

## OPPOSITION VERSUS INDIFFERENCE

BY HAROLD BERMAN

A MAN should never be afraid of opponents, but mortally afraid of those who are neither opponents nor the exponents of his ideal or outlook, nor for that matter, the exponents or opponents of any outlook or philosophy in particular. An opponent is he who has given the particular philosophy or outlook cherished by you some earnest and more or less consistent consideration, and is ready to do so again if new facts and added information are presented to him, but who sincerely finds himself at present unable to concur in your views or to accept your methods or cure as the panacea for the particular ill or ills it proposes to cure. Enlightened opposition implies by its very term a readiness to learn, a willingness to accept something new and different from the philosophy and outlook that one has espoused all along provided that the new prove more acceptable to his rationalizing facilities or mystical and intuitional needs and inspirations than the old system, in which case one is quite ready to accept it and make it his only guide in life and quite irrespective of the destruction that it brings in its train to one's inherited notions, his preconceived and cherished ideals and the number of one's hallowed idols that it will inevitably lay in the dust.

An opposition of this dynamic and enlightened nature not only is legitimate but becomes a positive incentive, and, on occasion, even an inspiration to the thinker and the creator, serving as it does to spur him on in his search of new knowledge, of new truths with which to impregnate his own opinions and outlooks, to broaden his field of vision as well as to clarify all disputed points and formulas. And being that the missionary spirit is exceedingly strong in all of us, and no sooner is a belief or *Anschaung* recognized by ourselves as *the truth*, and, hence, as possessing the essence of salvation, physical, mental or spiritual, in it than we itch

to preach it and make it known to our fellow-men, so that it becomes the medium of their salvation as well, we usually do go a step further afield and seek not only to defend our own assailed position but exert ourselves at the same time to convert our opponents, and occasionally do succeed in doing it, our own opponents presumably being open to conviction as all men engaged in the search of truth invariably are. It is in this manner that all philosophies and 'ologies make their headway in life, and from their beginning as the treasured possession of one or more favored discoverers or originators become the property of the many, though they inevitably become considerably diluted in the process of popularization and acceptance by the large masses of the people who could not possibly be expected to grasp all their postulated intricacies as well as their abstruse points. Its raging and torrential whirlpools have to be drawn off into the shallow wading pools fordable by the man of low stature, as otherwise they would either refuse to enter the stream altogether, or, having entered it, would be overwhelmed by its strong currents and swept away to their destruction. A thesis must be "watered down" considerably in order to make it acceptable to the weak stomach of the average man, but the essence of its principle cannot, and must not, be abrogated. These constitute the very soul, the life-breath of the thesis, and by tampering with the soul of a living organism we are destroying the body that it dwells in as well, and then we should have nothing whatever left of the entire cherished object.

But that, however, applies only to the indiscriminating mass of the people, and does not at all apply to the chosen, reasoning few who are, above all else, anxious to get at the truth and nothing but the truth. In the case of these superior men one should, on the contrary, take care that the idea be presented to them in its pristine purity, clarity and perfection, as these men do boast the stomach for strong meat; and, furthermore, they are of the seed of the martyrs who might sooner or later become the apostles to carry the divine Gospel, so strenuously opposed by them now, to the very ends of the earth in days to come. They will disseminate it, that is, after they have become converted from opponents into adherents, when they will become as zealous in your cause as they had been formally in its antithetical counterpart.

This g enre of man, the kind that does his own thinking and is truly anxious for light and leading, is the very one into whose

keeping the fate of your ideal may be safely entrusted. Of necessity, *he had to* be your opponent, even an active and sincere opponent, as the more active and sincere his opposition the more zealous and devoted will his adherence be after his conversion. Your Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of truth and its exponents, becomes the Saint Paul after he had beheld the vision of truth on the road to persecute its preachers. But no Pauls are ever bred out of the great masses of indifferent or jeering artisans and petty tradesmen to whom the welfare of their craft or trade is of far greater concern than all the systems of salvation and all the 'ologies in the universe. From these only lackeys and footmen of an idea are made, the "yea" shouters and the coach-followers of the great procession *after* it has become the mass demonstration. They, also, will be found on the band wagon when the proper time arrives, feebly mouthing words that they little understand and care less for.

The preacher of a new religious or social faith should *seek* with all his might to provide himself with opponents of such mettlesome calibre, who in the long run will prove even greater importance to him in his final hour of triumph than the facilely-acquired adherents of a certain, inconsequential, sort. Such an opponent, it is quite true, may prove a Calvin or a Torquemada and burn your body at the stake ere your idea has had the chance to convert him or others. But he is worth taking a chance with if you are truly earnest in your faith, inspired by its truth and ready to assume serious risks and hazards on its behalf. You will then either save his soul while preserving its shell, the body, or he will save your soul at the expense of your body, which is of little moment to you after all when the well-being and the salvation of your own and others' immortal souls is concerned. \*

Your idea or *Anschauung* has need of an opponent even as your body has need of nutrition and pure air as means for keeping life within it. And the trouble with us men of the present generation is that we have no opponents worthy of the name. Outside of the realm of economics-applied economics, of course—there seems to be no division of opinion among men. People have grown complacent and tamely acquiescent, tolerant to the point of absurdity. Fighting over abstract ideas and principles has become ungentlemanly, needless and a sore waste of time. Tolerate the other fellow and his vagaries and errors so that he in turn will tolerate you and your vagaries and errors and all will be as peaceful and as har-

monious as a graveyard, where all is decorum and peace because the occupants of the various graves had long since settled their accounts with their God and men, even as they did with life itself, living blood no longer courses in their veins while the worms have nibbled away again and again at their brains. The peace and harmony that we now enjoy in the realm of religion and abstract reasoning generally, far from importing to us the arrival of the long prayed-for millenium, really betokens *the twilight age*, the age of expiring lights and the oncoming of darkness, or at least of the lesser and dimmer lights of the night by which only the coarser and more material objects are clearly seen, while the finer ones are barely discerned and as if through a haze or fog. No one is certain about them; no one cares, or is able, to discern their true being and composition—and of what practical difference is it to us after all? Such seem to be man's thoughts, his perhaps unconscious and unanalyzed reactions to these abstruse matters, and, hence, his easy going and good natured behavior towards his so-called opponents and the supposed controversialists who have long since abandoned all controversy.

Far different is, however, man's behavior in things material and concrete, whether these affect his immediate well-being or at some possible more or less remote time. Man will not only haggle, and haggle mightily, about his day's wage or the price of a bushel of corn, but also about the possible coming changes in the system of production and distribution of wealth, which change may most likely not affect his own well-being at all and perhaps not even that of his immediate successors in life. But these matters indubitably *are concrete* in the sense that they affect his day's wage and, hence, his standard of physical comfort, the amount of money he is to have in his pocket in return for that bushel of corn, while the changes in our economic system, should they come today or tomorrow or next year, also are bound to affect them in the same way, and mayhap, even to a larger degree. But ideas, outlooks and philosophies languish, and will continue to languish, with us for lack of any serious, well defined and obstinate opposition.

Just as long as men will refuse to crack even metaphorical skulls over religious, moral or esthetic views, as they now do crack *physical* and *actual heads* over the question of Unionism, the tariff, foreign markets, Imperialism and the like material questions, it will profit the preacher but little to go on preaching his ideals and exert

himself in the thankless task to have them become the lighthouse radiating light and leading to erring man.

Where there is no friction the needle cannot become magnetized, and hence, remains incapable of acting in turn on the inert lump of iron. Similarly, where there is no friction of ideas, no serious clash between life-philosophies and outlooks but all is peacefully indifferent and indolently drab, serene and matter-of-fact, the dull and lifeless metal of life cannot be magnetized by any new ideas, but is doomed to remain inert; and the one who seeks to awaken it is simply indulging in useless effort and wasted motion. The old, long established systems, outlooks and philosophies will persist, despite the repetitive monotony and lukewarm dullness of their preachers and exponents because of man's mechanized, routine habits and his constitutional mental inertia which urges him on the path of least physical or mental resistance. But new systems and values have as much chance to survive, spread and propagate their kind as has the proverbial snow-ball in the eternally hot nether regions in an atmosphere wherein touch and sight are the only two of man's senses to survive and function in their full force, while the other and more delicate senses have become merely rudimentary or vestigial in their action.