

The Beatitude of the Meek.

It seems so incredible, that if anybody else than Jesus had said it, we should hardly trouble to think of it—Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. It is not only not true, it is the very reverse of the truth. We can see who inherit the earth, and it is not the meek. It is the self-assertive, the grasping, the proud. It is ambitious nations that extend their territories, and ambitious men that accumulate fortunes. A paradox may challenge the mind and provoke thought, but this beatitude goes beyond paradox; it flies in the face of fact. The meek are the very people who do not inherit the earth, and the man who sees this or thinks he sees it gives up the beatitude in despair.

Yet no one can without misgiving be at open issue with Jesus, and the misgiving is intensified when it is seen that this beatitude does not make its first appearance in the Sermon on the Mount. There, we are taken out of our depth in every sentence, and expect to be; but this particular saying is quoted from a psalm—a late psalm, with nothing daring, original, or sublime in thought or expression—the psalm of someone who says he has been young, and is old, and who, if he has anything to give, gives experience. It is this ancient saint who says more than once that the meek shall inherit the earth, and Jesus sets to his seal that this is true. When old experience and the Living Word of God so strikingly conspire, we may be sure a great truth lies hidden, if we could only find the key.

To begin with the psalm, the first ray of light breaks from the most unlikely quarter. If there is one sphere of human interest in which the beatitude seems out of place, it is that of national relations. It is not the meek nations which inherit the earth; it is those that shake the mailed fist. Yet the writer of the psalm thinks of a nation, and the meek are the quiet, lowly people who are conscious that the nation has a divine calling to fulfil, and that its chief good is to be realized, and its place on earth secured, not by entering into the conflict of national ambitions, but by renouncing it, devoting itself to its spiritual task, and letting God choose its inheritance for it. And this was the truth. Israel lost the land of Canaan, temporarily at the exile, finally when Titus broke up the Jewish state, because it refused to acknowledge it. The proud carried it over the meek; the nation which was destined to be a covenant people, a link between the outer world and the living God, and that only, entered into the selfish conflicts of the heathen, and perished in its pride. Self-assertion was its ruin, when meekness would have made it secure. The lesson of this experience lies in the beatitude, and it was never more wanted by the nation than at this moment. All the motives and watch-words which rouse even Christian peoples set it at defiance. The different nations regard each other as rivals, nothing but rivals; they all want the same things, and seem to be convinced that national security depends on getting them for themselves, and excluding others. In London and in Pretoria, in St. Petersburg and Paris, in Washington and Berlin, there is nothing to be heard but imperialism, annexation, the appropriation of spheres of influence, territorial compensation, and so forth. It is taken for granted that this is the way, and the only way, for nations to inherit the earth. But if there is truth in either the Old Testament or the New, there is a fatal misapprehension in this temper. A nation is not made secure, it does not get the good of the world, or of the land which God has given it, by pursuing a policy of selfish aggrandizement, or relentless rivalry with others; it inherits the earth only as it wakes to the consciousness of a divine calling, as it sees that the other peoples also have their place and vocation in the Divine Kingdom, and is divinely contented with its own. It is then that the real meaning and worth of national existence are disclosed; it is then that a nation finds the full value of the inheritance which God has given it. It is paradoxical only because we do not think; the simple truth is that till it learns meekness no nation can see the way to become, in the magnificent language of St. Paul, heir of the world.

It is the same with individuals. Meekness is so rare that it is constantly misunderstood. It is habitually confounded with weakness. The meek man is the man who can be thrust aside or trampled on with impunity; his rights may be taken from him, and he will not resent it. In reality, this is beside the truth. Meekness is fundamentally a temper of the soul in relation to God. It is that disposition which accepts without repining the place and the calling God has given, which submits to the limitations involved in them as divinely wise and good; it is that disposition which is perfectly expressed in the word of Jesus: Even so, Father: such was thy gracious will. It is only where this is its fundamental mood that the soul of man can find an inheritance in the earth. Meekness in this sense is not imbecility, nor indifference to one's rights. But it is the source of a conviction nothing can shake, that the true good of life, the only inheritance which can satisfy the heart, is not to be sought or found in the selfish war of all against all, but in some divinest and more human way. It is not by rivalry and grasping, not by a life acknowledging no law but the will of the stronger, that we become heirs of the world,

but by the very opposite—by submitting in all things to a divine necessity, to which the interest of our rivals is as dear as our own. The heart enlarges then to the scale of God's goodness; it can take in all he has prepared for it; it can say, All things are ours.

It is difficult to realize that there is a spiritual possession of material things, that it is the true possession, and that it can be lost by too eager a pursuit of the material possession itself. Yet it is the truth, and can be illustrated by tragic examples. It is not the great landowner who has the real inheritance in what is called his property; it may be only his burden or his pride, while the good of it is enjoyed by men of whom he never dreams. Possibly no man ever had a greater inheritance in the earth, by the natural grace of God, than Scott; no man had greater joy in nature as the work of God, and the common possession of all his children; in a sense, he was born heir of the world. And as far as he ever forfeited this great inheritance, he did so through the selfish ambition which moved him to appropriate as much as he could of it to himself, and to add field to field which he might call his very own. It was not in these dearly-bought acres that his inheritance in the earth lay; rather did he lose it in the pursuit of them, "wearing with the greatness of his way;" and many a man does the same who would be saved if he remembered this word of Jesus. What holds of material possessions holds of many other things. Ambition, as a rule, defeats itself, and before we set out on adventures of our own, in quest of some dazzling inheritance, we should make very sure that we take at its true value the inheritance God has given us. This is meekness and it is also wisdom. It is a law of friendship. Many people are always keen about new acquaintances. They are perpetually on the look-out for introductions. They want to meet all kinds of notabilities. But it is not in this way that we get the good that has been prepared for us in our relations to each other. Erskine of Linlithgow remarked in one of his letters that the longer he lived the more he valued the friends God had given him, and the less those he had chosen for himself. This is just a way of saying that as far as friendship is concerned, experience proves the truth of the beatitude—Blessed are the meek. It is true also of books and of reading. There is such a thing as ambition and greediness even here. There is a mood in which people are impatient because they cannot read everything, or everything that is written on some particular subject. "To know the literature" is counted a great thing. It is no plea for indolence to say that there is room for delusion here. The most original scholar of our generation in England has pointed out the difference between knowing what has been written on a subject and knowing the subject itself. It is not the *helluo librorum* who gets the good of books. It is not the quickest reader, nor the man with the biggest library. It is the man who in his reading as in his friendships is content to be what God has made him, and who proves by experience that this is the way in which the inheritance comes to him.

But the true key to all the beatitudes is the person of Jesus. The truth of them is seen when we look at him. One fact of his life flashes out its significance in each; they are one in him; this is their originality and their power as they fall from his lips. Others, like the author of the thirty-seventh psalm, may have caught a glimpse of this one or that; it is his glory not so much to have uttered as in his life to have demonstrated them all. I, he said, am meek. And to whom has the beatitude been fulfilled as to him? Even when he had not where to lay his head, he inherited the earth. Everything in it spoke to him of his Father, and of the laws of his kingdom. The face of the sky, the sun and the rain, the lilies and the sparrows, the cornfield and the fig tree—all were his. And they were his because he was meek. If he had entered into the selfish strife of men to win an acre for himself alone, the inheritance would have faded from his grasp. And has he not inherited the earth since? Of all the powers which at that day were engaged in appropriating the universe, the power of Jesus alone survives. There were names then in every man's mouth as famous as the names which fill the newspapers to-day—names associated with legions and ultimatums, with provinces and conquests and annexations. Who can recall them now? But his name has gathered authority to it all through the ages, because it is the name of one who, accepting the will of God, stood and stands outside the selfish rivalry, and also commands the confidence even of those who are in it. A part in his sovereignty, which is the true inheriting of the world, is only given to those who share in his temper. It is the disinterested who win moral authority. With the will and calling of God as the first and fixed principles of their life, they are set free from common ambitions, and find themselves, without an effort, "as having nothing, yet possessing all things." Blessed are the meek.—The British Weekly.

Socialism in America.

1. The Socialist Party.—Questions of national concern, whether economic, social, moral, or religious in character, have more or less adherents and devotees among the citizens. The several aggregates of persons of similar

opinions are called parties. Social reform, or rather revolution, is a question which has assumed proportions of national, and even international importance, consequently there has arisen a Socialist party. Alongside the Republican party, with McKinley at its head, the Democratic party, with Bryan at its head, and the Prohibition party, with the earnest Wooley as its leader, are now ranged the two branches of the Socialist party, the Social Democratic, with Debs as its candidate, and the Social Labor party, with Maloney for the Presidency. At the coming election in this country the Socialist vote will probably swell to the proximity of a million.

2. Socialism is Wider than its Party.—Socialism cannot be measured by party lines. It is a river which overflows its banks. It crops out, like an uneven substratum, in the unexpected regions of the other parties, revealing itself now as municipal ownership, now as hostility to trusts, and now in a cry for arbitration in the war of labor and capital. Whosoever shall apply to the great mass of partisan literature and partisan oratory, the touch-stone of socialism, will here and there detect the gold. Socialism is striking its roots deep into the great centres of learning; and almost every university has its student's Socialist club, and not a few of them their socialist professors. Socialism is turning the presses of the great publishing houses with an ever increasing volume of socialist literature which anyone who will take the pains to scan their catalogues may ascertain. Into the brain of the working man, befogged hitherto and benighted, the doctrines of socialism, though slowly, yet surely, are making their way. Like some subtle principle, socialism is finding its way into many thinking minds, which, while rejecting with scorn all connection with socialism, and vehemently denouncing it, yet in unsuspecting ignorance of their kindred cherish many of its views. On the whole there is, beyond a doubt, a great swelling and spreading of the principles of socialism in this country. Already the most hopeful speak of the present competitive system as a regime of the past. It must not be forgotten, however, that as yet socialism in the course of its development has not outgrown its agitation and propaganda stage.

3. Causes of the Growth of Socialism.—The movement is of recent birth, although of ancient inception. The bringing forth of this great doctrine into light and activity is due in the first place to the writings of such men as Saint Simon and Lasalle, and Owen, and Marx, and Engels, and Hugo, and Tolstoy, and Besant, and Bellamy, and George, and Sheldon, and others; in the second place to the acute consciousness of the rapidly widening gulf between the rich and the poor, the number of the former of which steadily diminishes, while that of the latter grows prodigiously; in the third place to the realization of the ever-intensifying struggle for existence, the difficulty of obtaining work and the uncertainty of holding one's job, the two spectres that day and night haunt the workingman; in the fourth place to the feelings of cold and hunger, experienced by thousands upon thousands of suffering human bodies, and this too when the world is so lavish of her products, and the warehouses of capital fairly burst with materials of food and clothing; and in the fifth place to the increased economic knowledge and ethical intelligence of the people, and a clarified and better understanding of the teachings of Jesus. A flood of light is being poured over society, revealing the hideous forms of misery and injustice, the fruits of selfishness and the results of the present system, and revealing also the lovely form of Him who said, "Love one another as I have loved you," and who lived a life of poverty, preached and suffered, in the glare of this light and the comprehension of that which it reveals, the conscience of humanity is beginning to awaken; its judgment to condemn; and its invention to devise means and ways for something better.

4. The Genius of Socialism.—True socialism is not anarchism. It holds rather that the present system is anarchy, and professes itself to be order, and order founded on the principles of love and justice. Socialism is no impracticable day-dream, no unbusinesslike Utopia, but instead a most rational and feasible scheme for adjusting social ills and evils. Socialism is not materialism; it is not anti-Christian; it is not opposed to marriage. While the charge of these things in some instances cannot be denied, yet they cannot be proved to be the tenets of true socialism, and the whole system can hardly, in justice, be condemned because of a few unnatural and radical outgrowths of craziness and excesses. Socialism unadulterated is Christianity applied. The aim of socialism is to bring the light of truth, the comforts of peace, and the joys of education and refinement to every land and to every home. It seeks to usher in the golden age, the reign of Christ. The genius of the movement can be best seen in the lives and labors of its founders and leaders, for never has there risen a class of more devoted and unselfish men, than the farseeing apostles and advocates of this system.

In order that any one who desires may learn something of this subject, I recommend two short works for perusal, namely, Kirkup's History of Socialism and Professor Schaeffle's Quintessence of Socialism.

H. S. BAKER.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

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