

**EXPOSITORY NOTES.****RUTH'S OATH.**

The English versions render Ruth 1:17, "where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD (Jehovah) do so to me, and more also, if ought (aught) but death part thee and me." This translation would lead one to the conclusion that death would finally part Ruth and Naomi; whereas the Hebrew reads quite differently: "Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if death part thee and me." Ruth is resolved to live and die wherever Naomi lives and dies: not even death shall be permitted to part them, for Ruth desires to lie beside her in the grave. The literal rendering heightens the impression of Naomi. The Christian reader cannot fail to note the comparative reticence of the Old Testament saints as to the life beyond the grave. Ruth says nothing of a happy reunion in the life beyond.

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**TRUE PROPHET VERSUS FALSE PROPHET.**

For a contrast between the genuine prophet of Jehovah and the professional seers and time-servers, see Micah 3:5-8. The one class divine for money and look well to their feasting, courting popularity in every way possible, though ready to encourage an attack on any one who refuses to cater to their pleasures. The false prophet has no moral energy, no sense of righteous indignation in the presence of oppression. In contrast with these flabby, selfish, hypocritical prophets, Micah exclaims, "But as for me, I am full of power by the Spirit of Jehovah, and of judgment, and of might, to declare unto Jacob his transgression, and to Israel his sin." The true prophet makes a direct appeal to conscience. He uses the surgeon's knife with a steady hand. He speaks out without fear or favor.

## BURDENS AND LOADS.

In Galatians 6:1-5, Paul might seem, to the reader of the English Scriptures, to contradict himself, when, in the same context, he urges Christians to bear one another's burdens and also to bear their own burdens. The Greek reader finds two different words used; and it is evident that the inspired writer has in mind two different kinds of burdens. The heavy weight of sin and sorrow is often too heavy for the solitary believer; he needs the sympathy and aid of his brethren. But to every man there is allotted a special work which is called "his own load"; this he must carry himself, alone. The Pharisees placed on men's shoulders heavy loads; Jesus, on the contrary, said, "My load is light" (Matt. 23:4; 11:30).

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## LEADERS OF THE CHURCHES.

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews refers three times toward the close of his letter to Christian leaders (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). They are described as men who "spoke the word of God" and as persons "who watch in behalf of your souls, as those who are to give account." If their ministry is successful, they are full of joy; if it is a failure, they sigh. The writer urges his readers to remember the leaders who have passed away; "and considering the issue of their lives," says he, "imitate their faith." He also enjoins obedience to living rulers; and in his closing words a special salutation to the leaders.

Who then were the leaders spoken of? Were they pastors or laymen? It seems evident that they were pastors who spoke the word of God and watched over the souls of men. Such men were entitled to the respect and obedience of the brotherhood. Because of their preaching, their piety and their office as watchmen, they ought to be obeyed. Pastoral leadership ought to receive adequate recognition on the part of the churches. God calls

the preacher to real leadership, not that they may lord it over God's heritage, but that they may inspire and guide in the work of the Kingdom.

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#### JESUS AND THE RICH YOUNG RULER.

The story of the interview is told in Matt. 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30. A rich young ruler, of blameless life and high moral ambition, came running to Jesus, and kneeling to Him, asked, "Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus pointed him to the commandments, and the young man replied, "Teacher, all these things I observed from my youth." As our Lord looked on the noble young man, he loved him, and decided to invite him to become a member of the small inner circle of His disciples. He wished the young ruler to become a helper in the work of the Kingdom. It would be pleasant to have such a choice spirit near Him all the time. What might not such an attractive personality mean to the Teacher and His disciples? He might easily become a leader among the workers who kept company with Jesus in His public ministry. To such noble employment Jesus decided to invite the rich young man.

But the work to which Jesus invited the young ruler was exacting; it would require a complete dedication of all his time and energy. Hence our Lord decided to put the matter before the ruler's mind in the frankest possible manner. "One thing thou lackest; go, sell whatever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." Jesus wished the young man to be free from the cares of business, that he might give himself to the higher task of winning men to God. "Save all your possessions by giving them to the poor; then become my disciple and helper." Had the rich ruler obeyed, he might have had a ministry equal in

power to that of John or Paul. Our Lord would have given him the true riches in exchanges for the wealth that perishes.

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EPH. 2:5, 6.

The translation of these verses, both in the common version and in the Standard revision seem to have been deflected from the right path by the unconscious influence of a theory of the atonement. It reads in the common version "quicken us together with Christ," "raised us up together, and made us sit together \* \* \* in Christ Jesus." The natural reading would show that in the quickening into life, and the raising from the dead, believers are thought of as sharing His lot. They are "in Christ," and "with Christ." The parties that are "together" are Christ and the believer. But this is one of the many places where the exact meaning of words is not determined wholly by the grammatical construction, or by the lexicon. The connection must be determinative. Here the whole force of Paul's argument depends on a different rendering of the phrase "together with." He is seeking to show that there is no reason for the Jewish and the gentile parts of the churches to feel estranged toward each other. On the contrary God has dealt with them conjointly. They were "together" in a state of sin, and with a sinful nature. They were both dependent upon His power for the quickening of their souls to responsiveness to the gospel. They were both made to "sit together in heavenly things." And now these Jewish and Gentile parties that God had joined "together" ought not by any thing to be put asunder. This holy wedlock must not be broken. The "togethers" are not Christ and the believer, but the Jewish believers and the gentile believers. This fits perfectly into the argument of the chapter. It is quite as fully in accord with the Greek

construction, and therefore is to be preferred. This idea may be conveyed by using the word "both." "We were both children of wrath, we were both quickened by Him, both raised to newness of life, both made to share in heavenly things in Christ."

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## JESUS AND THE CHILDREN.

AN EXPOSITION.

C. S. GARDNER.

The increased interest in the child, which is one of the most notable aspects of present day life, should lead us to a careful re-study of the passages which record the attitude and words of Jesus with reference to children. These passages are found in Matt. 18:1-14; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48, and in Matt. 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17. It will be noted they fall into two groups. The first group record the act, and the utterances of Jesus which were called forth by the ambitious contest of the disciples for the chief place in the prospective Kingdom. The second group record His act and utterances on the occasion when His disciples rebuked the parents who brought their children to receive His blessing. It will be noted also that these incidents were recorded by the writers of the first three Gospels, but not by John. This, however, is not a matter which concerns us in this discussion.

The commentators are not agreed as to the precise significance of these passages, and their disagreement makes me bold to offer an interpretation which in important respects differs from nearly, if not quite, all of them.

I shall fix attention upon the first group of passages, because all the questions at issue are involved in them. One group of commentators understand that Jesus, after taking the child and using it as an example of the mental attitude which it was necessary for those who would be-

come His disciples to acquire, makes no further reference to the child itself, but proceeds to speak concerning the disciples who are typified by the child. The words "who-so shall receive one such little child in my name," etc.; and "whoso shall offend one of these little ones," etc., refer to the disciples who have the childlike spirit, but not to children themselves. Even the specific words of Luke, "whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me," are supposed to refer to the child only as a representative or type of the disciples, and really to mean the disciples whom it typifies. The words occurring in Matt. 18:10 and 14, "take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones," and "even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish," are supposed to refer also to the disciples and not to the little children themselves. In a word, the whole discourse based upon this incident, after the reference to the child as a concrete example of the childlike attitude, is construed as having reference to the disciples and not to actual children. Accordingly we do not have in these passages a lesson as to the proper Christian attitude toward children, but as to the proper attitude toward Christians, who are childlike. At any rate, whatever teaching there may be as to the proper attitude toward children as children, it is only inferential and incidental and is not central in the meaning of the passages.

Another interpretation given by another group of commentators is that the children are referred to throughout the discourse and that Jesus therein sets forth the spiritual condition and significance of the child and the proper attitude of His followers toward children. Those who maintain this interpretation usually understand Jesus to teach that children are actually in the Kingdom of God, indeed are the typical members of the Kingdom, since they are by nature what adults must *become* by repentance and conversion. The problem, there-

fore, is to keep the children in the Kingdom, to prevent their *perversion*, which would render necessary their *conversion*.

Neither of the interpretations outlined seems to me to be satisfactory. Both seem to be colored too much by certain theological presuppositions; and theological presuppositions are not good glasses through which to see the simple but profound meaning of Jesus. Let us consider each interpretation somewhat in detail.

To the latter I shall first devote a few lines. I agree with it so far as it construes the discourse as having reference all the way through primarily to children, and as setting forth the general religious significance of children and the proper attitude with reference to them; and later on will state more in detail my reasons for agreeing with this view. But this group of interpreters seem to me to be in manifest error insofar as they represent Jesus as teaching that children are by birth naturally citizens of the Kingdom of God. There is nothing in His language which necessarily or even probably implies this doctrine as to the natural religious status of the child. All that His words can be construed as meaning, without reading into them a theological significance foreign to His purpose in uttering them, is that the openness of mind, teachableness and freedom from selfish ambition which characterize the mind of the normal child are antecedent conditions of entrance into His Kingdom. The grown-up people with whom he was dealing were not open, were not teachable; their minds were preoccupied with prejudices and presuppositions—false views of life, of God, of the Kingdom of God. Their ideals were wrong. They were, therefore, inaccessible to His truth. They must get rid of these mental obstructions which rendered their souls opaque to His light. Jesus was a profound psychologist. He perceived a truth which modern psychology emphasizes as so important, that the mental system which has been organized and crystallized in an adult

mind renders it very difficult to reach that mind with *radically* new truth, quite impossible indeed without a sort of mental revolution. He came teaching truth that was so profound, so radical to those whose minds had been formed in the thought-moulds of that time, so new and revolutionary to His adult hearers, that nothing short of a mental overturning, a reversion on "conversion" to the simplicity and teachableness of the child would make it possible for them to apprehend and appropriate His truth and live as true citizens of the Kingdom He was organizing. Those commentators are quite right who insist that the phrase "be converted," is not to be understood in the technical theological, but in the psychological sense—as the emptying of the mind of the false views which preoccupied and filled it and the turning back to the mental attitude of children. These words constitute, indeed, a solemn warning against mental crystallization—a warning which has been echoed with mighty emphasis by the modern science of the soul. As to the status of children, they mean nothing more than that they are normally in a mental attitude which renders them easily accessible to His truth and to the influence of His personality, a state of mind which is a necessary psychological condition of entrance into His Kingdom. But what is the nature of that Kingdom and by what process does one actually become a member of it? These questions are not answered in these passages. To insist on finding the answer in them is simply to read into them a preconceived theological doctrine, which they do not yield by any fair exegesis. Whatever else may be true as to the nature of the Kingdom and the process by which one enters it, it seems to me incontestable that the Kingdom is a system of social life organized on the principle of voluntary obedience to the will of God, and that the process by which one enters it involves certainly as one factor an acceptance by the personal human will of the divine will as the law of life. If this be true, then manifestly it is



impossible for anybody, child or adult, to enter the Kingdom except by an individual, personal act of the will. And this means that the child cannot be in the Kingdom before it is capable of a personal, voluntary act. To assume that one is a member of the Kingdom by natural birth betrays a remarkable lack of definiteness in one's conception of the Kingdom; and to read this assumption into the words of Jesus concerning little children is to divert one's mind from His central meaning in this passage.

But in my judgment the other group of commentators are also at fault and fail to apprehend the most important meaning of these beautiful words of Jesus. They assume that He, after using the child as a type of the mental attitude which it is necessary for His disciples to possess, goes on to speak about the solemn danger of "offending" one of them rather than the sin of perverting the lives of little children. According to this interpretation the passages have no direct bearing upon the subject which is so prominent in the thought of our time—the central importance of the child. This seems to me a great mistake. The chief reason which is assigned for adopting this interpretation is the expression in Matt. 18:6, "who shall offend one of these little ones *which believe in me,*" etc. This is taken as conclusive evidence that Jesus was here speaking primarily about the disciples typified by the children, rather than about the children themselves. But is this conclusive? Is it necessary to take the words, "which believe in me," in the theological sense? Some of the interpreters who take these words to indicate evangelical faith, in the theological sense, tell us that the words occurring in verse 3, "except ye be converted," etc., are not to be taken in the theological sense of "conversion." But if this expression need not be taken in the technical theological sense, why must the words, "which believe in me," be construed in that sense? It seems to me quite legitimate to

consider them as indicating simply the attitude of trustful confidence exhibited by the children toward Him, just such an attitude as normal children would always assume toward a person of such a character. But even if the words should be taken in the more technical sense, that would not necessarily exclude His direct reference to children; for do not many children believe in Him in the evangelical, theological sense of the word? We must remember that the term "children," or even "little children," does not necessarily designate infants. May it not have been true of the child to whom He was then referring that it really believed on Him in the evangelical meaning of the phrase? The assumption that the child was an infant, incapable of exercising faith, seems to me gratuitous.

But if there is no convincing positive, reason for adopting the interpretation here criticised, there seem to be important reasons for rejecting it.

1. It is difficult to carry it through all the passages consistently. This is true even of Matthew's account, which lends itself to this interpretation best of all. How, for instance, are the verses 10-14 to be construed in harmony with this view? On this hypothesis would they not imply the probability, or at least the possibility that some of the disciples would fall away and be lost? To those holding certain theological views, this implication would cause no hesitation in accepting this construction; but not so with many others. On the other hand, if Jesus is here emphasizing the danger of causing little children to stumble, of turning their docile lives in wrong directions instead of leading them, as may be so easily done, into the Kingdom, the meaning of these verses and their exact pertinence to the whole situation are quite obvious.

But if the interpretation we are criticising meets with difficulty as applied to the passage in Matthew, it fits still less the accounts given by Mark and Luke. Here beyond

question the natural course is to take the words as having primary reference to the children themselves rather than to the disciples. Indeed, if we are to take the words of Luke as expressing his understanding of the words of Jesus, even if they be not a *verbatim* report, we are almost compelled to construe this passage as an impressive declaration of the importance of child-life, and of the religious significance of our attitude towards children. "Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me." How could words be more specific? This is in fact the most specific report we have of the words of Jesus on this occasion. Why not take it at its face value? Why not construe the more indefinite words used in the other accounts in the light of this definite statement, instead of the reverse? It is true that Matthew gives a more extended report of the conversation than Luke; but it can hardly be denied that Luke's works give us his *understanding* of what Jesus said, and Matthew's words can be legitimately construed in entire harmony with the more obvious meaning of Luke's.

2. There is another reason for rejecting the interpretation in question. Those who adopt it usually treat the phrase, "these little ones," as referring to weak or immature disciples. But that is not consistent. According to that construction, the phrase must be regarded as a designation of all disciples; for surely it is not the weak or immature disciples alone who have the childlike spirit. If childlikeness of temper and attitude are characteristic of the members of the Kingdom, then the best Christians will possess this characteristic in the highest degree. There is no consistency, therefore in applying the phrase "these little ones," in an especial way to weak or immature disciples. The warning uttered against "offending one of these little ones," and the injunction, "take heed that ye dispise not one of these little ones," sound strangely unnatural as applied to strong, mature Christians, who represent the highest development of firm and

inflexible character. Our Lord's declaration that we must become like little children surely does not mean that we should have the weakness of the child. Paul's words should be recalled in this connection: "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men"—as showing the true meaning of the Master's words. But how natural and applicable are these words, if the purpose of Jesus here was to impress upon us the importance of the child and our responsibility to Him for our treatment of little children, who may be so easily influenced for good or evil.

To sum up, the teaching of these passages seems to me to be:

1. That a psychological condition of entrance into and of advancement in the Kingdom is the openness of mind, the teachableness, of the normal child. This lesson He sought then to impress because the disciples had given disquieting evidence of their need of it by their dispute about which of them should secure the higher places in the kingdom, showing all too clearly that they were deficient in childlike simplicity and humility. This lesson He taught most impressively by taking a child and setting it in the midst of the company and pointing to it.

2. Jesus then most naturally proceeds to impress upon His hearers and upon His disciples of all ages the unspeakable importance and the solemn religious duty of a proper and helpful treatment of children. The very fact that the child has normally the simplicity, humility, teachableness which render it easily accessible to Christian influences only makes more solemn our duty *not* to pervert it and cause its life to crystalize in a form hostile and resistant to the Christian appeal. To "receive such a little child in His name," to appreciate its possibilities, its preciousness in His sight, to love and cherish it in His spirit and lead it to know Him,—this is a characteristic mark of the Christian spirit,

The ancient world did not appreciate the child; at least its appreciation of the child was unusual and exceptional before Jesus came. He took the little child and "set it in the midst," and taught the world the lesson, which His own disciples have been strangely slow to learn, that the child is the central and most significant member of society. In this He anticipated the thought of the ages. The modern science of psychology and Sociology are tardily confirming His wisdom, which for centuries was obscured in the dust of theological controversy. In many matters, and in none more than in this, it is the profound simplicity of Jesus which often has prevented the world from understanding Him.