



**THE SIXTH SENSE  
ITS CULTIVATION AND USE**

**CHARLES HENRY BRENT**

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**BY**  
**CHARLES HENRY BRENT**

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## CHAPTER 4. IN RELATION TO CHARACTER

Good character is the reaction upon the whole self caused by the Mystic Sense as a habit visioning, and the will claiming, the excellent. It is the result on personality of a sustained effort to transcend the existing relation to life and its conditions, a state of chronic dissatisfaction with the progress and achievement of the moment, which makes the good mediocre by contrasting it with the superior and coveting the best conceivable as man's right and heritage.

The Mystic Sense is always finding a more excellent way. Excepting when taught to play casuistical tricks, it does not look for the conventionally proper, or rest comfortably in it.<sup>19</sup> It launches out into that noble freedom which, from a group of probabilities, selects that which is farthest removed from suspicion of selfish considerations and promises ultimately the best social results. On the other hand it is not disregarding of the accepted code of morals. This it takes as its foundation, individualizing it for personal use, and boldly submitting propositions for improvement to the social conscience for approval, modification, or rejection. Such approval, modification, or rejection is never a purely formal matter registered in the dictum of a tribunal but rather the culmination of a process akin, in the moral sphere, to that which is termed "natural selection" in the physical sphere.

Character and morality are not synonymous. Strong character may be good or bad, the latter being the result of the active exercise of the will in a conflict with goodness; it is the transformation of evil from a mere negation

<sup>19</sup> "The wealthy class in Rome and all over Italy began to conform to that conventional code of propriety by which the rich seem always destined, in the progress of civilization, to become more and more enslaved, till finally they lost all feeling for what is serious and genuine in life. The new generation followed their example with alacrity, and preached the new conventions with a passionate vehemence which must have been highly exasperating to those of their seniors who were still attached to the simplicity of primitive manners. Amongst those who protested against this development there was, however, one prominent figure of the younger age, Marcus Porcius Cato, a man of rich and noble family, and a descendant of Cato the Censor. His puritan spirit revolted against the tyranny of fashion to which the golden youth of Rome wished to make him conform; he would walk in the streets without shoes or tunic, to accustom himself, as he said, only to blush at things which were shameful in themselves, and not merely by convention."— Ferrero's *Greatness and Decline of Rome*, vol. i, pp. 135, 136.

into a positive, personal force by conscious volition. But our study is of good character and its cultivation, so that when the word “character” is used the determinative “good” is understood.

Character is the result of the correspondence of personality with the best that it knows. It is measured by the faithfulness with which it responds to opportunity. A man with small opportunity, who is scrupulously conscientious in availing himself of all the privilege afforded him, becomes a stronger character than another, who, with his great opportunity, is less loyal in his use of it. Of course the greatest character is that which knows ideal virtue and consistently aims to bring up life to its level. Character is determined by reaction upon environment, external and internal. There are many suitable environments possible for every character, more than there are unsuitable ones, as the vicissitudes of most lives testify. Character is thus bound up closely with individual personality and is never abstract, as morality is in the science of ethics. Character is created and disclosed by that phase of experience in which the Mystic Sense is busied in photographing ideals on the film monopolized by the actual to the discomfiture and obliteration of the latter. Better to-morrows are obtruded on poor to-days, partly by virtue of the fact that the Mystic Sense is naturally in constant contact with the ideally best, sensing and appropriating it just as the body, without conscious effort on our part, senses and appropriates light and air, and partly because, either feebly or vigorously, most men claim for themselves by deliberate volition a larger life than that which is.

The possession of character is the sole justification of self-respect. Self-respect ensues upon the growth of character, and is to character what perfume is to the flower. It is due to the consciousness of having within ourselves that which is worthy—not mere moral acquiescence but something we have made peculiarly our own by active effort. It is a high form of the consciousness which inspires an inventor when he has constructed a piece of mechanism. Self-respect is a witness to our having been individualized and is indifferent to external possessions or ought that is our own by virtue of favor and chance rather than by merit. Self-respect runs into self-conceit and stagnation when it rests content with that which is. It never dawdles in its movements nor loafs on the street corners. Self-

respect becomes self-contempt and self-abasement when our attention is turned from our cherished ideals and actual progress, and fixed upon our defects and failures. Penitence is not a bar but a necessity to character and its fragrant effluence, self-respect.

Character calls for and expects communal respect in the same degree that it receives self-respect. Reputation should be commensurate with character. It is possible for men to have the unmerited respect of their fellows without having self-respect. This is due to the practice of deceit, conscious or unconscious, which enables them to simulate character and have appearance without corresponding reality. To the man of character, it is as truly a pain to be overestimated as to be underestimated. He can afford to lose his reputation, though he can never be exempt from the keen pain involved. In the process of achieving character, the great frequently, if not always, have to endure the withholding of respect on the part of the community. Seldom does a man make a contribution to progress without being temporarily at least discredited by those whom most of all he is aiming to benefit. Self-respect towers at such moments. A man of character will trust himself when all men doubt him but make allowance for their doubting, too; he will wait and not be tired by waiting, or being lied about, won't deal in lies, or being hated won't give way to hating.<sup>20</sup>

Ideals become tasks and tasks become character in social experience. "A talent," says Goethe, "shapes itself in stillness, but a character in the tumult of the world." "That which would have remained only a quality in (our Lord), if He had stayed in the desert, becomes a life when He goes forth into the world." The ultimate test of a man's worth is his character and not his degree of morality—his power of volitional reaction upon environment, objective and subjective.

Every man at some time during his career,—most men for a considerable portion of it, and many from beginning to end,—covets character. Those who fail to claim it for themselves seldom fail to admire it in others. Frequently they put as much effort into pretending they have it as would win for them the real thing. They pay the price of gold for tinsel. Character

<sup>20</sup> Kipling's *If*—.

has commercial value and sometimes men are honest according to law solely because it is politic, or polite according to social requirement because it pays. But the honesty and courtesy of such men are not virtues. They are handmaidens of covetousness. They contribute nothing to self-respect. They have no moral content, and serve only to aid in bolstering up a vicious characteristic. However, it is a tribute to the kingliness of character that, either for its market value or because of its inherent worth, men clothe themselves in its appearance when they do not seek the substance.

The substance may be had by every man. Man not only is, but also acknowledges himself to be, responsible for what he is. He makes the confession when he keeps his worst self from the public gaze even though it promises him no special gain. The extreme to which the sense of personal responsibility and accountability goes is evidenced by the fact that, though *for others* we find it difficult to believe in the closing of the possibility of self-improvement and ultimate loss fixed and final, many, perhaps most of us, think and act *in our own case* as though we *at least* shall be held strictly accountable for our character and reap as we live. If we had no responsibility for what we were and did, there would be no room for shame, were we to be publicly known to be exactly what we are. Rob Henley's poem of its defiant note and we are in the presence of sober fact:

"It matters not how strait the gate,

How charged with punishments the scroll—

I am the Master of my fate—

I am the Captain of my soul."

Character, like fruit, gets rich flavor through living in a climate of extremes which give robustness by threatening very existence. The story of the transgression of Adam and his consort is illustrative rather than singular. The temptation set was the very stiffest to which human life, being what it is, could be subjected—a demand for self-discipline and obedience to mysterious law. It is interesting that the first recorded strain put upon the human will was not to do rather than to do. Seemingly it was the limitation of freedom, the restriction of choice, the narrowing of experience. In no

other conditions could man have had a chance to gain character. Had our first human ancestors won their day without lapse, every succeeding generation would have had to do the same. You cannot inherit character. You must win it. Temptation is never eliminated from human life, as we know it. Its conquest in one form opens the door to its appearance in another form. Our earliest human ancestors having known the higher chose the lower. But this did not, either in their own case or in that of their offspring through a thousand generations, close the door to the attainment of character. Human life begins in conditions which threaten character and therefore becomes eligible for character. The complaint that there are those in the world who, because of hopeless environment, never have an opportunity, finds sympathetic echo in every heart, but it does not absolve us from responsibility to our own opportunity.

Much is made of heredity by those who know little or nothing of the controversies which gather about the study of its operation. The popular interpretation presses hard upon its thorns and forgets even the existence of its blossoms. "The sins of the fathers are visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation," is the dominating thought which, by exclusive consideration, diseases the mind of many a man until his whole imaginative nature is employed in the service of some congenital, or supposed congenital, weakness to make him its victim. In this way fatalism is induced. Fatalism is a disease of the Mystic Sense which substitutes acquiescence for reaction. It is the straw committing itself to the river, not the oarsman using the current to his own advantage. Acquiescence is too tame a virtue for man, if indeed it be a virtue at all.

Whatever credit we give to heredity for endowing us with the tendencies of our evil forbears, we must give it equal credit for endowing us with those of our good forbears. If you are determined to be fatalistic, be so fairly, recognizing the possible transmission of every kind of tendency. Conscious acceptance of gifts of strength from the past is a powerful counter-irritant to defend us against a real or imagined inheritance of weakness.

The problem of heredity is obscured by the fog of controversy which just now envelopes it. We must remember that the main questions in doubt are its method, and extent, and our ability to intervene so as to modify or

improve its operations. Science very cautiously says that “heredity suggests, though it would be rash to say it is proved, that man is almost entirely the product of inborn factors which are hardly affected by [physical] environment.”<sup>21</sup> “Given parents of certain constitution, it can be said with confidence that *on the average* a certain proportion of their offspring will have such and such characters.” “Both [the Biometrician and Mendelian] agree that what is present in the germ-cell will be present in the individual, and that external conditions as a rule play but a small part in determining its appearance.” “Almost entirely,” “hardly affected,” “on the average,” “a certain proportion,” “as a rule,” form a relatively large group of qualifying clauses in three short sentences. When we know more certainly the mechanism by which heredity operates we shall be better able by eugenics and physiological or mechanical processes to combat its evils and foster its benefits. In the meantime there is no call for us to stand idle. If man were mere animal it would be another matter, but he is not. His Mystic Sense, which links him to a superior order, has steadily differentiated him from all below him. It has enabled him to transcend environment. By means of it he can acquire character even if the laws of transmission should forbid him to pass it on to his offspring by congenital endowment. It is a finer and stronger thing to improve steadily the tradition of family or race by a series of successive personal conquests and achievements than to gain exemption from evil tendencies by the more or less mechanical process of procreation. Release from temptation is not necessarily a benefit, and is never as productive of character as the gift of ability to defeat it. Frequently all that is needed is inspiration, mystical and human, to enable a man to rise above his evil inheritance and habit. Evil tradition is as real and destructive a phase of heredity as inborn weakness, whereas on the other hand *noblesse oblige*. It is rather the tradition of the family trait of intemperance than a transmitted physical peculiarity that keeps the line of drunkards unbroken. Children must not be allowed to suppose that they can be excused from struggle. Being prepared for all temptations as a normal part of experience they are least likely to become victims of any: being made expectant of all virtues, they may perchance glean some.

<sup>21</sup> Doncaster's *Heredity in the Light of Recent Research* (1910), p. 113 ff.

Our environment is our opportunity, particularly in those spots where it is uncongenial and threatening. To chafe and fret is to increase the inimical possibilities of difficulty. To think of it except with the intention of mastering it is weakening and depressing. To remove it with our own hands rather than have another remove it, if it be moveable, or, should it be immoveable, to weave it as material into our scheme of life, using its rough threads to the last stand, is to achieve character. A man must either fit his burden to his back or his back to his burden, if he desires to remain man. They are rare exceptions in mankind who have not capacity for so doing, if not by themselves, at any rate in a sympathetic social setting. A burdened life by the free use of the Mystic Sense may become a privileged life. Introduce fearlessness and experimental curiosity into hardship, and you get romance which keeps the wings of life moving and mounting, and makes the world of men around look up in aspiring wonder.

“There is no storme but this

Of your owne Cowardise

That braves you out;

You are the storme that mocks

Your selves; you are the rocks

Of your owne doubt:

Besides this feare of danger, ther’s no danger here;

And he that here feares danger, does deserve his feare.”<sup>22</sup>

The Mystic Sense has an inner ear. Through it conscience delivers its message by means of which we come to know and understand the meaning of ought and ought not. Ready response to conscience is to be coveted above all things, especially where conscience has been trained and illumined. A friend once wrote me, a few days before his death, that he had come to see that what pretended to be education was no education at all unless it included the development of conscience. But mere knowledge of

<sup>22</sup> Crashaw.



right and wrong, ought and ought not, does not impart goodness. To be aware that vice injures and virtue blesses is desirable but insufficient. There is not less vice among those who know than there is among those who do not know ethics, other things being equal, excepting where education is conceived to be something more than the imparting of information.

Sometimes nations and individuals covet character without being ready to pay the whole price for it. They give admirable facilities for the development of certain phases of training essential to character, but exclude that deciding factor which determines whether or not they may be woven into character. Influences from other sources may come in to repair wilful neglect, but, if not, the training goes for nothing so far as character is concerned. Public schools can never give character its best opportunity without a practical recognition of religion. Purely secular education, the imparting of learning including the science of ethics, without religion in church and home to supplement it, is a doubtful blessing at best. The current idea of secular education is not new. During the French Revolution its leaders mapped out what appeared to be a satisfactory programme of instruction. It was desired to have moral training, first without religion or with the “Worship of Reason,” then with a minimum of religion. The priests were suffered to continue as being at any rate moral policemen, but Danton planned to supplant them by *officiers de morale*. All experiments were of no avail. “*La morale populaire ... cherche encore,*” it was pathetically complained, “*un point d’appui solide.*” Then came freedom to worship, and later the Concordat reintroduced the old religious order, partially, it is true, because the people could or would not live without it, but largely for the sake of morals.

If religion without morality becomes superstitious sentiment, morality without religion becomes for the average man inoperative ethics and ultimately a pitiless judge. There is no more oppressive tyrant than a high ethical code with a will, untrained, uninspired, and helpless to respond. It becomes a mocking and cruel Nemesis viewing with indifference its writhing victims. The Chinese Classics are preserved by the wonderful nation who produced them, as a literary treasure instead of as a practical code of conduct—the sure fate of the Bible apart from the Christian Church.

It is too late in the day to pretend that morality and religion are synonymous, however intimate their relationship, or that the end of religion is to make men good. Righteousness, which is the Christian term for morality, is to be had only in part by the practice of embracing the excellent and bathing our mystic self in the fountain of ideals. The type of righteousness thus created can never be aught than self-conscious, like an overdressed woman, or a gaudy painting. The Mystic Sense must occupy itself in still higher altitudes. Having come from God and being partaker of His nature, it must aspire to Him. The end of life is religion, and the end of religion is to know God. The purest type of righteousness, experienced or conceivable, is created by our having as our dominant ambition to know the only God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent. The net result is Christian Character.

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## CHAPTER 5. IN RELATION TO RELIGION

The operation of the Mystic Sense in relation to religion is commonly called faith. Conversely, faith under another name is that operation of the Mystic Sense which promotes health of body, which affords a starting point for all intellectual, scientific, and other productive pursuits, which leads character from strength to strength. The subjective conditions under which, and the spheres in which, the Mystic Sense is employed, differ. But the faculty itself and its *modus operandi* are always the same. Just as the sense of bodily sight which views the dirt beneath our feet is the same sense which contemplates the blue sky, so the inner sense of sight which perceives an electron, an ideal, or a hypothesis is the same sense which sees God. It is as possible to see God as to see a hypothesis, and as possible (not more and probably less), to see a hypothesis as to see God.<sup>23</sup>

It is fitting that the most exalted operation of the Mystic Sense should be dignified by a distinctive term, provided that in so doing no room is given for the implication that there is a faculty, or set of faculties, used in religion alone. A man has religious capacity because he is man, and not because he is a specially favored individual of his kind. Man, unless he abdicates his manhood, a task so difficult as to verge on the impossible, must live by his Mystic Sense; he must keep touch with the unseen, or cease to be a man. To be a man, rounded and proportioned, complete and splendid, he must use his Mystic Sense not merely here and there but everywhere. The Mystic Sense has as true an existence in the whole personality, and relation to it, as the physical sense of touch, and is as acutely sensitive to the stimulus of the spiritual phase of reality as the body is to that of the material. It is analogous to all the sub-divisions of the nervous system but chiefly to sight and hearing, the most distinguished of the senses.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> A hypothesis receives passively our quest: God moves to meet us.

<sup>24</sup> Newman in his *Dream of Gerontius* endows the disembodied soul with perceptive powers analogous to those of the body, saying only the sense of sight. Thus:

Soul. "I cannot of thy music rightly say  
Whether I hear, or touch, or taste the tones."  
... "How comes it then

To perceive an ideal is as real a sensation as to look at a flower. An impression is left behind not unlike the photograph of the flower retained on the retina of the eye and revived by act of memory and will. But the visualizing has nothing to do with physical sense perception, and the part of the personality thus impressed is spiritual. To characterize tactual sensation of the body as real necessitates a like characterization of the tactual sensation of the spirit. If it be argued that in the latter relationship there is no certainty as to what is phantasm and what reality, let it be remembered that the history of science is largely a series of corrections of imperfect sense records. A highly developed power of observation with ability for accurate registration and correlation is the distinguishing feature of culture. The Mystic Sense, like the bodily senses, is capable of increasingly accurate perception by skilful and disciplined use. It takes its beginnings in

That I am hearing still, and taste, and touch,  
 Yet not a glimmer of that princely sense  
 Which binds ideas in one, and makes them live?"  
*Angel.* "Nor touch nor taste, nor hearing hast thou now;  
 Thou livest in a world of signs and types,  
 The presentation of most holy truths,  
 Living and strong, which now encompass thee.  
 A disembodied soul, thou hast by right  
 No converse with aught beside thyself;  
 But, lest so stern a solitude should load  
 And break thy being, in mercy are vouchsafed  
 Some lower measures of perception,  
 Which seem to thee, as though through channels brought,  
 Through ear, or nerves, or palate, which are gone.

...

How, even now, the consummated Saints  
 See God in heaven, I may not explicate;  
 Meanwhile, let it suffice thee to possess  
 Such means of converse as are granted thee,  
 Though, till that Beatific Vision, thou art blind."

The idea underlying the Beatific Vision is the complete apprehension of God by the complete man. Sight is chosen to denote this bliss because it is a princely co-ordinating sense, and our Lord spoke of the heritage of the pure in heart as being the vision of God, a heritage let it be noted, however, for now and not merely for hereafter. It seems reasonable to suppose that our powers of perception after death will be those mystic powers which we enjoy and use now, though then they will be rapidly developed as being our only perceptive powers.

This suggests the investigation in progress of psychic phenomena by scientific methods. The result may lead to an increase of our knowledge regarding the nature of such phenomena. But I do not see how, if communication with the departed be possible at all, we can expect to reach, and be reached by, them except through the Mystic Sense. The invocation of Saints seems to me more in line with what is probable than some of the experiments of the day. Disembodied spirits presumably approximate the nature of God and can approach or be approached only after a purely spiritual or mystical fashion, excepting in those rare psycho-physical instances which are themselves contingent upon a highly developed mystical character and experience.

gropings like the awkward jerks of a baby's limbs, and develops into ordered and reliable movement by exercise and experiment, which includes mistakes and the profit accruing to the experience. Superstition bears the same relation to faith that a false scientific hypothesis bears to ascertained fact. The Mystic Sense in its infant working catches a distorted view of the ideal, as when Darwin propounded his conception of heredity by pangenesis, and leads us astray in science; in like manner in religion a glimpse, through a mist of ignorance and moral deficiency, of the Absolute, eventuates in superstition. Both are necessary stages in the training of the Mystic Sense. Similarly to the way in which the theory of pangenesis stimulated discussion and research so as to aid the Mystic Sense to a more accurate perception of the true hypothesis of the manner of heredity, the superstitions of the nations conceived in sincerity, crude and even repulsive though they be, have contributed to the complete knowledge of God and His character which forms our most valuable heritage.

It is not hazardous to say that the ideals and hypotheses which are still waiting for the cognition of the Mystic Sense transcend gloriously those thus far apprehended. This means that science is in its infancy. It is equally true to assert that religion, so far from having fallen into decline, is but girding itself to scale heights impatient to feel the tread of human feet. That which is good and true in itself must persist, whatever its crudeness and blemishes. The Mystic Sense in relation to religion is only at the beginning of its history. Human, that is mystic, life began at so remote a period as to be beyond the reach of research. The operation of the Mystic Sense through many thousands of years<sup>25</sup> prior to human records led the way to that ordered approach to God which we call religion. The possibilities of its growth for the race at large are indicated and emphasized by individual instances taken from the common crowd. The world is just at this moment engrossed in seeing that every one should have an opportunity of developing fine physique and of acquiring information. It is assumed that under proper conditions a high average may be reached. The same is to be postulated for the development of the Mystic Sense in relation to the highest and best in religion. Under a sufficient stimulus the average man will

<sup>25</sup> Progressive civilization may be said to have begun 8,000 b. c.









the Word of Life. It was fitting that St. Paul should give Christianity the impetus which made it a world religion. The highest development of faith has assigned to it the biggest undertaking. St. Peter with undeveloped intellectual gifts and faith based on sight could not do what St. Paul with highly developed reason and singular faith could do. The Risen Jesus Himself declared that faith dependent upon physical or psycho-physical experience is of a lower order than that in which the mystic sense is independent of phenomenal action of the bodily sense—Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

The great multitude of mortals will always be outside of psycho-physical experiences. There is no religious loss in the fact. Rather the contrary. That which gives the soul its permanent hold upon moral and spiritual realities and regard for them in mystics is not their rare psycho-physical experiences, but the same exercise of the Mystic Sense in the daily round of commonplace religious duty which is open to every human being, with like wonderful results upon character. A phenomenal spiritual occurrence in the case of one who was not living a religious life would be a mere wonder, perhaps even productive of spiritual harm.<sup>29</sup> Such experiences are never to be sought for. If they come their peril is not less than their inspiration.

“The trivial round, the common task,  
Will furnish all we need to ask,  
Room to deny ourselves, a road  
To bring us daily nearer God.”

It is a great barrier to religious effort among the crowd, for those living the life of faith, to give the impression that their experience is one of a series of ecstasies. It is no more so than is that of a student of science or higher mathematics. It is the life of faith open to all men which forms the religious life of the best men and the best religious life of all men—the constant

<sup>29</sup> The miracles of Moses before Pharaoh are illustrative of that which abounds in history—wonders hardening further an irreligious life.





