

## II

### HINDRANCES

---

Two elementary considerations shadow over every thought of Religious Experience. One is the burden of hereditary influence that we bear, the other is the alliance of the soul with the body.

HEREDITY.—It is sometimes only after death that a likeness to one of the same family, which must have been there always, becomes singularly noticeable. It is this fact to which Tennyson refers in well-known lines of *In Memoriam* :—

As sometimes in a dead man's face,  
To those that watch it more and more,  
A likeness, hardly seen before,  
Comes out to some one of his race.

Those who have seen a collection of authentic family portraits have noticed how one feature seems to persist through them all, and a subtle suggestion of kindred is behind even the most dissimilar features. Now and then, after the lapse of a hundred years, two faces are found, a great-grandfather's and a great-grandson's, that almost are identical—the lines, the expression, the character of each hardly varying from the other. All such experiences, and none are more familiar, constantly bring into our minds the mysterious relation of heredity in which the race is bound together.

The scientific investigation of these facts is not of very ancient date; but in the past half-century it has been adequately pursued. Heredity and variation have been recognised as the two conflicting forces between which the generations of men have balanced. It would be too much to say that on every important point the men of science have come to an agreement. For the whole question of the transmission of acquired characteristics, the handing down to offspring of physical or mental features which were new in the parent, is still in dispute. Yet no one doubts that, on the whole, the mistakes and failures, and also the progress, of the race are perpetuated from father to son, and that we are the heirs of the ages, not only in outside possessions of civilisation and literature and freedom, but also in the character and complexion of our spirits. As Mr. Sorley said in his *Ethics of Naturalism*: "Man has been produced by, and has become part of, his fellows. He is organically related to all the members of the race, not only bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, but mind of their mind."

All that heredity means as a teacher of the solidarity of mankind, all that it has to teach of the mysterious nexus that binds the generations together, may be taken to be one of the most striking and most certain of the scientific generalisations of our time.

Yet the doctrine of Heredity is not really modern. It is difficult to say what the Church's belief in "Original Sin" means if it be not a statement of the same truth. Nowhere is it asserted more plainly and boldly than in that law of the "Ten Commandments," where it is declared that God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third

and fourth generation. If one is asked for the most conspicuous and memorable statement in all literature of the solidarity of the race (that idea which is sometimes dated from the time of Augusto Comto), one will find it in the words of Holy Scripture, "As in Adam all died." Not once or twice, but many times (perhaps the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body is the most remarkable instance) modern science and thought have proved not the enemy but the upholder and rehabilitator of old Scriptural truths which many had come to believe outworn.

This has been notably so with the doctrine of Heredity. That the fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge was so familiar a truth to the people who had fed their minds upon the Old Testament that it had graduated into the ranks of a proverb. It had been so fully and unreservedly accepted that a real danger had sprung up that its truth should be exaggerated, and the other side of the matter not adequately recognised.

Before this truth that every convolution of the grey matter of the brain hides within it the history of the past—a truth established by common experience and by science and heralded by Scripture—all men and women must stand, looking for its meaning for their own life and, above all, for its relation to their own moral responsibilities. What is to be said to the man who speaks like this: "My father was a drunkard; my grandfather was a drunkard; the craving for drink was in my mother's family too; a brother has already become a victim, there is no use in my striving against my fate. It is inevitable for me also"? What is to be said to the man who pleads, like the Scottish poet Burns:

If I have wandered in those paths  
Of life I ought to shun ;  
As something, loudly, in my breast,  
Remonstrates I have done ;  
Thou knowest that Thou hast formed me,  
With passions wild and strong ;  
And listening to their witching voice  
Has often led me wrong.

Is all personal responsibility to be removed from the man who can show that he has been endowed with a nature to which certain sins are peculiarly alluring, and that he has not had a fair chance in the race of life, being so heavily handicapped before he began ?

Unless our holy religion has some answer to this question, it will fail to meet one of the most pressing questions of human concern. But the Bible has most fully met the question. In the Old Testament and the New, an answer has been given. Both of the answers are good, though that of the New Testament is the more inspiring.

We take the Old Testament answer first ; and find it in words of Ezekiel : " All souls are mine ; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine : the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Besides its relation of kinship to all the race of man, each spirit has its direct personal relationship with God. The one truth must be upheld to correct the exaggeration of the other. One by one, and not two by two, men and women must stand before their Judge.

It is perfectly true that they do not start fair in life. The old notion of each man's soul being at the beginning like a sheet of white paper is utterly exploded. The sheet has been scribbled over by many generations. But there is nothing in that to make evil-doing irresistible and inevitable. Oliver Wendell

Holmes told about a sick man that, when he was bidden to send for the doctor, he said, "It is too late to send for the doctor now, a hundred years too late." Yet there is no ground for such fatalism even in regard to merely physical illness. The teaching of science seems to be that heredity does not fix the disease but only causes a predisposition to it; prepares a suitable soil for it to grow in. It is so, for example, with consumption. There seems little doubt that those who belong to a consumptive family are more liable than others to be attacked by that cruel disease. But it will not come to them unless the seeds of it are sown in their own life. Who has not known of men and women in whose family this tendency has been who yet, by constant care, by treating seriously what stronger people might treat lightly, have kept themselves in health up to a good old age? The same truth applies to the moral life. Heredity fixes trial and not fate. Every one must be tried some way. To some the temptation is to drunkenness, to others to covetousness, to others to violent temper—and so forth. Heredity fixes what our special trial will be. It by no means fixes what will be the issue of it. If we know our hereditary tendency, it is for us sedulously to train ourselves to its resistance. And often (as in the case of St. Paul, where a thorn in the flesh was the instrument of his discipline) the saints of God have found that, so far from yielding to their besetting sin, they have won their crowns just by the noble overcoming of that evil. Instead of a bad heredity being necessarily the prophecy of a bad life, it may only indicate the lines of a noble and pathetic struggle out of which the man who began the worst will come out the best, the last being first, and the character made strong and stable and enduring

just in those qualities where by nature it was in defect.

A realisation of personal responsibility in the eyes of God, a consciousness of individuality and free will, is the power which the Old Testament brings to redress the balance of inheritance and bring cheer to an otherwise disheartened life. Not once or twice, but many thousand times such a triumph over nature has been won. "Do not whine and moan about your hereditary tendencies," the great-spirited Word of God would say: "know your own manhood, feel that you stand on your own feet: and play your manly part, with God above to favour and to reward."

The New Testament message in regard to Heredity is even more inspiring. In its very first page it brought two cheering messages concerning this anxious theme. It showed how evil heredity might be fought, and it revealed also an older and better heredity for our race.

The first teaching will always be the greatest help to any man—to be shown that a thing has been done, and not only that it may be done. What is the meaning of the two genealogies of our blessed Saviour which St. Matthew and St. Luke have given—genealogies which no one can quite make clear in their details—except to show that Jesus is linked close to the race, to the evil and good men and women whose nature it pleased Him to take upon Himself? "Inasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself took part in the same." Never must we forget His personal sinlessness. But the marvel of it is all the greater when we remember that, according to the flesh, He came of men and women as bad, some of them, as may be. Judah, David, Rahab, and

such as they, were in the direct line of the descent from which the Saviour sprang. If from a race so marred by dark blots of human passion, if out of a heredity in some respects so shameful and in every way so imperfect and frail, the pure flower of the life of Jesus sprang, what man or woman should be cast down at the memory of burdens which cannot be greater or a life trial which cannot be so severe? That the Son of David should have been holy and harmless and undefiled and separate from sinners is an everlasting encouragement to every soul that dreads the inheritance of the past.

The New Testament has done yet more for us than this. It has reminded us of what we are apt sometimes to forget—the help to life that comes from a good heredity. It has shown this in the noblest way. Since the tendency of mankind is upward, the result of hereditary influences should on the whole be on the side of righteousness. But the Lord Jesus has brought to us a far more inspiring thought than this. He has reminded us that, not only are we the sons of men, we are the sons of God. We came from Him at the first, made in His image, after His likeness, and, though we bear the image of the earthly, the imprint of the heavenly is on us too. There is no better recognised law of the natural world than what is called “reversion to type.” When birds or animals, which have been by careful selection developed along a certain line, are allowed to go back to freedom and nature, in a generation or two they return to the original stock from which they sprang. With the differences that the moral life must imply, this is true also of the soul of man. Born of God at the first—His child yet, however far down the ages his race may go from its primal birth—there

is in man the longing for his Father's life, a yearning for the divine from which he sprang. It is not only the blood of creatures like himself that runs in his veins; the life of God is also his; the Father-Spirit abides in His children; the divine Heredity is strong in him even as the ties which bind him to his race. Give a man this noble thought; tell him of his origin and his destiny; say to him, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, then we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is"—then we have set a power against the powers of earth—then we have lifted the weight of a human inheritance that discourages and degrades; we have revealed an origin and a future to quicken heart and hope. Every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure.

**THE BODY.**—A bigger hindrance to the religious life than any other is the association of the soul with a body. There is a well-known story regarding the death-bed of Archbishop Whately. His chaplain read for his comfort the words of Scripture, "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body." "Read it in the original," said the dying man. In the original it is "the body of our humiliation." "Yes," said the Archbishop, "that is what St. Paul meant. Nothing that God has made is vile."

The story emphasises the truth about St. Paul's teaching. He combated fiercely the notion that the body is essentially "vile." The budding heresy of Gnosticism was what St. Paul in the first epistle to St. Timothy described as "science falsely so called."

When his epistles were written the heresy was already blossoming, though it was only to come to its full luxuriance in a later century. A central teaching of Gnosticism was that matter is an evil thing and that the body is vile. The heresy had dangerous results both upon morals and upon theology.

Its result upon morals was twofold. Men either believed that the body was so irretrievably bad that it did not matter what they did with it, and this was an excuse for the grossest self-indulgence : or else they starved and macerated and tortured the body, and fell into the opposite extreme of a hard and self-absorbed asceticism.

The result of a doctrine that the body is vile was equally serious in the realm of theology. Believing that God could not have been the Maker of anything so evil, the Gnostics removed Him away from actual contact with the world, and set between Him and the world a series of aeons or emanations. St. Paul called this a "doctrine of angels." The lowest of them was the Demiurge, in contact with the world and the Creator of material things. Thus the face of the Father was obscured in the mists of an unknown distance. Christ also, some of the Gnostics taught, could not have inhabited a frame of flesh and blood, could not have been in contact with anything so vile : and the body that He wore was only a shade, a phantom, a wraith : and thus by their Docetism the Gnostics robbed us of a human Lord.

Such a doctrine of the vileness of the body St. Paul opposed with all the vigour of his commanding intellect. There is something sardonic in the fact that the translators of the Authorised Version should have charged St. Paul with the statement that the body is vile.

Yet St. Paul did recognise that the body was a poor lodging-house for an immortal spirit, and that it needed to be redeemed. . He would not call the body "vile"; but he owned that it was often humiliating—"the body of our humiliation." Ever and again St. Paul recurs to the thought that it is hard to reconcile the body with a lofty view of life. The body responds inadequately to a spiritual stimulus: it hampers and thwarts its partner, the soul. When the loftiest in us would seek its satisfaction, the lowliest in us is refractory. Even St. Paul himself had to groan over the problem. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" It was manifest to him that, unless the body was redeemed as well as the soul, we should never reach the full mastery of life.

The whole subject does not bear discussion in its details, and some parts of it hardly bear thinking about. But every Christian feels at times that there is something humbling and distressing in the bodily life.

There is, for example, a peculiar grotesqueness in the relation of genius to physiology. We are tempted to laugh at our poor human nature when we think of a poet with a cold in his head, or a dyspeptic philosopher. The halo grows dim round certain noble brows when we think of the eminent men at their dinner-tables and recall the frailty of their frame.

Even the work to which these great souls needed to apply themselves in order to get food for their bodies seems sometimes a curious commentary upon their spiritual genius and their eternal destiny. Burns as a gauger in Dumfries was a strange enough spectacle. But is it not nearly allied to tragedy that any immortal spirit should be required to keep a shop, or be a clerk

in an office, or plough a field? One sometimes reads of an artistic lad who wants to be a poet or a painter, and will not take his father's counsel to go into trade. And it is impossible to refuse a certain sympathy with the artistic creature, even while one remembers that he has a healthy appetite which either he or his father will need to supply. Such incongruities between the heir of eternity and his bodily dwelling-place present themselves often enough to reflection.

The body also (with all its wonderfulness) serves the mind so inefficiently that a captious mortal often grumbles at it. To how much of the external world we are deaf and blind: how inadequate are our senses to receive and chronicle the impressions which are sent to them! A dog puts us to shame by its acute sense of smell. The commonest bird sees better than we. And our ears are far less sensitive than a rabbit's.

Then, when it comes to expression, how feeble an instrument is our tongue, how paltry the range of human speech. Even when it is eked out by the flash of the eye, the glow of the countenance, the gesture of the hands, how little of the thoughts that burn below can find an utterance. That great teacher, Thomas Aquinas, conceived of a human frame "so clear and transparent that the soul might sally out at every part, and sparkle out through the body as wine through a glass." But it is the experience of every one that, even when we wish to express a feeling so common as gratitude, our words fail us, and we convey but a slender notion of our real intention—even if we are not altogether misunderstood.

So could one go on to write of the "body of our humiliation"—the restraints it puts upon the higher

emotions, the impulses and temptations to evil it presents, its clogging weight of past propensities when the soul has long since repented and been forgiven.

But the final horror and humiliation which the body brings is its disease, its decay, its death. A line of Mr. W. E. Henley has haunted some people. He described the patients in Edinburgh Royal Infirmary, where he himself lay, and as he told of one patient, bleeding and bandaged after his operation, he broke out in a scornful cry :

Alas for God's image !

Some such thought of our poor humanity, as we see it associated with the squalor of sickness and the corruption of death, must have distressed every one at some time. The imagination can hardly bear such thoughts for long. Here is the secret of the growth of cremation—that cleanly and healthy method of the disposal of the dead which is associated with the time when Christian faith was at its purest, and the martyrs gave their bodies to be burned. The thought of the rapid consumption of the body by fire is less harrowing to the imagination than the appalling picture, sometimes inevitably with us, which the grave conveys.

What, then, are the saving truths which bring light upon this difficult and anxious theme ?

First, of course, and always is the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christian men and women do not realise in detail all that the relation of the mind of Christ to a human frame implies. It is not necessary, nor is it desirable, that they should realise that. But here was the fact that the Highest touched the lowliest, and was not soiled thereby. A human brain was behind the forehead of Jesus, and a human heart

was beating within His breast, and—quite apart from the dogmas which we passionately believe—it is the common consent of the mass of mankind that in Him the ideal suffered no injury from contact with the actual, and the body became the pure medium for truth and purity to look through. In Him was seen in its highest that phenomenon of which the shining face of Moses, and the transfigured look of St. Stephen, were the sublime illustration—the body so moulded by the spirit that its very lineaments were a language, and every feature was an utterance of the holiness within. This power of mentality over matter is one to which the Church has given insufficient attention in her dull readiness to believe that the age of miracles is past. She has needed to be awakened to it by the vagaries of half-crazed heretics. Yet it is one of her most precious truths. The Incarnation has within itself the message that the body is susceptible of spiritual impulses, and is itself the discoverer of spiritual truths which otherwise could not have been ours. Our vile body, indeed! Without it we should not have known what fatherhood and motherhood mean, or the joy of heart that beats with heart. Children have been taught to sing :

I want to be an angel,  
And with the angels stand.

But does any one really want that? What do the angels know of the gladness of life, or the stinging whip of pain that the mortal body learns? What can such serene and spiritual creatures understand of those heights and gulfs of experience which only a sensory system allied with a spirit can bring to consciousness? It is the glorious truth of the Incarnation that, even

into the heart of the Godhead, has been brought, and remains for evermore, "a fellow-feeling for our pains." The doctrine of the Incarnation has a hundred implications in regard to the human body. But chiefly it should be noted that it is the Christian lands which have revered and cared for the body as they ought. Where under Buddhism or Mohammedanism is a school of medicine worthy of the name? Where in the lands that own no subjection to the Incarnate Son of God are such infirmaries or hospitals as are the glory of our Empire?

Our vile body, indeed! The skill of science and the tender care of human sympathy have been elicited at their fullness just by that frail partner of our souls, so humble and so humbling often, and yet the frame that Jesus wore.

While life lasts, however, there will remain some shadow of "humiliation" over the body, and it is to a brighter day that St. Paul looked for its full redemption. "We groan within ourselves," he wrote, "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the Redemption of our body." "I believe in the resurrection of the dead." The soul with an organism, how changed, how composed, how compatible with a spiritual life, we do not know; but still a soul, not naked but clothed upon, a soul with an organism—that is what the great teacher bade us look for. We have no experience of a pure and unfettered spirit in this world (though we must think of God in such a way); nor are we to meet such an experience in the world beyond. The soul is to express itself through a body still, in the only way we can conceive of such expression. But it is a pure bride that the spirit finds in that serene world—a body that is tender to every touch of highest things, and the choice vehicle

of every thought of good : a body cleansed of all gross accretions, and responsive as never here to every impression of truth and beauty, and expressional as never here of every refinement and shade of feeling : a body "fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself."