

CHRISTIAN GROWTH.

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Luke 2:52.

Of all the works of the visible creation man is certainly the master-piece. Of all the wonders of earth or the visible heavens men and women are the most wonderful. Of all phases of human life the growth of a man or woman is the most interesting. It begins at birth and ends---? Dare we say that it ever ends?

By comparing man's growth with that of the other creatures we can see how amazing it is. The beaver of today has no more intelligence or skill than the beaver six centuries ago. By careful selection, breeding, and training for thousands of years the horse and dog have increased in intelligence only slightly over their wild ancestors. The old fable of the magpie trying to teach the other birds to build a nest shows how narrow are the limits of improvement in all the animal creation except man. It is true that man evolved from some lower form of life, he surely took a great leap in some bygone age-- a leap that has set him as far above the other creatures as spirit is above matter. Such a leap is wholly unexplainable by any law of science known today.

A chemist once figured out the actual value of all the elements that go to make up what scientists know of man. He found it was all worth a dollar and ninety-eight cents. In the chemist's laboratory there is no difference

between a Cromwell and a Dillenger. No difference between a Sam Jones and "Baby-face Nelson." The laziest, raggedest hobo on the streets is equal to Franklin D Roosevelt. In a British museum they still have the armor of Oliver Cromwell. When the heart of Cromwell beat beneath that coat of steel its rattle was heard around the world. But today it is only a clank of rusty steel against rusty steel.

How little we know that indefinable, unconquerable spirit that makes heroes of men and women? How little we know of that fire that burned behind the flash of Sam Jones eye. We only know it held men spell bound with its power. How little we know of the power that was in George Whitefield's voice. We know it made the multitudes laugh and weep. How unexplainable is the genius of Shakespear or Milton. But we know that all human greatness is the product of human growth.

How differnt is the spirit of man to that of all other creatures. How quickly even the most intelligent of these reach their limit. The most intelligent horse or dog will not learn as much in a life time as a three year old child will in a few days. But with man there is no limit except the limit of life itself. As long as the human faculties remain intact they can continue to grow and expand. And the greater they become the greater is their capacity for improvement. The greater the man or woman becomes the more plastic and expanding the mind

intelligence. The great mathematician grasps a new and intricate problem far easier than the school boy. The great physician finds out the cause and cure of a new and baffling disease far quicker than a novice would. The great musician catches heavenly strains of music from the sighing of the wind, the ripple of a brook, or the rustle of a leaf.

In all other creatures the laws of heredity are pretty well defined. Like produces like from age to age. If there is a change it is by the slow process of evolution, and proceeds along well defined lines. But man breaks all the laws of heredity. Genius in the human race springs up in the most barren and unexpected places. The son of a German peasant becomes the world's greatest musician. The son of a second rate farmer and settler becomes the immortal Lincoln. Try as hard as you can, you cannot explain the genius of Lincoln, Cromwell, or Micheal Angelo by any known laws of heredity. But we do know their greatness was a product of growth.

For long ages men thought there was a difference in the races of men. It was believed that some races were naturally endowed with superior intelligence or a superior spirit of progress. But of late years this theory has been exploded. For nearly two thousand years the Japanese shwed no superirbrity over the other yellow races of Asia. In intelligence, in spirit, in character, and religion they were one with China and Korea. But what a change has come in two generations. Today the Japanese

are one of the most enlightened and progressive nations on earth. They say that illiteracy is rarer in Japan than in America. The awakening of Russia is almost as great a marvel as that of Japan. Whatever we may think of their religion or their philosophy of life the world stands amazed at their achievements. Some years ago it was my privilege to hear a group of Negro girls from one Alabama's State Normal Colleges sing. They were dressed in their neat trim uniforms and sang with a sweet beauty that thrilled every hearer. As they sang my heart sang with them. When I thought of the progress these children of bondage had made in seventy years I could only exclaim, in wonder, "What hath God wrought?" We cannot explain the awakening of these races by any laws of race superiority. If Japan and Russia can measure arms with the great white race why cannot China and India and dark Africa do the same? Today there are definite signs of such an awakening in every one of these races. It is doubtful if there has ever been a race of men that were not capable of great achievements.

Every normal son and daughter of the human race is capable of greatness in some line of work. In the filthy slums of Kinwawa Kagawa found the same hopes, the same aspirations, the same passions that rule in the most aristocratic society. Here were the same crushed hearts, the same bitter tears, the same unfulfilled hopes that one would find in the most intelligent society. Man is great in success or failure, in triumph or defeat, in

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glory or in ruin. So great has God made us that we can not hide in obscurity, we cannot sink in oblivion, we cannot fall without tragedy. We cannot pass this way without leaving behind us a major achievement or a major ruin. When a leaf falls it strikes the ground with hardly a sound. But when a star falls it leaves a trail of light across a vast arc of the heavens and strikes with a force that shakes a world. God made you a star. You cannot fall without leaving a fearful ruin behind you.

Human life is vastly different from all other forms of life in that the greater part is spent in preparation for life's achievement. A lady once met a Negro boy on a lonely country road. Intending to ask of him some directions, she said, "Boy, have you lived around here all your life?" With a broad grin on his face the boy answered, "None, not yet." That Negro boy was a philosopher. He knew that the part of life he had lived was only the beginning. When a man has spent four years in college he commonly thinks he is prepared for life. After he has battled with life thirty or forty years he sees his mistakes.

At thirty years of age Christ was unknown to the world. At thirty-three He is supposed to have died. It was in three short years that "He lifted empires off their hinges, turned the stream of history out of its channel, and changed the whole course of human events." His life surely was the crowning achievement of the human race. Yet, all was accomplished in three short years. But he spent thirty years in preparation for that life.

Paul, next to Christ, perhaps left the longest shadow on the sands of time. But scholars say that if he had died ten years before he did men never would have known that he had lived. Paul probably spent fifty years in preparation for that ten years of labor, much of it no doubt very much against his will. It was God who was training him, and God's training is not always a "lark."

How was Christ's life prepared for His great task? With all the homes in the world to choose from, why did God choose the poor carpenter's cottage at Nazereth for His Son? Judged by the standards of the world it was not an ideal home. It was bare of comforts, it poor in every material thing. It was bare of beauty and culture, if we are to judge beauty and culture by the standards of men. What did this home have to compensate for these losses?

In this little home the means of life were very slender, but the ends for which they lived were great. The ends for which we live enrich our lives far more than any material means. Good clothes, proper food, beautiful homes, means of travel and entertainment, and money to pay our bills are all desirable things. But these are only the means by which we live. The great ends of life, faith in the unseen, the rebirth of the spirit, the redemption of the race. A man who lives for these things will live a rich and abundant life no matter how slender the means.

The prophet John was clothed in a rough garment of

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camel's hair and ate locusts and wild honey. But he laid out a highway for the King through the wilderness of this world. What a rich and abundant life he lived. Oliver Goldsmith and Samuel Johnson were often reduced to the barest necessities of life, but few men ever lived a richer and more abundant life than they did. Joseph and Mary, in the little cottage at Nazareth, found the means of life very slender and hazardous. But the ends for which they lived were greater than kings and princes. Back of them were the patriarchs and prophets before them were the prophets vision of a redeemed world. They believed in these things with a faith as strong as the rock-ribbed hills of Judea.

What a lesson here for the fathers and mothers of our day. How many homes in this land where the ends of life are only to eat and drink and rise up to play. With a world facing one of the greatest crises in history they see no more for life than a round of giddy pleasure. In means our life is surely the richest that men ever lived on earth. But our horizon of life is so small. We have no true conception of the great purpose of life. To gather together a few dollars, to build a fine house, to make our children secure in a few possessions. These, to most of us, are the highest ends of life.

Joseph and Mary were too poor to own a Bible. They had to carry their son to the synagogue that He might hear it read. But no man ever knew it as He did. It is said that Bud Robinson had to read the Bible by moon

light because he was too poor to afford a light. But he could repeat page after page easier than many of us can repeat the Lord's prayer. No matter how slender the means of life men will find a way to live. But when the ends are narrowed or destroyed the very fountain of life is cut off.

The very abundance of the means of life in our day is destroying the end. The telephone, the radio, and the moving picture have brought the world to our very door. It is an interesting world-- a colorful world. A man would have to be twice dead not to be interested in life that is brought to his very door. But we only hear its song and laughter and the tap, tap of dancing feet. The deeper cry of poverty, crushed hopes, and bleeding hearts is drowned out. It was this cry that awoke the heart of the boy Jesus in the little cottage at Nazareth. The very slenderness of the means of life was His gain. It put His ear closer to the heart of the world. Here He could hear the tramp, tramp of the shackled millions. The cry of a hungry bleeding world awoke a mighty purpose in His heart. It was for this that he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."