

an officer of the army—and we found out he was in the guardhouse most of the term of his enlistment," in childish protest against the slight put upon the family honor by their son. Yes, putting the matter in its true light, the one-time darling of the household was rather given to exaggeration.

"Well," she said as she set down to rest a moment, calling instructions to the girl in the next room, "let us hope that for the sake of the occasion he will not make a show of himself before the rest of the folks. I almost doubt that story—"

"About him being the wonderful theatrical manager?—so do I," breaking in on her train of thought, shrewdly. "He boasts of his power and money he has, but I have my serious doubts; I certainly have!" So that it was plain to be seen that a reception awaited the luckless Benjy that was hardly in his lordly thoughts.

The day arrived finally, cold, snowy and with a tang in the air that was suggestive of good home cheer and welcome food—such as the town restaurants and hotels didn't serve, the old innkeeper felt sure. The old couple awaited the first arrival with the eagerness of children. Then at length began the grand arrivals, with much hugging and kissing, and at times a few tears; looking upon the dear old faces, that had always been warm and kindly for them, the boys and girls began to have some emotions and compunctions, and whispered to each other their joy at having come—as well as stern resolutions never to stay away so long again.

In the big room that had always been sacred in the childhood days, there was much honest confessing of faults and covert crying. For a few brief moments the hollowness, the insincerity, the smallness of their sordid existence were borne in on them; their calloused consciences were softened for an instant, their mutual resolutions flowed thick and fast.

With the most of the members together again, pleasure succeeded remorse, and the room rang with jokes, old tales and stories of tricks played on innocent parents; business faded away for a time. At last Benjamin, the center of interest, arrived. Once the wife, wrapped from head to foot in costly furs, made her presence felt in the greeting, a look of amazement ran over the faces of her new relatives—for she was a wondrous beauty, charming and apparently overjoyed at the prospect of meeting the family of her big, handsome, bluffing husband. In the raptures over her and the three glorious children, they forgot the recently mingled doubts and fears as to her origin. It was hard for the skeptical brothers and sisters and their spouses to assure themselves that this was the black sheep, Benjy—lucky, as ever. He read their very thoughts and reveled in their distress and well-guarded amazement.

With the women in one group, the new daughter-in-law and her offspring about the old man fondling them happily, and the men in another, the old-time Benjamin left himself go; he hardly hated himself. He was, as of old, egotistic, arrogant, boastful—yet carrying his audience along with him when they would much rather be left behind, this wondrous Sinbad the Sailor. He enjoyed their discomfort to the utmost; yes, he was at the head of the managerial agency and fairly coining money—all the result of his talent and ingenuity. Sure, there must be something in it, they told each other—else, whence the glorious spouse?

Dinner was announced finally; the same old substantial, hearty affair for which they had often longed in fancy; a delight to those still possessed of the stomach requisite for its consumption—which, to tell the truth, one or two of them were not. Their enthusiasm was not shaded by their still sulking children—outside the three belonging to Benjamin. These latter were enraptured with the new grand-children, who, in turn, took them wholeheartedly to themselves.

But the twelve-year-old twins were frankly bored by the disregard for the finer things to which they were accustomed in the city; the simple life was not for them. As for the sixteen-year-old blase youth, he made no effort to conceal the sad waste of time in this dull spot; another time he fiercely assured his dotting parents, he would simply secede from the parental authority. Benjy, his wife and the three youngsters were in their glory. Yvonne fairly eclipsed the fair dames who had started out to patronize her. She had an air, a bearing, a graceful tact (due to her stage training) that simply left the sisters-in-law gasping.

They had sought to make an alien of her—to thrust her into the exterior darkness with her happy-go-lucky husband; nothing of the sort had been accomplished. Instead, the hit she made with her husband's parents elevated her beyond their reach.

As they came to the table, there ensued an awkward pause; the father had always said the grace before meals, but today he looked hopelessly about at the sons to take up the burden. For a moment there was an exchange of shamed, bored, half-amused glances.

"No use, Dad," finally blurted out George, to whom the honor seemed to fall, if to anyone. "If you expect me to ask a blessing, nothing doing. I forgot how years ago."

The rest merely glanced at each

other, then began to treat it as an uproarious joke. The father and mother crimsoned, and looked sadly at each other. Was it for this all the years of religious instruction?

"You wish for someone to say grace?" demanded Benjy's wife, with a smile. "Why, Ernest," to her eldest, seven years old, "you say it, sweetheart," and then to the vast astonishment of the guests, after making the Sign of the Cross, Ernest said the prayer. The meal went on, the joke being over with. Busy with her chat with the old invalid, who seemed enraptured at the attention the brilliant woman was giving him, Mrs. Benjamin was not aware for some time that her husband was appropriating more than his share of the conversation. Nor was it for some time that she became aware that her little ones, with their pretty acting ways, were being gently but energetically pumped by their new-found aunts and uncles. There was much subdued laughter, much sound that indicated embarrassment of some sort, but their mother for a long time was unaware of it.

At length, as the elder and mince pie came in, the pause caused her to look about; now she felt, rather than knew, that her husband had been running on in the old style; she sensed that his brothers were beginning to resent something; then before she could intervene, the storm burst.

"Oh, no, papa did not," prattled Ernest, for one moment Benjamin grew quiet—then essayed an attempt at mirth.

"How do you know that, dear?" insinuated George's wife with the cooing intonation of the deadly female.

"Cause," blurted out the young informer, "the man said if it wasn't for your wife and kids, I'd send you to jail."

For a moment, one dreadful moment, silence fell upon the table; the happy wives of the rest glanced triumphantly at their hubbies. Here was vindication, indeed! The fact that they had led an innocent child on to speak in this manner of his parent did not seem to be wrong in their estimation. Benjamin, his face deadly pale, glanced helplessly at his wife, from whose fine eyes flashed a fire that ought to have stricken the gossipers dead. Then, in the face of his distressed parents and angry wife, for once in his life, the recreant son arose to the occasion.

"Well," he said, with a deep breath, "I guess, boys, I might as well admit it, and shame the devil with the truth—"

"Benjamin!" called his wife, but he waved her to one side.

"I'm a down and outer—yes; she is the whole works. The thing to which the boy alludes was an actual fact. I got in bad—gave a check when I had no funds in the bank. I was four-flushing as usual; but my wife came to my help," proudly. "On condition that I turn the business over to her, they said they wouldn't push the matter." The Whitcomb Agency is—Yvonne Whitcomb, who, if you would like to know, glaring at the astonished sisters-in-law, "gave up a career on the concert stage to make a man of me. You see, she is—what none of the rest of you Whitcombs can boast—a good wife and mother, with children trained in a religious way that shames us all."

The honest confession cleared the sky at once; the pretended disapproval of the "foreign singer" evaporated. The satisfaction of his success raised hopes again in the breasts of parents who feared he was beyond an honest acknowledgment of his failings. The criticisms and bickerings of the morning gave way to a happier and more congenial feeling. When the parting hour came, there was every evidence that the gentle, unassuming manners of the good wife of the once hopeless younger son had won all hands over. The supercilious air of his elder brothers faded quite when it was made plain that to her the family owed its escape from the crowning disgrace of the weak Benjamin.—David Driscoll in Catholic Union and Times.

THE MODERNISTS AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Wilfrid Parsons, S. J., in America

In two preceding articles it has been shown that the issue raised by the Modernists in the current controversy in the Protestant sects has a much deeper bearing on religion than the single question of the Virgin Birth. Their denial of a doctrine held by the Church from the beginning has brought some to everybody the realization that the very foundations of Christianity are under dispute. That is why the dispute has found its way on to the front pages of the newspapers. With a sound instinct for new values, every editor in New York "played up" a series of events that the whole city, however dimly, realized affected life at its deepest places. It was not only the Virgin Birth that was argued in the sub-way, it was the whole religious question. In the depths of every heart there was stirred a passionate desire of knowing, of being sure.

"Can we know?" people were asking, "and if so, how do we know?" If the Churches have been teaching the Virgin Birth all along, why, science has proved it false, why, maybe the rest of what they teach must go, too. What foundation have we after all for our beliefs?

So the Virgin Birth was only one phase of the struggle, one sector was somehow made to depend the outcome of the whole battle. At a recent debate between a Fundamentalist and a Modernist the Modernist was declared the winner. After the decision was announced, a middle-aged lady in the audience was observed weeping bitterly, as if all were lost. But because the Virgin Birth was only one phase of the struggle, it is convenient as a point from which to examine the whole position and tactics of the Modernists, to judge if they are really so sound as their propagandists suppose them to be.

At the outset we can brush aside as irrelevant the claim the Modernists make that theirs is an effort to give reality to religion, to interpret religion to the modern world. No religion is worth the name if it cannot appeal to the modern world, and by the same token every religion does claim to make such an appeal. On this count the Catholic religion wins immediately, for it is clear to the most superficial observer that no religion has such a hold on its American members as the Catholic religion. Our crowded churches and the experience of pastors testify how deeply personal and sincere is the religion that American Catholics possess.

The Virgin Birth has been rejected by the Modernists on another ground, namely, that of freedom of conscience. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., writes to the World praising that paper for having said that "the root of this controversy . . . is in the right to freedom of conscience." Dr. Merrill declared on December 19, speaking of the Fundamentalists: "They want authority. We want liberty." Every Modernist who has spoken or written on the Virgin Birth has invoked his right to freedom as one of the grounds for his denials. What does such an argument amount to? Is there such a thing as liberty in this matter? Are we free to believe what we wish? Has any authority the right to impose certain beliefs on men? These are the questions the Modernists have raised. It is important to remark that these questions cannot be settled by saying, as the Modernists do: "This ought to be or that must not be. Every man is free. We must retain our liberty." The point to find out is solely if Christ, the Founder of Christianity, allowed us to be free. If He did not wish us to be free, then no amount of reasoning would make us free. Reduced to these dimensions, the question is easy. It is perfectly clear from many words of Christ in the Gospels that He did not intend us to be free. He intended His Apostles and their successors in the Church to be merely witnesses to His doctrine, to relate to the world what He had revealed. "Teach the whole world," He told them, "teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you. He who believes and is baptized, shall be saved. He who believes not, shall be damned. He who heareth you, heareth Me. He who despiseth you, despiseth Me." In all this talk about what Christianity is, it is good to get back to what Christ Himself thought of Christianity.

But this appeal to liberty in the mouth of the Modernists is only a slogan, a play to the American gallery. What they really have in mind is something more serious. Being mostly Rationalists, they will not admit that anything can be known except what may be discovered and understood by our unaided reason. This throws out the other way of knowing, namely through the testimony of witnesses, and in particular it throws out the Revelation by God of Divine mysteries. Modernism is really a denial of Revelation and hence of Christ's Christianity. Hence they will not take anything on authority in matters of religion, though it is certain that half of what they know in other matters, they know because someone told them. How irrational it is to say "I cannot know what God tells me," is clear when we reflect how many things we know because mere men tell us. The Church, which, by the way, by God's promise cannot err in the matter, tells me God has revealed that Christ was born of a virgin. If God says so, it must be true. Therefore I, too, know that Christ was born of a virgin.

"But science," say the Modernists, "has exploded the notion of the virgin birth." It would be interesting to know just what branch of science has done this thing. There are physical science, philosophical science, historical science, critical science. Philosophical science certainly has not exploded the doctrine, except in the minds of those held captive by the one-sided philosophy of Rationalism, which will not admit the possibility of our knowing anything in religion by the testimony of others, even of God. Nor has physical science exploded the doctrine, because it is outside the scope of physical science even to consider the matter. Physical science gathers the phenomena of nature and observes their laws, but it certainly cannot tell us what is or is not possible for God, Creator of nature, to perform. Historical science rather confirms than explodes the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. History, by a study of the Scriptural documents, tells us that the Virgin Birth actually occurred. There remains critical science, the science of the authenticity of the documents themselves. The Modernists have made a great

play of critical science. The researches of modern critical scholars, say they, have made it impossible for moderns to believe any longer in the Virgin Birth. The modern critical scholars they have in mind are the German subjectivist school of critics, to whom the American, English and French critics are a sort of echo. These German Protestant scholars have a process that is all their own. They start by saying that Revelation cannot be known or even made, and that miracles never happen, indeed cannot happen. Then they take up the documents. They find a passage that clearly teaches the Virgin Birth, such as those in Luke and Matthew set forth here last week. But the Virgin Birth is a miracle. Therefore it cannot have happened, therefore any passage that says it did happen is spurious, and its interpolation is due to myth, legend, or the desire to glorify Christ. Thus we have a perfect circle. The miracle of the Virgin Birth never happened because it is not in Scripture. It is not in the true Scriptures, because it is a miracle. That this is not an unfair description of the process I leave to any who are familiar with the writings of past Tubingen school, or of Loebstein or Pleiderer. As a matter of fact, critical science teaches that the Virgin Birth did happen, because both the passages in Luke and Matthew are found in every known Manuscript and every known translation earlier than the Manuscripts, and this is the only test known to science to judge of the genuinity of a text.

An example of the American echo of the German Rationalists is Dr. Elwood Worcester, quoted on December 19 in the Boston Transcript. Dr. Worcester starts with the assumption that Christ is not God. He then proceeds to show how it is that the Gospels seem to say that He is God. The early disciples, says he, made three attempts to glorify Jesus. The first was in Mark, writing on Christ's Baptism. This passage makes Jesus a very holy man, and the Gospel does not mention the Virgin Birth. The second attempt was made in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, who relate the Virgin Birth also. These attempts to show that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of David. The third attempt was made in John. This writer took Philo's doctrine of the Logos, and applied it to Jesus, and behold Christ at last stood out, a century after he lived, as God. It is useless to remark that these three attempts to "glorify Jesus" described by Dr. Worcester as facts, are wholly imaginary and have no foundation whatsoever in historical fact.

One trouble with all this "modern science" of Dr. Worcester, and of the others as well, is that it is exceedingly antiquated. Indeed it is to be feared that as scientists our American Modernists leave something to be desired. Most of what they have been giving us in sermons and debates lately was long ago abandoned by really modern scientists, even by German scientists. For instance, no modern scholar of standing any longer holds that Mark is the oldest Gospel. Matthew is the oldest Gospel, written in Hebrew. Again, the theory that John, the Logos-doctrine from Philo has been discarded by every real scholar, even outside the Catholic Church. When people began to read Philo, they found out that John's Logos and Philo's Logos have nothing in common except the same name. Dr. Worcester instances a very ancient palimpsest found on Mount Sinai by Mrs. Lewis and her sister in 1829. The document says: "Joseph begat Jesus." When this was found the Rationalists cried victory, there was no Virgin Birth, in spite of the fact that no other of several hundred manuscripts contains these words. But then people began to read the rest of the palimpsest and found it just as emphatic as the other manuscripts in favor of the Virgin Birth, and so they were forced to conclude that the word "begat" was used in a formalistic legal sense, in the genealogy where the word occurs. German critical scholars rejected that argument about the year 1900. This same test of modernity can and should be applied to all the rest of the Modernist assertions. On this test it will invariably be found that where "modern science" does not flatly contradict itself, it has already been superseded by some new theory. The truth is that real science does not contradict and never has contradicted Catholic truth.

But things like these make trouble for the un instructed. Modern Protestant critical and historical science changes so very rapidly, it is not surprising perhaps that busy Modernist pastors have not kept up with it. But at least we can ask them not to present long-abandoned theories as "modern science." The Modernists' teachers, those who robbed them of their faith in Christ, have practically given up the fight on the ground of the Scriptures, and have fallen back to the philosophical field of agnosticism, where they started. There we may leave them, for there they are outside the pale of Christianity altogether.

Yesterday has gone, tomorrow may never come: do what you have to do, today.

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