

The World Vision of a Savant

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The World Vision of a Savant

Auguste Henri Forel

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Dr Forel is one of the greatest scientists in the world and the greatest living authority on ants. His life has been devoted to humanitarian aims and purposes; he is a thinker, a scholar, a doer. He has been very active in temperance work in Europe at a time when public opinion was wholly on the opposite side. He is a man who believes in deeds rather than words, and when he took up temperance reform, he had his vineyards destroyed.

True science should occupy itself only with what man can know. Now, we can know things only through the channel of our senses—sight, hearing, touch, and so forth. These take the impressions of the exterior world to our brain by the aid of the nerves. The human brain, of which I have made a profound study from 1872 to 1907, comparing it as well as its functions to that of animals—this human brain is an organ weighing on the average twelve hundred and eighty grams, the cerebrum alone weighing about one thousand grams. It is composed of very tiny, interrelated nerve cells or neurones, of which it contains millions which are connected one with another by their fibres and their minute filaments. At a distance, these ramifications become covered with a white sheath which we call nerves, whether in the brain itself or serving to enter it or leave it.

The nerves of our senses enter the brain to carry to it their sensations; the nerves called motors leave the brain in order to direct our muscular movements which we call our will. But between the two, in the interior of the cerebrum, the living force which calls our attention travels from one neurone to another, combining there our sensations and our feelings in order to make of them immediate perceptions, then concepts, and finally abstract ideas with the aid of words, whether spoken or written. All these combinations demand their continual recall to our self-consciousness which is the synthesizing power over them.

Before the motor nerves leave the cerebrum, the attention is carried to the combinations mentioned above and concentrates on a group of neurones called **motors**, which are situated on each side of the centre of the brain. With the

aid of the motor nerves, the attention causes the transportation of the said combinations mentioned above to the spinal column, then to the outer nerve systems of our muscles as soon it becomes necessary to execute a movement of the will. The spinal column itself suffices only for the movements called reflexive. Now, with this necessary premise, let us come to our main subject.

Through ignorance human beings dispute and even make, alas, wars based upon misunderstandings; and these misunderstandings rest, for the most part, on words which excite the passions of hate. It is just the opposite of science. Let us cite some examples.

Peoples often make wars because of not understanding each other's language—as, for example, the Germans against the French, and vice versa. But then, why does a German born in France take the part of the French in the case of war, and a Frenchman born in Germany do the opposite? This is, nevertheless, what I have always observed. It is for this reason that Dr Zamenhof, living in Poland and distressed by such hatreds, without common sense, constructed his splendid international language, Esperanto, which is spreading more and more. But it will be necessary, later on, to perfect this language by having a single word for a single meaning and several words for several meanings.

Moreover, one makes a pretext that there are differences in races; but if one excepts those races, altogether inferior, with a lighter cerebrum (according to Wedda about eight hundred or eight hundred and fifty grams instead of one thousand) it is a fundamental error. All Europeans, Chinese, Japanese, Hindus, Semites, Americans, and so forth, are equal as races. It is necessary, therefore, to seek for other real causes, for the hatreds and the wars than the differences of languages and of race. Here are five such causes:

Creeds. It is necessary to distinguish clearly between religion and creed or belief. The term creed ought to be reserved for the beliefs, rites, formalities and so forth which are man-made and crystallized into dogmas; different in the different faiths, and taught by the clergy over the entire world. Diversity of creed separates peoples and foment wars, improperly called religious wars. True religion,* on the contrary, unites them.

Domination. Egoism gives to human emotions a tendency toward domination. The man wishes to rule over the woman, sometimes the woman over the man. Man wishes to rule animals, to rule the earth, to rule and control objects; but above all else, to rule other human beings. He wishes to be their superior, whether by brute force, by cunning, by manual skill and work, by speech, by writing, and so forth. The father or the mother, or both of them, wish in general to dominate their children in different ways. The spirit of domination, personal or collective, is, alas, hereditary. It is a very great obstacle to that social co-operation—peaceful, fraternal, and impartial—of which we have an urgent need.

Greed. But the worst hates, individual and national, are caused by money, by the universal money-greed which is corrupting today all humanity. There is only one remedy for this: the true co-operative state of the future, which I have

treated elsewhere. It is impossible to adequately treat here of this great social question.

Alcoholic drinks. By complete prohibition the United States, Finland and Iceland give us a courageous example. All countries ought to follow their example; for alcoholic traffic is the most nefarious of all things; it poisons life, above all, our brain and our soul. It causes deterioration, moreover, in the germ cells by what I have called "blastophthoria".

Tariff. Customs and duties tend to create national hatreds by their barriers created to bring revenue to national governments. The simplest remedy for this is free international exchange or what is called free trade.

It is necessary, therefore, little by little to suppress wars by a true Society of Nations which shall be a Society fundamentally cooperative. In this supernational society, it will be necessary to take from each state its army, making it little by little a super-national army; and to replace everywhere, gradually but surely, military service by civil service.

Our Bahá'í religion, with its twelve principles, is therefore a true religion without creed, supernational and spiritual, without dogmas or clergy. In December, 1917, before I knew about the Bahá'í Movement, I had published, myself as well as the Reverend Tschirn, the "Religion of Social Good." In March, 1919, I completed it, adding to it the term, "Scientific Religion." It was not until January, 1921, that at the home of my son-in-law I came to know the Bahá'í Movement. I wrote directly, then, to `Abdu'l-Bahá, Who was still living. ... Then I withdrew my "Scientific Religion of Social Good" as unnecessary in the light of this Movement and I became a Bahá'í like my son-in-law, Dr. A. Brauns.

Certain aspects of spiritual philosophy are strongly my belief. First as regards the term "God."

The term "God" can be interpreted very differently. All monotheistic creeds believe in a single "All-powerful God." But while some declare Him personal, we Monists look upon Him as representing the Force (metaphysical) of the universe, unknowable to human beings.

There needs to be a harmonizing of these two concepts of God. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are perfectly clear on this subject, and in due time the conceptions of God, so different in different parts of the world and with different temperaments, will adjust themselves to the one true concept.

There are several conditions of utmost importance which Bahá'ís ought to meet, if they wish to remain scientific. They ought above all to remain supernational and strictly super-ritualistic. They ought, inasmuch as they are Bahá'ís, not to mix with their Bahá'í truths any inherited creeds and beliefs or any other ideas in which error is mixed with truth. They should refrain from metaphysics, from seeking to know the Unknowable; and should occupy themselves wholly with the social good of humanity here on earth.

Confucius said about five hundred years before Christ, “Men of the four seas are all brothers. Do not do to others what you would not like them to do to you.” And the Roman poet, Terence, about one hundred and seventy years before Christ said, “I am a man and nothing that is human can be foreign to me, I think.”

Our duty as Bahá’ís is not only to speak and think of God, but to be active for the social good.

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