

PRACTICAL IDEALISM

By Rev. J. Alfred Nansen

The irresistible attraction of the unknown is the imperative of progress. The subtle consciousness that we are constantly touching upon the borders of vast fields, which are as yet by us unexplored, fills us with vague uneasiness and a sort of divine discontent. And when we once realize that unexplored fields may become known to us by careful investigation, this appeal of the unknown fascinates us, and we cannot easily stifle the impulses that well up within consciousness, impelling us to the conquest of discovery.

When once we gain a right understanding of human nature, by an introspective study of our own psychic nature and by the broader study of the psychology of human behavior in general, we will discover that effort to master the unknown is the spice of living. Unconquered fields have magnetic powers which keep the human species ever striving onward and upward. God Himself realized this when He placed man in the midst of a mysterious world and commissioned him with the task of subjugating its forces, utilizing them for the accomplishment of purposes to be devised by his own intelligence. This commission, God given to man, is not beyond the possibility of ultimate realization.

In the misty ages of a distant past God created a wonderful world. Man was placed in the midst of it, like a stranger in a strange land. Fiery tongues of lightning darted at random thru the heavens and struck terror to the heart of primitive man as it splintered the giant of the forest or cleft the rocky cliff wherein man himself made his dwelling. He realized that there was power there and this realization filled him with unrest and compelled him to investigation. Eventually a copper bit was placed between the fiery teeth of the lightning and it was made to light our cities, heat our homes and furnish power for locomotion and the means of conversation between friends separated by a continent of land or an ocean of water. A desire to know the facts connected with the display of electrical power in the heavens led man into a conquest in which he persisted until at last he conquered.

Swift streamlets took their rise in the melting snows of white capped mountains and gallop onward with terrific power ultimately to waste their strength as they poured their torrents into the dead level of the

sea. The natives, dwelling upon the banks of the river, recognized here a tremendous power, digging gorges in solid rock, and sometimes, wildly erratic in the spring freshets, climbing over its restraining channels and carrying their homes in its bosom in its onward journey.

The unknown source of its power led man into a series of investigations and experiments with the result that today it has been mastered and its power utilized in turning the wheels of industry.

Air currents fanned the cheeks of our primitive ancestors and sometimes, raging in angry violence, swept broad paths of desolation and ruin thru the trackless forests. Man, troubled in the face of the storm, surrounded by a power which he could not understand. He entered upon a conquest of investigation and has conquered. Today the air about us pumps the water which quenches the thirst of whole cities, and furnishes an unobstructed traffic way for locomotion.

Fire, accidentally set by lightning, did incalculable damage in the primitive history of the human race but man has tamed it until it has become his obedient servant. He sets it going beneath boilers of common water and produces new power which he encases in vessels of steel, hitching it to the drive wheels of giant horses of steel and iron which draw long strings of coaches over rivers, thru mountains and across plains at the rate of more than a mile a minute. In these coaches men and women carry on conversation, laugh and make merry, sleep and dine, feeling themselves in perfect safety. Or men hitch it up to the spiral drive of boats made of steel and iron and make these great boats carry the population of a whole city or a cargo of 50,000 tons of freight across an ocean to unload it at the threshold of a new continent.

This is how man is responding to the imperative of progress. I believe we are still surrounded by undiscovered powers as great as those we have just mentioned. I believe the next thousand years of human history will record achievements as great as those of the past millennium.

From his achievements of the past we see that man is not a mere tool of circumstances, a little cog in the universal mechanism of nature. We have discovered that, far from being hopelessly sub-servient to the natural forces by which he is surrounded, man has the ability to conquer these by his own intelligence and to put them to work as he will. Man has thus

produced results, thru intelligent mastery of natural forces, which nature left to itself would never have evolved.

It has always been the subtle attraction of possibilities lying just beyond the threshold of demonstrated facts which has led ultimately to great discoveries. The intelligent utilization of these discoveries has made achievements possible for the human race which primitive men, in the wildest imaginations of dreamy youth, could not have pictured.

Therefore, progress consists in evolving ideals and demonstrating their validity by bringing phenomenal realizations up to their level. It is thus that the mysteries of the universe have been pushed farther and farther back by man's pursuit of the knowable unknown by which he was surrounded.

The first step toward progress is meditation. It may be speculative and shadowy in the extreme, aroused by a primitive curiosity, which is strongest in youthful years, but it is by meditation that we are stirred to interest and inspired for conquest. The ideal is the product of meditation. An ideal is an unrealized possibility. Youth is the golden age of idealism. Without ideals there can be no progress. Once possessed of an ideal, man is never satisfied until it is realized. Though hazy and ill-defined in its early formation, an ideal grows into definite proportions as it is sometimes said to be by folks who like to appear too rational to be sentimental. It is that product of the sub-consciousness which first preced-

ed and finally ushers reality into the full day-light of consciousness. It is the imperative of progress, inspiring man to conquest and to the discovery of the truth.

Youth, without a dream-life of meditation, producing a rich harvest of ideals, is unpromising in the extreme. The greatest capital with which to face life as one emerges from his alma mater is not a conglomerate admixture of disconnected facts but a store of lofty ideals.

Ideals are spiritual things, for they are the products of sub-conscious thinking and all consciousness is spiritual phenomena. There is nothing worthy of man done anywhere except in response to ideals, cherished and nourished, persistent and compelling, in the minds of men.

All the business of the world follows in the wake of the day dreams of individuals. A medical student, dreaming of a large practice built up by a reputation still to be established by efficient service; the law student,

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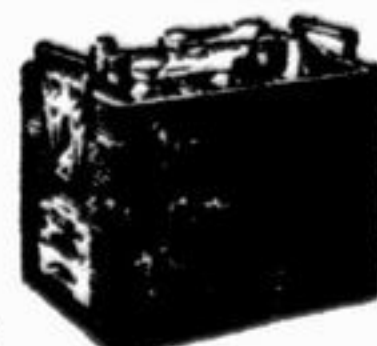
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