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Walks With
Men

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THE GOD WHO WALKS WITH MEN

FROM an older day we hear there was a time when God walked with men. That ancient belief is now a faded rose that has lost its glory, but it keeps a precious fragrance which still stirs the heart with wonder and with hope.

God walked with men! The idea seems to change the world from a great, implacable machine into a place of adoration and fulfilled love. It makes us ask, do we live in a universe of mechanical atoms, of strange, perfect stars and suns looking down without feeling or pity upon our griefs and lonely failures, or can we be actually living in the compassionate heart of God?

How could such an exalted idea ever become lost and forgotten? Was it merely a beautiful but empty dream? Or was it a sublime truth we have sold for the price to pay for personal and

selfish desires?

This world, we know too well, without a God who walks with men, imprisons us in a vast loneliness where we have to live with our own discontent, our failure, lacking real purpose or aim. It is not enough to become at times part of some officially heralded movement pronounced necessary and noble, if the nobility does not penetrate into our own hearts and redeem us from our unsatisfying selves. But the discontent lingers and the hope occasionally returns.

What has happened to human beings that they can be so skillful in doing great things but so helpless when they turn their wonderful powers to the greater task of ordering their own hearts?

I

AGES ago the Greeks, the Romans, the German peoples and the Scan-

dinavians attempted to fill this world of loneliness with imagined gods who walked with men. Their poets invented nearby heavens filled with deities whom the people worshipped as gods. These deities embodied the hopes, longings, loves and passions of human beings. Entering their daily lives, the imaginary gods and goddesses, fauns, elves and sprites, empowered to punish or reward, seemed for a long time to satisfy the up-reaching heart and still the restless mind.

The rise and spread of revealed religions, and the coming of the attitude of science which replaced the imagination of childish peoples, denuded the skies, the mountains, the forests and the fields of all these charming man-invented deities. Once more the world became a place of loneliness, unless people could find solace and healing in the proclamations of great religious doctors.

Mighty waves of faith did spread over the pagan world. There was something which the disconsolate person could find to cherish in his secret heart. A purer love and a more ardent adoration of God gave to our fathers and mothers a source of strength and courage—a sense of consecration to their Creator.

The religious systems, too, have attempted to overcome the loneliness of hearts, using the genius of architects, sculptors, painters and poets to create impressive cathedrals and colorful pageants to draw men away from themselves and plunge them into the ecstasy of a high communal experience.

However deeply our fathers and mothers drank of this golden cup, they did not succeed in handing their sense of fulfillment down to us. Nor could they express the nobility of their faith through the redemption of a warring, divided society.

II

WE of today are spiritual orphans. We cannot live as idle heirs of any fortune accumulated in the past. The precious treasure of faith has been wasted in wars, revolutions and the hideous tyrannies which have afflicted our time.

It is very plain to us now that nothing can compensate for the loss of the direct, simple, heart-transforming power of the love of God. However high men rise in their organization of formal worship of God, their work does not take the place of God. Beneath the clamor of religious systems we find with disconsolate fear that the human heart stands alone. Happiness? Yes, there are people who love us and people we love. There are many useful things to do from morning until night. Nevertheless we know there is a conscious solitude even in the happy heart. The world about us is terrifying, people become

more and more abandoned to pleasure as a flight from the solitude which we know too well is the emptiness where God has not brought His compassion, His understanding, His strength and His healing. It is within this emptiness at the center of being, that our anxieties are distilled.

Of course no one shows his anxieties to others if he can conceal them. We learn to put up a brave front in order to conceal that secret inner void. We talk about everything except the one great thing that really counts. Perhaps we conform to opinion and the public standard of manners and efficiency so successfully that after a while we regard the front as our real self. But if we do this, sooner or later some crisis overtakes us, strikes at our very heart, and makes us more conscious than ever how weak and helpless human beings are without God. What we call strength is often no more than the habit of closing

the heart, and this is the most disastrous weakness.

III

THEY teach us today that the universe is vast beyond comprehension. In it the little earth, our home, has become reduced to insignificance. There must be a God to create and rule this mighty universe, but can a God so majestic and powerful come down to walk with men? The beautiful old stories of God do not match the new stories of scientific discovery. The world has changed. There seems to be no connection between our modern universe and the simple spirit of pure love for which we long. Everything has become organized and technically perfected except people themselves.

Who is the God who has walked with men? When does He appear? How does He disclose Himself? Can we still seek

and find a deathless love that will claim our erring hearts, touch them with passion and save us from ourselves?

Today a wonderful event has taken place. People have thought that religion was something that happened centuries ago, and its story was complete and finished. Though everything has changed during the past few generations, nothing, they supposed, could change the systems of belief that have been in existence and ruled so long. The world could be uprooted, but God, they tell us, remained silent while millions suffered and the nations lost their way.

What happened was the bringing forth of a new truth about God's love for mankind. A great being in the East has revolutionized religion. Though he was persecuted and resisted, His words have been carried slowly but steadily to all parts of the world.

This is the essence of what this heroic, sublime and inspired Person has

told the world today. First, that the almighty God of the universe, Creator of man, remains forever concealed, too glorious for any human to approach. Second, He sends His Spirit to inspire a perfect man upon our earth and through Him pour forth His love and His saving truth to all who will listen and believe. Third, God reveals His divine nature and purpose to mankind age after age, so that the world is never left without His assurance of love and redemption.

This perfect being in whom the celestial Spirit enters and takes possession of the man's own personal powers is the Prophet, or as some say, the Messenger or the Messiah. There is no way to God except through His chosen Messenger.

In His Prophet, *God walks with men*. Through Him, God's passionate love for men is poured forth and His inspired guidance written or spoken as inspiration for individuals, races and nations.

IV

GOD walks with men! Alas, that in this humble human form some of the powerful leaders have failed to recognize the Spirit of God Himself. They have always resisted and condemned Him whenever He appears in the time of the world's greatest trouble. Though no human will can overcome God's will, the enemies of the Spirit have killed the Messenger and martyred those nearest and dearest to Him. Afterward, when darkened souls found that His message of love and immortality could not be suppressed, they did everything possible to alter its meaning and restrict its influence. They confined its free, universal, radiant love and living truth within a complicated system of theology, creed and ritual, which confuses all but a few, while proclaiming themselves defenders of the faith, and the champion of its mission.

But we are not concerned with sys-

tems and the great disputes about religion. Our longing is for the *God Who walks with men*. What we pray for is the infinite privilege of hearing His words with our own ears, admitting His love into our own hearts, and understanding His message with our own minds.

All of us have been taught to revere some Prophet's name and exalt His mission as explained to us in childhood and youth. But we have been warned that other Prophets are false messengers who arose solely to betray our inherited faith.

The sublime truth that comes to us today is that the Prophets are not hostile to each other, but identical beings all filled with the same Spirit and carrying out the same mission. Details of their Message changed from age to age because different conditions called for new treatment.

The miraculous bounty of our time

is that through this new revelation we can regard the religion of God as one universal faith, which passes through different periods of development but always upholds the one divine love and always works to bring people together as members of the one great human family.

God walks with men!

Let us fear no longer to search out for ourselves the tenderness, the ardor and the compassion of the love which God has poured forth through His Prophets, and to learn, with new minds, the infinite wisdom of His counsel.

The God Who walks with men is the Father of all humanity. There is no longer any religious reason for assuming that He cherishes only one race or one creed or that there is any divine word justifying prejudice and dissension among the many diverse peoples of the human race.

Since there is, beyond all our complicated doubting, a God Who walks with men, let us reverently draw near and join those throngs of people, those fortunate individuals and those dear companions actually standing in the presence of the Messengers who, one by one, stood forth, each in His own age, as the Witnesses and Spokesmen of God on earth. The tongues are different but the speech is one!

V

CAN the seeking heart make a better beginning of this joyous quest than to turn to the words of that great, heroic figure, Moses? Moses, we recall, arose among an exiled and enslaved people subject to the conquering might, the arrogant pride of the ancient Egyptian Empire. There was no daily reporting of His words and no description of His presence, but the recorded words carry full conviction that He expressed

God's love and truth to people exactly like ourselves.

The words are not many, but they do seem to lay a foundation for belief in one God and for love of humanity.

"Thou shalt have no other God before me . . . Thou shalt not kill . . . Love thy neighbor as thyself." God walked with men. He pointed the way, and when they took the way they were favored; but when they turned from the way, they fell into misfortune.

This view brings religion back to the individual. God has given religion to all and not made it a monopoly for any group to dispense for a profit. "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

But though the way was so plain, the people must have lost it and become as bewildered as people are today. For we find these terrible words spoken by a later Prophet: "Behold, the days come,

saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord; and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it."

What were they to seek—the words which they already possessed but had forgotten, or a new way to understand these words; or was it a new *word* they had to await?

God walked with other races also: To His people, Zoroaster said: "To enjoy the benefits of providence is wisdom; to enable others to enjoy them is virtue. He who is indifferent to the welfare of others does not deserve to be called a man." How this lifts the heart! "The best way of worshipping God is to allay the distress of the times and to improve the condition of mankind."

"Have the religions of mankind no

common ground? Is there not everywhere the same enrapturing beauty, beaming forth from many thousand places? Broad indeed is the carpet which the All-Loving One has spread, and beautiful the colors He has given it." "Diversity of worship has divided the human race into countless nations; from all these dogmas we may select one—Divine Love."

Another Prophet, Muhammad, said: "God is the light of the Heavens and of the earth . . . God guideth whom He will to His light, and God setteth forth parables to men, for God knoweth all things." He also said: "There is no compulsion in religion." Are we not to accept truth freely and cherish it as a blessing rather than bear it as a heavy load? "We make no distinction between any of His Messengers", Muhammad also said. Thus the different peoples, sharing their holy words, can draw closer in fellowship, acknowledging one God.

When Buddha walked with men, He said, "As a mother even at the risk of her own life protects her son, her only son, so he who has recognized the Truth cultivates good will without measure among all beings, unstinted, unmixed with any feeling of making distinctions or showing preferences." "To him in whom love dwells, the whole world is but one family." Among the Hindus their Prophet said, "Like the body that is made up of different limbs and organs, all mortal creatures exist depending upon one another." "Toward all that live, I am the same . . . Whoever devoutly worships Me, they are in Me and I in them."

VI

HOW inspiringly God walked with men when Jesus went about among the people in His day! His spirit of compassionate understanding, poured out upon humble individuals, upon the

sick, the blind and the erring, along with His firm repudiation of hypocrisy and pride, could only be a pure reflection of the power God vested in Him. Perhaps these healings were physical miracles He performed, but they might also have been spiritual healings, to make the inwardly blind see the light of Truth and the religiously dead arise to a new life of faith. Certainly He attributed all His works to the divine Power, and the religion He preached was based on worship of God, not of Himself. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." When an enemy asked Him which was the great commandment, He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind . . . And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love

one another.”

His work was done among a people whose ancestors had received a religion from God through Moses. The opposers used that religion as their justification. Can God's religion oppose itself? Or do the people abandon the spirit of their religion and exploit its outer forms and special privilege, so that a new Prophet must appear? The world of Christ's Beatitudes is a heavenly world, full of illumination and inner peace, but it has not conquered the world of our human strife nor made peace the great law over the nations.

Is it for ever to be thus? The Prophet's vision a dream, and our struggles and failures the reality? A future heaven but a present chaos? “I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”

VII

THIS greatest challenge to the human heart has been squarely met by the Bahá'í teachings. They explain that all the Prophets came to prepare the people, race by race or nation by nation, for existence in this very age in which we were born—the age when all peoples would be brought together and have to learn how to live together or else be faced with destruction. The learning how to live together means living according to the standards set for them by all the Prophets. The being faced with destruction means attempting to solve our great, world problems without any true, religious spirit.

Stated that way, anyone can see that all our wars today are the sufferings we impose on each other as punishments for breaking the laws of God. He does not punish us—we punish ourselves.

But how can we bring such a terrible period of suffering to an end? By wor-

shipping the one God, the Father of all peoples, and living according to the laws and principles His Prophet, Bahá'u'lláh, has revealed for humanity today. The Spirit which animated the Prophets of ancient times has animated Bahá'u'lláh and inspired His words with such truth that every sincere person can say to himself, "Religion is not dead—it is reborn. Religion is not something for primitive people living only simple lives—it is a world-unifying principle, a majestic World Plan for the redemption of a stricken society." The Bahá'í teachings call to the soul, summoning us to serve in a supreme crusade to establish peace and justice through divine Law. Nothing greater can enter the heart than this pure flame in the living God who, once more, has walked with men.

"Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee." Here speaks the very heart of religion. To the downcast soul, shrinking from its responsibilities, the

Prophet says: "Thou art My dominion and My dominion perisheth not, wherefore fearest thou thy perishing? Thou art My light and My light shall never be extinguished, why dost thou dread extinction? Thou art My glory and My glory fadeth not; thou art My robe and My robe shall never be outworn. Abide then in thy love for Me, that thou mayest find Me in the realm of glory."

Here are His words to us about brotherhood: "Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from the same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest."

The Prophet uncovers a deep source

of life within our personality which we can never attain by our own effort. The love that God offers us is universal. When we partake of it we know that the same transforming spirit enters all others who believe, and therefore by this sharing of universal love we become united.

How this world can attain peace is proclaimed in these noble words: "The sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its people in one universal Cause, one common Faith." When we grasp this divine truth we are able to make our lives count in the terrible struggle now going on between the way of God and the way of unregenerate man.

To accept and to assimilate truth we must prepare ourselves by willingness to give up errors, prejudice and half-truths even though, or rather especially when, these seem to have become the bulwarks of a decadent society. Truth

cannot enter the life which consciously profits by error. The gulf between the words of the Prophet and human intellect is wider than this earth, but it can be bridged by every sincere seeker.

“The time fore-ordained unto the peoples and kindreds of the earth is now come. The promises of God, as recorded in the Holy Scriptures, have all been fulfilled.”

God walks with men!

Shall we not arise and walk with Him?

For further information contact the Bahá'í Center in your city. If none listed, write National Bahá'í Headquarters, 536 Sheridan Road, Wilmette, Illinois 60091.