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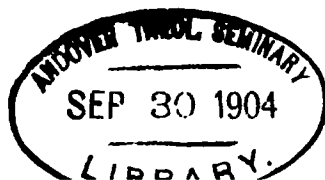
ARTICLE I.

THE ILLUSIONS OF A PERSONAL THEOLOGY.

BY THE REVEREND A. A. BERLE, D.D.

THERE are many indications that we are nearing the end of a revolutionary epoch in theology. On every hand there seems to be evidence that many of the theological fads and alleged improvements in thought and reasoning, as well as the application of the critical and rational instincts in an exceptional and peculiar manner to the materials of religion and the documents of religious authority and instruction, have at least reached the maximum of their attractiveness for pioneer spirits, and that we are in a fair way to return to the safe and sane highways of historical theology. In some respects this period, which now seems to be drawing to a close, has been a most interesting and fruitful one. We have styled it "revolutionary." But its revolutionary character was not shown in any specially violent outbreaks which characterized it, though it saw a few belated and absurd heresy trials, and witnessed a few rather heated controversies dealing with certain minor phases of theological thought. But it was none the less revolutionary because its processes were less violent but rather more fundamental on that account. The citadels of faith were assailed, this time, by men not conscious of overthrowing vitalities, but merely supposing that they were changing land-

Vol. LXI. No. 244. 1



marks. The most fundamental conceptions of religion were displaced by critics and theologians, as if these things could be made and unmade in a day. No point of view appeared to be to them other than just that. The identification of any series of views in a coördinate union with a series of convictions, with religion in its external expression, seemed to enter into the mind of hardly any one. The entire conception of religion being based on certain inward personal ideals and experiences, all external facts and authorities were dismissed either without deference or examined only with the vivisector's interest. Great emphasis was laid on the difference between "religion" and "theology," a difference which is real enough in academic circles, but which in many respects is perfect foolishness when applied to the practical administration of religious institutions. The exalted ideals of humanity were supposed to compensate for the loss of all external regulation and authority. The "person" was supposed to be of such value, that he was to be studied and ministered to at any cost, but especially at the cost of institutional religion. The universities and the churches alike fell eagerly into this way of thinking, with the result, that, while there seems to be a general agreement that there is more "religion" in the world than ever before, there is coincidentally also general agreement that the business of carrying on organized religious institutions is harder than ever. The maintenance of the church is a more serious problem than ever, the quality of the ministry is reported lower than ever, the number of those who seek this calling is declining, and the already complicated problem of the ministry of the church is made contemptible at the outset, by the still general agreement that no superior men go into the ministry in these days, and that therefore those who are coming out of the theological colleges must be of the "poorer

sort." Evidently the enormous emphasis upon the value of the individual man has not given that individual man a much deeper conception of his religious obligations, if these religious obligations have any sort of relation to the upholding of religious institutions. If there is more religion than ever in the world it is of a modest quality, which renders it unique in that respect, because none of the great religious bodies which should afford the natural channels for its expression and activity, seem to show any consciousness of the fact.

Nor is this all. Men still young can remember when many of the collateral religious instrumentalities which were supposed to be based upon the Christian church were characteristically religious institutions. The Young Men's Christian Associations form the most striking illustration of agencies of this class. But these are no longer distinctively religious institutions. The Young Men's Christian Association of Boston, for example, is now chiefly an educational institution, and might very properly, if any one were disposed to do so, have its right to freedom from taxation impeached on the ground that it is not carried on mainly for religious purposes. Its law school has lately reached such proportions and efficiency that the Association asked and was empowered by the Massachusetts Legislature to grant law degrees. How soon it will grant electric and mining engineering degrees and other degrees cannot now be foretold; but it is certain that, with its education furnished at lower cost than any avowedly educational institution can give it, by people who either give their services gratis or are maintained by other institutions, there is no necessary limit to its expansion in this respect. The same thing is true of other associations. Some have accentuated the educational element, and give themselves to it. Others have become gymnasias, with a religious meeting as annex. Still others have

become employment bureaus and employers' agencies. But, in most of them, the religious work, except in that broad, general, non-specific character, which is called "religious" only because it is said there is a "religious" motive behind it, is not only scarcely visible, but has often fallen into decay and desertion. Now it is possible of course that these institutions are more "religious" than they ever were. It is possible that they are more permeated with "religion" than they ever were. But, if this be true, why is it that the only features which accentuate that fact are the only ones which show signs of falling out of existence, and which most of the officials in charge admit to be the most disappointing departments of the whole work? In a similar way, the churches, also, tried this experiment. Institutional churches, so called, were begun with the assurance that the religious millennium was to be ushered in by them at once. After a dozen years or more, these churches, where they have not fallen into decay, are characterized by just such phenomena as are revealed by the associations for young men. They have become either trade schools or gymnasia or employment bureaus. On the churchly side, which is also the religious side, they have shown no gains, no permanence, no power for holding and ministering, that was not shown by the churches before them and better than they have shown it. The whole series of catchwords about ministering to the "whole" man, and "reaching the masses," and "going to the people," and the like, have become absolutely ridiculous in the eyes of those who know the facts. The urban demoralization goes on among churches of every order, except those which plant heavy endowments upon which the churches are reared. The so-called "down-town problem" is being met by no denomination, as a body, and in the isolated cases where there appears to be success, it is due to excep-

tional causes having nothing to do with the methods, but only with the money provided, usually not by the constituency ministered to. This is the simple truth about the urban situation about most of the denominations in the principal cities of the country at this moment. And all this comes about at a time when we are in the full swing of the doctrine of the worth of the individual man and the uselessness of institutions, except relatively, and when the "personal" ideal in thought, habit, conduct, and judgment of life has full sway. Evidently the fullest freedom of the individual is not working especially well for religious institutions.

Nor is the religious world alone in this demoralization. The legal profession is not less agitated and thrown into confusion. Here also the "personal" idea has gradually acquired a force and importance in the administration and interpretation of the law, which has made jurisprudence the despair of men trained in the older and more profound habits of that profession. Even the United States Supreme Court, the most exalted of such bodies probably in the world, whose decisions usually had in them a power and an influence nowhere equalled among civilized lands, shows the effects of this type of thinking. In the period preceding the last twenty-five years, decisions by the Supreme Court which did not represent substantially the opinion of the entire court were rare, and the dissenting opinions were, usually, in matters concerning the moot points of the law, which, while they afforded the materials for dissent, were not of a character which rendered the decision of the courts any less forceful; nor did they, in general, tend to show the court as being at war with itself in the habitual approach and mode of reasoning on the points of law involved. Of late years, however, this has all been changed. The court has more and more frequently rendered decisions

which not only did not represent the entire court, but were mere majority decisions, but not infrequently the members of the majority rendering the decision showed themselves governed by styles of reasoning which invalidated each other. The "personal" idea applied to the law has in some recent cases shown the highest court of the land to be a body by no means united in the most simple and elementary aspects of reasoning. A single judge has more than once impeached the reasoning of all his colleagues, though agreeing with them in the decision rendered! A single justice has changed his mode of reasoning diametrically in two cases which to the majority appeared to involve the same point! Nor has it been only one member of the court who has done this. Various members of the court have taken these anomalous positions. Thus the decisions have steadily declined in value, as indicating any course of sound and abiding constitutional interpretation. Eminent lawyers aver that the fact that a question has been decided to-day by the court in one way, by no means makes it certain that the point will not be decided in a totally different way when it reaches court to-morrow! At least two eminent lawyers and cabinet officers have recently found it needful to speak before the two most important law associations in the land on matters involving this very point. What careful theologians have been observing to be true in the sphere of religion and theology, careful lawyers have observed to be no less true when applied to the law and the courts. The overwrought and highly accentuated individualism in theology has demoralized the churches, and the "personal" standard in law has demoralized the courts. In both cases the highway of institutionalism and common standards was abandoned for a blind alley, with the result that always follows such a proceeding. Whenever a voice has been lifted against the sound-

ness of this experiment, either in law or theology, it has usually been hailed as the voice of an obscurantist or a pessimist lacking confidence in humanity. Thus the "personal" ideal has had full and fair trial. The only reason why we have not had the same effects in medicine, (though the quacks have always been among us, and are among us still,) is because the ethics of the medical profession is of so much higher quality than that of either the ministry or the law. The doctors to remain reputable have to reveal the formulæ by which they effect cures. And they are bound to give to their fellow-men all the information they have, which can help in ameliorating the pain of the world. This fact has protected medicine to a great degree from the charlatanry and the quackery of extreme "personalism," and has made everything that was true at once universally useful, and has made "personal" medicine impossible. In most of the sciences the thing was of course impossible. A "personal" botany or a "personal" chemistry would be too laughable to get itself even mentioned. History does admit somewhat of this kind of illusion or deception, and hence, in the study of history, the personal element has to be carefully watched to prevent blunder. But here the more careful critics are steadily insisting on citation of the authority and full bibliographies, which is nothing other than placing in the hands of the reader or critic, an instrument for preventing "personal" history. Nowhere, as in theology, has the "personal" idiosyncrasy acquired such force. Personal religion we can comprehend. A "personal" theology will soon be as foolish as a "personal" chemistry or a "personal" botany.

THE LABYRINTH OF THEOLOGICAL SYMBOLISM.

In tracing the lines back to the sources of the movement whose results we have just been describing, it may be re-

marked, that its beginnings, like the beginnings of every theological revolt, were perfectly serious and straightforward. The pathway of absolute rectitude is usually one of simplicity and unpicturesque evenness. Indeed, the essential difference between righteousness and sin arises in part from the very fact that the former tends to become a law of the whole, while the latter is almost always the attitude and habit of exceptionality. What is true of the life of righteousness, is also true of the habit and practice of right thinking. It has little that is gaudy or fascinating about it. The highways along which the race has come, have become highways, because they have been found to afford the simplest, the least expensive, and the most expeditious ways of arriving at certain points. In the ordinary routine of its daily life, the mass of mankind has little time and less inclination for experiments, and has therefore left these for inventors and pioneers, and has held to the old ways until the new was substantially established, and the way reasonably clear, before casting off from the old lines. When the pioneers have struck a successful road and made a genuine discovery, men have always given adequate praise and usually handsome emolument to the discoverer. But history does not record the countless failures. For one poem of Tennyson or of Milton, how many thousands of humble verses there have been, the world over, that have never seen the light of publicity! But none the less there has always been in the human mind a readiness to accept the new, and follow the leading that seemed to promise better things. And as the routine lacked picturesqueness, men have broken away from rectitude, often, as it seemed to them, from sheer force of *ennui*.

Then again routine tends to blur individual distinctions and merge all men into a common and often uninteresting human-

ity. When, therefore, the symbolists came along with a doctrine that made every man imagine that in himself there was a mine of emotion and thought which nobody could understand but himself, and that this emotion as such was a costly, valuable thing, which was, in fact, the supreme thing in life, immediately there developed a great passion for introspection and self-analysis, which has given us what we see in Ibsen, Sudermann, Maeterlinck, and the rest. It had and has an undoubted basis. There is in every man something of infinite worth and capacity. His own emotions are of undoubted value to himself. But for each man to assume that his emotions are of that costly, alabaster-box kind which make him unique among men, is simply to confound a most vulgar commonplace egotism with a very complicated and elusive even if true idea. By and by the same spirit began to creep into criticism, and the literary and theological critics began to assume this same symbolic tone. The literary critics could discover a true poet by a certain something which "appealed" to them, and handed out ultimatums in criticism with a freedom that astounds one even in this productive age. The historical critics began to see things that the average eye could not see, and began to apprehend things that the average intellect could not discern. In short, criticism began to be symbolic without knowing it, and began to take on the hazy tone and talk in the vague and unintelligible fashion which discusses "tone" and "color" and "essence" and "inevitableness" and the like in things that ought to be subjected simply to the rational critical judgment which knows no tone or color or essence or inevitableness, except as these terms are understood by the mass of men using their ordinary faculties in the ordinary way. A few, of course, protested and insisted on using language and their reasoning powers rationally. But this only

earned for them the sobriquet of Philistines. Others saw that a storm of complication and verbal obfuscation was coming, and prudently retired to wait till the storm was over.

When symbolism appeared in the realm of biblical criticism, it was suitably attired of course. Instead of flaunting scarlet it wore a sober suit of gray. Instead of talking about the emotions, it talked grandly about the "truth." Moreover, as became its theme, it assumed the nomenclature and the physiognomy of learning, and there was let loose a perfect hurricane of "personal" interpretation of the Scriptures and a mass of "consciousness" of meanings in the text which the astonished church heard with something like wonder and awe. Men grasped their Bibles and tried to find what they were told was there and while they did not find it, they mumbled over the new formulæ and tried after the manner of certain kinds of Browning critics to see new wonders in the heavens and strange spectacles on the earth, of which nobody had ever dreamt in his philosophy. From the rage of the critical symbolists the theological symbolists took fire and then came the mass of "personal" theology and this when translated into terms of the life of the ordinary man meant "do just what you please and find out what 'appeals' to you and take that as your guide." The theological symbol for this attitude was "experience." Experience had a good history, and represented a sound and true thing. Christian experience is the basis of faith, and trained Christian experience provides the inspiration for sound Christian judgment and thought. When, therefore, the symbolists called their "personal" vagaries "experience," it seemed like a reaffirmation of an old and tried thing, and the label caught the multitude, and many Christians at once were sent into the by-paths of their own "experience" for new and more vital conceptions of Chris-

tianity. Many, finding that path not specially interesting, took along with them certain intellectual narcotics like Christian Science and other pseudo-metaphysical jargon, with which to drug themselves into continuance of effort till the spiritual and intellectual coma was finally attained. Many more, honestly striving, kept on for years, and found that, instead of being on a highway that led somewhere, they were lost in a labyrinth of alleged "higher personality," where the voices of fellow-travelers and fellow-pilgrims gradually ceased, and they were mocked only by their own solitude and spiritual barrenness. At this point, sometimes ecclesiasticism and prelaty have made an opportune appearance, and beckoned them into the fold of some "true" church, where they have safely abided since, with the spiritual life completely lost in an external symbolism almost as meaningless as the inner one into which they had been led, had been. The intellect stopped inquiry, and the march which began with such triumphant outbursts of freedom ended in the cloisters of a monastic guard-house.

Glancing back over the theological productions of the past twenty years, one is surprised to find how much of it has just this character. Its passionate assertion of the value of the individual, and of his supremacy in the matter of religious judgment, and the inviolability of his primitive emotions and instincts, and the godlike quality of his "natural" aptitudes and insights, makes one think that organized collective religion is a mere dream, and that Christianity is a sort of universal elective system, wherein each one takes and uses what he wishes, without any respect to his fellow-men; and not only so, but feels under no obligation even to indicate what it is that he has chosen, or why, or what it is all about. All he tells you is that certain "experiences" govern him. He advises you of the

existence of certain instinctive judgments. If you don't understand them, you are a Philistine. If you talk about collective duty, and urge the federal union of the race and the mutuality of the spiritual and the moral life, he at once charges you with setting up a papacy or inaugurating a campaign of sacerdotalism. Meanwhile you cannot understand what he is talking about and know nothing about it, except that he leaves off all religious activities, and fails in every relation in which the common fellowship of Christian people seeks to express itself and become effectual in good works.

This labyrinthine confusion in thought and demoralization in religious habits and action is almost universal. But the exponents of this confusion of thought, when confronted with its utter inadequacy to meet the great abiding questions of the spiritual life, universally greet you with a reminder that "religion" and "theology" are not the same thing. Assuredly not. No more is a man the suit of clothes which he wears. But if the suit of clothes he wears happens to be a suit of khaki, with a certain kind of buttons and other equipment, and in his hands is a repeating rifle, and around his waist is a cartridge belt, the man and his clothes become pretty nearly interchangeable things for the average uses of life. If he happens to have a mask over his face and a bull's-eye lantern in one hand and a revolver in the other, and orders you to throw up your hands, to assume that he is a philanthropist who is seeking to work out some beneficent plan for your spiritual growth, on the theory that the clothing is not the man, will probably result in a very rude awakening. Of course there is a difference between religion and theology. But to assume that these things have absolutely no relation, and that a man has to think only of himself naked, to fulfill himself and his work, is simply to land him in jail the minute he goes out into

the street where most people are clothed. He may say that his personality is "clothed." But to jail he goes, or to a clothing store in any event. He may say that his personality is outraged by this process of insisting that he shall wear the vulgar things which men wear in the ordinary, unemotional, plain routine of daily life. But the symbolism doesn't "appeal" to the officer, and he must simply get on something that shall not necessarily rob him of his symbolic clothing, but also give him a garb which classifies him for the rest of the world. This is a very fair illustration of what has been brought about by the so-called "personal" theology of which we have been hearing for twenty years or more. And at almost every stage of its development it has grown more and more grotesque and impossible.

PERSONAL THEOLOGY AND PERSONAL MORALITY.

The relation between theology and religion is one so intimate that it is hard to think of them apart. Of course in this statement it must not be supposed that the theology is of the academic or formal type. But if we understand by "theology" the ideas about God and his government, the world and his Providence, man and his nature and accountability, law and its application and regulation of life, pain and its meaning, by which men are governed, it is perfectly absurd to say that most men have no theology. They have probably no such obfuscating nomenclature as many theologians have, but if they have ideas on these subjects, and most men have, then it is also true that these ideas form the substantial and essential basis of whatever religion they have. And just here it might as well be stated outright, without any reservations, that it is impossible to respect a man's religion if one has no respect for the ideas on which it is based. The individualists in theology and morals have generally held that they could respect a man's

religion, and honor him in his observance of it, even though they had no respect for the ideas underlying it, and even believed them to be based on falsehood, on superstition, or delusion. But, while this is theoretically possible, for the actual life of men it is not possible, and generally does not happen. It has never been the fortune of the present writer to know a human being gifted enough to have respect for the religion of a man whose ideas about religion he held in contempt. Such a person would be a phenomenon. It does not lie in human nature, living in a finite world and dealing with the urgent, insistent problems of human life, to hold any such attitude long enough to make any material difference in the activities of life. It is one of those purely ethereal, academic suppositions like the mathematical conception of infinity, which means absolutely nothing and is merely a necessary term. Theological ideas and their morally correlated ideas are as closely connected with the average man's religion as anything possibly can be.

Christianity has had its splendid sway over the progressive races of the world because of the fact that it accentuated the collective unity of the race above all things, and offered to the individual a sphere of activity and self-expression which was universal in character and aim. "Go ye into all the world" is the keynote of the appeal to the dominating, conquering impulses of the Western nations which have become the leading exponents of New Testament Christianity. Among Eastern nations, where Christianity has attained power and a foothold in the New Testament sense, it has almost always involved breaking away from the isolation and the solitude of oriental religious conceptions. In a word, Christianity is social in its outlook, and contemplates social aims and social activities. Hence any theological interpretation which stands in the way of this social aspect of Christianity must be diametrically op-

posed to the central impulse of the gospel. This is exactly what the "personal" idea of theology or the idea of an "individual theology" does. A personal theology contradicts the social aims of Christianity. It seeks the isolation of the individual and his government apart from his relation to the race. It makes the criteria of action resident in himself rather than in the general collective conceptions of the brotherhood. It is a kind of modern monasticism without the virtues of the old-fashioned kind. It is also a species of intellectual egotism raised to the dignity and erected into a system of selfishness. To have a personal theology one must necessarily think of himself apart from the rest of mankind and the community, and this of itself is the sure road to spiritual isolation and exceptionalness, which usually results in spiritual death. Nor is there any freedom sacrificed or any loss of initiative in keeping to the general movement of the common mind. The collective mind of the race is, after all, more powerful, more discerning, and more discriminating than any single mind, however brilliant, can be.

A personal theology, however, as a mere fad or harmless amusement, might be endured. The dangerous and depressing feature about it lies in that it has, as its necessary, certainly usual, concomitant, a theory of "personal" morals. Here again we might be met with the assurance that there are no morals which are not personal, and this of course is true enough. But it is also true, and even more true, that morality to be effective must have its strength not in the perceptions of any one individual however gifted, but in the collective recognition of mutual and common obligations. The Mormon morality springs from the Mormon theology. If the theology is loose, vague, illy-constructed, lacking in clearness of outline, and especially in definiteness of ideas which give sanction and

authority to moral obligations, there will be a corresponding weakness and lassitude in the moral life. Hence it is not strange to find that concomitant, and as we believe as a result of it, with the prevalence of the ideas about "personal theology" and a superheated "personalism" generally, you have systems of "personal" morals also, which show a widespread and very general destruction of the moral bond in society. It is no wonder that observers of this social and moral sickness are asking, whether it is not possible to erect a "new hell." But what does the inquiry for a "new hell" connote? Does it not simply acknowledge that the binding power in morals lies in some sort of a theological conception? And does it not prove clearly enough that, even in the mind of a college professor, there is a necessary inherent connection between the kind of theology a man holds and the kind of a life he lives? Why ask for a "new hell" if hell is not an idea or a conception which will influence men to right action? It is a curious circumstance, too, that this cry for a "hell-made" motive to righteousness should arise from a Universalist source! The righteousness produced by the fear of hell may not be of the ideal kind, but it is certainly better than moral anarchy; and this is about what the widespread acceptance of the theories of personal theology has produced, when they have been translated into the habits and practices of the ordinary man.

The fact, however, is, that the weakening of moral bonds and the loss of spiritual authority by doctrines and institutions which formerly exercised them, is due not so much to changes of ideas, as to the fact that the attention and seat of authority in matters moral is placed where it has no right to be. Such insistence upon the "personal sway" is exactly what the Hay-market anarchists insisted upon as their right, and is what all breakers of the natural ties of social life insist upon. Often

the fundamental conceptions of life have not much or seriously altered, because life has in itself corrective forces which tend to make certain ideas hold their own, whether they are pleasant or not. Retributive justice is one of them. The certainty of some kind of retribution is so grounded in the human consciousness that it probably never will be taken away. The "fearful looking for" which is the accompaniment of a guilty conscience, does not depend on any theological system. But when these sanctions are confused in their operation, and the attention of men is directed to their own inner life, and this is held to furnish all the needful criteria for a sound and upright life, the resulting confusion ends in almost absolute moral obliquity. The distinguished lawyer who conducted the prosecution of a notorious political ballot-box stuffer in Long Island, who at the same time carried on the normal functions of a Sunday-school superintendent, believed firmly that the cross-examination showed that the criminal had so long focussed his attention upon his own primacy in that particular district that the notion of its being in violation of the fundamental laws of the land never occurred to him. This is exceedingly likely to be the case. Where the egoistic impulses are regarded as in themselves something excellent and authoritative, it is not likely that the altruistic interest will have much chance. In a similar way a self-centered theology is likely to produce a self-centered morality, and thus ultimates in no morality at all.

The alternative to this conception is not one which insists on "original sin" and the natural damnation of all men. It is simply saying that the glorification of man has been woefully overdone. It is simply revealing the fact that the absurd emphasis placed on what the individual thinks and feels, is not calculated to produce a sound religious life, and is not even profitable for him who does it. The much-deplored loss

of authority is not so much that, as it is the exaggerated and utterly vulgar self-centered laudation of humanity which makes man willing to be ministered to by everything in the heavens above, the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth, while he gives out nothing, assumes responsibility for nothing, and shirks all the natural obligations which the social body would impose upon him in its religious organization, on the ground that he must live his "own" life on some theory of "personal" theology. It need not be added that in those denominations where this theory has had largest sway, peculiarly the Congregational bodies, especially the Unitarians, the corporate sense is the weakest, and the power of reproduction and inspiration to the foundation motives of religious activity are reduced almost to the vanishing-point. This does not say that the Unitarian creed, in so far as it may be said to have a program or a creed, has not much excellent material for a healthy, useful, and happy life. But it has in its history so driven down the stake of the supremacy of the individual in theological thought, and utterly ignored anything like authority in the collective denominational consciousness, that the stake has pierced its vitals, and its disappearance is almost inevitable. The Trinitarian Congregationalists share, to the degree that this spirit prevails among them, the same listlessness on the side of denominational unity and aggressiveness.

It cannot be contended, with truth either, that this has not any moral significance. It has the greatest moral interest and importance imaginable. Where the denominational or collective claim is strong, the standards are subject to constant correction and scrutiny. Where the individual feels bound to stand in harmonious and contributory relations to his fellow-denominationalists, his altruistic sense is stimulated, and the law of the whole becomes large on his horizon, and powerful

in determining his action and distributing his energies. Whatever may be the effect in other spheres of activity, religious life and power cannot be maintained without a highly developed spirit of collectivism. When it is excessive, it leads to the repulsive forms of sectarianism and proselytism. But even this form of it, actuated as it usually is by a missionary impulse, is vastly to be preferred to the lassitude of approaching death. John Burroughs tells us that the sweetest song-birds in America are also the fiercest fighters. This is not another form of the argument for the strenuous, that is, the quarrelsome life. It is merely saying that the finest emotions spring where the sense of power, which usually is inherent in the sense of collective strength and unity, is the strongest. Thus the "personal" theory defeats even the expectation and hope of highly developed and interesting emotions. Extreme personalism means, ultimately, sterility, spiritual and moral.

INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM IN UNITY ONLY.

The mainspring of the movement and the type of thought with which we have been dealing was the desire for freedom in life, self-development, and faith. From one cause and another traditional theology had become impossible to some, irksome to many, and powerless with a great many more. Freedom hitherto has meant an attack on something or a revolt from something. Hence it was a natural supposition that institutional life of any kind stood for the reduction of the individual to some kind of bondage, and the church, and indeed all institutions which required any kind of subordination to the law of the whole, became in the eyes of many the instruments of oppression. Now in what has been said let no one suppose that there is the slightest intimation that it arises from any desire to interfere in the slightest with the natural and perfectly sound instincts of mature and growing minds. Freedom

is the most precious heritage which the Reformation has left us. The dogmatic positions to which it led us are more or less vulnerable. Protestantism is a misnomer for the position toward which the Reformation strove. It cannot be in the mind of any one who is familiar with the New Testament to resign the ideal of catholicity or of a catholic church. But it cannot, either, be in the mind of any one to give over the right of private judgment, or indeed any part of that freedom which has been gained at so great a cost and maintained with such difficulty. But the alternative of papacy is not anarchy. And to deny a pope or a bishop is not to create a million lilliputian popes, each only a trifle less ignorant than the other, and none with dignity, self-command, and power enough to regulate himself, much less furnish inspiration for others! Freedom, then, must be maintained and developed and the individual must be kept inviolate for his highest growth and effectiveness. How shall that be attained? The simple answer is, that true freedom for the individual will be found in the unity of the brotherhood, in the law of the whole. The authority which once was the pope's and which many people thought could be transferred complete and without modification to the Bible, lies in neither, but in the collective consciousness of the church, as that church is inspired by the Spirit of God. There also lies the individual's freedom, and there only. All the discussion which leads away from this ideal is simply wandering in the wilderness. Separation from the common consciousness, and from the highway of common aspiration, common victory, and common defeat, is simply the isolation that first has the beguiling atmosphere of the pleasing and novel mystery, but that ends finally in the bog and the mire of darkness and moral death. Surely the age in which we live is intelligent enough to achieve compactness and solidarity of purpose and action,

without the fear of tyranny or the anxiety incident to anticipated sacerdotalism! What shall be said of our epoch of its organizing power, of its use of resources, of its intellectual alertness, of its readiness to apply its knowledge, if in the face of its greatest problem, namely the preservation of its religious life and organization, its freest individuals are to be kept from effective unity by the fear of bishops and the scarecrows of a possible papacy? There can be no severer indictment of our time than to deny to us this power, and forever make the souls that seek for effective service flee to a false and superficial unity in outward forms, because we make petty and transitory personal standards the apparent court of last resort for the religious life, and make personal theologies the method of instruction in religious thought. The revolt which led away from the extreme and unwholesome institutionalism and traditionalism, which may perhaps have stifled thought and hindered self-realization in some directions, was not more oppressive, and certainly was not as absurd and childish, as the present situation, in which the freest bodies in Christendom cannot formulate enough principles of unity to act in unison in the great business of the kingdom. It is for the individuals to know that in the law of the whole their freedom is secure. It is for the church to recognize that the methods of the Spirit of God are various, and that its security lies in the highest individual types which it can produce. These two basal truths, freedom and fellowship, form the pillars upon which strength and perpetuity rest. The first we have achieved, it remains for us to see whether we can maintain the second also.

There is in all that has been said no single word that is to be interpreted as a backward step from the great essential principles of the Protestant position. But eternal protest is not the state of a church going onward in spiritual conquest and

growth. The Holy Catholic Church never has been divided, and never can be divided. And a genuine catholicity has nothing in it that can interfere with the largest enjoyments of personal enrichment, inquiry, or growth. But if there is to be kept open a highway, it must be a highway, not a blind alley. If the historic advance of Christianity is not to end, like the Rhine River, in extinction, then the stream must be kept wide and deep, and the little streams of individual self-interest and self-development, even in devotion and spirituality, must flow into the great channel of the whole. Where the individual Christians all feel it needful to have the ritual modified to suit themselves, and the individual theologians all feel it necessary to add their "personal" touch, and the masses of the church at large are kept guessing whether these varieties of thought belong to the same class or not and whether the words used mean what they seem to mean, and have to carry on a perpetual game of hide-and-seek with symbolical meaning and critical guesses and economic theologies, the church may live; but it will be a weak, ill-fed, anæmic thing. In no respect is the need of the church so great at this moment as in this matter. If the mass of thinking men and women will come from the lanes and by-paths of personal self-assertion and self-gratification in which they have been wandering into the great common road of historic Christianity, and if the religious thinkers and preachers will all join in a grand and united affirmation of the simple essentials of the Christian gospel, and use the vernacular of common life, and deal with the processes and the practices with which common men are familiar, the tramp of the swelling forces will itself make a resounding that will awake echoes of the triumphant revivals of other days. Liberty has been achieved. Whether we can achieve the unity which is its custodian and protection, is the pressing question of the hour.