



What We Have to Be Thankful For

BY EDWARD S. MARTIN

HERE comes around again the month of Thanksgiving and it behooves us to consider what, if anything, we have to be thankful for. Undoubtedly, as compared with other countries, we have a great deal. Our farmers are not very prosperous; our fuel supply is more precarious and more costly than it should be; our railroads have to scramble hard to keep up with the demands on them; we have more murders and more hold-ups and more law-breaking generally than we should, and there are other drawbacks to our perfect satisfaction with our material circumstances. But on the whole they are good. We have enough to eat. Housing lags, but not many of us are living in trees or are homeless. There is very little unemployment. On the contrary, labor is scarce and wages are high beyond all precedent. A large proportion of our population is finding due pleasure and satisfaction in life. We are for the moment the richest country in the world and we are spending a good deal of our money on things we think are remunerative. Anyone who went out on the road in a motor car last summer must have been impressed with the great number of people who were refreshing themselves by that method. Many families, evidently not rich, one saw traveling in touring cars on the highways, and noticed innumerable signs out on farmhouses of food and lodging or campsites for tourists. Our people certainly move about. The roads of the country

are a great phenomenon. The travel on them is extraordinary and the pleasure derived from it—change of scene and thought and the enlargement of the understanding that follows—must be reckoned as one of our causes of thankfulness. We do not yet migrate in flocks and droves like the birds and wild creatures, but the mass of the people in this country probably do move around more than any other people on earth except some Arab tribes and the gypsies, and that is a good thing. To see other people and how they live and what they look like gets minds out of ruts and puts new pictures in them, and that makes somewhat for the understanding of life.

On the material side, at least, we Americans of the United States seem to be doing better than anybody else. But how about the spiritual side? Are we getting to be better people, wiser, more courageous, more alive to our responsibilities in the world? Are we more religious or less religious, and is the religion we have doing us as much good as it ought to?

These are really the great questions of the hour. Here is the world in a depressing state, very precarious at this writing in its political outlook. There is Europe disturbed by new complications that actually threaten war, and by other complications that have dragged along for months and that at least impede and imperil the return of peace. And just at this writing the papers are full of the dis-

tress of Japan with two great cities shaken to pieces by earthquakes, with an appalling loss of life and a vast loss of property. That we should help out in that matter, both in the way of first aid and of reconstruction, was to be taken for granted. We know how to do such things and we have the disposition and the wherewithal to do them. But in the greater and more difficult political duties we have not yet anything so good to say of ourselves. In those matters we still lag, with the armament agreement as the main achievement to our credit.

Religion as represented in the churches is, in a way, very active and prosperous. In organization and raising money it is remarkably efficient, and what it does is helpful to the world so far as it goes. But the sentiment is very prevalent both inside of the churches and outside of them that it falls short of what it ought to do; that for some reason or other it is not able to accomplish in the world at this time what is expected of it, in that it does not bring to men the inspiration and the power that the existing situation demands.

In his little book called *Religious Perplexities* Doctor Jacks of Oxford says, in a discussion of reason and religion: "There is a coward and a hero in the breast of every man. Religion is the power which develops the hero at the expense of the coward. As the change proceeds there comes a moment when the cowardly method of reasoning, with its eye on safety, ceases to dominate the soul. Thenceforward the man's reason becomes the organ of the new spirit that is in him. His powers as a reasoner are enriched, his survey of the facts more comprehensive, his insight into their significance more penetrating. Faith is neither a substitute for reason nor an addition to it. Faith is nothing else than reason grown courageous—reason raised to its highest power, expanded to its widest vision. Its advent marks the point where the hero within the man is getting the better of the coward."

That admirably describes what is

wanted of religion. The trouble with it as it prevails to-day in these States is that it has not produced on a sufficiently general scale the necessary new spirit in man which develops the hero in him at the expense of the coward. The times demand the "reason grown courageous" that Doctor Jacks talks about and don't get it, but get from us a cautious and rather timid reason which counts all costs like a cash register, pays close attention to safety first, and does not win even that. For to be timid and calculating when one should be bold is not even safe, and in world politics especially to keep out of what we should be in is to invite disaster.

Mrs. Mary Austin, discussing in the *Century Magazine* the question "Do We Need a New Religion?" insists that we do, because nothing less powerful and corrective than religion can pull human society out of its present parlous condition. Plenty of people think that. They see the politicians at work. They see the back and fill of national interests, the clashes of economic rivalry, the jealousies of mere politics, and they groan and say, "Those people can never work it out! The salvation of society must come up from the crowd through new leadership and new faith. The jockeying of nations won't save us. There must be something that will lift humanity out of itself, and nothing does that but what we call religion." But when Mrs. Austin talks about a new religion she means nothing more startling than a development of powers which belong to the religion that we have. She does not disparage Christianity, nor its Founder, whom indeed she puts ahead of all religious teachers. Christianity has succeeded, she thinks, in the personal problem but not yet in the world problem. She wants new leaders, new knowledge, to work out that end of it and she thinks we shall get it. "In the history of human kind," she says, "whenever new light has been strongly called, it arrives, and almost always by way of some transcendent personality. Occasionally a

group of minor prophets will light a little flame which they blow upon with their united breath until it kindles a great matter. But the greatest truths seem to pierce our darkness through the crevice of one mind at a time, carrying always something of the quality of the medium by means of which they are translated to his time. It is not, therefore, unnatural to expect, now when we so much need him, the arrival of a new prophet of the social order. It is within bounds to venture a guess as to that quarter of the horizon in which his appearance is most likely."

Perhaps she looks to Russia for her new prophet. As to that she does not say, but what she says reminds one that what we have most reason to be thankful for is not material prosperity, nor freedom from earthquakes, nor the fact that we live some distance away from Europe, nor the circumstance that we can pay our debts. The best thing we have is new knowledge visibly increasing, holding out to us the hope, and, indeed, the reasonable expectation, that we shall become wise enough and have power and leadership enough to manage and control the industrial civilization in which we live and constrain its warring elements to live in peace with one another. We can justly be thankful that we are not more stupid than we are, and may even find grounds to believe that we are growing less so. Medicine makes remarkable advances; so does the control of electricity, and the constant improvement in all sorts of transportation is tying the peoples of the world together into the one great human family that they really are. If one looks back even one generation the change in the attitude of minds about the several nations as members of the human family with responsibility according to their powers for its welfare is astonishing. The Great War did accomplish something. People do not think as they did before it happened, and though a good many of them struggle to get the world back to old habits of thought, they have very lim-

ited success, and what success they do have makes prompt and obvious mischief.

We talk about religion and reiterate the world's need of it, but religion is a loose word and means different things to different people. In most minds it stands for the relation between the visible and the invisible world which humanity has always been struggling, more or less blindly, to comprehend and use. There is an instinctive conviction in the minds of men that the development and use of that relation is necessary to the conduct of human affairs, and that nations prosper and civilizations survive in so far as it is understood and applied. If, instead of saying that the world needs religion, we say it needs understanding of life, we convey pretty much the same idea, for to give us understanding of life, its purpose, powers, and possibilities, and what to do with it, is what religion is for. If we think understanding of life is increasing, that is the most valid of all reasons for thanking this year. Many, many people do think so, and find reason for the belief not only in the swift and steady progress of scientific knowledge and the rapid development of man's control of material things which is a consequence of it, but in the very questioning of creeds and dissatisfaction with the Christianity of the churches which to many observers are signs of religious failure. But they do not betoken failure at all. They are a natural outcome of the suspicion that there is more in religion, more in Christianity, than we are getting out of it, and of determination to get what is coming to us. That determination shows not only in the efforts of the regular churches, but in all sorts of outside activities, many of them curious and some of them misleading, but nearly all of them usefully experimental, pursuing some phase of spiritual power that has been neglected, and apparently getting results from the pursuit. In religion as in science a great deal of valuable work is being done now-

adays by amateurs, people attached to no school nor committed to any creed, but who suspect the existence of desirable knowledge and set out to get it, and will try anything in their quest. They are very valuable, these earnest and unterrified seekers. Truth finds it hard to hide from them, for they will dig anywhere. Authority has no hold on them, ridicule only amuses them. They are often wrong and usually partly wrong, but their continuous efforts are adding to knowledge and they are helping us to understand human life. Some of these amateurs come to worldly success and renown. Edison, Ford, Einstein are examples. Others come to success, but not to much advertisement. Many more delve on, mainly useful in accumulating material for succeeding inquirers to use.

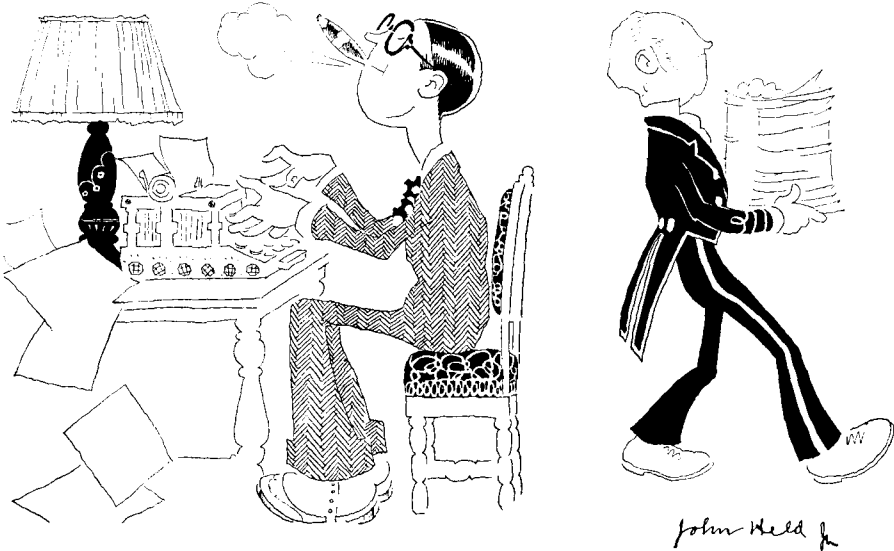
And there will be inquirers and the material will be used. A great characteristic of these times is the enormous provision of minds sufficiently furnished with knowledge to want more. Our system of schooling, defective as it is, furnishes a vast number of minds with the means to think, and out of the number so furnished, some are sure to think to important purpose. Everybody reads, and the huge daily flood of printed matter feeds that habit. Most of the reading so provided is pretty poor stuff, but the mass of it includes a great deal that is good, and there is a constantly increasing development of minds that feed upon it. When the quest for knowledge is once developed in any mind trash no longer satisfies it. On the whole we should be thankful for our provision of printed words, their great diffusion and the fact that so large a proportion of them are helpful to intelligence. Perhaps we should be also thankful for the movies, though not so much for what they are as for what they may become. They prevail enormously and probably cost at least as much as we used to pay for rum when we had it. They are like our provision of printed matter in that

they might be worse, but they are rather more subtle in their powers to mislead. They tell a great many stories that are not true, but probably they educate their patrons in the end to distinguish between what is true and what is bogus. The history of the growth of human intelligence is the history of the development of that capacity. We are apt to get things wrong at the first go and correct our impressions as the result of observation and experience. The movies impart a great many impressions which need correction, but not for that reason should we deny them a share in the great educational process that is proceeding. If people must think wrong before they can think right then the movies are helping us.

We are getting to know a great deal more about our neighbors in the world, their habits, dispositions and politics, than we used to. The papers print many times as much foreign news as they did ten years ago, and print it much more conspicuously, and we read much more of it because we think it concerns us. That is a significant change and we should count it a gain, and feel that it makes in its way for eventual peace and order.

Finally, we have abundant cause to be thankful that we live in such lively times, when there is so much going on and nobody knows what will happen tomorrow. A gamble is always interesting, so much so that folks incline to pay too much for it. But for us that interest in life is abundantly provided without effort of our own or deviation from the paths of discretion. We have only to keep track of current events and the processes of reconstruction as they work out in the world, and as we look ahead there looms up a speculation the like of which there never was. These times are not humdrum, anyhow. Let us be thankful for that. Thanksgiving certainly brings us more this year than turkey, roast and boiled, and three kinds of pie.

EDITOR'S DRAWER



AND I'VE SOLD SO MANY THOUSAND BOOKS I NOW GET TRIPLE PRICE

Confession of a Successful Novelist

BY BARON IRELAND

WHEN I was but a little lad my parents found no cure
For my insatiable desire to practice literature.
They'd planned that I, once come of age, should sell hay, flour, and feed.
While my ambition was to be a Dickens or a Reade.

And when I went to college I made bold this wish to state
To Professor Frelinghuysen, who taught English 38.
The kindly old professor patted me upon the head;
"A laudable ambition!" he benevolently said.

"But if you'd become a master of the medium of prose
You must serve a long apprenticeship, as every writer knows;
You must read the works of Addison, of Hazlitt, and of Pope,
You must learn the use of tmesis, of metathesis, and trope.

"You must wade all through De Quincey and you *must* feed up on Lamb;
You must boost your Fielding average; on T. Smollett you must cram;
For you've got to get the polish of these kings of English style
If in future you aspire to the ranks of Books Worth While."