

The Laws of Friendship
Human and Divine

BY

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PREFACE

One questions his right to speak on this holy theme at all. One should have lived and suffered and achieved much to have earned that right. I can only own the presumption and speak as I must.

In attempting to discuss the laws of friendship, human and divine, before a Haverford College audience, in that region of Friends, where Haverford's own Professor Jones had already written on *Social Law in the Spiritual World*, and so near to the place where Dr. Trumbull wrote his *Friendship, the Master Passion*, I might well have seemed in superlative degree to be bringing coals to Newcastle. And yet, I felt that perhaps the attempt was not less worth making on these accounts. The greatest questions are never new; we can hardly hope for more, in any case, than the individual outlook; and it seemed as if it might not be without interest to see how the central contention of the Friends is viewed by one quite destitute of either Friend ancestry or Friend environment, but brought up, nevertheless, on the "doctrine of benevolence."

My own pupils know, too, how prone I am to quote Dr. Edward Everett Hale's

FRIENDSHIP

saying to the effect that the best part of a college education is the fellows you meet there; and how firmly I believe that some of the most permanent and valuable and momentous of the friendships of life are formed in college. College students, too, are still in the natural friendship-making period of life. My theme, thus, seemed doubly appropriate to a student audience.

Moreover, there was the further personal reason, that in responding to the invitation to give these Haverford College Library Lectures I could hardly help wishing to share with the students of Haverford, in my single opportunity of addressing them, my best—that single thought that had been, perhaps, the most helpful and most influential in all my own thinking and living, the conception that unifies and simplifies for me the world and life, as does nothing else.

And yet, the great reason for my theme was simply that, after all, it is the greatest possible theme for any audience whatsoever. For the problem of these lectures, as I conceive it, and as I understand the Friends everywhere to conceive it—and I envy them their beautiful, significant, and

PREFACE

simple name—is not the problem of a mere bit of life, something outside the main relations of life—though friendship has been often, perhaps usually, treated in literature as though it were a kind of side issue—but it is rather the problem of the whole of life.

The very fact that the problem is so significant and comprehensive a one, and that the fundamental thought which lies back of these lectures has long been for me a kind of ruling conception, makes it inevitable that I should be dealing here with themes that I have already partially treated elsewhere. I refer especially to Chapter XI of my *Reconstruction in Theology*, and to a part of my *Letters to Sunday School Teachers*. My readers should be fairly warned of the recurrence of the general line of thought of those portions of my previous writing.

But I have taken advantage of these lectures to do what I had long wished to do, and what I believed deserved to be done—to work out in a more thorough-going way, and with somewhat ampler illustration, this conception of life and of religion as friendship, and to disclose, if I might, its great fundamental laws. My

FRIENDSHIP

own conviction is that no other analogy of the religious life has so much to contribute to our religious thinking and living; and that, at the same time, it is in the light of the likeness of the human and the divine friendships that our human friendships take on their true glory. I have, therefore, cherished the hope that this little book might help some to a richer and also to a more unified life in both the relation to God and the relation to men. For the human relation suffers as really as the divine from failure to heed its fundamental laws.

The lecture form has been abandoned, as not best adapted to the development of the theme. There was the greater reason for this, since two of the lectures were given without manuscript, and since considerable material has been added. I greatly regret that the preparation of these lectures for the press has been so long, though unavoidably, delayed.

HENRY CHURCHILL KING.

OBERLIN COLLEGE,
January, 1909.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
Preface	v

INTRODUCTION

I. Friendship, the Problem of Life.....	3
II. The Laws of Friendship, the Laws of the Spiritual Life.....	7

PART I

ESTABLISHING THE FRIENDSHIP

INTEGRITY, BREADTH, AND DEPTH OF PERSONALITY

III. Significant Personalities	19
IV. The Purpose to be a True Friend.....	22
V. Breadth of Personality.....	30
VI. Depth of Personality.....	37
VII. The Duty of Growth.....	42

DEEP COMMUNITY OF INTERESTS

VIII. Community in Large not Small Interests	47
IX. Abiding Relations with Men and God..	50

MUTUAL SELF-MANIFESTATION AND ANSWERING TRUST

X. Mutual Self-Manifestation.....	55
XI. Answering Trust	60
XII. Revelation and Trust in Relation to God	62

MUTUAL SELF-GIVING

XIII. The Giving of the Self.....	73
XIV. Self-Giving in the Divine Friendship...	77

CONTENTS

PAGE

PART II

DEEPENING THE FRIENDSHIP

CHRISTIAN STANDARDS

- XV.** The Qualities of the True Friend, as
Seen by Christ..... 87
- XVI.** Paul's Sketch of the Friendly Life..... 101

FRIENDSHIP'S MOODS

- XVII.** The Self-Forgetful Mood..... 117
- XVIII.** Reverence for the Person..... 134

FRIENDSHIP'S WAYS

- XIX.** Expression 149
- XX.** Personal Association 155

INTRODUCTION

I. FRIENDSHIP, THE PROBLEM OF LIFE



FROM the point of view of Christ, the supreme artist in living, our problem is the central, the all-inclusive problem. For *the problem of friendship is the problem of life itself.*

He who has learned to love—and only he—has learned to live. This, I suppose, is to be deliberately, even philosophically said. For, if life is correspondence to environment, the fulfilment of relations, certainly our relations to things are only secondary, a kind of mere preliminary to living; while our relations to persons alone are primary. Here we truly live. And this needs saying in this age of physical science, of mechanism, and of emphasis on things.

For persons are, after all, the most *certain* of all facts—no philosophy has ever succeeded in seriously questioning them, though philosophy has called into question everything else. Persons are for us, even more manifestly, the most *important* facts, for it is solely in the personal world that there lie for us the supreme and perennial

FRIENDSHIP

sources of character, of influence, and of happiness—life's greatest gifts and achievements. Character and influence can hardly be conceivably either acquired or shown outside of personal relations. And of our happiness it is not only true that friendship is its chief source; but it will be found on reflection, I think, that even that happiness that we do not think of as primarily personal at all in its origin, like enjoyment of nature or art, still owes a chief part of its charm to three elements, all going back to personal relations: to the fact that in it, whether consciously or not, we are coming into the revelation of the personal life of another—God or man; that its pleasure, as Kant long ago pointed out, can be *shared*; and that at least the social life forms the secure background for it all.¹

The only *eternal* things, too, are persons and personal relations. They abide forever. "Love never faileth." Men have an instinctive insight here; and every man who has once awakened to a genuinely unselfish love cannot help having a feeling of its eternal quality.

So that to be a true friend in every rela-

¹ Cf. Lotze, *Microcosmus*, Vol. II, p. 16.

PROBLEM OF LIFE

tion seems to be the sum of all. It is hardly possible to put more into the record of any life than is implied in the quaintly tender and beautiful epitaph in the inner court of Westminster Abbey: "Jane Lister—Dear Childe." And the charge of treachery, on the other hand, is the most damning accusation against a man that can be made.

It is not strange, then, that Christ finds the eternal life simply in knowing God. "This is life eternal, that they should know thee the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." Here is conceived a personal relation to him, who is Creator and Father of all persons—a personal relation, thus, of which it is to state the simple truth when one affirms: It is that relation which gives reality and meaning and value to all the other relations of life—a relation so fundamental, that itself once set right, it thereby sets all the other relations right. For no man can be a true child of the Father whom Christ revealed, and not be a true brother to every other child of God.

The conviction of the love of God, of at least possible friendship with him, is absolutely fundamental to life. It is literally

FRIENDSHIP

our *primal hope*. For all our arguments, in defense of all that most concerns us, rest finally on our instinctive immediate assumption and conviction, that the world is an honest world, that it is no mockery of the best in us, but a possible sphere of rational, worthy, joyous attainment and living; that is, that there is Love at the heart of things, that a Father's heart beats there.

Our problem is, thus, the one great human problem—individual and social; the problem of ethics, the problem of religion, the problem of life itself. From the Christian viewpoint, it is the problem of the Golden Rule, of "learning to live the life of love," as Paul in one passage puts it, of readiness for that great coming civilization of brotherly men, in which the kingdom of God consists; the problem of Christ's great commandment of love to God and men, of the life of the child of the Heavenly Father, of the life of heaven. For what has even the heavenly life itself to offer more than that one should have learned to give and to get the utmost in the personal relations in which he stands to God and men?

II. THE LAWS OF FRIENDSHIP, THE LAWS OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

It is a distinctly encouraging, simplifying, and unifying note that is coming into our sociological, ethical, and theological writing, in harmony with the fundamental spirit of the Friends, through the increasing, though often hidden, recognition of Christ's and Paul's principle of love as fulfilling all righteousness.¹ And great consequences follow. The ethical and religious form one unity. One principle, only one, runs throughout life. *The same qualities, the same conditions, the same means—not different—are required for relation to God and relation to men*, though we have been singularly slow in recognizing it.

The thought of friendship becomes, thus, the key to the highest attainments in our direct relation to God. The conditions of a deepening acquaintance with God are those of any deepening acquaintance. All our highest religious or spiritual aspirations have here their full conditions. And it will be more useful, more rational, and

¹ Cf. Peabody, *Jesus Christ and the Christian Character*, p. 121.

FRIENDSHIP

more in accordance with the dominant New Testament usage, to think of greater nearness to God, or of "the baptism of the Spirit," in terms of a deepening friendship with God. And we shall so avoid the perils of a false and superstitious mysticism, while we keep, at the same time, the assurance, the steady growth, and the joy of a true mysticism.

It should not be forgotten that, in making the thought of friendship the key to the religious life, we are not to go off again into a false subjectivism which ignores the fact that, if there is a God at all, he has been manifesting himself objectively in the world and in history, and supremely in Christ. The whole possibility of our going forward hopefully in fulfilling the simple conditions of a growing friendship with God, assumes his love as already made known in many ways, and unmistakably in Christ, and builds continually on our knowledge of him as given in Christ. "We love because he first loved us." We are seeking God as concretely manifested, and most of all in Christ, no God of our own mere reasonings or dreams or imaginations. We find the real God in the real world, pre-

LAWS OF FRIENDSHIP

eminently in the historical personality of Christ. And we make progress in our acquaintance with God, especially as the Spirit "takes the things of Christ and shows them unto us."

It should, of course, be said from the start that God's relation to us is certainly not that external and finite relation in which our friends stand to us. God is the very source of our being. "In him we live and move and have our being." He is immanent in us. His personal will is expressed in our moral constitution. We do not wish, and could not have, that degree or kind of separation from God that we do have (though here, too, within limits) from one another. But the personal relation to God is only the more close on this account, not the less real.

We know any friend chiefly by some form of manifestation in act. His inner life, as inner, is hidden from us as really as is the mind of God. And we have manifestations of God in like manner, and from them we may know directly his purpose and spirit, very much as we may know the purpose and spirit of our friend.

Moreover, it is well worth remembering