

# HELPING PEOPLE GROW

*An Application of Educational Principles  
to Christian Work Abroad*

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BY

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## PREFACE

THIS book has been written for those who interpret their task, not as getting things done, but as helping people to grow. Let it be said at once that it does not pretend to deal with the whole range suggested by the title—what single volume could! The goal proposed might be approached on the one hand from the viewpoint of standard Christian categories, verities, and convictions; or on the other from the scientific study of ways of redirecting human experience. This volume has been limited to the latter.

This limitation, however, has been made with no less reverence than if the emphasis had been in more patently religious terms. For in these psychological laws, also, we recognize God's ways of working. And in the patient labors of those students who have enlarged our understanding both of human nature and of the laws which govern its change and growth we see that which enables us all the more effectively and intelligently to be His co-workers. A master workman will lay hold of new insights while still doing full justice to the old. The specific aim has been to call attention to certain approved educational principles and to facilitate their application to the task of building up Christian character and institutions. The book should be judged, therefore, not by what it omits, but by what it has found space to say.

The chapters abound in concrete illustrations. This is because bits of human experience have always seemed to me like nuggets of gold. No more precious thing can a

person share than some life episode fraught with significance in the way of insight or warning. Such secondary or mediated experience with all its warm concreteness can be relived in imagination so that in a measure its original values may become a part of one. One's life is thus vicariously enriched. One of the main objects of this book is to make available such distillation of experience. As a result, those skilled in abstract thought may find these pages tedious. But let such have patience for the sake of those who get their meanings best through concrete episodes, and who do not readily grasp a principle until what it means in actual life is seen.

Four classes of persons have been in mind. It is hoped that missionaries, whether engaged in school work or not, may find this volume a help in appreciating the educational aspects of their task. It is equally intended for the nationals in the younger churches abroad into whose hands so rapidly is falling the actual work of the Christian movement overseas. For their sakes the illustrative material has been amplified. Educators may be interested in seeing their principles applied in unexpected yet most real ways to regions of life far removed from schools and colleges. And finally, supporting constituencies should find interest deepening as they face some of the issues which make up the warp and woof of Christian work abroad.

D. J. F.

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## CHAPTER I

### AIM IN TERMS OF INNER CHANGE

#### AN ANALOGY FROM NATURE

IN the process of evolution the fish's fin changed to a bird's wing. That change is called an adaptation. Similarly there was a first gorilla to rise and walk on his hind feet. That act and the resulting structural modifications are also called adaptations. The story of organic evolution is the story of manifold modifications by which the living organism has been brought into better adjustment to its environment. The essence of this conception of biological adjustment consists in the fact that it represents an actual change in the organism.<sup>1</sup>

Taking over from biology this concept of definite concrete modifications, we may say that what we want as a result of the Christian movement is adaptations—actual changes. From an educational standpoint Christian nurture is the process of bringing about these changes. However, the modifications in which we are now interested are not so much in the physical organism as in the realm of understandings, attitudes, abilities, ideals, and purposes. These changes include modifications in an individual's understanding and appreciation of his environment or in his capacity to deal with and to triumph over his environment. These adjustments are inward affairs constituting a form of growth.

For example, the person who has genuinely built up

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "The Practice of Teaching in the Secondary School," Henry C. Morrison, pp. 8-28.

from his experience the concept that God is a Father has acquired a new attitude toward the world in which he lives. He does not and cannot react as he did before. It is not merely that he does not longer look out upon the world as he did before; he *cannot* do so, for he is a changed individual.

Again, he who has genuinely acquired a given concept in the field of social relationships—let us say, the notion of the high worth of each individual, or the obligation of mutuality in service—has acquired a new attitude toward his relationships with his fellow men, and toward the relationships of these with one another. The new attitudes inevitably modify his whole social behavior; he conceives new ends and adopts new means.

We may say, then, that a main function of the Christian movement throughout the world is to produce in people actual changes, transformations, adjustments, adaptations—largely psychological rather than biological—leading toward a fuller, more meaningful, and more satisfying life. More specifically the goal of the Christian movement throughout the world is the remaking of mankind—the creation of a type of person having the quality and spirit of Jesus Christ. This means a new creature.

It follows that Christianity, from such a point of view, would not be a label, or a garment, or a profession; it would be a process of growth. Hence the important question for the Christian worker to keep before himself would be not what he has taught his people to know, not what he has trained them to do, but what kind of people he has helped them to become. We cannot at this stage stress too strongly the fact that the objective in such a Christian redirection of human experience is its modification in definite and significant ways. The needed change seemed so great to Jesus that nothing less than being

born again seemed adequate to describe his vision for transformed humanity.

### NERVE PATHWAYS

We can think of these changes or adaptations in still more concrete terms. Every time any stimulus recurs and leads to the same response it deepens, so to speak, a track along which a future similar stimulus can the more readily travel. As a result of our past responses and of our present conduct we are constituted as a growing bundle of nerve paths. The more often the stimulus has passed along a path the deeper it has become, and the more surely does the next stimulus keep to this same path. From one standpoint one may say that the acquiring of new nerve paths and the changing of old ones is what we mean by the development of Christian character. Learning is acquiring these new pathways; and teaching is the arrangement of situations which will lead to the development of those which are desirable and satisfying.<sup>1</sup>

We can look around us and see the evidence of these very real pathways built up in people. A well is being dug in India and blasting has begun. When the work has progressed to the point where there might be danger of stones falling on the workmen the Hindu supervisor demands that an offering be made to the village idol. Wherever this man goes he bears about within him a pathway such that whenever a situation like this occurs the idol-response is made.

In certain areas of the world it is customary for the menfolk of a family to sit down to a meal first and afterward the women eat. Given the eating situation, then, that accustomed response by man and wife runs along

<sup>1</sup> Cf. "Educational Psychology," Edward L. Thorndike, Vol. II, p. 55.

their nerve paths. When illiterate women get together in a village courtyard slander and idle gossip are likely to have full sway. Built into their nervous systems is something that makes gossip the almost inevitable reaction to leisure with one's friends in a cozy courtyard.

In many a land people for centuries have worked seven days a week, shops have been open every day and everything has gone as usual on Sunday. In those who become members of the Church new ways have to be established through instruction, discipline, and the experience of a Christian day of rest.

In fact, for many a simple person his whole religion is a matter of traditional training, of group loyalty and family affection—ties accumulating and deepening from babyhood to manhood with actual choice hardly entering. Changing such a person's religion means changing accumulated pathways of a lifetime. Part of the modern problem in Christian expansion is to discriminate between those habitual responses which should be discouraged and those which should be taken over and built into the new life.

It requires very definite planning to break up old tracks and to build up new ones. Note the problem of changing the response built up through the centuries to the Chinese New Year. This is a long protracted holiday season of social calls, gambling, drinking, theatricals, temple worship, etc. Passing along the streets one hears the constant click-click of gay parties and of gambling behind closed doors. In regard to some of these things another response to the situation produced by the Chinese New Year has to be built up in Christian young men and women, and this is not accomplished without painful effort. In one place it will be attempted by two well-equipped game rooms—one for men and one for women—to which the entire community is invited every evening of the season.

Or the Y puts on a special program of excursions to interesting places, or arranges meetings of the stamp club and choral society, or schedules a tournament of games in each department. At other centers discussion groups are started so that the members come to see not only the evil of existing conditions but how to take steps on their own initiative for making things better. All these constructive activities are building up new responses to an old situation—are making new tracks for old.

We must not think that these existent nerve paths are instantaneously destroyed at conversion. A thousand strands connect each individual with his racial inheritance, with his tribe, his family and his old customs. The acceptance of the gospel does not automatically break all these bonds. Even when a convert eagerly throws away or burns his idols, destroys his books of magic and his amulets, and enters upon a life of prayer and of Christian conduct, the ancestral religion functions in his thinking and living far beyond his own consciousness.

This truth is exemplified on every hand. A middle-aged woman becomes interested in the Church and its teaching, she comes quite regularly to church, but refuses to destroy her kitchen god. She tells the Bible woman that she knows it cannot help her but the tie is too strong for her of her own accord to break. The change needed involves an educational process, and will come about in accord with certain laws. Even if there is a sudden and more extensive recrystallization of character this, also, has its conditions, its specifications, its principles.

Habits built up in Christian work abroad are not always good ones. Village girls and boys are brought into a city school for training with the expectation that they will go back to their villages and engage in the uplift of their old communities. Disappointment very often meets this effort, for the whole process has built up within these

pupils nerve paths connected with urban life. These paths are actually there within them at the end of their course, and cannot be changed just because leaders would like the pupils to go back to villages. This does not mean that the pupils cannot go back; but that if they do, they will have to break down the city habits and build up habits suited to village life.

Or we develop a whole set of denominational pathways and then have to rebuild in order to get a Union Church. We continue to employ evangelists and Bible women to work in the vicinity of a congregation, and do not note that thought-tracks are being laid in the minds of the congregation which connect up need for evangelization with the receipt of foreign money and not with their own responsibility. Consciously or unconsciously a connection has been built up between evangelism and salaried officers so that any attempt to enlist volunteers finds little response. When a leader rents a building for a new Christian community and pays for a pastor's traveling expenses in regularly ministering to them, is it any wonder that something very definite within them has actually to be broken down before self-support can come? All too often what a congregation is learning is that it is more blessed to receive than to give. Instead of building up with meticulous care pathways of independence and self-reliance from the start, in our haste for results we often find that we have developed deep nerve tracks of dependence which have to be torn down at great nervous cost before a constructive start can be made.

Nerve paths are being built up in the leaders, too. Suppose that from the beginning a leader has continued to be pastor, evangelist, and administrator all in one so that all the church people look to him for counsel and all the workers look to him for direction. While human nature is human nature it will be difficult for this man so



to change the responses he makes to accustomed situations that powers and responsibilities may pass over to the people.

It is because successive reactions are building up a path in just as real a sense as brick upon brick builds up a wall that a wise leader is careful to guide the very first response. When a Christian group is first formed and they come asking for a service he perhaps may answer, "Well, if you will pay the way to your village of pastor So-and-So, and will give him a place to stay each time, I will arrange it."

### GROWTH DISTINGUISHED FROM STATISTICS

In the preceding two sections we have been looking at our task as the bringing about of adaptations, modifications, changes, adjustments, and have been trying to think of them in concrete terms. In the next four sections we shall be attempting to distinguish true inner changes from certain other manifestations which wrongly tend to absorb our attention. These distinctions are more or less obvious; but yet they are so commonly ignored or misconceived in actual practice that it seems worth while to give considerable space to exemplifying them.

In the first place, adaptations in the sense of actual changes in one's nature are to be distinguished from statistics. It may surprise some to note how often reports of work stop short of any mention of changes actually brought about. They give us plenty of numbers—but these do not measure adaptations; merely the opportunity for producing change.

A few examples will make this plain. In an eastern land a great church puts on an "evangelistic month" each year. A blank is sent out and the results of the evangelistic campaign seem to be measured in terms of the number of services held, number of people preached

to, number of hours of voluntary work given by unpaid laborers, number of shrines broken down, and number of baptisms performed.

A mission in another land requires each month from all local evangelists a report asking for figures on attendance at morning worship, evening worship, Sunday school, women's meeting, Christian Endeavor, and prayer meeting each week; also the amount of collection received, number of persons baptized at the communion services, number of pastoral calls made each month by the evangelist, number of Scripture portions distributed, etc.

In a recent pamphlet issued by one of our larger boards an account was given of a missionary who desired to stress the preaching of the gospel among the fifteen or more native workers employed in the district. They were to keep track of the number of meetings they held in a month (a meeting consisting of a group of five persons or more), not counting Sunday services or the daily morning prayers. They thought they were doing well when each reported thirty or forty meetings in the month, with the highest man around sixty or seventy.

"Then Bekali, whose work had been more of oversight and counsel for the district rather than house-to-house preaching, determined to show his men how it should and could be done. The first month he turned in a total of 250 meetings. I remonstrated with him, 'Why, Bekali, you don't mean 250, you mean twenty-five,' for they often have trouble writing figures correctly. I remember his quiet smile, when he insisted that it really was 250 meetings in the month. And then to prove it, he raised it the next month to three hundred and kept it near there for four or five months. Think of the physical strain alone of hold-

ing an average of ten such group meetings every day and keeping it up for months! In a short time he shamed the weakest worker into holding sixty to seventy meetings a month, while his nearest competitor rose to 150, but none could come near him. During the height of this campaign, those fifteen men held between twelve and thirteen hundred meetings of five persons or more in a month, and the total of those hearing the Word of God ran into many thousands. So Bekali led his people in everything spiritual."

This is unquestionably the account of a very earnest faithful worker, but after one has caught the distinction between adaptations and statistics one misses dreadfully in such an account any mention of actual changes.

One wonders whether that person is really interested in changed lives whose report consists merely of figures: "During the year I camped in 113 places, traveled about 800 miles, talked to 462 individuals, held 214 public meetings, visited 168 villages and hamlets, and talked in 432 houses." Similarly one feels that the report of a Christian Literature Society has not gone far enough when it is satisfied with stating that it has sold 3,500,000 pages during the first six months of the year. Our real interest is in life changes produced by these planned itineraries and these printed pages.

There is an insidious, yet ever present temptation to forget one's real objective in changed lives, and to interpret outcomes in terms of time-to-be-spent (so many terms of service by the missionary, so many days of voluntary evangelism by the convert); or in terms of institutions-to-be-maintained or methods-to-be-followed (so many hospitals, so many schools); or in terms of ground-to-be-covered (so many villages visited, so many