

Albert Schweitzer *speaks*

In the settlement of Lambaréné on the Ogowe River in French Equatorial Africa lives one of the greatest of contemporary world citizens—Albert Schweitzer—the world's leading authority on Bach, a renowned philosopher and theologian, and a famed medical missionary.

Born in Günsbach, Alsace, in 1875, Schweitzer studied music as a young man in Paris. He became organist of the Paris Bach Society, a writer of books on Bach, and an authority on the restoration of old organs. Then he turned to philosophy and theology, earning doctor's degrees in both. For several years he taught philosophy at the University of Strassburg, and occupied various church pulpits.

Finally he decided that he could be of more "direct service to humanity" as a medical missionary, and he plunged into his rigorous preparation as a doctor. In 1912 he completed this work and the following year he and his wife set out for Africa to help atone for the sufferings inflicted by the white man, and to bring the message of Christ to the natives.

With the exception of infrequent lecture and concert tours to Europe and America, he has remained in Africa ever since. To the world he has become known largely through his many books, such as *Out of My Life and Thought*, *On the Edge of the Primeval Forest*, *Christianity and the Religions of the World*, and *A Philosophy of Civilization*.

A part of his penetrating message to the world is given herein as he speaks:—

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Robert F. Berquist and Leonard S. Kenworthy

ON THE COLLAPSE OF CIVILIZATION . . .

"We are living today under the sign of the collapse of civilization. The situation has not been produced by the war; the latter is only a manifestation of it."

"My own impression was that in our mental and spiritual life we were not only below the level of past generations but were in many respects only living on their achievements . . . and that not a little of this heritage was beginning to melt away in our hands."

ON THE HOPE OF THE WORLD . . .

"The only possible way out of the present chaos is for us to adopt a world view which will bring us once more under the control of the ideals of true civilization."

"If men can be found who revolt against the spirit of thoughtlessness, and who are personalities sound enough and profound enough to let the ideals of ethical progress radiate from them as a force, there will start an activity of the spirit which will be strong enough to evoke a new mental and spiritual disposition in mankind."

"At the present time when violence, clothed in life, dominates the world more cruelly than it ever has before, I still remain convinced that truth, love, peaceableness, meekness, and kindness are the violence which can master all other violence. The world will be theirs as soon as ever a sufficient number of men with purity of heart, with strength, and with perseverance think and live out the thoughts of love and truth, of meekness and peaceableness."

ON REVERENCE FOR LIFE . . .

"The ethic of reverence for life is the ethic of Love widened into universality. It is the ethic of Jesus now recognized as a necessity of thought."

"Anyone who has accustomed himself to regard the life of any living creature as worthless is in danger of arriving also at the idea of worthless human lives, the idea which is playing so disastrous a part in the thought of our time."

"We have no right to inflict suffering and death on another living creature unless there is some unavoidable necessity for it, and we ought all of us to feel what a horrible thing it is to cause suffering and death out of mere thoughtlessness. . . . I have grown more and more certain that at the bottom of our heart we all think this, and that we fail to acknowledge it and to carry our belief into practice chiefly because we are afraid of being laughed at by other people as sentimentalists, though partly because we allow our best feelings to get blunted."

"But as soon as we in any way recognize the principle of love, even if we limit it to human beings, we arrive actually at an ethic of boundless responsibilities and duties. Love can not be put under a system of rules and regulations. It issues absolute commands. Each of us must subjectively reach a decision for himself as to how far he can go towards carrying out the boundless commandment of love without surrendering his existence."

"War means brutality and stupidity. . . . While I spread this idea (reverence for life) I fight against war in the deepest way."

ON CHRISTIANITY . . .

"What Christianity needs is that it shall be filled to overflowing with the spirit of Jesus, and in the strength of that shall spiritualize itself into a living religion of inwardness and love, such as its destined purpose should make it. Only as such can it become the leaven in the spiritual life of mankind. What has been passing for Christianity during these nineteen centuries is merely a beginning, full of weaknesses and mistakes, not a full-grown Christianity springing from the spirit of Jesus."

"Christianity can not take the place of thinking, but it must be founded on it."

"When Christianity becomes conscious of its innermost nature, it realizes that it is godliness rising out of inward constraint. The highest knowledge is to know that we are surrounded by mystery. Neither knowledge nor hope for the future can be the pivot of our life or determine its direction. It is intended to be solely determined by our allowing ourselves to be gripped by the ethical God, who reveals Himself in us, and by our yielding our will to His."

"If only our lives, in genuine non-conformity to the world, reveal something of what it means to be apprehended by the living ethical God, then something of the truth of Jesus goes out from us."

" . . . not one of us knows what effect his life produces, and what he gives to others; that is hidden from us and must remain so, though we are often allowed to see some little fraction of it, so that we may not lose courage. The way in which power works is a mystery."

ON JESUS . . .

"As one unknown and nameless He comes to us, just as on the shore of the lake He approached those men who knew not who He was. His words are the same: 'Follow thou Me!' and He puts us to the tasks which He has to carry out in our age. He commands. And to those who obey, be they wise or simple, He will reveal Himself through all that they are privileged to experience in His fellowship of peace and activity, of struggle and suffering, till they come to know, as an inexpressible secret, Who He is"

"The true relation to Jesus is to be taken possession of by Him. Christian piety . . . is valuable only so far as it means the surrender of our will to His."

"As modern men we imagine the state of the perfect human society to be one of harmony between legal organization and the practice of love. Jesus does not attempt to harmonize justice and love but says to man: If you want to be in the spirit of God, you may not act or think otherwise than in love."

ON SEEKING TRUTH . . .

"Nowhere does Jesus demand of His hearers that they shall sacrifice thinking to believing. Quite the contrary! He bids them meditate upon religion. In the Sermon on the Mount He lets ethics, as the essence of religion, flood their hearts, leading them to judge the value of piety by what it makes of a man from the ethical point of view. . . . Thus the Sermon on the Mount becomes the incontestable charter of liberal Christianity. The truth that the ethical is the essence of religion is firmly established on the authority of Jesus."

ON SERVICE . . .

"We must all carry our share of the misery which lies upon the world."

"The hidden forces of goodness are embodied in those persons who carry on as a secondary pursuit the immediate personal service which they can not make their life-work. The lot of the many is to have as a profession, for the earning of their living and the satisfaction of society's claim on them, a more or less soul-less labour in which they can give out little or nothing of their human qualities. . . . Anyone can rescue his human life, in spite of his professional life, who seizes every opportunity of being a man by means of personal action, however unpretending, for the good of fellow-men who need the help of a fellow-man. Such a man enlists in the service of the spiritual and good."

"Only a person who can find a value in every sort of activity and devote himself to each one with full consciousness of duty, has the inward right to take as his object some extraordinary activity instead of that which falls naturally to his lot. Only a person who feels his preference to be a matter of course, not something out of the ordinary, and who has no thought of heroism, but just recognizes a duty undertaken with sober enthusiasm, is capable of becoming a spiritual adventurer such as the world needs. There are no heroes of action: only heroes of renunciation and suffering. Of such there are plenty. But few of them are known, and even these not to the crowd, but to the few."

"Anyone who expects to do good must not expect people to roll stones out of his way, but must accept his lot calmly if they even roll a few more into it."

ON GRATITUDE TO OTHERS . . .

"When I look back upon my early days I am stirred by the thought of the number of people whom I have to thank for what they gave me or for what they were to me. At the same time I am haunted by an oppressive consciousness of the little gratitude I really showed them while I was young. . . . We ought all to make an effort to act on our first thoughts and let our unspoken gratitude find expression. Then there will be more sunshine in the world, and more power to work for what is good."

ON THE NEGRO . . .

"Whatever benefit we confer upon the peoples of our colonies is not beneficence but atonement for the terrible sufferings which we white people have been bringing upon them ever since the day on which the first of our ships found its way to their shores. Colonial problems, as they exist today, can not be solved by political measures alone. A new element must be introduced; white and colored must meet in an atmosphere of the ethical spirit. Then only will mutual understanding be possible."

"Within the primitive man there slumbers an ethical rationalist. He has a natural responsiveness to the notion of goodness and all that is connected with it in religion. . . . No one must think that he has described the thought world of the Negro when he has made a full list of all the superstitious ideas which he has taken over. . . . In proportion as he becomes familiar with the higher moral ideas of the religion of Jesus, he finds utterance for something in himself that has hitherto been dumb, and something that has been tightly bound up finds release."

ON MUSIC . . .

"Bach's music depends for its effect not upon the perfection but upon the spirit of the performance. . . . Only he who sinks himself in the emotional life of Bach, who lives and thinks with him, who is simple and modest as he, is in a position to perform him properly. If the director and the performer do not feel themselves in a consecrated mood, they can not communicate such a mood to the hearer; something cold will settle upon the music and deprive it of its best strength."

"'An inner unity of soul,' said Mosewius in 1845, 'is absolutely indispensable in performing Bach . . . ' May this perception penetrate everywhere; then will Bach help our age to attain the spiritual unity and fervour of which it so sorely stands in need."

ON THE FUTURE . . .

" . . . knowledge is pessimistic but my willing and hoping are optimistic. . . . Because I have confidence in the power of truth and of the spirit, I believe in the future of mankind."

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