

THE ADVENTURE OF FAITH

BY F. M. BENNETT

LIFE is an adventure. It is beneficently full of risks and uncertainties. That is what gives it charm and zest. Not all life succeeds. Much of it dies in the adventure of trying to live. It does not all arrive at the goal for which it seems fitted. Often the ends of life are defeated and it is made to serve other ends, compelled through defeat to enter other lives and into the very structure of the world. This is not to say that it does not render a service in its seeming defeat. Perhaps, in thus dying in its efforts to live it serves other life more perfectly than it could serve its own.

The adventurous nature of life is seen in all living experience. There is a risk in the actions of even the lowest cell forms of life. When the living cell ventures to obtain food, to multiply or reproduce itself, it often meets destruction in the process. The composition of the earth, of its rocks and its soils, gives evidence of the adventure of life. The living forms that have perished to produce these are evidence of the risks they have taken.

Every contact of life with the world, or with other life, is a contact of adventure. It is therefore a contact of faith. In such contacts there is always present the element of uncertainty, of risk. Will it bring benefit or harm? That question must be answered through experience. Every movement, every moment of life has its risks which may not be realized. Nevertheless they are there. That is what gives worth, charm, beauty to living beings.

In the philosophy of Henri Bergson it is this very risk, this adventure in life which gives it all its meaning, all its significance. It is this which distinguishes life from inert material and makes possible the creation of higher and nobler forms of life. If life should

cease to reach out in adventure, in a more or less conscious striving for creation in new directions, life, he says, would cease, would vanish. It would be overcome by the crushing weight of that which is dead.

If this is true for all forms of life, for the human this should be especially the day of adventurous living.

“Every day is a fresh beginning,
Every morn is the world made new.
Ye who are tired and weary of sinning,
Here is a thought for you.”

No condition or circumstance is hopeless to the person who is willing to take a risk in order to change it. Our days would be intolerable if we knew beforehand just what they would be worth to us. It is well that we do not know what of good or ill they may bring forth. That is largely left for us to determine.

So for us humans these are days of adventure and therefore days of faith. If there were no uncertainty or risk in them, how long could we keep the spirit of trust, courage, good will? It is sure that those who are most able to make certain what each day shall bring do not see life at its brightest and best. We need the adventurous aspect of each day to keep us from falling into hopelessness regarding the experiences of life.

There is nothing that will more thoroughly take the zest out of living than to be compelled to follow a changeless routine. It speaks well for the quality of human nature that so many who are so compelled still have ways of keeping up their courage and their interest in life. Modern methods of industry so largely tend to make machines out of men, so largely give the certainty of changeless toil, that the reaction from the depression of it is a real and constant danger to the social order. In the division of labor, in the monotony of constantly dealing with small parts of it, often there is left little room for the exercise of the adventurous nature of the soul. For many people the power of trust in the face of risk is lessened and life becomes stale and unprofitable. Perhaps the evident monotony of living and working which such conditions impose is responsible for much of the cynicism and pessimism which is so often expressed towards higher and worthier aspects of life. The restlessness of our time is largely the result of such conditions. Is it not because there is so little room left for the expression of the adventurous nature of life, and therefore little room for faith in

life itself that such restlessness becomes a danger to common welfare?

But should we expect less of this restlessness in certain groups whose lives are largely lived in dull routine? So long as conditions under which they live and work are such that there is not proper time for wholesome change we may not expect much in the quality of their lives. If we narrow the world to a humdrum of experience for any soul he is likely to wither. But if he does not he must in some way break through his limits in the natural adventure on which he exercises his faith.

This is apparently the underlying reason for much of the industrial and social restlessness of our time. In our haste to accumulate possessions we have made slaves and machines of a large part of humanity. The result is that where the wrong of it has been recognized there is inevitable disturbance. We have by no means seen the end of it nor shall we till there are larger opportunities for the expression of spiritual capacity on the part of the workers. We may not safely assume that man can "live by bread alone," and therefore strive only to make provision for a full supply of bread. We live by ideas and ideals, by every "word of God," that is, by every divine capacity, and we do not truly live till we are free to exercise these capacities. We must make room for life's adventures in order to have faith in life itself.

What is the meaning of this faith, this trust, which requires such opportunity for adventure in order really to live? In what must we have faith?

First, we must have a trust in the reliability and reality of the universe. We must believe in the world. Unconscious it may be, unrealized and unformulated, but the living soul must believe in the world in which he finds himself. It is a real and reliable world. We may depend on it and on its order. We may enter into its ways and find ourselves at home in it. If we meet it with fairness it will meet us fairly; if we meet it defiantly, with arrogance, suspicion, it will meet us in the same spirit, and will disown us. If we meet it with good will it will show good will to us. So we may trust the world as a real and large place which gives us much experience for the perfecting of life.

Then this faith is trust in the reality and worth of our knowledge. What we know about the world and its life is a worthy reality for us. If we do not trust our experience with it, and believe that it is worth while, our knowledge becomes, indeed, "vanity and a

striving after wind." But we do naturally believe in the reality and worth of our knowledge, and do not even question it, while we constantly seek for more that we may have the power to go forth at all times without fear.

Again we find this faith to be a trust in our own lives. We trust our ability to overcome difficulty, to conquer, and to find ourselves worthy in all changes and experiences. Normal life trusts itself. It naturally and as a divine right believes in the worth of the soul. It feels the stirring of divinity within. Where life does not trust itself it is not fit to make adventures in living. Where it does trust itself and does believe that it can overcome it proves its faith by its works.

Then there is a natural trust in human companions. This is the evidence of faith in human nature and in its essential worth. If one is to amount to anything himself he must have confidence in his fellows. There is no more destructive attitude than that which looks constantly with suspicion upon the actions and motives of others. There is evil outcome for him who habitually thinks evil of his neighbors. But to trust others, to believe in their worth, in their good intentions is to gain strength. To think well of human nature in general is wholesome and enables us to venture much for the sake of other lives.

As a result of such an attitude, such a faith, one should gain great confidence in the progress of life as a whole. This should mean that we believe in "all the good the past hath had," in the worth of the present and in the better care to come. Normal faith requires that we have some prophetic vision of the great good which the future will bring. If one has such insight then, as one says, "nothing is too grand for the future to accomplish, nothing too holy for the race to attain. To limit yourself is to close doors that might otherwise be opened to strength. To limit the future is to limit God."

Finally, then, we must have faith in God if we would profit by the adventurous life. If we would really have an end and meaning in life with this we must somehow start. It would be a blind world which had not divine life at the heart of it. With what good heart could we venture forth, with what good will could we meet the experiences of life if we did not assume as source and warrant for our confidence a center of divine good will?

Now, this is no creed. This is but a partial statement of an attitude which we must take if we would venture wholesomely into

the experiences which life brings. It is but a slight indication of the natural attitude which we should take towards the great adventure of life. Here we need something more than creed. We need confidence, courage, some inner power which shall send us forth always with a brave heart. When it is matter of the soul's life no external power can be a guarantee of safety. That must come from within, must spring from the innate strength, the natural abilities of the spiritual life. It is this attitude of wholesome trust which will prevent us from becoming hard or bitter, keep us from being cast down through defeats, keep us whole and victorious when we are tested by events. "To him that overcometh" and only to him, come the fruits of faith.

The creeds of the moral and religious life of man are the attempts to express in full finality the contents of faith for those who hold them. But if we attempt to make them fixed and changeless standards for all succeeding generations we are taking counsel of our fears rather than of our faith. When we attempt to make others conform to cherished standards, or to follow established practices, assuming that these are good for all time, then we make them hindrances for faith. To say of our creed or of our present conviction, as practically so often has been done, "as it was in the beginning it is now and ever shall be world without end," is to put a blight into human life and to impede its divine progress.

There is a better way: It is the way which makes of faith itself an adventure. If we daily meet our experiences trusting that the divine life who has led us hitherto will lead us farther on; if we find that life itself is an adventure, we may expect faith to grow stronger, more beautiful and wholesome. We shall expect it to change, to grow stronger as life grows richer. Shall we not expect that new and better forms of its expression will rise to lead the spiritual life?

Beware of fixed creeds and the assumption of changeless convictions. They are creeds of life and for life, and life is full of change. This is an adventurous world. It is an adventurous life. We are on our way, and we are going to meet new experiences, and in the might of our faith in the eternal goodness we are going to make them better experiences than the world has heretofore known.

In the presence of such an attitude, of such a faith, the old assumption that humanity is sick, constantly in need of a physician in order to live at all, the assumption that this is a lost human world, and that only a few who believe, and conform to the immovable

convictions announced in the past will be among those who are saved, becomes the poorest and weakest kind of unfaith.

It is a growing world, and, in spite of all that has tended to retard it, and to blight it, and to make it after one familiar pattern, it has grown in moral and spiritual power up to this present. Ours is the future and the future is for all. We may not safely depend on the special privileges for the few, but on the essential opportunity for all souls. We are to make real the time when each shall live for all and all for each. We are to make the great adventure of faith which affirms that all human souls are the children of one spiritual Father, and should be growing children sharing to the full his truth and love. It is our privilege to make this a growing reality.

This is to have faith for the adventure of life and to make the great adventure of an ever-growing faith.