

**THE
UNDERSTANDING
HEART**

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The understanding heart by Samuel M. Crothers

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CALIFORNIA

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TO THE
AMERICAN
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INTRODUCTION

WORDSWORTH describes the man of
"understanding heart." His thoughts

"From a clear fountain flowing, he looks
around
And seeks for good; and finds the good he
seeks."

He is no mere sentimentalist; nor is
he a cold rationalist. He believes in the
instincts of his own heart; yet he is
anxious to preserve

"His sanity of reason not impaired."

He has reverence for inherited faiths, yet
he would subject them to that scepticism
through which alone the true may be dis-
tinguished from the false.

There are those whose ideal of truth-
seeking is that of a heartless understand-

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ing. They take for granted that they are living in an unfriendly universe, in which the affections of the soul meet nothing but disappointment. They seek to prepare themselves for clear seeing by discrediting all that belongs to their emotions.

There are others who do not believe in any such line of cleavage between the faculties of their own nature. They believe in themselves as profoundly as they believe in the Universe. They believe in great spiritual ideals of love and duty and worship. In these they trust primarily on the testimony of their own hearts; but they find their faith stimulated and sustained by their experience. To them religion is not

“A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was.
For the discerning intellect of man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.”

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Those who have come to this point of view find in the formal creeds only suggestions, and not satisfactory answers to their questions. What is called "systematic theology" is altogether too ambitious for them. They are anxious to know not how one doctrine may be brought into logical consistency with another doctrine, but rather how it may fit into this goodly universe, and how it may interpret the happenings of the common day.

To minds of this temper the present organization of religion in our churches seems open to criticism. The criticism is friendly and hopeful, but radical in its character. The great impression is that of vast resources that have not been touched, mighty powers that are allowed to run to waste. We talk of man as a spiritual being; but how little of his spiritual energy is recognized, while still less of it is utilized! Religious teachers seem to be afraid of religion when it manifests

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itself in unconventional forms. We have not yet succeeded in organizing all the forces of what we call the higher life.

The problems of the understanding heart are educational. The religious nature tries to understand itself and its real place in the universe. Now the universe is not a fixed quantity. It is continually changing. No one form of thought can express its reality. The man thinking must be free to follow the new developments as well as to chronicle the old.

The real problems are those which grow out of necessity of continual readjustment. How may our ideals be adjusted to the actual conditions which we meet? How may our religious inheritance be harmonized with our fresh experiences? How may the institutions which have purely spiritual ends be adjusted to those which serve our material welfare? How may we at the same time live according to the rules of sound reason and

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according to the inspirations of religious faith?

Such questions come to us all. In the following chapters I have taken for granted that there is need of readjustment, intellectually and spiritually, if religion is to hold its own. This readjustment, however, can be no merely formal one. It must come through the multitudes of men and women who are doing their work and entering into all joyous activities with an understanding heart. It is through them that the religion of the world is being re-organized.