

**THE GRACE OF LIFE; A
SERIES OF SHORT PAPERS
ON PRACTICAL RELIGION
FOR BUSY PEOPLE**

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The grace of life; a series of short papers on practical religion for busy people by Robert Laurence Ottley

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ROBERT LAURENCE OTTLEY

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The Grace of Life

A SERIES OF SHORT PAPERS
ON PRACTICAL RELIGION
FOR BUSY PEOPLE

BY
ROBERT LAURENCE OTTLEY ✓
RECTOR OF WINTERBOURNE BASSITT

"Hails together of the grace of life."—St. PETER BILLY

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE following papers were written for *The Churchman* (New York), and were addressed in the first instance, as will be obvious, to American readers.

I have, however, ventured, with the kind consent of the proprietors of *The Churchman*, to reprint them, not because they deal exhaustively or adequately with the different subjects, but because, taken together, they are intended to present a certain type of Churchmanship—a Churchmanship which, while studiously avoiding controversy and partisanship, seeks, amid the complex circumstances of modern life, to fulfil what Scripture calls *the mind of Christ*, and to follow the leading of His Spirit.

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I.

WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN ?

O Lord and Master of us all,
Whate'er our name or sign,
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,
We test our lives by Thine.

J. G. WHITTIER.

THERE are many definitions of religion, many different ideas of what it means and involves. But it is the mark of wisdom and common sense to go straight to the fountain-head. To the question, "What is a Christian?" we shall seek an answer in the life and teaching, the patience and the Passion, of Jesus Christ.

Of two things we may be sure : First, that to be a Christian is to be *Christ-like*, and that therefore everything depends, not on correct opinions about Christ, not on mere imitation of the outward features and circumstances of His life, but on conformity to what St. Paul calls His *mind*; on the

extent to which we have caught something of His spirit. Secondly, we know that we are made Christians outwardly ; we are made, whether in infancy or manhood, members of the Christian Church, in order that we may become Christ-like in temper, behaviour, and character. The end and aim of all Church-life, all membership in the Christian brotherhood, is Christ-like living.

Speaking broadly, we meet, both in the Gospels and in the history of religion, with two opposed types of thought. There are those who, like the Pharisees, look upon religion as primarily a life of law and obligation. They regard the service of God mainly as a system of precepts, regulations, ordinances. To them goodness consists in a punctilious and faithful but anxious obedience to what they believe to be the requirements of Almighty God. But too often their service is without joy and their scrupulous obedience brings them no true peace. On the other hand, there are those who think of religion primarily as the life of Divine sonship. They feel themselves to be not merely servants, but children of a holy and compassionate Father. In their degree they share the confidence, the calmness, the sureness of filial instinct which they behold in Jesus Christ. In

Him they see the ideal of sonship: a life of toil for the good of men, but toil gladdened by perfect trust in the Fatherly goodness, and by perfect sympathy with the wise purposes, of God ; a life of whole-hearted devotion to God, overflowing in tenderness toward all that He has made ; a life of suffering and self-sacrifice brightened by the joy of sharing a Father's work, a Father's conflict, a Father's victory over evil.

Is it necessary to point out which of these two conceptions of religion comes nearest to the mind of Christ? Can we forget that He Himself sets in the forefront of His Gospel—His message of *good will towards men*--the truth of the Divine Fatherhood? And is it possible for a man to be a Christian without basing his whole conception of life, his thoughts of religion and his hopes for humanity, on this fundamental fact? *Pietas*, says an old Latin writer, *nihil aliud est quam Dei parentis agnitio*.

A Christian, then, is one who looks to Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, the Revealer of God's Fatherhood, as the true Pattern of manhood. What men ought to be, as the children of God, He is. But a Christian also looks to Christ as the Source of power to become, in actual fact as well

as in name, a child of God. The experience of all the Christian centuries is uttered in the words of St. John's Gospel: *As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.* What are the great outstanding characteristics of the true Christian—the truly Christ-like man ?

Perhaps the most conspicuous feature in the true Christian is vitality. He has life in larger measure than other men; he is a living proof of the truth of Christ's promise, *I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.* Whatever the Christian undertakes—whether he is engaged in business, in trade, or in the work of some skilled profession—he fulfils his appointed task with zeal, energy, diligence, thoroughness. He knows that a heavenly Father has assigned him his task—*Son, go work to-day in My vineyard*—and that the simplest way of glorifying God is to work heartily as unto Him and not unto men. Fulness of energy, strength of purpose and conviction, wisely directed activity,—these are the traits most characteristic of a Christian.

But next, a Christian will ever have before his eyes the image of Him whose briefest biography is this: *He went about doing good.*¹ He will aim

¹ Acts x. 38.