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REVOLT OF THE INDIVIDUAL.

BY REV. R. H. GRAVES, D.D.

CANTON, CHINA.

One of the most marked features of our present age is the Revolt of the Individual. One of the most notable truths in the new era introduced by the Christ was the importance of the individual. As opposed to all Jewish notions of the nation and the family, John the Baptist announced that man was to act as an individual and be judged as an individual; "And even now the axe lieth at the root of the tree; every tree, therefore, that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." (Mat. iii:10). Jesus preached the same doctrine to Nicodemus. (John iii). So we are taught that at the judgment every one must give an account of himself before God. As distinguished from the Jewish emphasis on the family and the Greek idea of the state Christianity emphasizes man as an individual. Nations and families meet with their judgment in human history—in this life—but each man's eternal destiny depends on his individual faith and conduct.

This essential note of Christianity is emphasized with more or less force in different systems of ecclesiastical polity. Episcopacy, Presbyterianism and Congregationalism vary in the place accorded to the individual believer in the government of the associated body. Infant baptism obscures the Scriptural doctrine of the responsibility and the importance of the individual. Baptists claim justly that they alone place the emphasis where the Bible does, that each man must be converted for himself, be baptized for himself, have a voice in the church for himself and be judged for himself—that he is responsible in religious matters to Christ alone. As a member of society he has various relationships and duties, but in the sphere of religion he must commune with God alone and is accountable to God alone.

As the judgment day draws nearer the idea of individualism permeates society more and more. Especially is this movement seen under despotic governments, like those of Russia and China. The revolt of the masses is notorious at the present time. All know of the seething state of the peasantry and middle artisan classes in Russia. Autocracy is straining every nerve to maintain its control and is forced to make concessions to the people, though grudgingly and perhaps only as a matter of expediency rather than of principle.

In China similar conditions exist, though the fires are still smouldering. There is a spirit of intense dissatisfaction with the Manchu power though it is the best perhaps that China has ever had. The people are tired of the corruption that honeycombs the whole mass of mandarindom, though there are wise statesmen and progressive rulers among the officials. It is the *system* that is rotten, and the masses that are discontented. It may be that they have as good a set of rulers as they deserve and better than they could secure by revolution, yet this counts for nothing, for it is always easier to complain of the ills we have than to fly to others that we know not of. A spirit of revolt against present conditions has come over the people. The spirit of militarism is rampant; not of devotion to a military leader, but a desire of the people to prepare to take things into their own hands. Not only are they anxious to resist the encroachments of foreign powers, but they are impatient with their own rulers. The monied classes are claiming recognition. Hitherto they were simply "squeezed" by the mandarins, nominally to benefit the Empire, but too often really to line the fat purses of the mandarins themselves. Now they are demanding control as a right. An interesting illustration of this popular feeling is seen in the matter of the Canton-Hankow railway. In compliance with the popular demand it was purchased by China from the American Syndicate which secured the concession, because they did not want the line to be controlled by a foreign nation. But when the mandarins

came to appeal to the wealthy classes to furnish the money, they refused to subscribe unless they themselves were permitted to organize a company and take entire control. This brought about friction between the Viceroy and the "Chamber of Commerce", or merchants' guild, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of a leading "citizen" who was finally released by a telegram from Peking. The *people* won the contest, and shares in the railroad sold like wild fire, the people crowding to invest their money and vieing with each other in saluting the lately imprisoned man with flags and firecrackers and incense.

Another illustration of the triumph of the popular will occurred in the now famous "boycott". In obedience to orders from Peking, the authorities made a show of checking it, but the committee in their placards and their posters and tracts claimed the *right* of the people to give their custom to whom they pleased, and to say what they chose about foreigners. So virulent were their attacks and so baseless the lies they circulated (such as that the Americans had burnt to death 20,000 Chinese in one place) that they inflamed the passions of the mob so as to render the position of foreigners quite precarious, not to mention the Sien Chow massacre. The native newspapers have taken the lead in this anti-foreign crusade, so that the Government is said to be taking steps to control them lest they involve China in a war.

In India the assertion of the popular will has taken the form of a boycott against British goods called the *Swadeski*, the people claiming that it is not an uprising against the Government, but a desire to promote native manufactures, on the principle of the protective tariff which prevails in the United States and elsewhere. Though a commercial contest it is also an illustration of the people claiming rights and power for themselves.

The danger of this individualistic reaction against all despotisms and control is that it may easily degenerate into anarchy and a revolt against all authority, as in Russia at the present day, and in France at the Revolution over 100 years ago. So intolerable is this to society

that there is certain to be a revulsion under some Napoleon. "License they mean, when they cry liberty," as Milton said. Still some progress is made. France now is far in advance of France under the Louises. God, who "from evil still educes good" so rules His world that in the ebb and flow of the nations, the tide is always rising until the "spring tide" of the future comes. Freedom is a prerequisite to a just judgment.

The abolition of slavery in America and the recent avalanche in England in the late elections, as well as the separation of Church and State in France all tend to the same end, the release of the individual.

But "the far-off Divine event" to which all things are tending is not the supremacy of the individual, but that of the Lord Jesus. In this blessed autocracy, however, all submit to the sway of the One not through fear or from compulsion, but because their wills are blended in His, and they love to obey Him. This is the joyful consummation.

It may seem strange that in lands where there is the most freedom there is a reflex current. This seems an anomaly and a backset, and yet it is undeniable. In trades unions and syndicates individual judgments and consciences are too often surrendered to the dictation of some demagogue or monied magnate. In politics individual convictions and conscience are too often abandoned to the will of the *caucus*, for the fancied good of the party, or the will of a "boss". Expediency expels conscience. In the commercial sphere it is notorious that "corporations have no souls." Men, otherwise good, yield to policy. These things show the weakness of individualism in a wicked world, and lead us to despair of the triumph of the right in an unregenerate world. Still, they tend to show men the necessity for the reign of Christ and to make us long for a millennial age.

The emphasis placed on heredity and environment by the evolutionary philosophy so fashionable in the last century has tended to dull the force of individual convictions in the spheres of religion and sociology. But

the trend is now in the other direction, and we may hope to see this undue bias corrected, as men realize the dignity of a man and the Scriptural stress on the individual conscience and the supreme importance of the individual character. "Every man shall give an account of himself before God," and a man will not be prepared for the judgment until he realizes this truth in its full force.

It must never be forgotten that our first parents fell through an undue assertion of their individuality, and this will always be a danger associated with such desire. Rebellion against just authority, ungratefulness to benefactors, disobedience to God, and any assertion of personality to the injury of our fellowmen—all these are illegitimate outbreaks of individualism, and must be met with stern reprobation. God gave us wills that we may make them His. The highest object of the individual should be to have "a conscience void of offence towards God", and to have the daily self-consciousness that we please God.

It is because of the perversion of individualism that there has been a reaction towards altruism, socialism, communism and even anarchy. There is an element of good in some of these, but this does not do away with the importance of the individual.

The highest conception of human virtue and privilege is not individualism as an end, but only as a means. The free, individual, loving, submission of our whole being to God; or, perhaps we should rather say, the merging of our minds, hearts and wills in His, is the highest end of man—"absorption into the deity", as some Eastern systems of philosophy have tried to express it, is our goal. These systems, however, err in holding that we lose our personality. The ultimate consummation and glory of man will be the conscientious, loving submission of his will to that of Christ in His blessed reign. "Then cometh the end when He shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father," and His mediatorial work being accomplished. "The Son also Himself be subjected to Him that did subject all things unto Him, that God may be all in all." (I Cor. xv: 24-28.)