

TIME¹

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN A BRITISH SCEPTIC AND AN INDIAN MYSTIC.

“He (Shelley) used to say that he had lived three times as long as the calendar gave out, which he would prove between jest and earnest by some remarks on

Time —

“That would have puzzled that stout Stagyrite.””

— *Prefix to the “Wandering Jew” in “Fraser’s Magazine.”*”

[The philosophical premises of this and the other essays in this volume should be studied in

Keynes.	Formal Logic.	Patanjali.	Aphorisms.
Erdmann.	History of Philosophy.	Bikkhu Ananda Metteya.	Essays (principally in the quarterly “Buddhism”).
Berkeley.	Three Dialogues κ.ν.λ.	The Tao The King and the Kwang Tze.	Writings of
Hume.	Works.	The Sufis, to whom chiefly Crowley is indebted for the foundations of his system of sceptical mysticism.]	
Kant.	Prolegomena: Critique of Pure Reason.		
Locke.	Human Understanding.		
Huxley.	Essays (Philosophical).		

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Scepticus. Well, my dear Babu, I trust you have slept well after our fatiguing talk of yesterday.

Mysticus. Ah, dear Mister, if you will forgive my adopting what is evidently your idiom, I found it, on the contrary, invigorating. What is it the Psalmist says? That the conversation of the wise is like unto good wine, which intoxicates with delight, while it hurts not the drinker? The balm of your illustrious words, borne like spice upon the zephyr —

Scept. Shall we not rather renew our inquiries into the nature of things, than, in unfertile compliment, waste the few hours we snatch awhile from death?

Myst. Willingly. But lately you were the “sahib” asking questions concerning Indian Philosophy as a great prince who should condescend to study the habits of horses or dogs — yesterday we changed all that.

Scept. I have but one apology to offer — that of Dr. Johnson.²

Myst. Pray forbear! Yet it may be for a moment instructive to notice the consideration which led you to assume a happier attitude; viz, that such identities of thought (implying such fine parallelisms of brain structure) were discovered, that, in short, you admitted the Indian (as you have been compelled to admit the Gibbon)³ to classification in your own genus.

Scept. You are hard upon my insolence.

Myst. Only to make the opportunity of remarking a further parallelism: that the said insolence is matched, maybe surpassed, by my own. A witty Irishman, indeed, observed of the natives of the Tongue of Asia that “the Hindu, with all

his faults, was civilised, like the Frenchman: the Musulman, with all his virtues, was, like the Englishman, a savage.”

And indeed we are too apt to think of you only as only as red-faced, drunken, beef-eating boors and ruffians, with no soul and less sense, as if you were all soldiers; or as prim, conceited, supercilious, opinionated prigs, as if you were all civilians; or as unspeakable stupidity incarnate in greedy oiliness, as if you were all missionaries. Your highest placed women make virtuous our courtesans by a comparison of costume and manners; if our advices be true, the morality test is still in favour of our light ones. Your law wisely forbids your own venal women to set foot on Indian soil; a rumour is even got about that you have no such women: but political economy is to be thanked, if it be so.⁴ Now, though you know that I am aware that India is simply the refuse-heap for your vilest characters and your dullest brains, I see that you so little appreciate the compliment I am trying to pay you, that your foot is already itching to assault my person, and to cause me to remember that your cook never forgets to spit into your honour’s soup, were it not that we may find a refuge from difference of caste and race, custom and language, in the supreme unity, that of the ultimate force of which this universe is the expression.

Scept. I have listened with patience to what is after all (you must admit) a rather spiteful tirade —

Myst. Forgive me if I interrupt. Do me the honour to remember that it was said in self-blame. I tried to give your honour “the giftie” (as one of your worst poets has said) “to see yoursel as ithers see you,” the “ithers” in this case being average Hindus, as ignorant of your real character as you confess your untravelled folk to be of ours.

Scept. Pray spare me Burns! We are — that is, you and I — on a better understanding now. Let us return, if you will, to the subject we too lightly touched on yesterday; that of TIME, and the real signification of that mysterious word, which is in the mouths of children, and which to affect not to

understand is to stamp oneself, in the opinion of the so-called intellectual classes, as a fantastic.

Myst. Yet who of us does understand it? I, at least, am at one with you in declaring its mystery.

Scept. You are of the few. Even Huxley, the most luminous of modern philosophers, evidently misunderstands Kant's true though partial dictum that it is subjective, or, in the pre-Kantian jargon, a form of the intellect.

Myst. Lest we involve ourselves in controversy, Homeric body-snatchers of Patroclus Kant, let us hastily turn to the question at issue itself. The scholastic method of discussing a point by quotation of Brown's position against Smith may do for the weevilly brain of a University don, but is well known to bring one no nearer to solution, satisfactory or otherwise, of the original problem.

Scept. I heartily agree with you so far. We will therefore attack the question *ab initio*: I await you.

Myst. As exordium, therefore, may I ask you to recall what we agreed on yesterday with regard to *Tat Sat*, the existent, or real?

Scept. That it was one, unknowable, absolute.

Myst. Objective?

Scept. Without doubt.

Myst. Did I not, however, observe that, however that might be, all intuitions, if knowable, were subjective; if objective, unknown?

Scept. You did: to which I pointed out that Spencer had well shown how subjectivity, real or no, was a mere proof of objectivity.

Myst. And *vice versâ*.⁵ Ah! my friend, we shall be tossed about, as the world this 2500 years, if we once enter this vortex. Let us remain where all is smooth in the certainty that the Unknowable is Unreal!

Scept. We agreed it to be real!

Myst. Oh never! The word “real” implies to us subjectivity; a thing is only real *to us* so far as it is known by us; even its Unknowability is a species of knowledge of it: and, by Saviri! when I say real *to us*, I say real absolutely, since all things lie to me in the radius of my sensorium. “To others” is a vain phrase, —

Scept. True; for those “others” only exist for you inasmuch as, and in so far as, they are modifications of your own thought-stuff.⁶

Myst. Agreed, then; instead of looking through the glasses of the metaphysician, we will content ourselves with the simpler task of measuring our thoughts by the only standard which is unquestionably valid, *i.e.*, consciousness.

Scept. But if that consciousness deceive us? *Myst.* We are the more deceived! But it is after all indifferent; for it is we who are deceived. Idle to pretend that any other standard can ever be of any use to us, since all others are referred to it!

Scept. Ah! this is equally a branch of the former argument.

Myst. That is so. However, we may defer consideration of this problem, though I suspect that it will sooner or later force itself upon our notice.

Scept. No doubt. This is very possibly the ultimate unknown and infinite quantity, which lurks unsuspected in all equations, and vitiates our most seeming-certain results.

Myst. But, for Heaven's sake, let us postpone it as long as possible, eh?

Scept. Indeed, it is the devil of a subject. But we wander far — By the way, how old are you? You appear young, but you know much.

Myst. You are too polite. I am but an ultimate truth, six world-truths, fourteen grand generalisations, eighty generalisations, sixty-two dilemmas, and the usual odd million impressions.

Scept. What is all this? You are surely —

Myst. No, most noble Festus. Put me to the test, and I the matter will reword: which madness would gambol from.⁷ How old may your honour be?

Scept. Forty-five years.

Myst. Excuse the ignorance of a “Babu,” but as Mr. Chesterton⁸ well knows, we do not easily grasp Western ideas. What is a “year”?

Scept. Hm! Well, ah, the earth moves round —

Myst. How long have you been a sectary astronomical?

Scept. Er — what?

Myst. You are then an astronomer?

Scept. I? Goodness gracious bless my soul, no!

Myst. Then how do you know all this about the earth?

Scept. Astronomers are paid, insufficiently paid, it is true, but still paid, to calculate the movements of the various heavenly bodies. These, being regular,

or regularly irregular, which comes to the same thing, serve us as standards of time.

Myst. A strange measure! What is the comparison in one of your poets between “Fifty years of Europe” and “a cycle of Cathay”?

Scept. You know our poets well.

Myst. Among my loose tags of thought are several thousand useless quotations. I would give much to have my memory swept and garnished.

Scept. Seven other devils wait at the door. But you were saying?

Myst. That an astronomer might perhaps justly compute the time during which his eye was actually at the telescope by the motion of the planets, or by the clockwork of his reflector, but that you should do so is absurd.

Scept. Yet all men do so and have ever done so.

Myst. And all are absurd in doing so if they really do so, which I doubt. Even the lowest dimly, or perhaps automatically, perceive the folly thereof —

Scept. As?

Myst. A man will say “Since the Derby was run” more intelligibly than “since May such-and-such a day”; for his memory is of the race, not of a particular item in the ever changing space-relation of the heavens, a relation which he can never know, and of which he can never perceive the significance: nay, which he can never recognise, even by landmarks of catastrophic importance.

Scept. One might be humorous on this subject by the hour. Picture to yourself a lawyer cross-examining a farm hand as to the time of an occurrence: “Now, Mr. Noakes, I must warn you to be very careful. Had Herschell occulted α

Centauri before you left Farmer Stubbs' field?" while the instructed swain should not blush to reply that Halley's comet, being the sole measure of time in use on his farm, was 133° S., entering Capricorn, at the very moment of the blow being struck.

Myst. I am glad you join me in ridicule of the scheme; but do you quite grasp how serious the situation has become?

Scept. I confess I do not see whither you would lead me. Your own computation strikes one as fantastic in the extreme.

Myst. Who knows? Think, yourself, of certain abnormal and pathological phenomena, whose consideration might lay down the bases for a possible argument.

Scept. There are several things that spring instantly into the mind. First and foremost is the wonderfully suggestive work, misnamed fiction, of our greatest novelist, H. G. Wells. This man, the John Bunyan of modern scientific thought, has repeatedly attacked the problem, or at least indicated the lines on which a successful research might be prosecuted, in many of his wonderful tales. He has (I say it not to rob you of the honour of your discoveries, but in compliment, and I can imagine none higher) put his finger on the very spot whence all research must begin: the illusionary nature of the time-idea. But I will leave you to study his books at your leisure, and try to give a more direct answer to your question. We have cases of brain disorder, where grave local mischief survives the disappearance of general symptoms. One man may forget a year of his life; another the whole of it; while yet another may have odd patches effaced here and there, while the main current flows undisturbed.

Myst. He is so much the poorer for such losses?

Scept. Certainly.

Myst. Did the stars efface their tracks to correspond?

Scept. Joshua is dead.

Myst. Yama⁹ be praised!

Scept. Amen.

Myst. You have also, I make no doubt, cases where the brain, from infancy, never develops.

Scept. True: so that a man of thirty thinks and acts like a child: often like a stupid child. Our social system is indeed devised to provide for these cases; so common are they: the Army, the Cabinet, are reserved for such: in the case of women thus afflicted they are called “advanced” or “intellectual”: the advantages of these situations and titles is intended to compensate them for Nature’s neglect. Even sadder is it when young men of great parts and talent, flourishing up to a certain age, have their brains gradually spoiled by the preposterous system of education in vogue throughout the more miasmatic parts of the country, till they are fit for nothing but “chairs” and “fellowships” at “universities.” The schools of philosophy are full of these Pliocene anachronisms, as the responsible government departments are of the congenitally afflicted: in both cases thinking men are disposed to deny (arguing from the absence of human reason and wit, though some of the creatures have a curious faculty resembling the former, shorn of all light-quality) to these unfortunates any conscious life worthy of the name, or the capacity to increase with years in the wisdom or happiness of their more favoured fellow-creatures.

Myst. Yet the stars have a regular rate of progression?

Scept. I see what you would be at. You would say that of two men born on a day, dying on a day, one may be young, the other old.

Myst. Ay! But I would say this to vitiate the standard you somewhat incautiously set up.

Scept. Abrogate it then! But where are we?

Myst. Here, that we may determine this most vital point; how so to act that we may obtain the most from life; or, if existence, the word of which intuitions are the letters, be, as the Buddhists pretend, misery, how to obtain the least from it.

Scept. Let us not speak ill of a noble religion, though we lament the paradoxical follies of its best modern professors!

Myst. A truce to all controversy, then. How shall we obtain the best from life? It is this form of the question that should give you a clue to my goal.

Scept. It is so difficult to determine whether Sherlock Holmes¹¹ is dead or no that I will take no risks. But the answer to your query is obvious. "He lives the longest who remembers most."

Myst. Insufficient. There are lives full of the dreariest incident, like a farmyard novel, or a window in Thrums, or the autobiography of a Master of a College,¹¹ who lives ninety years and begets sons and daughters, and there is an end of him by-and-by, and the world is nor richer nor poorer, scarce for an anecdote! Add to your "number of impressions remembered" (and therefore not expunged) the vividness of each impression!

Scept. As a coefficient rather. Let us construct a scale of vividness from a to n , and we can erect a formula to express all that a Man is. For example he might be: $10a + 33125b + 890c + 800112658e + 992f + \dots + \dots + \dots n$, and, if we can find the ratio of $a : b : c : d : e : f : \dots : n$, we can resolve the equation into a single term, and compare man and man.

Myst. I catch the idea. Fanciful as it of course is in practice, the theory is sound to the core. You delight me!

Scept. Not at all, not at all. Further, I see that since the memory is a storehouse of limited capacity, it follows that he who can remember most is he who can group and generalise most. How easy is it to conjugate your Hindustani verbs! Because one rule covers a thousand cases. How impossible is it to learn German genders! Because the gender of each word must be committed arbitrarily to memory.

Myst. He then is the longest-lived, and the wisest, and the worthiest of respect, who can sum up all in one great generalisation?

Scept. So Spencer defines philosophy: as the art of doing this.

Myst. But you leave out this “vividness.” He is greater who generalised the data of evolution than he who did the same thing for heraldry: not only because of the number of facts covered, but because of the greater intrinsic value and interest of each fact. Not only, moreover, is the philosopher who can sum up the observations “All men are mortal,” “All horses are mortal,” “All trees are mortal,” and their like, into the one word Anicca, as did Buddha, a wise and great man; but Aeschylus is also wise and great, who from this universal, but therefore commonplace generalisation, selects and emphasises the particular “Oedipus is mortal.”

Scept. Your Greek is perhaps hardly equal to your English; but you are perfectly right, and I do wrong to smile. Since we agree to abandon the mechanical device of the astronomer, all states of consciousness are single units, or time-marks, by which we measure intervals. That some, no longer than others, are more notable, just as the striking of a clock emphasises the hours, though the escapement maintains its rate, is the essential fact in counting.

Myst. And what is the test of vividness?

Scept. I should say the durability of the memory thereof.

Myst. No doubt; it is then of importance to class these states of “high potential” — may I borrow the term?

Scept. It is a suggestive one, thought I must say I am opposed to the practice of Petticoat Lane in philosophical literature. The broad-minded Huxley’s aversion to “polarity” is not his least bequest to psychologists. Of course, to begin our classification, all states of normal waking consciousness stand in a class above any other —

Myst. I have known dreams —

Scept. Wells says “There are better dreams!” — and a damned good way to look at death, by heaven!

Myst. Yes! But I meant that some dreams are more vivid than some waking states, even adult states hours long. You remember the “Flying dream,” though I daresay you have not experienced it since childhood: it is part of your identity, a shape or defining idea of your mind: but you have forgotten the picnic at — where you will.

Scept. There is something to be thankful for in that. Then, there are incidents of sport —

Myst. Mysteries of initiation —

Scept. Narrow escapes —

Myst. The presence of death —

Scept. Shocks —

Myst. Some incidents of earliest childhood —

Scept. Memories which can be classed, and therefore fall under great headings; intellectual victories —

Myst. Religious emotions —

Scept. Ah! this minute too, for I group them! All these are intuitions which come near, which touch, which threaten, which alarm, the Ego itself!

Myst. Yet in those great ecstasies of love, poetry, and their like; the Ego is altogether abased, absorbed in the beloved: the phenomenon is utterly objective.

Scept. To be abased is to be exalted. But we are again at metaphysics. The Ego and the Non-Ego are convertible terms. We are agreed that one of the two is a myth; but we might argue for months and aeons as to which of the two it is.

Myst. Here Hindu practice bears out Western speculation, whether we take the shadowy idealism of Berkeley, or the self-refuted¹² Monism of Haeckel. All these men got our results, and interpreted them in the partial light of their varied intellect, their diverse surrounding and education. But the result is the same physiological phenomenon, from Plato and Christ to Spinoza and Çankaracharya,¹³ from Augustine and Abelard, Boehme and Weigel in their Christian communities to Trismegistus and Porphyry, Mohammed and Paracelsus in their mystic palaces of Wisdom, the doctrine is essentially one: and its essence is that existence is one. But to my experience it is certain that in Dhyana the Ego is rejected.

Scept. Before inquiring further of you: What is this Dhyana? let me say, in view of what you have just urged: How do you know that the Ego is rejected?

Myst. Peccavi. My leanings are Buddhistic, I will confess: indeed, the great majority of Eastern philosophers, arguing *à priori* from the indestructibility of the Ego — a dogma, say I, and no more! — have asserted that in the Dhyanic state the Object is lost in the Ego rather than *vice versa*, and they support this conclusion by the fact of the glorification of the object.

Scept. But this is all *à priori*. For be it supposed that Dhyana is merely a state of more correct perception of the nature of the object than that afforded by normal inspection — and this is a reasonable view! — the argument simply goes to prove that matter, as the Ego, is divine. And this is our old vicious circle!

Myst. Also, since the object may be the Infinite. All Dhyana proves is that “things are not what they seem”

Scept. Not content with our poets, you seem to have wandered into Longfellow.

Myst. Also Tennyson.

Scept. I can sympathise: there is a blot on my own scutcheon. You are just, though, in your statement that the glorification of one of two factors —

Myst. At the moment of the disappearance of their dividuality —

Scept. So?

Myst. Surely. They also themselves disappear, just as carbon, the black solid, and chlorine, the green gas, combine to form a limpid and colourless liquid. So it might be absurd to assert either that Subject or Object disappears in Dhyana to the advantage of the other.

Scept. But at least this glorification of the consciousness is a proof that reality (as shown in Dhyana) is more glorious than illusion (as shown in consciousness).

Myst. Or, that illusion —

Scept. Of course! We are then no further than before.

Myst. Indeed we are. Glory, real or false, is desirable. Indeed we are too bold in saying “real or false,” by virtue of your previous agreement that the Subjective is the Knowable, and that deeper inquiry is foredoomed futile.

Scept. Unless, admitting Physiology,¹⁴ such glory is phantom, poisonous, and your Dhyana is a debauch.

Myst. You will at least admit, as a basis for the consideration of this and other points that Dhyana is more vivid than any of the normal dualistic states.

Scept. I must. I have myself experienced, as I believe, this or a similar condition, and I find it to be so; intensely so.

Myst. I suspected as much.

Scept. But pray, lest we talk at cross purposes, define me this Dhyana.

Myst. The method is to concentrate the attention on any object (though in Hindu estimation some objects may be far more suitable than others, I believe Science would say any object) —

Scept. That was my method.

Myst. Suddenly the object disappears: in its stead arises a great glory, characterised by a feeling of calm, yet of intense, of unimaginable bliss.

Scept. That was my result. But, more remarkable still, the change was not from the consciousness “I behold a blue pig” — the object I have ever affected — to “I behold a glory,” but to “There is a glory,” or “Glory is.”

Myst. Glory be! Exactly. That is the test of Dhyana. I am glad to have met you.

Scept. Same here. Be good enough to proceed with your exposition!

Myst. In a moment. There are other Westerns who study these matters?

Scept. To follow up the line of thought you gave me but just now, we have a great number of philosophers in the West who have enunciated ideas which to the dull minds of the common run of men seem wild and absurd.

Myst. You refer to Idealism.

Scept. To more; to nearly all philosophy, save only that self-styled “of common sense,” which is merely stupidity glossing ignorance. But Berkeley —

Myst. The devout, the angelic —

Scept. Hegel —

Myst. The splendid recluse! The lonely and virtuous student who would stand motionless for hours gazing into space, so that his pupils thought him idle or insane —¹⁵

Scept. Spencer —

Myst. The noble, ascetic, retired spirit; the single-hearted, the courageous, the holy —

Scept. Yes: all these and many others. But what mean your comments?

Myst. That extreme virtue is a necessary condition for one who is desirous of attaining this state of bliss.

Scept. There, my friend, you generalise from three. Let me stand fourth (like Ananias) and tell you that after many vain attempts while virtuous, I achieved my first great result only a week after a serious lapse from the condition of a Brahmacharyi.¹⁶

Myst. You?

Scept. The result of despair.

Myst. This may serve you as excuse before Shiva.

Scept. Quit not the scientific ground we walk on!

Myst. I regret; but my astonishment annulled me. On the main point, however, there is no doubt. These Westerns did, more or less, pursue our methods. Why doubt that they attained our results?

Scept. I never did doubt it. Certain of our philosophers have even imagined that “self-consciousness,” as they style it, is the very purpose of the Universe.

Myst. They were so enamoured of the Ananda — the bliss —

Scept. Presumably. Far be it from me to set myself up against them; but I may more modestly take the position that “self-consciousness” is a mere phenomenon; a bye-product, and no more, in the laboratory of life.

Myst. Alas! I can think no better of you for your modesty: whoso would make bricks without straw may as well plan pyramids a hovels.

Scept. Your stricture is but too just. Teleology¹⁷ is a science which will make no progress until the most wicked and stupid of men are philosophers, since like is comprehended by like: unless, indeed, we excuse the Creator by saying that, the Universe being a mere mechanism, that it should suffer pain (an emotion He does not feel) is as unintelligible to Him as that a machine should do so is to the engineer. Strain and fatigue are observed by the latter, but not associated by him with the idea of pain: much more so, then, God.

Myst. You are bold enough now! Our philosophers think it not fitting that man should discuss the ways of the inscrutable, the eternal God.

Scept. I have you tripping fairly at last! What do you mean by “eternal”? You who have uprooted my ideas of time, answer me that?

Myst. A woodcock to mine own springe, indeed. I am justly caught with mine own metaphysic.

Scept. Throw metaphysic to the dogs! I'll none of it. I will resolve it to you, then, on your own principles. The term, so constantly in use, or rather abuse, by your devotees as by ours, is meaningless. All they can mean is a state of consciousness which is never changed — that is, one unit of time, since time is no more than a succession of states of consciousness, and we have no means of measuring the length of one against another: indeed, a “state of consciousness” is atomic, and to measure is really to furnish the means for dissolution of a molecule, and no more. Thus in the New Jerusalem the song must be either a single note, or a phenomenon in time. Length without change is equivalent to an increase in the vividness, as we said before. And after all the Ego can never be happy, for happiness is impersonal, is distinct from the contemplation of happiness. This quite unchanging, this single vivid state, is as near “Eternity” as we can ever get — it is a foolish word.

Myst. That state is then impersonal?

Scept. Ah! — Yes, I have described Dhyana.

Myst. The heaven of the Christian is then identical with the daily relaxation of the Hindu?

Scept. If we analyse their phrase, yes. But Christians mean “eternal time,” a recurring cycle of pleasant states, as when a child wishes that the pantomime “could go on for ever.”

Myst. Why, do they ever mean anything? . . . But how does this eternal time differ from ordinary time? Our guarantee against cessation is the fact that the tendency to change is inherent in all component things.

Scept. Our guarantee indeed! Rather the seal upon the tomb of our hopes! But to sing, even out of tune, as the Christian does, that “time shall be no more,” is, indeed, to cease to mean anything. The dogma of the Trinity itself is not less inane, the only thing that saves it from being blasphemous.

Myst. To be intelligible is to me misunderstood.

Scept. To be unintelligible is to be found out.

Myst. To be secretive is to be blatant.

Scept. To be frank is to be mysterious.

Myst. I wish your poet-martyr¹⁸ (I do not refer to Chatterton) could hear us.

Scept. To return, I would have you note the paradox that unconsciousness must be reckoned as a form of consciousness, since otherwise the last state of consciousness of a dying person is for him eternity. That this is not so is shown by the phenomena of anaesthesia.

Myst. Is it, though? Is the analogy so certain? Is there nothing in the attempt of all religions to secure that a man's last thoughts should be of triumph, peace, joy, and their like?

Scept. I have been reading that somewhat mawkish book "The Soul of a People." Disgusted as I was by its ooze of sentimentality, I was yet not unobservant of its cognisance of this fact, and I was even pleased — though this by the way — to see that the author recognises in the ridiculous First Precept of the Buddhist Faith, or rather in the orthodox travesty of Buddha's meaning, a mere survival of some fetichistic theophagy.

Myst. Doesn't it say somewhere that "Long words butter no parsnips"?

Scept. It ought to. But pray proceed with your defence of religion — for I presume it is intended as such.

Myst. I was saying that if unconsciousness be not reckoned as consciousness, the death-thought is eternal heaven or hell, as it chances to be pleasant or painful. But, on the other hand, if it be so reckoned, if that and that alone has in death no awakening, no change, then is it not certain that there is the Great Peace? Disprove immortality, reincarnation, all survival or revival of the identical —

Scept. Identical? Hm!

Myst. — of the consciousness which the man calls "I" —

Scept. Which Haeckel has pretty effectively done.

Myst. And Nirvana is ours for the price of a packet of arsenic, and a glass of Dutch courage.

Scept. In a poem called “Summa Spes,”¹⁹ a gifted but debauched Irishman has grossly, yet effectively, stated this view. “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!” is the Hebrew for it. But if we survive or revive —

Myst. The problem is merely postponed. If “death is a sleep”: why, we know what happens after sleep.

Scept. The question resolves itself, therefore, into the other which we both of us anticipated and feared: What is this “identical consciousness” which is the cause of so much confusion of thought. We have in the phenomena of mind (*a*) a set of simple impressions; (*b*)²⁰ a machinery for grasping and interpreting these; of sifting, grouping, organizing, co-ordinating, integrating them; and (*c*) a “central” consciousness, more or less persistent, that is to say, united to a long series of similar states by the close bond of the emphatic idea, I, which “central” consciousness takes notice of the results presented to it by (*b*). A state which can be summoned at will —

Myst. What then is “will”?

Scept. You know what I mean. God knows I am bothered enough already without being caught up on a word! Which can be summoned at will: which in a succession of simple, though highly abstract states, observes the results (forgive the repetition!) presented to it by (*b*). But if we turn the consciousness upon itself, if we add a sixth sense to the futile five?

Myst. It is resolved after all into a simple impression, indistinguishable, so far as I can see, from any other. That is, logically.

Scept. An impression, moreover, on what? It is not the (*c*) that is really examined; for (*c*) is the examiner: and you have merely formulated a (*d*) expressible by the ratio $d : c :: c : a$ — an infinite process. The final factor is always unknowable — yet it is the one thing known.

Myst. And because it is always present, therefore it is unkennded.

Scept. We are now nearer Spencer than appeared. For the fact that it must be there, unchanging in function, while consciousness persists, gives the idea of a definite substratum to subserve that function.

Myst. I cannot but agree; and I would further observe that when, in Dhyana, it ceases to examine, and apperceives, the “relative eternity,” *i.e.*, the intense vividness of the phenomenon gives us a further argument in favour of its permanence.

Scept. But that it should persist after death is a question which we should leave physiology to answer, as much as the obvious question whether sight and taste persist. And the answer is unhesitatingly “No.”

Myst. Yet the mystic may still reply that the association of consciousness with matter is as incredible as the contrary conception. Cause and effect, he will say, are if anything less likely (*à priori*) than concomitance or casuality. Even occasionalism is no more improbable than that the material should have a manifestly immaterial function.

Scept. Yet it is so!

Myst. Ah! would it serve to reply that it is so! But no! the materialistic position, fully allowed, is an admission of spirit.²¹ They must conceive spirit and matter both as unknowable, as irresolvable, like x and y in a single equation (whose counterpart we seek in Dhyana), so that we may eternally evolve values for either, but always in terms of the other.

Scept. Just so we agreed lately about subject and object.

Myst. It is another form of the same Protean problem.

Scept. Haeckel even insists upon this in his arrogant way.

Myst. Huxley, at once the most and the least sceptical of philosophers, urges it. There is only one method of investigating this matter. Reason is bankrupt; not only Mansel the Christian but Hume the Agnostic has seen it.

Scept. We all see it. The Bank being broken, we do not put what little we have saved into the wildcat stock Faith, as Mansel counsels us: but add little to little, and hoard it in the old stocking of Science.

Myst. Well if no holes!

Scept. We expect little, even if we hope for much. We are pretty safe; 'tis the plodding ass that is Science, and the fat priest rides us still.

Myst. We offer you a Bank, where your intellectual coin will breed a thousandfold.

Scept. What security do you offer? Once bit, twice shy; especially as your business is known to be patronised by some very shady customers.

Myst. Do you offer to stop my mouth with security? We give you all you can wish. Let Science keep the books! I say it in our own interest; the slovenly system that has prevailed hitherto has resulted in serious losses to the shareholders. One of our best cashiers, Christ, went off and left mere verbal messages, and those only too vague, as to the business that passed through his hands. Too many of our most brilliant research staff keep their processes secret, and so not only incur the suspicion of quackery, but leave the world no wiser for their work. Others abuse their position as directors to further the ends of other companies not even allied to the parent firm: as when Mohammed, the illuminated of Allah, lent his spiritual force to bolster up the literal sense of the Bible, thus degrading a sublime text-book of mystic lore into the merest

nursery, or too often bawdy-house, twaddle and filth. You will alter all this, my friends! Let Science keep the books!

Scept. For a cross between a plodding ass and an old stocking, she will do well! And what dividends do you promise?

Myst. In the first year. Dhyana; in the second, Samadhi; and in the third, Nirvana.

Scept. It is not the first year yet. Is this coin current?

Myst. Ah! I remember now your phrase “Dhyana a debauch.” You are of course familiar with the name of Maudsley, perhaps the greatest living authority on the brain?

Scept. None greater.

Myst. By rare good fortune, at the very moment when this aspect of the question was confronting me, and I was (so any one would have imagined) many thousand miles from expert opinion, I had the opportunity of putting the matter before him. Our conversation was pretty much as follows: “What is the cause of the phenomenon I have described?” (I had given just such a sketch as we have drawn above, and added that it was the most cherished possession of all Eastern races. The state was familiar to him.) “Excessive activity of one portion of the brain: relative lethargy of the rest.” “Of which portion?” “It is unknown.” “Is the phenomenon of pathological significance?” “I cannot say so much: it would be a dangerous habit to acquire: but since recovery is spontaneous, and is apparently complete, it is to be classed as physiological.” I obtained the idea, however, that the danger was very serious, perhaps more so than the actual words used would imply. A further inquiry as to whether he could suggest any medical, surgical, or other means, by which this state might be produced at will, led to no result.

Scept. This is most interesting: for the very doubts which I did entertain as to the safety of mental methods directed to attaining this result, are dispelled by what is a cautious, if not altogether unfavourable, view from a naturally-inclined-to-be-unfavourable Western mind. (My mother was of German extraction.) How so? Because my teacher, himself a Western scientific man of no mean attainments, thought no trouble too great, no language too violent (though he is ordinarily a man of unusual mildness and suavity of manner) to be used, to impress upon me the extreme danger of too vigorous attempts to reach the state of concentration. “If you feel the least tired in the course of your daily practice,” he never wearied of repeating, “you have done too much, and must absolutely rest for four-and- twenty hours. However fresh you feel, however keen you are to pursue the work, rest you must, or you will but damage the apparatus you are endeavouring to perfect. Rest for longer if you like, never for less.” This adjuration recurs with great force to my mind at the present moment. Our Western “Adepts” — if you were a Western I would ask you to forgive the word — know, as the great brain specialist knows, the dangers of the practice; the dangers of the training, the dangers of success.

Myst. Blavatsky’s mysteriously-phrased threats were to this effect. Maybe she knew.

Scept. Maybe she did. Well, what I wished to point out was that, had you pressed Dr. Maudsley, he might possibly have admitted that scientific precaution, under trained guidance and watching, might diminish the danger greatly, and permit the student to follow out this line of research without incurring the stigma — if it be a stigma — of risking his sanity, or at least his general mental welfare?²²

Myst. It may be; in any case I follow knowledge; if my methods be absurd or pernicious, I am but one of millions in the like strait. Nor do I perceive that any other line of action offers even a remote chance of success.

Scept. The problem is perennial. It must be attacked on scientific lines, and if the pioneers fall, — well, who expects more from a forlorn hope? Time will show.

Myst. We have wandered far from this question of time.

Scept. Even from that of consciousness; itself a digression, though a necessary one.

Myst. An elusive fellow, this consciousness! Is he continuous, you, who declare him permanent?

Scept. Do I, indeed? I gave a possible reason for thinking so; but my adhesion does not follow. The lower consciousnesses, which I called (*a*), are of course rhythmic. The biograph is a sufficient proof of this.

Myst. Were one needed. Spencer's generalisation covers this point?

Scept. *À priori*. That the higher (*c*) are also rhythmic — for we will have no *à priori* here! — is evident, since the (*a*)s are presented by (*b*) no faster than they come. Even if (*a*), being fivefold, comes always so fast as to overlap, no multitude of impacts can compose a continuity.

Myst. But those reasons for permanence were very strong.

Scept. Strong, but overcome. Is it not absurd to represent anything as permanent whose function is rhythmic?

Myst. Not necessarily. It is surely possible for a continuous pat of butter to be struck rhythmically, for example. That it is inert in the intervals is unproved; but if it were, it might still be continuous. That a higher consciousness exists is certain; that it is unknowable is certain, as shown just now, unless, indeed, we can truly unite (*c*) with itself: *i.e.*, without thereby formulating a (*d*).

Scept. But how is that to be done?

Myst. Only, if at all, but cutting off (c) from (a): *i.e.*, by suspending the mechanism (b). Prevent sense-impressions from reaching the sensorium, and there will at least be a better chance of examining the interior. You cannot easily investigate a watch while it is going: not does the reflection of the sun appear in a lake whose surface is constantly ruffled by wind and rain, by hail and thunderbolt, by the diving of birds and the falling of rocks. To do this, thus shown to be essential to even the beginning of the true settlement of the time problem, and the solution of the paradoxes it affords —

Scept. How to do this is then a question not to be settle offhand by our irresponsible selves, but one of method and research.

Myst. And as such the matter of years.

Scept. I have long recognised this. That it should be started on a firm basis by responsible scientific men; that it should be placed on equal terms in all respects with other research: such is the object of my life.

Myst. But of mine the research itself.

Scept. I applaud you. You are the happy one. I am the martyr. I shall sow, but not reap; my eyes shall hardly see the first-fruits of my labour; yet something I shall see. Also, to construct one must clear the ground: to harvest, the plough and harrow are required. First we must rid us of false phrase and lying assumption, of knavery and ignorance, of bigotry and shirking. Let us pull down the church and the Free Library;²³ with each stone torn thence let us build the humble and practical homes of the true “holy men” of our age, the austere and single-minded labourers in the fields of Physics and Physiology.

Myst. Here, moreover, is the foundation of race harmony; here the possible basis for a genuine brotherhood of man! He will never be permanently

solidarised — excuse the neologism! — by grandiose phrase and transitory emotion; but in the Freemasonry of the Adepts of Dhyana what temple may not yet be builded?

Scept. Not made with hands — *ἐν νοῖς οὐρανοῖς αἰώνιος.*

Myst. Has not this mystical bond brought you and me together, us diverse, even repugnant in all other ways, yet utterly at one in this great fact?

Scept. We have talked too lightly, friend. Silence is best.

Myst. Let us meditate upon the adorable light of that divine Savitri!

Scept. May she enlighten our minds.

Footnotes

¹ It must not be supposed that the author of this dialogue *necessarily* concurs in the views of either disputant, even where they agreed. — A.C.

² Taunted with having described a horse's "pastern" as his "knee," the great lexicographer pleaded "Ignorance, Madam, pure ignorance."

³ See Huxley, "Man's Place in Nature," and elsewhere.

⁴ *Cf.* Crowley, *Epigrams* (1550 A.D.) —
"The bawds of the stews be turned al out;
But some think they inhabit al England throughout." — A. C.

⁵ This is not an *ignoratio elenchi*, but a criticism, too extended in scope to introduce here. — A. C.

⁶ The physical basis of thought, as distinguished from its physical mechanism. A Hindu conception. Sanskrit, Chittam.

⁷ I am not mad, most noble Festus. Acts xxvi. 25. The rest is from *Hamlet*. There are many other such apt or perverted quotations in the essay.
