The Emmanuel Movement

A Pioneering Attempt to Treat Personality

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ONE OF THE spiritual healing
movements of the twentieth cen-
tury which attracted a great deal of
attention was the so-called Emmanuel
Movement of Boston. When Chris-
tian Science was spreading rapidly in
the early nineteen hundreds, this heal-
ing movement was inaugurated under
the guidance of Rev. Elwood Worcester,
the rector of Emmanuel Episcopal
Church, and his associate, Dr. Samuel
McComb. Dr. Isador Coriat, of Tufts
Medical School, whose interest was
aroused when the two clergymen came
to him for advice, assisted in a new
healing venture which came to be
known as the Emmanuel Movement,
a designation coined by a press
reporter.

Dr. Worcester was born in Massil-
lon, Ohio, in 1862, and graduated
from Columbia College and the Gener-
al Theological Seminary of the Pro-
estant Episcopal Church. He did post-
graduate work in philosophy, psy-
chology, and Hebrew at the Univer-
sity of Leipzig, where he received his
Ph.D. degree, magna cum laude.

While he was teaching philosophy at
Lehigh University he was called to
become the rector of St. Stephen's
Church in Philadelphia. After serving
in that position for a few years he
accepted the call to Emmanuel Church
in Boston.

Rev. McComb was born in Ireland
and graduated from Oxford Univer-
sity. He did his post-graduate work
at Berlin University, majoring in psy-
chology and history. When the posi-
tion of professor of Ecclesiastical
History was offered to him at Queen's
University in Canada he accepted the
offer.

Dr. Isador Coriat was a Jew, a man
who was learned in profession and
respected by other physicians as an
unusually expert diagnostician. He
was on the faculty of Tufts Medical
School and was especially interested
in psychotherapy, as were other well
known authorities of that day, among
them William James, Morton Prince,
Lewellys F. Barker, James J. Putnam,
Boris Sides, and Frederick Peterson.

During the first years of his associa-
tion with them he collaborated in the
preparation of the official Emmanuel
book, Religion and Medicine, and was
liaison between the two clergymen
and the medical men of Boston.

Through his study of psychology
and religion Dr. Worcester became
interested in the psychological aspects
of illness. When he arrived in Phila-
delphia he became acquainted with a
member of his parish in whom he
found an especially kindred spirit, Dr.
S. Weir Mitchell, the well-known
neurologist. Dr. Mitchell was widely
known because he pioneered in neu-orology and was interested in the de-
plorable conditions he found in state
mental institutions. The unscientific
approach to mental illness disturbed
him greatly. These two humanitarians
had much in common and undoubtedly
their association influenced Dr. Worcester to such an extent that when he accepted the call to Emmanuel Church in Boston in 1904 he was prepared to enter the field of healing. Fortunately his associate in the Boston Church was a man well prepared to undertake such a mission. He had majored in psychology and religion, and while he might not have entered the field of healing by himself, his latent interest was aroused by the enthusiasm of Dr. Worcester. Both were interested in the entire field of mental therapeutics and were convinced that it had a place in the healing ministry of the Church. Dr. Coriat, through his connection with Tufts Medical School was well aware of the new interest in psychology and psychiatry that was being promoted by men of high standing in the medical field. When the two clergymen consulted him for advice, this was the incentive he needed to venture into the field with them.

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE was spreading, and they tried to analyze the reasons for it. Although they say that their movement had no relation to Christian Science either by way of protest or imitation, nevertheless it did serve the purpose of calling their attention to the importance of mental and spiritual factors in illness. The power of the mind over the body, emphasized by Christian Science, was clear to them, but they felt that more than that was involved. The therapeutic value of medication, surgery, good habits, and healthful Christian living and thinking were to be considered. Worcester and McComb did not attempt to prescribe medication, and before they started their healing classes they consulted leading physicians, such as Dr. Joseph H. Pratt, Dr. James J. Putnam, Dr. Richard C. Cabot, as well as Dr. Isador Coriat and other physicians, neurologists, and psychiatrists.

Worcester and McComb believed that people turned to the cults for help because they offered something the established churches were not giving. Although clergy, physicians, editors, teachers, and even humorists criticized these cults and presented them as false and erroneous, yet the undeniable fact remained that many people turned to them for help and evidently found something the established churches did not offer. The churches ignored healing as if it were a charisma that ended with the post-apostolic period; it was the contention of Worcester and his associates that Christ heals today as He did in New Testament times, using the prevailing medical skill and knowledge.

They arrived at that conclusion after a thorough study of Christ's miracles of healing. It was these miracles that caused many to follow Him, but since the second century, they seem to be the portions of the Gospels that are hardest to accept. The reason for this incredulity, they contended, is to be found in a lack of understanding of the underlying principles of healing. Medical research admitted that many cures are affected by other than physical means. They believed that God has the power to cure disease but does not cure all disease by the same methods or with the same materials. If the disease needs medicine or surgery, God uses these to serve His purpose. If the disease is functional, God heals through the mind or the spirit.

Physical blessings follow spiritual exercises and it was their purpose to return to the Christ of the Gospels and accept His teachings in a literal