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## DIVINE DRIFT IN HUMAN HISTORY

“AND THE SPIRIT OF GOD MOVED UPON THE FACE OF THE WATERS”

—GENESIS, I. 2

THE waters with all that constituted them such were already present. The land was already hiddenly spread out. The soil was already latently gifted with powers of production, and yet, inside of all those powers, directing them, inspiring them, holding them along the line of a supreme purpose, was God's spirit power. So that things that were without beauty, and that knew nothing about beauty themselves, somehow in course of time came to bud out into forms of beauty; so that things which were without reason, and that knew nothing about reason themselves, somehow in course of time came to unfold into reasonable and intelligible shape; so that things that had no purpose of their own, and that knew nothing about purpose themselves, somehow in course of time grew into intentional relation with a great deal that was about them and beyond them.

This working of God's spirit power inside of the powers properly belonging to waters, forests, and seas as he made them, shows in this second verse, and keeps showing all along the line of the Genesis narrative of creation. The raw stuff that he made behaved with a wisdom that the stuff itself had no suspicion of. It proceeded wisely, but the wisdom of its procedure was not its own wisdom. It is so everywhere. It was so with the flower that blossomed on your window-sill this morning. Every part of the plant contributed something to that blossom: the roots did something toward it; the leaves did something; the sap did something; but none of them knew that they had a hand in the blossom or knew anything about the blossom. Something so of the individual raindrops falling in the sunshine. Each one glistens and blushes in the sunlight, but the superb arch of color which each of these little tinted individualities contributes to compose, they each of them knew nothing of and had no purpose of. “The Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters”—waters

of creative week, waters of every week since. Waters lying out flat on the ground, waters dropping down through sunshine, and coloring the air red, green, and purple, on their way down.

Almost everything that acts intelligently, acts with an intelligence that is not all of it its own. Things without brains sometimes behave as wisely, and more commonly a great deal more wisely, than things that have brains. Your watch works intelligently, but is not itself intelligent. So in the department of art. You bring together material for the construction of a house—wood, brick, and stone. No one of these ingredients can be termed beautiful, and yet your house when completed may be a thing of surpassing beauty; but this beauty will not be a summing up of the material put into the house, but the spirit of beauty in your own mind, that worked inspiringly upon and within that material. The sentence you write may be wise, but, if so, it is wise not with its own intelligence, but with yours. Building stones, painter's pigment, statuary's marble, alphabetic signs, are to be respected in their own character, to be sure, as God respected the originary stuff of the globe; but it is by virtue of some "moving spirit," either man's or God's, that stuff of any sort has to be taken up and made efficient in the realm of beauty and wisdom, and in the region of intent and purpose.

Certain birds, when the migratory season comes, fly south. They have no reason for flying. There is a reason for their flying, but it is not their reason. Nothing could be more intelligent than their procedure under those circumstances, but yet they have no intelligence of their own to be intelligent with. They are wise with a wisdom which is not theirs. We do not know how this can be, but it can be because it is. We disguise our own ignorance of the matter by importing a Latin word, and calling it instinct. Things that we understand we talk about in Saxon; things that we do not understand, and make believe we do, we talk about in Latin or Greek. But that is what we mean by instinct, if we mean anything by it—intelligence that is not *of* the animal become operative *in* the animal—inspiration prolonged earthwards until it reaches the ground, and figures in the flutter of a bird's wing or the cunning comb-building of a honey-bee. You will find the same thing in any bee-hive that you find in this second verse of Genesis—the material fact with all the native forces belonging to it, and a spark of supernal quickening alive inside of it.

One of the most graphic illustrations of this is seen in the beautiful tree-like structure of the coral. The little animals whose skeletons pack together to compose coral know nothing about the delicate buddings and blossomings and graceful branchings of the coral shrub. They are as igno-

rant of the part they play, the purposes they subserve, and the results to which they contribute, as a cube of granite mortared into the wall of a cathedral. As has been said, "they build more wisely than they know," which is exactly what we are trying to say and to illustrate. They work with a wisdom and a grace that is not theirs. It is somebody's, but not theirs. Ever since the time when the original material of the universe was called into being, unreasonable things have been behaving reasonably. They have acted with a grace, a cunning, and an intention that was no part of themselves. To say that it is the nature of a flower to build itself up in such wise proportion and such delicate figure is not saying much. To say that it is the instinct of a bee to follow, in the shaping of its cells, the wisest method of construction that mathematical science could have selected for it, is not saying much. It explains nothing. It simply states that the bee, which is not a mathematician, behaves as though he were a mathematician. He works luminously, in shining that is not his own shining.

Such matters we can think about a good deal without thinking to the end of them. They are curious as questions of merely scientific inquiry, although that is not the reason we talk about them here. Things in this world are so the offspring of one creative parent, and, like children of one father, look and behave so much alike, that when you strike upon such a fact as a bird or an insect carrying itself with more wisdom than it has of its own, we immediately wonder if this is not a principle that is likely to be found operating in other creatures besides those that have wings and make honey-comb. The more we come to know about the universe the more perfect the understanding which the different and remote parts of the universe are seen to have with one another; and that not only as relates to the distant portions of the physical system of things, but also as regards the inter-relation between things physical and things spiritual. Drummond's fascinating book, *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, was wrought out at the impulse of just that idea. Every physical fact if we could entirely understand it, we should probably find to be the raw, earthy end of a moral or a spiritual fact. It was on that account that such common things as lilies, yeast, and chickens served the Lord such good purpose in his disclosures of the spiritual world. So that when we find a tree shaping itself cleverly and beautifully, that of itself has no sense or delicate insight of its own to do the shaping with, or a bird behaving with a sagacity that its own small brain can give no adequate account of, we are set wondering if this is any more than a low, small beginning of a very high and large matter; and whether instinct is not a word that, with a little

coaxing, could be encouraged to serve us also on wider ground and in higher regions than those to which its office work is ordinarily limited. Let us see.

The interest which the careful reader derives from the study of history has in it two elements. In the first place, we are so endowed with inquisitiveness and with intelligent sympathies that we enjoy knowing what has transpired in the world. There is a good deal of heart in most of us; and whatever man has done—the discoveries he has made, the conflicts in which he has engaged, and the amelioration he has achieved for himself or for others—all of this appeals to us as being to some degree our own matter. We are somehow personally present in all those of other times and peoples, near or remote, which have made up a part of the general life of mankind.

That is one element of our interest in historic study, but there is a second element which more immediately concerns us here. As we get into the matter more deeply, we discover not only a great many interesting events, that are such because of what the events themselves denote, but events that appear to have an understanding with other events that may have transpired a long time or a vast distance away, that (so we imagine) are sometimes caught in the act of squinting at each other across the spaces, like mountains far removed, that nevertheless, in the early morning, wink and blink at each other before the sunshine has yet crept down into the valleys and seas that lie between—events such that they appear to mean something when taken together that neither of them is able to give you any inkling of when taken alone. Just as when you see the letter "s" written on a bit of paper, you can look at it without its meaning anything in particular to you. Farther on you see the letter "u"; well, that is not going to mean anything either. Still farther on your eye tumbles down on to the letter "n"; neither does "n" mean anything. But quite possibly your eye slides back over the three so rapidly that they all become visible at a single glance and you have s—u—n. That means something. The three seen together spell out a fact. Clearly somebody's intelligence has been at work in the writing and arranging of those letters—intelligence that was not in the letters. In looking at them you encounter mind—somebody's mind. Somebody's mind has been there. There is an intelligence in the three letters combined that was not in each of the three viewed apart.

So there are historic events that, as we enter more deeply into their study, impress us in very much the same way. Each taken by itself may not denote much, may not indeed denote anything in particular; but if we

chance to get them so placed (as we did the three letters) that they can be seen together, they will spell out something to us, and we shall know that there has been an intelligence at work there, and that taken together they mean a great deal more than the respective actors in each of the separate events had any suspicion of, exactly as a coral branch is beautiful with a beauty of which no one of the little polyps that composed it ever suspected or could have suspected.

For instance, we have all been interested in the life and conquests of Alexander the Great, who subjected the East to Macedonian power and diffused throughout the nations a knowledge of Greek and of the Greek language. We are also interested in the fact that, when Christ came, there was prevalent throughout the civilized world a language sufficiently plastic—the Greek—to serve for the expression of divine truths; sufficiently delicate to articulate the subtle inflections of divine thought. Now those two events, the conquest of Alexander and the coming into the world of divine truth, that needed to be written down, were three hundred years apart. Alexander knew nothing about the evangelists, and the evangelists probably never had heard much about Alexander. But I do not think we can read those three hundred years of history, with a tender sensitiveness to their suggestions, without feeling that what Alexander did was a part, an intentional part (I am not saying now whose intention), of the great scheme which embraced among other the coming of a written gospel. Alexander had no sense of that scheme—no more than the letter “s” has a sense of the word “sun” that it helps to spell; no more than the fluttering wing of the migratory bird has a sense of the warm clime toward which it is moving; no more than the polyp has a sense of the beautiful coral branch that will be complete a thousand years hence and contain its own little body as a part of the delicate structure.

That is the consummating glory of history, that it spells out thoughts and purposes that are hundreds and thousands of years long—purposes that are so much more far-reaching and truths that are so much wider than the microscopic minds and the little polyp-purposes of the men who come and go with the fleeting years, that we know that the best meaning even of men’s own lives was one that was hidden from themselves; that the final explanation of the deeds they performed and the aims they pursued lay not in the events of their own day, but in the relations in which those events were knit with what was to transpire beyond their own horizon; that they were hardly more than unconscious letters of the alphabet, helping to spell out words and paragraphs whose meaning as yet existed only in the Supreme Intelligence, by whom the processes of history

are conceived—the moving Spirit of God, by whom the progress of history is ordained and achieved; that men, even at their best, are wise with a wisdom that is not theirs; that historic actors, even the most distinguished and productive, have ingeniously contributed to results of which they have never dreamed; that whatever may have been the intelligence of Moses, Alexander, Cæsar, Paul, Augustine, Hildebrand, Erasmus, Napoleon, relatively speaking they were all but as polyps helping to fashion a coral branch, whose beauty or even existence they had no power to suspect; that they were wise in part with a wisdom that was not theirs; and that, in that sense of the term, which is the only just sense I know, instinct played in their lives and workings as determinative a part as in the bird's migration to more suitable climes, or the bee's architecture of the honey-comb.

Now that is a great thought, and it is solid with comfort and with quickening. It lets us see the Supreme Intelligence shaping the outcomes of history. It lets us feel the prevalence in the world of certain tides of event and certain currents of thought that exist entirely independently of the men and women who think their small opinions and do their small deeds in the world, without perceiving how their deeds and opinions are drawn into a divine drift as old, as infallible, and as divine as the Spirit of God that moved upon the face of the waters before the dawn of the first morning.

There is something in this matter of drift that is wonderfully impressive. One seems to feel in it the presence of a mind and purpose that lifts events off from the level of commonplace, and to ennoble them with a dignity and suffuse them with a splendor such as Moses discerned among the flaming branches of the shrub at Horeb. Drift implies the presence and energy of a power that is distinct from and transcends the multitudinous individuals that are carried by the traction of that drift. At a certain season of the year we know that the icebergs drift southerly toward regions equatorial. It never occurs to us to imagine that the bergs gathered in crystalline convention among the polar seas, and voted in congressional action to migrate toward a more southerly zone. It is not their co-operant motion that creates the southerly drift; it is the southerly drift—a part of the arterial life of the throbbing body of the sea—that creates their co-operant motion. It underlies all those mountainous glittering individualities, and bears them in strong purpose upon its own bosom; and what looks to be the motion of the berg is most of it the motion of the sea become a demonstrative and prismatic effect hundreds of feet above the ocean's wave.

There is a vast deal in all this matter of drift—drift of event, drift of

idea. If we could have materialized before our eye the divinely personal currents that are shaping the direction of event, of opinion, of philosophy, of theology, we would see, I believe, that the currents which play in the depths of the sea, that pulsate among the higher and lower strata of the air, and that even throb among the stars, drawing them along in congregated splendor, not each star for itself, but millions of them floating along together in the drift of a single cosmic tide—I say if we could see and feel all these things as they are, we would discover that, with all of liberty, yea, even of license, that attaches to the human individual in his thinking and his acting, there are divine impulses of constraint and inspiration that work with as much exactness of intelligence and with as much imperialism of impulse as the energies of the same God operate among the slippery water-drops of the sea or marshal in orderly phalanx the radiant hosts of the stars.

In this is the fascination of history, and in this is the fascination of helping in however small a way to make history. There is nothing to hinder our word or our work being a thousand times wiser than *we* are. If a pitiable little *zoöphyte* can build infinitely better than he knows, *you* can. Instinct is the most unerring wisdom of which we know; and when there is so much said in the Bible about God's working within us to will and to do of his good pleasure and the like, it is a mournful pity for us to suppose that a monopoly of instinct has been vouchsafed to beasts, birds of passage, and insects. Instinct is the ability to do better than we know. It is being wise with God's wisdom. It is a talent for hitting a target in the dark, because some one with eyes that can see in the dark takes charge of the arrow after it leaves our bow. If you had rather call it inspiration than instinct, we shall not quarrel about words. The ant is a wiser economist than he knows. St. Paul writes a wiser gospel than he knows. Somewhere between St. Paul and the ant we come, dropping into the draft of invisible drifts; walking in divine light which, without filling our own eye, shapes our thought and determines our act; moving, if we will, with infallible step toward an invisible goal a million years away. The art of successful living consists not in making our own way, but in being true men and true women, and then surrendering ourselves to whatever drift of act, purpose, or opinion comes our way, absolutely assured that it is the pull of the Almighty.

A little brook comes dropping down into the river from off the hillside. Tremblingly it merges its waters in those of the river. "Whither am I going?" asks the brook. To the sea. "Yes, but that is a thousand miles away, and I am but a tiny bit of mountain-spring. The way is long;



how can I know it? And winding; how can I be sure of it? And it runs in the dark, as well as in the light; how can I see it?" Poor little brook! No, blessed little brook! Be true to yourself, sparkling little creature from the mountain-side: push into mid-channel, and the slip of the current, which is the hand of God, will itself bear you unerringly through straight ways and through winding ways, through day and through night, till you mingle safely at last in the deeps of the great sea; for the Spirit of God still broods upon the face of the waters.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "C. H. Parkhurst". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent initial "C" and "H".

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