

The Educated Good Will

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Pittsfield, MA

August 9, 1908¹

If each one of you should tell me what you honestly feel to be your attitude towards your fellow man, I am sure that you would all with one accord tell me that it is one of Good Will. Nor should I respect you any the more or any the less as individuals for so telling me. Indeed, not one should think of this attitude of Good Will towards his fellow man, as anything that he may feel any special personal pride over. It is simply the natural expression of a characteristic of the human soul. Just because I am a man, and just because you also (whom I know best and understand best of all the people in the world) are of the same nature and the same powers as myself, I have towards you a feeling of good will. It is no virtue in me, it is simply natural and inevitable that a human being should have that feeling of good will toward those with whom he comes in closest contact. The human soul is overflowing with good will. It is at once the impelling motive of our good and our evil. Only a short time ago I was appealing to a man to stop drinking. He realized the utter foolishness of it. He did not care for the taste of liquor. He despised himself for getting drunk. His defense was simply this, that the bunch with whom he drank were the men with whom he worked. They were all rock-bottom good fellows. They worked together, and they drank together. Perhaps with a little less of a fineness of the spirit of good will toward one's constant companions than he had, I appealed to him to quit the bunch. My appeal was answered by a clear rebuke that they were his friends, and he would stand by them even in their folly and his own. I should have known better than to appeal to his own selfish interests. He was true to his inherent impulse of good will as expressed in good-fellowship. Yet there was something lacking, as you will at once feel. He had the good will for his companions, and indeed, I am sure that if I had gone to the man and asked him to help me, a total stranger to him, he would not

¹ This is from the bound collection that includes sermons from May 24, 1908 to August 9, 1908.

have returned me a stone for bread, or a serpent for fish.² His good will rang true. He has the inherent impulses of noble manhood. I would like to have such a man for my friend. But what is the matter, you ask? That is just the question which I wish to answer this morning, but I wish to answer it in the broadest possible terms that I can present. Herein is one of the profoundest questions of human life, not alone for the individual, but for society as a whole.

By way of contrast or perhaps it would be better to say by way of supplementing this example of that inherent good-will that is at the heart of human nature, let me quote a passage from Channing³ in which his good-will shines forth. "Does anyone ask," he says

Why I shall pity [and help] the poor [man]? I answer, because he is A MAN; because poverty does not blot out his manhood[humanity]; because he has your nature, your sensibilities, your wants, your fears; because the winter wind pierces him and hunger gnaws him and disease racks and weakens him, as truly as they do you. Place yourself, my friend, in his state. Make yourself by a strong effort of thought the inhabitant of his unfurnished and clod abode, and then ask why you should help him. He is a man, though rags cover him, though unshorn hair may cover his human features, —a member of your family, a child of the same Father; and, what is more important, he not only has your wants and feelings, but shares with you in the highest powers and hopes of human nature. He is a man in the noblest sense, created in God's image, with a mind to think, a conscience to guide, a heart which may grow warm with sentiments as pure and generous as your own. To some this may seem declamation. There are some who seldom think of or value *man as man*. It is man born in a particular rank, clad by the hand of fashion and munificence, moving in a certain sphere, whom they respect. Poverty separates a fellow being from them, and severs the golden chain of humanity. But this [is] a gross and vulgar way of thinking, and reason and religion cry out against it. The true glory of man is

² See Matthew 7:9-12.

³ William Ellery Channing (1782-1840) was an early 19th century Unitarian.

something deeper and more real than outward condition. [A] human being created in God's image, and even when impoverished by vice, retaining power[s] *essentially the same with angels*, has a mysterious importance; and his good, where it can be promoted, is worthy of the care of the proudest of his race.⁴

Here in the passage by Channing we have another illustration of the inherent Good Will of man towards man. I think that you feel the difference in the moral tone of the two illustrations. It is there, and the difference rests in this. The impulse is the same but in the case of the man with whom I was speaking, the impulse is untrained, undisciplined; it is narrow, it lacks perspective; it is confined within the narrow limits of a few friends, linked together by ties of fellowship and work. It is what may be called the uneducated good will. In the case of Channing the goodwill is trained, and disciplined; it is broad and far-reaching. It will restrain itself from the immediate self-satisfaction that it may do the greater good in the long run. It is the goodwill that rests not upon the generous impulse towards a few intimate friends, but upon a broad and sympathetic understanding of the human soul in all its deepest hopes and aspirations. His impulse of good will goes out towards a man not simply because he is a friend and companion, but because he is a human being, just because he is a man. Channing's is the educated good will.

Here is the difference. It is natural and inevitable that this good will should express itself in the life of man. All kinds of life bear witness to this great and fundamental fact of human nature. Among their own kind all people show this impulse. It is the ray of light that relieves the shadow of some of the darkest facts of human life. The vagrant shows his good will to his fellow vagrant; the criminal to his fellow criminal; the merchant to his own friends, the politicians to their own, the members of a church to their own friends. Jacob Riis in his

⁴ Quoted in William Wallace Fenn, "William Ellery Channing and the Growth of Spiritual Christianity" in *Pioneers of Religious Liberty in America*, Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1903, pp. 203-4. William Wallace Fenn (1862-1932) was Dean of the Harvard Divinity School (1906-1922) and a professor of Earl C. Davis when he studied for his S.T.B. degree, granted in 1904.

book, *How the Other Half Lives*,⁵ says that the dividing line between the one half of humanity and the other may be drawn by noting this fact of whether or not the doors are locked. This world of the open door exists not alone because they have nothing that thieves would want, but rather because they have big generous feelings of goodwill toward their kind. I could tell you a large part of the tale of sin and crime, by following along the line that I have suggested. Our trouble is not the lack of good-will. That is natural, inherent and inevitable in human nature.

What we need is to educate our goodwill, train and discipline it, lift it out of the small circle of our friends and intimates, and place it upon the high mountaintop to which such men as Channing have elevated theirs, so that we can obliterate the mean and petty distinctions of social, and geographical limitations. I say, the thing that we need is to educate and train and discipline our goodwill ourselves, until we see, recognize and honor that mysterious importance of the human soul wherever and however it may be found. We need, I say, the educated good will. Think over that saying of Jesus, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."⁶

"But," you say, "is not education the watchword of modern life? Was it not the force that broke the back of the giant of European political and ecclesiastical authority? Under the ever-accumulating strength of a large and free educational impulse, have we not developed our great democratic institutions? Is not education the force that we depend on today in facing the problems of today? Are we not taxing ourselves to the utmost in order to develop a nation of educated men and women?" To all this we answer, "Yes." "Then why do you say that the great need of today is the need of the educated good-will?" That I will try to point out.

It is not an easy thing to define education. But in a general way one may say that education is that knowledge of facts and principles of life that enable one to live the better and the richer life. There was a time to be sure when we thought that

⁵ Jacob Riis (1849-1914) *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890.

⁶ John 8:32.

the man who had stored up a large mass of facts, who was conversant with certain philosophies of life, and was master of the literature of one or more foreign languages, was an educated man. That of course precluded the possibility of any great number of men ever-aspiring to regard themselves, or to be regarded, as educated men. A few men therefore were sort of set aside by society to meet the demands of learning, just as a few priests were set aside to meet the demands of piety and religion. We were educated vicariously through the ministrations of a priesthood of education, just as we were initiated into the mysteries of religion by a priesthood of the church. But with the development of the modern world we have turned to the idea of universal education just as we have turned to the idea of the universal priesthood. Education is that knowledge of facts and principles of life such as will enable man to live the best life, to most completely fulfill his function in living. That man is educated who can meet the conditions and the problems of his life in the best and the most effective manner. From this point of view the educated man is determined, not so much by the quantity or the kind of his education, as by its quality and its efficiency for human life.

Now then the educated good will would be that good will that sees the facts and the principles of life, yes knows the facts and the principles of life and through that knowledge strives to attain the best and the most efficient realization of life's purpose. Let us see how we measure up to this standard of the educated good will.

To what extent do we dare to face the facts of life? We have a family of children whom we love and whom we cherish. Our heart is filled to overflowing with good will and parental affection for them. Everything that we can get for them in the way of those things that make life seem rich, we wish them to have. That is a noble and a generous impulse, but there is a limit to that. There are other fathers and mothers, who have children. Their love is just as sweet, and their interest in them is just as precious to them as is your love for your children. You have a circle of friends towards whom your good will is wont to express itself. You would be generous and lavish with the bestowals of your tokens, but does your appreciation of the facts and the principles of life ever tell you that there are other people than yourself who have those same feelings of good will, just as generous as your own, but who have to let those

feelings go unexpressed just because you and I are not large enough to see beyond the little group with whom we mingle daily? The businessman, for purposes that seem to him valid, seeks to amass a fortune. He wishes to become rich, perhaps for the influence that his wealth will give him, perhaps that he may feel assured of the welfare of his family, perhaps just for the fun of the game. But he forgets the men who have the same and even better aspirations than he, and whom he pushes to one side with ruthless hand that he may satisfy his own wishes and lavish upon his family and his coterie of friends the goodwill that is inevitable in his nature. In all these cases the good will is there, but it is not an educated good will. We do not take into account the facts of life. We do not get outside of our little clique, we do not rise to the height of feeling that that man over there who works for us, that neighbor of ours who is carrying a burden, that discouraged man who sees no open vista before him, that outcast who wanders alone through the night is made of precisely the same stuff that we are made of, that he has the same generous feelings, that he has glimpses of hopes and aspirations that we have. Our experience is not wide enough, our education is not broad enough, to let us into the secret of human life. We are still like the fellow whom I met this week, our noblest impulses go to waste, that we may be prodigal and lavish with those who from our little circle, we crush those outside of it. As we face the problems of our great social life, we need, I say, to be better educated in the facts of life as they are. We have compassed this mountain long enough, we need to go over into the neighboring valley, and find out what is going on there, who our fellow men are, what they are doing, how they fare. We need to become educated in the facts of life.

But beyond that we need to become educated in the principles of life. Down beneath the facts as we see them are the great working principles. Not an event, not an incident of human life that is not the finite and the concrete manifestation of a great working principle. You read of some crime, or hear of some shame that stirs your whole being. Do you ever stop to picture the working forces that are behind that tragic event. You read of a woman who has taken the life of her children. What does it mean? Down at the Isle of Shoals off the New Hampshire coast there is a spot that is marked as the place where the mother killed her children that she might save them from the cruelties of the savage. You shudder at the thought. You may wonder as to whether the savages, or some short-sighted white man who stirred the

spirit of revenge in the savage heart, is the one most to be condemned for the horrible necessity. You read of some strike that indirectly causes you some inconveniences. For the time being it limits your capacity to show your good will toward that little circle of friends to whom you are so attached. Without taking the trouble to find out the principles at the bottom, you condemn the striker, and like a little child you go off into the corner to pout. All the time it may be that the striker is fighting to save his family from dependence. Why is it that we are so ready to load those people who have sand enough to stand up and assert their worth as men, with the mud from the shallow mud pond of our own ignorance. Do we ever stop to think that they are made of the same kind of stuff that we are, and that their motives are not more likely to be selfish and unjust than the motives by which we act? I hear men pass judgement of condemnation on this movement and on that, and I ask them for their reasons, and behold they do not know the first thing in regard to the principles and very little in regard to the facts of that which they condemn. Their condemnation grows out of a merely ignorant prejudice. We need to get outside of our own little corner of the world; we need to get into the other man's place and look at the thing as he does; we need to see and to feel and to think with him. We need the broadening and enlightening education of a sympathetic experience. A hundred years ago the foreign missionary movement started its work with a lofty enthusiasm, a magnificent goodwill, but it was profoundly ignorant, not only of the conditions of other religions other than Christianity, but it was profoundly ignorant of the essential principles of its own religion. In a hundred years it has learned many things, and not the least of its lessons is the one that is expressed by the words, "Judge not that ye be not judged."⁷ Judge righteously, judge with the understanding heart that knows and feels the throb of the human soul. Our goodwill needs not only to be broadened by the wider knowledge of [the] facts of life, but quite as much does it need to be deepened and enriched by the sympathetic understanding of its deepest and eternal principles. Rise to the height of thinking of man as a man.

But when comes the purpose of it all? What about that life-purpose of yours? Modern education has been criticized on the ground that it is merely utilitarian. That criticism is just, if

⁷ Matthew 7:1.

the only object that one has in life is to come out on top in a fierce struggle for existence. Do you seek knowledge of the arts and the sciences, of commerce and business, that you may the more effectively and the more certainly grab a lion's share of what men are pleased to call the good things of life? Or do you seek your knowledge that you may give a more efficient expression of your inherent goodwill to the great and important life of man? That is the final question, and it is one that you can answer only in the secret chambers of your own household of ideals. But as you answer this your life appears, not only appears but is noble or ignoble, grand or petty, sublime or despicable. Can you think of anything more mean than the life of a man who accepts all that has been done for the good of the life of man, who accepts all that is being done for the good of man today, and himself does nothing but grab, filch, and hoard that he may enjoy for himself, and lavish upon those who constitute his elect the evidences of his goodwill? In comparison with such a one, the generous whole-souled sinner is a joy and delight forever. More than all else, we need to have an educated purpose, a large and a broad-minded purpose that understands with an understanding that is supremely human, and in being supremely human, is divine, that the purpose of all life is to transform all that we have or know into the best the cleanest and the noblest that life can attain. The supreme purpose of the educated goodwill is to give to man yourself, and your all, not because he happens to be of your family or your friend, but because he is a man, and because you know the secrets of his life by reading the secrets of your own.

There is nothing meritorious in that impulsive goodwill of yours. That is your natural talent. But the question is, will you bury it in the ground of your own little circle of social, business or church clique, or will you put it to use in the great thoroughfares of the world, that it may become a factor of increasing force and power for the truth that makes men free, that it may assist in the coming of the time when men shall cease to follow after the false gods to which we now pay our reluctant tribute, or perhaps it is our willing tribute, when we shall cease to offer our human sacrifices upon the altar of our unknown gods and shall respect and honor and reverence the

spirit of the living God as he is revealed to us in the life and the deepest purposes of Man. Let me quote from Ruskin,⁸

Nevertheless, it is open, I repeat, to serious question, which I leave to the reader's pondering, whether, among national manufactures, that the Souls of a good quality may not at last turn out a quite leadingly lucrative one? Nay in some far-away and yet undreamt-of hour, I can even imagine that England may cast all thoughts of possessive wealth back to the barbaric nations among whom they first arose; and that, while the sands of the Indus and adamant of Golconda may yet stiffen the housings of the charger, and flash from the turban of the slave, she, as a Christian mother, may at last attain to the virtues and the treasures of an Heathen one, and be able to lead forth her sons saying,

"These are my jewels."⁹

Think again of the meaning of the words, "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

⁸ John Ruskin (1819-1900) English writer, philosopher and art critic.

⁹ John Ruskin, "Unto This Last, II. The Veins of Wealth," *The Cornhill Magazine*, July, 1860, p. 286.