

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### GOODNESS TRUE GREATNESS.

SERMON BY REV. H. WALKER, R. OF WEST CH. CH. TORONTO, 14TH DEC. 1870, ON MATTHEW XX. 16-18.

The tendency has been too much, in the past, to place human greatness in intellectual endowments and attainments,—in heroic deeds in war, or in political achievements in the State. The men that have been most honoured in history have been those who have held a high place as men of great literary power, who have made discoveries in science, or greatly advanced the knowledge of nature among mankind; or who have swayed the sceptre of power as natural rulers among their fellows, and guided with skilful hand the ship of state through the storms of national change or national danger, or have boldly and wisely steered into new seas and new scenes, and have thus greatly advanced the interests of human society.

Very largely the heroes of the past have been warriors, who, while they held high the banner of their country, have too often done so by trampling on the rights of others; or, at least at the cost of much suffering and sorrow, both to their own people and to other nations. They have raised themselves to their high pinnacle of fame upon the bleeding bodies of the slain, while deepest distress has nued the relatives of the dead and wounded. And many maimed and disabled men have had to endure years of poverty, suffering and sorrow, in order that these favourites of fortune might receive the plaudits of their country. No doubt there have been men, in each of these departments, who have deserved well of their fellowmen and who have nobly acted their part in promoting the true well-being of humanity, and the real advancement of human society.

But while willing to give freely and heartily the meed of praise to every noble character, to every true man whose life has been a blessing to his fellows, we yet hold that there is a kind of excellence higher than any any of these departments to which we have referred, namely, moral or spiritual excellence, which at once promotes the glory of God and the good of men, by seeking to be conformed to the image of Christ, and to walk in His footsteps.

Who must be held to be the standard of greatness or excellence among men? Certainly no Christian can for a moment doubt that the Lord Jesus is the true and only standard of human greatness, the only perfect man, who had no weakness, no infirmity of temper or character, or habit of life, and who invariably lived for the Divine glory and the well-being of mankind. Surely he did more for the advancement of human society in everything that is highest, noblest and best, than any other that ever lived. If this be admitted, then it follows that the more closely men resemble Him in character and conduct the more worthy they are of the commendation of their fellowmen and the more truly worthy of being held up as models for others to follow.

In the parallel passage in Luke xxii. 24-27, we are told that "there was a strife among them which of them should be accounted the greatest." This resulted from pride and ambition which our Lord severely rebuked. On this as on a former occasion (Matt. xviii. 4) the world's standard of greatness and that of the Lord Jesus are not only different but contradictory. Christ tells His disciples that the world's standard of greatness was the exercise of lordship or authority, and that such persons received the honourary title of "benefactors." But in the Christian economy they are not to claim superiority over each other, but each is to do what he can for the benefit of others, and that he that does most for others is truly great—or that *goodness is true greatness*.

It is interesting to note that the terms which apply to rank originally meant goodness. For instance "lord" or "lady" means a person that gives away bread,—a bread distributor. So all titles of dignity or rank were originally significant of benevolence or goodness, although they have come to be terms only of dignity or worldly greatness.

In Christ's estimation then, true greatness consists not in receiving but in giving, not in selfish absorption of good things, but in imparting good to others, not in being served but in serving, not in sitting still and being ministered to, but in going about and ministering to others. And our Lord enforces this

principle, by setting forth His own example as the model for all Christians, and the standard of true greatness—"I am among you as he that serveth, even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto but to minister." Usefulness in the world and in the Church—a humble readiness to do anything, and to put our hands to any good work, a cheerful willingness to fill any post however lowly, and to discharge any office however unpleasant, if we can only promote happiness and holiness on earth these are the true tests of Christian greatness. The hero in Christ's army is the man who looks not on his own things but on the things of others, who is kind to all, tender to all, thoughtful for all, with a hand to help all, and a heart to feel for all.

It is the man who spends and is spent to make the vice and misery of the world less, to bind up the broken hearted, to befriend the friendless and cheer the sorrowful, to enlighten the ignorant, and to raise the poor. This is the truly great man in the eyes of God. This is the man who is walking most closely in the steps of Christ, who spent his life in ministering to the wants of a sin-burdened world, as in doing good to the bodies and souls of men, and who from his own experience declared it more "blessed to give than to receive." And this true greatness is within the reach of all, for although all may not have learning, or gifts, or money, all can minister in some way to the happiness of those around them. If you then ask, wherein does true greatness consist? We reply in moral and spiritual excellence, in humility, in usefulness, in living for the glory of God and the good of our fellowmen, for inasmuch as eternity surpasses time in importance, so man's moral and spiritual nature, and its influences, surpasses his merely intellectual attainments or achievements, and still more the benefits conferred by military tactics, or prowess, or by statesmanship. Let us then test the opinions of men on this subject of true greatness by trying men by this standard of excellence.

The names that stand most prominently emblazoned in the annals of the past, are those of men who in former times taught mankind the arts of peace, made discoveries in science, led armies to victory, or established wise laws for the guidance of states and the progress of society. In each of these departments history places a halo around many conspicuous names—from Egypt, and the East, Greece and Rome—such men as Socrates, Plato and Solon deserve to be held in honour to the end of time. Yet if we examine the moral character of these greatest men of heathen antiquity we find very great defects of character, which detract seriously from their right to the place of highest honour as great men. They could not control their own evil passions, or did not conform to what their own consciences told them was morally right. The best of them indulged in vices which they knew to be wrong, and the great warriors and statesmen were guided not by a sense of duty to the Supreme Ruler of the universe and to the people, but by ambition to get for themselves a great name among men.

Then if we glance at the greatest characters of sacred history, we find not one among them free from faults. Certain defects stand out prominently in their history, like dark spots upon the sun. There is only one man free from these, and He more than man—the God-man, Christ Jesus. And so in modern times, who are the men most generally held up to admiration as the greatest of men? Men who have made discoveries that have tended to increase the knowledge of mankind, and advance the interests of commerce, and national freedom and power. All honour to the men who have discovered the right principles of astronomy, the mariner's compass, printing, the steam engine and the telegraph. We would accord no stinted honour to the men who by patient study and labour have lightened the burdens of the toiling multitude, and multiplied their enjoyments; who have broken the yoke of tyranny, and proclaimed a jubilee to the enslaved among the nations; who have devised means for educating the masses, and have thus elevated mankind and taught that all men are entitled to equal political rights.

But there are other men who deserve yet higher honour, who have laboured in yet higher departments. Men who, following in the footsteps of the great Benefactor of our race, have taught mankind that they are all brethren, children of one common Father, and that they should love one another and live in peace, avoiding war and strife of every kind, who

have taught men to live not merely for the present world but for the world to come; who have sought, often at great self-sacrifice, to make known the love of God in Christ to our guilty race, and tried to lead men to love Him in return; and from love to Him to keep His commandments, to lead pure and holy lives, and to walk in the footsteps of Christ, or to be humble, gentle, kind and loving. Men like the modern missionaries, who have taken their lives in their hands and gone forth to the high places of the field, planting the banner of the cross, teaching men the way of salvation, while at the same time they taught them most efficiently the habits of Christian society and promoted the interests of commerce, science, and the highest civilization.

Dr. Campbell, in his "Martyr of Erromanga" has very strikingly shewn that such men as John Williams are the truly great men of our race in the estimation of Heaven, and that while warriors and statesmen have been most honoured in the past, men who have lived like Christ, to save and help mankind, will in the future hold a higher place on the roll of honour, than those who have only sought to promote the material interests or temporal welfare of others. Some of the heroes of the past have combined both characters, and are, therefore, held in highest honour. Lord Lawrence, the late Governor-General of India, combined the characters of hero, statesman, and humble devoted Christian, and through this combination was chiefly instrumental in saving India to the British, during the revolt of the Sepoys. Through his courage and firmness, his Christian courtesy and wisdom, he had trained the Sikhs to become the best soldiers in India, and then by the same character and ability, kept them under his influence, so that they checked the revolt, until the British army arrived to subdue it. He did much during his earlier career, and while Governor-General, to advance the interests of Christianity, and therefore of humanity, in India, and is worthy of all honour as one of the great and good.

He made duty his polar star, the guide of his conduct through life—first duty to his God and then duty to his country. In times of great trial, like Asa and Jehoshaphat of old, he looked up to God the Great Ruler for guidance and success. No wonder then that his name stands high in the temple of fame, and that he is honoured not merely for his military genius, but especially for his moral greatness, being eminent for truthfulness, simplicity and honesty of purpose—free from self-seeking, and animated chiefly by a desire to do his duty. This is the very essence of the spirit of Christ, who sought not His own glory, but the glory of Him who sent Him. Similar statements might be made respecting Havelock and other heroes.

Carlyle in his history of Frederick the Great has put great honour on his favourite hero, and we do not wonder, for considering the great disadvantages under which he was placed in his early days by the brutal treatment of his mad father, who professed to be a Christian, and the infidel teachings of Voltaire, he shewed many noble qualities. But yet he was not a man of the highest type. He was a great soldier and statesman, but in his moral and spiritual excellence had not been developed, and in these he did not excel. He sought, and sought successfully, to promote the material progress and power of his nation, and for this he is honoured.

What a moral grandeur attaches to such a man as Alexander Duff—the greatest missionary of India—patiently, for many years, at the sacrifice of health and comfort, and in constant risk of his life, laying broad and deep the foundations of a system of Christian instruction, which is fast sapping the foundation of the hoary system of error in India and preparing the way to present the people of that ancient land to his adored Redeemer. While thus securing to them as the necessary result, all the privileges of a free and advanced Christian community. So, also, what peculiar and deserved honour was lately conferred on the great pioneer of the freedom and Christian civilization of the dark continent of Africa—the truly great and good David Livingstone. These men will continue to shine like stars of the first magnitude, even in the annals of earth, while the mere heroes of war will be looked on with awe and dread, as passing meteors or blazing comets, portents of evil and danger.

So also the servants of Christ in all departments of Christian work, are worthy of more honour than those who labour only in the interests of the present life. Such men as Howard and Wilberforce, Moody