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THE NEW INSPIRATION OF RELIGION.

BY

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AMERICAN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

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“The object of the American Unitarian Association shall be to diffuse the knowledge and promote the interests of pure Christianity ; and all Unitarian Christians shall be invited to unite and co-operate with it for that purpose.” — ARTICLE I. of the *By-Laws of the American Unitarian Association*.

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THE NEW INSPIRATION OF RELIGION.

“ For the invisible things of Him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his eternal power and Divinity.”

It is possible, though somewhat difficult, to imagine man without religion. But given any form of religion, ranging from the fetish worship of primitive people to the open-souled reception of the last returns from the universe, it is impossible to imagine a religion without inspiration. Even ethics must have passion, else it is a mere outline of behavior, and religion must have inspiration, else it is a mere body of divinity; and a body without inspiration is a corpse.

We have no difficulty in supposing that there have been inspired religions in the past; but the tendency in religion is to stereotyped forms, and that which is stereotyped is not inspired. It lacks the essential power of life and motion. The movable type may be rearranged in infinite variety; the stereotyped plate must be subjected to fire before it can be broken up. The mistake is often made in modern thought that we attribute inspiration to the past in the exact ratio of its remoteness; and we find it easy to believe in Saints, provided they are two thousand years old. But this claim for inspiration in the past justifies itself in the

fact that religion has produced in the past both prophets and scriptures. This is in all time the test of religion: *does it breed prophets and does it make scripture.* If it breeds no prophets, it is sterile. If it makes no scriptures, then it has ceased to have the living word spoken to it; because if to any human soul a living word be spoken that is deep enough in its resources and keen enough in its appeal, it must eventually make a scripture, a holy writing; it cannot die. We admit this freely of the past. We name the prophets. We have no difficulty in believing in Isaiah and Zachariah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah and all the rest. We have no difficulty, in assuming that not only has God spoken to the Hebrew; but that he has spoken to the Greek, the Hindoo, the Persian, and the Mohammedan, is more difficult, except to him who has faith in the universality of religion. Our prophets must be gray men, and our structure must be venerable with age.

Now, the purpose of that statement is not to deny the fact. The fact is manifest. There have been prophets and there have been scriptures; the prophet speaks still out of the past, and the Scripture remains. But the inquiry for us is to know what constitutes this inspiration which gave prophets and scriptures to the past.

FIRST, A CONVICTION OF REALITY. These men of the past had power to deal with things that were "not seen," as though they were still within experience. They spoke the vision of the inner eye; they declared that the eye which sees is not the eye of the Seer; but that the inner eye is fixed upon that which is more evident to it than any demonstration to sight. It was such a vision as when Job declared that the new revelation of God to the sufferer led him to say, "I have heard

of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye seeth Thee, therefore do I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

It is this sense of the reality of the unseen — this power of the invisible — which appears in that fine statement of the Epistle to the Hebrews with respect to Moses, that "he endured as seeing Him who is invisible." This is the meaning of the text "the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that do appear." There is to the prophet's eye an appearance that does not appear to the common man; as in the definition of Martineau, "The prophet is the man who has discovered to what heights of divinity he must look up, and upon what adamantine manhood he must take his stand." All this is freely admitted for the past. The sense of reality made the prophet the real man. But he had more than this sense of reality; the inspiration of religion in the past which bred prophets and made scriptures is due to the fact that BETWEEN THIS REALITY AND HIMSELF THIS INSPIRED MAN COULD ESTABLISH A RELATIONSHIP. He was not simply a looker-on at realities. They did not pass in parade before his eye. He was not simply the observer of a procession of the divine manifestations. He established divine relationships. He might well use the common phrase, "All this I saw, and part of it I was." So that his history was not simply his story of that which had appeared to him or was in plain sight, but that which also he felt, and the inner life arrayed itself and proceeded to constitute a part of the picture that he himself had seen.

But there is still another peculiarity that must test the ancient inspiration of religion. There was in the religion of the past, which, in some sort, still survives,

A POWER OF ABANDON TO THESE REALITIES that were perceived and under these conditions were established. I have said there was a sense of reality. That with this reality there were set up relations just exactly as real as the relation of lungs to atmosphere, or eye to light, or ear to sound. The whole relationship of the man to his environment, of function to its field of exercise, was in the prophet a sense of God. Not only was this true, but there was *an abandon* — a *letting one's self go* — to the full currents of inspiration of religion.

Now the question arises whether these conditions remain, and if they remain, whether they are less or more. For religion that is catalogued, labelled and shelved may be interesting as a part of the museum of human history, but is no longer potent as a part of the dynamic of personal life. If Religion has not new inspiration, it will not breed prophets; it will not make scriptures. My claim is that the new inspiration of religion produces profounder results, both in prophet and in scripture, as tested by the sense of reality, — the relationship established between the soul and the Real, and the abandon of the soul to the Reality. That is the proposition for which Unitarians make the claim of the present inspiration of religion.

Revelation is the coming of the present world into the range of the observer; its meaning and inspiration are tested by the effect upon him.

What is the test for the inspiration of these books of Hebrew religion? All the documents are anonymous, therefore you could not prove the writing. The documents are not equally valuable, because they are the product of a thousand years of growing literature. What is the proof, then, of their inspiration? The proof does not lie in your discovery of the inspiration

of the writer. It lies in your discovery of *the inspiration of the reader*. That which finds me, that which inspires me, is inspired for me; there may be equal inspiration in two documents, but there may be unequal susceptibility in the reader of the documents. For instance, many a man is inspired by Milton to whom Browning says nothing, and yet Milton and Browning were both the mouthpieces of God. The inspiration is to be found in the reader. "THAT IS INSPIRED WHICH INSPIRES." You see we get now the appeal to the individual as he stands fronting his universe, though the universe is not the same to every observer.

Allow me to illustrate that for a moment. The sidereal universe has widened away. We had at one time a Deity enthroned somewhere outside the world in a kind of oriental sovereignty and the world deployed its forces under his eye. Now there is nowhere for God to be enthroned because He is everywhere; and the *where* is lost in the *everywhere*; just as your sense of measures might be dropped into the sea of thought and you no longer spoke of inches, or of a yard, or fathoms and miles, but you spoke of depth and distance in gasps of the breath and in pulsations of the heart and in fine admirations of the soul. You see, the immensity of that which you sought to measure has simply defied measurement, but has become more real therefore. The universe always *is*. This Deity who was enthroned outside the world, and administered it with the arbitrary petulance of an oriental sovereign, has lost his meaning to the modern man. So meagre was our conception of God and His world that were it possible for an instant to re-establish His throne, a million worlds would cast their glory on His back. The Milky Way, which was a haze to the eyes a hundred years ago, pal-

pitates with worlds to-day. Have they come into being since then? They have been coming into view by better instruments for a hundred years. "One day is with God as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." That hundred years was the mere flicker of an eye; the mere momentary lifting of a thought in comparison to the eternities in which they have been coming into being. What has happened then? We have gained new instruments of observation. That is all. There was no lens strong enough to do more than bring the near planets nearer, a hundred years ago. Now, the great lenses, absolutely achromatic, through which the heavens are looked upon by the observer, have not created the heavens. They have simply revealed what has always been there. We have been lifted to them by better powers of observation. In the observatory of a great university they were photographing the stars; they discovered, as they thought, upon the plate after its exposure through the night, blurs and defects; they set again in its place the delicate plate for exposure through the night; there were the same blurs and defects upon the photographic plate, for which no one could account. What had happened? That which the eye could not see, even through the telescope, had looked into the telescope and had photographed itself upon the plate; it was worlds in-the-making which had registered themselves there as the revelation of the Eternal. The observer had caught the universe at work. One is reminded of the saying of Jesus, "My Father worketh up to this point and I work."

From the side of scientific thought the claim is made that life is enlarged, that experience is enriched, and as a result, therefore, revelation should be enhanced and inspiration deepened. Whatever enlarges experience

must *add new revelation*. *Whatever enriches experience must deepen our inspiration.*

What is the fact with respect to the scientific study of the world as to its effect upon religion? This history of thought in this respect has passed through three periods. In that supposed antagonism which existed between theology and scientific statement, the first period was marked by the question, How can we reconcile *what we hear* from science with *what we know* of religion? We can all remember the time when a nice adjustment was sought for the new fact to the old form; when we were trying to get a new specimen under the old catalogue; when we were trying to arrange not only the new working theory in science, but the new scientific fact, under some title which would account for it, and the constant question was, How can we reconcile what we hear from science with what we know of religion? Then there came the second period, in which the question was, How can we reconcile *what we have been taught* in religion with *what we know* in science? That shifted the emphasis, and it was no longer an equation on the old terms. Now, at last, we stand in the midst of that period when every devout and earnest soul must ask himself the question, *How can we pay the debt which religion owes to science?* Dismiss from your minds for all time the idea that you can pay it by giving up religion. That no scientific mind demands, and the scientific facts do not require. You cannot pay a debt by repudiating it. That is neither good economics nor good sense. What is the method which science has forced upon religion? It has reduced faith to its necessary and lowest terms. Man's universe, as I have said to you, has been immensely extended in time and space, in variety and in interest.

What has been the result? That in modern life we deal with things at first hand, and the claim upon religion is that it also shall be no longer quoted, but experienced. The Pharisee and the Scribe must be still, while the common man tells what he sees and feels. This is the heightening of the religious sense in man. We no longer quote, saying, "Rabbi (this or that) has said such a word in the past." No. We deal by scientific method with things at first hand, which introduces us to realities, establishes relations and enlarges experience. Religion will pay its debt to science when it realizes that this must be its method also.

There appears at once a certain peril to the timid. I have already intimated that the greater universe requires the greater God. If you will have your own idol, then the probability is that he will look like a pigmy on the immense pedestal which the world's thought has provided for him. He used to be "magnified and non-natural," now he will appear puny and unnatural. A pedestal for the enthroned divinity has been infinitely extended and enlarged, and to put your little cabinet God, who would interfere on demand with the order of nature with miracle for individual benefit, who had a kind of a sheriff-administration of the world for small offences, who had a special providence which was special for the saints and not for the atom as now it is, — to reconstitute your worship on the old terms before that shrine is to find your deity shrivelled under the light of modern thought and appear as a mere speck in a universe where once he loomed great and impressive. The timid soul realizes that the greater universe has changed all the conceptions concerning God, and the anthropomorphic deity, "the man-fashioned and non-natural" being, has disappeared out of the universe.

Another peril appears on the side of a threatened materialism which accounts for nothing, and we confuse the definitions of the new thought with the suspicion that there are no realities to correspond to them. How this has been carried forward appears in this simple statement from Dr. Martineau. He is speaking of this enlarged universe, of this supposed conflict between Religion and Science. He says:

“When it appeared that no commencement could be found, that cosmical time goes back through all that had been called eternity; that for the prefix of an almighty fiat no vacancy could be shown, the natural forces seemed to have secured the system of things all to themselves and to leave no room for their first appearance in succession to an earlier power. Faith, terrified at the prospect, vowed for a while to search somewhere for the crisis of their birth; and while inexorable discovery penetrated the past, taking the centuries at a stride, Faith kept beside upon the wing, watching with anxious eye for the terminal edge which looked into the deep of God; till at last, weary and drooping, she could sustain the flight no more, and to escape falling into the fathomless darkness, took refuge in the bosom of her guide, not to be repelled or crushed, as she had feared, but to be cherished and revived.”

This is the so-called reconciliation of Religion and Science, which is simply the discovery that God has not been banished by modern thought, and that the soul still lives and listens, and that the universe is vocal with the revelation of God's will.

Now, I call your attention, as briefly as I may, to the results of this new inspiration.

What has come of this new view of the universe? Of course, there are two or three things which happened

that one must deplore, but they have not happened as logical results. They have happened as earthquakes happen, where a city is engulfed because the planet is cooling; they have happened as when volcanoes kill because men have built their houses on the green slopes where a furnace glows beneath. The new thought of the universe has produced two results which we must deplore, but which I hold are unnecessary. The first is that men have supposed that the idea of cause, since it is no longer called Jehovah or by some tribal name, has passed out of the order of things. Whereas, what has happened to all thinking minds is this, that the idea of cause has taken its place alongside the idea of space and time as one of the data of our thinking, and we can no more think of the "uncaused" than we can think of that which is out of time and out of space. And so far from selecting now your deity for worship, you are haunted by a deity who will not be dismissed. God is upon every thinking man's track; and *atheism is impossible*. That is the first intellectual result. There are people who say they have given up God. They had no God. Having seen their idol taken away, they are in the position of Laban, who pursued after his daughter and said, "Take her, Jacob! Take my daughter to thine own land, but under the furniture of the camels there are my household gods, and those I will take back with me to my tent." That is the attitude of the irreligious man who supposed himself to be religious. Having had his deity conveyed away, he will part with every other consideration to get his idol back.

Another thing has happened which we must deplore, but which is not inevitable. When the repressive influences of the older forms of religion were taken off, the invertebrate creature dropped into a jelly mass

because it had been sustained only from the outside. You cannot produce a spinal column by external protection, and you cannot produce regeneration by external pressure, and you cannot make one of nature's creatures vertebrate by putting it into stays. When Hell was extinguished in the tears of the divine compassion, when the Day of Judgment ceased to be a spectacular expectation and became a present experience; when the Atonement failed to make men one with God, because God seemed to be no longer wrathful, but always forgiving; when all these repressive methods disappeared, the natural instincts came to the front, and I have no doubt that the charge is perfectly true that some men have "gone to the bad" because they have lost the old securities of religion. There are such people. But what happened when that other natural condition asserted itself? "They went to the bad"—they went "to their own place." They never were good. They simply were like hounds in leash, whose sense for the prey was always with them, restrained only by the collar and untamed in desire. When men, under the new aspects of religion, go into evil because they have lost their religion, it is because they simply have discovered themselves as deformed with basilar instincts; the brute element is waiting for its liberation. That is no fault of the newer time. It is the testimony to the fact that many of us are not yet human.

Now against this unlovely aspect set the real fact. What is the new inspiration for religion? It is a call to *communion with God*. I am "doomed to be saved;" I cannot escape God any longer. We read now with a meaning more intense and beautiful than ever before that splendid One Hundred and Thirty-ninth Psalm:

"Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, and whither

shall I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend into heaven, Thou art there. If I make my bed in the under world, behold Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and fly unto the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me and Thy right hand shall hold me. If I say the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me; for the darkness hideth not from Thee, but the night shineth as the day."

The splendid reality of the soul's experience is found in a more intimate communion and deeper sense of God. There are men to-day, called scientific, who, in the agony of their earnestness, will not assume any religious name, who are as religious as Ezekiel was in his effort to make Jerusalem a place of righteousness, or Jeremiah in his plaint over the sins of the people. They have an utter sincerity, cardinal virtue, passion for righteousness, ethical earnestness, willingness to have the universe on its own terms, and have it no other way. If that be not the test of a deeper sense of God, I do not know what its symptoms are. And instead of coming to God as in the old way, calling — calling across the gulf to where He may be — He finds me where I am; and when I am still, the footfall which I hear may be His step. I cannot escape Him. It is not simply now that "underneath are the everlasting arms," but we are shut in with God, and this deeper communion and keener sense of the Eternal is the contribution of the new time to the utterly sincere soul.

The new inspiration of religion has made this contribution also: It has made a distinct contribution to the *courage of life*. If religion does not add zest to life, then it fails, so far. It is not simply something to comfort me when I am in trouble. That were an imported influence; that were an imparted presence, but

since religion is nature at her highest and human nature at its best; since religion is a passionate devotion to the will of God, and finds that Will written on every page of the Book of Life, it is not something that is to comfort me when I am at my lowest; it is something to hearten me when I am at my busiest. It has added zest to life. Religion is not a raft shoved out to a sinking man, but it is the clothing of the mind; it is the blood which goes through the veins; it is the heart of courage that is beneath all other things; it is the zest of every day's experience. Now, this contribution is made by the modern thought of God and life as an inspiration to religion; its courage is heightened; you are no longer afraid; God is no longer propitiated, not because it is impossible but because it is unnecessary; God is no longer feared; not because He is turned towards us, but because we have discovered that He had never turned away; and the splendid courage of modern thought concerning God is bedded and embosomed in the thought that this universe which is Himself — or His garment, if you will — flames with that Inner Life which we have discovered to be the Light of God. And so the man who believes on the terms of modern Thought in God says there is nothing in God's world to be afraid of. Does he look out at the future? His utterance then is such a word as Emerson's, "All that I have seen of God's work in the world leads me to trust for that I have not seen; and whatever it is that the Divine Providence has in reserve for us, it must be something large and in the grand style of His work." Thus there is a distinct heightening of the courage of the human soul under the new inspiration of religion.

And, finally, we get a *new interpretation of faith*. Faith used to be thought of as something independent

of or exceeding the ordinary reasoning of life. This is not faith, but credulity; after the manner of Tertullian in the third century, saying "I believe it because it is impossible." Rather take that better word of the same Tertullian, and it is more native to our present thought — "The soul divines what is divine." It was in one of his better moments that he said this. We get now a new definition of faith, and it is a distinct advance in the inspiration of religion. Faith is not the acceptance any longer of the unproved and unprovable on the testimony of somebody in whom I believe. Religion is no longer supported upon two great pillars, miracle and prophecy. The miracle may occur, but if it occurred every day of the week, it would not only cease to be a miracle, but it would still be external to the soul; and no bridge can be built from any spiritual experience to any physical wonder; and the old, blind instinct of common sense, like another Samson, has gone into this idolatrous structure of religion, sustained upon these two pillars of miracle and prophecy, and flinging its arms about the supports has dragged them from their foundation. Did religion perish when these supporting pillars fell? No. It was not really dependent upon these supposed supports. It was sustained by other guaranties of strength in the human soul itself. It was bedded in deeper foundations, and the pillars that were supposed to hold the canopy above the worshipping soul proved to be the temporary devices of human fancy. That is all. They were the ornament of the age that produced them, just as much as an arch or a turret may be. So that faith is no longer the statement of the unproved and unprovable upon somebody's word in whom we believe. *Faith is the loyalty of the soul.* I would not have the world other than it is, in all

its natural forces; but I would make it other than it is in its social discredit and reproach; the faithful man to-day, the man of faith, accepts God's work as perfect, and matches human work to that ideal; the loyal soul is the faithful soul. The faithful soul would not have the universe jarred out of its course because he happens to be in the path of danger. He accepts the terms it sets for him; he accepts his life upon the terms he has discovered in the normal condition of the world, and instead of putting faith in place of reason, he demonstrates that faith is twin with reason.

For the first time in the history of the world religion seems really native to man. God is not sought any longer. He is the next of kin and lives in thy house. He is not importuned any longer, for "He knoweth what things you need before you ask Him." He is not atoned-to any longer, for His unvarying compassions are the breath of our life. He does not interfere any longer; He asks us simply to work to His plan; and interference is excluded in perfect life. He does not ask us to believe that which discredits our intelligence; for the proof of our faith is the rise of our intelligence to His thought. He does not threaten us with some remote Day of Judgment, but sets us shivering in the presence of our neglected ideal. He does not harry us with some exaction which we cannot abide, but He haunts us with the imperative ideal of beauty and of life. He does not reward us by a heaven to which we must travel; our heaven descends and is now. He does not offer us a refuge from Himself, but a home in Himself. And the brotherhood of the race might raise this day a song of praise unto the Eternal because it has discovered "the Divinity of man and the Humanity of God."

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