



DOWN TO EARTH

BY ALAN DEVOE

The Treasure of May

IN THE merry month of May, the faith of earth has only devotees. For this green while, at least, backsliders, doubters, relapsed heretics and indifferentists are nowhere in evidence. There is now a unanimity of praise (praise, as the theologians observe, being the primal stuff of prayer) and a full-spirited, one-hearted rejoicing going up to That Which brings it about that anemone and bloodroot are blossoming again in the dark loam, swallows skimming and skittering again over the sunny farmlands, new generations of foxes and raccoons making their first excited explorations of the hollow tree and the den in the field.

This is a season of belief.

The faith of earth, natural religion, the (as it were) spontaneous shout of *Gloria!* and spontaneous flinging up of a man's arms in worshipful acknowledgment, is a thing as ancient and enduring as human life on this planet. Sects are born and die. This particular formulation and that particular formulation, seeking to catch the *Mysterium Tremendum*, prove inadequate or untrustworthy and wither away. Theories are susceptible to skepticism. They fall in an endless succession. But when all that is problematical has been dis-

carded, when shrewdly doubting intellect has demolished syllogism after syllogism and left however many speculative guesses and edifices of conjecture in ruins, still always there remains *this*.

It was so on the first morning. It will be so on the last day. For this "wild religion," this leap of the spirit in a rapturous dance and a worshiping bow toward the Whence-of-being, belongs not to guess or reckoning or calculation or fallibility of any kind. It is because it is. It proceeds from the initial facts of the human creature's creatureliness; it resides in man as man, intimate as breathing, inseparable as hands and feet; it is a part of the inalienable stuff of his spirit. On an antique morning, as particular scriptures put it, there began to be a light that never had been before on land or sea. It cannot go out.

In all specific religions, sects and theologies, faith is held to be a virtue. It is insisted that we earn merit for subscribing to the proposed doctrine, demerit for rejecting it. In a good many of our moods, we may look at this proposition with a cool

distaste and say, Where is the sense in that? Are we not to examine a creed with our best critical intelligence, decide it is true or decide it is false, and hold that conclusion precisely as we hold that two and two make four or that three and five don't make eighteen? Where is the merit or demerit? What sort of priestly shenanigans have we here?

But this is not, of course, what religious teachings mean by the doctrine that faith is a virtue. What the doctrine means is that when a man is once persuaded, in an insight of completely compelling revelation, to believe the truth of a given faith, it thereafter becomes meritorious of him to hold fast to this conviction under whatever duress of transient mood, and not to let what has once been given him to know to be made to seem doubtful or dim merely because at the moment he has got a spell of indigestion or must meet a mortgage payment. The doctrine that faith is a virtue, far from being some sort of mystical flummery, is a defense of reason against unreason, conviction against whim, knowledge against mere shifting mood-of-the-moment.

Suppose, for a trivial example, that a man once *knows* — with the whole inrushing compulsion of his faith in mathematics, his faith in maps, his Total Conviction — that the distance from his village to the next village is five miles. Now on a bright May morning, as he trudges along the road from village to vil-

lage, with bobolinks calling in the spring meadows and chokeberries blooming in the uplands, there attaches no merit to the man's reposing faith in the fact that he is indeed taking a walk of five miles. He has read the maps; he has trusted arithmetic and geography; the May morning conduces to an ease of faith in the reliability of what, in his hour, he *knows*, bone-sure, blood-deep, intellect-positive, whole-souled. He is possessed, if you like, in the fullness of Revelation.

BUT now suppose on some black and bitter winter midnight, in a time of terror and emergency, he has to make this same trip from village to village. Great events are at issue. Perhaps life and death are at issue. It is black night, bitter cold, the sleeping ice-sheathed trees are like dead trees, and the sleet flies stinging from the north. How far is it now, from village to village? How hard is the way?

In faith, it is five miles. In faith, this route is the same route it was on the May morning, with bobolinks singing and swaying on the sun-warm spears of the meadow-grass. In faith, held fast and sure, these bare and crooked trees are only asleep and at rest. They are not dead, not wicked specters. This darkness is only the friendly dark that is the other half of the sunlight of May morning. This is only ice under foot, only water touched with frost, only (in very truth, not some

silly fantasy) the treasure, locked in winter conservancy, of the roots of the garden of the world. How far is the way? Five miles, in faith.

But in un-faith? In lost faith, in the terrible tumbling surrender to anti-reason and momentary whim? Why, it is ten miles, it is a hundred miles, it is thousands. This chill of frost is a finger of death, these black trees tower and crook evil hands and snatch at a man, this glaze of ice under panic-flying feet is enough to send him sprawling in nightmare. How far — oh God, oh God — from village to village now? Why, as far as the moon, as far as infinity; impossibly, impossibly far. There is no bearing the burden of this journey.

Faith, says the doctrine, is a virtue. It keeps a man being a man, reposing fast in a knowing of what he knows, and so pole-starred toward reality. Un-faith, says the doctrine, is surrendering of what once it has been given to us to *know*, whole-souledly, to be true. It is thus fundamental betrayal. In such a treachery, we are undone.

This is what the religions have meant by saying that faith is a virtue. They have not meant that the initial act of faith is a virtue, as in the little girl's definition of faith as a meritorious act of "believing what we know to be untrue." The initial faith in all religions is, if you like, a gift; that is to say, it is such a truth offered as may be accepted in surety, in complete conviction, in an em-

bracing motion of the intellect and will. But where virtue lies is in the keeping of this motion as a continuum: the ever-repetition of the initial gesture of entire trust. Is it five miles from village to village, on the May morning? Is this sure, certain, an absolute all-over warranty acceptable by our (as it were) Total Organism? Do we take it so, now, in this sure hour of sunny sense and convinced insight? Very well. Good. This is our faith. But this becomes a faith of any virtue, any power, any manworthiness, only insofar as we are true to our sworn May-morning oath in a temptingly traitorous midnight hour of February storm.

SO FAITH is a virtue, in the religions of the world; and so it is a virtue in that "wild religion, before sects and creeds," that primary aboriginal gesture of the upflung arms and the spirit leaping in praise and trust, that is the religion of nature, perennial and universal. We all have our revelation. We all have our deposit of faith. We are all made to know, in this or that piercing moment of such certainty as passes argument as it exceeds formulation, the things we need to know. We may not, perhaps, be users of religious language. It may not occur to us to think in the terms of Paul on the Damascus road. For all that, the needed "given" is given us, in this sudden hour, that secret flash of inexpressible understanding, this instant (it may be) when we hear a kildeer calling; or

smell unexpectedly in a gust of wind the scent of a plowed field. We are caught up, flooded, and informed beyond question. In a motion of our whole spirit, as real as anything we might verbalize in a church formula, it is uttered in the depths of us: I know. I believe entirely.

The faith — this ancient, ancient faith, without any name, this aboriginal and perennial thing, foundationing every particular creed ever constructed — may come to indwell us in any place and hour. About once a year, in May-time, nature contrives that all of us shall be touched and caught up by it almost compellingly. We are all but coerced. It is so easy, now, to believe in the Wisdom creating and sustaining this flowering and singing earth, the Mind infinitely parental and joinable in devotion by our small minds here, that we are made almost to hold the faith without even knowing that we hold it. In this season — with jack-in-the-pulpit blooming in the deep shade of the woods, bullfrogs shouting marsh-credo in our ear, the oriole incredible among the apple-blossoms — we can smile only a sad brief smile, as of incredulity, at that pathetic thing, a pessimist, and feel only a kind of irritated sorrow for one so life-cut-off, so faithless, so sickly withholding as a skeptic.

And so it is in May. It is easy.

But there are other months. Shall we remember the May-truth — piercingly sure of the presence of God as it was at the time — next nineteenth of December or tenth of March? Will the truth of the faith be abiding with us in a blizzard, in a winter midnight, in the moment when there are no “signs”? Will we be sure of our Mayflower sureness, our hepatica credo, our chokeberry *Numen inest*, in the seasons when nature sleeps in seeds?

There is a wise thing to do in May: to go out to it and into it, in an aware concentration, and collect this into a reliquary. Many religions of the world make use of reliquaries. Sometimes they are jeweled and filigreed. Sometimes they have a saint’s thumb-joint in them, sometimes a fragment of the founder’s cloak, sometimes a holy hair.

The faith of earth can make do with a very simple thing for reliquary: just the treasure, in the mind, of the way the fiddleheads of ferns unroll in May, just the fixed remembrance — but fixed, fixed — of wood pewees calling in a May-time woods, and of our knowing then.

The Wisdom is undoubtable in May. We may get to faltering, along about midwinter. It is wise to have made a reliquary, on these golden mornings now, for carrying in the winters of our disbelief.

Trading with the ENEMY

By PATRICK McMAHON

SEVERAL senatorial tempers, long stretched taut by the flow of war goods from our European and Asiatic allies to Red China and the Iron Curtain countries, suddenly exploded last February when the Peiping radio boasted that China had received more than a billion and a half dollars' worth of supplies from the West during 1952.

The report, of course, was a phony, probably designed for the very purpose it achieved, to cause dissension among the "free" nations. But like many Communist propaganda phonies, it did contain an element of truth. For the \$1.5 billion figure just about hits the 1952 volume of exports from the non-Communist world to all of the Iron Curtain countries.

And like most Communist propaganda, it was very cleverly designed. It hit the center of the most controversial phase of economic relations between the United States and the trading nations of Western Europe and free Asia: the practice of trading with the enemy — regarded by Americans as highly immoral, but traditionally accepted by Europeans as just hard-headed realism.

There is at least one example, however, which if fully appraised in all of its tragic results and effects, should raise doubts even in the minds of our European friends as to just how hard-headed and realistic it is, to trade freely with the enemy.

There is one absolutely vital war material that is not found anywhere within the Soviet perimeter. The material is so essential that no nation lacking an adequate supply could possibly turn out the great masses of arms, munitions, and equipment necessary to wage modern war. Without it no nation could, without risking suicide, pursue an aggressive foreign policy.

The material is industrial diamonds. More than 95 per cent of the world's entire output is distributed through a single agency, the enormously rich and powerful diamond syndicate controlled by deBeers, of London, Johannesburg, and Kimberly.

The story of how this ultra-capitalistic diamond cartel, with the assent if not the outright collaboration of the British government (and to a lesser extent the South African, Belgian, Dutch, Swiss, Swedish, and