

# BISHOP BARES ALL!

By WILLIAM MONTGOMERY BROWN

AS I am an old preacher, I must have a subject and a text, even for an after dinner speech, else I do not feel at home. My subject on this occasion is, *The Masses*. My text is, "Ye must be born again."

But, though I am an old preacher, I am the youngest person at the dinner and can prove that I am. You all are old enough to remember the old *Masses*. I am too young to remember it.

The old *Masses* does not mean anything in my young life. When the old *Masses* was making its impression upon America, when it was inspiring you with its wit and wisdom, and with its appreciation of the new era into which the world was breaking, I was sitting complacently as a Bishop, utterly oblivious to all that was going on. So to all practical purposes, the old *Masses* lived and died before I was born. I was born while the war was on. Before that I was dead while living. I have had more of life within the nine years since the country went into the war, than during the whole of the two generations through which I passed before.

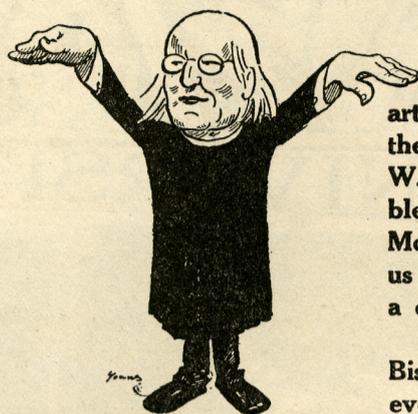
Being born means coming into the world that exists. No one can claim that he has been born if he is still sticking around in a world that does not exist. That is where I was. The world had moved into a new era, but I did not know anything about it. I was not supposed to know. I thought it was a sin to know anything that Moses and St. Paul did not know.

All the genuine knowledge in the world, all it needed for its salvation, I supposed, was tied up in a sacred bundle thousands of years ago and delivered, once for all, to the saints. And the saints, from that time on, when they wanted to deliver any knowledge to the sinners, had to untie that bundle and give the poor sinners what they found. It was poor picking all around.

I do not want to say a word against knowledge being handed down to us, or against our receiving revelations from the past. The point I am making is that we are not really alive unless our hearts are open to receive revelations from the present too. The moment we assume that any plan of salvation was revealed once for all in a perfected formula to anybody—to Moses, to Paul or even to Jesus—that moment we cease to live. No one is ever really born until he becomes a heretic.

And you, as young as you seem to be, were heretics long before I was. Oh how I envy you! I greet you as my seniors. I greet you as my superiors. I feel like sitting at your feet and having you expound to me the Gospel according to the old *Masses*.

But while I sit there please remember that I am young. I belong to the younger generation; and I will not permit anyone to tell me that the revolutionary truth was revealed once for all to Max Eastman and Art Young, or even to Karl Marx and Daniel De Leon. I am willing to worship these



**THE NEW MASSES** started under such financial handicaps that our artists and editors and poets felt the need of spiritual help. Charles W. Wood found us a Bishop to bless our labors. He is William Montgomery Brown, and he gave us his revolutionary blessing and a check for \$1,100.

This gallant and youthful Bishop must be known to nearly everyone in America by now. He was for decades Bishop of

Arkansas in the Protestant Episcopal Church, and was deposed for heresy last year at a trial that was like a remarkable echo of the middle ages. He is still Bishop in the old Catholic Church, however, and does his preaching at Communist and labor defense meetings throughout America. He is constantly active, despite his 71 years, and puts to shame the tired radicals who write and talk in liberal circles.

Bishop Brown's "Communism and Christianity," the book that provoked the heresy trial, has sold into the hundred thousands. It is a defence of Darwinism and Communism as basic spiritual ideals in the modern consciousness, and is well worth reading.

The Bishop's blessing on the NEW MASSES, delivered at a dinner in New York, is printed here for its fine wit and courage. It contains, we think, some of the most amazing confessions ever made by an American Bishop.

men as saints, and I do not want to break with their glorious old traditions; but if you had told me that you were going to duplicate the *Masses*, and get out exactly the sort of magazine the *Masses* was, I should not have been interested.

Instead, you told me in the prospectus that you were going to be different. You announced your intention to interpret life as you find it in America now; not binding yourselves even to the inspired interpretations in the *Masses* of ten years ago.

That means, as I see it, that you are genuinely religious, and that the NEW MASSES will be primarily a religious publication.

For religion does not consist of any special theory about life, either about the origin of life or about its destiny; religion is the urge of life itself—the desire for more life and the effort to get more life. If your magazine is impelled by that force, it is bound to live as a great exponent of religion.

It may be crucified, because of the reality of its religion, as the old *Masses* was. It may be that some solemn assemblage of bishops or post office officials will attempt to depose you from the sacred ministry. But that will not make any difference. For you will live abundantly while you do live—as the old *Masses* did, as Jesus did, as John Reed did. The only thing worth while in this world is life. The de-

sire for a more abundant life and the effort to attain it constitute all there is of Christianity, or any real religion.

I am not going to advise you as to how to realize your aims. I wish only to express the hope that you will not try to be consistent.

If you are really alive, you will go after the truth; and you will not worry as to whether any truth which you discover is pleasant or not, or whether or not it seems to quarrel with some pet theory which you have come to hold. If you follow life, wherever it leads you, you may go wrong; but, at least you will go. If you try to make life conform to anybody's theory, you will stop.

I want to write for the NEW MASSES if I can. I am not a magazine writer. I am a preacher. But I am young yet and I can learn. A while ago, I submitted an article to several magazines. It was an intimate story of my life; and it seemed to me that such stories were becoming popular. It was a true story, you know—one of those confessional things which does not hold anything back. I thought they might publish it under the title "A Bishop Bares All," or something like that.

But they did not. The editors all said it was a great story. They said it was well written too. I think they were right, for I got Mr. Charles W. Wood to collaborate with me so as to make sure that it was well written ac-

ording to the best style of magazine writing.

It was an article by Mr. Wood in the Hearst International Magazine which started the bishops after me on the heresy trail—one among the most fortunate events of my life, going far toward making it worth living.

But this fine magazine story which I told so well, with Mr. Wood's expert help, was never printed.

The editors said it was too thrilling—in fact, exciting; and they did not want their readers to become excited.

I took pains to read a number of magazine stories before I tried to write one. They were generally the story of some man who had achieved wealth, honor and success, who told how he did it all, how he made himself. It was always by the same method; by industry, honesty and thrift, combined of course with an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of one's work.

Well, I had achieved wealth, honor and success by another route. I had begun life as a slave on a farm, bound out as a war orphan when I was only six and a half years old; and I had become wealthy, and I had received the princely honor of Bishop of Arkansas and had met with such extraordinary success as a builder of churches and an organizer of congregations that they used to tell me I could make Episcopalians out of fence posts, which was true of Orthodox ones.

But I had achieved my wealth, I said in this article, because it was given to me; I had been made a Bishop because I had a pull, and I became successful in my ministry because I did not know anything about what I was doing.

If I had known that I was preaching a lot of lies, does anybody think that I could have succeeded? Of course not. I would have been an utter failure as Bishop of Arkansas if I had known anything at all. I was utterly ignorant. I even thought I was alive, though I was as dead as a door nail.

As for my early struggles, I had plenty of them, but they did not have anything to do with my achieving wealth. If I had not struggled so hard, in fact, I would have been much better off.

For I was bound out to an old German farmer, who did not love me so that I could notice it, but who did like to see me struggle. I struggled with the weeds, thistles and briars. I struggled with the hoe and the pitchfork, the axe, the cross cut saw, the maul and wedge, the wheat in the sheaf, the corn in the shock and the pumpkins on the vine and with the cows and the horses and the pigs; and the more I struggled with these things, the more he let me struggle; and he kept me working on that farm until I was sixteen, letting me get almost no schooling at all. If I had not been so industrious, I fancy he might have got rid of me sooner than he did. As it was, he

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