

MYSTICISM AND MODERN LIFE

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Mysticism and modern life by John Wright Buckham

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JOHN WRIGHT BUCKHAM

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MODERN LIFE**

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BY

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Christian Ideal*, etc.



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To H. W. B.
In Grateful Recognition
of Twenty-five Years of
Mystical Comradeship

“On all that my hand does
Thy hand is laid”

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PREFACE

DOES religious conviction spring from the rationalizing faculty or the intuitive faculty, from the "freezing reason's colder part" or the "warmth within the breast"? Does it rest upon logic or faith?

This is an issue upon which the recent study of mysticism throws much light. Nor is it aiding us in this respect alone. It promises much help in untwisting the tangle of modern life and in affording a clue to its true value and use.

Many readers will take up—or perhaps let lie—a book entitled *Mysticism* with a not wholly unjustified prejudice. The phrase "religious experience" would be far preferable for a volume like this to the much-misunderstood and much-abused word "mysticism," were it not that the latter indicates the faith of a historic succession of men and women who have been the exponents and defenders of religious experience of an intense and significant type. While I shall endeavor to show that every one who has an immediate religious experience of his own is to that extent a mystic and belongs to the mystic fellowship, still I

agree with writers upon mysticism that there is a chosen company whom we may well call "the mystics" who have attained to such heights of religious experience as to serve in a peculiar way as its exponents—the great adventurers in the spirit realm. Their experience, while normal for them, is not the *norm* for all.

It is the aim of the writer in the first place to point out the presence of mysticism in modern life and thought, and then to assist, as far as he may, in the much-needed task of sifting the normal from the abnormal in mysticism, of clarifying the distinction which Professor Rauschenbusch has succinctly put in a letter to the writer, "between the open-eyed kind and the shut-eyed kind, the kind that makes a man realize his fellows and nature more keenly, and the kind that makes him lose consciousness of them and interest in them; the kind that makes human nature more complete and normal, and the kind that introduces abnormal and wild-eyed qualities."

Whatever tends to make religion esoteric, incomprehensible, over-refined, an affair of the elect and not of humanity as a whole, is misleading and fatal. It defeats religion in the name of religion. It is a common impression that mysticism is such. On the contrary—as I trust this volume will help to show—mysticism

in its normal form is not an inscrutable, exclusive religious cultus, but the gift, in some form, of everyone who will cultivate his capacity for it.

The task, for the author, relates itself very closely to one in which he has been for some time engaged and to which his previous volumes have been devoted—the study of the nature of Personality. In pursuing such a study it is impossible to pass by the mystics with their rich contribution to the meaning of this most fundamental of realities.

The gentle reader who does not care for the critical discussion of mysticism may omit Part II. The author deems this, however, to be a very essential part of the volume. "One does not like to be a fool, even a blessed fool," as a neighbor of mine remarks. Without a philosophy to justify him the mystic can hardly escape this suspicion.

In briefly acknowledging obligations I cannot do less than begin with the great mystics themselves, to whom I owe more than I can express for the generosity and confidence with which they have shared with me—as with all who will listen—the secret of their inner experience. To the writers upon mysticism also I am greatly indebted, as the following pages will show. Professor Rauschenbusch and Dr.

George A. Gordon have clarified and furthered my task with suggestion and cheer. To my colleagues, President C. S. Nash and Professor W. F. Badè, hearty thanks are extended for encouragement and aid; also to my wife and to Mrs. George DeWitt Castor, Miss Olive Brownsill, who in the last months of a fatal illness gave freely of her fine insight and sympathy to these chapters, and Miss Bertha M. Buckham. The editors of *The Homiletic Review*, Dr. Robert Scott and Professor George W. Gilmore, have extended greatly appreciated assistance. The latter has read the manuscript and has made many valued suggestions.

Acknowledgments are made with thanks to *The Homiletic Review* for the use of the chapter dealing with "Christian Mystical Literature"; to the *Christian Intelligencer* for the use of parts of the chapters "Lessons from the Mystics" and "The Mystic Way"; and to the *New York Christian Advocate* for the use of a part of the chapter "Mysticism and the Church."

The needless repetition of quotation marks in the case of longer extracts has been avoided. All indented paragraphs in smaller type should be understood as quotations.

Finally, in accord with the word of Plato in the *Timæus*, "All men, Socrates, who have