

Education the Means; Religion the Dynamic

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Scripture: Psalms 37:1-10

Text: Psalms 37:3, "Trust in the Lord, and do good."

So many, and so complicated are the problems of a social nature which confront the people of this country today that any man who is at all interested in the public well-being is often brought face-to-face with the question, "How are we going to solve these difficulties?" In fact so pressing are these problems, that it is not uncommon to hear the discouraged cry of a pessimist declaring that all is wrong, that our social condition is past redemption. Of course no man of common sense will admit for one moment that this gloomy outlook is true. But on the other hand no man of common sense can shut his eyes to the plain facts that are presented to us. The problem does exist, and the question is still pressing, "What can we do about it?" Aside from those evils which must of necessity exist in any community of human beings, who are slowly evolving from savagry, there are three general causes which may explain the peculiar nature of our social problems. In the first place we are a growing developing democratic community. We are living under a free Gov't in which individual rights, and

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The manuscript includes, "(Sermons I)," suggesting this was written for one of Earl Davis' classes at the Harvard Divinity School, presented on January 14, 1904 to "Hom 2."

Senator George Frisbie Hoar (1826-1904) had a long political career including serving from Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate from 1877 until his death on September 30, 1904. Likely the Canton version of the sermon was modified to recognize the life and recent death of Senator Hoar.

individual initiative are the basic principles. To many of us, the type of mind, the strength of character which are necessary in living under such a Gov't are natural inheritances, bred into our very nature by generations of good blood, and by lines of self-restrained freedom. For generations we have been learning the lesson of self-assertion and self-sacrifice, the lesson of self-control which must be learned by every citizen of a democratic community.

But on the other hand each year thousands upon thousands of people, allured to our country by hopes [of] fortune and freedom, come to us from their foreign homes to settle and live here in a democratic community. They have been living in a different world. They are not accustomed to our ways, to our habits of life. They have not the power of self-control that are ours by inheritance. They do not know how to govern themselves. It is our great problem to absorb these people, to remold them and imprint upon their natures the seal of democracy-self-control.

Another aspect of this same problem, perhaps more serious and threatening still is the so-called Southern Race Problem. You know its issues and its threatening developments. Here is an explanation for many of the gloomy and discouraging, but yet encouraging, outbreaks in our American life.

But in the second place we must not forget to emphasize the fact that we are a growing developing community, made up of men of ambition and hopes.

The evils of self-indulgence and decay, which slowly undermine the moral fiber of a nation which has risen to the height of its power, are not present here. It is true that here and there we find {??} {??} spots of festering evils of idleness and luxury, but the great mass of our people are open to the evils which come from too great eagerness of ambition and desire to little self-constraint. Being actually alive, alert, and trying to accomplish something, we are not able to adjust to a nicety our own selfish ends with the conflicting desires of others. Witness the struggle for mastery in a growth of young plant life, as compared with the evils of decay in a forest which

has begun its decline. We have the evils of a rapidly growing people.

But over and above all this, we must recognize one other great movement of our time. It is perhaps the fundamental cause which explains the other two. Within the last hundred and 50 years, men of thought have been changing their base of operations from a system of Philosophy which has obtained for 1800 years or more, to a new system which is sometimes called Idealism, but more pointedly may be called the philosophy of commonsense. This new way of looking at things, the new way of regarding man and God, is revolutionizing modern life. Scientific investigation, historic study, new methods in education, modern philosophical ideas, and over and above all Liberal Religion are but manifestations of this great transformation. The spirit of this new habit of mind is making its way into the everyday habits and customs of our people with such rapidity and certainty as to seem quite incomprehensible. Our colleges and public schools, our libraries, our periodicals, our daily papers, all these are agents which are carrying into the minds of the great mass of people these ideas of which liberal religion is but the expression on the religious sides of our lives.

Already the effects of it are being felt. The churches are complaining of the great unbelief, and making charges of infidelity, and lack of religious faith. The leaven is at work, and no power can stay the progress of God's spirit working within our souls. Just as surely as the sun is in the heavens must the atmosphere of this new philosophy become the atmosphere of the life of all people. Great dangers are involved in the process of this transition. Many of the evils accompanying the change are upon us now. But still greater ones, I believe, are ahead of us.

Within the limits of these three larger movements may be grouped all the more apparent evils of our present age. Spoils systems in politics, bribery, dishonest use of money, abuse of social freedom, religious apathy, moral laxness, are concrete evils attendant upon these larger movements. While we may become discouraged at local conditions, at particular lives, we must always remember that these evils are not permanent. They are the pains incident upon a

growth and readjustment of a great body of people. Kipling, in one of his capital personification stories, "The ship that found herself,"² describes the unrest, the dissatisfaction of the different parts of the ship as it starts on its first voyage. Each part of the ship is complaining, finding fault, because the other parts interfere. But soon the corners wear off, the parts become acquainted and adjust themselves to new conditions; the friction grows less and less, until finally all settle down to work, each doing its own part, and each helping the other; all working harmoniously together. The evils, the wickedness of this people of ours are the creakings and groaning of a humanity which is trying to find itself.

These conditions present to us concrete problems to be solved. It is not for any one of us to take upon himself the responsibility of the whole movement. One must not imagine that this mountain of evil is to be removed by the faith of one life or one generation. Fortunately for us we do not have to meet the entire problem at one moment. But not a day passes that we do not come in contact with concrete cases which are expressions of the greater evils. Daily we hear of people who are abusing their political privileges, who betray a political duty who dishonor themselves and their community by these unrighteous ideals. All too common are the evidences of a lack of self-control and self-respect, such as should mark every citizen of a democratic community. How frequently, too we meet a person who has misjudged the significance of liberal religion. Of course you and I know that liberal religion is a call to pure moral living. But many people, as they have seen the old religious shells shattered, have jumped to the conclusion that religion also has been shattered. Free from the restraint of old ideas, they live, unguided and unbridled, little realizing that the new point of view means, demands, a pure devoted life, unspotted from the world. In these concrete forms we meet these great problems. In our own personal life, in the life of our friends, in the community in which we live, around us on all sides these evils exist in varying form and intensity.

² Rudyard Kipling, "The ship that found herself," a short story first published in *The Idler* in 1895.

In these same concrete forms we must solve the problem. Wherever we find evidences of self-indulgence, of selfishness, of sin, there is the opportunity for you and we to take hold of this great perplexing power of evil, and at least we may remove something of the debris of the mountain which the faith of the ages will finally destroy. People may advance wonderful theories and isms for the regeneration of the world. But they are all theories and nothing more. If a man has an acre of potatoes to hoe, he may talk as much as he pleases about transforming the weeds into potatoes, but there is only one way of hoeing the potatoes, and that is the old-fashioned way, hill-by-hill, row-by-row. There is but one way of solving the social problem. "Trust in the Lord, and do good." Says the Psalmist.

There are two powers which are at our disposal, as we attempt the solution of this problem. The one is education and the other is religion. Already systems upon systems are at work, educating our people into the standards of lives of self-control. Public schools, universities, colleges, correspondence schools, evening schools, libraries. Oh, the systems of education are simple astounding. Then, over and above all these, we must remember that the greatest and most powerful university is the university of life, where men learn the truth by the real experience of life. In the hands of almost every child is being placed the material by the use of which he may develop into a man of strength and power. The lessons of history, the facts of science, and the ideals of great souls are finding a resting place in the minds of all our children of all grades of social development. By these means of education, we are carrying to all classes of our people the ideas of truth, goodness, and beauty, by which our ancestors lived, by which we are trying to mold and direct ourselves in this generation. We may say then that education furnishes the material to be used by individuals in their self-development. But education in itself is inadequate. It is not enough to know what a good life is; it is not enough to know what a good Gov't should be; it is not enough to know what the laws of the music are. The products of education may rest inactive or be devoted to evils and crimes most atrocious. The educated criminals are the most cunning. Outside of education itself we must look for a power which shall

direct the minds and souls of men into awareness which leads to righteousness, and peace and nobility. We do not sufficiently realize that beneath all the more-or-less occasional aims of life, there is the one great fact of the religious life, which is our anchor in time of trouble and our inspiration in everything that we do. We may doubt this religious truth, and that religious truth, we may assert that we do not believe in religion, but deep down beneath these more shallow appearances of our life there is the permanent reality of the ultimate religious truth, the impulse to grow to something better. It is this truth that is the motive power in every effort of our life, the deep connection of a truth which is nothing less than the consciousness that we are seeking a common cause with God, our father.

You and I go to inspect a great machine. We stared in wonder as we watch the great wheels revolve, and transmit the power over the belts and shaftings out into the machines of the factory. You may say, "Oh, certainly the power of the machine is in the great fly wheel. That is what makes it go." Our friend says, "The power is in the piston rod. That is what makes the wheel go." Then I say, "That the steam is the source of the power." But the engineer, who knows what is going on in that machine turns to us and says, "The power is an unseen energy. The wheel, the rod, the steam transmit the power. But the power is unseen."

So it is with these two means that we have with which to solve our problems. Education is the material, the mechanism, the machine which transmits the power, which manifests and reveals the power. But the power, the dynamic is the unseen spirit of God in our souls. The most perfect machine is worthless unless there is present the unseen power.

Now we have our problem and the working tools, and our work. How shall we go to work? In the first place, I take it that each one of us is more-or-less deficient and I do not know of any more tangible being to begin our reforms on than ourselves. We must look over our own educational material and see if we know the few essentials of a rational life. Do we know what we can do? Do we know what

we cannot do? Are we wise enough to confine ourselves to doing what we can? Do we know what honest is? Is self-respect and self-control a part of our working knowledge? These are the essentials, and other bits of wisdom might be added to our educational means. Then if we are to help solve the problems, if we are to be active agents of right living, we must keep ourselves in touch with the great source of all truth and all power. As we would make our lives the expression of the Christ-like possibilities within us, we must keep open the avenues of communication between our own soul and God, our Father. That close relationship with God through man is the only way of getting that power which must be ours if our life is to be the fulfillment of the divine spirit within us.

But we live in communities, where we meet these same problems in other people. In our daily life we are bound to come in contact with men who are not awake to the responsibilities and duties of a free life; we are bound to come in contact with conditions where we have the opportunity to take our stand for the higher life. Then it is our duty to come forward in strong defense of purity and nobility. Wherever we find the unhealthy diseased souls, to them we are called as men, as citizens, as upholders of a noble life, to do all in our power to make their lives more complete. If they lack education we must educate them; if they lack the religious inspiration we must supply the truth. But we must remember that our only means of transmitting to them the religious insight is by being ourselves the living witnesses of the religious life. Through all the ages the voice of God has been speaking to the world through pure souls. You and I must make our souls pure, and with purity and sympathy carry to hungry souls the bread of wisdom and to the thirsty the living water of life. As members of a town or city, then we must make our lives strong, noble serviceable. We must let pass no opportunity for helping the untrained to grow into the fullness of manhood necessary for the duties and obligations of political and religious freedom.

As members of this narrower circle of the church within the community we stand especially for that power, for that dynamic, which comes of the religious life. The church is the central station house of spiritual power. You and I are

the transmitters of that power into the outer world. The help, the inspiration, the impulse to noble life that you and I get from worshipping God here together, that must we give expression to the outside. Charged with a great power in our common service here, we go to our homes, to our business life, to our social life, transmitting by the nobility of our lives the religious spirit here received. Thus in our capacity of bearers of spiritual power to the world, we should come in contact with men out of whose life has gone the inspiration which is in ours. To them all is dark and unmeaning. In their uncertainty they are led here and there by chance desires and passions. To them we must be the apostles of light. By a simple quiet noble life, rather than by word, leading rather than directing, let us bring them into full consciousness of the spirit of God within them. As we live trusting in God and doing good may we show them that real life is to trust in God and do good, as the wise Psalmist as told us.