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A Desperate Need.

Faiths, Cults and Sects of America (from Atheism to Zen)—
By Richard Mathison, Bobbs-Merrill Company; \$5.00; 384 pp.

According to Richard Mathison, in the next 12 months about three dozen people will claim to be Jesus Christ, a flying saucer faddist will tell of his recent trip to Venus and his visit with Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Séances will be held all over the United States and numerous women will claim to have received the word from God. Other strange religious practices, form of worship and morality will be insisted upon for admission into unusual cults, sects, odd, offbeat, and crackpot religious bodies.

Mathison deals in turn with what he terms the established cults of today: Spiritism, Swedenborgians, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science, Unity, New Thought, and The Mormons. He describes in vivid detail some of the cultic groups in California, which he calls "the Mecca" for cultists. Among them are the groups begun by Sister Aimee Semple McPherson, Annie Besant, Madame Blavatsky, as well as the group known as the "Mighty I Am," the "Self-Realization Fellowship," and optimistically enough "Mankind United."

Racial cultism has always been a phenomenon of American religious life. Father Divine and Sweet Daddy Grace have initiated large influential groups which have emphasized the racial elements in religious life.

Cults of sex and violence are the most brutal groups in American religious life. It is almost beyond belief the practices that go on under the aegis of religion. For example, there was an obviously psychotic individual, Aleister Crowley, who was once called the "old master of irreligion," "the wickedest man in the world," who upon his death-bed hexed the doctor who refused to give him more morphine to deaden his pain. Crowley dies shortly after; but the doctor, just as the master had said, died 18 hours later. Crowleyanity became, during Crowley's life, probably the most absurd and fantastic type of cultism, characterized by a singular contempt for American culture and morality.

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