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THE APPLICABILITY OF THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD TO THE STUDY OF THE TWO-FOLD WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

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THE APPLICABILITY OF THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD TO THE STUDY OF THE TWO-FOLD WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

H.E.Milnes.

As the foundation upon which to build the thought of this paper we have given the Scientific Method and the Two-fold Witness of the Spirit. Neither the validity of the former nor the reality of the latter is at all questioned or denied. These are granted as generally accepted facts and we take them as the fundamental postulates of the investigation. The doubt is whether they can have anything in common;whether the one can be used in the study of the other.

Slightly changed,by putting it in the form of a question, the problem is--Can the Scientific Method be applied to the study of the Two-fold Witness of the Spirit? So self evident does the matter seem that the immediate and involuntary answer is,"Yes".

Such an answer,upon reflection, is seen to be based upon such an argument as:-The Scientific Method can be applied in general to the study of religious phenomena. Now since we have admitted the reality of the Witness of the Spirit as a religious phenonenon,the method in question can but be applicable.

But in making this answer we have already either thrown aside as worthless or considered as answered the objections which two classes in particular adduce.

The Mystic alleges that "in its essential nature religion transcends knowledge". The Revelationist holds that "normal religion necessarily presusposes a supernatural and personal communication of the mind and will of Him who is the true object of religious thought and worship;in other words an authoritative didactic revelation from God".

Both the Mystic and the Revelationist by their very postulates thus seek to bar out all scientific study of religious phenomena. In this,however,they fail. Their views are inconsistent and self destructive. As Dr. Warren cogently says,"Without such a study,and the logical use of the results of such a study,neither the Mystic can show the transcendence of religion in its relation to knowledge,nor the Revelationist the existence and exclusive claims of his revelation".

It may be that both these objectors are moved by a fear as common as it is false,that Science and Religion are mutually opposed and exclusive,so that where one is allowed the other is wholly barred out. They fear that the scientific investigation of any religious phenomenon is an attempt to reduce the supernatural to the plane of the natural and so rule God out.

As calculated to ally any such apprehensions we quote Prof G.A.Coe who, in his lecture on the Relation of Adolescence to Religious Experience says, "But can pyschology ~~assume~~ deal with experiences that may be the direct operations of the divine Spirit upon the mind of man? Would not the method of psychology assume that these phenomena are natural? The reply is that the Scientific Method assumes nothing whatever as to the presence or absence of God in any event, whether in the physical universe or the mind of man. And, assuming the hand of God in religious experiences, may we not, with all the greater confidence, expect to find them definitely and consistently co-ordinated with their conditions? That the divine Spirit observes antecedents and waits for conditions to ripen; that He does not vouchsafe the same blessings to all ages or to all individuals; that we have it in our power to prepare the way for his gracious manifestations or to hinder their appearance--all this is already currently among us. Now it is simply such uniformities as these that science looks for in its empirical examination of religious experience".

The problem then is not one of productive, or metaphysical, causality but one of inductive causality. The question is not what or who is the real agent, but what is the rule of happening, the conditions under which the phenomena occur; knowing which we shall be able to interpret and deal with them in all the ordinary

affairs of life.

The field is now clear. All general and imaginary scruples have been met. It is possible in general and perfectly permissible and indeed wholly reverent to study scientifically,or empirically if you please,any and all religious phenomena.

But the actual application in particular of the Scientific Method to the Two-fold Witness of the Spirit is yet another matter. The abstract possibility of so doing says nothing of the difficulties to be met,the inadequacy of the applications made, and the poverty of the results reached. There still remains the lack of insight into self and the inner consciousness,the failure as yet to comprehend the working of the Infinite,the personal equation of predisposition in creed and belief as to the function of the Holy Spirit,as well as many other elements,all of which are barriers in the way,but barriers which growing knowledge and insight ought to remove.

Now in order to indicate in just what way the Scientific Method can be applied in particular to the study of the Two-fold Witness of the Spirit,it becomes necessary to state the fundamental assumptios of the Scientific Method. Here we are indebted to Dr Warren's statement. In his language it designates and includes:--

First--That procedure by which the mind carefully,critically and

repeatedly observes a group of phenomena,and so comes to know their exact character andthe normal order of succession.

Second--That procedure by which the mind reaches verifiable or otherwise satisfactory conclusions touching the causex or causes of such phenomena,the conditions under which,and the laws accord-ing to which these causes act.

Third-- That procedure by which the mind reaches verifiable or otherwise satisfactory conclusions touching the connections and correlations of these phenomena with others,and of their causes with other causes,and the true purpose and significance of said correlations.

The method now to be pursued is to hint,if possible,the necessary and permissible precedure in the particular application of the Scientific Method to the study of the Two-fold Witness of the Spirit. But since we are dealing with a single experience or phenomenon,rather than with a group of phenomena,our first task is to see if it be possible so to apply the Scientific Method as to learn something of the exact nature and character of this witness.

Abstract theorizing can but prove abortive. The experience we seek to know lies in the personal realm. One might lay down certain postulates and rigidly draw his conclusions from his apriori premises. But these would have no value. The only fruit

-ful field is that of the concrete articulate experience of the individual. Hence by the most approved methods, there should be made a painstaking collocation of the experiences of as large a number as possible of those who claim to possess this Witness of the Spirit. Thus and thus only would valuable results be reached.

But before one can do this and before the results reached can be satisfactory and trustworthy, there are two preliminary questions that the student must comprehend and upon which he must come to definite conclusions.

We are dealing with the subjective. The realm of investigation is that of personal consciousness. The validity of the results obtained will of course depend upon the degree of introspection and selfknowledge which the individuals, with whom one is dealing, are capable. He must then reach satisfactory conclusions upon First, "Consciousness in general, and the selfevident validity of its deliverances" and upon Secondly, "The Legitimacy indispensableness and scientific value of the testimony of Consciousness in the realm of the subjective religious activities and results." (Dr. W.F.Warren).

Now this experience of the Witness of the Spirit necessarily being "an experience which must be the common property of all saints so far as it is necessary to saintship" (B.P.Bowne, Zion's

Herald Feb. 1st.,1899) our results must have in them the element of universality. We shall be brought to strip the experience of much of its concomitants,which vary so much in and with individuals,and to reatin for our conclusions upon the nature of this Two-fold Witness,that which is found to be the common data in the experiences of all who lay claim to the witness.

As a forehint of the probable resulys,we venture to quote again from Br. Bowne the following," Returning now to life,the Christian fact is this:The sincere and continued attempt to be disciples of Christ results in the conviction that we are in the right way,that we are on the Lord'd sideand He is on our side; and this conviction grows from more to more as the life broadens and deepens. The new life takes firmer hold and strikes deeper root;and as the soul grows in grace and knowledge of the truth,this life becomes more and more rooted in the conviction off its divine origin. Under the influence of Christian teaching, the believer willadjust himself and his experience to the forms of Christian thought and doctrine;and as we view the Spirit as the immediate agent in purification,sanctification and upbuilding of the soul,we naturally come to regard our strength and joy,our peace and rest in God as wrought in us by the Spirit, as the marks of his presence,as the witness he perpetually bears in us as to our being children of God".(Ibid)

The further problem now before us in making this particular study is,Can we discover the cause of this phenomenon,the conditions under which it acts and the laws of its action?

This study carries us at once into the realm of the infinite. The very phenomenon under consideration has as its fundamental postulate that the productive cause is the Infinite Spirit. Our starting point was,"The Spirit witnesseth with our spirit that we are the children of God".

The field of investigation is that most interesting and fascinating one of the influence of spirit upon spirit and the communion of personality with personality. If finite spirit can commune with finite spirit,and this all admit,shall we deny the possibility of the communion of the divine with the human, even as the promise is,"He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father,and I will love him and will manifest myself unto him"?

This divine promise sets forth that essential truth of a right philosophy which says that the possession of knowledge involves the constitutive,constructive action of the recipient. Not alone is it true that "no object is capable of being known save as it reveals or self-manifests itself to the cognizing subject",but it is also true that such self-manifestation is in vain until the cognizing subject has,by his own constitutive thought,built it into and made it a part of his own experience.

"For",as Dr. Bowne says,"a revelation can take place only by stimulating the mind to think the thought revealed.Nothing could be revealed to a stone,even if the matter were chiseled into it. No high truth could be revealed to an idiot,however fluent he might become in the repetition of verbal forms. In order to the reception of any knowledge whatever the appropriate activity of the subject is as necessary as the existence of the object". (Theory of Thought,page 53).

We have then as a condition of the action of the Cause,a voluntary attitude of the personality of the finite toward the Infinite. As a concise and conclusive stating of the position adduced we turn to Dr. Warren's discussion of "The Philosophy of the Self Revelation of God as affected by pious forms of self surrender on the part of man". The outcome of the chapter is the conclusion that "The receptiveness of a man at any moment is the guage of the present possibilities of God's self revelation to that man,tho not the guage of future possibilities".

Thus we have the conditions under which the Infinite Cause comes into relation with and acts upon man.

As we next seek to comprehend the laws by which this interaction takes place we are confronted by a deeper problem than any we have as yet sought to construe. Direct solution and dogmatic statement are impossible. Critical thought compels the

belief that the most we can do is to state something of how we must think about the Spirit's mode of operation. Singularly appropriate are the Master's words, "The wind bloweth where it listethand thou hearest the sound thereof butx canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the spirit."

Does the Spirit act mediately, or immediately upon the human spirit is the question that here arises.

The present almost universally recognized necessity of the retention of the human element and regard for the human powers and faculties of the soul in inspiration and all kindred spiritual activities furnishes the angle of perspective from which to view the divine Spirit's mode of action. Thus we are helped as to how we shall think about it. Says Austin Phelps, "Is it not a positive law of the Holy Spirit's working that it moves in and thro the natural laws of the soul itself? It creates no new elements of the mind. It introduces no new principles of mental action. It is simply one work of God within another. It is a spirit energizing a spirit".

In writing upon this point in connection with "The Assurance of Salvation" Dr. Henry Sheldon says, "It has become well nigh a commonplace in theological thinking that in inspiration the Holy Ghost acts dynamically, carrying up the human powers

to a higher plane of action,instead of discarding or repressing them. But,if this is the method of producing conviction or insight respecting the truths of the divine kingdom,analogy favors the conclusion that it is also the method of prpducing conviction to the personal standing of a believer before God.----- While then we do not deny that in accommodation to some special demands of the religious experience the Holy Spirit may operate immediately for producing conviction of acceptance with God we are persuaded that ~~the~~ assurance as a standing fact in the normal Christian life rests principally upon the mediate agency of the Spirit. By awakening the spiritual susceptbilities and enkindling the filial disposition He helps to give such a content to a man's religious consciousness as in itself involves assurance of salvation. (Didactic Theology pages 217--218).

The closing word must concern the relation of this phenomenon of the Witness of the Spirit to other personal religious phenomena and the significance of such correlations. More than to indicate some of the possibilities cannot be undertaken. But in view of the foregoing discussion the suggestions as to the possible lines of investigation will carry with them the conviction that here too the Scientific Method is applicable.

As expressive of different phases and stages of the religious experience much is said of Justification,Regeneration,and

Santification. In point of time, in point of logical relation, it ought to be ascertainable in some measure how the Witness of the Spirit stands related to these phenomena just mentioned.

Further still in the same connection there is room for the inquiry whether this witness is in any way necessary for a true understanding and comprehension of these other personal experiences.

Nor can an impartial investigator doubt that the possession of this witness by the believer bears a vital relation to his joy and happiness in religion, to his filial confidence in God, to his growth and progress in holiness, in fact to the entirety of his personal religious experience.

This leads to and touches upon the chapter suggested by Dr. Warren in his elaboration of "The Christian Consciousness", entitled, "The Necessary Skepticism or Liability to Skepticism of all Souls not possessed of the self-evidencing light of consciousness touching personal fellowship with God".

For ourselves we are led to believe that the Scientific Method is wholly applicable to the study of the Two-fold Witness of the Spirit, and trust that coming years shall afford the opportunity for further and more detailed investigation in this realm.

H. Edwin Milnes. April 3rd., 1899.