

# FAITH\*

ARTHUR L. MURPHY

ONE day in 1870 Joseph Lister was making his ward rounds at the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. It was a Sunday, I believe, and Sunday rounds were a bit special. Lister always wore his frock coat and his cane swung gaily as he strode with brisk, long steps up the hospital drive. There was more time for close study of his cases on Sunday and time, too, for a little joke here and a chat there, bits of psychotherapy springing easily from the broad kindness of his nature, essential bits in the process of healing. As the rounds came to an end this morning and Lister made his way down the drive his faithful old nurse, Mrs. Porter, watching the last swish of his coat-tails from her ward window, said to her assistant, "I think it is the little ones and the old ladies he likes best." That is the text of my words to you this afternoon.

Now why should such a text apply to you? No matter that you sit wrapped in the hoods and gowns of your well won wisdom, you are not old women. No matter how fresh, eager and beautiful your upturned faces, your accomplishments today deny you the epithet of little ones.

Could it be that in their littleness and in their frailty, the very young and the aged possess a gift which many who are strong and learned may lack—a gift that like the flame of a candle burns brightest with its first flare and again with the final flickering spurts before gutting itself in darkness?

The surgeon who works in human flesh and human spirit must use his greatest skill in babyhood and in age, so as not to disturb vitally the unstable flame of life. Whereas in the young adult, strong with physical vigor, he can give full vent to his operative yearnings, confident that the body will respond well to his boldest thrusts. Why, then, do so many surgeons, like Lister, with the added worry and responsibility upon them, still like the little ones and the old women best?

Would it surprise you if I said it was because the little boy on his hard, flat bed of boards, with the tubercle bacilli gnawing at his spine, can, by straining, look out his window to the sky beyond and see elves peeking at him through the clouds? Or because the old lady, down the corridor in 416, dying of advanced cancer, can pass her empty half-drugged hours watching a demure miss, with hoop-skirt and poke-bonnet, step down from the picture beyond the foot of her bed and dance the state-

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ly sets of her youth? Perhaps you think those are not good reasons. Let us look at them from another view.

The job of living in to-day's civilization is hard. The first four years of a woman's life are her own, but she is too young to do very much with them. Comes five, and anxious parents are already watching for the first glimmer of reason to whisk her off to school—off to begin an education that will really end only with the grave. Her reason is wheedled and trained in rational patterns. Her memory is drilled. Facts pile upon facts in her growing mind—the simple, the basic, serving only as a foundation for the more and more complex; but always facts.

“Only dogs can bark. This creature barks. Therefore this is a dog.”

Science must be logical; but she does not acknowledge conclusions attained by argument alone. John Hunter, great English surgeon of two centuries ago, wrote to Sir Edward Jenner verging on the discovery of vaccination, “Don't think” he said, “Try—Be patient. Be accurate.” Koch, the great German pathologist, contemporary of Lister's, wrote his famous postulate on how to prove that a given bacterium causes a given disease. First, he said, you must find the living germ in the infected body. You must grow it on a culture in the laboratory. Separate it from the other organisms which may contaminate its growth. Inject it into another body. Produce there the symptoms of the disease. In that body find again the same germ. Then, only, can you say, this organism is the cause of this disease. And so he discovered the tubercle bacillus.

Science is exact, unemotional. Science is made of facts; little bits of substance you can hold in the palm of your hand; numerals, bacilli, crystals; bits of reality you can see; that you can hold aloft and say “Look what I have found”!

Science is a demanding mistress, and as our world grows, her intricacies and her advances take more and more place in our brain. To find room for her in our hearts as well, we need follow her far on the road toward her Ultima Thule where all science must, as it approaches perfection, become an art. It is only when you have travelled, wearily, through the dust of the day and groped through the blackness of the night that you come to appreciate most fully the myriads of wonders and mysteries that science can show you but alone cannot explain. Perhaps you have already travelled far enough to understand



this and love science all the more for her failings. Perhaps you believe that in her lies the answer to all your questions.

If you have not, or cannot, or will not, follow science to an understanding of her limitations; if the world grabs you up, if you must have time for this and time for that; earn dollars for this and dollars for that; if you must ride the modern merry-go-round of twelve hours to work and four to relax and eight to sleep, six days to labor and one to rest, fifty weeks to work and two to play, before working again; if you cannot follow science to her uttermost frontiers and yet have been so inculcated in her elementary tenets that you accept nothing without factual proof, what have you then? You have only that which you have made, that which you have found, facts, material, substantial but small and often unimportant, facts that you hold in the palm of your hand. Indeed, a sorry state.

And what is the alternative? The alternative is to have faith.

You are happy here to have become wise in halls built in the tradition of the great faith, and to have had nurtured within you that with which each man is born. Not all people of this world are as fortunate. To many, faith is an agent to be used only when more crass, and to them, more substantial means have failed them; or when they are scared. As you go out among them, rubbing shoulders in the grubby labor of getting your daily bread, you must guard against the materialism of ignorance. Faith cannot be held in the palm of the hand. The harder you grasp at it with physical force, the more evanescent it becomes. It must be wooed in the heart and wed in the highest strata of the mind.

At Duke University in recent years serious workers are attempting to prove faith with statistics. Their experiments are fascinating, and many are convincing. They have shown that there are influences in the ether about us which the keenest microscope or telescope cannot see, and the most sensitive radar cannot hear. It may well be that some day a man will rise from Duke or another of our great Universities and say, "See here, with my mathematics and palaeontology, with astrophysics and biochemistry I have proved the apocalypse of St. John." I say, that may be. With faith, we shall not need him.

Faith in its broadest sense, beggars definition. I do not know how the dictionary describes it, but it is the smile on the new baby's face, before his eyes can focus on the world.

It is the elves peeking through the clouds at the boy with the tuberculous spine. In the haze of sickness and old age it may be the demure little miss who steps dancing from the picture frame or the benign peace on the face of the old lady as she passes to her reward. The surgeon likes to believe that in his association with the two earthly extremes of the infinite, a little extra faith has rubbed off and clings to his coat-sleeves. In its elements it is the same God-given instinct that too often through the middle years lies, half-buried beneath the mortal yearnings of acquisition and bodily comfort.

Faith has kept mankind alive through pestilence and massacre, injustice, persecution and war, since civilization began. The wars of aggression we have seen and fear to see again are promoted by men of faith, too, men with faith in evil. True faith is peace and good accomplishment. It is the stronger.

Have faith in yourself, your country. Faith in your ideal, whatever it may be, will make it real. With faith, if it be a true burning faith, must go the labor that builds reality from mental blueprints, accomplishment from dreams. I firmly believe that given faith and the will to work, you may hang your ideal as high as Sirius and climb to it with unfaltering step.

Faith is your most precious possession. With it you can make a million dollars, or go to Heaven when you die. You might do both, if you have enough faith. May I, without sacrilege, paraphrase the works of Saint Paul, "And now there remain faith, hope, charity, these three; but the first of these is faith."