

The Philosophy of Benevolence

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There are in the world two profound^{ly} different philosophies in their attitude toward charity, ~~toward benevolence~~. These two ~~profound different~~ philosophies are nowhere better expressed than in the words of Christ when he said that

"Thieves creep in but to kill and to steal and to destroy; I am come that ye might have life and that ye might have it more abundantly."

This first philosophy of life of which Christ speaks in ~~contrast~~ is not simply a theory, ~~but~~ It is a world-wide practice. Our life which is so wonderful, so beautiful, is profoundly tragic. There is no square yard of the earth's surface where ^{always} some kind of war is not going on. There is the war of planet against planet; animal against animal; of species against species; so that when you consider it you understand the phrase of the poet:

"Nature *red in tooth + claw.*"

There is a battle for the food supply; there is a deadly struggle for existence, so that one speaking of animals said that the death of every wild animal and every bird and every beast is tragic, ~~also~~ there has always been war among men, many sorts of war, - the war of competition ranging from the struggle between two men in the market up to the battle of nations for the mastery of the markets of the world, and in ~~this~~ war of competition it is no ^{trifling} ~~slight~~ affair, but men and women and children are slain by the thousands in the ~~course~~ of this struggle for money, for economic advantage, and then ~~as~~ the culmination of all these other kinds of war, there is

personal conflict ranging from war of one individual ^{to} ~~to~~ ^{into} another, to the war of nations, of which we have the greatest illustration in the history of the world at the present time.

It is no wonder in ~~the~~ presence of these facts that the ancient Greek philosopher said that "War is the Father of all things and by Strife all things come to ~~thee~~ ^{be}", and it is in the presence of these facts that the great German philosopher of the last generation developed his terrible philosophy of life, in which he said the facts show that not only war is universal but it is necessary. . . He says that it was by struggle that the best survive and the weak are eliminated; that charity is fundamentally vicious in that it preserves the weak; that Christianity is fundamentally mistaken, not simply historically but because of that which we count ^{it} essential virtue. Christianity weakens ^{and destroys the Roman} ~~and destroys their~~ own Empire by introducing the sentiment of charity and benevolence which preserves the weak and ~~destroys society, and~~ he says ^{answer} The one essential virtue is strength. ~~It is the virtue that should govern society, is paramount, and the law that rules among the titles should rule among men in order that the strong should conquer and survive and rule the world. There has been perhaps nothing in the history of the world so searching, so profound, and so bold a statement of the philosophy of war as the actual fact and as the necessary condition for the development of first rate men on this planet. Nietzsche was a very great genius, a great poet, writing in prose, a man personally of a magnificent character, but a man with this theory of life preached in the latter half of the 19th century to the young men of Europe and a great many of them believed it. No other man of the last fifty years has exerted a greater influence over the young, intellectually, in the European universities than this strange genius, Nietzsche.~~

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Take the programs of the Universities and you will find again and again that Nietzsche is made the subject of courses of study in those European Universities because of the literature that is gathered around him. For instance, the book of _____ takes the position that the theory of international charity and benevolence all are illumined and that which we must have for our nation, whichever it is, is the struggle to master others and let the weak go to the wall, which is where they should go. We must be strong. We must have ships. We must have arms. We must be able to enforce our will everywhere. This is put forth as the truth and as the thing which should guide mankind. There are others I might name. These theories have gained a great following. Of course the theory is not new and the practice not new but if this philosophy is true, if war is a fact, so profound and universal and necessary, why then of course as Nietzsche says, benevolence is a vice and charity is a vice because it simply cherishes, nourishes and keeps alive that which should pass ^{out of} ~~up~~ existence.

What is this philosophy which Jesus of Nazareth put forth in contrast to that? For one thing, I think it is not a philosophy of the ^{weakness} ~~sick~~ I think the philosophy which Jesus sets up is austere, severe. It is not lax. It is not tolerant of ~~every sort~~ of imperfection, but on the contrary it demands and demands and demands nothing less than perfection.

^ "Be ye also perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect". I think it is a mistake, and a mistake which is sometimes cherished in the church, that Christ is meekly sentimental in his attitude toward evil, toward disease, toward vice, toward weakness. What are the figures of speech by which Jesus expresses Himself and His own attitude? I remember three.

For one thing, he is a gardener, ~~and he~~ tells what one should do for the fig tree which will not bring forth fruit. One should go to that fig tree which is not bearing fruit and try to make it well. One should bring nourishment to it. One should ~~bring cultivation to it~~ ^{cultivate} it. One should try to save the sick tree and make it ~~worth while~~ ^{well} if it can be made ~~worth while~~ ^{well} and if it can not be made ~~worth while~~ ^{well} it must perish, ~~so he says.~~

Another figure of speech by which he expressed his philosophy is that of the shepherd. He is there to care for the sheep. He is not there to kill and destroy. ~~He is talking about sheep.~~ Many years I remembered the latter part of the text "I am come that ye might have life", and it was years before I discovered it was the second half of the sentence and he was setting in contrast this theory to the other, that He is there to care for the sheep. He is there not as an hireling, not as a thief nor a murderer, ~~and if one gets lost he is there to try and find it.~~ He is there to search into the night ~~to try and find the lost sheep.~~ He can not bear that any one of the sheep shall be lost if he can find it and bring it back into the fold.

But without doubt the greatest figure of speech by which he describes his attitude toward life and the deepest attitude we should have, is the figure of speech of the physician. He is there to cure men. ~~And I have come to think in these last years of my life there is no other expression which describes so well what~~ ^{our attitude} ~~life~~ ought to be toward human beings who are ~~sick in body or mind~~ ^{perverse}, as the ~~physician~~ ^{word}. ~~He is, not a sentimentalist, a weak-minded man. He is there for~~ ^{The physician} ~~one thing,~~ ^{first} to see what is the matter. He is there to diagnose

the disease, to see to the roots of the evil, and then he is there to cure. He will use medicine and a sharp knife, but he is there to cure and bring back to health those who are sick. This is ~~his~~ ^{the} attitude toward physical disease ~~of man~~ and those suffering in mind or perverse in character. We have an illustration of this in that great play which Forbes-Robertson gave for three or four years, "The Passing of the Third Floor Back". It is a picture of a third rate boarding house in London, where the land-lady had been a lady but now a thief, a fraud, and everybody in the house was like that in one way or another. They were a bad lot. Into that house came the stranger, this great, noble gentleman, with the most wonderful voice any speaking man has had. He comes and cures that situation. And how does he do it? He treats them as if they were good and they are. That is the wonderful insight of the Great Physician, that they are good and that underneath this perversity there is goodness. He talks to this land-lady who tries to cheapen him, and when she looks into his face she remembers she was a lady once, and she has to be. He talks to the little Jew. The stranger said "You are a Jew, are you not?" And the little Jew said, "What has that got to do with it?" He said, "You are a Jew, of course I can trust you", and then he made him see, in a sentence or two, a great picture of that line of Jews. And so he met this perverse human situation with eye and mind and heart of the Great Physician.

That, I take it, is the philosophy with which Jesus contradicts the philosophy of hate and the philosophy of war. We have these two philosophies of life on trial at the present time, as never before. It has thrown the nations of the world into war as was never before seen, and we shall see what

shall come of it. It is as if civilization were on fire, as if all that men had achieved in thousands of years were likely to be destroyed. What is the outcome? It is not the preservation of life; it is the destruction of life and civilization. It could almost be the destruction of this race from off this earth, and over against that we have that still, pale figure standing back yonder on the hills of Gallilee declaring that there is a truth deeper than all this, a tragedy, and it is the truth that there is that in man which above everything else craves to give and receive love, which above everything else craves to stretch out its hand to those in need and bring them life, and so he stands there with this memorable message on his lips, "

"There are those who kill and destroy but I am come (and you must come) that all the world may have life and have it more and more abundantly."