

**THE SPIRITUAL LIFE,  
STUDIES IN THE  
SCIENCE OF RELIGION**

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The spiritual life, studies in the science of religion by George A. Coe

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**GEORGE A. COE**

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Relig.

# THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

STUDIES IN THE  
SCIENCE OF RELIGION

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TO  
S. E. C.

*"Twas nothing that I can phrase,  
But the whole dumb dwelling grew conscious,  
And put on her looks and ways."*

## PREFACE

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THE studies here presented have been undertaken in response to a conviction that, in the interest of both science and religion, a new intellectual attitude is necessary with respect to the facts of the spiritual life. The religious processes taking place around us and within us must be observed with all the precision that modern psychological methods and tools render possible. For, whatever else religion may or may not be, it is at least a mass of ascertainable states of consciousness; and in the absence of information to the contrary we must presume that such states can be analyzed and described, and that their relations to one another and to the recognized laws of the mental and bodily life can be to some extent determined. What is needed is an examination of the facts as such, without reference to their possible bearing upon theology or philosophy. Until this work is done there will remain an important gap in the scientific knowledge of man. For, clearly, it is the humanity that now is that gives us our problems concerning man's origin and development, and that necessarily controls and tests our hypotheses. Simi-



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larly, knowledge of what religion now is must be the most illuminating factor in any satisfactory science of religion.

Religious propagandism also has a decisive motive for seeking to understand the religious consciousness of to-day. Ignorance is sometimes power, it is true, but, on the whole, the safer course in a good cause is to trust in knowledge. Moreover, aside from this general motive there is special need for the kind of knowledge here in question. Current events are forcing upon thoughtful minds in all the Protestant Churches a suspicion, if not a conviction, that what has claimed a peculiar right to the name "evangelical," both in piety and in modes of propagating the Gospel, has not fully solved its own chosen problems. There is reason for doubting whether even the spiritual teachers and guides of the people really grasp the mental processes with which they have to deal. Training in doctrine, in philosophy, in history, and even in the questions of the day, constitutes only a logical equipment; there is still necessary a psychological equipment in order that one may appreciate the vast mass of mental states and processes of a nonlogical sort. The evident decay of the revival, the alienation from the Church of whole classes of the population, the excess of women over men in Church life, the apparent powerlessness of organized religion to suppress or seriously check the great organized vices and injustices of society,

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the failure of the Sunday school to make the people or even its own pupils familiar with the contents of the Bible—these facts ought to raise a question as to what, among the matters upon which we have laid stress, is really practical and what mere ignorant blundering.

This question is already being raised, and it is bound to be asked more and more often and in louder and louder tones. It is no sign of enmity toward the Church or of coldness toward Christianity, but rather an incident of the expanding spirituality of men who find in Jesus the final meaning of life, and in evangelical Christianity the essential germ of future religious progress. This germ demands to be understood. It is necessary to perceive that the problems here suggested do not concern matters of mere temporary expediency. They go to the bottom of life; they concern the very essence of religion, of religious forces, and of the mind in which religion lives and through which it works for the healing of the nations. If this be true there is not a ray of reasonable hope for the solution of these problems unless in some way—either by a happy hit of uninstructed zeal or else by definite knowledge of the psychical factors involved—we manage to put ourselves into line with the mind of man as it is.

The present volume does not undertake to solve these problems, much less to present a systematic or complete treatment of the general psychology of reli-

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gion. My task has been the much less ambitious one of working out a few closely related groups of facts which will claim a place in the systematic psychology of religion when this comes to be written, and which in the meantime have an important bearing upon the practical side of religious life and work. While I have tried to approach the facts in the spirit and by the methods of science, I have not hesitated to point out in each chapter some of the practical uses to which its materials and results may be put. I hope that these suggestions will show where to look for a practical solution of several of our most troublesome problems.

I am under obligation to the editors of *The Psychological Review* for permission to reprint in Chapter III, with alterations and additions, an article that was published in the September, 1899, number of that journal.

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Evanston, Illinois,