

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Blessed Are the Meek

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Blessed Are the Meek

Author: G. C. Edmondson

Illustrator: Kelly Freas

Release date: December 7, 2007 [eBook #23762]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Greg Weeks and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdp.net>

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BLESSED ARE THE MEEK ***

Transcriber's Note: This e-text was produced from Astounding, September, 1955. Extensive research did not reveal any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.



BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

*Every strength is a weakness, and every weakness is a strength.
And when the Strong start smashing each other's strength ... the
Weak may turn out to be, instead, the Wise.*

BY G. C. EDMONDSON

Illustrated by Freas

The strangers landed just before dawn, incinerating a good li of bottom land in the process. Their machines were already busily digging up the topsoil. The Old One watched, squinting into the morning sun. He sighed, hitched up his saffron robes and started walking down

toward the strangers.

Griffin turned, not trying to conceal his excitement. "You're the linguist, see what you can get out of him."

"I might," Kung Su ventured sourly, "if you'd go weed the air machine or something. This is going to be hard enough without a lot of kibitzers cramping my style and scaring Old Pruneface here half to death."

"I see your point," Griffin answered. He turned and started back toward the diggings. "Let me know if you make any progress with the local language." He stopped whistling and strove to control the jauntiness of his gait. *Must be the lower gravity and extra oxygen*, he thought. *I haven't bounced along like this for thirty years. Nice place to settle down if some promoter doesn't turn it into an old folks home.* He sighed and glanced over the diggings. The rammed earth walls were nearly obliterated by now. *Nothing lost*, he reflected. *It's all on tape and they're no different from a thousand others at any rate.*

Griffin opened a door in the transparent bubble from which Albañez was operating the diggers. "Anything?" he inquired.

"Nothing so far," Albañez reported. "What's the score on this job? I missed the briefing."

"How'd you make out on III, by the way?"

"Same old stuff, pottery shards and the usual junk. See it once and you've seen it all."

"Well," Griffin began, "it looks like the same thing here again. We've pretty well covered this system and you know how it is. Rammed earth walls here and there, pottery shards, flint, bronze and iron artifacts and that's it. They got to the iron age on every planet and then blooey."

"Artifacts all made for humanoid hands I suppose. I wonder if they were close enough to have crossbred with humans."

"I couldn't say," Griffin observed dryly. "From the looks of Old Pruneface I doubt if we'll ever find a human female with sufficiently detached attitude to find out."

"Who's Pruneface?"

"He came ambling down out of the hills this morning and walked into camp."

"You mean you've actually found a live humanoid?"

"There's got to be a first time for everything." Griffin opened the door and started climbing the hill toward Kung Su and Pruneface.

"Well, have you gotten beyond the 'me, Charlie' stage yet?" Griffin inquired at breakfast two days later.

Kung Su gave an inscrutable East Los Angeles smile. "As a matter of fact, I'm a little farther along. Joe is amazingly cooperative."

"Joe?"

"Spell it Chou if you want to be exotic. It's still pronounced Joe and that's his name. The language is monosyllabic and tonal. I happen to know a similar language."

"You mean this humanoid speaks Chinese?" Griffin was never sure whether Kung was ribbing him or not.

"Not Chinese. The vocabulary is different but the syntax and phonemes are nearly identical. I'll speak it perfectly in a week. It's just a question of memorizing two or three thousand new words. Incidentally, Joe wants to know why you're digging up his bottom land. He was all set to flood it today."

"Don't tell me he plants rice!" Griffin exclaimed.

"I don't imagine it's rice, but it needs flooding whatever it is."

"Ask him how many humanoids there are on this planet."

"I'm way ahead of you, Griffin. He says there are only a few thousand left. The rest were all destroyed in a war with the barbarians."

"Barbarians?"

"They're extinct."

"How many races were there?"

"I'll get to that if you'll stop interrupting," Kung rejoined testily. "Joe says there are only two kinds of people, his own dark, straight-haired kind and the barbarians. They have curly hair, white skin and round eyes. You'd pass for a barbarian, according to Joe, only you don't have a faceful of hair. He wants to know how things are going on the other planets."

"I suppose that's my cue to break into a cold sweat and feel a premonition of disaster." Griffin tried to smile and almost made it.

"Not necessarily, but it seems our iron-age man is fairly well informed in extraplanetary affairs."

"I guess I'd better start learning the language."

Thanks to the spade work Kung Su had done in preparing hypno-recordings, Griffin had a working knowledge of the Rational People's language eleven days later when he sat down to drink herb infused hot water with Joe and other Old Ones in the low-roofed wooden building around which clustered a village of two hundred humanoids. He fidgeted through interminable ritualistic cups of hot water. Eventually Joe hid his hands in the sleeves of his robe and turned with an air of polite inquiry. *Now we get down to business*, Griffin thought.

"Joe, you know by now why we're digging up your bottom land. We'll recompense you in one way or another. Meanwhile, could you give me a little local history?"

Joe smiled like a well nourished bodhisattva. "Approximately how far back would you like me to begin?"

"At the beginning."

"How long is a year on your planet?" Joe inquired.

"Your year is eight and a half days longer. Our day is three hundred heartbeats longer than yours."

Joe nodded his thanks. "More water?"

Griffin declined, suppressing a shudder.

"Five million years ago we were limited to one planet," Joe began. "The court astronomer had a vision of our planet in flames. I imagine you'd say our sun was about to nova. The empress was disturbed and ordered a convocation of seers. One fasted overlong and saw an answer. As the dying seer predicted the Son of Heaven came with fire-breathing dragons. The fairest of maidens and the strongest of our young men were taken to serve his warriors. We served them honestly and faithfully. A thousand years later their empire collapsed leaving us scattered across the universe. Three thousand years later a new race of barbarians conquered our planets. We surrendered naturally and soon were serving our new masters. Five hundred years passed and they destroyed themselves. This has been the pattern of our existence from that day to this."

"You mean you've been slaves for five million years?" Griffin was incredulous.

"Servitude has ever been a refuge for the scholar and the philosopher."

"But what point is there in such a life? Why do you continue living this way?"

"What is the point in any way of life? Continued existence. Personal immortality is neither desirable nor possible. We settled for perpetuation of the race."

"But what about self-determination? You know enough astronomy to understand novae. Surely you realize it could happen again. What would you do without a technology to build spaceships?"

"Many stars have gone nova during our history. Usually the barbarians came in time. When they didn't—"

"You mean you don't really care?"

"All barbarians ask that sooner or later," Joe smiled. "Sometimes toward the end they even accuse us of destroying them. We don't. Every technology bears the seeds of its own destruction. The stars are older than the machinery that explores them."

"You used technology to get from one system to another."

"We used it, but we were never part of it. When machines fail, their people die. We have no machines."

"What would you do if this sun were to nova?"

"We can serve you. We are not unintelligent."

"Willing to work your way around the galaxy, eh? But what if we refused to take you?"

"The race would go on. Kung Su tells me there is no life on planets of this system, but there are other systems."

"You're whistling in the dark," Griffin scoffed. "How do you know if any of the Rational People survive?"

"How far back does your history go?" Joe inquired.

"It's hard to say exactly," Griffin replied. "Our earliest written records date back some seven thousand years."

"You are all of one race?"

"No, you may have noticed Kung Su is slightly different from the rest of us."

"Yes, Griffin, I have noticed. When you return ask Kung Su for the legend of creation. More hot water?" Joe stirred and Griffin guessed the interview was over. He drank another ritual cup, made his farewells and walked thoughtfully back to camp.

"Kung," Griffin asked over coffee next afternoon, "how well up are you on Chinese mythology?"

"Oh, fair, I guess. It isn't my field but I remember some of the stories my grandfather used to tell me."

"What is your legend of creation?" Griffin persisted.

"It's pretty well garbled but I remember something about the Son of Heaven bringing the early settlers from a land of two moons on the back of his fire-breathing dragon. The dragon got sick and died so they couldn't ever get back to heaven again. There's a lot of stuff about devils, too."

"What about devils?"

"I don't remember too well, but they were supposed to do terrible things to you and even to your unborn children if they ever caught you. They must have been pretty stupid though; they couldn't turn corners. My grandfather's store had devil screens at all the doors so you had to turn a corner to get in. The first time I saw the lead baffles at the pile chamber doors on this ship it reminded me of home sweet home. By the way, some young men from the village were around today. They want to work passage to the next planet. What do you think?"

Griffin was silent for a long time.

"Well, what do you say? We can use some hand labor for the delicate digging. Want to put

them on?"

"Might as well." Griffin answered. "There's a streetcar every millennium anyway."

"What do you mean by that?"

"You wouldn't understand. You sold your birthright to the barbarians."

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BLESSED ARE THE MEEK ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE
PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE YOU DISTRIBUTE OR USE THIS WORK

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the

work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4,

“Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”

- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you ‘AS-IS’, WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.