

The Perils of the Present

By THE REV. GEORGE STANLEY FRAZER,

Pastor of Fifth Avenue Methodist Church—Author of "The Facts of Faith" and "Christianity and the Man of Today"

On the gateway before the entrance to Harvard University is carved on a tablet of stone a noble utterance from the early days of 1643: "After God had carried us safe to New England and we had builded our houses, provided necessary for our livelihood, and convenient places for God's worship and settled the civil government; one of the next things we longed for and looked after was to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity, dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the churches when our present ministers should lie in the dust." These are great and noble words from the Pilgrim fathers who came to this New World, braving the perils of the sea, landing on the rock-bound coasts, and dwelling in the midst of pathless forests. Those were days of hardship and struggle, days fraught with a measure of superstition such as hold no temptations for the people of an advanced civilization. It is true that the witches of Salem and the hard theologies of men like Jonathan Edwards are no longer present to haunt our modern habits of thought, but it is also true that we have in a very large measure departed from the path of duty which animated their purposes. If we are compelled to confess that our educational sentiments have changed altogether, "for better or for worse," no one would care to revert to those days when educational opportunities and equipments were so scant and far removed from the life of the average man, but we cannot but deplore the tendency which is directed not so much toward the development of that which is noblest in life as to enable youth to get things quickly. Ruskin was not far ahead when he said: "Education is the loss of human souls to what is best; and making what is best out of them; and these two objects are always attainable together, and by the same means. The training which makes men most serviceable to others." But of what value is such a definition to those who would learn only enough to enable them to get and to get quickly? forgetting that—

"A little learning is a dangerous thing. Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring. There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again."

The Perfection of Educational Ideals

When we think of the more than eighteen million children in the common schools of our country, and of the millions of youth in the other institutions of our land, it is enough to move us to deeply ponder as we listen to their footfall. These are to be the future guardians of the history and traditions of this republic. What ideals will animate them as they are entrusted with the affairs of humanity? Their administration of that which has been bought at such sacrifice and which is vital to the life of the future will depend upon the faith and the vision by which they are now being led.

What a wail of lamentation is uttered at the sight of thousands of young men turning from the learned professions to enter the arena of trade and commerce! In his Yale address, President White spoke of materialism as "an evil spirit that has given its cup of secrecy to youth and beguiled them from the paths of noble scholarship and the intellectual life." There are many who believe that never again shall we see the like of Longfellow or Whitier, Hancock or Prescott, Beecher or Brooks, because we are forgetting the fact that money is for life, and not life for money. No man can realize the benign power in wealth until he sees the forces stored up in money liberated and employed for the enrichment of life. When men are blinded by a course and grovelling greed they inevitably lose sight of life at the point where it is most worth seeing—that unapproachable, imperishable beauty that gives to life its real value.

Estimating life in terms of the dollar

And just here we are made to feel the treacherous falseness of the material estimate of life. In no way is this more easily recognized than when a man is estimated by his worth in money. Dr. Van Dyke gives an account of a banquet when "two great railroads and the major part of the sugar and oil in the United States sat down with three gold-mines and a line of steamships." "How much is that worth?" asks the curious inquirer. "That man," answered some walking business directory, "is worth a million dollars, and the man sitting next to

Not at all. It is not wealth that makes a man or poverty that unmakes him. The real worth of life is to be found not in the things a man has or does not have, but in what he is. We need to revalue our values in the light of His star who placed the things of the soul above all else to be prized. We need to study nature and nature's God, as did Robert Burns, that we may see beauty in "the fold of clouds, in the slant of trees, in the glint of flowing waters, in the mists trailing over the hills, that our minds may be wrapped in a kind of enthusiasm for Him, who in the language of the Hebrew bard, 'walks on the wings of the wind.'"

Discussion Between Faith and Science

Perhaps nothing in our day has bred such innumerable errors and countless perplexities as the confusion which has arisen from the discussion between faith and science. Nothing can be more amusing than the rivalry with which men swallow anything bearing the name and label of science. Let a man put forth any kind of dogma and call it scientific and it will be accepted by many as indisputable truth. Some have gone to the length of believing that science is all knowledge and religion all faith. And it is not to be wondered that contentions have arisen, when one book varieties of "Religious Experience," by William James, is allowed to pass for a scientific study of religious experience. One would think that the author was writing "a thesis on the methodology of religion," dealing almost entirely with what might seem to be its excesses and eccentricities. He seems to lose sight of that deep stream of faith and vision, which has been flowing on down the ages and making fruitful that which was barren and desolate.

It is manifestly absurd to assume the defensive attitude toward science, as though we were afraid of fact, for when we come to the study of religion we find that science and religion both rest upon the same fundamental basis of faith, and both attest, each in its own manner, the kinship of man with God. Still religion is what is meant when she brings to task that type of scientist, who would translate all forces and qualities back into material terms, and looks on the soul of man as nothing more than a mass of matter, and places the fungus of the field on a parity with the genius that lies within man. There is something in the nature of man that is at eternal enmity with any theory that appraises in like value the sap of the tree and the spirit of the saint, because unconscious matter has no relevancy against the spiritual order.

For is man to stand abashed in the presence of that bewildering contrast of his apparent littleness and the overwhelming vastness of the physical universe. Lord Kelvin has given us a hint of the incredible richness of the spiritual world, with its thousand million suns and planets. In comparison with this measureless expanse of space, our earth is but a pin-point. As one astronomer says: "If God had a spirit, and one of His angels to discover this tiny planet amongst the glittering noets of His stars, it would be like sending a child out on some vast prairie to find a speck of sand at the foot of some blade of grass." What then is man with his petty cares and fleeting life? Pascal says: "Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed. The whole universe should arm itself to crush him—a vapour, a drop of water suffices to kill him. But though the universe should crush him, man would still remain noble, because he knows that he dies, and the advantage which the universe has over him." The universe is unconscious of its own vastness. It is, and will always be a mass of brute, unintelligent matter. It never felt the touch of its Creator's hand, and we may be very sure that in the scale of God's judgments its vastness has no value against a spiritual order. God is a Spirit, and spiritual values with Him must be supreme.

Religion Not a Matter of Scientific Experiment

Science is rapidly coming to see that its method does not exhaust the universe and that an eminent scientist has recently said, "If we dogmatize in a negative direction, and say that we can reduce everything to physics and chemistry, we gibbet our nature as a negative pedant, and are falling far short of the richness and fullness of our human birthright." God cannot be discovered by analysis, neither can he be understood by experiment. He will not be found by exploration of the universe, or by mere investigation of cold facts. Said one: "I have searched the heavens for years and have not found God. His failure was not surprising, neither was my same man disappointed. We do not test friendship by the stethoscope, nor God by telescope or microscope." We can know man by dissecting him, we know him by some quality that is higher and nobler than physical analysis. We may examine his brain, his sinews, his bones, his arteries and fail to find the touch of his genius, or the force of his love. From a scientific standpoint we may fall in tracing the movements of his inward life, but still we shall know him through that mysterious and inexplicable communion that exists between our souls.

No experiment in apologetics can suffice to satisfy mere scientific curiosity. As Dr. Fitchett has expressed it: "Facts are not to be applied under its own condition and laws, and these conditions are personal to the subject." Spiritual knowledge is very different from mere intellectual apprehension. We attain to the knowledge of a fact mentally by examination, by comparison, by the process of analyzing and defining it, but we cannot know a thing spiritually by becoming like it. We may know the theory and the philosophy of music, but we cannot know music until our souls respond to the appeal of its enchanting melody. One of the sad defects of our age lies in the fact that too many men do their thinking in the light of what they find in the sub-human world and the methods employed in its study. In a hot debate, Huxley told his opponent to dissect a cockroach and learn the truth. But this is not the only road to truth, for the soul of man is far more noble than the anatomy of a dead cockroach. We cannot learn below man all that we need to know for the interpretation of the life of man. What cannot be found in the sub-human world does not exist for many men, because they fail to take into account the fact that the laws of the soul are as authentic, as reliable, as uniform as anything which can be found in the study of non-human life.

The Reverent Type of Scientist

Still it is encouraging to note the reverent attitude with which the scientist of today is dealing with the spiritual element in life, and how far science has journeyed since Huxley. This may be seen from the words of an eminent scientist before the British Association for the Advancement of Science: "Genuine religion has its roots deep down in the heart of humanity and the reality of things. It is not surprising that by our methods we have failed to find it. There is a principle of relativity

here; and we are deaf and blind, therefore, to the imminent grandeur around us, unless we have insight enough to recognize in the woven fabric of existence, flowing steadily from the loom of an infinite progress towards perfection, the ever-growing garment of a transcendent God." This betokens a new method of dealing with old problems, and the coming of a new type of mind—a kind of scientific spirituality which studies the truths of faith with the care and caution of science, while keeping the warmth and glow and power of faith. As for our part, we must live with open minds, welcoming every ray of light, knowing that all truth confirms a true faith, and that he who seeks the truth is obeying a noble impulse. We want nothing but the truth and our house of faith must be built upon the rock of reality to insure permanency. When we have a reverent, God-fearing science and a type of religion noble enough to take the last found fact of science and read its meaning in the light of God then we shall realize something of the privilege that springs from freedom of the truth and our futile disputations shall cease to an end.

Amid the confusions which are springing up all about us, it is well for us to remember the famous saying of Pascal: "The heart has its reasons, which reason knoweth not," and that mighty truths that make us men are the most authentic notes that echo through our mortal years. There is something within us that is deeper and broader than mathematical calculation, and in the higher matters of life the appeal is to be to the largest and noblest reason. No man can study religion who does not bring a human heart with him to the great investigation. There is one temple into which we may enter and meet with the Great Invisible, and that temple is the heart of man. When we come to the study of religion we find that science and religion both rest upon the same fundamental basis of faith, and both attest, each in its own manner, the kinship of man with God. Still religion is what is meant when she brings to task that type of scientist, who would translate all forces and qualities back into material terms, and looks on the soul of man as nothing more than a mass of matter, and places the fungus of the field on a parity with the genius that lies within man. There is something in the nature of man that is at eternal enmity with any theory that appraises in like value the sap of the tree and the spirit of the saint, because unconscious matter has no relevancy against the spiritual order.

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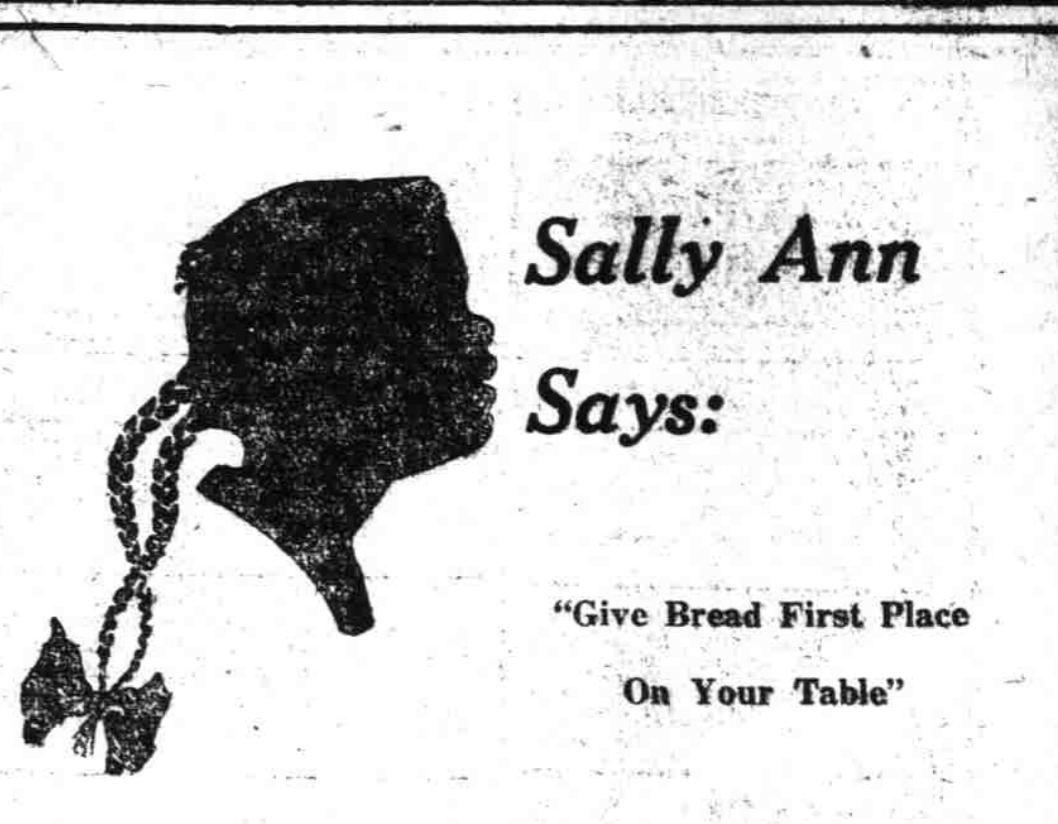
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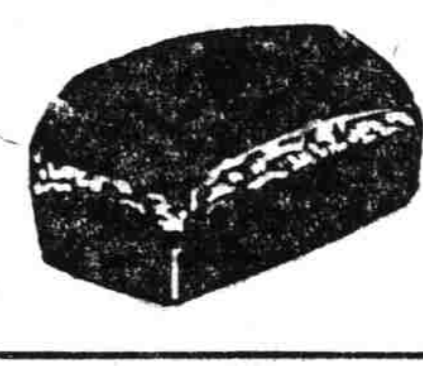
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