

VIII

WHO ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES?

'JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES'¹ is the latest official name given to a system of religion which has been known in the past under various other titles or sub-titles—such as 'The Millennial Dawn,' 'The International Bible Students' Association,' 'The Associated Bible Students,' 'Millions Now Living Will Never Die,' 'The Watchtower,' and now 'Jehovah's Witnesses.' Like some of the extra-church organizations which we have been considering, it had its origin in the United States of America, the home and fertile breeding-ground of so many of the newer religions of the past century.

I

The founder of the movement was Charles Taze Russell, who was born and brought up in Alleghany, Pennsylvania. We know very little of his parentage, or of his early boyhood and training. As a young man he inherited a haberdashery business from his father; and in his off-time from work, he lectured and preached in various churches and halls, becoming known among the careless and the irreverent in his own neighbourhood as the 'crank preacher.'

Having distinct gifts of speech, and especially (let us note this for our own guidance) a vivid, simple, and

¹ This name was adopted by Judge Rutherford in 1931, from Isaiah xliii.10, 'Ye are my witnesses saith Jehovah, and my servant whom I have chosen.'

WHO ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ?

direct use of the English language, he aroused considerable interest, and soon secured a large local audience both of admirers and critics. Later, finding himself successful as a speaker, he sold out the five 'Men's Furnishing Stores' which he had inherited from his father, and devoted most of his time and tireless energy to preaching his new doctrines.

Regarding his gifts and qualifications, we know that he had very little schooling, and certainly no college training or intellectual discipline. Moreover—though he made some claim to these at a later date—he had no special knowledge either of history or philosophy ; and in after days he was much too busy travelling, lecturing, and preaching to read any of the classical books, either of religion or philosophy, that might have enlarged his mind. Afterwards, when he became well-known, he was foolishly led to claim that he had a 'working acquaintance' with the original languages of Scripture—Hebrew and Greek. In a public examination in 1913, during one of his many Court Trials, he made an open claim that he knew Greek ; but when a Greek New Testament was handed to him by the cross-examining advocate, he was forced to confess that he did not know even the Greek alphabet !¹

I do not lay any special stress on the fact that he did not know Greek or Hebrew. But I do lay some stress on the shabby pretension that he did know ! Revelation—let us be thankful—does not necessarily come to scholars any more readily than to simple folk, for it is quite possible to believe that scholarship may make a man hesitant about his own personal claims or his individual illumination. But it does shake our confidence to see someone claiming to bring a new

¹ *Some Facts and more Facts about Pastor Russell*, Rev. J. J. Ross, p. 18

revelation about God and Jesus Christ, who yet tries to boost himself by a patent lie. The average person finds it difficult to imagine that the righteous and holy God can give any 'special revelation' through a dishonest man.

Moreover, it has lately been discovered that most of Pastor Russell's¹ system was a more or less wholesale appropriation from the writings of an earlier and more mature writer. This man, J. H. Paton of Almond, Michigan, U.S.A., published his ideas about the Christian faith under the title of *Day Dawn*. A comparison of the writings of the two men shows that Russell's system is in the main an unacknowledged pilfering from the work of the quiet, retiring Mr. Paton.

Just as Mrs. Eddy owed most of her Christian Science theory to Dr. Quimby, and afterwards tried to disown the debt, so Pastor Russell appropriated the ideas of Paton in wholesale measure and proclaimed them as his own system—a kind of intellectual and spiritual dishonesty that offends honest people. But we can say one thing at least, that had he confined himself only to Paton's more gracious exposition, he would not have indulged in that constant slanging of all other Christians and churches which is such a notable feature of his published works and tracts. It is nauseous to hear his rather insolent claim that he alone can interpret the Bible aright, and that his type of 'Christian' forms the only true Church—all others being apostate. Every church comes under his lash, and often the worst motives are imputed to those who differ from him.

¹ I call him 'Pastor,' the name he assumed, though he was never received, admitted, or ordained by any church or organization. In the same way, I call Rutherford 'Judge,' though he was only an ordinary lawyer and advocate.

WHO ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ?

We always tend to suspect any church or any man who exalts himself by decrying others.

Pastor Russell was certainly a first-class business man who knew how to catch the ear of the public and bring his theories into the open forum. He put immense drive into the system which he had taken from Paton, founding a world-wide publishing agency for his own writings and tracts, which in the end became a good money-making concern. By a great net-work of colporteurs or travellers he peddled his publications over the English-speaking world, his agents calling from door to door in every hamlet and village, handing in tracts and inducing people to buy his numerous volumes. Nowadays, to be quite up-to-date, the agents of Jehovah's Witnesses have gramophone records which they play in village streets and at cottage doors, recording speeches of Judge Rutherford, Russell's successor, and in America they have command of a radio which spans the continent.

Russell at first called his new system *Millennial Dawn*, no doubt to distinguish it from Paton's *Day Dawn*. His chief published work was named *The Millennial Dawn Series*, issued in six volumes : but this was afterwards renamed *Studies in the Scriptures*. These were published between 1886 and 1903. The books are written in easy and fluent English, and profess to be a commentary on the whole Bible. Indeed Russell dares to hint that, in some ways, his books might supersede the Scriptures. Unless that is his notion, I do not know what the following quotation means : ' Even after a man has used them, after he has become familiar with them, if he has read them for ten years—if he then lays them aside and ignores them, and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood the Bible for ten years,

our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness. On the other hand, if he has merely read these Scripture Studies with their references, and has not read a page of the Bible as such, he would be in the light at the end of two years, because he would have the light of the Scriptures.' This outdoes some of the Papal claims, without having any of the Papal tradition or authority at its back.

It was in 1910 that he called his system and organization by the catching title 'The International Bible Students' Association,' and later 'The Associated Bible Students'—titles by which many guileless people were induced to buy his books and subscribe to his funds. Until the recent War and the consequent paper shortage in Britain curtailed the supply of his books and tracts, it is said that there were over two hundred colporteurs and pedlars going up and down our countryside, inducing people to buy his literature. Undoubtedly he organized a first-class travelling bookshop for his own literature. Actually, on his own confession, millions of these volumes and pamphlets have been sold or distributed in Britain and America. When we come to examine his teaching, we shall see how cleverly he used the specious title of his organization to catch many unwary people and influence those who were uninstructed in their faith and in the use of the Bible.

2

Pastor Russell died in October 1916. He was followed by 'Judge' Joseph Franklin Rutherford, his right-hand man, who took over the reins of the organization. He was a Missouri lawyer who had become attorney for the organization; and he too was a very

WHO ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ?

forceful person, and also a first-class business man. It was he who gave the greatest prominence to the catchy slogan *Millions now living will never die*; and wherever he was billed to speak, under this arresting title, sheer curiosity and speculation took thousands to hear him. He died a few years ago, in 1942, and has been succeeded as President of the organization by Mr. Nathan Homer Knorr, about whom I do not know much, except what I read about him and his travels in their paper *The Watchtower*. According to an article in *Collier's Weekly*, the leading spirit—what the author of the article calls the 'Great Personality'—is a recent convert called Hayden C. Covington, a lawyer from Texas, who acts as the Society's legal adviser and counsel. He has defended hundreds of cases in the American courts where members of the organization have claimed freedom from all types of national service, on the ground that they are 'ministers of the gospel,' and therefore exempt from any conscription.¹

I understand that the coming of the atom bomb, with its cataclysmic possibilities of physical destruction, has given this organization a new audience and hearing in America, for many alarmed and thoughtless people are led thereby to think of the end of the world and the coming Millennium. No doubt, as soon as ordinary travel is again open and paper for books is once more available, there will be handed in at our doors the usual tracts advertising the teaching of Russell's and Rutherford's books. (I preserve half a dozen copies of these tracts slipped unobtrusively into my letter-box in past years.)

This is a very short review of the origin and history of the strange organization now called *Jehovah's Wit-*

¹ *Collier's Weekly*, November 1946

nesses. There is one note worth adding, since the War shut Britain off from America. During our dark days of terrible anxiety, when our existence as a people was so gravely endangered, the followers of this creed in Britain claimed full exemption from any kind of national service whatever. (They have claimed a similar exemption in other countries; and I understand that in Canada and Australia their work and preaching have been outlawed.) In America they have refused to perform some of the normal duties of ordinary citizens, such as 'serving on a jury' or registering their votes in an election. For this, unfortunately, they have been rather badly handled in some American districts in the heat of the pressing anxieties of the late war. In the United States, their members have refused to salute the flag or recognize any national emblems, and have forbidden their children to join with other children in any concerted discipline or training. It is not difficult to understand how the average good citizen in every country reacts to such isolationist conduct in the affairs of his town and state, by people who make use of all the amenities and protection of a nation and yet refuse to fulfil the natural obligations of ordinary citizenship. It is not as if these 'obligations' involved any real question of conscience or principle. It should be noted that their objections to national services—during an emergency, for instance—are a late development in their teaching: for I can find no trace of this strict attitude in the early writings of Pastor Russell.

A further contradiction is seen in their attitude to the usual churches of the lands they invade. The article in *Collier's* to which I have referred says, 'They are against all organized religion, since they can find no justification for a church or a hierarchy of any kind

WHO ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ?

in the Bible.' If they cannot find a justification for a church in the Old and New Testaments, the only thing one can say is that they do not know the Old and New Testaments. Where was there a more organized church with a distinct hierarchy than among the Jews—a church, too, which Jesus constantly attended? Moreover, our modern name of 'church' or 'ecclesia' came from the institution set up by the Apostles in the New Testament! In any case, do Jehovah's Witnesses not actually form churches of their own—and rather autocratic churches at that? They form local societies called 'Company Organizations,' and they meet in what they call 'Kingdom Halls.' Merely to give a thing a disguised name is not to abolish it. So far as central government is concerned, they are as much an organized church as any other church in the world. It is rather a mean and shabby device to run down a 'church,' because they themselves avoid using the name while all the time they themselves use the same principles of 'organization.'

3

What is their teaching?

In all that matters, it is, of course, still a continuation of Pastor Russell's system as given in his six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*—a teaching appropriated and dressed out from J. H. Paton's *Day Dawn*, and greatly worsened in the process.

(1) Russell's teaching is essentially *Unitarian*. He believes in God, but there is no Son of God and no Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, as he puts it, is in no sense personal, but merely a 'kind of influence.' I do not know what he means by a 'kind of influence.'

It can mean anything or nothing. And as he uses it, it generally means nothing.

Who and what is Jesus Christ? This is the acid test of any system which deliberately calls itself 'Christian.' Pastor Russell threw aside what he called 'the unreasonable and false doctrine of the Trinity' or what he dubs more vulgarly 'Trinitarian Nonsense.' The Jesus of our Gospels was not in any particular sense 'Son of God.' Before He came among us, He was the *Archangel Michael*. In obedience to the Divine Will, this Archangel Michael gave up his spirit being, and was born of the Virgin Mary, as an ordinary wholly-human being. I wonder if the Pastor really thought that this Michael idea makes the uniqueness of Christ's personality any more reasonable or understandable than calling Him Son of Man or Son of God?

The origin of this Michael myth lies in the obscure book of *Daniel* (Chapter xii, verse 1). It reads as follows: 'And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people.' In the Jewish angelology, Michael was regarded as a sort of patron-saint of Israel, who protected them against their enemies, and was generally thought of as a great warrior who could slay his thousands. Dr. R. H. Charles, whose work on all apocalyptic literature is pre-eminent, refers to the two passages where Michael is mentioned in the New Testament (Jude, 9 and Revelation xii:7) and remarks of the second of these passages, 'Here the figure of Michael *thrusts aside* that of the Messiah: for it is Michael and not the Child that overthrows Satan when storming the heavens.' But Pastor Russell, who swears so much by the verbal inspiration of the Bible, *identifies* Michael with the Messiah, although they are referred

to separately. In any case Michael was only a figure in ancient Jewish angelology, and must just be treated as such. By and large, it is an odd and unfortunate thing that Russell should have chosen *Michael* of all possibilities—the angel of war and carnage to become the Prince of Peace and the ‘Lamb’ prepared for the slaughter!

As to what took place when the fabled Michael the Archangel became the Jesus of history, we had better allow Pastor Russell to speak for himself: ‘Our Lord Jesus changed His nature when He left the glory of the Father, and became a man taking our nature. He changed His nature again when He sacrificed Himself as a man, and was begotten as a New Creature at the time of His baptism at thirty years of age. It was this New Creature, no longer earthly but heavenly, that was resurrected on the third day, and received a body, as it pleased the Father—a spirit body. He received immortality only at His resurrection and as a reward for the faithful obedience to the Father’s will.’

What all this may mean, and where it may come from, I can make no guess. I ask you however to notice some of the points involved :

(i) Jesus was a ‘lesser order of angel’ before His incarnation on earth. Does this make His coming any easier or more reasonable ?

(ii) During His life, He gave up this angel nature, and became wholly and only human, in nothing different from any other man.

(iii) At death the person called Jesus, who lived in Galilee, died, and was never raised again as a personal human being. Here once again are Pastor Russell’s own words: ‘Our Lord’s human body was supernaturally removed from the tomb. We know nothing about what became of it, except that it did not decay

or corrupt. Whether it was dissolved into gases, or whether it is still preserved somewhere as a grand memorial of God's love, of Christian obedience, and of our redemption, no one knows, nor is such knowledge necessary.' 'No one knows,' he says. But surely he himself appears to know the whole story, from the beginning to the finish. Pastor Russell claims to accept the Bible as literally inspired; but when occasion suits him, he has little hesitation in discarding any historical statement in the New Testament.

(iv) Jesus was not immortal, just as none of us is immortal. At His death, He, as a personal human being, was *annihilated*. (This is Russell's own word.) But He received immortality 'as a gift from God,' when His spirit was taken to God's presence.

(v) When He appeared afterwards to His disciples on various occasions, it was in a special 'body-appearance,' created specially for each occasion.

(vi) Jesus has no longer any connection with our nature, but is merely an invisible spirit.

I have no quarrel with any man who believes this, but I have a distinct quarrel with any man who says that *he founds this creed on the New Testament*. From the first supposition of the Archangel Michael to the semi-deification of Jesus as a higher type of immortal angel, this belief of *Jehovah's Witnesses* has nothing to do with the records of the New Testament which they profess to follow and honour so faithfully.

4

From this, let us consider some of Pastor Russell's other doctrines.

His view that the historic Jesus was not 'immortal'

WHO ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ?

is only in agreement with his general theory that *mankind* as such has no claim to immortality. He 'dates' his doctrine from the Garden of Eden, the story of which he takes as exact literal science. Adam, he says, was *created* 'immortal.' But Adam sinned : and by his sin he earned death, and so lost his original gift of immortality. In this connection Russell translates one text with brutal literalness, and runs it through his whole system, brushing aside any other passage that might seem to modify it. That verse is '*The Wages of Sin is Death.*'¹ There is no thought in his mind that the death spoken of here might be *spiritual* death, viz. the death that sin can produce in the human soul. No—he says—it is literal physical extinction, that and nothing less. Physical death, he states, entered the world when Adam sinned. Since then, every person—body and soul—has died and been annihilated. The dead have simply ceased to be. All Christians, by whatever name they are called, and indeed all religious people who believe that our personal souls live on, have been trusting in a fool's dream. *No human being that has ever lived and died exists any longer.* Why? The answer is, '*The wages of Sin is Death*'—physical, complete and total death. Men lost immortality when Adam sinned !

Whenever he meets a passage or a text that disagrees with his pre-arranged theory, Pastor Russell shows the most astonishing agility either in dodging it or changing it. As an instance of this agility, let me take one striking and even amusing example. When the dying thief repented and turned to Jesus, saying, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,' Our Lord replied, 'Verily, I say unto

¹ Romans vi.23

thee, 'To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.' Of course such a passage—one among many—would quite obviously 'knock the feet' from Pastor Russell. It evidently says two things: (i) that the thief at death is not annihilated; and (ii) that the union of the souls of men with God is not postponed, but is immediate. So Pastor Russell—who had to confess in a public court that he knew no Greek—turns and says, 'Ah! but you are misreading this passage in the Greek. What it says is this, *Verily I say unto thee to-day*, Thou shalt be with me in paradise.' This Greek scholar says—with all the genuine Greek scholars of the world against him—that this is what the original words mean. '*Verily I say unto thee to-day*'—as if Jesus put it thus in case you might think He said it *yesterday or to-morrow!* Actually the word 'To-day' is emphatic, and is placed first in its own sentence that it may be prominent. '*To-day* shalt thou be with me in paradise.' With what little Greek I still preserve, I fear I must agree with the scholars! But it is worth noticing, is it not, how deadly it is for any man to come to the Scriptures with a pre-conceived prejudice. To such a man, truth itself speaks in vain.

But when Christ comes again (He and God being now the only two Immortals existing), all the dead—and remember they are really dead, annihilated—will be raised again and given a Second Chance. How these 'annihilated ones' are to be raised again and reassembled together, we do not know; but all this lies in the power of God, according to Pastor Russell. They are to be re-assembled, let us observe, not as *spiritual beings*, but as *bodies*—bodies as real as ours are at this moment, bodies also that

WHO ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES?

live by 'eating and drinking,' as Russell asserts. It is not a spiritual resurrection this, but a physical. And the resurrection will be on *this little earth*. All this is going to take place at any moment now, since Christ has already come.

I quote Pastor Russell's own words: 'God's plan of salvation for the general race of Adam is to extend to each member of it, during the Millennium, the offer of eternal life upon the terms of the New Covenant sealed for all with the precious blood of the Lamb . . . and when at the close of the Millennium (A.D. 2914) all the obedient of mankind shall have attained all that was lost in Adam and redeemed by Christ, then all, armed with complete knowledge and experience, and hence fully able to stand the test, will be severely tested (as was Adam) but individually (Revelation xx. 7-10), and only those found in fullest heart-sympathy, as well as in outward harmony with God and His righteous arrangements, will be permitted to go beyond the Millennium into the everlasting future or world-age without end—by continuing to eat food. All others will be destroyed in the second death—destroyed from among the people.'

At any moment now, since Christ has already come, there will be a *Great Second Chance*, offered to all people who ever lived on this earth.¹ Mark this—this immense total people will be raised again as *bodies* on this little globe! Think of it quietly for a moment—millions and millions and millions and millions of them living again as natural men and women on *this earth*, and

¹ As if they saw the physical impossibility of this, the later Witnesses have changed this original creed of Pastor Russell, and have now substituted 'all the faithful' for all men. But who the faithful are, from the days of Abel, they do not venture to say!

living by eating food ! The mere physical and economic problem of the business does not seem to have worried Pastor Russell or Judge Rutherford. We can always pass off a trifling consideration like this by saying piously, ' God will provide.' Even on Russell's ridiculous and unscientific estimate of the existence of man during only six thousand years—and we know that man has existed ages longer—it is an astounding economic situation he asks us to contemplate.

5

That we may see just how farcical this whole system is, allow me to quote the following passage (how rich it is in cosmic comedy !) : ' Remembering the Lord's promise that in the millennial period " the earth shall yield her increase " and that the desert and wilderness-places of the earth shall become as a Garden of Eden, we may safely estimate upon all the land, which we may find, according to recent estimates, to be 57,000,000 square miles or over 36,000,000,000 acres. What would this mean as to space for each individual who has ever lived in the world, i.e. 28,441,126,838 persons ? It means that there would be twelve hundred and seventy-five acres for each little village of two hundred families. Quite a sufficiency of room, all will agree, under the new conditions promised. But if more space be necessary, with faith we will readily see that it will be quite within the divine power to raise vast continents from the depths of the ocean, or indeed to give a literal as well as a symbolical fulfilment to the declaration—' There shall be no more sea.' With all the knowledge we have of the history of mankind, these figures are just tragic nonsense. Russell says, '*with faith we will*

WHO ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ?

readily see . . . No ! only with credulity and sheer ignorance of all science !

While we are on figures read this : ' We have found a clear and connected line of chronology from creation to the beginning of the Christian era—in all, a period of four thousand one hundred and twenty-eight years, which, together with eighteen hundred and seventy years of the Christian era, make six thousand years from creation to the year A.D. 1873.' This sort of stuff comes from two fundamental fallacies—(i) treating the Bible as if it were a record of science and mathematics ; and (ii) being blind to all the scientific discoveries which God has granted to the human mind. The Bible is a record only of man's experience of God, not a textbook of science.

Let us observe the subtle, even the low appeal, which this type of teaching makes to countless thoughtless people, and more especially to countless wicked people. Russell's doctrine is that there is no such thing as *punishment* in this world, or indeed in any other world. When a man dies here on this earth, he dies—and that is the end of it, and of him ; for he is not immortal. On the one hand, Russell deliberately shuts his ears to every solemn note of warning uttered by Jesus Christ about the penalties of sin and the consequences of evil conduct. On the other hand, he is blind to the fact that there is *daily punishment* in this world by the laws of nature, which even he would admit are the laws of God.

These Witnesses of Jehovah (why, by the way, do they witness about *Jehovah*, the God of the Old Testament ? Why do not they witness about the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ ?) allege with real pagan glee that there is no punishment or penalty in this universe,

and so when a man dies, no matter how he has lived, he just dies. But there is more to follow. When Christ comes—and He has already come¹—all these dead annihilated people will be raised again, and will receive the privilege of a Second Chance. Every man—no matter how he has lived, no matter how he has ruined others, and no matter how he has deliberately rejected God in this life of reason, conscience, and Christian light—will be raised again and will receive a Great Second Chance. The offer of God in Jesus Christ will be plainly and unmistakeably put before him once more. He will have full light and opportunity given him to consider his decision.

If he accepts, he will be made immortal—remember, he is not immortal now!—and he will continue to live on this earth, ‘by partaking of food and drink,’ for ever and ever. Thus our future immortality—on this earth, for the promised future life is to be on this little earth—consists in an equal immortality of the physical body as well as of the spirit. But if the man once again refuses God’s final offer, and is impenitent and intractable, he will be blotted out—painlessly annihilated; and this annihilation will be final. Whatever happens, there will be no question of ‘retribution’ of any kind or sort, for Russell is assured that all penalty or punishment is un-Biblical and immoral.

I wonder what he makes of God’s penalties, here and now, in this world? The laws of Nature and the laws of Man (which are God’s laws implanted in us) are laws which if broken, punish inevitably. ‘Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him.’ However, leaving that alone, we are assured by Jehovah’s Witnesses that there are only these two alternatives

¹ See later

in the future 'heaven on earth'—physical bodily life, made immortal by partaking of food on this earth; and painless eternal annihilation for the impenitent.

We may have no difficulty in setting this aside as being contrary to all our knowledge of the universe, as well as to every teaching in the New Testament—a groundless speculation, and ethically valueless. But we should not fail to see the subtle appeal which this type of teaching makes to millions of careless people who would like to believe it.

6

Let us observe the implications of this creed.

(i) No matter what kind of rotten and vicious life a man may have led here, and no matter how many guileless people he may have ruined, there will be no reckoning for him to face either in this world or hereafter. Russell preaches this as 'Christian' in spite of the constant and solemn warnings which Jesus addressed to the evil and impenitent. 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that every man may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.'

(ii) According to this easy creed, so appealing to the careless, nothing we *do* or *are* in this life of moral choices has any effect on our future. Character and quality do not seem to matter; evil goes unpunished, and goodness unrewarded. Does it matter what we are or what vicious ruin we cause? The same fate meets everyone, good or bad—annihilation.

(iii) When Christ returns and begins his Millennium, everybody—saint or devil, the helpless people stifled in the gas-chamber, or the evil fiends who butchered them—will be 'resurrected,' all alike and all equally,

from their present annihilation, and will be given, each and all of them, a Great Second Chance. If they repent and accept Christ, no matter of what infinite rogueries they may have been guilty, they will receive immortality 'as a gift from God.'

If, however, on having the full claims of Christ presented to them again, they do not repent, but persist in selfishness or villainy, they will be painlessly annihilated—with the emphasis on the word 'painlessly'! It does not need me to point out how diabolically attractive this type of easy doctrine may seem to thousands of people who do not want to believe in the ethics of the New Testament, or live in the honour and strictness of the Christian faith.

There is only one thing to be said. Any man can believe this sort of doctrine if he likes, just as he can believe that the moon is made of green cheese, if he likes. But we deny his right to call it *Christian*, or to delude himself that he can base it on the teaching of Jesus Christ or His Apostles.

When he touches on the Second Coming of Our Lord, Russell reaches his climax, and with him, of course, Judge Rutherford and Jehovah's Witnesses. As we have seen, he believes that Jesus has already come, and that we are now in the age of the promised reign of God. I cannot enter into the elaborate and childish calculations on which his pronouncements are so shakily built. It seems, however, according to his reckoning, that 1872 was the exact six-thousandth year from the creation of Adam and Eve. This, of course, is sheer nonsense. The seventh Millennium was to be the beginning of the Reign of Christ. This began some time in 1873 or 1874. Jesus came then invisibly as a spirit. *He is here now. We are in the Millennium.*

WHO ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES ?

I fear that we should not have known this if Russell had not told us !

In 1878 according to his calculations, the period of the ' disfavour of the Jews ' ceased. At that time they were again ' *received into God's favour.*' Would that, in view of all their recent intolerable sufferings, they had been received into man's favour ! The end of the ' times of the Gentiles ' came in 1914. In that year, according to Russell, ' *the full establishment of the Kingdom of God*' came, and also ' *the final end of the Kingdoms of this world.*' It is a real pity that he prophesied these things so many years before the events. For 1914, I fear, was not the beginning of the Millennium, but the beginning of Pandemonium ! It was a very unfortunate year for him to have lit upon.

Since the all too obvious failure of Russell's prophecy regarding 1914, his followers have made a discreet change in their prognostications. Evidently, they now prophesy that on some day before 1984 Gabriel's trumpet will blow, and Christ will announce that the final end has come. Then the ' Great Theocracy of God ' will be established on this earth, and the only human beings left to share in the New Age will be Jehovah's Witnesses. This is charming from two points of view : (i) Few of us may be left to verify whether 1984 will be any more fortunate than 1914, and (ii) the humility of the ' Witnesses ' in believing that they alone shall survive is delightful !

7

According to Russell and Jehovah's Witnesses, since Jesus has already come, and since the promised Millennium is presently here, there are therefore ' *millions now*

living who will never die ! This was the great slogan that Judge Rutherford used to placard over every city in Great Britain and America. How it attracted the crowds ! The Usher Hall in Edinburgh was packed to the doors ! Christ had come ! We were now in the Millennium ! Therefore 'millions now living will never die' ; for they will now receive immediately the Great Second Chance. At any moment to us who are living now, the great final offer of God may be made. But we must become members of Jehovah's Witnesses and belong to the only *True Church*, before this amazing offer in its fullness is made to us. If we refuse, and reject this final offer of God, we need have no fear or foreboding, no matter what our sins may have been. We shall only cease to exist for ever. In many ways, a most comfortable doctrine for unrepentant men, especially for those who by their power and cleverness in this life can avoid any penalty from their suffering fellowmen here in this world !

All this is tragic stuff—this calculation of days and events based on the reputed ages of the ancient Patriarch, and on a revised edition of Archbishop Ussher's chronology of the Old Testament. Naturally, a man like Russell neither knew nor cared for any of the assured findings of science or any of the proved discoveries of men. He laughed at geological testimony about the age of the world, and God's evolving processes in the past. He was that worst kind of 'religionist,'—one who despised all knowledge outside his own narrow interpretation of the Bible. Essentially an obscurantist.

It is worth more than a passing consideration to ask how a creed like this, so demonstrably false on the main issues, should yet receive acceptance from so

many people. It will not do for us to feel superior, and say that most people are fools, and will believe anything. I am of opinion that no creed or philosophy can last for two or three generations without having some concealed germ of truth in its heart. One purpose of this book is to show that our modern heresies only live and thrive because they are emphasizing some truth or half-truth which the ordinary churches have overlooked or understressed. Christian Science, for instance, has emphasized the healing power of mind over body, and the continual resources of the love of God ; Spiritualism has sought to establish the eternal communion of spirit with spirit, Theosophy has tried to find the common message of all religions. To my mind, it is only some real residuum of truth in any creed that keeps it going. Perhaps if the Church emphasized the aspects of truth which we so often overlook, many of these modern heresies would never arise, or would quickly pass out as needless.

8

Is there anything, then, in Pastor Russell's teaching or methods which has given his system the vogue and passion of a half-truth? Has he emphasized something which we have overlooked? I suggest the following points :

(i) He speaks and writes with extreme limpidity, and uses simple English with an ease and grace which anyone can understand. That is, he speaks to the people ; and he honours the people by believing that they can understand any abstruse point of doctrine if only he uses words they can understand. *Do we?* I leave it there.

(ii) He has as wonderful an acquaintance with the letter of the Bible as anyone I have recently read. Russell uses over 5,000 quotations from the Old and New Testaments in his books, and displays a wonderful ingenuity in applying texts as his proofs. We may disapprove of the use of texts as 'proofs'—and we do so on good grounds, for anyone can prove anything from chance texts picked up from anywhere—but on the other hand, his use of Bible material is certainly impressive.

(iii) His system represents a natural and even healthy protest against the popular theology and preaching of his own day, with its doctrines of everlasting physical punishment, and torments that never end. It was out of that atmosphere, and as a protest against it, that Mrs. Eddy stated her creed of God as only eternal love and goodness; and in the same way, Russell found a great following among the common people by his 'abolishing of hell.' How some of the old divines in America and elsewhere used to glory in the licking flames of the bottomless pit, describing 'the agonies of the damned,' in the comfortable assurance, however, that they were not going there themselves.

(iv) In a certain good way Russell did a service to the world on the question of the *Advent of Jesus*. All these terrible hopes and fears about some cataclysmic event which have been so common and so ruinous in Christian thinking were dismissed by him; and he practically said that when Christ came, He would come so quietly and unobtrusively that no-one would even notice His coming. Commenting, for instance, on Acts i:11 ('Shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go') he writes, 'What, then, was the manner of His going? Was it with great splendour and with

great demonstration ? Was it not as quietly and secretly as was possible, consistent with His purpose of having thoroughly convinced witnesses of the fact ? None saw Him or knew the fact, except His faithful followers.' Again he writes : ' Our Lord's first advent was not a startling, exciting, or alarming event. How quietly and unobtrusively He came ! So much so that only those who had faith and humility were enabled to recognize in the infant of humble birth, in the man of sorrows, in the friend of the humble and poor, and finally in the crucified one, the long-looked-for Messiah.' I am sure that Russell's preaching of a silent and unmarked ' coming ' of Jesus Christ did much to help those who had been terrorized by fears about a cataclysm and an Armageddon.

(v) His protest against all the other churches for their sacerdotalism and their priestcraft should not be overlooked. He called us all—Protestants as well as Romanists—' the whores of Babylon ' and the ' organization of Satan.' What a choice scream of invective he had ! But it is worth noticing the response that crowds of ordinary people give to a crusade against sacerdotal claims and any form of clericalism. *It is so easy for churches to elevate their priests and lower their prophets !* And it is astonishing, by and large, to notice how readily average simple people object to all priestly preference, and welcome those who denounce the powers and pretensions of the ' ordained.'

(vi) His advocacy of many needed social reforms helped his preaching. He declaimed openly against the evils of drink, gambling, all selfish extravagance and needless luxury, when many official clergymen were discreetly silent. He spoke against the devilries of war and the brutality of strong nations. Even at the end of

last century—and that in individualistic America—he made a saner judgment about Socialism than we sometimes hear to-day. ‘Socialism differs from Nationalism in that it does not propose to reward all individuals alike. It differs from Communism in that it does not advocate a community of goods or property. It thus avoids the errors of both, and it is a very practical theory, if it could be introduced gradually, and by wise, moderate, unselfish men.’

9

I despair of any criticism of this ‘Millennial Dawn’ theology of Jehovah’s Witnesses ; for I do not know where to begin or where to end. It is all based on such a foolish and perverse use of the Bible. But since it glories most of all in its predictions about the Messiah and Millennium, let it be judged by them. ‘*It is an established truth that the final end of the kingdoms of this world and the full establishment of the Kingdom of God will be accomplished at the end of A.D. 1914.*’

Be ye the judges !

To sum up :

(i) The creed of ‘Jehovah’s Witnesses’ is simply literalism run mad. Worst of all, it is a literalism built mainly on a few selected and often perverted texts. It is blind, deliberately blind, to the whole body of teaching in the New Testament about God, Jesus, and human salvation.

(ii) It feasts, like all similar systems, on the obscure books of *Daniel* and *Revelation*, which it regards as ‘secret books’ where God has hidden an important revelation. What a terrible view this implies about the character of our loving Father, the Lord God—that He

WHO ARE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES?

should hide His most important revelation from the hearts of simple and trusting people, like the clues of an obscure crossword puzzle. We know that His fullest revelation, for now and for the future, for us and for our beloved dead, was given openly and perfectly in the life, the teaching and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ our Lord. There are no hidden ciphers in the Scriptures where God has concealed important truths to be puzzled out by man's ingenuity.

(iii) This reckoning of days and dates is as unscriptural as it is senseless. How often must we point out the reserve of Jesus? 'Of that day and that hour knoweth no man . . . neither the Son.' So far as the New Testament is concerned, there is only one ethical message for our outlook on the future—live in God's goodwill now; love and follow Jesus Christ; and trust to God for to-morrow. Everything about to-morrow rests in the known character of God.

(iv) Beware especially of all cheap, easy creeds which do away with every moral and spiritual value. The early Christians were called, and called themselves, 'the People of the Way.' Christianity is a 'way of life,' a definite way of living in the will of Jesus Christ, a life of ethical values, where the supreme thing is the quality of our life in union with God. The only thing that counts in the Christian creed is the *character*, the *life*, and the *faith* which we form here. If we live in God's will, true to His commands and true to our own best, if we make Jesus Christ our master and our friend, we shall hear His word, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'