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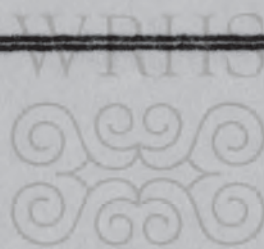
Spiritualism, 1925.

"SPIRITUALISM."

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

THE TEMPLE, SUNDAY MORNING,

APRIL 19, 1925, CLEVELAND, O.



JOSEPH T. KRAUS
Shorthand
Reporter
CLEVELAND

Spiritualism is the belief in a possibility of communicating with the dead; spiritualism is as old as the belief in the existence of spirits, which in turn is as old as man himself. One of the most ancient forms of worship was the worship of the dead; one of the most widespread and primitive of human rituals is the ritual of invoking and consulting the dead. The Bible, which marks a sharp advance over the form and content of primitive religion, already classifies necromancy--which is the consulting of the dead--as a form of idolatry, and prohibits it. Thus in the eighth century Isaiah, in one of his prophecies, declares: "And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto the ghosts and the familiar spirits that chirp and that mutter, say unto them, Should not a people seek rather its own God? on behalf of the living should they consult the dead?" And in Deuteronomy, written in all likelihood in the seventh century before the common era, it is stated: "There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or one that useth divination, or a sooth-sayer, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer; or a charmer, or one that consults with a ghost or a familiar spirit, or a necromancer. For whosoever doeth these things is an abomination unto the Lord."

This same injunction is later on repeated twice in the Book of Leviticus, where necromancy, or spiritualism, is spoken of as a defilement. When King Manasseh

restored idolatry into the temple of Jerusalem and throughout the land, we are told that he also permitted the restoration of necromancy. On the other hand, when King Josiah destroyed idolatry in Palestine, we are told that he also prohibited necromancy. So that as early as twenty-six or twenty-seven hundred years ago official religion endeavored to divorce itself and to disclaim any kinship with this thing which today is called spiritualism. Evidently the practice had become so abused and had contributed to so much of immorality and superstition that the officials of religion and of government set about to suppress it.

The classic instance of consulting the dead, in the Bible, is, of course, the story of Saul and the witch of En-dor. Saul is in desperate plight; he is to face the Philistines on the morrow, and he is ignorant of the outcome of the battle, and very much is dependent on the successful outcome of the battle; and so he seeks him out a witch--one who divines by means of consulting the dead, and the witch materializes for him the form of Samuel, and Samuel prophesies the defeat of Saul and his army.

The interesting thing about that story of Saul and the witch of En-dor is, in the first place, that we are told that Saul had destroyed all the necromancers and all the witches and all the sorcerers in the land. In other words, even in the days of Saul necromancy was taboo--prohibited; on the other hand, we see that even King Saul himself, who was responsible for the prohibition of Spiritual-

ism, yields to it and sets out to seek a diviner; and thirdly, it is interesting to note that in the days of Saul, as in our own day, the chief mediums and performers and professional diviners were women.

Modern spiritualism began in America back in 1848. It is highly interesting to note that in practical America, the soul of the so-called hard-headed business man, the two most extreme, mystical faiths of the nineteenth century were born. I refer of course to spiritualism and to Christian Science. And it is also noteworthy that both of these faiths or movements were the creation of women, again. I say it is noteworthy because where men are most practical and least philosophic, they are likely to be, strange to say, most mystical and most superstitious. That sounds like a contradiction in turn, but it is not. The men who are the most practical are likely to be the most mystical and the most superstitious; for it takes a philosophic turn of mind to conceive and analyze, and the practical man has not a philosophic turn of mind or he would not be taking himself and his work so terribly seriously.

The founders of spiritualism, the Fox sisters, living in the little town of Hydesville, New York, we are told, suddenly became aware of strange noises and unaccountable tappings. One of the sisters arranged a code with the source whence the tappings came, namely, that three raps would signify Yes, and one rap would signify No; two raps would be doubtful. And they thereby established communion with a

spirit who, they maintained, was the spirit of a murdered peddler. It was later on established by investigators--and I understand confirmed by the confession of one of the Fox sisters--that the strange noises were actually caused by one of the sisters partly dislocating and restoring to place again the bones of her knees.

Such were the humble beginnings of spiritualism. But the movement, strange to say,--and this is the important thing--did not end there. There is a strange survival quality about this thing spiritualism with which one must reckon. When some years ago Professor Münsterburg, of Harvard, exposed Palideno, this woman who had baffled and received the authentication of some of the greatest scientists of the world,--when she was exposed back in 1909, people thought that spiritualism had received a death blow. But it had not. Somehow spiritualism survives one expose after another. Similarly, in our own day, the Scientific American is successfully exposing one professional spiritualist after another; yet the movement goes on apace, and has its hosts of followers.

If our newspapers are trustworthy, in our own city there are numerous, numerous spiritualistic circles where the strange ritual of consulting the dead is practiced. One must account for this phenomenon. Here is a situation that has as yet not taken place anywhere else in the world: one successful scientific experiment to demonstrate the validity of spiritualism. Furthermore, nearly all of the

mediums at one time or another have been caught in fraud, conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary. And yet in spite of these facts people believe in spiritualism.

Now, why? Principally because they want to believe in it. When people want to believe in a thing, no manner ^{of} rational argument or logic will persuade them to the contrary. There are in the world millions of bereaved and sorrow-laden men and women--men and women who have lost a dear one and who ache for the touch of a vanished hand, and who ache for the sound of a voice that is stilled; there are everywhere in the world men and women who have lost some dear one, and who have not yet reconciled themselves to the loss. They cannot think of him as dead; they do not wish to think of him as dead. Surely, their spirits live, and their religions have justified and sanctioned their faith in immortality. Now, if these spirits of the departed live, why can we not establish communication with them? So unconsciously reason thousands of men and women. And when men appear on the scene who say "We can communicate with the departed, and we are qualified to act as mediums for such communication," many of these thousands of bereaved men and women will turn to them in their hour of need.

And it is quite easy to see, too, how readily such eager and receptive people can be duped and victimized by professional spiritualists. The war, for example, has given a tremendous impetus to spiritualism; not because new evidence attesting the verity and truth of spiritualism was

discovered during the war, but because millions of new graves were made by the war, and millions of sorrowing hearts were added to the dark register of life. And so it is these people who are the rich harvests of the commercial spiritualist. Of course there are the curious people, the people who are intrigued by the mystery of it, the people who out of fun and out of a spirit of a lark will attend these seances or visit mediums, curious to know what it is all about, and at the same time there is a lurking suspicion back in their mind that perhaps, who can tell, there may be something in it after all.

Now, modern spiritualism bases itself squarely upon the evidence of certain psychical and physical phenomena, which they maintain cannot be accounted for by the known laws of nature. They point, for example, to certain psychical phenomena, such as apparitions, clairvoyance, obsessions, automatic writings, or to certain physical phenomena, such as table-tilting and the movements of bodies not propelled by any visible force, or strange sounds, or strange lights, or spirit writing; they point to these facts and maintain that they cannot be accounted for except by positing a supernatural spiritual force or intelligence; that the ordinary laws of nature, scientifically established, do not and cannot account for them.

Now, these evidences of psychical and physical manifestations are attested not only by professional mediums and by lay people, but also by eminent scientists. Many

eminent scientists, reputable men, have collected and sifted a great deal of data and have arrived at a similar conclusion. Alfred Russel Wallace, for example, called modern spiritualism a great and all-important truth. Sir Oliver Lodge actually communicated with his boy Raymond, who died during the war, and published the conversations which the bereaved father had with his departed boy. Professor Hislop, of Columbia, professor of logic and ethics, sees no reason except the suspicion of for withholding a sound spiritualism. Professor Hartson, of Cambridge, wrote: "During the period of twelve years I have had, through the mediumship of Mrs. Piper (this famous medium) communications with the spirits of those who have been dead for some time. During the first few years I absolutely disbelieved in her power. I had but one object--to discover fraud and trickery, and I had had plenty of experience with these. Frankly, I went to Mrs. Piper with Professor James about twelve years ago with the object of unmasking her. Today I am prepared to say that I believe in the possibility of receiving messages from what is called 'the world of spirits.'" And the great chemist, Sir William Crookes, writes: "I consider it the duty of scientific men who have learned exact modes of working, to examine phenomena which attract the attention of the public in order to confirm their genuineness, or to explain, if possible, the delusions of the honest and to expose the tricks of the deceiver; that certain physical phenomena, such as movement of material substances, and the production of sounds resembling electric

discharges, occur under circumstances in which they cannot be explained by any one, is a fact of which I am as certain as I am of the most elementary fact in chemistry."

So there you have it. Spiritualism apparently is not a matter which can be left out of court. We may be on the threshold of discovering new natural laws which were heretofore unknown; we may be on the threshold of discovering new facts which will extend and modify our knowledge of psychic laws; or we may be chasing up a dark alley. This is clear: that science ought to scrupulously collect, examine, sift, and correlate these facts, and endeavor to account for them. But it is surely too early in the day to begin to dogmatize on spiritualism. In the first place, our facts, the so-called evidences--our data, are so pitifully inadequate and largely unauthenticated, that it is supreme folly at this juncture to declare that spiritualism is a fact scientifically established.

Most of these phenomena take place in the dark under psychic strain, with a possibility of conscious or unconscious fraud constantly present; with the possibility of self-delusion, both on the part of the sitter and on the part of the medium constantly to be reckoned with. As yet no phenomenon has been studied in the clear, cold light of a scientific laboratory, and under the exacting, rigorous, crucial tests of a scientific inspection. And we ought to keep this fact clearly in mind. In the second place, it has not yet been definitely established that these manifestations

these phenomena, even if true, cannot be accounted for by other than supernormal or supernatural forces. It has not at all been proved that there cannot be an alternative interpretation of these same facts; that for example, the workings of the sub-conscious mind, or the workings of a dual personality, or the workings of what we call telepathy, cannot account for these facts. I do not say that they can, or that they have been proved competent to account for these facts. On the other hand, in deference to scientific truth, it should be said that it has not yet been established that they can account for them.

In the third place, all the phenomena reported, all the answers received from the world of spirits--and there have been thousands of them reported--all the messages received from the world of the dead have not given us one worthwhile truth; not one worthwhile scientific fact, for example, has been revealed to mankind through the medium of this communication. The dead tell us nothing, apparently nothing that we do not know; and the dead seem to know nothing but what we, the living, tell them. That is quite important to think about.

And lastly, the array of prominent names ought not to weigh considerably with us. Science is no respecter of persons, and the argumentum ad hominem does not weigh with science.. The finest minds of antiquity, for example, Plato, Aristotle, Pliny, Virgil, all believed in astrology. If names are proofs, then astrology should be a fact. On the

other hand, we are not justified in dogmatizing negatively and saying that spiritualism is, by the nature of things, a folly; for there is nothing in the fundamental structure of the universe or of life which precludes the possibility of communicating with the departed spirits. Mind you, I do not say that communication with the departed spirits is a fact. I do say that there is nothing in the nature of the world or of man which precludes the possibility. Science seems to lean more and more to the spiritualistic interpretation of the universe as against the materialistic. We now are coming to believe the things; we are now coming to believe that things are forces, that things are energy, and that the mind of man is an energy, a force, not created by the brain, nor dependent forever upon the brain, but in human life working through the brain, even as the wind works through the pipes of the organ giving you music. The pipes of the organ do not create the wind. The mind of man is an energy, a force, perhaps the most subtle and the most powerful force in the universe; and energy is never destroyed, just as matter is never destroyed.

Now if--and I stress the word "if"--if mind persists, if mind is self-existent and persists after the dissolution and the crumbling of the physical body--in other words, if mind continues to live, then why may it not be possible for that living spirit to establish communication with other living spirits who may be resident in the flesh? It does not follow that they do; it does not follow that there

is not some irremovable obstacle which makes it impossible for such communication; but until such time as we have definitely demonstrated this fact, belief in spiritualism, in the possibility of intercommunication cannot be hastily, and should not be for the sake of science, brushed aside.

Fifty years ago people would have laughed out of court the possibility of flying in the air in a machine heavier than air; and twenty-five years ago, fifteen years ago, people would have laughed to scorn any man who would have maintained that I could stand here and speak, and my voice would be heard ten thousand miles away from here, carried by the air, and by no material wire or substance. It is not wise for a modern man in scorn to brush these facts aside, and say they are all fraud, they are all preposterous impositions, they are all meaningless.

In other words, it is my firm conviction that it is too early in the day to dogmatize about spiritualism; that one ought to keep an open mind on the subject. But just as one ought not to dogmatize about it, so one ought not to make a religion of it. That is the worst thing that can happen to it. All superstitions arose from attempts of people to make religion of half truths. Spiritualism belongs in the laboratory, not in the church; spiritualism should be entrusted to the hands of competent, trained scientists, and not into the hands of ministers or preachers. Spritiualism ought to be secularized completely. It has very little to do with religion. The most that spiritualism can do for religion is

to confirm the faith in the immortality of the soul, which religion has maintained for thousands of years. That is all that spiritualism can do for religion--to reaffirm or confirm a faith which religion, by gift of intuition, if you will, or as a result of the dire necessities of human life, posited in the survival of conscious human personality after death. Beyond that spiritualism has nothing to offer to religion.

For even if it be established by absolute truth that the dead are not dead but living, and that we can communicate with them, our life will continue to be very much what it is today. You will continue to live in this mundane existence with its problems and its perplexities, and the experiences of the departed spirits, disembodied and living on another plane of being, can be of very little help to us, living as we do in a physical world, with its bitter and trying problems of life.

Religion will continue to concern itself in the future, as in the past, not so much with spiritualism as with spirituality; not with the task of establishing communication with the departed but with the task of establishing friendly communication with all the living. Religion in the days to come will still cling to its central foci, namely, ethics and morality, and the relationships between man and man, between man and God. The problem of survival is but one of the problems of human life. The problem of worth is another problem, and perhaps an infinitely more important problem. What value is there in survival? And why should

men look to it with such longing if, in the space of time allotted to us--our fifty, sixty, seventy years--we make nothing of our lives? We permit our physical powers to go to waste, our spiritual and mental powers to lay fallow. Why do we need continuation in eternity if we make nothing of our life in our temporal existence? What value has immortality for a man who does not link himself up with the immortal and spiritual qualities of life? Most men should not be immortal; most men live too long as it is; most men make nothing of that gift of life which is given to them.

The chief concern of religion is the development, the harmonious and complete development of our life here; to make it regnant with meaning and purpose; to make it rich with abundant and good and meritorious acts; to establish a kingdom of God here upon earth. Not eschatology, not apocalypse, not the concern of the ultimate end, but ethics, morality. These things are the realm and the province of true religion.

So that religion today would do well to imitate the religion of twenty-five hundred years ago, namely, to disclaim any kinship with a religious spiritualism; to divorce itself completely from it, and to deny unscientific spiritualism to cloak itself in the garb of religion, because it has nothing to do with religion any more than chemistry has, or physics has, or psychology has. If spiritualism is anything, it is a science; if it is not a science it is nothing.

There is the menace of it. Mankind has fought

three thousand years to center the religious thought of mankind upon this earth and upon this world and upon society. Mankind has struggled desperately, religion has struggled desperately, to establish the center of gravity from the other world, from the hereafter, from heaven and hell, to this world, to the problems of justice and kindness and love in this world. Now comes a faith which attempts again to throw back the center of gravity into the other world, into the hereafter, and to fix the attention of people on what will take place later on.

That is, to my mind, a menace to civilization. Spiritualism ought to be secularized completely. Chemistry once upon a time was a religion. It traveled under the cloak of alchemy; and alchemy was a religion until science deprived it of its religious cloak and reduced alchemy to the bit of scientific truth which it contained. Psychology fifty years ago lent itself to all forms of religious aberration; today psychology is becoming a science, and thereby removing the religious cloak from the few bits of scientific truth which were there. The same thing must happen to spiritualism.

To men and women living in this world the true faith and the sufficient faith is this: that there is a good and wise God in the universe; its Creator, its provider, its beneficence; and that wherever we are, here or there, in whatever condition we are, we are under His sheltering love; that wherever our dear ones who have gone before us are, or

in whatever condition they may be, they are still in God's world, and under the protecting love of a God who embraces everything there is or was or shall be; and that while we are upon earth, our chief concern is not to think of the hereafter, or even to think of our dear departed, except as a tribute or as an inspiration, but our chief concern while here on earth is to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

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1. Sp. is belief in the possibility of communicating with the spirit of the dead. This belief is as old as the belief in the existence of spirits which ^{in turn} is as old as man. Primitive bro, the earliest form of worship was the worship of the dead, and one of the most ancient and widespread rituals was consulting and conversing with the spirit of the departed dead.

2. The Bible, which marks a sharp advance from primitive, as early as the 8c. claims necromancy as a form of idolatry and prohibits it: Am. 10:1.

"And when they shall say unto you: Seek unto the ghosts and the familiar spirits, that chirp and that mutter: Should not a people seek rather their own God? In behalf of the living should you consult the dead?"

So in Lev. 19:31:

"There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass thru the fire, one that useth divination, a soothsayer, or an enchanter, or a socerer, or a charmer, or one that consulteth a ghost or a familiar spirit, or a necromancer. For whosoever doeth these things is an abominator unto the Lord."

This injunction is twice repeated in Lev. where necrom. is spoken of as a defilement.

When King Manasseh restored idolatry, he restored necrom. - when K. Josiah destroyed it - he extensively destroyed necrom.

The classic example in the Bible of Spirit. is, of course, the story of Saul and the Witch of Endor. The interesting facts set out in that account are (1) Saul had ordered all necrom. killed, (2) that belief was so strong, that Saul

himself curse to Necro. (3) that curse, then a, now,
were the chief occurs of the day -
is in ^{on the face of it, then, what appears to be a} curse curse
is in reality an ancient superstition.

3. Modern Sp. began in America in 1848. It is highly
interesting to note that practical America, the home
of the hard-headed business men, has within the last 34
years given the world two extremely mystical
faiths, Spirit. & Ch. Sec. - It is also noteworthy that both
creations of women - Mrs. Eddy & the Fox sisters.
It is well to remember that the more practical a
people is and the less philosophical, the more mystical
it is likely to be - and also the more superstitions.

4. The Fox sisters living in Hydesville, N.Y. became weary of strange,
myst. tappings. They arranged a code 3 raps for yes, 1 for
no, 2 for doubtful, and they thereby estab. communion
with what they maintained was the spirit of a murdered
peddler. It was later estab. by investigators, and
in time confirmed by the confession of one of the
Fox sisters themselves, that the noises were caused
by one, the sister partly dislocating and restoring
to place the bones of her knees - Such was the
humble beginning of modern Spirit.

5. But the movement did not end there. It swept over
the world. There is a strange survival quality to Spirit.
It seemingly is able to withstand one exposure after
another. When Prof. Hugo Münsterberg of Harvard exposed
the celebrated medium Palladino in 1909 that clever
person that had been authenticated by the world's most
eminent spiritists, one that that Sp. had received a death
blow - Or in other words was recently when the Sec. Sec.

has been exposing the greatest of them. But somehow
Sp. is not on the wane. If one is to judge by the
newspapers, in our own city, there are numerous Sp. circles
engaged in the strange ritual of necromancy.

6. There has as yet not taken place anywhere in the world
the successful ex. experiment, which may be said to
have proved Spirit. Furthermore, almost all
mediums, at one time or another, have been caught
in fraud, conscience or unconscious. And yet
people will believe in it. Why?

1. Prim. bec. they want to believe in it. There are
many bereaved and sorrow-laden men & women
who ache for the franchising of a vacillated heart and the
sound of a voice that is still — They have with broken
hearts seen their dear ones leave them. They cannot
think of them dead. They do not wish to think of them
dead. They believe that their spirits live, their rel.
justify & sanction the hope of immortality. If they
live, why cannot the living communicate with
them? When, therefore, men appear who claim that
such comm. is possible, and that they can be
the mediums for such comm., such bereaved and
distressed people quite naturally turn to them
in their great need. That such eager & receptive
people are readily duped and inveigled, goes without
saying. They constitute the rich harvest for the
comm. spiritualist. No war gave great imp. to Sp.
Nec. that new evidence was discovered — but that many

Prof. Hypslop of Columbia - "Sees no reason except
the suspicious, my neighbors, for withholding assent"

Prof. Hodgson of Cambridge. (p. 245) Piper?

Sir William Crookes, ^{chemist} (p. 267)

8. Clearly the matter cannot be laughed out of court.
We may be on the threshold, ^{The sc.} ^{g. new ~~sc.~~ laws} ^{nat.} ^{discovery}. We
may be led by continued experience to extend our
knowledge of the psychic, or we may be chasing up
a dark alley. It is the bus. & sc. to follow up these
phenom. and analyze them, and reconstructing them,
and attempt to explain them. It is clearly, too,
early in the day to dogmatize about it.

1. Our data is pitiful meager, and largely un-
authenticated. Most of the phenom. occur in
the dark, in the midst of psychic strain, and
emot. abandon, with the ever-present poss. of
fraud, and without a modern acceptance on
part of sitters and mediums. Few of the phenom.
have been tested in the white light, a balancing
and under strict sc. regimen.

2. It has not yet been estab. that most
of the so-called psych. manifestations, apparitions,
clairvoyance, may not be the products of the sub-
conscious mind or of a multiple personality,
or of telepathy. Nearly all facts are suscep.
of alternative interpretation. (over)

(3) In this way, ^{out of} ~~with~~ the thousands of spec. cum. not
in worth while part of sc. value has been revealed
to man. Nothing that man did not know: nothing
that contributed to his knowledge. The apparently
what the dead say, they receive from the living.

(4) he must not be misled by the array of prom.
names - sc. is no respect of persons. & the
arg. ad hom. is not valid. The greatest names
& authority behind in anthology - and that for the
war flat -



millions of new names were made, and millions of
sorrowing hearts were added to the dark register of
life—

2. There are many who while not believers in it, yet not
of enmity and for the lack of it, will attend seances
and visit mediums. — They are intrigued by the mystery
of it — and by the thought that perhaps, who can tell there
may be something in it after all.

7. Modern Sp. bases itself upon the evidence of certain
physical and psychical phenomena which apparently
cannot be explained by the known laws of nature.
Such psych. manifestations as apparitions, clairvoyance,
obsessions, automatic writing, and such phys. phenom.
as table tilting, movements of bodies, sounds, lights,
spirit writing, ^{or} of which there are reported to be
numerous authentic instances, cannot be
accounted for except by the intervention of
supernatural spirits forces or intelligences—.

1. Not only have hundreds of people, prof. med. and
lay, attested to these phenomena, but respectable
scientists have collected & sifted data, and
arrived at a similar conclusion.

1. Alfred Russel Wallace, called modern Sp. "a great
and all important truth."

2. Sir Oliver Lodge — communicates with his son
Raymond and publishes the communications.

9. An outlet one to dramatize concerning my which
1. There seems to be nothing in the fund. nature
of things which precludes the possibility of comm.
with the departed.

2. Sc. itself seems to be including more and more
to a sp. concep. of the universe, as against a mat.
concep. Things are forces, energies. The Human
mind is energy - working thru the brain, as the wind
works thru the organ pipes, moving thru them but
not by them. It is self-existent. - Being energy
it is indestructible. - It lives - If it lives, may it
not in some manner comm. with thunder
living spirits which are still in the flesh - There
is a possibility which cannot be brushed aside.

50 yrs. ago men superstit. brushed the fear of
poly away aside; and 25 yrs. men laughed at the
thought of radio.

10. If all the things we should not do - is to make a
religion of it. It belongs to the laity not the church.
It is not their province, the sc. - not the ministers.
It is very little to do with religion, anyhow. At best
it can compr. what reli. has maintained as articles
of faith thru centuries & gives vigor that the soul of man
is immortal.

(2) Beyond that, it will leave matters probab. when
they are now - Man living in this world will continue
to be faced with the problems of this world - and
their exp. in the next, will pass under in a disambled
state, under conditions utterly different from the present
life, will be of little help to men in this world

(7) The concern of rel. will still be not speculation - the
concerning the dead, but spirituality, the improvement
of self and of society. Its central aim will still
be ethics and morals - and not eschatology -

① The problem of survival is but one of the problems of human life.

② And as of God, rel. must try to disclaim friendship with the unseen.

11. All superstitions in the results, making of
rel. cut of 10. half-furths - the
whole subject of spirits ought to be secularized,
like chemistry psych., which once was the breeding ground
of so many super. - like psych. which still
is the source of so many super.

12. The rel. man will cont. to live in the faith that
the world is ruled by a good & true god, that whether
in this world or next, he is under his dest. wing,
and that his chief task here on earth - "is to
do justice etc. -