

Permanent Characteristics of Liberal Religions.

Most of our problems are pretty much a question of baggage. One of my ancestors in the year 1769 found the town of Ipswich rather too stable and fixed in its habits and customs to suit him. In the spring of that year, equipped with an ax, a gun, a bag of seed-corn and a few other necessities, this young man mounted his horse and started for ~~west~~ for the province of Maine. He selected a tract of land, planted his seeds, and built a cabin. Having finished these preliminary tasks, he returned to Ipswich for a brief visit. In the late summer again he set forth for the new land of promise. With him went his bride. Into an unsettled region for hard work, plain living, and dangers, but, withal, into a life of wholesome creature effort with its manifold joys and sorrows, they were going. They carried very little baggage.

Some twenty years or more ago a remote section of Berkshire County was invaded by

a New York man of affairs. His standing in financial and sporting circles had been achieved, not by any constructive effort, but by shrewd, and often questionable methods of floundering. From various farmers he bought some 14000 acres of farm and woodland. He established a great game preserve, built great stables and houses. Into this quiet and remote spot that had known little more of human life than the hard toil of farmers and wood cutters, he brought luxury, extravagance, and manners. The fever lasted but a few years.

Four or five years ago a member of this family came to the great house on his honeymoon. Great preparations were made for this honeymoon in the hills, both at Berkshire, and, as I recall it, in the divorce courts. The Sunday papers took due notice.

Since then only the passing stranger visits the place. Last spring, just as the Hefaticas ~~were~~ and Treliam were breaking through last years covering of leaves, I walked ~~off~~ over the mountain, along the neglected roads of the

estate. The houses and stables, exposed now both to the weather and inquiring man, I examined. Doors broken in; windows opened; furniture, shades, scattered about. Every thing told the story of neglect and decay. More money had been expended here than most families have during an entire lifetime. The whole thing seemed to symbolize a great tragedy. ~~The~~ ^{at} N. Y. telephone directory, the sensual novels, the stock ticker, the gaudy, and grandiose appearance of every thing, even the fire-place, told the tale of a tragic failure in judging life's values. They had not loads of baggage.

Leaving these crumbling buildings behind I continued my ^{walk} past deserted and decaying farm houses until at last I came to the little cemetery, where rested the toilers ~~and~~ who once lived and labored here. The cemetery was neglected, the marble slabs were falling; many of the gravestones had caved in. Here and there a lilac bush bore witness to human sorrow and affection. These falling stones, and the deserted farm houses were all that remained of those who had once, lived, labored and lived, among there

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beautiful, but exacting hills. There had but little baggage, but they were creators. The two pictures, ^{conveying} roughly the ^{spirit} of the nation's life and the ceremony, suggest more than I care to point out, or even wish to imply. But the deserted mansion in the hills, with all its implications, may bear witness to a genuine impulse, that feels the failure, and limitations of much that has been and still is characteristic of our ~~great~~ ^{prosperity}, modern life. It may betray a blind, and unintelligent, but yet real desire for real values, - an undefined need ~~to~~ of getting free from superfluous baggage.

For we have accumulated so much baggage of every kind and description, that we are no longer masters of the baggage, but have become its bond-servants. We go where the baggage bids us go, and when the baggage bids us refrain, we refrain. We have builded us great states, to protect us in life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but these states ~~we~~ have brought us to the verge of anarchy, and ~~decay~~ bankruptcy. To clothe, feed, and shelter ourselves, we have

built a great industrial system, but while its wheels stand idle, we ~~lack~~ lack adequate food, proper shelter, and sufficient clothing. We have built a great religious system to deliver us from a fear of the Universe we ~~are~~ live in, but it has bound us to form, and dogma, and strife, without giving the truth that may make us free. The top of each of these systems, to remedy their limitations and shortcomings, but have built system after system, until, to use a figure borrowed from industry, our productivity staggers under its load of ~~and~~ overhead charges and expense. We are ^{overburdened with} ~~burdened with~~ baggage, and we chafe under the load.

Hence the unrest of the times. The turbulent revolutionary spirit reminds us that a passion for freedom and life still exists, a passion, let it be remembered, that has left many stately mansions with all their contents to rot on mountains and hill-sides of history. This passion, ^{at times} terrible and remorseless in its destructiveness,

and after gloriously heroic in its up building⁶¹
is pressing us to examine our baggage, to decide
what we need; to discard what enslaves
us, and to take up our journey to a new
land of promise.

"Shoulder your deeds, my son.

Such are the stern commands of our
decade. In no uncertain tones are they
issued. The clash of armies, the rise and
fall of nations, the overthrow of empires,
the collapse of religions, the conflict of
classes. — no one is exempt, and the
pressure is terrific. The great war
which began in a quarrel over

baggage, is ending in a passionate and terrific revolution, whose master spirit is a determination to cast aside superfluous baggage, that men may again ~~become~~ become masters of their burdens. For years men have noted the increasing intricacy of our social atmosphere, the storm clouds gathering on the horizon. The storm has broken, the first terrific gusts of mind and rain have swept over us. But neither is the full fury of the storm spent, nor have we begun to appraise the extent of the devatations.

The situation presses upon us, for insight, judgment, and action.

To some it spells a terrible, and unrelieved fear. To others it is an undoubted promise of the reign of justice, and peace that beckons us forward. To many a great life, not without dangers, ~~of~~ calls from the future. But no one questions

the statement, that the times need whatever of wisdom, and sound method, each may have to offer. No one questions the general statement, that each will contribute very largely in terms of his natural predispositions, and limitations. The legislator will ~~pass~~ suggest legislation, both sensible and foolish. The militant will call for the use of force. The industrialist will urge the starting of the wheels of industry. The banker will insist on the re-establishment of credit. The devotee of authority ⁱⁿ religion will call for a return to the age of faith, and obedience. The reformers will ~~fresh~~ press each his own particular interest.

"Then there are those to whom comes a stern call to spend and be spent in some unrequited labor, as bold adventurers in unexplored regions." "But you no gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses: no wallet for your journey: neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staff" said Jesus to his

disciples. Thus equipped with only a great
passion, many will go forth. They will be
stern, harsh, uncompromising, - perhaps
fanatical. Some will be wrong, and some
will be right. Some will find only sand;
Others will fan out fine gold. How we
love such in history, and how we shun
them in life. But I sometimes think we
shun them just because we secretly
love them the more for their very oban-
donment, their sheer ability "to forget
themselves into immortality" as Wendell
Phillips phrased it. God knows we could
not live if all the world were like them,
but what would life become were it not
for this "legion of the lost ones, this cohort of
the damned." In them the salt has
not lost its savor, nor the vinegar its
acidity. Neither has the spirit become
enchained. He must not that his face
shine."

Following along in the trail of these bold adventures, come those of a more social disposition, who see clearly the cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night, that leads them forward. But they check the speed of their travel that they may have company along the way, and, perchance, transform the unblazed trail into a pathway.

I suppose that I idealize the facts, but I like to picture these Pilgrims of the Forest, who with Thomas Hooker set out from Newton in 1636 to make a new settlement in Connecticut. In my imagination I see them journeying through the forest - the strong determined men, the radiant women, the sturdy children, the herd of cattle, Especially do I recall that the frail Mrs. Hooker was carried the entire journey on a litter. Often I imagine myself lurking about the campfire at night, ever dropping upon them, I hear them talk over the day's journey, discuss their difficulties, ~~to~~ joking and bantering. I watch the settling down

for the night, - the fastening of the sentinels, the guards for the cattle, preparations for sleep. As the camp fire burned low, I have heard the men talking of their farewells. I have heard them talk about the foundation of authority being laid in the free consent of the people: I have heard them say that the choice of public magistrates belongs to the people by God's own ordinance." Many other things, both interesting and uninteresting I have heard in my everchaffing ~~expositions~~.

Sometimes I have gleaned suggestions concerning the place, and task of liberal religion in the economy of human society; - suggestions both as to the necessary baggage that belongs to the equipment of liberal religion, ~~both~~ for its urgent tasks of critical times, as well as those extra comforts and luxuries, that liberal religion may enjoy in more peaceful times without seriously affecting its moral fibre, -

Among these filigees of the forest, as among their
spiritual kinsmen everywhere, there seems to
have been a very strong grip ~~upon~~ reality. You may
call it common-sense, - you may call it
a sense of the practical nature of things, or what
you like, the fact remains that this ~~keen~~
power of ^{keen} observation, this searching insight into
things as they are, this grip upon reality is
a marked characteristic of such liberals. ~~It is~~
~~there are~~ no pretensions to infallibility, no
finality of judgement, no errors of interpretation
are claimed for them, but just a wholesome
sense of reality. - They use their eyes, their ears,
their minds. ~~And~~ Of course this characteristic
is not confined to those intergroups and
people where ~~liberal~~ the phrase Liberal Religion
is used. In fact if there is any one ~~thing~~ that
characteristic that differentiates the modern
world from the medieval it is this tendency
to a strong grip on reality. The vast
 strides that have been made in the

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systematic observation of nature in the field of the natural sciences, the gleanings of scientific knowledge, and its application to arts and industries, - all these bespeak the increase, both in scope and intensity, of the ~~tendency to~~ ^{emphasis on} this sense of reality.

While this movement ~~has~~ ^{has} by no means achieved its fully recognized place, yet it has developed far enough to make ~~clear~~ ^{safe} two generalizations. One is in the nature of a fact, and the other a moral value.

The first is that social developments, both political, industrial, and religious, grow out of forces already operating in life. Whether one's interpretation of life, be in terms of mechanical materialism, or theistic idealism, or whatever may be our language for expressing ultimate things, we have come pretty much to the conclusion, that there is no power without the power that interferes, ~~and~~ either ^{to} brings order out of chaos, or to throw a monkey-wrench into the wheels. We no longer look into

the heavens to watch for the intervention of an absentee land-lord, or the coming of a messiah ^{from the clouds} with a new heaven and a new earth ready made. If we have any grasp at all on the meaning of modern knowledge, we must assume that forces operating within the process, are the forces that will carry us from the past, through the present into the future. ~~Logical~~ ^{The idea of} Growth, evolution has definitely replaced the idea of both creation and intervention. The increasing sense of reality, characteristic of modern thought, seems to have clearly established this generalization.

But ~~the possibility of~~ this generalization, based on ~~from~~ the vast facts gained by scientific investigations, has been made possible through ~~by~~ the faithful ~~investigations~~, observations and results obtained by following what has come to be called the method of science. The doctrine of free inquiry for which the protestant reformers contended in the limited field of religious ~~experience~~

controversy ⁻¹⁵⁻ ~~problems~~ has been growing in importance and application, until it has become the established and accepted method of enlightenment. Even propagandists have to bow their knee to the method of science, and ~~conceal~~ ^{cover} their cloth their material in the garb of scientific investigations.

This leads to the second generalization of moral in its nature. Free inquiry, is not merely a doctrine, or a right. It has become a fundamental moral obligation, principle. It is applicable not only to pure science, and applied science, but also to history, past and current; to social and industrial problems; to political and religious problems. Freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought; freedom of expression, have become social values than which no other is more important. ~~And~~ Faithfulness in inquiry, clarity in thought, and candor in expression have become individual moral values than which no other is more needed at the present time.

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With the broad aspects of modern thought, in which this sense of reality has become so established, liberal religion is on its real home ground. It recognizes the principle of evolutionary growth, through the operation of immanent forces. It recognizes the moral value involved in the method of free inquiry, and candid expression.

This a permanent characteristic of liberal religion, - a characteristic that differentiates it from all forms of authority religion, whether the authority be openly recognized, or secretly followed.

But it is apparent that powerful influences are at work ~~in our~~ to-day, seeking to curtail the scope of free inquiry, and freedom of utterance. It is not yet clear how serious has been the damage wrought by the war upon this principle of freedom. Whether it is merely a phase of hysteria, or strong re-entrenchment of the method of the dictation of

authority, time only can disclose. In either case the very primary assumption of liberal religion is at stake. To contribute to the reinstatement of this method of freedom both by the candor of utterance, and the worth of the thing said, will be no small task in the years that are before us, ~~and~~ such a contribution will be priceless. Here science, education, political and social reform stand on common ground with liberal religion.

Moral Purpose

A more distinguishing characteristic of liberal religion, ~~is and one in which I judge, so large a circle do not share,~~ is hardly more than an extension of the sense of reality. It is the perception of a moral purpose at the very heart of these ^{universal} forces, ~~of which we are but as~~ I know full well that vast numbers of men and women, who boast of their common sense, their ~~keen~~ strong grip on reality, their adherence to values of modern thought, pass by on the

other side of the road, where the concept of moral purpose is mentioned. I recall an address which I heard Dr. Carter deliver at Harvard, speaking as a man of science. ~~Be~~ before the evidences of immortality he said that the only forces that he could see operating in human life were the primary impulses to get, and begot. I have heard ~~been~~ practical business men, say substantially the same thing. So have all of us, and will continue so to hear. I have also heard of great philosophers and scientists make the same general observation. Nations even have staked their destiny on the faith that there ~~are~~ is no validity to the claims of moral values, and moral purposes in the universe. But the trouble is with their powers of observation. The sense of reality is not keen enough. They may see things, and read facts, but they do not see behind the things, and know not the meaning of facts. Of course they cannot see that

Moral Purpose

While liberal religion shares with all those to whom the ~~first~~ general point of view of modern thought is natural, this sense of reality, there is a second characteristic, which appeals to a less inclusive group. As we view with enquiring minds, the processes of human life, we are confronted with many ~~searching~~ questions, and an equal variety of answers. ~~the laws to this world forces~~. We see natural law easily enough. We can understand something of the ~~laws~~ operation of the ~~laws~~ gravitation. We have learned much about the manifestations of electricity, and even of life. We can trace our way through historical documents, and gain some idea of what has taken place. We can trace the evolution of religious ideals, customs, and thoughts. But in the background is always the haunting, yet evasive question, as to the meaning of it all. "Blind chance," say my friends, just

plain machine movement, with no particular meaning. Two elemental forces, "To get, and to beget." account for all things. "Eat, drink, and be merry for to-morrow we die;" all these boast of their sense of reality. They see only what the anatomy. They see force. They see passion, they see conflict, blood, war, strife and flounder. These things all men see.

But many see all these things, and something more. Sebastian Castellio, one of the less conspicuous, but not the less real prophets of the reformation, in describing the life of a Christian.

"I cannot do violence to my conscience for fear of disobeying Christ. I must be saved or lost by my own personal faith, not by that of another. I ask you, whether Christ, who forgave those who went astray, and commanded his followers to forgive until seventy times seven, Christ who is the final judge of us all, if he were here, would command a person like that to be killed!... O Christ, Creator, and King of the world, dost

there see, and approve these things. Hast thou become a totally different person from what thou wast? When thou wast on earth, nothing could be more gentle, and kind, more ready to suffer injuries. Thou wast like a sheep dumb before the sheavers, Beaters, spit upon, mocked, crowned with thorns, crucified between thieves, Thou didst pray for those who injured thee. Hast thou changed to this? Art thou now so cruel and contrary to thyself? Dost thou command that those who do not understand thy ordinances and commandments as those over us requiring should be chained, or drawn and quartered, and burned at the stake? "

In spite of the mediaeval language that he uses, we understand the full point of his inquiry? Do moral values have a standing in the universe? Are they simply vague sentimental effusions of weak men, who cover their losses

in the struggle for existence. By enthroning
in the universe their selfish whims, and
their sentimentalism? Or do moral values,
moral standards, moral purposes appear
in the thoughts of men, because in a
process of evolution, they represent the
surviving qualities best adapted to
the universe we live in. Are the men
who deny the validity of ^{the claim of} moral values to
a place in the universe, possessed of a
keener sense of reality than those who
see moral values, moral order, and moral
purpose, operating every where, and
with an unerring nicety in all the
relationships of human life. Who is right?

Here liberal religion may make a distinctive
and genuine contribution to the thought
and conduct of the times. ~~That~~ The
heart of the universe is moral. The
essence of life is moral. Moral values rise
above force, passion, states, and church. The
great passion that controls all passions is
moral, ~~and~~. If we can see this ~~to me~~