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The Deeper Life

Was Jesus Right

By Rev. S. G. Bland, D.D.

PROBABLY no teacher before Christ, and no teacher since, uninspired by Christ, has so excited childlikeness as He has done. He has made it, of all natural and spontaneous things, the type of the ideal. He taught that the wisest and most successful thing any one could do was just to become like a little child. One of His most distinctive sayings was, "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

This saying is, of course, accepted by all who call Jesus, Master, and unquestionably a sense of the sacredness and beauty of childhood has come into the world generally through Christianity that was unknown before. Yet, I fancy, no one would affirm that the teaching of Jesus concerning childhood is accepted or even understood by the most of His professed disciples. Here comes in that way of thinking that has been so convenient and so disastrous in the ordinary Christian life almost since the first—that way of distinguishing between this life and the next and postponing the Kingdom of God. All professed disciples of Jesus Christ would admit that the childlikeness that He loved is the law of heaven, but not all would admit that it has the same right to be considered the law of earth. Childlikeness is not the dominant or outstanding characteristic of most Christian people. It is not even a quality that many of them are seeking after or believe in. There is no widespread sense of unconsciousness or failure because it is rare. Its infrequency is not often mourned. A yearning to be more childlike is not often expressed, nor, as far as can be judged, often felt. There is even quite a measure of content in being consciously unchildlike. Very few people are ashamed of their pride. Most are rather proud of being proud, and think it a strong manly trait. I don't know that I ever heard a man or woman say, "I know I am proud, with any deep sense of shame or sorrow. Most Christian people, too, will stand up for their rights and resent the slightest invasion of them with a spirit that is very unsuggestive of a child. Trustfulness, again, is a thing more people are ashamed of having than of being without. To be considered an "easy mark" would be a stinging humiliation, yet that is just what children are.

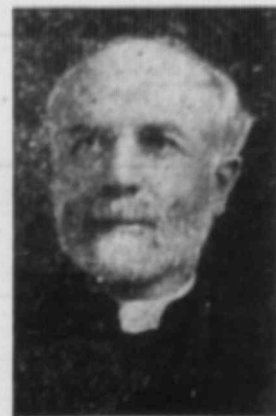
Humility is not a Protestant virtue. It is not an Anglo-Saxon one. We Anglo-Saxons, whether of Britain or of America, are on the whole a proud, masterful, aggressive and combative race, and rather proud that we are. Childlike we are not, and so it is perhaps not strange that the prevailing type of Christian character among us is not strongly suggestive of the child. Childlikeness, in short, is one of the things we Anglo-Saxon Christians admire, and are content to postpone the acquisition of till we get to a world where it will fit in better than it does with this.

And it may be that it is just here that we are making one of our biggest mistakes, all the bigger because we are not in the least conscious of making any mistake, but rather being very shrewd and sensible.

And so, perhaps, there is not any kind of enquiry which it would be more worth while for us to make than the enquiry as to what Jesus meant when He made childlikeness so indispensable, and as to what measure of conformity there is among us to this ideal.

I say, Anglo-Saxon Christians, partly because we know them best, and partly too because I suspect there have been and are now other sorts of Christians

who at least in this respect have come much nearer to the ideal of Jesus than we have. And, first, what did Jesus mean by the Kingdom of Heaven? He meant unquestionably a social order, a world brought into harmony with the will of God, each



Dr. Bland

changed into a reflection of heaven, something outside each of us, objective, visible and, of course, still future. But it is just as clear that he meant by it a state of mind, something subjective and inward, and therefore possible at once. "The Kingdom of God," He said, "is within you," or as it may be rendered, "among you," either interpretation gives the same idea.

Now there is no need to discuss the indifference of childlikeness in regard to heaven or in regard to an earthly society made like

heaven. No one would question that. The practical question is whether childlikeness is essential to the right temper, the happy temper, the temper that will work best now, best fit into the present order of things. Jesus evidently included in His idea of the Kingdom of God the attitude of mind which the child of God will maintain, and which is the key to life. And He evidently thought that the most marked feature in the attitude or temper was childlikeness. So essential was it in His thought that no one could be said to have that temper or attitude who was not childlike.

Do we really believe this? Do we honestly think that childlike people get the best of it?

Let us try to get at this matter in the most practical way. Do we believe that the wisest, happiest, most successful man is the humblest, the most trustful, the least self-assertive, the most friendly?

I think I am right in naming these as the most conspicuous traits in normal children. They do not think highly of themselves. They easily think others wiser. They are very teachable. They have not the least hesitation in confessing ignorance and asking questions. They have very little, if any, sense of dignity, and are very slow to perceive or resent an insult. They readily trust people. They are quick to make friends, and quick, if wronged, to forgive and forget. They care little for social distinction, differences in the way people dress or the kind of houses they live in. They are not eaten up with cares and worries. They live in the present, and like the birds of the air take little anxious thought for the morrow. They are easily pleased, and quickly forget disappointment. They do not allow yesterday or tomorrow to overshadow today. They are essentially light-hearted and cheerful.

Now, in all, or most of these respects, must we not confess that they are almost the antithesis of most of us, especially of the more ambitious of us? And for a Christian people does not this seem a strange thing? Does it not seem as if we modern Anglo-Saxon disciples of Jesus had agreed to pay very little attention to one of the things that Jesus seemed to think most important?

If Jesus is right, all our efforts to construct a really happy social order while we refuse to be what He said we must be are like the effort to build a stable and enduring house without a foundation.

I am deeply convinced that before we can reach a really satisfactory kind of civilization there will have to be a far more thoroughgoing and fundamental transformation in our general character and ways than most of us dream of. A people ambitious, anxious, over-wrought, suspicious, and wary, too busy to play, above all proud and quick to take of

ferent self-interests, by increasing discipline, by any means. Enter into the

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Mr. Parsons a union should be to manufacture asked for such a to bear our own "protection" of field and no far in the past certifying "industries" at the expense primary industry this is had not for the whole and true that "least relatively dense cited by trary is too value. We can of war conditions. I have action of the "manufacture" the five years of the operation section there have been put agricultural p and West, are substantial as has not been confirmatory obtainable fr in Ontario. I years, 1901-1

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