

The Brotherhood Man

His Outer Life before Men

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE BROTHERHOOD
OF ST. ANDREW AT ST. STEPHEN'S PARISH HOUSE,
BOSTON, SUNDAY, FEB. 12, 1899

BY

CHARLES SUMNER HAMLIN

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BEFORE MEN.

The invitation to address the Brotherhood of St. Andrew came as a complete surprise. I should have hesitated long before accepting it, did I not feel that a request from this great Christian body was a command which must be obeyed.

The subject assigned to me is "The Brotherhood Man: His Outer Life before Men." It deals of necessity with the relation of man to his fellow-men, with his outer life before man as opposed to his inner life before God. It has not necessarily to do with religion, but rather with ethics. In religion we deal with an infinite personality. When dealing with finite personality, we are in the domain of ethics.

The study of man is a most interesting one, to the student and historian as well as to the philosopher. One instinctively calls to mind the beautiful words of Sophocles in the *Antigone*, telling of the wonders of nature, and pronouncing the greatest wonder of all to be man: he fearlessly sails over the sea; earth yields him her treasure; with plough and steed he makes the barren soil redundant; he captures fish and fowl; he rides the fiery steed and guides the stubborn bull; he studies the future by the past; teaches his children; makes laws; loves his country; he yields only to death,—to the grave he must go! A better epitome of life could not be written. In the history of the world man has indeed proved himself a greater wonder than Nature.

At the height of our present development, at the very zenith of our prosperity, it becomes our bounden duty to consider just what are the duties we owe ourselves and society, and whether or not we are fulfilling such duties. It should be remembered that material prosperity may be but

the forerunner of intellectual and moral decay. If we advance in harmony with true morality, we shall have healthy progress. Without it must follow retrogression and decay.

The ethical duties of man to his fellow-men is a subject which for centuries has engaged careful thought and attention. We must, as I have said, carefully keep out of the domain, in such a discussion, of both religion and law. In religion we are dealing with the infinite: our discussion has to do only with the finite. In law personality is regarded as complete, and society is considered but the aggregation of equal units. The personality we are considering, however, is capable of infinite development; and it is this development of the individual in his relations to his fellow-men with which we to-day concern ourselves. Ethics has been called the science of self-preservation. It deals with man as opposed to his fellow-men, with self as opposed to society. The theory of these relations has been carefully studied, especially by the English and German philosophers, and, beginning with an absence of the religious element almost akin to Paganism, has undergone a steady development, finally merging into the truths of Christianity.

We find two diverse schools of philosophy, running side by side, treating of the relation and duties of man to his fellow-men: the one, Utilitarianism, so called; the other, Idealism. The former is purely objective, the latter subjective. The Utilitarian school is best represented by Hobbes, Mandeville, Locke, Rousseau, Paley, and later by Bentham and John Stuart Mill. According to this latter school of thought the natural state of man was considered a warlike state. Society was an armed neutrality. All things were good or bad as they affected individuals. Its disciples believed, originally at least, that man had no interest save in himself; that society is but the aggregate of completed units. Mandeville even looked upon man as a brute seeking simply the gratification of his own desires. While incidentally he does seek the good of others, it was not, according to Mandeville, because of others, but because it is his own good. The theory of these writers is one of intense individual selfish-

ness, the one man opposed to every other,—the success of the one the measure of the loss to the other.

As opposed to this extreme selfishness of Utilitarianism, there were other systems of philosophy,—notably, those of the Sentimentalists and the Idealists. The Sentimentalists early grasped the idea of a broader self, and something beyond one's self. Cumberland recognized that, although our object in life is to seek happiness, yet that happiness must be sought in connection with others. With him sympathy was a link binding together mankind.

Adam Smith, the famous economist, carried the idea yet farther: he looked upon sympathy as a universal element of mankind; he thus recognized a broadened "self." He preferred the judgment of the man within the breast (conscience) to that of the man without (vanity). His writings furnish an easy stepping-stone to the school of philosophy known as Idealism.

The theory of the Idealists was the very opposite to that of the Utilitarian school. The latter based morality solely on the consequences to self. The Idealists absolutely repudiated this narrow conception of self in connection with morality.

The principal writers of the Idealist school were Cudworth, More, Clarke, and Kant. They taught the idea of absolute right and wrong. To them the laws of the world were but the thoughts of God. The idea of right and wrong they believed to be firmly implanted in our nature. Kant even broadened the idea of self almost to the conception of Universal Reason. His maxim of life was, "Canst thou will that thy maxim should be Universal Law?" With Kant actions were good or bad according to the motive which determined them, not according to the object aimed at.

Thus these two schools of philosophy stood opposed one to the other, the one utterly selfish, the other utterly disregarding self.

The later development of the Utilitarian school, however, brings it very near to Idealism. Bentham, starting with a

narrow conception of self, broadened it into the "greatest happiness of the greatest number." He clearly saw that society has an important place in the problem of self. He would even have sacrificed the individual to the many.

John Stuart Mill began with the belief that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote individual happiness, wrong as they tend to promote the reverse. He taught that man gives up much to society, not because of any claim which society may have upon him, but because thereby he individually is benefited. It was a purely selfish philosophy, but Mill, later in life, was forced practically to abandon it. He finally recognized that there was such a thing as social feelings of mankind as opposed to those of the individual; that man never conceived himself save as a member of a body; that the ultimate sanction of conduct is a subjective feeling in our own minds. In other words, his conception of self becomes broadened until it embraces society. Finally, he grasped the truth that individual happiness comes out of the happiness of society, and that the true prosperity of the individual comes from the prosperity of society.

Thus we see these rival schools of thought, originally as wide apart as the poles, come together in substantial unity.

But it may fairly be asked, To what practical purpose should the Brotherhood Man apply these ethical teachings? One has only to look around him to find the answer to this inquiry. The early Utilitarian view of man we see daily reflected in life.

How few of us in the struggle for existence strive for other than our own selfish gain! How many of us look upon life as but a conflict between man and man, in which the strongest survives! How many believe that the gain of one in this world is necessarily achieved at the cost of loss to another!

Look around us at the mad struggle for wealth and power, the favorable recognition of success, even though acquired by methods of doubtful morality. Observe the tendency of the times to estimate the value of a man's life by his material success or failure.

Or, to broaden the conception, do we not to-day see great nations, really interdependent because of diversity of soil, manufactures, or climate, eying one another askance and ever increasing the burdens of taxation for the creation of fortifications and engines of war, which, if used to their capacity, might destroy civilization, and even man himself? Do we not hear the proposition boldly advanced that conduct which would be characterized as wrong in an individual, and would subject him to scorn and contempt, is justifiable in the case of a nation? Can we not but deplore the steady growth of the feeling of militarism, which openly distrusts and even derides the beneficent peace offering to humanity at the hands of the Emperor of Russia?

Let it be the duty of the brotherhood man to break down these savage, barbarous conceptions of mankind, and to hold up the true ideals of life. Let us reveal to our fellow-men by precept and practice that the sacrifice of self for the good of society is, in the long run, not only true expediency, but also is in strict accord with the principles of Christianity. Let us teach our fellow-men that the gauge of a useful life should be not material success, but its contribution to the common cause of humanity.

Selfish, material success is limited, but the good the individual can do for humanity is illimitable. According to the material standard, how few have succeeded in this life! In the contribution to the general good of humanity, what a wealth of riches has been gathered! Let us keep before the world the idea of the common good and the necessity of personal sacrifice. Let us constantly impress upon our fellow-men that development of society through individual sacrifice is what tends to make the progress of man and of nations permanent, and not ephemeral. Let us obey the injunction of the man within the breast rather than the man without. Let us follow the teachings and precepts of that great Saviour of men who gave his life that others might live. These are the truths for which the Brotherhood Man should strive.

The remembrance of the Columbian Exposition has not yet faded from our minds. Who can forget the Court of

Honor, guarded by majestic buildings, our highest conception of the beautiful? or the noble columns of the Peristyle, and the shimmering waters beyond? On that Peristyle, in letters of gold, were those sacred words: "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Let us seek that truth; and, knowing it, we, too, shall be made free, and throwing aside the false ideals of life, we can better discharge the sacred duties we owe ourselves, society, and our Maker.