

THE HUMAN ELEMENT
IN THE MAKING
OF A CHRISTIAN

STUDIES IN
PERSONAL EVANGELISM

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BY

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TO
MY MOTHER

PREFACE

ANY vital discussion of personal evangelism ought to be carried on between two individuals alone, if it is to be personal; and therein lies the difficulty in writing a book on this subject. We are naturally reticent about our inner life and shrink instinctively from revealing those processes by which our spirits have been disciplined and made fit for true fellowship with God. Nevertheless, we who are Christians need to help people to understand the laws of cause and effect as they apply to Christian experience; we must be able to answer some of the practical questions that are put to us by those who seek reality in the spiritual life and need working principles; and we want, by our counsel, to help and not to hinder those who are within our influence. People do not usually find their way into the kingdom without some personal help. Our Lord spent a large portion of His time in dealing with the personal life of individuals and yet His chosen method has long been neglected by His followers.

This little book has been written in the hope that it may help to define the human element in the making of a Christian. It does not pretend to deal with that part of the Christian life which is hidden with Christ in God, but is concerned chiefly with the human side of Christian experience, the moral situation we have to face in our own hearts, and the personal challenge that we meet in the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is written in the belief that if we have a rational understanding of human nature and its normal reactions we can apply the message of the gospel with more wisdom and help many bewildered or discouraged people to find their heavenly Father.

Each chapter is arranged in two parts: a general discussion of the subject and a Bible study. The studies can be used for group or class discussions by leaders in Sunday-schools and Christian associations or by college students. The "References for Reading" in the Appendix will furnish supplemental material for the use of group leaders.

The writer is keenly conscious of her limitations in attempting to interpret the significance of a Christian life; but there are too many unshepherded folk in this time of world distress, and any bit of experience that might help one of the least of them must not be withheld.

B. C.

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THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN THE MAKING OF A CHRISTIAN

CHAPTER I

SOCIALIZING MY FAITH

"The one thing of which I am sure these days," said a thoughtful man, "is that I am not sure of anything. I want something real, something that will show this mad world how to get a grip on something solid." "How about God?" asked his friend. "He is real to some of us." "Well, if He is, why don't all of you begin to make Him real to the rest of us? He can't be very real to most Christians or they wouldn't succeed so well in keeping Him out of all their conversation. If any one has help, this is the time of all times to give it." The ring of this challenge might well drive us to self-examination. It brings forth in sharp outline the contrast between our usual attitude toward the inarticulate longings of people and that of Jesus Christ. His intense interest in their spiritual needs is so unlike the dull apathy that most Christians show. How can we be sure that we *are* Christians when we are so far from possessing His spirit toward others? For "when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd. Then saith He unto His disciples, 'The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest'" (Matt. 9 : 37, 38).

The harvest is even whiter now. The fact that three-fourths of the civilized world are in deadly combat after nineteen centuries of Christian teaching has filled our minds with questions and upset our theories. We Christians, though dazed, feel

that some reply must be made to those who are saying quite frankly, "What is Christianity worth?" "Where is thy God?" for one hears this on all sides. The world is ready to talk about Him as never before.

We are faced, too, by frank questions about our social relationships. The world is becoming quite sure that the existing community conditions and their inherent injustices are obstacles that must and can be removed so that people if they want to can know God. The Christian conscience is becoming sensitive to social needs and is exacting a higher standard for a Christian life. People are hoping that some one will tell them how to use this social spirit in the creation of a social programme that will build up the kingdom of Jesus Christ on sure foundations. They are sure that He is related to it all in some way and they are ready to have His help and talk over His programme with any one who sees it from His point of view. We say to ourselves that it is chiefly a matter of education; that people need to be taught the ethical principles of Jesus Christ and the laws of social adjustment, and that a well-ordered community life based on justice and co-operation will solve our problems. Well, education is certainly doing a great deal and pointing the way so clearly that people are forced to own to their sins of omission. We see illustrations of this all about us. Recently a prominent manufacturer who had exploited the labor of children to swell his profits and had been for years the devout and respected church leader in his town and its philanthropies suddenly lost his religious influence in the community when people began to learn their social responsibility toward all little ones and began to apply the standards of Jesus Christ to the situation. The light of publicity is being thrown on unsanitary housing, sweat-shop conditions, and other social evils, and those who are responsible for them are either correcting them or concealing their connection with them.

We can plead ignorance no longer and we are face to face with a need for such moral decision of character as will purge us from our social sin. Responsibility is being located in the human will, and if we fail there we are in open disobedience to the light. The real social problem that we Christians have to face is found in the age-long fact that people know the good and do it not. Why is this so? Why does a man drink when

he knows it ruins him? Why does a girl take coffee at ten o'clock at night when she knows she will lose a night's sleep? Why does a man allow foul drains to exist in a house he owns when he knows that the little children living there may die of typhoid? There are some, also, who see the beauty of a Christian life of fellowship with God and yet are unwilling to pay the price in order to have it themselves.

That was a revealing sentence in the leading address at a conference of social workers: "After the minimum-wage law has been passed, after the child-labor laws have been enacted, there yet remain the souls of people." It is a quiet admission that more than law is needful; the inner desires and choices of people's hearts must direct the will toward the enforcement of the law. It is the lesson of the Old Testament which the prophets discerned. The laws of God must be written in the hearts of people before they will become effective. Yes, indeed, all our social justice for which we ought to fight is only one part of the work; "there yet remain the souls of people" who know the good and do it not, who must be touched not alone by the precise counsels of education but who must catch the contagion of Christian character from association with those whose "character," as John Stuart Mill says, "is a perfectly fashioned will," one which does always those things that please God.

It is a big task that we have been given, with two distinct parts: to turn the calcium-light of God's righteousness upon all the conditions of our day until people see what He wants, and see too, how miserably far short of His expectation we have come in doing what we want at the expense of others; then to lead people to want and to will what God wants and wills by drawing near to them in love and sharing with them our relationship with Him until they cannot resist the appeal of His love. When this is done we must then link ourselves with all who will to apply our united will to the bringing in of God's kingdom.

This kind of work cannot be done through books or laws alone, any more than a little child can be educated apart from association with personalities that have had more experience with life and its meanings. It must be by example, or, as the small boy once put it: "Our teacher teaches us boys to be polite." "How does she do it?" asked his mother. "Oh, I don't know. She just walks around—and we feel as polite as

anything." Thus it is that our great gift to our generation is that we be what we ought to be and bring others in touch with the source of our life and victory.

We know that the chief source of our life is the reality of God as we come to know Him in Jesus Christ, who gives us the power to be and to do what we ought to be and to do. We know that all society needs this power to create new desires in the heart and give a new moral drive to the will. This can only be achieved when we begin to socialize our faith and to share it; for multitudes of people will never come to know God unless they find Him with our personal help. Many of them question the efficiency of the church because the social upheavals have seemed to contradict her voice. They do not know where to turn for help if we who rub elbows with them in the jostle of business and social life are silent. We dare not fail them when the meaning of the word Christian is being redefined by common consent with a new accent on social relationships. This voice of the people calls attention to our daily living and invites a close scrutiny. The gospel of a life is the only Bible many people will ever read. The masses of people are more influenced in their attitude toward God as He is seen through the ordinary manifestations of Christianity by the spirit and walk of us who are their friends than by any other means. Of course if we have no conscious ideals of the Christian life that are worth sharing, they will soon find us out; but if we really have them they will want them, and we would be unworthy, indeed, if we were smugly selfish about them. We have our great opportunity to give our best, sure that some wistful-eyed folk will turn to us to listen.

Surely some very human prophets are needed to-day; some who can give voice to the stifled convictions of people and interpret them in the light of the true character of God, Who is adequate for all that the human heart and society craves. As we try to think it through there are four elemental needs in human life to-day:

(1) *The need of a vision.* "Where there is no vision," the proverb runs, "the people perish." It is all too true. We live and grow by our visions; dreams, that call out our pluck and will to make them real. A girl dreams of herself as a college woman, and she buckles down to her elementary studies with a vim that makes the dream come true. A man dreams of a

little home with wife and children, and he plods along in his business and makes of himself a man worthy to support a home. The girl has her vision because she has seen a college girl the personification of her ideal; the man has seen a home and the ideal lures him on. The latent powers of each are called out by the concrete vision. So it is with the spiritual life. People "feel," as the poet says, "a Presence that disturbs" and they have all sorts of ideas about God. They may know the historical facts of the life of Jesus Christ or they may not. At any rate, if they do know about Him, it is as a dim tale of some one who because He walked the earth long ago is totally unrelated to the twentieth century. They need a vision of Him now in this day that is only possible when God is allowed to live in us by His Spirit and use us as the embodiment of His truth and love until people see Him incarnate in terms of human life that they can understand. In other words, God must become personal to them. The church and her religious teaching seem so impersonal to the multitudes; they need to be mediated to them through the life of some person. "I would give anything I possess to have a faith in God like yours," said a long-time unbeliever to a Christian friend. "I've always known what the Bible says about it, but I never saw any one before who had the nerve to live it. You've given my thinking a jolt." People to-day need many jolts like that; if they see the vision of God in a life they will find it hard to resist.

(2) *The need for sympathy and companionship in suffering and the restoration of the life marred by mistakes.* One of the big burdens that people carry is the load of loneliness that becomes too bitter to be borne when the fact of sorrow and suffering presses close. To suffer and to be alone in it with no understanding friend near by brings despair. What a poor appeal we could make to most people in the world to-day if we could not bring to them a living Lord who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" and who shares our sufferings. The value of suffering is one of the big mysteries of life; but it is an unescapable fact which does not cease to be even though we ignore it or deny it or run away from it. Without it some of the richest gifts of experience and character are lost. Chief among these is the sense of God's intimate understanding that humbles us with wonder that He should care about all we feel, suffer with us, and give His strength and help. There are

thousands about us who have not this comfort. They are haunted by the cry of their hearts:

"What can it mean? Is it aught to Him
That the nights are long and the days are dim?
Can He be touched by the griefs I bear,
Which sadden the heart and whiten the hair?
Around His throne are eternal calms,
And strong glad music of happy psalms,
And bliss unruffled by any strife;
How can He care for my little life?

"When shadows hang o'er me the whole day long,
And my spirit is bowed with shame and wrong;
When I am not good and the deeper shade
Of conscious sin makes my heart afraid,
And the busy world has too much to do
To stay in its course to help me through,
And I long for a Saviour,—can it be
That the God of the universe cares for me?"

The wonderful truth that God as we see Him in Jesus Christ identifies himself with the struggle and pain of this world is what people need to see more clearly. They need the comfort and courage that comes from the realization that they do not walk alone, bearing the brunt of the consequences of their mortality, but that God himself is under the burden. Now, how shall people see this and find their understanding Father unless those who live in His Spirit get under the burdens of people with love and sympathy and courage. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John 3 : 16).

It is not a system of ethics that people need so much as an understanding friend through whom they come to know the very heart of God. We need to confess our sin of pride and fastidiousness that has made us shun the pain of others and shirk our duty to give our strength to their weakness. People will never come to know their heavenly Father until they see Him walking the streets in the temple of our bodies, ministering to those sick, and in prison, and naked and hungry. Has our Christian life ever cost us inconvenience, suffering, and sacrifice for others? How far are we willing to enter vicariously into the "fellowship of His sufferings"?

"Lead me, yea, lead me deeper into life,
This suffering, human life wherein Thou liv'st
And breathe'st still, and hold'st thy way divine.
'Tis here, O pitying Christ, where thee I seek,
Here where the strife is fiercest; where the sun
Beats down upon the highway thronged with men,
And in the raging mart, O! deeper lead
My soul into the living world of souls
Where Thou dost move."

(Richard Watson Gilder.)

But it is not only help in pain that people need in order to see the Father but the restoration of fellowship with Him as their Redeemer from sin. If there were no way in which God could restore the spirit of people who suffer because of their sin or the sin of others, and heal the open sore that blights humanity, all our efforts at social reform would be futile. Back of every social problem lies the fact of sin and the active energy of sin; back of all unbrotherliness there is sin. It is the age-long, ugly fact with which we have to reckon. What good will it do to keep cleaning the basin of the fountain so long as the filth comes pouring out from the waters. We must get at the source and find our true help. In other words, the continuous attitude of the loving God, which was once revealed in the historic fact of Jesus Christ on His cross, must be so brought home to the hearts of people that they will hate sin as He hated it. As He refrained from no cost to cure it, so those who sin will find His healing and be restored to a friendship with God, forgiven and cleansed. People can read rules of ethics and be taught ideals but they can only see and receive the truth of the cross of Christ as it is ministered to them through those of us who carry the marks of the Lord Jesus in humble hearts and can speak out of a full experience to those who need a Redeemer. And from the streams of living water that flow out from a cleansed heart the mire and filth of this world will be washed away. If we were finding honestly, for ourselves, the restoring power of God by letting Him deal with our sin we would find some of the same spirit burning in us that set Paul on fire whom Myers so truly depicts in his lines:

"Oft when the Word is on me to deliver
Lifts the illusion and the truth lies bare,
Desert or mountain, the city or the river
Melts in a lucid paradise of air.

Only like souls I see the folk thereunder
Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings,
Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder,
Sadly contented with the show of things.
Then with a rush the intolerable craving
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call,
Oh, to save these! to perish for their saving!
Die for their life, be offered for them all!"

(3) *The need for a love that will make the dream of brotherhood a tangible reality.* We all talk about the love of God and yet take pride in being most exclusive in our love toward others. We look at it so often as a personal luxury to be used only when a fortuitous combination of circumstances proves irresistible. We are so satisfied with a few understanding spirits and fail utterly to appreciate multitudes of others because we are blind and stupid and only half-awake. Professor William James speaks of the "great cloud-bank of ancestral blindness weighing down upon us, only transiently riven here and there by fitful revelations of the truth"; and he shows how this blindness keeps us from discerning the possibility of the ideal life in other people. It is all true. Most of us are so limited in our insight into the true nature of others that we go on through life appreciating only a few of the personalities we meet. Indeed, we are so blind to the inner life of people that we often are surprised to discover that certain persons should have any friends at all, and say to ourselves: "I cannot see what any one can find to satisfy himself in that individual." It is our blindness and stupidity that keeps us from realizing people as they are, and it is fortunate, indeed, for us all that there are some friends keener than we are who respond to us and appreciate what is hidden in us. There are certain people who have a great capacity for friendship, merely because they are open-eyed enough to see the beauty of personality and to delight in it. Such people get the most out of life.

Love never hurts any one and it is God's own medium for understanding Him and bringing others nearer to Him. The bonds of brotherhood are real when people are bound together by common experiences and trials, but they never are severed if they are knit together by love. Love not only helps us to realize the inner ideal and dignity of all other people but is the active creative force that calls out latent powers and

transforms discord into harmony. The more the vision of God in Jesus Christ holds the attention and the more real becomes the sense of God's forgiveness and friendship, the easier will it be to look at others with the active spirit of love instead of stodgy indifference. In this way we gain stature in personality and find our largest life and call out others also into fulness of life.

The ideal of Christian brotherhood which Jesus Christ holds up is nothing short of the perfect bond. "And this is my commandment that ye love one another, as *I have loved you*." Are we willing to socialize not only our faith but our love to this extent?

(4) *The need for some moral dynamic in order that social ideals may be worked out.* We have not been slow about sharing our social ideals. We have socialized our working laws of hygiene, we have socialized our ideals for the relation of capital and labor, for recreation and education, suffrage and social morality. But in it all we have kept to ourselves the only thing that will make any of these ideals personal and potent. We have not socialized our faith in our living God revealed through Jesus Christ. We have researched the valley of dry bones, like the prophet of old, and brought together through the ordered ways of social laws and organizations bone to bone until out of the chaotic mass a mighty army for social betterment takes shape. We have done all that human wisdom can do, but the army is still inert; it needs the breath of God that it may arise and live and do. If only we could make the connection between sharing our faith and sharing our ideals! It is here that we Christians fail so pitifully. Some of us go out armed with ideals, some of us with faith. We all fail because we are not completely furnished. Those who preach social ideals fail to give a permanent motive power to the will, which alone can come from a vital Christian faith; those who preach faith often lack the laboratory work that would show people the application of the ideal. If only God would open our eyes to see our need until we should see the whole truth! All that we have done is right, but we must not leave the other undone. Let us socialize our ideals and socialize our working faith in God until we shall not need to say: "Know Jehovah, for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith Jehovah" (Jer. 31 : 34).