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EDITORIAL COMMENT

UNDER this enigmatic title a recent address by President Eliot has obtained for the faith of spiritually-minded Unitarians far wider attention than is given to any of its ordained preachers. It carries the marks of an offhand talk, lacking the balanced statements of a carefully prepared paper. For instance, it uses the word religion in three different meanings—our conscious relation to God, reasoned thought about God, or theology, and organization for the worship of God, *i.e.*, the Church. In his religion Dr. Eliot finds no place for "mystery"; and yet he undoubtedly finds it in that thought about God to which he assigns the central ground of faith. He rules out "the supernatural element," meaning the miraculous, but in regarding God as the immanent Author of nature he doubtless finds in nature the real supernatural—God himself. God is to him "so immanent that no intermediary is needed." But he would hardly deny that the ignorant and the thoughtless must have intermediaries to bring them to the truth of the divine immediacy he has found. In his affirmation of the wondrous "revelation of Christ" the fact of a great intermediary is recognized. Scrutiny of the particulars of this "new" religion shows it to be essentially Christ's own. The sum of it is in "the two great commandments"—love to God and service to man—but this is the core of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the Synoptic Gospels generally. New this is not, except in contrast with what has caused it to be forgotten—ecclesiasticism and scholastic theology.

These are what Dr. Eliot's negation of "authority" in religion seems aimed at. So his denial of any sacraments except "natural hallowed customs" is evidently leveled at superstitions, perversions of baptism and the Lord's supper. To religion socialized for social salvation he gives strong and proper emphasis as the mark of the true Church, including "only persons of good-will," as in Jesus' teaching. "Not every one that saith 'Lord, Lord,' but he that doeth the will of my father."

The new thought of God, says Dr. Eliot, is the characteristic of the new religion. It "accepts literally St. Paul's statement: 'In Him we live and move and have our being.'" This thought of human life as ensphered in the divine—the thought of Jesus as well as of Paul, is reviving to-day throughout the Church, supplanting semi-pagan ideas with a stronger spiritual life. The new type of theology it develops, "thoroughly monotheistic," has for its philosophical correlate "an absolute monism." But it is surprizing for Dr. Eliot to inject this phrase into his outline of religion as more "inspiring to the soul" than the Biblical Trinity. The soul has no use for the clear cold crystals of philosophic speculation, while it needs the inspiration of an intense monotheism. And this, as Professor Clark tells us in his warmly evangelical work, "The Christian Doctrine of God," provides for all the truth involved in the apostolic phrase, "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost," while superseding the anti-trinitarian controversy which seems to linger in Dr. Eliot's thought. It is also surprizing to find no place in

SERMONIC LITERATURE

THE DIVINE ECONOMY

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And when they were filled Jesus said unto his disciples: Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.—John 6 : 12.

CHRIST means so much, that even His more casual utterances warrant our scrutiny, and promise to be interpretable in terms of long and abiding import; for the thoughts of a great Master are never small thoughts, even tho spoken in regard to matters seemingly trivial. The smallest and most delicate beam of light leads back to the sun, and gives us a fair taste of what the sun contains and is.

"That nothing be lost." The expression that our Lord here uses is a quiet symptom of God's economic treatment of values, of the interest He takes in preserving whatever He feels, or ever has felt, to be good. Scripture informs us that at the close of His creative work He pronounced a eulogy of satisfaction upon all that He had produced. It is quite in accordance then with what we should have expected, to be informed by those seemingly qualified to speak, that nothing which He then made has been lost, and that however much the substances that compose our material globe, and that compose the various features of soil, ocean, forest, and hill that overlie and decorate it, may change their form, and almost elude our grasp, they never cease to be, and that no object or particle of what then came into being has resigned its existence and slipt back into nothingness. Nature gives us no hint of annihilation.

There is a great deal of encouragement suggested by this disposition of His to be loyal to what He has once done and to take scrupulous care, and preserving care, of whatever is expressive of value, be that value greater or less, produced by Him or produced by us. It is something to know that even when His dealings are with material matters He does not make a thing till He is sufficiently interested in it and has sufficient regard for it to make sure of His taking care of it after He has made it. Scientifically assured that nothing that has been made has ever been unmade we easily anticipate the unlimited continuity, in one form or another, of that which constitutes the material of the present universe. I am only trying to habituate our thoughts

to the idea that divine interest is interest great enough not to undo anything; that whatever God does has an unrepealable value.

And Dr. Edward Hitchcock, deceased in 1866, the devout geologist of Amherst College, in an essay or sermon of his calls attention to that passage in the Second Epistle of Peter, where the casual reading might suggest that the existing universe is going to be wiped out after a while, and remarks upon the fact that we are not there taught that the elements are to be eventually annihilated but that only by a process with which we are familiar and which is there stated, those elements are to be dissolved on their way to the formation of a renewed heaven and a restored earth. For while we may not regard the Bible as intended to be a text-book on geology, yet it is possible that the devout intuition of a man of God may be so keen and so searching and so appreciative of God's habits, as to be able to anticipate the line along which scientific thought might in course of time become clever enough to tread. There are several reputed instances of that in Scripture.

All of the foregoing I have adduced simply with a view to getting distinctly before us our thought, that in a good thing, a thing good enough to be called good here in the sanctuary, there is an element of the eternal, that it becomes a part of those indestructible assets that fill the treasury of the world and make out a portion of the riches of God.

With this idea come home to us clearly and fully, the first stimulating thought that will accrue to us will be that whatever the point of progress at which things have yet arrived, whatever the gain, larger or smaller, God has already made in the achievement of His ends and the attainment of human destiny, there will be no going back from that point, that history never retrogrades; that the machinery of history is like the mechanism of a watch which, as it comes out of the hands of the manufacturer, is constructed to run only in one way and always moves from one o'clock to two, and never from two to one. If you consult the interior of the watch, you will discover there something that is very much in the nature of oscillation, an alterna-

tion that is half of the time forward and the other half backward; but such is the construction of the thing and so are all its interior works held under the law of a progressive impulse that in whichever direction interior parts move the three hands on the dial are uninterruptedly *en route* toward to-morrow.

And if a human mechanic can construct a watch in that way, certainly a divine artificer can construct the mechanism of history in that way, and to the divine artificer with whom reason and Scripture have made us acquainted it would never occur to construct that mechanism in any other way. A divine mind that is disposed to economize crumbs of bread and fragments of fish, and not only to economize them, but to multiply them in the process of economization, could never be so negligent of the larger values as to let slip from His treasury of accomplishment anything that He had once earned for Himself and for His people in the way of their promotion along lines of divine intention and human betterment.

When it is a matter of deciding whether we will paint the future outcome of things in colors of white and of crimson or in black, the first thing to consult is the conception we cherish of the character of Him in whose hands and heart that outcome of things is presumably carried. It takes less man, less soul, to try to fit our feet into the tracks that God leaves behind Him as He moves than it does to attain to a profound, and therefore a sustaining appreciation of Him by whom these tracks are left. But when we have done that we ought to do the other thing also, and in such way to observe the markings that God's feet leave upon the ground after He has gone over it, as to be able intelligently—not languidly, but intelligently—to determine definitely the direction of His goings, whether the world is ripening or decaying, and whether there are satisfactory evidences that the fragments are being gathered up or whether the policy of God is one of loss and abandonment, and the horologe of the ages after having struck six is retrograding toward half-past five.

And people ought to be making earnest with these things, Christians especially. Practical evidences of divine movings in nature and in history, and divine forward movings are fundamental to all evidences of Christianity. There is no advantage to be gained from the Christ of God, unless the God of Christ is a Being competent to hold His own and munificently to husband results achieved, saying

nothing of augmenting those results. And to the eye that is open the evidences are all around of a régime of divine economy, that keeps what it gets, that never lets go, so that whether in nature or in history,—and each of the two is a veritable Bible—old effects are preserved to become the seed-corn of a new blossoming.

To take a single illustration from nature. Suppose yourself seated before an open grate, loaded with burning anthracite and regaling your heart with the thoughts that spring up in your mind under the touch of the warm and fantastic illumination. Do you know what the glow really means that radiates from those lumps of mineral, seemingly so unpromising, but which nevertheless show themselves able, not only to produce a mild kind of daytime in the midst of the evening, but to create before your imagination splendid castles in the air whose foundations are beams of light and their walls framed of airiness and fire? Do you know that each fervid and sparkling atom that twinkles up into your eye from out the bed of glowing coal is a bit of old sunshine that millions of years ago was deposited here by the sun, and that has been divinely conserved in the treasure-house of the ages, and that not one flash of light and of flame that was radiated from the central orb of our system in the ages when that system was still young, but what contains in it at this moment the same potencies of heat and illumination that belonged to it the day it fell from the sun on its way to make our globe warm and lustrous? These economics of God are things for us to think about. Such facts as the one specified, tho revealed to us in material ways, tell us a long beautiful story of the habits of God's mind, and of the rules by which He conducts His administration of the world, and help us to realize that the frugality suggested by the intimation of our text is simply an expression in a casual and inconspicuous way of a principle that the divine mind cherishes and that that mind can be trusted to make effective in all matters of intrinsic value, be the value of divine or of human production. It is a thought full of tremendous comfort that the goodness that is in a good thing never becomes wasted or evaporated by the flight of days or of years.

So, likewise, to turn from the world of nature to the world of event, very much of unquestionable moral value that asserts itself in history may become temporarily concealed,

like old sunshine that for ages lay immured in the fastnesses of the earth's crust, but without being extinguished, and when the opportune moment arrived, evincing still its wealth of undimmed refugence. So there are in history what we have learned to call the dark ages, say the two centuries following upon the death of Charlemagne, respecting which a historian has written as follows: "It is certainly not too much to say that no other period has appeared surpassing that in the general gloom and fear of Christendom, since the Son of God was crucified on Calvary. The earth again seemed to shiver as under the cross; the heavens to be veiling themselves in eclipse, like that which of old had shrouded Jerusalem from the sixth hour to the ninth. It looked as if the gospel had failed; as if the Church had wholly lost divine virtue amid the carnival of lust and blood; as if the wickedness of men had become too great to be longer endured; as if the history of the planet were about to be closed, might properly be closed, amid universal dread and death."

In those terms of splendid rhetoric quoted from the late Dr. R. S. Storrs is no exaggeration; but that dense night began soon, near the beginning of the eleventh century, to show symptoms of returning day, as one discovers in the very early morning when, altho the valleys continue wrapt in gloom, the lower slopes of the hills show the first faint flashes of a day that is still mostly beyond the horizon. During all that period of moral desolation there had been no destruction of the influences making for righteousness that had been borne into the world in the person of Christ. Nothing had been annihilated. Every beneficent force that had been in operation during the apostolic era still survived. The currents of divine grace by becoming subterranean had neither terminated their existence nor abated their power. And even the dark ages, so called, were, as the student of history so well understands, less a period of night than they were a season of storm, whose heavily charged clouds afforded fitful displays of the electric energy with which they were stored and which were pregnant with those possibilities of fruitfulness that later on descended in irrigating showers.

The same lesson of the persistent vitality of the truth is taught us again in the progressive emergence of the Christian Church from a condition of storminess and gloom as evinced in the steadfastness of the Waldenses

and considerably later in that gradual revival of primitive faith and life under the ministrations of Wyclif, Huss, Savonarola, and so on to the times of Luther and Calvin. Or if you desire still another illustration contemplate the condition of religious thought and the low tone of moral life as exhibited at the opening of the eighteenth century and then mark the process of moral and spiritual resurrection as it transpired under the influence of the Wesleys and their colleagues and adherents.

Without entering more deeply into the details of the history of religion and of morals, such illustrations suffice to indicate that the same principle is present and regulative in history as in nature, that once a good thing comes into existence it is there to stay—it is something that can be counted upon; that the machinery of history is not only furnished with a propulsive energy but that the propulsive energy is possess of a certain eternal validity, which while not uniform in the manner of its manifestation is uniform in the matter of its inwardly contained efficiency; that the truth once entered into action never wears out; that while it may pass under an eclipse or rather while men may voluntarily and purposely pass out of the range of its influence, it exists with an unrepealed and an unabated energy. We may stand outside of the sunshine for a score of years, but when we step within it again we shall be brightened and warmed, for the sun never ceases to be sunny. The scientific doctrine of the conservation of forces is as true in the spiritual as in the physical realm.

Now in the same manner that standing outside of the sunshine works within us that sense of chill that drives us back again into the sunshine, so when we have stood for a time out of the range of the beneficent influences once known to the world and to us, influences whether of person or of truth, there comes to us a similar sense of chill, and the like feeling of moral chilliness crowds us back into the warmth again, and a consciousness of darkness urges us once more toward the light. It is for that reason that conditions that are desperately evil effect within us or in society a moral revulsion, and people are never so stirred to their moral depths as in the presence of iniquity that is atrociously bad. That is the ministry that is rendered by the Judases, whether of the first century or the twentieth: they bring us back into

range with the interminable efficiency of some reality, some holy thing or other that once existing always exists, never fades out, never becomes a back number, never is abandoned nor lost, a part of the inextinguishable treasury of God and of His world. That is the ground for the debt of gratitude that we owe to bad men if only they are sufficiently bad, sufficiently treacherous, sufficiently contemptuous of constituted authority, sufficiently sunk in the mire of their own lusts and greed and withal sufficiently conspicuous in the publication of their depravity to diffuse throughout the community at large a sense of the murkiness of the atmosphere which we are respiring. If we had become a little indifferent and half-hearted and slipshod in the matter of individual or public righteousness such display draws us back within range of the eternal idea that righteousness stands for and expresses, and we find and feel the power that is in the idea, always is in it, a star that is never dimmed, a dynamic that is never palsied, God-minted coin that never tarnishes, one of the jewels that is never lost.

It is this fact of the eternal validity of what is good, the unabated verity and power of what is true, that enables us to regard with entire composure those periods in the life of Christ's Church, when, for whatever cause, the excellencies and realities of the gospel tell upon the world with less evident effect. The actions and reactions of the past nineteen hundred years make it sufficiently evident that Christ and all that He incarnates in the way of life, righteousness, and love, is something which, now that He has once come into the world, the world can not permanently elude; that we can not permanently escape its influence and dominance. It is like those cometary bodies that form part of our solar system, and that swing off into the incalculable depths of space, but which, when they have had a surfeit of centrifugance, begin to be mindful once more of the central orb to which by the ordinance of their own constitution they are bound, and slowly wheeling upon their racks beat their swift and magnificent way homeward, in lustrous acknowledgment of the solar sovereignty to which they owe their allegiance.

The truth which we have been emphasizing and illustrating is one that is bound to recur to us with quieting and sweetening power whenever there passes out from our midst, or from the midst of the community at large,

a life that has been strong in the virtues, and radiant with the graces, that compose beautiful and heroic character. It is then that we may well bethink ourselves of the orbit which such a life has pursued, of the spaces through which that orbit has led, and of the individualities, susceptible to every influence, which have thronged those spaces, and which have received, each of them, communications shed upon them by the moving luminary under whose baptism of light and fervor it has been their inestimable privilege for a time to stand. Human spirits—whether of men or women—framed upon broad lines, and distinguished by those features that are the touch upon them of the finger of God, are only then commencing to fulfil even their earthly mission, when they have arrived at the point of transition to the shining fields, and that every influence for good—which because it is an influence for good can not be lost but has in it the essence of eternity—that every influence for good which they have exerted, every living demonstration of the truth which they have made, every impulse of tender service which they have communicated, is, from that moment on, a working possession in the souls of all who have come into any kind of personal touch, who have become sharers in the blessedness of the inspiriting contagion, and who have been made thereby possessors of possibilities which only the life everlasting will be sufficient fully to expand and to bring to final fruition.

And it is all of this great matter that especially confronts us when the question turns upon the value of life, and upon the question whether life is really worth living. Life is worth living, not so much because of what we get out of it, but because of what we put into it, and that, too, not alone what we put into our own life but what that life of ours turns over into the fund of the general life. And if there be in us any fine thought, any wealthy aspiration, any tender sentiment, there is no end to what we can do, to what we are doing, in the way of planting just those seed-kernels of high and sweet impulse in the bosoms of others. If we are possessed of any of the spirit of Christ, what more urgent stimulus do we need than to know that there is not a true word that we speak, a noble service that we render, that has not come into the world to stay, that has not become a deposit in the treasury of God and of God's

world, and instinct with the genius of immortality. It is not the ring of the word nor the size of the act that fixes for it its long-pulsing destiny, but its inherent verity, its intrinsic jewel-beauty, diamond-luster. Why if a bit of sunshine that slipped from the sun a million years ago has been kept of God in the treasure-house of the coal-beds, and to-day beams out upon you from the glowing hearth, how much more may we believe that so minute a thing, even as a sweet smile, that delicate ray of human sunshine, is a part of the treasured wealth of

God and kept forever in the casket of whatever soul it once enters into in gentle solace or sweet inspiration.

No good thing is ever lost. Such things are treasures laid up in heaven, secure from theft, unimperiled by moth or rust. It is a great thing to live, is it not, when you remember that any hallowed influence that issues from you to-day quietly enters into the current whose flow is always onward toward the eternal fields, diffusing sweetness and freshening along ever-widening lines and circles of impulse.

SHOW US THE FATHER*

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Philip saith unto Jesus, Lord, show us the Father. . . . Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.—John 14:8, 9.

“Show us the Father!” In saying this, Philip expresses, unknowingly, all the aspirations of religious humanity.

The great writer, Peter Rosegger, has entitled one of his books, “Der Gottsucher” (“The Seeker of God”). When he wrote this title, he used a name by which man can be designated, the complete man, deprived of none of the higher faculties and characteristics of his being. Man is a seeker of God.

We say it, first, to all nature: “Show us the Father!” And, altho our thinkers and philosophers have objected, it is none the less true that, in order to combat the error of seeking God in material nature, we are obliged to begin that way. It is wisdom itself; it is the road which God has indicated, as the one leading from the ephemeral to the eternal.

If Christ has said: Consider the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, was He not sure that a gracious message was inscribed upon the petals of those lilies? Did He not feel that every sparrow which spreads its wing is a dove from the ark, sent to humanity with a message, fragmentary, it is true, but a message from Him who is hidden behind the veil of the material world?

We must, therefore, appreciate to its full value this search for God in nature. We must “drink of the tenderness and eat of the

fear” of the creation which surrounds us, now smiling like a mother, now terrible as a monster. But whatever our solace in finding the trace of the eternal Father upon the sands of our mortal shores; whatever the charm felt, at moments, in fleeing from the noisy cities and the feverish society of men, to seek the presence of God upon the heights, in the solitude and silence of a retreat, it is none the less true that there is an ancient and gigantic struggle between the living soul and exterior nature. If this nature is, at certain times, a transparent veil, scarcely covering the figure of the Father, it becomes for us, at other times, a black and fatal wall, against which both our minds and our hearts hurl themselves. Never can humanity accustom itself to the force of its violence, nor to its dreadful impassibility when, dumb, blind, and deaf, it crushes out existence after existence and becomes a tomb, in which man is buried alive with his love, his intellect, and his hope. The message of nature, summed up for us, is, after all, this: “Dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return.” Nature ends in nothingness; but man has no right to assent to his own nothingness nor to practise the resignation of the dead leaves.

When I think of the nature of that God who recounts to us at morning and repeats it at evening, when I think of His majesty and His insufficiency in satisfying our souls, I am reminded of a sad story.

One night, off the coast of Brittany, a ship was swallowed by the waves; she contained

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