

Written for this Paper

THE PROBLEM OF AGENCY.

That men's minds need direction and that interference with personal agency is seen everywhere in human experience, is so plain as to require no comment, but few there are who are masters of their own acts or even of their own thoughts; and race proclivities are as much the product of the whole as of each individual apparently.

There is but little originality in the masses. One here and there by personal will makes a position. The majority need one made for them; will is weak and enterprise is stagnant; they move in grooves and are automata almost. Put them anywhere, there they remain. They vegetate and do not grow; they are satisfied with little rather than to increase that little of their own volition. Probably a few are moved by example. They try to imitate and in this, advance a square or two on the checker-board of life. Hence but few men employ themselves. They have to be employed, and as of old, they stand in the market place because "no man hath hired them."

Thousands are indisposed to work save at that to which they have been accustomed. Adaptability is lacking. There is no self-help or self-reliance. The pointing of a pin, the polishing of a needle, driving a team, immersed in a coal mine, or claiming to be a mechanic, men will hesitate almost to starvation point ere they take up earnestly (and then hardly ever successfully) something to which they are unaccustomed. The force of circumstances insists at times that this shall be otherwise. The fathers in this Territory were made farmers—many of them by compulsion. If they had wanted to they could not have got away from here; being exhausted on arrival; and deeming duty absolute they reluctantly remained, like the Pioneers who "came here willingly because they were obliged," as President G. A. Smith used to say.

But they never loved their occupation, and in this feeling centers probably a fact of science. Children so born and raised, rebel, dislike, forsake that which after years of experience in the past of the fathers has become a matter of routine and habit, a modification to indifference or acquiescence, spite of the original dislike.

We heard of a person who said to President Young that he would never raise boys to his own occupation—merchandising; but after years found a number so engaged. To use a semi-vulgar phrase, "that which was bred in the bone would come out in the flesh;" "like (it may be said) begets like." "Ye are of your father the devil," said good authority, "for his works ye do." Per contra, the claim of paternity made by the Jews as to Father Abraham was denied on a philosophic ground, "If ye were the children of Abraham ye would do the works of Abraham."

Have not many been "born into the kingdom of God" because of the spiritual longing of their fathers, who years prior to their advent had fallen asleep? Parental characteristics are repeated, as all comment

testifies. How like his father, in walk, gesture, proclivities, mental or business acumen! "How like the mother," says an observer; "all her beauty, her cleverness, her spirit and person!" "How like the father in some things, how like the mother in others!" says another. How modified and blended at times when mutual love and regard determined an unforeseen future! And further, how again at times close parentage is ignored or unperceived, because heredity struck back a generation or two, reproducing ancestral features for a surprise.

If the aspirations, characteristics and features are thus reproduced, what of individual agency? When an inveterate drunkard repeats himself in his posterity, where is the agency of the child? When posterity is cursed with disease or with passions beyond control, is it not simply the "visiting of the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third or fourth generation?"

Even if the assertion is made that agency can modify by cultivation or repression this undoubted inheritance, is it not at times after much struggle, lifelong effort and vast cost? For power used in this way is evident waste and might have been prevented perchance by intelligent consideration. The old saying is not yet worn out, though repeated almost ad nauseam, "Ye cannot gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles;" and common sense does not look for special sobriety in the drunkard's home; does not count on virtue in the haunts of profligacy; does not expect special industry in the offspring of the idler; does not ask for a high type of reverence, devotion, religion where skeptics repeat themselves; does not think that intelligence will grow robustly in the soil of ignorance. "As men sow, so shall they reap," is surely an eternal law, and it may not be too much to say that considerable religious, moral and mental phenomenon is purely the working of irresistible "cause and effect." Nor can we doubt that much parental anxiety, much of family discipline, much that claims encouragement or repression or the diverting of embryo agency, is directly traceable to feelings, conditions, loves, dislikes, neglect or hypocrisy on the part of uncontrolled progenitors.

Most men and women need discipline as much as their children. Free and unrestricted agency is no more possible to one than to the other. "When I would do good evil is present with me," said Paul. Any Pharisee will admit that; but Paul went much further than that when he said, "The things which I would, those I do not, and the things which I would not, those I do." Surely all experience points out the imperfection, the limit of agency. Where is the person who would not change his condition, his surroundings, his opportunities, if he could? He feels within, longings—good ones; desires—grand ones; ambitions—great ones; all good, perchance, and the confession that probably these things are withheld for good is simply a blind giving away of the point after all.

Where, then, is the origin or limit of agency? It is where responsibility begins, when there is a measure of experience, where there is in part com-

prehension of law. Up to this time, according to the need, we in education's processes endeavor to control agency to make it subservient to rule, to authority, to such order as superiors inaugurate or establish, sometimes by compulsion, then by penalty, finally by intelligence. After maturer years, society, associations, conditions, affect that, each making the faculty more or less modified partly by necessity or partly of choice as the case may be. The measure of responsibility is in the individual. If he is non compos mentis, society condones, excuses or confines according to its manifestation. But no one is obliged to be another. He must be himself, and as he acquires self-knowledge learns his defects, ailments, weaknesses, moral obligation insists on restraint, correction, improvement. When such defects are radical and chronic, all appliances of educational science aim at redemption, and point out methods of control or expansion—development as the case may suggest.

There can be no personal responsibility as to what a man or person is. But as to what shall be made of that he constitutes the agency of effort. Men must try, must seek to remedy—to overcome. President Young said that as a man ought to pray, he should "compel his knees to bend, his body to bow, his lips to speak." This may not be done at once, but persistence may will, eventually compel success. The same authority had a will of his own, as is well known; but it required half his life to bring himself to leave off tobacco. A man with less iron in his composition might have lived and died a usurer. Only the strength of that privilege which all may enjoy comes when "the Spirit helpeth our infirmities."

The power of faith centers in this promise—this endowment. By it weak ones become strong, ignorant ones full of wisdom. Evil is eradicated, subdued, brought into subjection. Agency is purified, strengthened, enlarged, modified. The things formerly loved are now hated. Will is sanctified, lost, swallowed in obedience to a higher law, even that of Christ. "Nevertheless not my will, but Thine be done!"

After all, there are persons of great decision, of powerful will, and it may be harder to secure their conversion and regeneration than where persons are more pliable, disposed to submit, to obey, to do right so far as they have light and knowledge. When these become illuminated, their path is like that of the just which "shineth brighter and brighter to the perfect day." The agency of the child is checked, reprov'd, corrected, enlarged, cultivated. Some men are ever children, and they, while subservient, useful, passive, are never leaders. They do not "achieve greatness." They never overcome. Untrammelled agency is a thing unknown in the economy of God or the experience of men. Only in part can men do as they will. The limit of ability is the limit of agency; and while there was a great truth in the words "ye will not come unto me that ye might have life," it was equally true, no doubt, "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him!"