

The Day of March Has Come

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“Wonder is the effect of ignorance,” wrote Samuel Johnson, that literary dictator of an age of reason. By and by when our knowledge is more complete, he opined, those phenomena which now fill us with awe will lose their spell over us, for wonder is but a pause in the reasoning process. A century after Johnson, Tennyson plucked a flower from the crannied wall, and addressed is thus:

I hold you here, root and all, in my hand
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are, root and all, and all in all
I should know what God and man is.

The two points of view here expressed epitomize from the beginning man’s fundamental attitudes both inside and outside the Church toward the inexplicables of life. In the Church of our day they are more pronounced than ever. As the points of the compass make toward the magnetic poles, so men have gravitated about these two positions—rationalism and faith—between which, so far as religion is concerned, there is a great gulf fixed. Asbury’s theological tenets place her solidly at that pole which is the very antipode of rationalism. Not only is Asbury one of a steadily diminishing number of seminaries that continue to emphasize a transcendental faith, but in her stand for the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification she is unique. In fact, the spread of scriptural holiness is her ruling passion. In a world and in a Church enslaved by the god of reason she is charged with a great mission, one that will tax to the utmost her intelligence, her courage, and her grace. For her the day of defensive warfare is over. For her the day of

march has come.

It is my intention to consider with you the relative merits of two or three modes of aggression—an aggression that is to be directed against modern religious paganism, whether it reside at the top of Mt. Olympus itself or on those broad plains and green valleys below, over which the Olympian gods preside. Inasmuch as campaigns are won not by any single strategy but by a combination of strategies, mine is a question of emphasis, not of elimination.

I ask first, what are our chances of success if we meet our opponents on the cold, altitudinous plains of reason? Let it be said at the outset that our doctrinal position has nothing to fear from even the most painstaking scrutiny on the part of men dominated by the modern scientific temper. This temper requires that the seeker after truth shall have scrupulous regard for two maxims: (1) he shall be sure of his facts and (2) he shall adopt that theory of explanation which offers to him the fewest difficulties while best explaining all the facts. With these things in mind we should convince the open-minded investigator that our theological tenets are at least as sustainable in the light of reason as are those of any other system of belief. It should be remembered too, as Professor Compton observes, that one’s faith in a way of life may represent a thoroughly scientific attitude even though he may not be able to establish satisfactorily the correctness of his hypothesis. In our case faith is based upon the assumption that the Biblical standards of regeneration and entire sanctification, as understood by John

Wesley, most adequately meet all our needs.

It is true that the spirit of the age is most hostile to a faith in the supernatural. For this reason believing Christians have often seemed embarrassed and apologetic. As though all the mysteries of life were confined to the pages of the Bible! Is it not passing strange that some men of science — and religion — can coast so easily over the rough places of science — the hills and the bogs and the gorges — only to stumble conveniently upon The Rock of Ages! Why is it only in the church that the mysterious becomes so very disconcerting? Do we forget that in all the areas of natural science there are deep mysteries that never have been or never shall be cleared away? Henry Drummond of Edinburgh is right when he says, "I find so many more puzzling things outside the Bible than in it." At the end of his book, *The Riddle of the Universe*, Haeckel writes, "We grant at once that the innermost character of nature is just as little understood by us as it was by Anaximander and Empedocles, 2,400 years ago. We must even confess that the essence of substance becomes more enigmatic the deeper we probe into its heart." If science does not blush for her inability to explain, why should faith? We need then have no misgivings over engaging in a contest in which the strategy of logic is dominant, for the reasonableness of our theological position is tenable enough, as far as reason goes. It remains for us to shed ourselves of those complexes that dilute our testimony and incapacitate us for strong and decisive action. It is to be borne in mind, however, that in a logical disputation we should expect to meet our opponents on ground held sacred by them; we should expect to use weapons which they from long and continued experience brandish most expertly.

Be that as it may, it is in point to

make some brief inquiry into the value of the appeal to reason so far as the history of the Church is concerned. (It goes without saying, of course, that any religious appeal that is without intellectual foundation is worse than useless.) I take an example from the early Church. Stephen arraigned before the Sanhedrin was accused of doing great wonders and miracles among the people, of teaching doctrines calculated to work havoc with the traditions of the Jews. A blasphemer, they called him. You remember Stephen's defense, in Acts 7. How he drained himself of all his logic, of all his art, of all his strength! He spoke of Moses' disappointment with the children of Israel for their failure to recognize him as their deliverer from Egyptian bondage, especially after they had witnessed him avenge one of their brethren at the hands of an Egyptian. When Stephen added that the Israelites "understood not" these things, he put his finger upon the tragic flaw in human nature — spiritual blindness. Both Moses and Stephen failed to get their critics to see the truth. Nor did the faultless arguments of the chief of the apostles avail anything in the face of a Gibraltar of religious scepticism. But Paul had hoped for no more. His letter to the Corinthians shows clearly his opinion of human reason as a mover of men, "And I brethren, when I came to you, came not with the excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. . . . And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." Luther, likewise, before red-capped cardinals and purple-robed bishops spent himself in a vain effort to bring these princes of the Church to a knowledge of the truth. He finally came to the end of himself, "Here

stand I; I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen." The German monk had failed to establish his thesis before his ecclesiastical superiors, but he left the Diet of Worms to turn the world upside down. Nor was it the "sweet reasonableness" of his theology that did it. Two centuries after Luther the established church of England refused to see the scriptural soundness of the new evangelicalism and forced John Wesley to retire from its active ministry. Yet who doubts the part Wesley and his Methodists played in lifting England out of paganism and possibly saving her from the horrors of a French Revolution?

In *The Catholic Church and Current Literature* George N. Shuster points out the subjective dangers attendant upon one's attempting to rationalize his theological position. Speaking of the final victory of romanticism over rationalism in the first half of the nineteenth century he writes, "There was also a Catholic rationalism manifest in the habit of restating scholastic philosophy in terms of intellectual science, and in those tendencies to render doctrine 'conformable with reason', which finally developed into 'modernism'." Scholasticism by and large was to the Middle Ages what rationalism is to the present period — its temper was, believe what can be proved. It was not, as Hurst tells us, the dialectics of the scholastics that prepared the way for the Protestant Reformation; it was the teachings and influence of that spiritually-minded group for whom the heart is the home of all true theology — the Christian mystics. Likewise it was John Henry Newman, not Thomas Aquinas, who brought converts into the Church of Rome.

All of this suggests that which has long been a commonplace among our prophets and poets: there is a logic of the heart that transcends the logic of the mind. George Eliot, for exam-

ple, all her life repudiated Christianity because it failed to satisfy her reason. In her closing days, however, this brilliant and understanding interpreter of the human heart leaned heavily upon the devotional lyrics of the old monk Thomas á Kempis. It was as though she was irresistibly impelled to yield to the wisdom of her heart — she who at one time in the character of Dinah Morris had poured out the message of her soul, a message which for the reader of *Adam Bede* strikes all the chords of the heart in a grand symphonic sweep, but one which the mind of George Eliot wistfully rejects.

In any case the doctrines for which we stand are not theorems to be explained. They are facts, communications from God, to be accepted. One may ingeniously mill out a psychology of regeneration or sanctification but in the end it will be a mere rationalization. For it is not within the province of psychology, or any other science for that matter, to pronounce on matters of faith. The continued practice of such reasoning on our part may serve to promote a high degree of mental fecundity, but it is entirely probable that this accretion will correlate negatively with a corresponding degree of spiritual barrenness. Is it not man's insatiable urge to explain, man's "headiness" in matters of religion, that is responsible for the multiplied sects and schisms in Christendom today?

If our major appeal is to man the reasoning creature we can expect to fare no better than did the apostles and prophets when they resorted to this same procedure. Reason is, after all, but a fractional and elusive instrument in getting at truth. "Some men," writes Arnold Lunn, "expect to find God lying at the end of a string of syllogisms." An intelligent account of our position we must be able to give. Our concern has been with the efficacy

of such an account.

But man not only thinks; he also feels. Some psychologists are of the opinion that emotion is the basis of civilization. John Dewey, considered by many to be our greatest educational philosopher, says that we have lost confidence in reason because we have learned that man is chiefly a creature of habit and emotion. We do know that feeling is a prime mover of men, that most people seem to calculate after an emotional rather than a mental pattern. What are the possibilities of a Christian aggression in which true emotion plays a major rôle?

It is pertinent to note here that much criticism has been directed against the modern church in connection with this word "emotion." It seems that we have either far too much feeling in our religion or far too little. The evangelicals are accused of being surfeited with a facile and effervescent enthusiasm nauseating to the modern temper; the liberals are charged with being cold and lifeless. I do not know which we should fear the more — Wesleyan fervor reduced to the level of mawkish, sentimental effusions, or Wesleyan intellectualism bristling with formal logic. Against the rising tide of emotionalism among the sects some of the moderns have reacted in the extreme. In *The Challenge of Israel's Faith* G. Ernest Wright says, "The Father-son picture is in continual danger of degenerating into a mere sentimentality." As though all the virtues of life are not always in danger of degenerating into their correlative evils!

It needs to be emphasized that this same indictment of superficiality against the more turbulent minorities may well be preferred against Christians generally today. For although the ethics of a well-bred religionism may not exhibit the provincialisms of a crude evangelicalism, even a casual glance at the contemporary scene

shows a religious sentimentality that is widespread. It was Mark Twain who quoted Charles Darwin's father as saying that Christianity is a feather-bed on which to catch falling Christians. Modern Christianity has been expansive on the fatherhood and love of God, who is all too frequently represented as a great cosmic nursemaid who helps people out in time of trouble. A brief illustration has been used to make the situation more poignant. At the foot of the Matterhorn the traveler in the Alps one day chances upon a delicate little forget-me-not. He handles it affectionately, for it speaks to him of the tenderness, the gentleness of God. As he lifts his gaze, however, to behold the jagged, snow-covered peak lose itself in the clouds some 15,000 feet above, he is reminded of another aspect of God's nature, one almost lost sight of these days. He remembers that God is greater, sterner, and more awful than a sentimental Christianity suggests. Today we clutch at the forget-me-not; we have lost the high Alps in a fog. Today our ears are tuned only to the soft music of the flutes and the violins in the great cosmic orchestra; for us the boom of the drums and the blare of the trumpets has been silenced. We have desperate need of returning to ponder those attributes of Deity that were a passion with men like Calvin and Knox — the Sovereignty, the Justice, and the Holiness of God. We need a Luther or a Wesley to rescue these words from their dead estate. But however emotion has been debased in the service of religion, whatever the brand of sentimentality, whether it be of the loud, lachrymose variety or something more sophisticated, we can nevertheless not afford to blind ourselves to the validity of strong emotional appeal. Without it we are powerless to effect the good.

To learn something of the value of this type of approach I again glance

at the history of the Christian Church. The student of Church history well knows that no great movement toward God ever took place except under men who were more remarkable for their spiritual fervor than for their unusual intellectual gift. They were for the most part men of the David Brainerd type. Francis of Assisi and his kind influenced their times quite out of proportion to their mental strength. Thomas of Spoleto heard Francis in the year 1220 and expressed his amazement at finding this plain spoken, unimposing preacher the admiration of so many learned men. Two hundred and sixty years later Savonarola began preaching in Florence. His sermons, at first erudite, logical, and polished, attracted little attention. It was only when Savonarola abandoned his love of intellectual display and broke through all the traditions of the pulpit that the crowds flocked to hear him. Michelangelo, they say, could not refrain from shedding tears at the remembrance of these sermons. It is reported of John Wesley, "the best-disciplined mind of the modern pulpit," that he brought to the Gospel the feeling that is most intense when it is most repressed. Of Whitefield, "He was something that burned men like fire, that bent them like the wind, that drove them like a wave of the sea." Of Phillips Brooks, "He drove through our veins like a bolt of lightning." S. Parkes Cadman feels that Spurgeon's provincialism and intolerable theological temper have been singled out for just criticism, but at the same time he is quick to state that for power and persuasiveness Spurgeon had no equal. Examples such as these could be multiplied. It should suffice to observe that the men who moved people toward God were men of passion. But what saith our Lord concerning this matter of enthusiasm? There are times when Christ is represented as being vexed, and times when He is

shown as being angry. But only once is He represented as being perfectly nauseated, and that at the church of the Laodiceans, a church proud of her knowledge, and boasting a "deeper than common insight into Divine things." John the revelator records the cause of the divine opprobrium: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." So then the record would indicate that if the slain of the Lord are to be many we must do more than proclaim the truth. (An adding machine can do that.) Evidently what counts is our enthusiasm for the truth.

But man not only thinks and feels. He also wills. It is not enough that we convince men that they should accept a certain pattern of conduct, not enough that we arouse in men an ardent desire to pursue a course of action. Our mission will fail utterly unless we see men embrace with all their heart and mind and strength that which we believe to be the Bible plan of salvation. When Dewey asserts that a philosophic faith can be tried and tested only in action he is but attesting to the scriptural formula for establishing the validity of the Christ way of life: "O taste and see that the Lord is good." (*Ps.* 34:8) The man born blind knew that he was healed because something had happened to him. The Jews could not gainsay his testimony. Paul was forever talking about his Damascus road experience. It was his mightiest argument. Sometimes there is more logic in a single demonstration than in a volume of argumentation. "Come and see," answered Philip to Nathaniel's question, "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" "Come and see," urged the woman of Samaria upon her curious neighbors. "Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands, reach hither thy hand and

thrust it into my side," spoke One to a chronic doubter. It was ever thus! We may dazzle man with Socratic wisdom and move him with excruciating pathos, but until man tastes and sees for himself he will remain as Christless as the untaught native in the highlands of Tibet.

In contemplating a campaign for the souls of men we shall by no means ignore the claims of reason, although we know that dependence upon this

factor alone is a questionable procedure; we shall remember to invest heavily in the resources of emotion, for truth freighted with feeling will by God's grace bring men to the very borders of Christian experience; but having exhausted all our energies of mind and heart we shall not for a moment fail to proclaim with Job-like tenacity that the faith we seek to promulgate is to be "tried and tested only in action."

THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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process of construction on the seminary campus. The cost of this building, without furnishings, will be approximately one hundred seventy-five thousand dollars. Every effort is being centered upon completing this building by commencement, with the view that it must be completed by the opening of the fall quarter in 1947.

Another significant event in the life of the seminary was consummated in October. The Free Methodist Church has officially designated Asbury Theological Seminary as the seminary to which they will send their students sponsored by the Wesley Foundation. A Wesley Foundation House will be established near the campus of the seminary for Free Methodist students, beginning with the fall quarter of 1947. The plan of cooperation between the Free Methodist Church and the seminary extends over a period of three years.

The next outstanding event at the seminary will be the Minister's Conference for 1947 which will be held February 25-27. Bishop Edwin Holt Hughes and Dr. R. P. Shuler will each deliver five lectures at the conference. There will also be daily class sessions in connection with the conference, and other special features. More than three hundred ministers were in attendance at the 1946 conference, coming from a territory extending from New York to Louisiana. The conference is open to laymen as well as ministers. Those who have planned to attend the conference in February, should make reservation in advance for entertainment by writing to Dr. W. D. Turkington, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky.