

The True Teachings

Lizzie M. Holmes

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Once upon a time there was a good and wise being who was the chief of all the people in the land, and greatly beloved and honored by them. He left them to the care of several of his favorite sons, who at different times came and dwelt among them and taught them how to live, so as to attain -the greatest happiness. One especially, whom all the people who knew him loved dearly, came and lived a simple, truthful life, and taught the people that they were all brothers and the children of one father. He told them that this father had given the land on which they lived to all of them alike—that it was never to be bought or sold, but that every one should have access to it and should thereby earn his living by the sweat of his brow. They were to love one another, as they did themselves, and were to treat each other as each would wish to be treated. Over and over again he repeated these words, and he assured them that if they observed these simple rules all would attain a state of happiness that would be practically heaven. Within each soul, he declared, dwelt the divine spark which developed, would insure a condition of heaven, it mattered not where it might be.

But he also pictured the honors and darkness of their condition if they forgot these rules and neglected to live up to his precepts — a condition which would not come as a punishment, but as a natural consequence of such lives. Should they ever cease to love each other and to regard each one's right as sacred as their own, great sorrows, and turmoil, and sufferings would come upon them that would seem to be apparently endless.

After a time this wise and good teacher left them, and there remained only the memory of his words and life to guide the people. Those who had known him best, understood what he meant and endeavored to carry out his teachings. They had all things in common, and no one owned wealth which could be used in extracting more wealth from their fellowmen. They loved all living beings and were kind and gentle in all their dealings.

But the other people would not live thus. The land was taken possession of by the strongest men, and the others who must live upon the land or die were made slaves. These disinherited people had no tools of their own, and no seeds, and no material for making useful things. So, when they obtained a chance to use any of these, they were compelled to give up a large share of what they produced for it. And thus it was that among these people, who were in reality brothers, there arose classes, and the majority of the people were made poor and servile, while a few became rich and powerful.

But the followers of the great and good teacher, grew in numbers and spread over all the land. They were sincerely anxious to carry out the teachings of their leader, but they became so interested in trying to make people believe in him, and his words, that they nearly forgot what it was he had said. From day to day they grew more and more zealous in spreading his teachings and more and more vague as to what these teachings were. They remembered that he had said that great happiness and peace would follow the living of his principles, but they forgot just how the happiness was related to conduct, and so they began to make a mysterious glory of this promise, a glory to come some time, in some mystical future, in some far off, indefinable place.

They also remembered that he had said that if his rules were not lived up to, terrible results would follow and awful conditions would prevail; they forgot that he had said these things would be but the natural consequence of their conduct, but they magnified the statement into a vague and awful horror that would seize upon the guilty unbeliever at some unlooked for moment and would be a never ending torment. They pictured these shadowy and supernatural horrors very vividly to frighten people into believing in their kind, good teacher, who had never dreamed of driving people to believe him in this way.

And as time went on, the descendants of the followers of the good teacher grew to be very powerful, and began to use very cruel methods to compel people to adopt their faith. But as they, themselves, had forgotten so much and misunderstood the little they remembered of what the good teacher had said, and as they laid more stress on the matter of belief than anything else, their lives were hardly to be distinguished from those of the unbelievers. They did very few of the things their teacher had bid them do. They bought and sold land and all the wonderful gifts it contained; they hired the disinherited people to do their work and paid them as little as they in their helplessness would consent to do it; they speculated and gambled in the products of toil when these products were also the very necessities of life. They pushed on and applauded horrible wars, because these wars furthered their own greedy, commercial schemes. They grasped at every means for accumulating the wealth they never produced—just as all the other people did.

Some there were who questioned them. But when they were asked what their teacher meant when he told all men to love one another and to do to others as they wished to be done by, they replied that of course they should love one another when they belonged to the same class, and they ought to give alms to the classes below them, but surely it was never meant they should love everybody, the poor, the degraded, the stranger, all alike. When asked what was meant when it was declared that the land should not be sold forever, they replied that that applied only to the people and the land of that olden time. When asked what was meant by the wise teacher's strong condemnation of the selfish, the wealthy and the tyrannical, they answered that he meant extreme cases, not men who grew rich and bossed their working people in the customary ways. And when one wondered how the idea of universal brotherhood under one father could be consistent with the condition of classes, the poor and the rich, the eternal bliss in a future heaven for believers, and everlasting torment for all the others who did not believe just the proper thing, they had no reply, or said that universal brotherhood was a myth, an impractical figure of speech.

Of course all the other people of the country lived in the same way, and the original desire and command of the father of them all was utterly misunderstood and disregarded. Yet, so powerful had the name of the great teacher become that all the people of the land were called by his name, and many of them really believed they were doing all that was necessary to be a consistent

follower. These people were very particular about the observance of certain rites and ceremonies they imagined had been enjoined by the great teacher, much more so than they were concerning their conduct toward their fellow-man. They also laid great stress on the commission or omission of little acts that injured no one and involved no self-sacrifice one way or another. But actual justice toward other creatures, when it meant the giving up of some of their old time-honored privileges, was not to be thought of.

When they were reminded by a few sincere and lofty souls that they ought to consider every man a brother and give him an equal opportunity with themselves if they really wished to call themselves by the name of their leader, they cried out, "Incendiarism! You want to uproot the very foundation of society!"

Meanwhile the land fast hastened into a state that well justified all the forebodings of the great teacher. The people who could not show a legal title to any of the land on which they were born, were homeless, without food, tools to work with or material to work upon; for the privilege of being allowed to labor they were forced to give up threefourths of what they produced. The rich needed only part of them for their service, and so there was constantly a shifting class who went about seeking vainly for a chance to labor, always a class that hungered, froze, suffered and died from want; and another class just a little above, that lived on the verge of actual want, and sometimes worked themselves to death.

The conditions under which people toiled were so very hard, and the chances for working even under these hard conditions were so few, that many people resorted to taking things by force. Thus even the rich and prosperous were not happy and at peace, for they lived in constant dread that their possessions would be taken from them by force by the poorer classes or by the schemes of men in their own class. They spent much of their own money, time and energy in trying to protect themselves in the possession of the great wealth they had never really produced.

Horrible wars were prosecuted and thousands of human beings killed and mangled in them, because of the greed for plunder and power. Awful accidents occurred and dreadful deaths resulted because men would not spend money to make things secure. Terrible pestilences raged, because the people lived in such horrible conditions, and famines came because they were robbed of what they had raised. Hatred, suspicion, envy, covetousness, murder and greed surged through the hearts of men, and no human creature felt safe and at rest. All the awful suffering that the great teacher had pictured as the result of ignoring his mandates, had come upon the people. And yet they did not recognize it as that which he had foretold, but still pointed out a future state of torment which was to come upon all those who did not do or believe as they wished.

But there had always been a few people who remembered the original teachings of their beloved elder brother, and others who felt in their intuitive souls what it was that he had taught and that all mankind had ignored. These brave souls were constantly endeavoring to tell again what the father of all had meant, that all the people of the land were of one family, and that all should have equal rights and liberties. They were silenced one after another, by imprisonment, by gagging, or by death. Yet more and more of them appeared and finally they would not be silenced, and the people would listen to them. The "logic of events" emphasized their words, and a great wave of unrest surged over humanity. A great longing for that condition involved in the principle of universal brotherhood swelled up in the hearts of the people. Even the wealthy began to realize that their happiness would be more secure if every one were assured of plenty and peace, and they, too, wished for the establishment of the Golden Rule on earth. Humanity grew tired of wars, desperate struggles with one another, of robbing and murdering, of greed and

tyranny, and at last a great hope shone in the eyes that had been so full of woe. And then—and then—

To be continued in the last half of the century.

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