

## **"THE BISHOP OF LONDON ON 'GETTING ON.'"**

"THE Bishop of London possesses a mind of unusual interest, and everything that he says is worth paying attention to, whether we agree with it or not. In addressing the pupils of the Philological School the other day, he took as the subject of his remarks, 'Success in Life.' Considering his own career, one might expect that he would justify, and possibly glorify, success, for few men of our generation have risen more rapidly and achieved such brilliant success as he. But the Bishop did not take that line of thought at all, and we are glad that he did not. Enough and too much has been written for boys as to the way in which they may regard the world as their oyster to open at their will. Strength, instead of purity, of will has too often been represented as the most desirable of attainments. Now we do not doubt for one moment that this element of great will-power is an important element in the building up of character. Without it nothing can be achieved that is worth achieving. But mere strength of will may, and often is, accompanied by the worst traits in human character. We need not accept all the deductions of Schopenhauer to agree with him that what he calls the 'will to live' is a root of all the crime, sensuality, and base unsatisfied longings which make up the carnal side of human nature.

"It is true that Nature itself implants this forceful 'will to live' in every one of us, and that without it the human race would soon cease to exist when confronted with the terrific forces of the material universe. It is true that great and beneficent discoveries are due to the persistence of this intense will in us. It is even further true that many noble qualities, and no little of the social and the humanizing elements in life, are intimately connected with a powerful will. Many of the great human scourges of the race have, unconsciously and unintentionally, done immense good for mankind through the possession of this vast overflowing energy. 'There shall be no Alps,' said Napoleon in his selfish desire to conquer Italy, and the result was the wonderful roads which connected Northern and Southern Europe.

If ever there was an example on a colossal human scale of the 'will to live,' it was embodied in Peter the Great, an awful and drunken barbarian; but see what he did for Russia. In this world, whose ultimate problems we do not pretend to solve, the 'will to live,' with all its potential consequences, is a great fact without which the human race would gradually die out.

"Now the successful man, in the ordinary sense of the word, is he who develops in himself in an abnormal degree this 'will to live.' We in the Western world scarcely recognize that this 'will to live' carried to great lengths is not only not universal among mankind, but is rather exceptional in its operations. It is the brute inheritance, at least on one side, against which some of the great religions of the world have contended, and contended with success. The East as a whole finds in the quiescence of the will, in its passive submission to a vast and supreme Power, the solution of the problem of life. Even among Western peoples the average man lives with content amid the **[R2492 : page 163]** 'petty murmur of his bourg' rather than contends for the great material prizes of life, or what are supposed to be such. It is well that this is so, for if every one were fired by the ambition of a successful general, or politician, or merchant, the competition among men would be so terrible that, from another point of view, annihilation would be the lot of humanity. Men would not be able to stand the strain, nor would Nature afford the mass of them the opportunity for attaining, or even seriously striving for, the object of their ambition. Earth would become a hell, and this green **[R2492 : page 164]** globe would witness tragedies compared with which the most awful in history would dwindle into insignificance. Most men are, happily for themselves and for their fellows, contented, like the Apostle, with food and raiment, and taking the world as a whole, they live the lives of decent and faithful fathers, sons, husbands, and friends. Ambition is the mark of a comparative few, and what are called the prizes of life are contended for by an insignificant minority.

"We say that this is well, and the Bishop of London is evidently in agreement with our position, for he does not think that success in life usually develops the best qualities among men. It is indeed true, as Wordsworth said, that it is dangerous to look on tyrants with a dazzled eye, and one might add that it is not quite safe for most men to take as their models those who are generally estimated to be successful men. There can be, as the Bishop said, no absolute rule as to what one should do to gain success. One may spend one's life in the most praiseworthy diligence, and yet die poor, unknown, and be accounted by the world as a failure, tho happily the world's coarse judgments do not constitute the final court of appeal. One may master all science, one may be a great thinker, and yet pass away from these noises of earth unrecognized, and even laughed at, by one's fellow-men.

"It has been reserved for few great men to attain renown in their own lifetime. They have been hated and ridiculed, while the shallow charlatan has won the success of his age. This is, indeed, such a truism, that one does not need to dwell on the fact. If we are to measure character, genius and worth by the standard of success, we should have to say that the great men of the world have been among the least successful men. What does seem to us to ensure success is some overplus of human energy with which a man is born, and which cannot be created in him afterwards, and which is directed towards the attainment of objects that can be best appreciated by the average man. There is a general demand in the world at any given time for a kind of mechanical talent rising at times to genius, but of a variety which can be estimated by common people, and which can apply itself to objects of general desire. He who possesses this kind of overplus of human energy is the successful man, because he holds a monopoly of what all desire and of what all can appreciate. To him all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players, and he soon finds out that he can play the best game of them all in some particular line.

"In a world such as ours, how far is it wise to encourage that kind of talent? Religion, as we have said, over most of the Eastern world has persuaded countless millions of people that this kind of success is not worth while. Buddhism and Brahminism have indoctrinated a large proportion of the human race with a positive contempt for the kind of existence which alone seems worth having for a member of the New York Stock Exchange. Indeed, if we contemplate the two varieties of mankind from a spiritual, instead of a physical, point of view, we might be led to doubt whether the human race had a common origin. There seems absolutely nothing in common between the two types.

"On the one hand, we see the action dictated by the strong will, by the 'will to live' endowed with keen intelligence and a rather low standard of aspiration. On the other side, we see a being who is striving – for what? For the cessation of all will, for the attainment, not of material commodities, not even of mental good, but of entire peace and calm, and to him all the efforts of human life in our busy civilization seem entirely purposeless and even absurd. Are we to take the extreme Oriental view, or must we accept the standard of the strong will as believed in and acted upon by the busy men of our busy world? If the latter is a true theory of life, then we must accept the successful man as our hero, even tho we cannot teach our youths how to imitate his example.

"We think there is a mean between these extremes, as there is between most extremes. We cannot annihilate 'the will to live,' because existence itself on our planet depends upon its mysterious operation. Neither can we desire the *larger development* of the 'will to live,' the will carried to an abnormal point, as in a very great general or financier, among average men. All that we want among average men, as Hegel said, is that they should be good men in all the fundamental relations of life. If they happen to achieve that reward which, as Coleridge says, so rarely comes to merit, well and good.

"But it is well that most men should not go out of their way to seek rewards. So long as they are standing on the ground of right, they are safe; but the moment they quit that point of moral vantage for the perilous peaks of human ambition, they are usually lost. They must not, then, put forth the abnormal 'will to live,' but neither must they crush that will without which human life would be empty of all positive content. No, what is really needed among men is a pure will, a will cleansed of all that degrades life while prolonging it and extending its relations. This was the best Greek idea, it is also the Christian idea, which comes to men, not as taking away the real content of life, but as giving life more abundantly; but life which can control those fiery courses of the soul instead of leaving them to their own ungoverned sway. On the whole, therefore, we say with the Bishop that success in life is a dubious object of desire, since it is connected inextricably with so much that wars against the soul. But we must not, as the Germans say, throw away the baby along with the bath. We must accept the will, but we must give to it that direction and noble purpose which render it truly free."

– *London Spectator*.

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