

SCISSORS PICTURE BY MARTHA BENSLEY BRUÈRE



VI. THE PUBLIC DINNER: "MR. CHAIRMAN, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN —"

# THE SURVEY

GRAPHIC NUMBER

FEBRUARY 1,  
1927



Volume LVII,  
No. 9

## What is Worth Fighting for in American Life?

By JOHN HAYNES HOLMES

**W**HAT is worth fighting for in American life today is the same thing that was worth fighting for yesterday, and the day before. What is worth fighting for today will be worth fighting for tomorrow, and the day after. What is worth fighting for in America, is worth fighting for in Russia, in Italy, in India, in China. The battle for humanity changes neither with time nor place. Each age has its own drama, with its own characters and plot; each nation has its own climate, color, language, and spirit, with its distinctive problems; each soul caught in the tidal flow of human events brings thereto his own personal reaction of temperament, character and ideal, which changes as experience remakes the man. But the battle itself is still always and everywhere the same. For mankind is one; it moves, as it has ever moved, in one great march toward the unknown; it fights, as it must ever fight, against enemies without and within that bar its way.

I AWOKE to life in a family bathed in the tradition of the anti-slavery struggle. At intervals, for a period of years during my youth, I sat at the feet of a great-uncle, who wore the blue from Bull Run to Appomattox. The flame of freedom for the slave still burned in his soul as when he fought at Gettysburg, and later marched from Atlanta to the sea. More constant and more important was the influence of my grandfather, who was an Abolitionist in the days of Gar-

rison and Phillips, and one of the young men who resolved in 1850 "that Theodore Parker be given a chance to be heard in Boston." A hundred times, from the lips of this beloved man, I heard the story of the anti-slavery meetings, of the Liberator, of the assault on Sumner, of the rendition of Anthony Burns, of John Brown and Harper's Ferry, of Theodore Parker and the Boston Music Hall. Through him I met some of the heroes of the great days—Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Frank Sanborn, Julia Ward Howe. In his library I read books, letters, documents—memorials of the battle for emancipation. Thus early was I grounded in an abiding sense of the rights of man, moved to pity for the downtrodden and oppressed, taught that only by labor, sacrifice and struggle can liberty be won!

Furthermore, in my contact with the memory of Theodore Parker, buried in 1859 in Florence under a slab appropriately inscribed, "The Great American Preacher," I learned

the meaning of religion as primarily and necessarily an agency of social redemption. My grandfather worshipped Parker from the beginning to the end of his days. He was his parishioner and intimate friend, was married by him, named his only son after him. He preserved as his most precious possessions Parker's pulpit Bible, his cane, his book of prayer. Through my grandfather, the hero-worship of the great preacher was transmitted to me. I cannot recall that this took me into the ministry—other more direct influences were at work here. But I collected the Parker books and sermons, and

### Where Do We Go from Here?

*This is the first of a series of outspoken articles to be published in Survey Graphic throughout 1927. They will be written by men and women who, from radically differing backgrounds and in widely different fields, have borne creative relationship to their times. Each has been asked to give the roots in his own experience of what he feels is worth fighting for in American life today; the encounters which have fortified that faith, thrown it down, modified it, refreshed it, brought it to the point where he can share it with others as something to lay hold of.*