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SPIRITUAL DIAGNOSIS.

AN ARGUMENT FOR PLACING THE STUDY OF THE SOUL ON A SCIENTIFIC BASIS.[1]

THE study of the soul in health and disease ought to be as much an object of scientific study and training as the health and diseases of the body.

It has long been one of the favourite axioms of Apologetics, that a Christian life is the best argument for Christianity. And, if an old argument, it is after all the best argument, for in these last days there is nothing in the philosophy of apologetical religion at all worth reviving compared with this living power of true lives. A free-thinker may go very far without meeting an argument to throw him back upon his own inner soul, but no one can live long, be he in high life or low life, without coming within the influence of a Christian man. The power of the individual, the value of the unit, the respect due to one human soul—this is the great truth for churches, for armies, and for empires. Students of the new science of sociology may deny this truth as they will, and their great disciple, Herbert Spencer, may denounce what he calls the "great-man-theory of history" as only fit for savages gossiping round their camp fire, but it still remains a great and important truth (as he himself expresses it before failing to refute it) "that throughout the past of the human race the doings of conspicuous persons have been the only things worthy of remembrance."

The past has indeed no masses. *Men,* not masses, have done all that is great in history, in science, and in religion. The New Testament itself is but a brief biography; and many pages of the Old are marked by the lives of men.

[1] Essay read before the Theological Society, New College, Edinburgh, November, 1873.

Yet it is just this truth which we require to be taught again to-day—to be content with aiming at units. Every atom in the universe can act on every other atom, but only through the atom next it. And if a man would act upon every other man, he can do so best by acting, one at a time, upon those beside him. The true worker's world is a unit.

Recognise the personal glory and dignity of the unit as an agent. Work with units, but, above all, work *at* units.

But the capacity of acting upon individuals is now almost a lost art. It is hard to learn again. We have spoilt ourselves by thinking to draw thousands by public work —by what people call "pulpit eloquence," by platform speeches, and by convocations and councils, Christian conferences, and by books of many editions. We have been painting Madonnas and Ecce Homos and choirs of angels, like Raphael, and it is hard to condescend to the beggar boy of Murillo. Yet we must begin again and begin far down. Christianity began with one. We have forgotten the simple way of the Founder of the greatest influence the world has ever seen—how He ran away from cities, how He shirked mobs, how He lagged behind the rest at Samaria to have a quiet talk with *one* woman at a well, how He stole away from crowds and entered into the house of *one* humble Syro-Phœnician woman, "and would have no man know it." In small groups of twos and threes He collected the early Church around Him. One by one the disciples were called—and there were only twelve in all. We all know well enough how to move the masses; we know how to draw a crowd round us, but to attract the units—that is the hard matter. Teach us how to fascinate the unit by our glance, by our conversational oratory, by our mystery of sympathy! We know how to bring the mob about us, how to flash and storm in passion, how to work in the appeal at the right moment, how to play upon all the

figures of rhetoric in succession, and how to throw in a calm when no one expects, but every one wants it—every one knows this, or can know it easily; but to draw souls one by one, to buttonhole them and steal from them the secret of their lives, to talk them clean out of themselves, to read them off like a page of print, to pervade them with your spiritual essence and make them transparent, this is the spiritual science which is so difficult to acquire and so hard to practise.

"After a spirit of discernment says an old French Sage (La Bruyère) the next rarest thing in the world are diamonds and pearls." [1] Of the three elements body, mind, and soul, which make up a responsible human being, two only have been hitherto treated as fit subjects for scientific inquiry. From six thousand years of contemplation of the phenomena of human life and thought, only two sciences have emerged. Physiology has told us all that is possible of the human body; psychology, of the mind. But the half is not accounted for. We wish, further, a spiritual psychology to tell us of the unseen realities of the soul. This is where our University training must be supplemented. It deals with man as a body and a mind. It forgets that man is a trinity. It is an extraordinary and momentous fact that by far the most important factor in human life has been up to this time all but altogether ignored by the thinking world. Of course every religious writer has a few notions upon the subject, but notions are not enough. If the mind is large enough and varied enough to make a philosophy of mind possible, is the soul such a trifling part of man that it is not worth while seeking to frame a science of it?—a science of it which men can learn, and which can be a guide and help in practice to all who feel an interest in the deepest thing in human life?

[1] "Après d'esprit de discernment ce qu'il a au monde de plus rare, ce sont les diamants et les perles" (*Charactères*).

It is no use to say there is no special soul—that there is a strange never-comprehended essence, half emotion, half affection, half reason, half unearthliness, to attempt to analyse which would only leave us, like Milton's philosophic angels, "in wandering mazes lost." But this is the mere concealment of ignorance in mystery. There *is* a soul, and there is a spiritual life. Plato knew it and called it, in his wonderment over it, "the soulish mind." Solomon knew it when he talked of "the hearing ear." Addison knew it and defined it: "'Tis the divinity that stirs within us." And in *Culture and Religion* the Principal of St. Andrew's University charges his students "that there is a faculty of spiritual apprehension which is very different from those which are trained in schools and colleges, which must be educated and fed not less but more carefully than our lower faculties, else it will be starved and die."

The same thoughtful writer has put the problem which we are endeavouring to meet in plain and forcible terms. "But because the primary truths of religion," he says, "refuse to be caught in the grip of the logical vice—because they are transcendent, and only mystically apprehended, are thinking men therefore either to give up these subjects as impossible to think about, or to content themselves with a vague religiosity, an unreal sentimentalism?" The Principal's question is a striking question. Are we content to let this great spiritual life work silently around us without attempting to know more about it, to analyze it, to make it more accessible to us and us to it? Are we to regard it as some weird element, unapproachable, mysterious, unstable, incomprehensible in its essence? There is, it is true, an element about it which keeps us at our distance from it; but as its groundwork is human may we not see the points where it touches the human, the changes it effects, the hindrances to the changes and the wonderful complexity of action and interaction which it

originates? Are there materials there for a philosophy, and is it lawful to reduce it to a science? Can there, in short, be a *science of spirituality?*

At first sight the idea is repulsive in the extreme. Yet a science is a classification of facts; and is there anything irreverent or presumptuous in attempting to classify the facts of the spiritual life? The facts, it may be answered, are too numerous; they are more than the sand of the sea. But so are the combinations of elements with which the chemist deals, and the modifications of morphological type with which the biologist deals, yet we have a chemistry and a biology. That, then, is the least of the difficulty. But a great one, apparently an insurmountable one, lies just on the threshold. The facts of physical science lie in the order of the natural, and they are finite. The facts of spiritual science, if we may call it so, lie in the order of the supernatural, and they are infinite. They are pervaded by an element which no man can fathom. "The Spirit bloweth where it listeth." We look in a man's soul for that which we saw there yesterday, but the unseen influence has swept across the heart and the spiritual scenery is changed. The man himself is the same, his passions unaltered in their strength, his foibles unchanged in their weakness, but the furniture of the soul has been moved, and the spiritual machinery goes on upon a new and suddenly developed principle. Here, then, our investigations are stopped at the outset. Dare we approach no nearer? Often we would fain do so. Often we are placed in such circumstances that plainly we must do so. A friend is in trouble, we are in trouble. But how are we to proceed? What guide have we in ministering to a soul diseased?

Is there no guide-book upon the subject, no chart or table of the logical history of the spiritual life, no chair of Spiritual Diagnosis? We do not mean a table such as Doddridge has given us in *The Rise and Progress of*

Religion in the Soul. The fatal error of that style of work is to give the inquiring soul the idea of a certain mechanical process to be passed through before conversion can be attained. But conversion does not always develop like a proposition in Euclid, or sensitized plate in photography. God the Creator will have no machine-made men in earth or heaven. And it is not His will that there should only be a few stereotyped forms of saints—the Richard Baxter type, the Jeremy Taylor type, and the Philip Doddridge type. Therefore it is a dangerous thing to put forms and processes, which exist only in the logical imagination, into the hands of the inquirer. But when these works are put into the hands of the Christian teacher or minister, their utility is beyond all praise. He, as spiritual adviser, should be thoroughly acquainted with the *rationale* of conversion. He should know it as a physician his pharmacopœia. He should know every phase of the human soul, in health and disease, in the fulness of joy and the blackness of despair. He should know the *Pilgrim's Progress* better than Bunyan. The scheme of salvation, as we are accustomed to call it, should be ever clearly defined in his consciousness. The lower stages, the period of transition, its solemnity, its despairs, its glimmering light, its growing faith; and the Christian life begun, the laborious working out in fear and trembling, the slavish scrupulosity, still the fearfulness of fall, still remorse, more faith, more hope; and last of all the higher spiritual life, the realization of freedom, the disappearance of the slavish scrupulosity, the pervasion of the whole life with God.

Such a skeleton is easily made and easily remembered, and it is all that many have to perform their work with; but it is no more adequate for its great task than is the compass of a schoolboy's whistle to take in the sweep of Handel's *Messiah.* To fill up such an outline with all the exquisite tracery of thought and emotion and doubt, which

develop within the mind of an inquiring soul, is a great and rare talent; and to apply such knowledge in the practice of daily life is a power which scarce one will be found to possess. Let not any think that such knowledge is easily attained; nor have many attained it. The men to whom you or I would go if spiritual darkness spread across our souls, who are they? How few have penetration enough to diagnose our case, to observe our least apparent symptoms, to get out of us what we had resolved not to tell them, to see through and through us the evil and the good. Plenty there are to preach to us, but who will interview us, and anatomize us, and lay us bare to God's eye and our own? *X* won't be preached to along with *Y* and *Z* and *Q*; that won't do *X* any good, for he thinks it is all meant for *Y*, *Z*, and *Q*. But to take *X* by himself; to feel his pulse alone, and give him one particular earnest word—the only one word that would do—all to himself—this is the simple feat which we look in vain for men to perform. There is a tendency piously to leave such matters to God, and say they are quite safe in His hands, who alone searcheth the heart. But He hath appointed us to be our brother's keeper, nor will He do for my brother what could be done by me. We cannot expect the Spirit's help to teach us what only laziness and personal indifference hinder us from learning; and to despise a power which He gave us capacities to possess is not the way to show that we trust Him who gave it. "Placeat homini quidquid Deo placet."

This study of the soul, in which I am endeavouring to enlist your interest, is a difficult study. It is difficult, because the soul as far transcends the mind in complexity and in variety as the mind the body. The soul is an infinitely large subject—an infinitely deep and mysterious subject.

The chemist in his intricate analysis deals not with elements more subtle and evasive.

> Ay, men may wonder while they scan
> A living, thinking, feeling man.

But we do not need to go to Mrs. Browning, or to *Hamlet*, to be told "What a piece of work is man!" Apart altogether from the religious element in him, he is still the greatest mystery of science. Every man is a problem to every other man—much more every spiritual man. It is hard to know a man's brain, and harder to know his feelings; but hardest of all to know his religious convictions. It is hard to know the deepest that a man has. A well-known American essayist and poet has told us that the difficulty of analyzing our neighbour's character arises from the fact that every man is in reality a *threefold* man. When two persons are in conversation, there are really *six* persons in conversation. Thus, to put the paradox into the shape of an example, suppose that John and Tom are in conversation, there are *three Johns* and *three Toms*, who are accounted for in this way:

Three Johns
1. The real John; known only to his Maker.
2. John's ideal John; John, *i.e.*, as he thinks himself; never the real John, and often very unlike him.
3. Tom's ideal John; *i.e.*, John as Tom thinks him; never the real John, nor John's John, but often very unlike either.

Three Toms
1. The real Tom.
2. Tom's ideal Tom.
3. John's ideal Tom.

In this way when I talk to another it is not me that he hears talking, but his ideal of me; nor do I talk to him as he defines himself, but to my ideal of him. Now that ideal will, without almost inconceivable care and penetration on my part, be quite different also from his real self as God

only knows him, so that instead of speaking to his real soul, I may possibly be speaking to his ideal of his own soul, or more likely to my ideal of it.

From this it will be seen at a glance that the power of soul analysis is a hard thing to possess oneself of. It requires intense discrimination and knowledge of human nature—much and deep study of human life and character. The man with whom you speak being made up of two ideals—his own and yours, and one real—God's, it is one of the hardest possible tasks to abandon your ideal of him and get to know the real—God's. Then having known it, so far as possible to man, there remains the greatest difficulty of all—to introduce him to himself. You have created a new man for him, and he will not recognise him at first. He can see no resemblance to his ideal self; the new creature is not such a lovely picture as he would like to own; the lines are harshly drawn, and there is little grace and no poetry in it. But he must be told that none of us are what we seem; and if he would deal faithfully with himself, he must try to see himself differently from what he seems. Then he must be led with much delicacy to make a little introspection of himself; and with the mirror lifted to his own soul you read off together some of the indications which are defining themselves vaguely upon its surface. Even in social and domestic circles the difficulty of performing this apparently simple operation upon human nature is so keenly felt that scarce one friend will be found with a friendship true enough to perform it to another. And in religious matters it will be at once conceded that the complexity of the difficulties increases the problem a hundredfold.

There is a danger, however—speaking next of the more directly religious aspects of the question—in exaggerating these difficulties; and, indeed, the further objection may have occurred to some minds that, by attaching so much

importance to the human power we take away the one great element in salvation—its Divine freeness through the grace of God.

Is not religion for the poor and illiterate? is not the way easy to find? Thank God it is so! So little can man do to enlighten it. But he can do something, and he ought to do more. In this more than in anything else he is his brother's keeper. Not for himself does man live. Every action of every man has an ancestry and a posterity—an ancestry and a posterity in other lives. "Each reads his fate in the other's eyes," says Emerson. "I am a part of all that I have met," says Tennyson. And how do you explain that most wonderful phenomenon, which is as surpassing a contemplation to some minds as the thought of eternity itself—*the silence of God*? God keeping silence! And man doubting and sinning and repenting all alone, and groping blindfold after truth, and losing his way and working out his salvation with painful trembling and fear! It is an unfathomable mystery; but it may not be, in small part, just for this that on the one hand, God offers man the glory and honour of sharing his work; and on the other, that He wishes human souls to be graven with the marks of other human souls in all their free and infinite variety. God is a God of variety. No two leaves are the same, no two sand grains, no two souls. And as the universe would be but a poor affair if every leaf were the counterpart of the oak leaf or the birch, so would the spiritual world present but a sorry spectacle if we were all duplicates of John Calvin. Therefore has God made room for individual action in the building up of His kingdom upon earth; and therefore it is not a presumption but a duty for every man to be moulding and making the souls around him, to be perfecting and guiding his own faculties for this great work. The great danger in doing this work, next to doing it without any education for it, is to overdo it. In dealing with

a case which is once put into our hands we are apt to consider it too much of a professional and personal matter. Our influence has become too conscious. We have found what a powerful thing it may become, and we seek a "reputation for influence." Thus our pride is smitten if success does not at once crown our efforts, and we attempt to second them by unlawful means. We assume the didactic when we should simply be attractive or suggestive. We encourage the favourable and forget to notice an unfavourable symptom. We supply allopathic when prudence would suggest homœopathic doses. And finally, we assume too much upon ourselves, forgetting that we are but fellow-workers together with God, and by taking too officious an interest, the individual, making nothing of it, is apt to throw the responsibility of non-success upon us, and so spoil not only our whole influence with others, but his own chance of being bettered in the future by others.

There are also limits to the exercise of this power which are as yet not well defined, and which rest at present upon no religio-philosophic basis, but on mere empiricism. The whole subject, indeed, rests in the meantime only upon the merest individual empiricism; and it is a matter of profound regret that so sacred and important a subject should exist in such a dishevelled state when the scientific method, which is being applied to so many trivial matters, could be so easily applied to it. We can conceive of some minds being deeply shocked to hear of scientific observations being taken on a human soul, and adjustments made to it, and results calculated as if it were a mere question of spectrum analysis. But the irreverence is only in the words. We *do* wish a scientific treatment of the subject; and if there is anything to sadden and humble in the contemplation of the religious work of the day, it is the thought of the crude and slipshod treatment of one of the most sacred subjects in the religious life.

We are not ignoring the power of God in conversion by not speaking of it. You say He can work with the roughest tools even on the finest of marbles. Without denying it, He would not polish diamonds on grindstones if He could get lapidaries to do it better. It won't do to talk religiously, or complacently, or *blasphemously* of trusting in Him when we are too lazy to qualify ourselves for being worth the using in His service. Don't fear that we shall become too acute at diagnosing and prescribing for souls, and so take the matter out of God's hands.

And now, in conclusion, as to the great subject of the training and exercise of the power of spiritual discernment, what is it possible for us to say? We can indeed but guess at it. Those who have thought of it have confessed that everything yet remains to be done. Thus one of the keenest minds of New England has said, "The school of the future may be called a *Life School*, whose object is to study the strength and weakness of human nature minutely, . . . to understand *men*, and to deal with them face to face, and heart to heart, . . . and in regard to such a school as this, while there has been much done incidentally, the revised procedure of education yet awaits development and accomplishment." Henry Ward Beecher, in his Yale lecture (on preaching), has given to this subject perhaps by far the most valuable popular contribution of the age. His chapter on the study of Human Nature is especially discriminating, and only the knowledge that there must now be few into whose hands that work has not fallen prevents us stealing time to make lengthened quotations. (Let two suffice, page 85 and page 94.) Beecher, had he been less of a preacher and more of a pastor, could have been one of the greatest students of the soul. As it is, he is surpassed by few, perhaps by none in this country, only by Dr. Spencer[1] in his own. Spurgeon is

[1] Author of *Pastor's Sketches.*

not so much of a practical analyst as a self-introspectionist. So also was Thomas à Kempis and Blaise Pascal, and pious John Hervey and quaint Robert Bruce, and so also in a sense was Dr. Duncan, and Dr. Gouldburn, who has done for spirituality what Burton did for melancholy. The Puritan writers, and pre-eminent among them Baxter and Owen, were skilled analysts of human nature, but they seem to have applied their power more in the pulpit than the pew. In this respect, too, Bunyan was quite unsurpassed, and in some of his sermons, specially his famous "last" one, the most masterly specimens of this kind of work are to be found.

Yet with all this perfection there was always something wrong about these men from the practical point of view. They knew so much about humanity that they had lost what of it they had themselves in the pursuit of it in others. Although they are always called practical hands, they are only so in a gross sense. They were most of them wanting in that delicacy of handling which makes analysis effective instead of insulting; and many of the Puritans were quite destitute of the foremost quality which distinguishes the successful diagnosist—respect, veneration even, for the soul of another. A man may be ever so gross and vulgar, but when you come to deal with the deepest that is in him, he becomes sensitive and feminine. Brusqueness and an impolite familiarity may do very well when dealing with his brains, but without tenderness and courtesy you can only approach his heart to shock it. The whole of etiquette is founded on respect; and by far the highest and tenderest etiquette is the etiquette of soul and soul.

To know and remember the surpassing dignity of the human soul—for its own sake, for its great God-like elements, for its immortality, above all for His sake who made it and gave Himself for it—this is the first axiom to be remembered. Many men study men, but not to sym-

pathize with them: the lawyer for gain, the artist for fame, the actor for applause, the novelist for profession. How well up is the actor in plot and passion and intrigue! how deftly can the novelist anatomize love and jealousy, vengeance and hate! And when there are men found to study human nature for its own sake, or for filthy lucre's sake, shall there be none to do it for man's sake—for God's sake? There is one great reason why the ministry of so many great and holy men has been so far from being what is called a converting ministry. We read their biographies, and shrink into nothingness at the contemplation of such holiness and saintliness of life as we had never dreamed possible to man, and we marvel, and greatly, that one irreligious, unconverted man should be left in the whole country-side but we find indeed that their parish was no better than its neighbours. And the explanation is plain. Those men laboured under a terrible disease—it is called Theophobia—the name explains itself. A minister catches it, and his power is gone. Men are awed by it, venerate it as they venerate few things else. They will speak of it and praise it, but never imitate it. It is a grand but useless spectacle. Those who have it become wrapped up in one subject; and though that be the highest of all, it is nevertheless a monstrosity when followed to the exclusion of everything else. The sympathies of these men are all and always Godwards. They are always vindicating God. Their whole atmosphere is of God. They have left earth before their time. They have left human nature in the lurch; they have forgotten humanity, and humanity can no longer profit by them, it can only wonder at them. Their thoughts go always straight up to God, and are never healthy enough to be refracted back upon man. Now to get to God is a high thing, but they only get at one side of Him. They don't see over to the other side, which is inclined towards *man*. Yet to get to man by way of God, and

God by way of man, is the only way to keep the entire health of the soul.

We have much yet to say of this study, but the subject must end almost before it is begun. The one great thing is to study life earnestly and practically and realistically.

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We must aim at the manly and sturdy type of the religious diagnosist; we must try to be, as Oliver Wendell Holmes forcibly says, "a man that knows men in the street, at their work, human nature in its shirt sleeves—who makes bargains with deacons instead of talking over texts with them, and a man who has found out that there are plenty of praying rogues and swearing saints in the world."

One thing I can assure you of. If any man develops this faculty of reading others, of reading them in order to profit by them, he will never be without practice. Men do not say much about these things, but the amount of spiritual longing in the world at the present moment is absolutely incredible. No one can ever even faintly appreciate the intense spiritual unrest which seethes everywhere around him; but one who has tried to discern, who has begun by private experiment, by looking into himself, by taking observations upon the people near him and known to him, has witnessed a spectacle sufficient to call for the loudest and most emphatic action. Gentlemen, I have but vaguely hinted at this subject; I venture to think it a question of vital interest, giving life a mission, giving a new and burning interest even to the most commonplace surroundings, and opening up a field for lifelong study and effort.

HENRY DRUMMOND.