

Who Are the Fittest Who Survive?

The atmosphere of fall seems always to provoke a ~~more~~ sprightly yet more sober mood. As the air grows more chill slumbering energies ~~are~~ awakened with vigor and people are in more of a mind to confront the realities of the mart, a nd shop, and school.

The opening once again of a great university like the one in our midst ought to be entered into with determined zeal and glad-heartedness. But I doubt whether any generation of students in peace time has ever settled itself for a new academic year with more genuine cause and reason for serious reflection. The prevailing spirit of enthusiasm which is in all of us need not be dampened; but certainly it ought to be deepened. For if we are not blind we will see the signs of a most perilous time~~§~~. What young man is there here who enters upon another college year without the sober realization that he is for the first time in our history subject to a peacetime~~§~~ draft? Who is there among us who fails to apprehend the present terrible crisis which threatens every hour to erupt in volcanic fury? It is questionable whether ordinary people like you and me are even partially aware of the imminent danger which surrounds us. Recently I read a report on England which noted that despite ~~of~~ the highly inflammable controversies raging a few miles across the channel in Berlin the people of England were making their merry way toward the countryside witho~~ut~~ almost complete abandon, utterly oblivious of the tide of danger which was rising steadily around their unprotected shores. It was vacation time and their one desire was to get away from it all. Here in America in villages like this we, ^{too,} seem hardly aware of what is happening. We seem not to heed the warnings and threats which flare all around us. The present situation suggests the end of civilization as it was seen through a parable by the famous Danish Theologian, Soren Kierkegaard. He pictured a theatre in which the leading actor steps calmly to the footlights to

tell the audience in quiet tones that the theatre is on fire backstage. His intention is to avoid a panic. But the audience refuses to take him seriously, thinking the whole thing to be a hoax, ~~as~~ a vaudeville act. In ~~agony~~ anguish the actor reasserts his plea for them to leave the theatre. But the audience ~~keeps on~~ applauds more loudly. Eventually the fire spreads and they all perish, trapped in the flames.

It may be that people are gluttons on doom and they that refuse to take the dark prophets seriously. And yet the most sensitive and serious observers continue to brood darkly. With some spark of hope remaining most creative thinkers will echo Norman Cousins dictum: "It is not too late, but it has never been later." It seems as though the human race is confronted for the first time with the difficult problem of survival.

These considerations about survival raise once again the important question of "the survival of the fittest". After studying the progression of life on this planet the ~~the~~ scientists have concluded that the only organisms which survive the long processes of time are those which are able to adapt themselves to changing conditions and newly arising requirements. Hence only those which can fit the new circumstances of life which occur can survive. The others perish because of their unfitness. ~~This line of reasoning has long since been transferred~~ For example the huge dinosaurs perished from the earth when other creatures much smaller in physical size but more nimble and resourceful in brain power outsmarted them. And evolution has seemed to favor intelligence over against size and strength. Hence the most fit seem to be the most intelligent. This line of reasoning has long since been carried over into the human realm. But against the perilous background of our day the one paramount question we ought to ask is this: "Who are the fittest who survive?" "What constitutes their fitness now?"

In respect to the tension and the anxiety of our time it is, therefore, to this question that I wish we would address ourselves this morning. I assume that we have the capacities of seriousness and intelligence to pursue it.

Who, then, are the fittest who survive? If we are truly searching we will see that some of our popular notions are to be dispelled. It can hardly be maintained that the fittest are the best looking, the strongest physically, the largest in size, the wealthiest, the most successful, or the most popular. Not in this world. Rather it is being discovered, with strong affirmations from wise men of science, that the fittest individuals at our present stage of development are persons of character.

Léon du Nouy

The great French biologist who has probed deeply into the processes of evolution has said: "Evolution continues in our time, no longer on the physiological or anatomical plane but on the spiritual and moral plane." In other words the only development that counts for anything now is morality through character. And if evolution is to continue, if things on this planet are still to progress, a heavy part of the burden of responsibility falls squarely on each man individually. From the religious point of view it has long been thought that the vast changes in the universe depended solely on the processes of God. But now, says duNouy, it depends as much on the efforts of men. They have been accorded a determining part in evolution by their acquisition of free moral life. And the only kind of improvement that means anything now is the improvement that man must make himself - the improvement of his character. The man with character is the fittest.

During my vacation I met an acquaintance who appeared to me to be a perfect example of a ^(Bob Plummer) human being who seems, according to these terms, unfitted for survival in our time. He is a man with a marvelous education at one of the greatest universities in America. His native intelligence is unusually high. He holds a highly responsible position as an engineer. I had last seen him during the war when the atomic bomb was unknown and when the future was not clear. But seeing him again frightened me because I had scarcely greeted him before he launched an insane tirade

against most of his fellow men. In quick succession he damned and blistered the Catholics, the Jews, and the Negroes. Everything about the world and his own pitifully small life in the world that he did not like he blamed on them. He had no use for any of them, In fact, he hated them. According to him they had stolen his precious rights which they did not deserve. Now putting that man over against the One World I knew to exist I felt sick inside. For he and his kind seemed wholly, miserably unfit to live in it. And the ills of this man were moral in nature. He is morally unfit because of his inability to command the moral power to live in a world whose most desperate problems are ^{not} these of his profession, engineering, but of human relations.

This kind of unfitness is all the more sickening when you consider its scope. A key figure in the motion picture industry has recently ~~issued~~ pronounced a policy which seems ~~very~~ tragically irresponsible. The famed Howard Hughes had taken over the control of RKO Radio Pictures. Shortly thereafter, Dore Schary, one of the firm's most capable and creative directors, resigned. And one of his reasons seems to be Mr. Hughes' new policy. Mr. Schary had begun production on a unique film called "The Boy With Green Hair". This was to be a fantasy throwing more light on the plight of minority groups. The Boy With Green Hair was symbolic of people who are persecuted for being different. Simply because he had green hair he was persecuted. It was to be definitely a film with a moral message and had been praised by many outstanding ~~xxx~~ critics and leaders. But as soon as Hughes took over he ordered that no more pictures with moral messages of any sort would be made. Thus this movie was stripped of its real meaning and was reduced simply to the point of being an entertainment, and nothing else. Mr. Schary believed that the movie art could be used in the interest of contributing moral values. ~~so~~ So he quit. Thus a tremendously powerful influence on the life of America shows itself without the ability to perceive the real needs of the world it seeks to influence. If this

is typical of our civilization we do not deserve, indeed we cannot, survive.

Once again we must return to the basic requirements for our survival. They are moral in nature. Every wise man from General MacArthur to the last preacher has said so. The requirements of the universe are now moral. Someone was asked once what he would ask of the great Sphinx if he could be assured that his question would be correctly answered. His question was this: "Is the Universe friendly?" In other words, human beings desire deeply to know if the powers of the universe mean to favor human life or destroy it. That was a good question for theological discussion about twenty years ago, but a more pertinent and far more realistic question today is this: "Are we friendly to the Universe? Are we willing to obey its laws?" The great American physicist ^{Arthur Compton} suggests the importance of this question. "All things work together for good for him who serves the Lord" he asserts and that "is the exact parallel of nature's laws that are friendly to the well-adapted organism. On the other hand, nature's uncompromising attitude toward the man who will not so adapt himself is accurately caught in Paul's proverb, 'The wages of sin is death!'"

Thus if character counts for so much now the character of each one of us is of supreme importance. We must remember that the most crucial thing about our lives is character. If we want to show that we are evolved, if we want to survive, we had better inspect seriously the inner confines of heart and mind. Someone told me this week of a boy ^(Dick Phillips) I know who seems not to sense this important fact. He continues to proclaim loudly that his one desire upon finishing his course of law is to make \$10,000 a year. By this fact he shows himself unfit to adapt himself to the changing needs of life. What you do with your life and training, I repeat, are of vital, crucial importance. You may turn your advantages to serve yourself and you will devolve into a n unfit product of human evolution. But turn your gifts and your training into the service

of moral values and you will show yourself cognizant ~~of~~ and worthy of your place as a fit person.

This is not a private affair. Not so many years ago the fittest person had a chance of surviving solely on his own strength. But in our world even the fit people shall perish if there are not enough of them to turn the present tide. Everybody's weakness endangers the whole. Several years ago an amazing thing happened in our ~~year~~. A heavy branch of a dead tree fell out over the wires of a telephone pole. This caused a tremendous tensing of the wires as it exerted its pressure. The first pole, nearest the ~~fall~~ branch, stood straight and true, absorbing the crash. But the second pole, far down the line, being rotten through and through (though standing with the appearance of erectness) succumbed to the tension and crashed, damaging three cars and narrowly avoiding a passing pedestrian. Now it is interesting to note that each of those poles served the purpose of carrying the electric current for an entire community. But when one fell the resulting tension put all to the test, and because even a few were weak, the whole community suffered. We are today that tightly bound in our relationships with each other and the unfitness of even a few may cause us to perish. Our hope is in the possibility that enough of us will insure survival by being morally fit, by raising character to the highest consideration.

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We ought now to note the significance of religion in the development and maintenance of Character. If character is of real life it must be rooted in a fertile soil. And ^{the} only soil I know of that sustains and nurtures character is religion.

There is hardly a wiser man in our time than the great English historian, Arnold ~~Toynbee~~. Toynbee has spent his life ~~in~~ studying history, trying to ferret ^{out} the great truths and principles from mankind's struggles. No one in our present world has a greater grasp of the moments and factors which make us today what we are. In his latest book this is what he says: "If mankind is going to run amok with atom bombs,

I personally should look to the Negrito Pygmies of Central Africa to salvage some fraction of the present heritage of mankind . . . The Africans are said by our antropologists to have an unexpectedly pure and lofty conception of the nature of God and God's relation to man. They might be able to give mankind a fresh \$tart." (COT p.162) Does it seem strange to you that a historian would place so high an importance on religion as a factor in survival? Perhaps religion counts for more than we have ever dared to think.

The religion of the New Testament was profoundly concerned with the matter of survival. The more scholars study the New Testament the more convinced they become that its pages were written with the earnest expectation that a universal ~~crisis~~ crisis was at hand. Their entire thinking was pervaded by the idea that the Kingdom of God was about to triumph over the Kingdom of Evil. As individuals they were concerned about their survival. Jesus, sharing this apocalyptic view, taught that survival dependd upon a fitness for the kingdom of God. They must make themselves fit, and to do that they must keep his commandments. And this fitness consisted of moral rightness and fidelity to Godd

It can no longer be regarded as a preacher's platitude to say that the same holds true today. The handwriting is clearly on the wall. As human beings we are being pushed to the outer edges of reality and there we see ourselves in relation to each other and to the Supreme Power of the Universe. This is the repeated testimony of those who have taken the trouble to face the facts and think their way through. Ordinarily we do not think of newspaper men as sensitive souls. But this week I read a statement by Wayne Guthrie who is the assistant Managing Editor of the Indianapolis News. He was one of the few newspaper men invited in 1946 to witness the atomic bomb tests at Bikini. What he saw there revolutionized his thinking. Thereafter he was gripped by the incomprehensible horror of what he only dimly saw. These are his words of reflection: "I am not a preacher nor the son of a preacher. I'm just

a plain grass roots newspaper man, a father, a husband, and a fellow citizen of all of you. From what I've seen, heard from able scientists and read I have one conviction which I will not waive. That is this - there is only one real, ultimate, conclusive and final defense against the atomic bomb. And that defense is one word. And that ~~word~~ is the word that was made ~~eternally~~ immortal by the most dynamic figure that ever trod the face of this earth. I mean the Man of Nazareth and the word, my friends, is PEACE." (in KIWANIS MAGAZINE Aug. 1948)

In the light of all I have said this morning can you not now see the supreme importance of Jesus in human history? He was himself the fittest of the fit. By the example of his life and death he made a living description of what it means to be fitted to live. And by his life he laid out the way to survival. It is to that way that men are now turning for their only chance. That way leads ~~to~~ to the Kingdom of God.

Ordinarily it has been thought that only about ten percent of college students ever manifest a recognizable interest in religion. In fact I suppose that that is a pretty fair percentage for people in general who show a serious concern for religious affairs. That would hardly seem to be a sufficiently large number of people to turn back the onrushing tide of annihilation. That is a pitifully small garrison to hold out against the vast legions which seek to destroy civilization. Thus our only hope is in the possibility that more people seeing the signs of the time would win an inner revolution with themselves and begin to take seriously ~~their~~ their part in moral and spiritual evolution. Where else should we look for this turning than in a college community where people come to possess the treasures of civilized heritage? It is a matter for ~~the~~ personal, intelligent choice. Choice means action. Intelligence means the capacity to comprehend ~~and~~ what is happening in our world. To act intelligently upon a positive choice is to stand in need of a power that is not one's own. To make

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that choice is to meet with the necessity for a positive, creative religious faith. That is precisely what religion is: the power to see it through; the conviction that one has joined his will to the underlying Cause and Power of all Reality; the assurance that though he may lose his life he has lost it in an eternal purpose; the hope and faith that if he offers up all that he is and ever hopes to be to God that he will fit himself for survival, and not only himself, but that he will ~~con~~tribute to the upward march of humanity toward truth and larger life. For how can a man evolve and become fitted for life if he lives apart from the Creative power that made him, the world, and all that there is therein?

Let everyone here now search himself. If you do not feel that I have spoken in exaggerated terms of the present ~~crisis~~ crisis of mankind, then I urge you, as I urge myself, to face this question: Are you among the ranks of the unfit who have lost all capacity to meet the challenges of the present ~~crisis~~ crisis? Or are you going to be among the fittest who having discerned the signs of the times possess the capacity to be responsible for the moral and spiritual evolution of mankind? Before we depart from those questions let us hear again the words of our scripture:

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burnedIf ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in~~in~~ my love.