghazzali, p. 44, *Wisdom of the East Series*, New York, 1909.

⁴ Bonaventura's *Life of St. Francis*, Chaps. I and VI.

⁵ Quoted in Delacroix's *Etudes d'Histoire et de Psychologie du Mysticisme*, p. 118, from Guerrier.

⁶ See Introduction to Taylor's *Select Works of Plotinus*.

⁷ Rufus Jones, *Studies in Mystical Religion*, p. 282.

visions" in the Dominican monastery at Constance, before he received his "conversion experience."⁸ These are among the great names of mysticism. The cases multiply when we consider the lesser mystics. In her recent volume *Religious Confessions and Confessants*, Anna Robeson Burr has cited many more than we have space to repeat here. We quote but a few. "Angela da Foligno mentions intense bodily suffering after she becomes a recluse. 'Never am I without pain, continually am I weak and frail. . . . I am obliged to be always lying down. . . . My members are twisted. . . . also am I unable to take sufficient food.' Margaret Ebnerin, of the Gottesfreunde, notes her own intolerable suffering when meditating on the Passion. Blood poured out of her mouth and nose; she remained comatose. Pain in the head and trembling were other symptoms of this attack which was suddenly cured on an Easter Sunday. The nun Veronique Giuliani had a similar attack, the pain lasting for over twelve years. . . . The mystical abbess, Maria d'Agreda, was as a child subject to great variations of mood. When she became a visionary, she suffered intensely; her body, she says, 'was weak and broken'. . . . An obscure illness afflicted A. C. Emmerich at the age of fourteen, and she had several visions. As these grew more frequent her health steadily declined. . . . Hildegarde of Bingen notes many illnesses, by which she was beaten and overwhelmed, 'even from my mother's breast.' After her fourteenth year she grew stronger till middle age, when she seems to have suffered an inflammation followed by catalepsy; during ecstasy her 'veins and flesh dry up,' and she took to her bed. She had her first visions at three, at eight had others and took the vows; at fifteen they became frequent. . . . Bunyan's tumults and melancholies are intermittent, and he often connects them with 'weakness in the outer man.'"⁹

Not to raise the question as to whether or not such facts as these prove mysticism to be a pathological phenomenon, we mean to point out here that the mystics are determined to an unusual mode of reaction upon their environment by a nervous organization which is either congenitally extraordinary or else made so by subsequent austerities or ill-health. The result, or perhaps we should say, the concomitant, of such physiological conditions is on the psychological side a sensitivity and awareness of the operations and processes of the mental life, which

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Burr, Anna Robeson, *Religious Confessions and Confessants*, Boston and New York, 1914, pp. 196-200.

becomes a habit of almost constant introspection. Because the mental machinery does not move smoothly and normally it attracts attention to itself; hence the interest in the inner rather than the outer world which we mentioned in our first chapter as being an essential phase of the mystic's temperament; hence also the mystic's responsiveness to ideas rather than to the objective environment. He responds more readily to the thought world which his social group expresses than to his material surroundings.

But mere responsiveness and tendency to introspection are not enough in themselves to determine that the reaction will be a mystical one. The artists and poets and men of genius of all kinds may and do share an enhanced sensitivity of reaction with the mystics and exhibit more or less of unstable neural organization. Their degree of sensitivity may be high or low at the outset and increase with the development of technique, and, for cases of even this are not wanting, sometimes with illness. But the factor which really sets the type of character, which determines that one shall be a mystic rather than a poet or philosopher is the environment. Whenever we have an environment which emphasizes in the consciousness of the individual the symbol of highest value as an object to be experienced by immediate contact we have an environment which calls forth the mystical reaction. And not only does the environment summon the system of reactions which we call mystical but it determines as well what the type of mystical reactions shall be. When the sensitive individual finds himself confronted with a milieu which places all its values in a transcendent deity which must be sought by turning away from the world of ordinary phenomena we have the mysticism of the classic Medieval type, striving ceaselessly after the beatific vision and finding in the visions and voices and other automatic phenomena, resulting from the subconscious response to their strivings, confirmations of the conceptions of ultimate value which they have learned. When the environment stresses attainment of value from some single climactic experience of contact with a divinity still set over against the world, as was the case of the Port Royal conceptions, we have the mysticism of Pascal and Angelique Arnauld. Most of our thought about mysticism has had reference to these types. But it is noteworthy that the modern environment with its emphasis upon immanent conceptions has called forth two such modern mystics as Walt Whitman and Maurice Maeterlinck, who find their immediate contact with highest value in the world of everyday surroundings. In fact, one reason why it has been hard to give any satisfactory delineation of various types of

mysticism is that the mystical experience may vary almost as indefinitely as the varieties of environment in which it is called out. And this is why, also, the mystic cannot give us any one abiding truth. Mysticism is but the sensitive reaction to conceptions of highest value already existing in the social environment. So far as the individual can seem to identify himself with these, either in thought or in some action, he catches the mystic thrill, howsoever different they may be from the highest value of some other social group. "Whatever else the mystics give us," says Pollock, "it will not be positive confirmation of any one dogmatic system. Romanists and Protestants, Hindus and Moslems are of the company, and within each faith divers degrees of orthodoxy and manifest or suspected heterodoxy are represented. Plotinus at one end and William James at the other cannot be ruled out because one of them was a heathen Neo-Platonist and the other a Christian so eccentric as to refuse to be fitted into any system whatever. The only inference we can draw is that every one of the seers expressed his insight, naturally and inevitably, in a form conditioned by the terms and symbols which were familiar to him."¹⁰

Let us look once more at the way in which the Medieval environment produced its type of mystic. Without going into the details of the surroundings of each one of the Medieval mystics we may mention some of the broad features of the civilization of the Middle Ages which tended naturally to produce experiences like those of Suso, St. Francis, St. Teresa and others of their class.

There was first of all the conceptions of the residence of value in a transcendental realm and the necessity of negating the ordinary relationships of life in order to attain to experience of this value. We have already set these forth in our first chapter and will not enlarge upon them further than to remark that they were the core of the Medieval consciousness. Then there was the monastic system founded upon these conceptions. This institution brought the powerful influence of social pressure to bear upon the individual to accept its ideals and to strive in accordance with them. The inmates of the monasteries and nunneries were constantly stimulating one another to other-worldly aspirations and this-world abandonment, through the confessional, by personal example, appreciation and exchange of experiences, etc. Further, there was the fact that life outside monastic walls was frequently hard, barbaric and unsatisfying, especially to sensitive individuals with no

¹⁰ Pollock, Sir Frederick, *The Relation of Mystic Experience to Philosophy*, *Hibbert Journal*, October, 1913.

relish for the brutality of military pursuits. This fact enabled them to turn all the more readily to the ideals of the cloister. With all this load of social and other pressure behind him, it is not surprising that the individual abandoned himself, even extravagantly, to the socially suggested religious practices, which, by their very nature, could result only in the auto-hypnosis of the ecstasy and rapture. The Medieval mystic is really the outcome of the placement of ideal value by the Medieval social consciousness.

This consideration of the part played by the environment in the mystical experience brings us to the question of the relation of the classic mystics to ourselves. If we would experience value as deeply as they, if we too would have some sense of direct encounter with measureless worth must we practice the same technique as they and resort to the lonely cell, the hair shirt, and physical mortification? The answer is "Decidedly not." For such a procedure would involve an attitude the very reverse of theirs, disloyalty namely, to the ideals of our own time and place. Our age no longer looks upon matter and the ordinary relationships of life as evil. Value is not isolated in a transcendent world but woven with the here and now at its best. It is by searching as earnestly for the best in our own time and living as deeply and sincerely into it as they did with reference to the ideal value of their time that we truly lay hold of the principle upon which they acted. We are not likely to have experiences so intense as theirs because our value is spread out, so to speak, over a wider area of human interests and is not all concentrated upon the one point of private devotion, but it is apt to move us more simply and often, perhaps, at the end of a duty done, in the presence of some esthetic phase of the world in which we move, or in the consideration of some new relation in the midst of its endless unfoldments. It is, in fact, in just such touches as these that we are aware of our kinship to the mystics in their experiences of exaltation. To give but one illustration we may show by a quotation from Bertrand Russell the way in which the modern mind experiences its mystical moment in values of truth and beauty. "Mathematics," he says, "rightly viewed, possesses not only truth, but supreme beauty—a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet sublimely pure and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show. The true spirit of delight, the exaltation, the sense of being more than man, which is the touchstone of the highest excellence, is to be found in mathematics as surely as in poetry."¹¹

¹¹ Russell, Bertrand, *The Study of Mathematics*, in *Philosophical Essays*, p. 73.

The "sense of being more than man" is precisely the experience for which the mystic has always striven, but in times when the conception of transcendence reigned it could not be found springing up within the pale of the ordinary human interests. Pascal was also acquainted with the attractions of mathematics but he would not have admitted that this experience brought one in contact with "highest excellence" or value. And in this he shows his relationship to an earlier type of social consciousness. The goodness of common concerns, according to the mystics produced by the older social consciousness, is antagonistic to the goodness of the transcendent world of true values. But according to the modern mystic our highest values must be experienced within the concrete goodnesses of common concerns themselves. There only can they be really apprehended. We see this attitude most plainly in the thought of Maurice Maeterlinck, which John Dewey has summarized as follows: "The natural kinship of man's intellectual and moral life with nature, naturalistically reported and accepted; the mutual interpretation of unconscious instinct, blind passion, and conscious luminous reason, the unfathomable and equable character of our immediate, ordinary, commonplace experiences, so that our experience has no goal save itself—these ideas define Maeterlinck's interpretation of life."¹² Such is the kind of mysticism which the thought milieu of today tends to evoke. The more sensitive spirits of our time will not respond with trances and raptures, but with a calm deep sense of the dignity and joy of human life.

But if sensitivity makes the individual responsive to the social environment, and if the latter determines what, in the main, he shall be, the instincts acting under the pressure of the social environment set the problem which the individual must solve in order to attain to his immediate contact with the ideal value. The instincts must be organized with reference to the values prized by the social consciousness. They enable us to appreciate many phases of the development of the mystical life which would be otherwise dark. We have noted the rôle played by the sexual instinct in the development of St. Teresa's mysticism. Her long struggle for unification was fundamentally an effort to relate this tendency to her transcendent ideal. The same problem seems to lie at the base of the savage austerities of Suso, undertaken, he tells us, in order to "conquer the lively nature of his youth." The unhappy married life of Catherine of Genoa and Madame Guyon undoubtedly played a fundamental part in turning their attention into mystical channels. The fact that the control, or perhaps we should say the re-relating, of

¹² *Hibbert Journal*, Vol. 9, 1910-11, p. 765.

the sexual instinct has entered into the development of the mysticism of some individuals as a problem is doubtless accountable for the extreme view occasionally expressed that mysticism is wholly explicable in terms of the repression of that instinct. Thus we have Leon Winiarsky remarking that in mysticism "Il est certain que nous avons ici affaire à la corruption du penchant sexuel. . . . Le besoin non satisfait, arrêté se transforme en toute une série de phénomènes psychiques souvent morbides, appelés amour"¹³ But such a view attempts to simplify too much the phenomenon of mysticism. It fails to account for those cases, such as Boehme's, e. g., in which a happy marriage relationship seems in no way to abate the mystical experiences. Boehme's most brilliant illuminations came to him after his marriage. And he died the father of four sons and two daughters.¹⁴

The fact is, that in Boehme's case as well as in the cases of Plotinus and Eckart and others who fall into a class of what might be called philosophical or intellectual mystics we have another instinct to the fore entirely, viz., that of curiosity. These men while repeating with all the mystics that the final experience of highest value is essentially indescribable in intellectual terms yet display a marvelous ingenuity in at least relating all the processes of life to this experience in a rational fashion. They could not rest satisfied without finding out so far as possible what might be the relation of their highest value to all phases of their experience. If they virtually preach that our tendency to investigate should not be exercised upon the immediate world of sense objects, as we find them doing in their doctrine of complete disregard of the things of the world, they yet show by their works that it still operated in them to the extent of a profound scrutinizing of their conception of the source of all worth. It is surprising how much Plotinus and Boehme have to say in their system concerning what is essentially inexplicable. The problems of those mystics who bring with them a good native endowment of the instinct of curiosity are primarily intellectual. As we have shown, the cataclysmic character of Pascal's mystical experience was partially due to his difficulty in squaring the values upheld by Jansenism with his intellectual pursuits in other than religious lines.

Of course, we must avoid oversimplification in this matter. We must remember that the factor of environment operates closely with the instincts. Thus while the instinct of curiosity acts selectively to turn

¹³ *Essai sur la Mécanique Sociale, Revue Philosophique*, Vol. 45, April, 1898.

¹⁴ See the biographical introduction to *The Signature of All Things*, in Everyman's Library.

the individual's attention to the intellectual phase of the mystical experience, the resulting influence of the selected intellectual environment—monastic school, books read, etc., e. g.—acts in turn to further stimulate the instinct of curiosity. Again Pascal's case illustrated well the fact that in the life of any one individual mystic the instincts operate, not separately but in combination, building up systems of reaction in response to special phases of the environment. Most often it is these complexes of instinctive reactions which give the mystics, especially the Medieval mystics their trouble. In the days when the highest ideal values rested in a transcendent object, the self which had to be surrendered, or broken up and reorganized with reference to the ideal was the self which consisted in a system of reactions directed upon some object which was held to be definitely at variance with the ultimate ideal. As the Medieval mystic could not help coming in contact with the secular world in some form during childhood and youth, they always discovered some self to combat which such contact evoked. Accordingly while we may find one instinct which plays a major part in setting the problem of the individual mystic we must always expect to find it functioning in combination with other instincts.

We have now reached the end of our study. We have attempted to interpret mysticism throughout these pages in terms of processes which we already know. We have taken the position that mysticism arises from the interaction of the three great factors of sensitivity, social environment, and the normal instincts. Whether or not our hypothesis has been sustained by the course of the discussion must be decided by the reader. Those who are acquainted with the characteristics of mysticism as pointed out by Coe, Leuba and James may feel inclined to question whether our categories are sufficient to do full explanatory justice to the phenomenon. But we venture to think that what we have said is not inconsistent with the analyses of these men. We have made use of the Jamesian conception of the trans-marginal origin of the mystical revelations, but we have tried to show in addition that behind the subconscious contents is, not the workings of a mysterious "instinct for transcendence," which Miss Underhill postulates, but the stimulations of the vast encircling world of material and social beings. That is to say, our assumption has been that had we all the data in hand concerning any one mystical experience we should be able to trace the elements of the complex result to specific impressions made by the milieu upon the sensitive organism. We have agreed all along with Professor Leuba that the mystics share with the rest of mankind the usual outfit

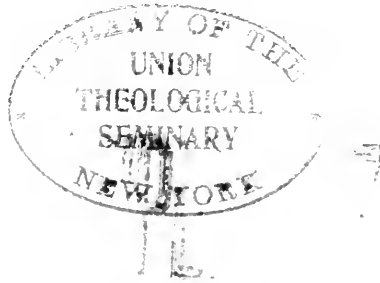
of human instincts, and we have noted with him the signs of the operations of the sexual instinct in the experience of St. Teresa, but we have traced its influence more definitely, we believe, in the struggle leading up to the stage of visions, revelations and raptures. Leuba was more concerned to make out his case from the character of the experiences which were the outcome of the struggle. Our conception, likewise, of the enhanced sensitivity of the mystic is in harmony with Professor Coe's view that the mystic is unusually suggestible and that his suggestibility leads him to give interpretations of experience the force of present experiences. These interpretations of experience, we also hold with Professor Coe, come from the social environment.

There arise two thoughts in conclusion.

1. In the first place we are led to feel that we may not look to mysticism for the sure revelation of the transcendent world which the historical mystics have always claimed as a definite attainment. Since their comprehension of value is always received from the social consciousness of their time they cannot give us any better statement in cognitive terms of that value than some clear-minded thinker might give us who was not noted for any mystical experience. At best the mystic can only say *that* it is rather than *what* it is. Such a confident assertion may and does have the effect on contemporaries of the mystic of arousing enthusiasm for the values prized in their day and even releases the tendencies to emulation. For such a service each generation must be grateful to its mystical leaders. In so far as the values are vital the message of the mystic is a true inspiration to his time. But in so far as the consciousness of the mystic is moulded by a past or passing social order as was undoubtedly the case with Neo-Platonism and in the later Middle Ages and, in some quarters, even today, the influence of the mystic may be actually retarding and retrogressive. His sensitivity then makes unrealities real. His strong certainty simply consecrates a view not really expressive of the true trend of his time. For this reason the world of values outside the normal relationships of human life which the Medieval mystics reported as experienced is not accepted by us today. It was based on a social consciousness essentially foreign to our own. We may not expect, therefore, a recrudescence of this type of mysticism to maintain itself long before such a mysticism as that represented by Maeterlinck and Whitman.

2. Secondly, we see that the point of marvel in the mystical experience is not in the place where the mystic thought it was. Those experiences which proved the supernatural character of his revelation to the

mystic are now seen but to indicate the operation of normal processes under somewhat special conditions. Visions, voices, trances and ecstasies have all been studied in recent times. It has been found that they can be re-instated experimentally under conditions of hypnosis and that they occur spontaneously under other than religious or mystical conditions. We can no longer believe that they necessarily designate any special divine favor. The wonder to the modern mind must lie in the perpetual marvel of the normal processes of life themselves which show us such remarkable plasticity and complexity. We wonder and are impressed at the intricate interaction of environment and temperament and instinct. They open up to us indefinite vistas of research. Though they may present us with a more sober, less poetical version of the mystical experience, they yet call forth our profound respect for human nature and will, if understood in something of their enormous range of implication, not destroy the sense of the mystery of existence but lay for it a far broader, deeper foundation.



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