

## Where Earth And Heaven Meet

From where I write, I look past the stony beach where sandpipers play in and out across gently rippling Lake Wingate to the distant emerald shore where rolling hills keep communion with the sky, and I think about other horizons where earth and heaven meet. Besides this distant union of earth and sky just beyond these inland waters there are countless other horizons where forests rise with a constant urgency toward the sun and stars, where mountains point granite fingers at the heavens, where the timeless sea and eternal sky embrace. Nature abounds with meeting places. The most impressive horizon I know of is a creature called man, in whom earth and heaven meet. In human nature mingle the lowest and the highest elements we know, lust and love, self-indulgence and self-sacrifice, ignorance and knowledge, foolishness and wisdom, bigotry and humility, timidity and courage, the temporal and the eternal.

It is this dual nature of man that supplies one of the chief puzzles of religion and philosophy. The opposites in man are so intimately fused together that it is difficult to find the joints between them. Where does mind leave off and body begin? Even a trained scientist often finds it impossible to say whether a person's sickness is physical or spiritual, or both; a veterinary is less apt to have this problem with a beast or a bird. When a cat or a parakeet is sick we do not say of it, "It's all in his mind." We know it's in his body. However, when a boy complains that he's unable to go to school because of a severe headache, but later in the day goes fishing, we conclude his sickness was all in his mind. We can never be sure, where body and mind mingle the point of fusion is uncertain.

Yet we are careful to maintain some distinctions between the physical, touchable, weighable aspects of human nature and the less tangible faculties of our being. If someone dares to say that brain and mind are the same, we challenge him, daring him to make a detailed chemical analysis of the mind in the laboratory as has been done innumerable times with the human brain. We are neither body or mind, but both body and mind. We are neither right or wrong, but right here and wrong there. We are not so much wise or foolish as we are wise in this regard and foolish in another. Man is the meeting place of weakness and strength, of misery and grandeur, of the dust of the ground and the breath of God.

It is this double aspect of human nature that makes possible either cynical pessimism or half-blind optimism, depending upon which partial view we take - the half-truth that man is evil or the half-lie that man is good. We frequently hear the remark, "Human nature being what it is," and then we are told to expect the worst. "Human nature being what it is, you'll have to look out for yourself first, or you'll lose the shirt right off your back." Or, "Human nature being what it is, it is useless to attempt prevention of war."

Of course, human nature has a powerful potential for evil. It is of the earth, and it is earthy; but, this is not the entire truth about human nature any more than the earth is all there is of a horizon. Man, like a horizon, is where earth and heaven meet, where the lowest and the highest come together. The highest is as much a part of the horizon as is the lowest. If Benedict Arnold, betraying his country at West Point, is demonstrating human nature, so is George Washington, desperately hanging on to hope at Valley Forge in spite of cold and blizzards and the desertion of

his troops. If human nature is Al Capone of Chicago making a fortune from vice, human nature is also depicted by Charles Valiant, a French physician, daring to work with X-ray before scientists had learned to protect themselves from those powerful rays, but refusing to quit his important research although his fingers had to be removed, and later his arm at the elbow, then his arm at the shoulder and at last his other arm. If human nature is John Wilkes Booth firing a bullet into Lincoln's brain, human nature is also Abraham Lincoln giving his life for the Union. So when someone points to the evil man does and cynically asks, "But what can you expect of human nature?" I am inclined to counter, "You can expect George Washington, or Charles Valiant or Abraham Lincoln." As the book of Genesis puts it, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Earth is present in man, and heaven too. Dirt is there, but so is deity. The realist does not take his choice between the two and form a philosophy from his preference. He recognizes both.

The irresponsible expressionists miss the real moral significance of the twofold nature of human beings. The expressionists exclaim, "Enjoy yourself, it's later than you think," and advise the unrestrained acting out of every feeling and the fulfillment of every bodily urge. But sensualism and libertinism are no more the manifestations of what is in man than is prayer, or self-denial, or holiness. Meanness is no more evidence of what is in man than is magnanimity. Man is selfish and sacrificial, little and great, sensual and spiritual. Man is a horizon where earth and heaven meet. When, therefore, the expressionist gives full vent to the worst that is in him, the earthly, and represses his possibilities for good, the heavenly, he is less than half a man as surely as this little earth represents far less than half of what is out there on the distant horizon where a small world meets the greatness of the sky.

Express yourself? I should say so! You are body. Take care of it. Feed it. Exercise it. Work it. Rest it. Express it purposefully, wholesomely, in a way that will not shame you before God or man. However you are soul, too, and the soul should govern and hallow the body as the heavens dominate and bless the earth which gets its energy from the parent sun, and its light, and its rain, and its gravitational pull, and its direction - all from above.

Great manhood and womanhood is where earth and heaven meet, and heaven wins.