

The First Fifty Years

LINDSAY B. LONGACRE

THIS is a significant day. A 50th anniversary is no mean achievement for anybody or for any institution. Survival alone is worth something, but when, in addition to survival, a half-century has been filled with earnest and successful action, the period is worth celebrating. In the history of Methodism in Colorado which will be written some day, The Iliff School of Theology will hold an important place. As some great ship shows the course it has taken by the light on the water it has traversed, so the School in its progress across the years has left behind a shining trail. That whole path cannot here be traced, but a few of the salient features of its course call for mention.

It is really to Mrs. Elizabeth Iliff Warren that the existence of the School is due. Her initiative, her direction and her money laid the foundations upon which the School was erected. The School gets its name from John Wesley Iliff to whose memory it was erected. The building was the gift of Mr. William Seward Iliff, to whose generosity is due also the fine pipe organ that graces this Chapel. Loyal co-operating with her mother during her life time and carrying on the work since her mother's death, Miss Louise Iliff has been unremitting in the service of the

LINDSAY B. LONGACRE was Professor of Old Testament at The Iliff School of Theology from 1910 to 1942, and Professor Emeritus thereafter until his death in 1952. On the occasion of his retirement he delivered a notable commencement address, which, happily, coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the school itself. Since *The Iliff Review* is observing an anniversary of its own in this issue, we could think of no more appropriate way to do so than to make Professor Longacre's address available to a wider audience. It was published at the time (1942) in the school newsletter.

School, and in that service, as well as in generous gifts, she has exemplified the faithful devotion which she inherited. Among her many gifts should be especially mentioned the establishment of the Elizabeth Iliff Warren Fellowship, the proceeds of which are awarded each year to an outstanding graduate elected by the faculty, making possible an additional year of study in some other institution of learning. The Fellowship was established in 1926 and since that time each year some student has been its beneficiary.

Along with those whose names have been mentioned, and representing another aspect of the development of the School stands Bishop Henry White Warren. None who knew him well will ever forget that virile character, that far-flung imagination, that resonant voice and, above all, that impassioned earnestness for the establishment and advancement of the School that led to tireless labors in its behalf. If Mrs. Elisabeth Iliff Warren is the one to whom the existence of the School is ultimately due, the School's dominant character religiously and scholastically is due to Bishop Henry White Warren. It is fitting that the front page of the School's catalog should carry one of his words about the school. It reads: "The Iliff School of Theology has been established to promote progress in doctrine and experience." This was his consistent attitude and it is this spirit that he bequeathed to the School. It has been faithfully maintained and still inspires the School's administrators and faculty.

The corner stone of the building was laid June 8, 1892—fifty years ago almost to the day, and the School was opened in the fall of that year. For eight years it carried on its work successfully. It was felt, however, that its endowment

was not sufficient for the increasing scope of its activities and so, in 1900 it was temporarily closed, no one supposing at the time that ten years were to elapse before its reopening. But that is what happened. It had begun as a department of the University of Denver and the catalogs of the years 1892 to 1900 carry the name of the University. During the interval between 1900 and 1910 not only was the endowment definitely enlarged but the School was incorporated as a separate institution independent of the University, and this has been its status ever since.

Its work, its characteristic work, is done, of course, by the teaching staff. Upon president and faculty rests the responsibility of giving the School the academic standing their work and scholarship make possible for it in the family of theological seminaries. Within this group, from the time of the reopening of the School in 1910, individuals have, of course, come and gone. Their names may be found in the successive catalogs. One, however, the man who came as president of the School at its re-opening in 1910, should be mentioned. There rested upon him the responsibility of determining the academic level from which the School should take off, the direction in which it should proceed and the standards by which it should be guided. Dr. Harris Franklin Rall was qualified to meet the situation. Thanks to his vision, his ability and his vigor the School got off, so to speak, on the right foot, and has since maintained the high standing he initiated.

The School soon became known as an outpost of what has loosely been called liberal Christianity. At first its teachings were looked upon with considerable suspicion by many earnest ministers and laymen. It was, as they said, "dangerous." An extreme, and at this date rather amusing, example of this is in an issue of the Rocky Mountain "Pillar of Fire," dated February 15, 1905. A long editorial discusses the University

of Denver and the School of Theology saying, along with much else, "These schools are for the education of Methodist young people and the training of young men for the ministry, and they profess to be deeply spiritual. The fact is, they are given over to worldliness, encouraging football and ungodly Greek societies, and are concerned with evolution and higher criticism."

To give point to this condemnation the whole front page is used for a cartoon in which is shown a procession moving toward the brink of a lake of fire labeled, "Hell." Leading the procession is Mrs. Warren carrying the Iliff School of Theology building. Immediately behind her come Chancellor Buchtel and Bishop Warren bearing the University building on their shoulders. Other individuals are named. One is carrying the banner of the Colorado Conference. All are roped together and are marching forward heedless of the doom awaiting them.

But changes in this attitude have come about far beyond the anticipations of fifty years ago. This is due to a number of factors—for instance, there are the alumni themselves. Not only are they members of the Colorado and other conferences, where they inevitably carry on influence of friendliness toward the School, but many of them have proved themselves highly successful in just the sort of pastoral work for which it was sometimes supposed they would be unfitted if they should attend such a school as Iliff. Further, the world of religious thought has changed noticeably in the course of the last fifty years. Ideas which then were new and suspicious are now seen to be valid and fruitful, and in advancing these validities the School has played no mean part. It is being recognized more and more that it has been on the right track all the time. Finally, but not without significance, and a further confirmation of what has just been said, the faculty members themselves are more and more in demand as speakers, writers and consultants, not only in

Methodist churches but in those of other denominations and even in some so-called secular fields as well.

It is, perhaps, not out of place to mention one aspect of the conduct of the School which relates especially to the professors and their teaching. It is the fact that, as far as I know, no one officially connected with the School has brought to bear any influence upon a professor designed to limit or modify his teaching in his classes. After a professor has been once engaged he has been allowed to conduct his classes and present his subjects as he has seen fit. And if the School has been able to develop any of the integrity and independence without which progress is impossible, it is due not least to the academic freedom which has been one of the School's outstanding characteristics.

Such a brief statement as this is inadequate to do justice to the School and especially to that intangible factor we call its spirit. The School is more than a building or a board of trustees or a curriculum. In these rooms young men have seen visions—and old men have dreamed dreams. Indeed, as we think of them, we can almost imagine that the walls of this pleasant chapel fall away and we become aware of the goodly company of those who have preceded us: founders, administrators, faculty, alumni. Truly we are compassed about by a great cloud of witnesses who have built into this institution visions, hopes, plans, devotions—seen and unseen—fulfilled and unfilled—inspiring—challenging—a goodly heritage gathered during its first half century and laid on the threshold of its second.

One further constituent of the School has so far been unmentioned—the student body. One might almost say that in this respect the end crowns the work. Those who have graduated are among the many witnesses just mentioned; but their representatives, their successors, are here and again a class is graduating, leaving these halls where they have spent the last few years and going to

their respective fields of life and work. They came here, and have stayed, often at considerable sacrifice—a sacrifice that fell not only upon themselves but, for those who are married, upon their wives as well. One recalls the story of David who, when his warriors demanded the lion's share of the booty, laid down the principle that, "as his share is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his share be that tarrieth by the baggage: they shall share alike." So while these men have gone out to fight the battle of the books their wives have tarried by the baggage; but when it comes to credit and devotion they shall share alike—God bless them all.

And now a word—well, several words—to you of the graduating class. Just because this is the School's jubilee year is no reason why you should not be addressed—nor any reason why I should not have the privilege of addressing you. What I should like to say is so beautifully suggested by a brief passage in the book of Deuteronomy that I shall take my start from there. Leaving out some of the big names and some repetitions, the passage reads as follows:

- (1) When thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, "What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which the LORD our God hath commanded you?"
- (2) Then thou shalt say unto thy son, "We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out from thence,
- (3) That he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers."

First, when thy son asketh thee in time to come, says the Scripture. So it can be said to you that in time to come you will be asked about the testimonies and the statutes and the ordinances that you have heard here in Iliff. You will be asked about the School—probably you have been asked already; but some of that asking can be disregarded because it was prompted by curiosity or criticism.

Deeper questions than these will arise and will be justified because those whom you meet will get the feeling that you think of religion differently, read the Bible indifferently, look at life differently, from those who have not been here. Your points of view will be noticed and you will be asked about them. It will be felt that there are testimonies, statues and ordinances that you observe which others do not. Why do you do it? What do these things mean?

If something like this does not happen it may well be questioned whether your seminary career has been of any real value. If a seminary course makes no difference why waste all that time and energy? If you have not seen some things here you had not seen before, if you have not learned some things you did not know, if you have not received some things you did not previously possess, it is obvious that you have nothing to show for your work and your time.

It is also true that if a seminary does not place these advantages before an acquisitive student, if a seminary attempts nothing but the polishing up of a few venerable shibboleths, it may well be questioned whether that seminary justifies its existence and support. And in a day when every direction must be wisely chosen, when every effort must count to its highest efficiency, no seminary has a right to be an institution designed simply to inflate undernourished minds with pride in their own platitudes.

If, however, students and institution together are striving to delve deeper, to see farther, to understand better, than is possible for those who neither seek nor knock, then there will be opened to seminary and student an abundant entrance into an experience which justifies the existence of the seminary and the attendance of the student.

It is obvious that the difference between the seminary man and the one who has not been there will necessarily exist as long as the church at large stops short of the rich experience that the

seminary make possible. It is inevitable. And it will be noticeable directly in the degree to which the student has done his work and has availed himself of his opportunities. Unfortunately it happens that students, some students, manage to imitate the motions so successfully that they achieve graduation without inoculation. These, however, are not the students here under discussion nor are they to be found (we hope) in this class now about to graduate.

Reminding you then of your parallel to the passage in Deuteronomy, all this means that **YOU WILL BE ASKED**—and you ought to be. What will be your answer? The Scripture carries the story right along: **THEN THOU SHALT SAY** unto thy son we were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt, and the **LORD** brought us out from thence. In other words, give your testimony, tell your experience. This is good Methodist doctrine as well as good Hebrew doctrine.

The ancient Hebrew story which those Hebrew fathers were to tell their children is too familiar to need re-telling here. It is epitomized in three words: Egypt—wilderness—Canaan; or, bondage—exodus—the promised land. You doubtless have anticipated the easy parallel between this experience and your own. No one who has made even the shortest step from ignorance toward knowledge but knows that sense of emancipation, that new vision of freedom, which attend such a step. This is said with no thought of asperity toward the Egypt of ignorance. That is where we all started. And it is only by the grace of God that we, like the Hebrews, have been led out. What if some look back upon that earlier time with regret. It was so with some of the Hebrews; it is so today, for those who merely graduate. It is so for those who are content with custom and routine, who dream of no Utopias and desire no change. When, half against their will, they are carried out into a wilderness of uncertainty, its dimness is not, to them, the grey light of a brightening

dawn, but, the forbidding clouds of an advancing night; and they wish they were back again in the old familiar world where they felt so at home.

But to return to our Scripture! Such words as those could not have been written until the people were at home in their promised land and had found it good. The story gives the end result but passes over the process which must have been long and arduous. Those new settlers could not have been as confident as that at the beginning. It is so with students. It is not absolutely certain that every student, immediately upon graduation, has fully established himself in the new country. He may still feel himself to be somewhat of a pioneer. He has yet to put up a shelter, clear some ground, find water, do some planting, in a word, make a home for himself and make himself at home. But just as the Scripture reflects the period of establishment and success, so one thinks today of the graduate who (to use the Master's figure) having put his hand to the plow does not look back; of the one who, though but recently arrived, has already staked out his claim, and with courage and with great joy has welcomed the new call and the new hope.

Is this experience to be told? Why not? There may be some hesitation at first. Perhaps that has been inevitable. One cannot be too positive about a country that he has been able to observe only through a telescope. But after one has settled there, has found his way about, and can speak from his own personal knowledge and experience, the time for hesitation and silence has passed. He no longer need be on the defensive—and should not be. Let him speak up and speak out.

Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God,

But children of the heavenly King may speak their joys abroad.

The Scripture now concludes with the third step in the words: "THAT HE MIGHT BRING US IN." First, the question was asked. Then came the answer

which began with the account of what had happened, viz., Egypt, wilderness, promised land. But the answer goes on beyond that objective statement to give a reason, an explanation, for what had occurred. Here one enters a different field. Any explanation or interpretation rests back upon the interpreter. Any reason he gives will be *his* reason, and this makes his reason profoundly self-revealing; for there can be no question of the sincere belief and trust that inspire these words. What this man would have said had he been put on the spot and interrogated by some sociological or psychological inquisitor I do not know, but I am sure that it could be said of him, as the epistle to the Hebrews said of Moses, that he held firmly to the Unseen One as though he saw Him.

He was sure that the new land to which his people had come, the land that had become their home, was the crown of their experience and the confirmation of their faith. Perhaps you will follow this Scripture even here, so that the new experiences into which you have come, the new possessions you have acquired, may be seen and held as having back of them a divine significance. In principle this is nothing new. Probably each one of you felt, when you first came here, that in some way, by some means, near or remote, you had been led. The only difference between your first coming and the present moment is not in the fact of the leading but simply of where you might have stopped. You were led here not as to a point of repose but as to a point from which to proceed. You have been following that leading through these last years and have found a new country. You have rounded out the Scripture parallel.

If, however, you have caught anything of the spirit of the School you cannot stop even here. This is (or should be) for you literally, a Commencement. However dogmatic your professors may have seemed to you, I cannot believe

that any member of the faculty supposes, even in his own field, that the last word has been spoken or the last boundary traced. Neither, I think, would they have you suppose that you had come to the end of your journey. You have once more reached a point, not to stop at, but from which to go.

We pursue a flying goal, and if I were to leave but one word with you, a sort of valediction for future reference, it would be: GO ON. Life lies ahead. The only failure is to stop where you are. Happy the class, the student, yes, anyone, who goes on, until the stop comes over which he has no control; who, even as that moment approaches, has still the spirit which Tennyson attributes to Ulysses, when this fabled hero, toward the end of his life, says in Tennyson's words—words that, perhaps, you, too, will feel like saying when you approach your journey's end:

All experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravelled world, whose
margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an
end,
To rust unburnished, not to shine in
use!

And vile it were
For some three suns to store and
hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in
desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking
star
Beyond the utmost bound of human
thought.

Come my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer
world.

And though
We are not now that strength which
in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which
we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts
Made weak by time and fate, but
strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to
yield.

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