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*PERSONAL RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE.*¹

THE title of this section of the great department of religion is somewhat ambiguous, as it might mean a discussion of the influence of the individual on religion, on religious development and organization; or it might mean the influence of religion on the individual, its effects on personal character and its special impact on the single soul. Fortunately these two subjects are cognate, and are only different sides of the one pre-eminent subject of personal religion. From whichever side we enter, we come close to the heart of faith. The real subject of this section is the place of the individual in this great matter of religion, the relation of the human soul to God.

Our subject is the climax of all the sections in this department of the Congress. All that has gone before of religious education and agencies and work lead up to this transcendent culmination in which the soul is at home with God; and the section that follows, dealing with the social influence of religion, can have meaning only in so far as religion is a living power in the hearts and lives of individuals. Indeed, this whole wonderful Congress, attempting to cover or at least to touch upon, every branch of universal knowledge, is a mighty illustration of one aspect of our subject, reminding us of all the inspiration that has come to the hearts of men and all the glory of truth that has broken upon their sight, part of the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world. And still more, I make bold to say that the magnificent triumphs of human knowledge

¹ Lecture delivered at the International Congress of Science and Art, St. Louis. The department of Religion was divided into sections dealing with such subjects as Religious Education, Religious Agencies and Work. This section, entitled "Religious Influence: Personal," was followed by the section "Religious Influence: Social," and the following lecture was introductory to its particular section.

of which this Congress is a record, all the arts and sciences represented in such profusion here, would lose all their joy and lose all essential meaning if we were compelled to abandon the sphere of this humble section of personal religion. The only unity of knowledge and life and nature and the universe is God, and if we can never enter into a relation of personal communion we are only fumbling at the fringe of things, and can never get further than the fringe. All our attainments and achievements turn to dust and ashes, with no true meaning and no clear future for them, if we are shut out from any hope of spiritual fellowship. My purpose, therefore, in this lecture is not to treat of details of what religion can do for a man, or what a man can do for religion, but to impress ourselves anew with the fact that religion means the impact of God on the human soul, and the communion of the human soul with God.

This simple fact, which might be taken as an axiomatic definition of religion, needs to be enforced on our generation. In our thinking to-day, which is inevitably sociological, there is the equally inevitable danger of the individual being submerged in the mass. In practice also our social organization is becoming ever more complex, so that we are compelled to lay less and less stress on the individual. We see that man can never be considered in isolation, that he has become what he is through society, that the social reactions are responsible for every stage of his progress. The family, the industrial conditions, the civic relation, the state are not merely the different spheres in which man's abilities and energies are employed, but they have conditioned these very abilities and energies. We are what the social forces have made us. Development and environment are the great watchwords of our day, and the mighty truth in them can bear constant repetition. It carries with it much hope for the future in improved conditions and in

practical efforts for the betterment of all classes. So full are we of this thought that we attempt to explain all life and the history of all thought and progress in broad lines of cosmic development. The individual drops out of our calculations. We make less of personal initiative and more of the environment that moulds men. We are tempted to look upon the single life as merely a plastic material on which society works. And perhaps there never was more necessity for a protest and for some re-assertion of the place of the individual. The current of modern thought runs so strongly in one direction that most of our systems would have no place for this section of the Congress, a section entitled, "Personal Religious Influence," even when much would be made of the following section on "Social Religious Influence." All who know the thought of our time will admit the existence of this tendency. We find it not only in the material sciences, but even more strongly in sociology and in all the branches of history which deal with man and his progress. The modern school of history itself boldly preaches and practises this doctrine, and the importance of it for us in our present connexion is simply this, that if they are right, then there is no room for the consideration of our subject at all.

We see the tendency very marked in the protest against such teaching as that of Carlyle's doctrine of heroes, a protest made so strongly by Lord Acton, who more than any other man of our time has influenced the study of history in England. With him the great purpose in history is to get behind men and grasp thoughts. History is the growth and development of ideas, and this is true of every kind of history, political, religious, literary, or scientific. In the *Letters of Lord Acton*, recently published since his death, this is incessantly and vigorously asserted. "The vividness and force with which we trace the motion of his-

tory depends on the degree to which we look beyond persons and fix our gaze on things." This represents a useful protest against the picturesque scenery of an older school of historians, and is perhaps a necessary revolt from Carlyle's teaching. Our new historians are interested in doctrines, in principles which push things towards certain consequences, not in the passions and follies and wishes of persons. They are interested in what Lord Acton called "the impersonal forces which rule the world, such as predestination, equality, divine right, secularism, congregationalism, nationality, and whatever other religious ideas have grouped and propelled associations of men." But surely the protest has been carried too far. An impersonal idea, after all, is unthinkable. It is right in history to get past the men who played their part on the stage, but never to leave them so far out of account as to forget their real connexion with the ideas. Acton's plan for his projected *History of Liberty* would seem to assume that there is an impersonal force called liberty which somehow ground itself out and developed spontaneously. After all, as there could be no society without the individual with his contribution to make to the whole, so there could be no idea without an idealist, and no religion nor religious influence without the single soul. In the great scheme of modern history projected by Lord Acton, and being so worthily carried out by scholars in the Cambridge History, he reckoned modern history as beginning with the close of the fifteenth century, "when Columbus subverted the notions of the world and reversed the conditions of productive wealth and power; Machiavelli released Government from the restraint of law; Erasmus diverted the current of ancient learning from profane into Christian channels; Luther broke the chain of authority and tradition at the strongest link; and Copernicus erected an invincible power that set for ever the mark

of progress upon the time that was to come." Surely the very mention of the names is enough to suggest doubts as to the rigour and vigour of the theory.

The history of the world may not be, what it has been called and treated, merely the biography of great men ; but at any rate the history of the world would be different if the influence of even a few of its great men had been left out. We sometimes think we can explain a great man by our common phrase that he was the creature of his time, and there is usually much truth in the use of the phrase. The leader gets as well as gives. He cannot be put in a separate category as a thing apart, as if he were a peculiar creation, unrelated to the past and independent of the present. No man could affect his age if he were not in the fullest sense the fruit of the age, entering into its thought, knowing its problems, feeling the pulse of its life. The great world-movements do not owe their origin to one man's thought, like Minerva sprung full-grown from the brain of Jove. They grow from the needs of the time, the slowly gathering vital forces that must find outlet. The Reformation, for example, was greater than the reformers greater than Luther or Calvin or Knox. In its political aspect it was the breaking of bonds in Western Europe that had become intolerable. In its inner aspect it was the movement of the soul of man towards liberty of mind and conscience, towards a fuller knowledge, a truer faith, a purer worship. But the acknowledged truth of all this gives us no warrant for imagining that we have explained the great man by calling him the creature of his time. If he brought no free and individual force to the situation, the situation would only be where it was. Granted that the Reformation would have been without Luther, there would need to be some other sort of Luther somewhere else, or, if you prefer it, some score of pigmy Luthers to do his work.

There could be no Reformation without at least some kind of reformers.

This modern tendency to ascribe historical events to vague causes as opposed to personal influence needs to be checked by the absolute truth that nothing has ever been, or can ever be, accomplished in the way of progress without a distinct and definite personal agency. As Dr. Harnack, the great Church historian, whose presence at this Congress gives even such a gathering distinction, says, "History tells us that no aspiration and no progress have ever existed without the miraculous exertion of an individual will, of a *person*. It was not what the person said that was new and strange—he came when the time was fulfilled and spoke what the time required—but how he said it ; how it became in him the strength and power of a new life ; how he transmitted it to his disciples. That was his secret, and that was what was new in him."¹

It is a foolish way to treat history as if it were in a vacuum, the whirl of impersonal forces without father or mother or any definite connexion. We have become so scientific to-day with our tendencies and streams of influence and movements of thought, though it is not easy to see how there can be spiritual tendencies without spiritual beings, and moral influence without moral life, and movements of thought without thinkers. As if there were in the world man but not men, the generic man without the individual ! It is of a piece with so many arguments of political economists about human life in terms of x and y , and their talk of the masses, as if the masses were not composed of units each with his own heart's bitterness and his heart's joy. We play with words when we talk of tendencies and movements, as if we were really accounting for anything by the use of words like these ; and our preference of such

¹ *Christianity and History*, p. 35.

general terms to acknowledging the creative influence of individuals is part of the latent infidelity which dislikes to admit *creation* in any sphere, the launching of a force straight from the hand and the heart of God.

It is thus we find room for revelation and a place for personal religion, a place for communion with God, and the influence of all that religion stands for on the single human soul ; and thus also we find room for the unique place an inspired and consecrated soul can have in his generation, influencing others and lifting life to a higher level. If a generation has any distinctive character at all, it is and must be the fruit of personal character. And it is here in this region that religion does its permanent work. In its ultimate issue religion consists of a relation of the soul to God. Religion is Communion, entering into and living in a relationship of love and service and obedience to God. The abiding power of our Christian faith is that Christ brings us into this relation of simple trust and loving dependence on our Heavenly Father. Religious influence, then, is personal before it can be social. It brings the individual into the presence of God. There is a moment which came to the prophets and to men called to exceptional work, a moment when the world is dissolved, when earth has faded and heaven has opened and reveals the eternal, a moment when in all the universe there seems nothing but God and the human soul. That moment altered the perspective of everything afterwards to the Hebrew prophets ; they read everything in the light of that moment, and when in the future they were brought up against seemingly impassable difficulties and things that seemed irreconcilable with their faith, they simply fell back upon God ; for they knew that whatever else might be false that great experience must be true.

To most of us our religious assurance does not come in

that direct fashion : it is *mediated* to us, so to speak. It is brought to us by human hands. From soul to soul the flame leaps and spreads. The fire is kindled from the living glow in another's heart. But even so, we are still in the same mysterious region of personality, the holy of holies of the human spirit where God meets with man and man tastes the power of endless life. The unique work of Christ is that He proves Himself to be the way of access to God. To see Him is to see the Father. All that is implied in the Christian faith originated in a life, the life of the Master ; and its perfect work is done when other lives are moved by the same spirit. The heart of religion lies not in adherence to an abstract system of thought, not acceptance of certain great truths, nor even reverence of great moral principles, but adherence to that thought and truth and morality as they are revealed in a great personality, as they are incarnated in a life. The dynamic of religion is personal love ; the driving power is found in the devotion of the disciple to his Lord. Every great religion has had this personal note, and Christianity has it in a pre-eminent degree. It asks for discipleship, demands submission to the authority of Christ, and can be satisfied with nothing less than personal spiritual relations with Him. This is why the faith can be universal, since it asks not for intellectual assent to propositions, but personal loyalty to a matchless personality, and is not an idle sentiment but a power in actual life, presenting an ideal to every man that sees the vision. It is not a system of teaching merely, but a new principle of life which takes root and assimilates elements of its environment transforming them into new forms of life. The beginning of this process is when a man becomes a Christian, when he opens heart and life to the influence of Jesus ; but that is only the beginning of a process the goal of which is that he is a man *in whom Christ lives*. It is a

spiritual transformation after the image of Christ. No part of the being of man is to be left out of this great scheme ; the body and its members are to be the body and members of Christ, and to be treated as such ; the mind is to be the mind of Christ ; the heart is to be the seat and throne and sanctuary of Christ. What a magnificent ideal this New Testament conception is of the Christ-birth in a man till he becomes a veritable re-incarnation, until he is no longer he but Christ, re clothed in flesh and human attributes by Him, so that he can say with some measure of truth, as St. Paul could say, " I live, yet not, I, but Christ liveth in me."

The psychology of it is that we bring every thought into subjection to the obedience of Christ, superimposing Christ's will and mind over ours, desiring to serve and please Him and not ourselves, making Him in all things our conscience and bringing everything to the test of that conscience. We let Him colour opinion and thought and judgment and desire and ambition and hope, transforming them all into His glorious purpose. The bond of personal attachment is the deepest thing in religion. And as a matter of historical fact Christ's personality has been the dominating power in the Christian religion. The Christian character is modelled on His character. The Christian mind is the same mind as was in Jesus Christ. Only this personal element can give the necessary motive for true living. We know in practice that to be aware of the truth of a thing is quite different from possessing its power. We know what moral inability is. A man may know the right and desire the right and sincerely will the right ; and yet cannot do the thing he would. He needs to be infused by a personal power that will carry him over the things that stand in the way of his will. He needs a larger and higher love that will give him the victory. This Christ gives, so that His lover can say, " I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth

me." Faith is needed before moral effort can be successful, a faith that merges into a personal love. Christ the Teacher is also the Saviour; the Revealer is also the Redeemer. He redeems by revealing; He reveals by redeeming. Thus the Christian life is the imitation of Christ; and this is the power of His teaching, that it is Himself and not merely His sayings we follow. Christ never says to us, "Go," without also saying "Come." He goes with us. To go to any duty, any command, any cross even, means to follow Him. This personal touch, personal communion, personal love, is the unique power of Christian ethics. He who gives us the victory stands in our battle.

I do not speak of the details of this mighty personal influence, the practical effects of this communion. I do not speak of the peace and rest of heart which faith produces, the way in which the character is made strong and true. The important thing after all is to get to the source, the living fountain of strength and beauty of life. All effective social work of religion, to be treated in the next section this afternoon, depends on our being right here. It is personal religion which can give equipment for social service. If our life is poor within and our character is weak, our religious work will effect little. The ultimate value of a man's work is what he is. That is primarily of more importance than what he does. His power of real service is conditioned by his personal worth, his character. True religion deepens and enriches the quality of the life.

We need to have the personal note back into our confession if our religious testimony is to be effective, moving men's hearts with the pang of desire, convincing the world of God. We were born for the love of God. It is written in the needs of our nature, in the wants of our heart. Until we submit and enter into the blessed fellowship we are orphaned and desolate. "Thou hast made us for Thyself,

and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee." That word of the great Augustine sums up our life, and points to what personal religion may be to us, when the heart is fixed on God.

HUGH BLACK.

WHAT IS "THE COMMUNION OF THE HOLY GHOST" ?

THE most familiar words are not always the best understood ; and not only multitudes of those who have listened to the Apostolic Benediction, but even many of those who have repeated it hundreds of times, would probably have to confess that they attach no definite meaning to " the communion of the Holy Ghost." If the notions of those who do attach any definite meaning to the phrase were put into words, they would be found to differ widely from one another. At all events commentators are at variance among themselves, many seeming to grasp at explanations suggested only by the sound of the words. Among older scholars it was not unusual to adopt the interpretation, which is probably that of the uneducated, that it signifies fellowship, or worshipping intercourse, with the Holy Ghost. Among interpreters of recent date, both Schmiedel, in the *Handcommentar zum Neuen Testament*, and Dean Bernard, in *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, understand it of the fellowship among saints due to the Holy Ghost. Meyer seems only to allow the sense of " participation " in the Holy Ghost, the verbal idea involved in the noun being taken in a middle sense ; and of course his is a weighty vote.

But, if the balance and harmony of the three clauses of the Apostolic Benediction be assumed, then the primary meaning must be something akin to " grace " and " love."