

## THE JAPANESE NOT IMPERSONAL

**W**E must now face the far more difficult task of presenting a positive statement in regard to the problem of personality in the Orient. We need to discover just what is or should be meant by the terms "personality" and "impersonality." We must also analyze this Oriental civilization and discover its elementary factors, in order that we may see what it is that has given the impression to so many students that the Orient is "impersonal." In doing this, although our aim is constructive, we shall attain our end with greater ease if we rise to positive results through further criticism of defective views. We naturally begin with definitions.

"Individuality" is defined by the Standard Dictionary as "the state or quality of being individual; separate or distinct existence." "Individual" is defined as "Anything that cannot be divided or separated into parts without losing identity. . . . A single person, animal, or thing." "Personality" is defined as "That which constitutes a person; conscious, separate existence as an intelligent and voluntary being." "Person" is defined as "Any being having life, intelligence, will, and separate individual existence." On these various definitions the following observations seem pertinent.

"Individuality" has reference only to the distinctions existing between different objects, persons, or things. The term draws attention to the fact of distinctness and difference and not to the qualities which make the difference, and least of all to the consciousness of identity by virtue of which "we feel each one of us at home within himself."

"Personality" properly has reference only to that which constitutes a person. As contrasted with an animal

a person has not only life, but also a highly developed and self-conscious intelligence, feeling, and will; these involve moral relations toward other persons and religious relations toward God.

Consciousness is not attendant on every act of the person, much less is self-consciousness, although both are always potential and more or less implicit. A person is often so absorbed in thought or act as to be wholly unconscious of his thinking or acting; the consciousness is, so to speak, submerged for the time being. Self-consciousness implies considerable progress in reflection on one's own states of mind, and in the attainment of the consciousness of one's own individuality. It is the result of introspection. Self-consciousness, however, does not constitute one's identity; it merely recognizes it.

The foundation for a correct conception of the term "personality" rests on the conception of the term "soul" or "spirit." In my judgment, each human being is to be conceived as being a separate "soul," endowed by its very nature with definite capacities or qualities or attributes which we describe as mental, emotional, and volitional, having powers of consciousness more or less developed according to the social evolution of the race, the age of the individual, his individual environment, and depending also on the amount of education he may have received. The possession of a soul endowed with these qualities constitutes a person; their possession in marked measure constitutes developed personality, and in defective measure, undeveloped personality.

The unique character of a "person" is that he combines perfect separateness with the possibility and more or less of the actuality of perfect universality. A "person" is in a true sense a universal, an infinite being. He is thus through the constitution of his psychic nature a thinking, feeling, and willing being. Through his intellect and in proportion to his knowledge he becomes united with the whole objective universe; through his feelings he may become united in sympathy and love with all sentient creation, and even with God himself, the center and source of all being; through his active will he is increasingly creator of his environment. Man is thus in a true sense cre-

ating the conditions which make him to be what he is. Thus in no figurative sense, but literally and actually, man is in the process of creating himself. He is realizing the latent and hitherto unsuspected potentialities of his nature. He is creating a world in which to express himself; and this he does by expressing himself. In proportion as man advances, making explicit what is implicit in his inner nature, is he said to grow in personality. A man thus both possesses personality and grows in personality. He could not grow in it did he not already actually possess it. In such growth both elements of his being, the individual and the universal, develop simultaneously. A person of inferior personal development is at once less individual and less universal. This is a matter, however, not of endowment but of development. We thus distinguish between the original personal endowment, which we may call intrinsic or inherent personality, and the various forms in which this personality has manifested and expressed itself, which we may call extrinsic or acquired personality. Inherent personality is that which differentiates man from animal. It constitutes the original involution which explains and even necessitates man's entire evolution. There may be, nay, must be, varying degrees of expression of the inherent personality, just as there may be and must be varying degrees of consciousness of personality. These depend on the degree of evolution attained by the race and by the individuals of the race.

It is no part of our plan to justify this conception of the nature of personality, or to defend these brief summary statements as to its inherent nature. It is enough if we have gained a clear idea of this conception on which the present chapter, and indeed this entire work, rests. In discussing the question as to personality in the Orient, it is important for us ever to bear in mind the distinctions between the inherent endowment that constitutes personal beings, the explicit and external expression of that endowment, and the possession of the consciousness of that endowment. For these are three things quite distinct, though intimately related.

The term "impersonality" demands special attention,

being the most misused and abused term of all. The first and natural signification of the word is the mere negation of personality; as a stone, for instance, is strictly "impersonal." This is the meaning given by the dictionaries. But in this sense, of course, it is inapplicable to human beings. What, then, is the meaning when applied to them? When Mr. Lowell says, "If with us [of the West] the 'I' seems to be of the very essence of the soul, then the soul of the Far East may be said to be 'impersonal,'" what does he mean? He certainly does not mean that the Chinese and Japanese and Hindus have no emotional or volitional characteristics, that they are strictly "impersonal"; nor does he mean that the Oriental has less development of powers of thinking, willing, feeling, or of introspective meditation. The whole argument shows that he means that *their sense of the individuality or separateness of the Ego is so slight that it is practically ignored; and this not by their civilization alone, but by each individual himself.* The supreme consciousness of the individual is not of himself, but of his family or race; or if he is an intensely religious man, his consciousness is concerned with his essential identity with the Absolute and Ultimate Being, rather than with his own separate self. In other words, the term "impersonal" is made to do duty for the non-existent negative of "individual." "Impersonal" is thus equivalent to "universal" and personal to "individual." To change the phraseology, the term "impersonal" is used to signify a state of mind in which the separateness or individuality of the individual ego is not fully recognized or appreciated even by the individual himself. The prominent element of the individual's consciousness is the unity or the universalism, rather than the multiplicity or individualism.

Mr. Lowell in effect says this in his closing chapter entitled "Imagination." His thesis seems to be that the universal mind, of which each individual receives a fragment, becomes increasingly differentiated as the race mind evolves. In proportion as the evolution has progressed does the individual realize his individuality—his separateness; this individualization, this differentiation of the individual mind is, in his view, the measure as well as the

cause of the higher civilization. The lack of such individualization he calls "impersonality"; in such a mind the dominant thought is not of the separateness between, but of the unity that binds together, himself and the universal mind.

If the above is a correct statement of the conception of those who emphasize the "impersonality" of the Orient, then there are two things concerning it which may be said at once. First, the idea is a perfectly clear and intelligible one, the proposition is definite and tangible. But why do they not so express it? The terms "personality" and "individuality" are used synonymously; while "impersonal" is considered the equivalent of the negative of individual, un-individual—a word which has not yet been and probably never will be used. But the negation of individual is universal; "impersonal," therefore, according to the usage of these writers, becomes equivalent to universal.

But, secondly, even after the use of terms has become thus understood, and we are no longer confused over the words, having arrived at the idea they are intended to convey, the idea itself is fundamentally erroneous. I freely admit that there is an interesting truth of which these writers have got a glimpse and to which they are striving to give expression, but apparently they have not understood the real nature of this truth and consequently they are fundamentally wrong in calling the Far East "impersonal," even in their sense of the word. They are furthermore in error, in ascribing this "impersonal" characteristic of the Japanese to their inherent race nature. If they are right, the problem is fundamentally one of biological evolution.

In contrast to this view, it is here contended, first, that the feature they are describing is not such as they describe it; second, that it is not properly called "impersonality"; third, that it is not a matter of inherent *race* nature, of brain structure, or of mind differentiation, but wholly a matter of social evolution; and, fourth, that if there is such a trait as they describe, it is not due to a deficiently developed but, on the contrary, to a superlatively developed personality, which might better be called super-person-

ality. To state the position here advocated in a nutshell, it is maintained that the asserted "impersonality" of the Japanese is the result of the communalistic nature of the social order which has prevailed down to the most recent times; it has put its stamp on every feature of the national and individual life, not omitting the language, the philosophy, the religion, or even the inmost thoughts of the people. This dominance of the communalistic type of social order has doubtless had an effect on the physical and psychic, including the brain, development of the people. These physical and psychical developments, however, are not the cause, but the product, of the social order. They are, furthermore, of no superlative import, since they offer no insuperable obstacle to the introduction of a social order radically different from that of past millenniums.

Before proceeding to elaborate and illustrate this general position, it seems desirable to introduce two further definitions.

Communalism and individualism are the two terms used throughout this work to describe two contrasted types of social order.

By communalism I mean that order of society, whether family, tribal, or national, in which the idea and the importance of the community are more or less clearly recognized, and in which this idea has become the constructive principle of the social order, and where at the same time the individual is practically ignored and crushed.

By individualism I mean that later order of society in which the worth of the individual has been recognized and emphasized, to the extent of radically modifying the communalism, securing a liberty for individual act and thought and initiative, of which the old order had no conception, and which it would have considered both dangerous and immoral. Individualism is not that atomic social order in which the idea of the communal unity has been rejected, and each separate human being regarded as the only unit. Such a society could hardly be called an order, even by courtesy. Individualism is that developed stage of communalism, wherein the advantages of close communal unity have been retained, and wherein, at

the same time, the idea and practice of the worth of the individual and the importance of giving him liberty of thought and action have been added. Great changes in the internal structure of society follow, but the communal unity or idea is neither lost nor injured. In taking up our various illustrations regarding personality in Japan, three points demand our attention; what are the facts? are they due to, and do they prove, the asserted "impersonality" of the people? and are the facts sufficiently accounted for by the communal theory of the Japanese social order?

Let us begin, then, with the illustration of which advocates of "impersonality" make so much, Japanese politeness. As to the reality of the fact, it is hardly necessary that I present extended proof. Japanese politeness is proverbial. It is carried into the minutest acts of daily life; the holding of the hands, the method of entering a room, the sucking in of the breath on specific occasions, the arrangement of the hair, the relative places of honor in a sitting-room, the method of handing guests refreshments, the exchange of friendly gifts—every detail of social life is rigidly dominated by etiquette. Not only acts, but the language of personal address as well, is governed by ideas of politeness which have fundamentally affected the structure of the language, by preventing the development of personal pronouns.

Now what is the cause of this characteristic of the Japanese? It is commonly attributed by writers of the impersonal school to the "impersonality" of the Oriental mind. "Impersonality" is not only the occasion, it is the cause of the politeness of the Japanese people. "Self is suppressed, and an ever-present regard for others is substituted in its stead." "Impersonality, by lessening the interest in one's self, induces one to take interest in others."\* Politeness is, in these passages, attributed to the impersonal nature of the Japanese mind. The following quotations show that this characteristic is conceived of as inherent in race and mind structure, not in the social order, as is here maintained. "The nation grew up to man's estate, keeping the mind of its child-

\* P. 88.

hood."\* "In race characteristics, he is yet essentially the same. . . . Of these traits . . . perhaps the most important is the great quality of impersonality."† "The peoples inhabiting it [the earth's temperate zone] grow steadily more personal as we go West. So unmistakable is this gradation that one is almost tempted to ascribe it to cosmical rather than human causes. . . . The essence of the soul of the Far East may be said to be impersonality."‡

In his chapter on "Imagination," Mr. Lowell seeks to explain the cause of the "impersonality" of the Orient. He attributes it to their marked lack of the faculty of "imagination"—the faculty of forming new and original ideas. Lacking this faculty, there has been relatively little stimulus to growth, and hence no possibility of differentiation and thus of individualization.

If politeness were due to the "impersonal" nature of the race mind, it would be impossible to account for the rise and decline of Japanese etiquette, for it should have existed from the beginning, and continued through all time, nor could we account for the gross impoliteness that is often met with in recent years. The Japanese themselves deplore the changes that have taken place. They testify that the older forms of politeness were an integral element of the feudal system and were too often a thin veneer of manner by no means expressive of heart interest. None can be so absolutely rude as they who are masters of the forms of politeness, but have not the kindly heart. The theory of "impersonality" does not satisfactorily account for the old-time politeness of Japan.

The explanation here offered for the development and decline of politeness is that they are due to the nature of the social order. Thoroughgoing feudalism long maintained, with its social ranks and free use of the sword, of necessity develops minute unwritten rules of etiquette; without the universal observance of these customs, life would be unbearable and precarious, and society itself would be impossible. Minute etiquette is the lubricant of a feudal social order. The rise and fall of Japan's phenomenal system of feudal etiquette is synchronous with

\* P. 12.

† P. 14.

‡ P. 15.

that of her feudal system, to which it is due rather than to the asserted "impersonality" of the race mind.

The impersonal theory is amazingly blind to adverse phenomena. Such a one is the marked sensitiveness of the middle and upper classes to the least slight or insult. The gradations of social rank are scrupulously observed, not only on formal occasions, but also in the homes at informal and social gatherings. Failure to show the proper attention, or the use of language having an insufficient number of honorific particles and forms, would be instantly interpreted as a personal slight, if not an insult.\*

Now if profuse courtesy is a proof of "impersonality," as its advocates argue, what does morbid sensitiveness prove but highly developed personality? But then arises the difficulty of understanding how the same individuals can be both profusely polite and morbidly sensitive at one and the same time? Instead of inferring "impersonality" from the fact of politeness, from the two facts of sensitiveness and politeness we may more logically infer a considerable degree of personality. Yet I would not lay much stress on this argument, for oftentimes (or is it always true?) the weaker and more insignificant the person, the greater the sensitiveness. Extreme sensitiveness is as natural and necessary a product of a highly developed feudalism as is politeness, and neither is particularly due to the high or the low development of personality.

Similarly with respect to the question of altruism, which is practically identified with politeness by exponents of Oriental "impersonality." They make this

\* In their relations with foreigners, the people, but especially the Christians, are exceedingly lenient, forgiving and overlooking our egregious blunders both of speech and of manner, particularly if they feel that we have a kindly heart. Yet it is the uniform experience of the missionary that he frequently hurts unawares the feelings of his Japanese fellow-workers. Few thoughts more frequently enter the mind of the missionary, as he deals with Christian workers, than how to say this needful truth and do that needful deed so as not to hurt the feelings of those whom he would help. The individual who feels slighted or insulted will probably give no active sign of his wound. He is too polite or too politic for that. He will merely close like a clam and cease to have further cordial feelings and relations with the person who has hurt him.

term (altruism) the virtual equivalent of "impersonality" —interest in others rather than in self, an interest due, according to their view, to a lack of differentiation of the individual minds; the individuals, though separate, still retain the universalism of the original mind-stuff. This use of the term altruism makes it a very different thing from the quality or characteristic which in the West is described by this term.

But granting that this word is used with a legitimate meaning, we ask, is altruism in this sense an inherent quality of the Japanese race? Let the reader glance back to our discussion of the possession by the Japanese of sympathy, and the humane feelings.\* We saw there marked proofs of their lack. The cruelty of the old social order was such as we can hardly realize. Altruism that expresses itself only in polite forms, and does not strive to alleviate the suffering of fellow-men, can have very little of that sense which this theory requires. So much as to the fact. Then as to the theory. If this alleged altruism were inherent in the mental structure, it ought to be a universal characteristic of the Japanese; it should be all-pervasive and permanent. It should show itself toward the foreigner as well as toward the native. But such is far from the case. Few foreigners have received a hearty welcome from the people at large. They are suspected and hated; as little room as possible is made for them. The less of their presence and advice, the better. So far as there is any interest in them, it is on the ground of utility, and not of inherent good will because of a feeling of aboriginal unity. Of course there are many exceptions to these statements, especially among the Christians. But such is the attitude of the people as a whole, especially of the middle and upper classes toward the foreigners.

If we turn our attention to the opposite phase of Japanese character, namely their selfishness, their self-assertiveness, and their aggressiveness, whether as a nation or as individuals, and consider at the same time the recent rise of this spirit, we are again impressed both with the narrow range of facts to which the advocates of "imper-

\* Cf. chapter xiii.

sonality" call our attention, and also with the utter insufficiency of their theory to account for the facts they overlook. According to the theory of altruism and "impersonality," these are characteristics of undeveloped races and individuals, while the reverse characteristics, those of selfishness and self-assertiveness, are the products of a later and higher development, marks of strong personality. But neither selfishness nor individual aggressiveness is a necessary element of developed "personality." If it were, children who have never been trained by cultivated mothers, but have been allowed to have their own way regardless of the rights or desires of others, are more highly developed in "personality" than the adult who has, through a long life of self-discipline and religious devotion, become regardless of his selfish interests and solicitous only for the welfare of others. If the high development of altruism is equivalent to the development of "impersonality," then those in the West who are renowned for humanity and benevolence are "impersonal," while robbers and murderers and all who are regardless of the welfare of others are possessed of the most highly developed "personality." And it also follows that highly developed altruistic benefactors of mankind are such, after all, because they are *undeveloped*,—their minds are relatively undifferentiated,—hence their fellow-feeling and kindly acts. There is a story of some learned wit who met a half-drunken boor; the latter plunged ahead, remarking, "I never get out of the way of a fool"; to which the quick reply came, "I always do." According to this argument based on self-assertive aggressiveness, the boor was the man possessed of a strong personality, while the gentleman was relatively "impersonal." If pure selfishness and aggressiveness are the measure of personality, then are not many of the carnivorous animals endowed with a very high degree of "personality"?

The truth is, a comprehensive and at the same time correct contrast between the East and the West cannot be stated in terms of personality and impersonality. They fail not only to take in all the facts, but they fail to explain even the facts they take in. Such a contrast of the East and the West can be stated only in the terms of com-

munalism and individualism. As we have already seen,\* every nation has to pass through the communal stage, in order to become a nation at all. The families and tribes of which it is composed need to become consolidated in order to survive in the struggle for existence with surrounding families, tribes, and nations. In this stage the individual is of necessity sunk out of sight in the demands of the community. This secures indeed a species of altruism, but of a relatively low order. It is communal altruism which nature compels on pain of extermination. This, however, is very different from the altruism of a high religious experience and conscious ethical devotion. This latter is volitional, the product of character. This altruism can arise chiefly in a social order where individualism to a large extent has gained sway. It is this variety of altruism that characterizes the West, so far as the West is altruistic. But on the other hand, in a social order in which individualism has full swing, the extreme of egoistic selfishness can also find opportunity for development. It is accordingly in the West that extreme selfishness, the most odious of sins, is seen at its best, or rather its worst.

So again we see that selfish aggressiveness and an exalted consciousness of one's individuality or separateness are not necessary marks of developed personality, nor their opposite the marks of undeveloped personality—so-called "impersonality." On the contrary, the reverse statement would probably come nearer the truth. He who is intensely conscious of the great unities of nature and of human nature, of the oneness that unites individuals to the nation and to the race, and who lives a corresponding life of goodness and kindness, is by far the more developed personality. But the manifestations of personality will vary much with the nature of the social order. This may change with astonishing rapidity. Such a change has come over the social order of the Japanese nation during the past thirty years, radically modifying its so-called impersonal features. Their primitive docility, their politeness, their marriage customs, their universal adoption of Chinese thoughts, language, and

\* See chapter xxix.