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Autor: W.R.

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THE HUMAN STRUGGLE

“Silent and alone the distant years they viewed
— not understanding, and not understood”.

If I were asked to write an epic on the human struggle that is how the opening lines would read.

The greatest struggle of mankind is not in the field of material endeavour, scientific enquiry, or military conquest. It is not even in the field of moral probity, or religious philosophy. Deep in the heart of all humanity the major task at every level, and through all the years, is to achieve ordinary, everyday, personal communication. The need to mutual understanding is the hub around which the whole wheel of human endeavour revolves.

Life is a very intimate and personal problem, and it never in any circumstances becomes any different. It begins in the home— firstly as a child, and then as a parent. It draws its reality from its friendly contact with just a few people—a man, his wife, their parents, their family—but principally, a man and his wife, COMMUNICATION.

We get so confused in our thinking. We get our values so out of focus sometimes. We read about the epic dramas of humanity. We discuss the amazing discoveries of science. We contemplate the whole vista of endeavour which modern progress has opened up— endless, limitless. We lose our sense of perspective. We become impressed by bigness, and we think that it must be against such a mighty background that man’s greatest struggle would be recorded. Actually, none of these things— absolutely none of these things— have any reality in the true human struggle.

We, each of us, live from day to day intimately amongst a few kindred spirits. Our living moments are coloured by the degree of understanding and harmony which we are able to create amongst those who are closest to us.

Sometimes we make mistakes. We hurt those people. We make them the butt of our foolish prides, our egotism, and resentments. We become offended at what they inadvertently do or say. We do not seek to understand them. We equally are not understood. In time our mutual tolerance wears thin. Deep-seated grudges warp and distort our outlooks. Secret resentments eat away all the friendliness of look, smile and word. Communication splutters to a halt. Cold unfriendly silence settles down like a death mantle over our personal living. We seek to escape out into the bigger sphere of human relationships, and lose our identity in the bigger issues. We think that by striving mightily with big things we will condone our failure in little things. But we cannot escape. The big things are only shadows. It is in the little things that we truly live.

Here then is the field of mankind’s greatest struggle. This is the backdrop for every man’s greatest challenge. Here is where man’s mightiest epic must be written. Here is where man ultimately will find his true victory and his true worth— not in conquering the world and spanning the universe, but in understanding and controlling himself. And for all of us, it starts right where we are with those intimately close to us— forgiving and seeking forgiveness, striving to understand, and to love, and to care— and in this way opening the doors to warm human communication, and driving back the cold wall of silence forever.

Our opening lines could be man’s saddest epitaph: “Silent and alone the distant years they viewed— not understanding and not understood”. Our challenge is to see that it will never be written about us.

[Extracts from “Progress”] —W.R.