The Angel in the Garrison

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The attempt of modern science to establish a psychology as definite and as authentic as biology is like the fish's to leap a waterfall's upstream.
Long ago had our racial consciousness slipped over the brink of spiritual power into the shallows below. Our self-knowledge has come to be determined by that inferior level where power may sometimes, indeed, flow in as from above, but where power is neither to be created nor maintained. Perhaps it would be more accurate to assert that psychology has ceased even attempting to re-ascend the stream: officially, at least, it is more like the second generation of fish that, spawned beneath the falls, feels only a vague instinct of the height which gives its own waters renewal. In modern psychology as taught in the schools there may be much logos, but there is no psyche. The mind's camera has been exposed in a darkened room.

For the essence of this matter is that the psyche is not spiritual fact observable, but a spiritual power to observe all fact. It is not a series of mysterious observations which can be organized into authentic knowledge, it is a mysterious but authentic gift to know. It is not an image of things within which may or may not be real; it is an inner eye which may or may not be possessed. True genius, scientific as well as religious, has always been aware of this fact.

The method of this "psychology" was borrowed, of course, from natural science. Natural science is organized knowledge, definite fact, authenticated observation. Its field of observation is nature; its power of observation is intellect. Now intellect transcends the phenomena of nature as the physical eye transcends the objects upon which it turns its vision. The intellect may, indeed, misapprehend the significance of phenomena in particular instances, as in particular instances the eye may erroneously determine perspective, but from the very nature of things the most unintelligent mind cannot fall to a level of consciousness lower than the phenomenon itself. Its relative advantage remains secure in the same way that the relative advantage between vision and visioned

remains secure to the eye. Here there can be no question of the knower slipping downstream with respect to the thing known. Man is fast anchored upstream to the rest of nature as the animal is anchored upstream to the plant, or the plant to the mineral. The problem of natural science, therefore, was never the problem of establishing its own power to know, but merely to establish authentic knowledge of things knowable from the beginning. The mind has grown more accurate through training, but the mind was trained, not created, by its dealings with natural phenomena. Mind created science, science did not create mind. But because our age has been influenced, with respect to consciousness, by the authority of the natural sciences more than from any other source, we have come unquestioningly to accept the dictum of science concerning the proper method of investigating consciousness itself.

But the essential superiority of the knower to the known which obtains between rational intelligence and natural phenomena by no means determines the relation of knower to known as between rational consciousness and the essential nature of man. The most that any psychologist can claim for his own consciousness is that it exists, but its existence, obviously, is conditioned by its position relative to the entire stream. The psychologist's self-consciousness may appear to him complete and aware of no higher existences, but this very completeness may conceivably correspond to a mere stagnant pool shut off from the main current. For even the most dogmatic psychologist cannot avoid the differentiation between minds, the differentiation manifested perceptibly between Shakespeare and his readers, for example, or between Christ and his followers. But the materialistic psychologist explains all such differentiation without altering the essential character of his own consciousness in the least—without even, apparently, realizing any need for altering it. He explains genius, whether religious or artistic, by establishing its factors in terms of heredity, environment or physiological status. Genius appears to him either a greater accumulation of elements present in every mind, or their mere superior arrangement, or, on the contrary, their disarrangement into abnormal states. In other words, he translates the phenomena of consciousness into a medium lower than consciousness itself. He breaks consciousness up into elements similar in degree to the elements which are the raw material, the objective, of natural science. Since the psychologist cannot remove the manifestation of genius—its religion or its poetry—he solicits every possible circumstance of heredity, environment and physiology to sustain his own inherent, unalterable conscious perspective, thereby, for the unwary, obscuring the very fact at issue: that genius is not the power of impression but the power of expression. Genius renders from the inside out, while the psychologist can only register from the outside in. He consequently emphasizes heredity, environment and physiological status because these are all three alike external, material conditions supremely significant to minds whose power of impression surpasses their power of expression, though they are supremely insignificant to minds conscious of possessing an independent creative force. This is not to assert that heredity, environment and physiological factors do not condition expression, for they do; but their influence is limited to

conditioning the form, the extent and sometimes the direction which expression assumes: not one of them singly, not all combined, can explain the force by which they are shaken into significant patterns of character and art. Heredity may be as the oil of the lamp, environment may be as the colored globe, and physiological status as the wick, but genius is the flame. To establish the formula of genius in terms of neurotic instability is to betray unmistakably at last the spiritual prostitution to which science has fallen in these latter days. Its triumph is the triumph of logic merely, which convinces only those who start from the same premise; an ominous triumph in this case, since the authority of science has been able to transform much of the world's reverence for valuable spiritual gifts into indifference or sympathetic contempt as for the victim of some mysterious mental ill.

Though responsibility for accepting a material psychology may be forgiven the general, it is more difficult to overlook the responsibility of the scientist himself. He should have recalled the early history of his own subject, the days of Galileo and Kepler, when reason itself, as the power of establishing authentic laws of matter, was upstream to the priest's consciousness; when the priest, consequently, began his attack against reason by denying its validity and ended by condemning it as a dangerous perversion of human nature. In those days the scientist had to defend himself against a consciousness intellectually so much lower that its attack must have seemed as unreasonable to him as would be the attack of so many trees. But today the psychologist himself, since he cannot create art must obviously be downstream to the artist, just as, since he cannot create devoted faith and self-sacrifice among multitudes of people over centuries of time, he must be even farther downstream with respect to the founders of religion. Had the modern materialist, however, realized the case of his own predecessor, he might have felt himself into the profound truth so far denied his reason; that while language is universal, experience is confined to those inhabiting the same spiritual domain. Religious conviction today, in a world of rational materialism, occupies the same position relative to the scientist as the scientist, in those days of dominant theology, occupied relative to the priest. The position is that of a Macbeth against whom advances the nightmare of Birnum wood.

Into a world rationalized as regards ideal if not action, religion has unexpectedly returned, renewing in men the strange lost sense of the soul. Slipping easily through the meshes of biological "truth," and become a force in consciousness itself, this spiritual renaissance cannot be denied—like an angel in the garrison it can only be recognized and obeyed. By individuals, religious experience can be cherished for its own sake in the very teeth of reason; but one may be certain that in this pragmatic age religion may not establish social forms until science has come to terms with its every claim. The task of testing religion, of course, was never rightly the province of biology, and only appeared so while religion was considered in the perspective of history. In the personal perspective, which its return compels, the task falls once more to psychology. But the psychology born of natural science, as shown, rests upon an absolutely false premise. Its premise does not

contain that easily vulnerable falsehood which can be disclosed in terms of the correspondence of phenomena; its premise is the more impregnable falsehood consisting in the fact that the psychologist himself is essentially incapable of fulfilling his function. It is not his method which fails, but his experience. He develops his mental film capably enough. The trouble is that the film is blank.

II.

To indict the psychology, therefore, is to indict the psychologist himself. But to indict the psychologist is also to render verdict against the society accepting a premise whose error it never required an elaborate laboratory or special instruction to expose, but only the determination of the individual heart to safeguard its own fairest hope. Society accepted a material psychology because its strongest determination fell in the material world. Spiritual affirmation there has been, even under the reign of the gods of coal and iron, but affirmation which cast back to the days when science could reasonably be ignored. Increasingly now there is spiritual experience among those who would not ignore science even if they could, but these minds still hesitate to press their claims against an authority traditionally opposed to that claim, and one whose method and positive achievement they rightly admire.

The scientific mind came to be considered the true type of supreme intelligence as the result of three distinct influences: the triumph of science over theology in the question of facts; the positive achievement of science in its own field; and last but not least, the rise of universal education. The rapid spread of literacy, and the growing need of education as part of one's equipment for labor, served to identify science with the new effectiveness and advantages of education itself. Knowledge came to imply book knowledge, and the reader of books attributed his own new sense of increased power, naturally enough, to the sources from which it was chiefly supplied. The triumph of natural science as ideal standard of truth was made complete by the basis it seemed to render all men for a conviction of intellectual self-sufficiency. But universal education was made possible only by enthroning the lowest of all intellectual faculties, memory. Memory alone will give the student possession enough of his texts to meet an institutional standard, because institutional standards necessarily make education a matter of receptivity; and the mastery of only a few books under this system creates in the student's mind the conviction that he could, if he so desired, succeed to the heritage of all human wisdom. All human wisdom supposedly being reducible to three feet of wood-pulp and leather. It would be merely a question of adding more rungs to the ladder already begun. This feeling on the part of students has created a tendency on the part of their masters to re-write all old works for which a new need was felt—especially history and philosophy—and to re-write them in terms of the modern standard. In the process of translating history and philosophy into the language of economic values, much unsound material undoubtedly was cut away; but the translators cut away also even more material which had permanent significance as witnessing the faith of men in their own

spiritual destiny. Faults of an unscientific material were attributed to the maker's mind; an easy superiority of fact was considered an equally easy superiority of intelligence. Thus another influence was added to the economic pressure already operating toward opportunism, and cooperating with it prevented the average person from perceiving the gap intervening between the receptive mind, whose faculty is memory, and the creative mind, whose faculty is insight. The heritage to all human wisdom, the proud boast of democracy in education, is a heritage of external fact merely. To the true heritage of wisdom, the quality attaching to minds independently of their material, there have appeared few heirs; for minds so trained, so penetrated from the beginning with the need to go on, ever on, through field after field of fact, seldom have opportunity to realize that there soon comes a point where the longest ladder will not serve, but wings are required. Never suspecting his own inadequate psychic instrument, the modern layman does not suspect the inadequacy of the scientist's intelligence for the task of psychology. The scientist, indeed, has only succeeded to the Parthian victory of the priest—that victory whose tragedy consists in the fact that, having been too easily won, it leads the victor to overestimate his own powers.

For these reasons, then, the nineteenth century was content to huddle upon one small island in the sea of human consciousness. It not only cut itself off from the larger area of ancient experience, but even vaunted its own ability to do so as the symbol of truest intellectual freedom. But that small island has been revealed in all its abject desolation by the War. Two waves of experience, rolling from opposite directions, have overwhelmed it forever: the soldier's consecration to a spiritual power not received from without but welling up in his own being, and the civilian's realization that social stability, even for prosperity on its lowest terms, requires a directive force not resident in the scientific ideal. The scientific ideal has served not life but death, thereby revealing itself less as the criminal to be punished than as the servant to be put under control. Its authority to establish a final standard of truth has, at any rate, been discredited; the problem now is rather to organize a new conviction than to reinterpret an old doubt.

III.

As a matter of fact, at the very moment when the cleavage appears between consciousness and natural phenomena, the real contribution science has made the race in the way of thought now first becomes evident. Turning once more, in the light of personal aspiration, to direct contact with spiritual conviction in its original sources, we are struck by the fact that this conviction, from lack of precise and mutual knowledge, possessed an inadequate instrument of thought by which to express itself to other minds. The soul of the older, pre-scientific race expressed itself as a kind of poetry, by allusion and image; expression whose content is therefore necessarily limited to those sharing the key. Real enough to the possessor, religion became dark and shadowy in the process of transfer from one to another mind. Viewed from the perspective of inexperience, its concepts are as actors whose backs are turned

to the audience, losing the plot in the mazes of half-heard echo. The man of religion spoke a language apart, a lover's language, certain that his every wingéd word would find a nest in the heart of him moved by the same passion; unable to image that passion completely to the cold. In other words, religion was given the race in the form of implicit knowledge, a knowledge continually betrayed when translated into the medium of customary speech. But science, creating an external universe mutually perceptible and firmly grasped, has made knowledge explicit. Steeped in the habits of explicit thought, the modern mind differs from the ancient mind not so much in thinking different thoughts as in thinking the same thoughts in a different way. Science has placed the transfer of experience upon a new, socialized basis. The actor now faces his audience, revealing the whole plot. One mind can give its all to another mind through their mutual possession of the same external universe. Slowly but surely knowledge has been turned inside out. This fact, the necessity of science, is also the opportunity of religion. For the first time may we perceive another's as positive light in the world of communicable thought, not merely as negative shadow. For the first time is the mystery of being captured from knowledge, where it perishes, and given the knower, where it lives on. For the first time also can religion be socialized above and beyond ritual and form on the plane of instruction. And the development of mind as self-consciousness from thought implicit to thought explicit actually turns both ways, enabling us to perceive at last that religion and science required one another from the beginning—that the relation of one to the other, in fact, is nothing more or less than the relation of soul and body in the social organization.

PART 2

If the real problem at issue were the difference in degree which exists between the consciousness of the material psychologist, or the believer in material psychology, and the man who has undergone spiritual experience, the argument would stick fast on the shoals of practical impossibility. But this is not the problem at issue. However it may appear, spiritual experience is not a personal, untransferable gift, like talent or temperament. The chief point to be examined is less that the "spiritual" mind differs from the "material" mind in degree than that, wherever on the stream of reality the latter happens to be located, it faces the other way. The material mind faces downstream. This is the source of their disagreement, that the scientific attitude has its back to the religious attitude. The scientific attitude is concerned with a reality not only downstream to spiritual attainment, but downstream to its own being. Its point of view upon the human drama is the point of view of the lower natural order. The properties of its spectacles it attributes to its eye.

For the basis of science is the conviction that conscious states derive as effects from physiological conditions. This conviction is one capable of proof. The proof itself is unquestionably sound to those establishing it. The proof consists of fact as well as theory, of demonstration as well as hypothesis. The proof cannot rationally be denied, but actually, however, it can be

overstepped. For physiological conditions, while they do determine states of consciousness, and do so in human conduct as rigorously as the procedure of mathematics, are causal only for the minds facing downstream. The law holds, but it is not the only law. For minds facing upstream—even from the bottom of the stream itself—another law, apparently contradictory, operates. For the consciousness which has learned to seek its reality upstream, in the spiritual order, that which was cause becomes effect, and that which was effect becomes cause. Consciousness dilates, aware of itself as knower rather than mere repository of knowledge, as steadfast love rather than capricious lover; regards its previous state as death compared to life, as seed compared with flower; and stepping as it were from the moonlight of reflected being into the sunlight of being direct and essential, perceives the tyranny of nature replaced by the intimate regard of one all-sustaining Friend. This is the difference, then, between the two attitudes we call spiritual and material: that the spiritualized mind faces the sun of life, the materialized mind its own projected shadow.

Much confusion exists as the result of the terms “inner” life and “outer” life, which serve less to distinguish the upstream from the downstream of consciousness than to oppose inactivity to activity of conduct. The mind turned upon itself for nourishment too frequently asks for bread and receives a stone. The mind’s sustenance is actually not what it contains, in the way of acquired ideas or even personal talents, but what it receives, in the way that a spring receives fresh water or a flower receives light. The well-stored mind, especially the mind with a talent, undoubtedly has, in comparison, a semblance of independent “inner” life, but this independence is by comparison merely, as by comparison the camel is able to go without food. The real life of man is not thought but recognition of God. The first step toward real life is not to acquire more ideas, but to effect a different attitude. In other words, the first step is to turn consciousness about from a downstream perception to a perception upstream. This involves the mind as the mirror of reality, not as the storehouse of impressions. Memory and imagination are not concerned; what is concerned is insight, the dove sent forth from the ark of consciousness to find a point of dry land.

Here lies the preliminary difficulty which diverts many modern minds from spiritual attainment to psychic development—that in and by itself the intelligence is not a boat which can readily be turned about, but rather like the breath by which the mirror is obscured. The capacity of minds to take on new ideas and discard old ones is not like the ship’s freedom of movement about the sea, but the passenger’s freedom about the ship. It does not avoid the consequences of wreck, if toward wreck the vessel is directed. All the customary faculties, memory, will, reason, which in the material mind are concerned with the lesser interest, and exist in terms of the lesser interest, must be detached from that object and made to function for a different end. That change in the character of consciousness which transmutes material into spiritual being depends upon an awareness of self not as passenger in the ship, but as the ship itself.

Spiritual development, consequently, is a matter of humility, that humility which follows the loss of the sense of independence self-contained. The true nature of humility is not hateful self-abasement, but the perception of an object of devotion which creates a joy so profound that self is forgot. An example of real humility is the youth possessing elements of greatness in art. At this stage, the mind is downstream to attainment, but pointed upstream to attainment in others because this attitude serves the instinctive best interests of the awakening mind. It receives impressions from the masterpieces of art in the only way that impressions retain their dynamic quality, by giving them entrance into the mind as from above, in terms of the same qualities by virtue of which the masterpieces were originally created. It reverences that aspect of other minds which it reverences in itself. Genius is far nearer the attitude of humility than is mediocrity. It is the capacity for humility which sets one upon the way of power. That capacity is never a matter of the physical will, whose instinct is to dominate, but of the spiritual will, whose nature is to be inspired. In the spiritual world, the virtues arrange themselves in a scale the reverse of the physical virtues. Possession and domination follow last; the foremost are obedience and response.

But obedience and response bring strength only to the mind which has found levels of being higher than its own. To respond to new impulses within self, originated by self, merely substitutes one incapacity for another. Darkness can not drive itself away, it flees only from light. Efforts to achieve religion through a mere understanding of new ideas may change the image in the mirror; it will not remove the blur. One confronts the fact here that religion has nearly everywhere been reduced to the lower terms of knowledge or conduct, so that society closes round the inquiring mind a darkness like its own. All things of all lives can be explained in terms of material intelligence, for every experience entering the material intelligence, either at first or second hand, takes on the shadow of the closed room. The problem as to whether spiritual reality actually exists is not like the question as to whether a certain picture hangs in a locked room, which depends upon the picture, but the question is whether the picture contains the quality of beauty, which depends also upon the inquiring eye.

The book of Job is the eternal drama of the search for God, for spiritual reality, on the part of a consciousness surrounded by materialism. The name of religion is constantly employed, and the authority of religion freely acknowledged, but the miracle of the spiritual life cannot be performed. Job himself was one with his environment until cast outside its resources by extremity of misfortune and pain. Even when feeling himself outside, he turns again and again to it for consolation. Job’s friends typify the various ideas held about the spiritual life by complacently darkened minds. One and all, these are but material attitudes disguised under the terminology of faith. One and all, they represent mind in its relation to the downstream of experience—their content is derived from the usages of society, and all they actually know of the eagle is the empty net. The God of Job’s friends is nature adapted to the social organism. But the walls of Job’s mind have been

broken through as by the weight of a falling tree. He has learned the limit of darkness for the first time through the power of light. Little by little his being adapts itself to the direct rays of the sun, until his intelligence formulates the astonishment of the sprouted seed. He stands outside himself as the sprout stands outside the seed; all his senses respond to their vital power of expansion through a new cycle of growth. From being one who had derived all his happiness from possession, he becomes one who brings to possession a greater joy. From being dependent on things, he learns to render the material world to his new vision as means to an end. He learns that spiritual reality is not the mirage of social prosperity, but social prosperity is its mirage. He learns that the way to God is not that narrow, crowded gate which typifies social competition, but the freedom of every sail to receive the wind once the sail has been unfurled. The path of the spirit brings many agonies, but these have to do with unfurling the sails; never do they mean that the wind has fallen to a dead calm.

In his endeavor to reach upstream to that self we make remote under the cloudy title “soul,” Job left behind every element of thought and emotion, every faculty and attribute, and breasted the current only by becoming one selfless detachment from desire. His consciousness passed as it were through the narrow door of death, where the back carries no burden and the hands no gift. His lost lands and his lost loves merely objectify his loss of the habitual factors of self; his physical agony in the same way represents supreme mental confusion, the quivering patches of shadow and light. But on the further side of that door, when the process came to fulfillment, to Job was rendered back his memory and will, his desires and thoughts and emotions, his recognitions and relationships—all the possessions of self by which being is maintained. But their moment of annihilation in “death” had severed their attachment to the physical centers of life; and their return was as the agencies of spirit. Immortality ascended into his life as sap to the bud in spring. Without physical death, he entered heaven from the earth of his own nature. The heaven he entered was not merely that easier environment which allows “soul” to exist as summer allows existence to the butterfly; it was itself established through the power of his own new perception. Soul does not come by wishing for heaven—heaven comes with the attainment of soul. All the emphasis religion brings to bear on life, in material societies, is vain and sterile by reason of our submission to the mere continuity of time. We remain on the surface of self as the fly upon water. We recognize the supreme transformations of death, but we attribute them to the physical death shared by the serpent and the weed. We develop the strength of giants for the downstream of things, but for their upstream reality we remain as children in the womb. The defensive armor we have cast from our bodies we still retain for our minds. We avoid the Armageddon of self by keeping within that darkened cave where the sun of truth enters not.

There are three stages in spiritual development; the first is that in which consciousness is like the passengers in a ship, borne they know not where; in the second stage, consciousness becomes as it were the ship itself; but in the third stage it seems like the very sea. To the ship, storms are ominous,

fatal—to the sea they are passages of its eternal music, evidences of its greatness, renewers of its power. From this condition the soul looks out upon the world neither as conqueror nor slave, but as an actor in the drama of God.

The reason that a spiritual leader like Gandhi seems to be recognized by the world more readily than is the spiritual Servant, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, comes from the fact that Gandhi’s influence operates directly in the field of politics, which everybody understands and most people consider supremely important, while ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s influence operates directly upon the unseen world of the soul, which alas few people give the first or in fact any vital place in the scheme of life. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was and is invisible to all save those who are truly humble: to them he is more visible than the sun. In the steadfastness of this supreme conviction the friends of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá may gaze serenely out upon the epic happenings of the day, beholding Job relived in the struggles and agonies of humanity itself; pain multiplied everywhere as never before, until through darkness as of annihilation, men become aware of the sound of the Voice of God.

Excerpts
Fiction
Glossaries
Guardian
Histories
Introductory
Letters
Maps
Music
Newspapers
NSA-documents
NSA-letters
Personal
Pilgrims
Poetry
Presentations
Resources
Reviews
Scripts
Software
Statistics
Study
Talks
Theses
Transcripts
Translations
UHJ-documents
UHJ-letters
Video
Visual
Writings

inventory

bibliography

abbreviations

links

about

contact

RSS

new

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