

WHAT IS MAN

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I

a. Man the Machine. b. Personal Merit

[The Old Man and the Young Man had been conversing. The Old Man had asserted that the human being is merely a machine, and nothing more. The Young Man objected, and asked him to go into particulars and furnish his reasons for his position.]

Old Man. What are the materials of which a steam-engine is made?

Young Man. Iron, steel, brass, white-metal, and so on.

O.M. Where are these found?

Y.M. In the rocks.

O.M. In a pure state?

Y.M. No--in ores.

O.M. Are the metals suddenly deposited in the ores?

Y.M. No--it is the patient work of countless ages.

O.M. You could make the engine out of the rocks themselves?

Y.M. Yes, a brittle one and not valuable.

O.M. You would not require much, of such an engine as that?

Y.M. No--substantially nothing.

O.M. To make a fine and capable engine, how would you proceed?

Y.M. Drive tunnels and shafts into the hills; blast out the iron ore; crush it, smelt it, reduce it to pig-iron; put some of it through the Bessemer process and make steel of it. Mine and treat and combine several metals of which brass is made.

O.M. Then?

Y.M. Out of the perfected result, build the fine engine.

O.M. You would require much of this one?

Y.M. Oh, indeed yes.

O.M. It could drive lathes, drills, planers, punches, polishers, in a word all the cunning machines of a great factory?

Y.M. It could.

O.M. What could the stone engine do?

Y.M. Drive a sewing-machine, possibly--nothing
more, perhaps.

O.M. Men would admire the other engine and
rapturously praise it?

Y.M. Yes.

O.M. But not the stone one?

Y.M. No.

O.M. The merits of the metal machine would be far
above those of the stone one?

Y.M. Of course.

O.M. Personal merits?

Y.M. PERSONAL merits? How do you mean?

O.M. It would be personally entitled to the credit of its own performance?

Y.M. The engine? Certainly not.

O.M. Why not?

Y.M. Because its performance is not personal. It is the result of the law of construction. It is not a MERIT that it does the things which it is set to do--it can't HELP doing them.

O.M. And it is not a personal demerit in the stone machine that it does so little?

Y.M. Certainly not. It does no more and no less than the law of its make permits and compels it to do. There is nothing PERSONAL about it; it cannot choose. In this process of "working up to the matter" is it your idea to work up to the proposition that man and a machine are about the same thing, and that there is no personal merit in the performance of either?

O.M. Yes--but do not be offended; I am meaning no offense. What makes the grand difference between the stone engine and the steel one? Shall we call it training, education? Shall we call the stone engine a savage and the steel one a civilized man? The original rock contained the stuff of which the steel one was built--but along with a lot of sulphur and stone and other obstructing inborn heredities, brought down from the old geologic ages--prejudices, let us call them. Prejudices which nothing within the rock itself had either POWER to

remove or any DESIRE to remove. Will you take note of that phrase?

Y.M. Yes. I have written it down; "Prejudices which nothing within the rock itself had either power to remove or any desire to remove." Go on.

O.M. Prejudices must be removed by OUTSIDE INFLUENCES or not at all. Put that down.

Y.M. Very well; "Must be removed by outside influences or not at all." Go on.

O.M. The iron's prejudice against ridding itself of the cumbering rock. To make it more exact, the iron's absolute INDIFFERENCE as to whether the rock be removed or not. Then comes the OUTSIDE INFLUENCE and grinds the rock to powder and sets the ore free. The IRON in the ore is still captive. An OUTSIDE INFLUENCE smelts it free of the clogging ore.

The iron is emancipated iron, now, but indifferent to further progress. An OUTSIDE INFLUENCE beguiles it into the Bessemer furnace and refines it into steel of the first quality. It is educated, now --its training is complete. And it has reached its limit. By no possible process can it be educated into GOLD. Will you set that down?

Y.M. Yes. "Everything has its limit--iron ore cannot be educated into gold."

O.M. There are gold men, and tin men, and copper men, and leaden men, and steel men, and so on--and each has the limitations of his nature, his heredities, his training, and his environment. You can build engines out of each of these metals, and they will all perform, but you must not require the weak ones to do equal work with the strong ones. In each case, to get the best results, you must free the metal from its obstructing prejudicial ones by education--smelting, refining, and so forth.

Y.M. You have arrived at man, now?

O.M. Yes. Man the machine--man the impersonal engine. Whatsoever a man is, is due to his MAKE, and to the INFLUENCES brought to bear upon it by his heredities, his habitat, his associations. He is moved, directed, COMMANDED, by EXTERIOR influences-- SOLELY. He ORIGINATES nothing, not even a thought.

Y.M. Oh, come! Where did I get my opinion that this which you are talking is all foolishness?

O.M. It is a quite natural opinion--indeed an inevitable opinion--but YOU did not create the materials out of which it is formed. They are odds and ends of thoughts, impressions, feelings, gathered unconsciously from a thousand books, a thousand conversations, and from streams of thought and feeling which have flowed down into your heart and brain out of the hearts and brains of

centuries of ancestors. PERSONALLY you did not create even the smallest microscopic fragment of the materials out of which your opinion is made; and personally you cannot claim even the slender merit of PUTTING THE BORROWED MATERIALS TOGETHER. That was done AUTOMATICALLY--by your mental machinery, in strict accordance with the law of that machinery's construction. And you not only did not make that machinery yourself, but you have NOT EVEN ANY COMMAND OVER IT.

Y.M. This is too much. You think I could have formed no opinion but that one?

O.M. Spontaneously? No. And YOU DID NOT FORM THAT ONE; your machinery did it for you--automatically and instantly, without reflection or the need of it.

Y.M. Suppose I had reflected? How then?

O.M. Suppose you try?

Y.M. (AFTER A QUARTER OF AN HOUR.) I have reflected.

O.M. You mean you have tried to change your opinion--as an experiment?

Y.M. Yes.

O.M. With success?

Y.M. No. It remains the same; it is impossible to change it.

O.M. I am sorry, but you see, yourself, that your mind is merely a machine, nothing more. You have no command over it, it has no command over itself--it is worked

SOLELY FROM THE OUTSIDE. That is the law of its make; it is the law of all machines.

Y.M. Can't I EVER change one of these automatic opinions?

O.M. No. You can't yourself, but EXTERIOR INFLUENCES can do it.

Y.M. And exterior ones ONLY?

O.M. Yes--exterior ones only.

Y.M. That position is untenable--I may say ludicrously untenable.

O.M. What makes you think so?

Y.M. I don't merely think it, I know it. Suppose I resolve to enter upon a course of thought, and study, and

reading, with the deliberate purpose of changing that opinion; and suppose I succeed. THAT is not the work of an exterior impulse, the whole of it is mine and personal; for I originated the project.

O.M. Not a shred of it. IT GREW OUT OF THIS TALK WITH ME. But for that it would not have occurred to you. No man ever originates anything. All his thoughts, all his impulses, come FROM THE OUTSIDE.

Y.M. It's an exasperating subject. The FIRST man had original thoughts, anyway; there was nobody to draw from.

O.M. It is a mistake. Adam's thoughts came to him from the outside. YOU have a fear of death. You did not invent that--you got it from outside, from talking and teaching. Adam had no fear of death--none in the world.

Y.M. Yes, he had.

O.M. When he was created?

Y.M. No.

O.M. When, then?

Y.M. When he was threatened with it.

O.M. Then it came from OUTSIDE. Adam is quite big enough; let us not try to make a god of him. NONE BUT GODS HAVE EVER HAD A THOUGHT WHICH DID NOT COME FROM THE OUTSIDE. Adam probably had a good head, but it was of no sort of use to him until it was filled up FROM THE OUTSIDE. He was not able to invent the triflingest little thing with it. He had not a shadow of a notion of the difference between good and evil--he had to get the idea FROM THE OUTSIDE. Neither he nor Eve was able to originate the idea that it was immodest to go naked; the knowledge came in with the apple FROM THE OUTSIDE. A man's brain is so

constructed that IT CAN ORIGINATE NOTHING WHATSOEVER. It can only use material obtained OUTSIDE. It is merely a machine; and it works automatically, not by will-power. IT HAS NO COMMAND OVER ITSELF,ITS OWNER HAS NO COMMAND OVER IT.

Y.M. Well, never mind Adam: but certainly Shakespeare's creations--

O.M. No, you mean Shakespeare's IMITATIONS. Shakespeare created nothing. He correctly observed, and he marvelously painted. He exactly portrayed people whom GOD had created; but he created none himself. Let us spare him the slander of charging him with trying. Shakespeare could not create. HE WAS A MACHINE, AND MACHINES DO NOT CREATE.

Y.M. Where WAS his excellence, then?

O.M. In this. He was not a sewing-machine, like you and me; he was a Gobelin loom. The threads and the colors came into him FROM THE OUTSIDE; outside influences, suggestions, EXPERIENCES (reading, seeing plays, playing plays, borrowing ideas, and so on), framed the patterns in his mind and started up his complex and admirable machinery, and IT AUTOMATICALLY turned out that pictured and gorgeous fabric which still compels the astonishment of the world. If Shakespeare had been born and bred on a barren and unvisited rock in the ocean his mighty intellect would have had no OUTSIDE MATERIAL to work with, and could have invented none; and NO OUTSIDE INFLUENCES, teachings, moldings, persuasions, inspirations, of a valuable sort, and could have invented none; and so Shakespeare would have produced nothing. In Turkey he would have produced something--something up to the highest limit of Turkish influences, associations, and training. In France he would have produced something better--something up to the highest limit of the French influences and training. In