

## ETERNAL LIFE BEGINS

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HE world has often stopped to scratch her head at the anomalies which crop up in the lives of her intellectual giants. Genius has been branded erratic because it has so often deviated from the beaten path of the generality. Indeed, a host of anecdotes, cherished as history, have embalmed the foibles of learned men whose learning has long since been forgotten. The fringe is an object of wonder; the garment itself is passed over. Socrates' bald head and cantankerous wife, Diogenes' lamp and tub, Isaac Newton's fits of abstraction, Edison's hours of sleep—all these are known to people who know little more of the characters to whom they belonged. Puzzling and therefore interesting is the enigma of intellectual greatness wedded to singular and extraordinary traits. Yet nothing, I suppose, does the populace deem more enigmatic than the spectacle of profoundly learned men who have strode the wide halls of knowledge stooping to enter the dream house of fantastic belief. This is considered an anomaly worthy of the name. Pet foibles can be understood; all men have them. But science and faith in the same individual,—horrors. The wonders of the world hold nothing greater than this. Holding on to a kink and wisdom, this is amusing; adhering to the dogmas of the Catholic Faith and wisdom, that is just a brain cracker. It has probably caused some to repeat, in more prosaic fashion perhaps, the sentiment of the poet that "Great wits are sure to madness near allied, and thin partitions do their bounds divide."

Church-going assigned as a proper task for women is the outgrowth of this divorce between Faith and Reason handed down at the bar of popular opinion. The tradition of woman's ineptitude for genuine intellectual attainment and the current idea that the feminine element of the human race lives on its feelings give birth to the attitude of making religion the lady's job. She can not think very capably so give her an outlet to her desires in some faith or other. Lean learning makes a fat faith. Our great male makes mock of mystery for the grey matter under his scalp renders unnecessary any flight to a futile faith. Belief in a creed places the bar sinister on a man's in-

tellectual standard, because in Faith there is none of the rich blood of reason; it is vitalized by a weak stream of urges and desires. Yet legions of voices from history past and present are raised to protest this judgement. Lives which are marked with signal achievements in every branch of science and human knowledge stand forth to give the lie to the assertion that Faith of its nature excludes the intellectual. Not pigmies either are these men, nor were their contributions to science only mediocre. In astronomy, in biology, in physics, in anatomy, their names still live. Nor is it with theories or opinions that they are associated but with laws and principles and methods which are the very alphabet of their respective subjects. Yet these men who had outstripped their fellows in the wisdom of this earth would tell us that they had no less sure knowledge of their Faith than they had of their science.

The Catholic scientist knows and he believes. In knowing he believes, and in believing he knows. Pasteur, through the glass of his microscope, saw the multiplying bacteria in his test tube of gravy. His name has become a household word through that experiment. On its findings governments everywhere have enacted rigid laws on the sterilization of food products. A loud laugh would probably greet the endeavor to tell an enlightened intellectual that the caption "Pasteurized" on top of the bottle from which was taken the cream for his morning coffee, was traceable to the Faith of a nineteenth century Frenchman. But the contention would be true. Faith runs all through the fabric of everyday life. It plays an important part in all scientific inquiry; in the scientific inquiry of others as well as of Pasteur. Through the lense of his microscope he saw the phenomenon which has initiated the modern method of food preservation. He believed in that microscope. Experience, present and past, furnished him a reason for thinking it true. The apparatus was true; what it revealed would be true. Through it he saw a few centimeters of meat gravy growing moldy with age and containing millions of tiny entities multiplying every minute. With mental eyes, he saw the mysteries of God. His Faith was not a microscope for it could make no analysis of the things it looked on. It could not part the outer veil of the Infinite to search the ceaseless activity of the Almighty, as his microscope could peer through the greasy liquid to see the life within it. But, though not a microscope, his Faith was a glass which showed him in some way the mysteries of God. He had reason for holding the facts which the instrument in his laboratory showed him, because it was true, authentic. More reason had he for holding the doctrines exposed to him by Faith, for he knew that the medium by which he

saw them was more certainly true. That medium was God. God's truth was more certain than the truth of any microscope. If what he saw by Faith could not be put down in minute and exhaustive detail on finely ordered charts such as he used for his chemical experiments, the fault was in the inability of his mental eyes to grasp those truths. Like an X-ray machine, Faith shows truth. It pictures all that lies hidden in God, but only in shadowy fashion. That it shows truly is certain, for its light is the word of God.

This is the whole background of Faith,—assent of the mind to doctrines because God has revealed them. It is intellectual acceptance on the authority of another. Take away the value of authority and scientific achievement would be seriously retarded. Authority is a stream which nourishes the tree of human knowledge. Dam up the stream and if the tree does not wither, still its fruits will be fewer. The scientist shut away in his study, noting carefully the results of an investigation, brings into play different sorts of mental acts, acts used by all people, those who dig tombs as well as those who dig in tomes. In every notation there is an unconscious assent to the rudimentary principles, the first rays of knowledge to cast themselves over the waking mind—that a man who is alive is not dead, that half a pie is more than none, that you can't eat your pie and have it, and so on. Also he has the long-worked-for conclusions which come from garnering bits of knowledge and putting them together. He compares and argues and deduces and so comes to conclusions. Were these the only sources upon which a man could rely, the span of a human life would be all too insufficient for an exhaustive study of any one field of knowledge. This scientist, and any scientist, and anyone at all assents to truths which he did not know naturally and which he could never have figured out for himself. He accepts countless statements on authority. He believes things even in his scientific works. Doubtless, Luther Burbank, unbeliever though he was, in his work of plant-grafting assented to and used the principles worked out by Mendel two generations earlier. Copernicus overthrew the geocentric theory of the universe centuries ago; in our own day his teaching is among the a, b, c's of Astronomy. A Catholic scientist assents to the testimony of a fellow scientist and he assents to the doctrines of his Faith. What is the difference between the two acts? This is the difference: he accepts the other's word, knowing it may be wrong; his assent to the Faith is unquestioned and precludes any fear of error for the speaker of its doctrines is God who can neither deceive nor be deceived. That the doctrines are not completely comprehended does not matter. The reasonable mind sees that in bowing

down to doctrines veiled in the shadows of incomprehensibility but mounted on the unshakeable pedestal of God's authority, man's intellect is raised and enlightened, for then it is in contact with Truth itself.

When John Stoddard and Alfred Noyes, agnostics, men accustomed to say yea only to that which fell within their vision, embraced the Church, they made an act of Faith in her doctrines. The charge would be made, perhaps with a kind of pity, that they had allowed their minds to be saddled with the creeds of priestcraft, that they had given up the wider freedom of thinking their own thoughts for the empty formulas of a formless faith. Yet, in reality, by binding themselves they became free, by accepting the ideas of God they were in touch with wisdom unlimited. Saddled indeed they were. Bridled and saddled and reined that they might walk straight to Truth and not go off the road. Their act of faith gave intellectual allegiance to the Creeds, external expressions of doctrines grounded and founded on the word of God. Formerly they had followed a limited good, sought a walled in truth; now they were in contact with a good unfettered, and united to a truth without boundary. The Church and her Creeds are but means to show men a truth their own efforts would fail to strike, however straight their aim. They are the guide lines which offset man's chronic tendency to error.

Faith is generally handed the leper's garment of "feeling" by those who live on their feelings. A modern college lad in all the cocksureness of youth tells a Catholic editor: "Shut up in your own little world you do not even dream of the dominance of free thought in our educational institutions." Aside from the fact that we can thank Providence that our dreams are not concerned with such stuff, the remainder of his little sentiment needs distinction. We will admit the "dominance" and wink at the "educational" institutions, but what dominates them is neither free nor is it thought. Rather, in aiming at a freedom from thoughts which seem to hurt, a domination by desire is effected. Pride of intellect and fear of what accepting the Faith may lead to are the things which keep a man from the Faith. Contemporaneous education offers thought which frees from truth and freedom which fastens to evil. The welter of conflicting opinions which issue from the pens of college professors, and the unbridled rowdyism which characterizes the average campus indicate the kind of thought and freedom which is the achievement of modern education. It lacks that element which is the essence of education—leading the mind to truth which abides always. One Truth alone abides al-

ways. It is the Eternal Truth, and Faith is the way by which the intellect reaches it.

John Moody calls the history of his conversion, *The Long Road Home*, and it is well named, for I suppose the Church does seem like a home after one has been wandering about the dead-end alleys of modern thought. But, while by Faith "Eternal life is begun in us," it brings us to accept things which appear not. Only when those things do appear will we be really home, so we are still on the road going home. Faith is the aurora of beatitude, the first rays of eternal life which shine in the darkness of this way. It is the light before sunrise. It shines before us lighting up somewhat the home which is ahead of us. We are like travellers climbing to our mountain home in the early hours of the day before the sun has broken over the horizon. Home is there in the distance. The figure we love is at the gate. We see them both in shadow, only in dim outline. When at last the sun bursts forth in one glorious blaze of light, then we shall see before us in all their beauty the home and the beloved face. On the way up we saw them in very truth but only through the shadowy darkness; arrived, we shall see them as they are.

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