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THE TEACHING OF JESUS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEWER PSYCHOLOGY.*

BY PRESIDENT J. M. BURNETT.

THIRD LECTURE.

Jesus is the master of all that teach. The teacher even more than the preacher may lay claim to Jesus as the glory of his profession. He was more teacher than preacher. The relation that he established between Himself and His intimate followers was that of teacher and learner. They were disciples, students; he was teacher, master, rabbi. A strange error of a scholarly commentator fell under my observation recently. From the use of the term "Master" as applied to Jesus the thought was emphasized that the relation between Jesus and His followers was that of authoritative mastership on the one side and humble obedience on the other. Had the commentator looked at the Greek he would have seen that the word there translated "Master" was *didaskalos*, *teacher*. In England the teacher, especially the head teacher, was and is still, called "Master." So that, even more than appears on the face of our translations, the Gospels show that Jesus took toward His followers not so much the attitude of authority, giving commands and demanding unquestioning obedience as that of teacher, giving instruction and desiring on the part of His followers most of all the spirit of the learner, of the inquirer, of the searcher after truth, who, when he finds it, finds life and freedom.

A CHRISTIAN PEDAGOGIC.

Modern education owes much to Jesus; more than the average teacher realizes. But educators, strange to say, have not undertaken a thorough study and analysis of

*Gay Lectures for 1914-15.

the principles and methods of the Master with the view of giving them a practical application in educational methods: A task yet for Christian educators. The influence of Jesus in education has been rather the silent, sub-conscious sort, but nevertheless permeating and effective and in recent years strongly confirmed and supported by the Newer Psychology.

There is in the teaching of Jesus a pedagogic principle of the most far-reaching and all-controlling kind. Necessarily so. The end governs the means. Every earnest, thorough-going philosophy of life must and does always contain also a pedagogic. For education is the means of accomplishing individual and social ends and ideals. For instance, whatever men have conceived to be the ideal state and the relation of the individual citizen to the state they have endeavored to accomplish by the training of youth. The Spartan conception of the state as a military camp and of the citizen as a soldier, led to the severest discipline and training of the youth of Sparta for military duties. The Athenian conception of a free citizen in a free state found expression in an education of culture. In modern Germany the ideal of efficiency has affected the entire educational system from bottom to top. Among ourselves there is a prevailing utilitarianism that is impatient with anything in the schools that is not patently and immediately useful for living.

Always and everywhere men value education or rather a method of education by its fitness as a means to accomplish the ideals of individual and social life that appeal to them. And every ideal of life, as soon as it prevails to any extent among men, is going to demand recognition in the schools and places where youth is trained.

There are five elements in the teaching of Jesus that sooner or later had to seek their fulfillment in and through education: (1) A certain lofty but attainable ideal of life that, being spiritual, gives meaning to all of life, and permeates all the life and must be sought for in all the activities of life. To the attainment of these spiritual

ideals everything else is subordinated. Such ends of life necessarily seek to control the means of their self-realization. (2) The spirit of service that in the teaching of Jesus characterizes the individual's attitude toward others and toward society. Unselfish, loving, service, is a fundamental social law and the school being social must seek to express this fundamental social fact. (3) The human spirit is educable. Morals may be taught and learned. These ideals of character are attained through knowledge of the truth, "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (4) The truth most serviceable to this end or "the truth," is that revealed in the word of God and in the person of Jesus Christ, God's Son. (5) An intense personal and social responsibility to attain these ends.

Putting these five things together you have a most comprehensive and powerful pedagogic. This Pedagogic embraces certainly the following program. (1) Moral or character interests must have first place. Upon esthetic culture must be super-imposed ethical culture or better the ethical must transfuse the esthetic. Atmosphere, environment, character of instructors and everything must be conducive to the finest spiritual culture and power. (2) The curriculum must give a large place to social service subjects. The student is equipped in spirit and by training, through all professions or by special professions, for an effective social ministry. (3) To the attainment of these ends the Bible, Church History, specific training for definite forms of religious service, are stressed, not compulsory, but elective or optional, with equal credit and value with other studies. This in broad outline is the program of Christian education toward which the best modern educational thought has been moving.

THE DOCTRINES OF JESUS.

When we come to examine the separate or specific teachings and sayings of Jesus we shall find that they al-

ways have the soundest psychological basis. He knew what was in man. His teaching is never arbitrary but a revealing of the nature of our own hearts, of the laws of the growth of character. I shall subject some of the doctrines of Jesus to as searching a psychological analysis as the occasion permits, as examples of what may be done, I believe, in every instance.

THE LAW OF LIBERTY.

In the first place I will call your attention to Jesus' doctrine of soul liberty. Every individual has the right of free, unconstrained, non-mediated, access to God. Worship is the free expression of the soul's desire and feeling toward God. Compulsory religion is an impossibility. Man cannot be made to be good. Character results from this free response of the soul to truth. The gospel depends for its extension solely on its power to appeal to the interest and arouse the affections.

No other principle has so deeply and widely affected society. Personal, social, political and economic freedom are consequents. The doctrine has a religious foundation, of course, in the worth of the individual as a child of God; it also has a sound psychological basis in that the mind is free in functioning.

The mind is not a receptacle into which separate items of knowledge may be put or stored at the wish or whim of some outsider. The mind is an organism assimilating, as the body its food, from all its environment only that that fits in with its own felt need. We see and hear many things every day of which we take no cognizance, of most of which we are not conscious. We notice only those things that fit into our own mental organization. Every perception is an act of apperception. We can understand the new fact insofar only as it can find a place in the experience and organization of the mind. Our attention may be compelled to some object by an unusual sound or sight but unless something of vital interest is found the

matter at once fades from consciousness. No real effect is left on the mind. Any matter to be effective must arouse attention and interest and give the mind time to assimilate and to organize it. In this way it is seen that no truth, however elementary, can be forced on the mind. From a psychological point of view compulsory education is impossible. In fact force and punishment are likely to have the opposite effect. In the spirit of rebellion the mind will reject that that otherwise would be found to be good. Certainly all such matter is pure dead lumber when forced upon the mind. All learning to be helpful, to enter into life and character of the individual, must be made attractive and interesting. There must be in it some appeal to the mental life as now constituted.

Let me try to state more pointedly what I have said. (1) The mind receives the new fact in the light of what is already in the mind. The mind takes an attitude of reception or rejection, of friendship or hostility, towards everything presented to it from the very nature and constitution of the perceiving faculty. To know or understand in any other way is a mental impossibility. The mind of itself accepts or rejects. This is the first element of its freedom. Truth to have meaning to me must be apperceived by me. (2) We know by attending, but the attention is the free response of the mind to stimulus. Involuntary attention may be attracted for a moment but unless voluntary attention follow no knowledge results, the mind must attend because something is found of interest or of value. Interest is the only thing that will compel attention and the mind finds that interesting which vitally associates itself with the life. In other words to get the mind's attention there must be a free response from within the mind. (3) The valuation of experience appears in consciousness as feeling. Pleasant feeling, or happiness, is the mind's valuation of the experience as helpful. An unpleasant feeling is the valuation of the experience as hurtful. The tendency of the mind to reject, to rid itself of the unpleasant and harmful and to cling to

the pleasant and helpful, so that to present an unpleasant idea is necessarily to arouse the opposition of the mind to its reception; to present a pleasant idea is in the very nature of the case to prepare a welcome. And this valuing a new presentation is in the light of experience or by the mental content.

Truth, therefore, to influence character and conduct, must find a place in the mind. It finds this place only as the mind opens from within to receive and make room for it. The door of the mind opens only to the one who is not altogether a stranger but about whom there is at least the look of one who would be a friendly helpful co-occupant and helper.

So the mind grows from within and character grows through such ideas hospitably entertained and truths clearly grasped and pleasurably held.

Herein lies the explanation of the instinct of freedom, whence arise all impulses and movements toward liberty, intellectual, spiritual and social. Jesus resting the fate of the gospel on its power of appeal is then psychologically sound.

THE PLACE OF THOUGHT AND ACT IN THE BUILDING OF CHARACTER.

Character rests upon a double foundation of thought and action. Thought and deed together make the man for weal or woe. By no modern writer has this two-fold fact been stated so explicitly and forcibly as by Jesus. Sometimes one side of the truth is emphasized, sometimes both facts are placed side by side.

“Out of the heart proceedeth evil thoughts—these are the things that defile a man,” Math. 15:19-20; “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil; for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh. And why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”

Luke 6:45, 46. And a still more remarkable statement in some respects is that with which the "Sermon on the Mount" closes; "Therefore, whosoever *heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them*, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock; and the rains descended and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that *heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not*, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell; and great was the fall of it," Math. 7:24-27.

Language could not more clearly, emphatically, forcefully, set forth the fact that character and destiny are the result of thought and deed.

The psychologist would express this truth somewhat as follows: (1) Every idea tends to express itself in an appropriate act. This results from the organization of the nervous system. And unless inhibited the idea will express itself in an act. The more powerful the thought and the more central its place in the mind, the more powerful will be the impulse to action. So that it is almost a certainty that the *inner content* of the mind will express itself in appropriate conduct. (2) When an idea becomes strongly intrenched in the mind; when it has come to occupy a central place in the mind by the law of apperception it tends to accept or reject all impressions or suggestions in accordance with, or in harmony with, this central idea. So that two men will find in the same environment suggestions in harmony with and confirmatory each of his own tendency of thought. (3) The resulting act confirms and strengthens the connection between act and thought; and every repetition tends to fix more and more habits of conduct. (4) It is possible, however, especially in the beginning to inhibit the act, to intercept between idea and act. The result is that the energy of idea dissipates; the impulsive force of the thought

scatters and spends itself in vague, indefinite, feeling. The more this is repeated the more difficult it becomes ever again to make the connection between thought and its appropriate act.

THESE RESULTS THROUGH TYPES OF CHARACTER.

1. Those who have so far separated thought and conduct that they are able to act a part. The life of act and deed is entirely artificial. They are the hypocrites, the most despicable and the most hopeless of characters. Here lies one of the greatest dangers of preachers and all professional religious workers.

2. Those who have inhibited the act appropriate to the idea until the impulsive force of the idea dissipates itself. These are the sentimentalists; the weakest of all creatures; well compared by Jesus to the foolish man that built his house on the sand. The soundest teaching, the noblest ideas, unaccompanied by appropriate conduct is an untrustworthy foundation for character. These, the sentimentalists, live on feeling and sentiment but are absolutely unreliable and are sure to go down before any real test of character. Here lies the danger of a religion and of preaching in which sentiment overbalances clear thinking and positive deed.

3. Then there is the character in which act always follows idea. There is no interruption between thought and conduct. These are the honest folk, the strong men, whether for evil or for good. For the evil there is always hope; for a new content of thought may be given and when so a new conduct and character will result. For this class of sinners Jesus had no harsh words; for them he was always hopeful; he endeavored only to implant in their hearts the regenerating idea. Those who learned his lessons, who got his ideas deeply fixed in their hearts, and let no occasion pass in daily life for the doing of them He compared to the wise man who built his house upon the solid bedrock for a foundation, for such a char-

acter is so solidly and firmly founded and grounded that no storm or stress of temptation or trial can possibly overthrow it.

The same general truth viewed from another standpoint is the *uselessness of a purely negative reform*. This truth is strikingly emphasized by one of the most peculiar of all Jesus' parables. "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out, and when he cometh, he findeth it swept and d garnished. Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there: and the last state of the man is worse than that ,rst," Luke 11 :24-26. It is worse than useless to be rid of the evil spirit and clean up and leave the house empty; it is one of the emphases of Jesus that the house of man's heart must for his moral safety be fully occupied by positive good. We express the negative side of the same thing in the proverb, "An idle brain is the devil's workshop." The psychologist would express it in this way: (1) Only ideas inhibit ideas. I can not say to myself, "I will not entertain this thought," I can not directly prevent myself thinking evil thoughts; I can do so only indirectly, by the inhibitive power of other thoughts and (2), only desire inhibits desire. I can not directly prohibit an evil desire; I can do so only indirectly by the power of attention centering the thought about other and better things until a nobler and more powerful desire arises in my soul to preoccupy or expel the evil desire.

This also explains Jesus' method of attack on the evil in men (and indicates to me as a preacher my method of attack on the same evil), a method characterized not so much by denunciation of the evil as a revealing of the attractiveness of the good. The great thing is not so much to get people to hate the evil as to love the good.

But it is time now to turn from a consideration of the doctrines to an examination of the methods of the Master's teaching.

USE OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

Jesus' use of illustrations is so striking and has been commented on so often that it is not necessary to say very much about it here other than to call attention to the fact growing out of what was said in the first lecture about the nature of language and the nature of the knowledge of spiritual things, that the only possible method of imparting new and spiritual ideas, or conceptions of a spiritual kingdom, was through some method of suggestive illustration. Words had to be given a new association and suggestion and a new and spiritual content of meaning. Jesus' use of the story or parable and scenes and incidents from nature and the ordinary affairs of life are the marvels of teaching skill in making them convey the profoundest and most far-reaching spiritual truth.

The pedagogical effectiveness of illustrations is: (1) in enabling the hearer to apperceive the truth by tying it onto his narrower observation and experience; (2) in fertilizing the mind with its suggestions from which the perceiving mind may work out a comparatively accurate concept of the truth, and (3) in giving the truth an emotional setting which powerfully adds to its impulse for action. It seems to me that these are the characteristics of an ideal illustration and are the characteristics of the illustrations of Jesus. A quite common use of illustrations by preachers and other public speakers for the sole sake of the interest in the illustration, the story for the story's sake, Jesus never employs; with Him an illustration always drives home the truth to mind or conscience, impelling to conduct.

THE LAW OF APPERCEPTION.

Much is necessarily said in pedagogical psychology of apperception. Enough has been said in these lectures, I hope, to make the meaning of the word clear. I wish here to call your attention to one instance only in the

teaching of Jesus where this law is applied: the finest example of apperceptive teaching in all the literature of teaching. It is the conversation with the woman at the well.

Four times Jesus starts the conversation from the point-of-view of the woman. Four times He begins with the content of the woman's mind; a very common-place and rather sordid mind, narrow and quite void of any kind of spiritual concept, but with some curiosity about some commonly debated topics of formal religion. To this mind Jesus is able to reveal the most refreshing, soul-satisfying view of religion, the most complete spiritual conception of God, the most heart-searching revelation of Himself. (1) In the first place the conversation began, under the circumstances, about the most natural thing in the world, a drink of fresh water, but Jesus skillfully turns the conversation so as to suggest the soul refreshing power of a truly spiritual and God-given religion. (2) When the woman did not entirely comprehend He began the attack anew by suggesting that before the conversation continue further it would be a matter of propriety for her to call her husband that in his presence they might without impropriety continue the conversation. This brought out a situation that enabled Jesus to search the woman's conscience and reveal Himself somewhat to her. (3) A third start is taken from a somewhat higher plane. The suggestion that there was a prophet in her presence suggested the possibility of getting an answer to a question of common debate in which the woman showed some partisan interest as between Jew and Samaritan. From this narrow, bitter partisan viewpoint Jesus carries the mind of the woman to the loftiest conceptions of the spirituality of the worship of God who is spirit. (4) All this brings out from the background of the woman's consciousness a fact that heretofore had made little impression on her, a prophecy of which she had heard, that one should come, the Messiah, of whom she had some rather vague but wonderful notions. It

was now possible for Jesus to reveal Himself to her, and in the enthusiasm of the discovery she forgot her water-pot and went a blazing herald to her own people of the presence of the Christ in their midst.

Into this conversation Jesus had put all the energy of His mind because of His faith that the most commonplace and sordid were capable of receiving the most spiritual teaching if only the teacher were sufficiently skillful.

What preacher after that could despise the common, ignorant, world-absorbed people, as beneath the worth of his powers: the lower the people, the farther to carry them, the greater the skill and power required, the greater teacher and preacher it is necessary to be.

INTEREST AND ATTENTION.

In the preceding lecture I called your attention to the laws of interest. It only remains for me at this time to call your attention to some examples from the teaching of Jesus. (1) *Tying on the lesson to be learned to the instinctive interests.* One of the characteristics of the teaching of Jesus (and of the Gospels and of the Bible as a whole), is its universal human appeal and this is the explanation, that its appeal is to the common human experience. The Bible is the only other book that stands on this plane of interest with the Iliad. Jesus constantly uses this principle both to explain and interest. One illustration will suffice. It seems to me that one of the most difficult things Jesus had to do was to make people understand why He associated with the social outcasts. How could people be made to see that it was His mission to save such as these, that the gospel was an expression of God's love for them? He pictures to them with rapid stroke the story of a wayward, prodigal boy, his ruin and final repentance and return to be received by his father's love and joy. There is not a human being anywhere who does not understand that story and to whom it does not appeal for its common humanness and who does not ap-

preciate through it with some greater degree of interest the life of Jesus, because it touches the instinct of father love. (2) *Making the new interesting through the old.* Men have debated about the originality of Jesus. He was original in the truest sense; but to be absolutely original is impossible, certainly for a teacher who expects to be understood. The teacher who would be understood and appreciated can never leave the old entirely behind. To interest his audience the speaker must always associate in some way what he has to say with their point of view. In the "Sermon on the Mount" Jesus refers constantly to the Scriptures or to the traditional teaching or to well known custom or belief. He contradicts or expands and enlarges; he puts in a new light or expounds the deeper spiritual meaning; but He is all the time dealing with the mental content of His hearers.

The Synoptic Gospels are composed largely of what might be called the incidental teachings of Jesus. He seldom sits down to deliver a formal address. He is usually dealing with incidents as they arise, responding to some call, answering some question, meeting some definite or particular situation. For instance it was such an occasion on the same day that brought out His teaching on the relation of the church and state, on true neighborliness and on the resurrection. (3) *By a shock of difference.* Jesus frequently sends His teaching home with a shock; shocks the minds of His hearers into life. He sometimes flatly and boldly contradicts their most cherished traditions. His statements are sometimes exaggerated or hyperbolic, as when He instructs to turn the other cheek or not to let the one hand know what the other does. Sometimes though rarely He resorts to ridicule as when He compares the faultfinder to a man with a log in his eye asking to take a splinter from another's eye; sometimes His sentences catch the attention and cling in the mind by sheer beauty and perfection of form, as in the Beatitudes and the Golden Rule. (4) *By the concrete.* Few minds can attend very long to abstract statements.

The matter, to hold attention, must be put in concrete form or frequently illustrated with concrete examples. This is one of the most striking characteristics of the teaching of Jesus. One example will suffice. When He wishes to show the ugliness and hurtfulness of *conceit* He personifies it. He draws the picture by means of an allegorical story of a Pharisee at prayer set over against perfect humility personified in the Publican. And in a few strokes the characters are made so concrete that it is hard to believe that the Pharisee and the Publican are not real persons. None of Bunyan's characters are more vividly drawn.

Thus in these and many other ways in the teaching of Jesus are to be found the finest examples illustrating the laws of mind expounded in the best and latest treatises on psychology. Jesus is in truth the Teacher; the Head Master, in the school of life, where you and I are students. He sets free, not enslaves, the human intellect. He does not bind but liberates. He does not give us a copy blindly to follow; He gives us principles to work out and apply for ourselves. He does not lay down for our unquestioning acceptance exact formulas; He utters great, vital truths, fructifying in our minds. His glory is not in producing so many copyists from among His students but in the fruits of minds quickened and vitalized by His mind. We shall be learners of Him that we also may be teachers of others.