

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SAINTS

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The Psychology of the Saints by Henri Joly

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HENRI JOLY

**THE PSYCHOLOGY
OF THE SAINTS**

The Saints

THE
PSYCHOLOGY OF THE SAINTS

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The Psychology of the Saints

By *Henri Joly*

*With Preface
and Notes*



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

HAVING treated successively of the psychology of the inferior animals,¹ of the psychology of great men,² and of the psychology of criminals,³ I now come to the psychology of the saints.

We may ask: Are all these different psychologies utterly distinct one from the other? Is instinct an occult possession and crime a phenomenon standing quite by itself, a thing apart, the offspring of a deviation or spontaneous retrogression of the human race? Is the great man a mysterious gift of the Unconscious or the sudden incarnation of a spirit which sets at defiance all attempts at analysis? Is the saint a being in whom a miraculous agency has completely ousted and supplanted nature?—I have, in turn, endeavoured to combat every one of these notions.

There is one other theory, however, to which I am quite as unwilling to subscribe, and that is the theory that all manifestations of the human faculties, from the lowest even to the very highest, are produced by the blind and automatic action of our inferior powers. According to this idea, man is

¹ *L'instinct, ses rapports avec la vie et avec l'intelligence*, 2nd ed. Thorin, *L'homme et l'animal*, 3rd ed. Hachette.

² *Psychologie des grands hommes*, 2nd ed. Hachette.

³ *Le crime*, 4th ed. *La France criminelle*, 3rd ed. *Le combat contre le crime*, 2nd ed. L. Cerf.

nothing better than an animal of a rather more complicated nature than the rest; crime is a disease; and genius and sanctity merely striking and, more often than not, fantastic exhibitions of the pride, ambition, self-deception and restlessness inherent in our nature.

No—great men and little, we are all of us formed out of the same clay and the same spirit is breathed into each one of us. We stand, as it were, on different steps of the same ladder, which springs from one and the same nature and reaches up to one and the same God.—We may aggravate the original weakness of our nature by yielding to it, or we may use the help offered to us and so develop all the potential strength and beauty it possesses, but whichever course we take, we can never completely destroy a single one of the features of our complex humanity. No matter how degenerate on the one hand, or perfect on the other, they may become, our fellow-men never fail to be objects of warning or encouragement to us. The resemblance we bear to one another affords us the means, while it teaches us the necessity, of applying the lesson to ourselves. It is under the influence of this conviction that the following essay has been written.¹

¹ During the course of this work, I have often been obliged to treat of very difficult subjects. I wish to express my gratitude to M. Monier, Superior of the *École des Hautes Études ecclésiastiques*, who kindly revised my proof-sheets and placed his great theological learning, as well as his literary experience, at my disposal.

PREFACE

BESIDES the official dogmatic teaching of the Christian Church which can be reduced to a comparatively small compass there is a great mass of traditional beliefs, historical and religious, which she preserves with reverence and respect, not as in any sense setting her seal on every item of which it is composed, but because, as representing the "folk-lore," so to say, of the faithful at large, it has a critical value not final or decisive, but of an importance varying with the subject in hand. It is, we might say, a *nidus* from which matter is drawn from time to time to be subjected to the severer methods of criticism, and rejected or accepted according to the verdict. Taken as a whole, it contains a mingling of truth and error, as does every similar body of tradition; but for this reason to despise it or deny it all critical value would be to cast away the gold together with the ore. It can be trusted safely and usefully if its claims are rightly understood; for it does not pretend to be a mirror of facts, but only of subjective impressions and beliefs concerning facts. We cannot at once pass by inference from "It is said" to "It is"; yet "It is said" has an undoubted critical value under due conditions.