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Have the Scientists Done a Better Job?

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IT IS my purpose here to re-emphasize the contributions of the earnest, if only semi-literate, preachers and laymen who busied themselves day and night a hundred years ago in the vast region then called the West, busied themselves in the work of "saving men's souls from the 'everlasting burning.' "

To make our story clear, it is necessary to assess the raw material of the region which stretched from the eastern ridges of the Alleghenies to the Mississippi. At the fall of Napoleon the West was a dense wilderness broken in its upper reaches by the rolling prairie. Into this wilderness there had come the poorest of the eastern communities, carrying their possessions on their backs or on pushcarts, now and then on horseback. With these, in proportion of about one to three, there were Scotchmen, Irishmen, and Germans, the tang of the foreigner noticeable in their speech and behavior. Both the older American settlers and the new arrivals from Europe were themselves peasants or descendants of peasants, their strongest motive the possession of a tract of land and a home for themselves and children. Their dim past told them of a thousand years of subordination and oppression, of poor food, of labor on the manors of their lords, and of dirty cottages with straw-covered floors and leaky roofs.

In the wilderness they felt the magic touch of freedom and the dignity of land-ownership. They were new men, talking of liberty. But they were still ignorant, perhaps a fourth of them able to read their own names in print. Ignorance is first-cousin to superstition; and the Westerners brought their ghosts from the dark castles of Europe to the mysterious wilderness that knew no bounds. Here the terrific cyclones which swept great swaths of the forest before them, or the terrible river floods that carried away trees and cabins alike, were the work of strange powers. If the moon carried a wide, reddish ring about it, there was to be a disastrous storm; if the sun went down wrong, there was evil to come. The cows were bewitched in the forest and the milk was therefore poison to the baby. Corn must be planted when the moon was new and growing. If a cock crowed after sunset, there would be a death in the family. Life was shot through with fears and superstitions; the better-educated as well as the stupid were under the spell of spirits and signs: the inheritance of ancient Europe qualified by the uncertainties and the dangers of a boundless wilder-

So long as we leave this prestige in the hands of the historical disciplines, religion will continue to be classified with archaeology, and theological students will know why farmers and villagers staged a revolt in 1000 B.C., but they will be totally oblivious to the rural-urban conflict in 1928.

7. Finally what are the trends toward the building up of the emotional, artistic, and spiritual life of the students? Here it seems to me we are witnessing a distinct forward movement on the part of a number of seminaries. Union has just established a school of music; our seminary has the Hilton Chapel and its chair of drama; the stamp of the Oberlin Conservatory of Music has been on the Oberlin graduate for a generation. In all this there is the clear-cut recognition that religion is going to be furthered by the sky pilot and not the mechanic; that the man who has no imagination, whose life does not kindle with great emotion, who does not have a sense of the dramatic value of great issues, cannot succeed as minister. More than this, we are seeing that religion is caught and not taught, and that it makes no difference whether a man knows all the techniques of literary, philosophical, and sociological analysis if his own life does not kindle with emotion as he contemplates great religious issues. If he has not gifts in the expression of his thoughts in the natural language of religion, the great symbols of art and literature and music, he cannot be a leader of a congregation in worship. We are developing a whole new conception of the function of a service of worship. We see in pageantry and drama a means of arousing the most sublime emotions. We had at the Seminary a very compelling example of the value of dramatic presentation when our Department of Drama, taking the body of human material which Mr. Hutchinson had gathered in his study of the religion of two hundred farmers, made this concrete and living for us in the family of one farm family, who on an income of $25 per week, were compelled to absorb into themselves the shock of all the reforms which city people saw fit to project. The portrayal was so vivid that all came away with a new sense of the teaching power of dramatic production.

In the matter of religious music, Oberlin and Union have set an example which it seems certain will be followed on a large scale. Some even dare to believe that modern religion will cut for itself new channels of emotional expression. After long years of meagerness we may develop a Protestant symbolism which will do justice to the genius of a free church in a free society.

A New Aesthetic for Protestantism

By FRED EASTMAN

THE saints in the stained-glass windows of Graham Taylor Hall looked down the other evening on a form of art in striking contrast to their medieval beauty. It was a new play entitled *Milk* by Margueritte H. Bro, a student in our drama classes, presented by our Seminary Players. Nothing new about a play, of course, but this was much more than an ordinary play. It was the fruit of a new philosophy in theological education and of a new aesthetic for modern protestantism.

A bit of this play's history will illuminate the idea. Nearly two years ago the Seminary's Department of Social Ethics under the leadership of Professor Arthur E. Holt and his associate, Carl Hutchin-

son, in co-operation with the Federal Council of Churches, began a study of the social and ethical problems besetting the producers and distributors of milk in the six states which furnish Chicago's milk supply. The surveyors made case studies of hundreds of farmers and their families and finally presented their findings to a rural urban conference on October 29. In the meantime, however, the case studies had been presented to the drama department of the Seminary which undertook to discover the deeper emotional struggles in this modern social situation. Mrs. Bro took the material, brought her dramatic training and her insight to bear upon it, and created a one-act play. The Seminary Players took the manuscript and, together with the author, worked over it for weeks, suggesting additions here, deletions there, sharpening of character and action throughout, until it was finally ready for presentation to the public. The public had listened attentively to the speeches of the conference in the afternoon, but when it saw the play it pulled out its handkerchiefs and wiped its eyes. Its emotions had been touched and its sympathies aroused by the portrayal of the struggle in one farmer's home.

A new aesthetic for protestantism may lie in just such portrayals. Medieval Catholicism expressed its philosophy in paintings, sculpture, and stained glass, glorifying the supernatural and the mysterious. It found its beauty there—in God's investing human beings with supernatural powers and authority, usually through the church. Protestantism, on the other hand, finds God in the natural order, not outside it. The beauty it glorifies is chiefly the beauty of character—courage, kindness, mercy, love. The struggles in which it interests itself are not Catholicism's struggles of God with devils and such but the struggles of the human soul to keep its godward course through all the stresses and strains of everyday life. Just now in thousands of farmers' homes in the Middle West a bitter struggle is on against the spiritual despair that so often follows economic failure. To discover the spiritual forces in conflict in those homes, to enter sympathetically into them, and to find the beauty under the rugged surface —there is the task to which the author and her fellow-students set themselves in this play. And that is essentially an artistic undertaking.

Much of the art in modern Protestant churches—in hymns, in stained-glass windows, and in architectural symbolism —is dead because the philosophy underlying it is dead. Drama is a live art, because underlying it is the philosophy of struggle. The deepest struggles of our lives are emotional ones, and emotion is the very stuff of drama. One good play which holds the mirror up to a living spiritual struggle and reflects upon it the light of religion is worth more to the inner life of human beings in the midst of the struggle than all the medieval symbols that could be gathered in one building. Such use of drama in religion is not a fad, or a new wrinkle in religious education, or a means of "holding the young people in the church." It is a deliberate attempt to crystallize the beauty of the common life around us. The liquid fires of social sympathy and imagination are made to produce not only facts and programs but art.

The significance of this as an experimental project in theological education can hardly be overestimated. Trained researchers, gathering data and making case studies, presenting those studies to students in religious drama; these students searching out the emotional struggles, separating the essential from the unessential, and then portraying them in terms of character and situation—here is a teaching device rich enough in its possibilities to kindle the most sluggish imagination.

No textbooks here, no lectures; in their place living characters, in present-day battles, the issues of salvation and damnation here and now. Young men and women who can stand the rigors of such intellectual and emotional training may go out into the world with less book-learning, but they will have more understanding, more sympathy, more imagination, and more power to help human beings find fellowship with each other and with God.

As the last words of the foregoing paragraph were being written, a report of one of the students (Gregory Vlastos) was brought to the writer's desk. In it is this testimony to the value of drama study for a student for the ministry:

> The course on drama-production has awakened in me certain dormant reactions toward life as a whole, which had been numbed into a frozen lethargy by the over-intellectualism of the curriculum of the last two years. It has given me a kinaesthetic appreciation of preaching, in terms of an experience whose communication depends upon the re-enactment of the same by the communicant to his audience. It has left me with the overtone of a dramatic conception of life, as the ordered progress of inward experiences in response to an outward incidence of events. A study of the Indian drama has soothed a strong but inarticulate longing for a spiritual view of life which I have missed in the first two years, but which was so gloriously revealed in the passionately intellectual beauty of Indian art.