

JOHN R. MOTT

Apostle of Jesus Christ

IN FRONT OF TRINITY CHURCH, BOSTON, is a statue of Phillips Brooks, the rector who made that parish the preaching peak of his generation. The sculptor depicts the commanding figure of Brooks with another form standing behind and overshadowing him. The other figure is that of Jesus Christ. Phillips Brooks, towering above the pulpit masters of his time, humbly felt himself the servant of his Lord.

John R. Mott has been, and will be, memorialized in many places. His portraits hang on uncounted walls and will be hung on countless more. His life has been incorporated in many books and will be immortalized in many more. But if the portrayals are true to the primary purpose of his life, the figure of the Christ will always be standing over him. He was an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

John Mott was prepared for his apostleship by pioneer parents. He was the scion of sturdy stock who left the more settled and sheltered valleys of New York for the more open and isolated plains of Iowa. His alert mind was sensitive to the lengthened horizons of the west. He once said: "I have long thought that it was life on these boundless plains which profoundly kindled my imagination and was a great factor in making me responsive in later years to worldwide visions and plans."

Typical of so many American youth, his mind was awakened by the touch of a local minister who inspired him to read and later influenced him to go to college. His family had become Christian under the influence of a Quaker evangelist, J. W. Dean, State Secretary of the Iowa Young Men's Christian Association. Thus was formed the first link in Dr. Mott's life-long connection with the great organization which was eventually to honor him with its highest offices and which he was to lead to worldwide achievements.

The first college to which John Mott went was Upper Iowa University in Fayette. While he was a student there, a Young Men's Christian Association was formed and he became a charter member. Though active in religious work, he looked toward law as a preparation for a political career. One is tempted to let his imagination picture what positions he might have filled had he turned his amazing talents toward public office.

But at Cornell University, in which he next enrolled, the direction of his life was changed. To that campus came J. E. K. Studd, famous English cricketer and a member of the Cambridge Seven formed under the influence of Dwight L. Moody. Young Mott went to hear Studd. Let Dr. Mott describe the experience: "The first three sentences I heard him speak revolutionized my life." Hear them: "Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." Later a member of his staff was to say: "What I have seen of Mott's leadership in fifty years is convincing evidence that he always lived by the text that changed his life."

Having gotten a new sense of direction, John Mott's dynamic and creative mind would not let him stand still. He set to work. He joined a Bible class in an Ithaca church. He initiated work among prisoners in the town jail. He was elected vice-president of the Student Christian Association. Later he became president. And in his senior year was largely responsible for raising the funds to house the student Christian work in Barnes Hall on the Cornell campus.

The stream of John Mott's life, which had risen in the uplands of high personal spiritual experience, was now headed toward the wide sea of God's service. Then a mighty tributary came in to swell the stream. John R. Mott met Dwight L. Moody. How priceless would be the photograph of their first meeting! The bearded Elijah of Northfield must have realized that he was laying his mantle on a young and powerful Elisha whose prophetic work would carry the eternal gospel to the ends of the earth.

John Mott, the enlisted follower of Jesus Christ, was now to begin his work as the ambassador of Christ. The Creator had seemingly put the stamp of leadership on his commanding figure and regal bearing. At his graduation from Cornell in 1888, he

became Student Secretary of the International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations, but only after prolonged soul searching, for other opportunities beckoned him. In this office he travelled over America, becoming a familiar and electrifying figure on our nation's campuses.

In 1891 John R. Mott made his first visit to Europe as a delegate to the World Conference of YMCA's at Amsterdam. Fifty-seven years later I had the privilege of seeing and hearing him in that same city of Amsterdam as he led in forming the World Council of Churches. As I recall him standing majestically in his red academic robes looking out over the assembled throng in 1948, I wonder what memories filled his mind as he thought of the movements in which he had served since his first visit to Amsterdam over a half century earlier. Every great religious cause and every significant ecumenical conference during those five decades had felt his leadership.

His first visit to Europe kindled his enthusiasm for foreign missions. He often admonished young men, "Keep your eyes on the ends of the earth." The lad who lifted his gaze to the broad fields of Iowa was on his way to becoming a world citizen. Personally I have to confess that whenever I looked into the eyes of Dr. Mott, they somehow suggested to me the gaze of an eagle. An eagle seems to look through you and beyond you. So did Dr. Mott. His piercing eyes looked straight at you and yet seemed to see long vistas beyond you. His vision became adjusted to vast distances.

He repeatedly circled the globe travelling over two million miles visiting the leading universities of all lands. I have heard him say humorously that he often felt like asking his traveling companions to place a board at the foot of his bed each morning bearing the name of the country in which he was waking up.

Dr. Mott is credited with having influenced more young men than any other man of his time. May I testify for myself. I saw him first at the Student Volunteer Convention held in Rochester in 1910. John Mott at 45 years was a figure a student never forgot. He looked like a statesman. He spoke like a statesman. He was a statesman. If a man like Mott felt that Christian service and foreign missions were big business, they were big

business. He captured my imagination. He was no small factor in shaping my choice of work.

John R. Mott was an ambassador of the young King of Calvary to the youth of America and to the students of Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. For over half a century he riveted the attention of the Christian world on youth and helped to rivet the mind of youth on the making of a Christian world. As Professor Kenneth Latourette has said, "There have been many great missionaries, but no one else has been the means of bringing together in cooperation in the spread of our faith so many diverse ecclesiastical groups or on so extensive a geographic scale."

John Mott was an ambassador of Christ to kings as well as to campuses. He visited with the statesmen of the world. He was welcomed in the councils of governments. In 1916 and 1917 at the request of President Wilson he was a member of the Mexican-American Joint Committee and a member of the Commission sent by the President to Russia. His cooperation was sought by governments not only because he was head of the vast and potent Young Men's Christian Association but also because he was John R. Mott.

And we must remember, too, that Dr. Mott was a global worker before we had global wars. And if the churches and peoples of the world had adequately responded to his missionary appeals, the chances are that the last world war would not have occurred. Dr. Mott saw the needs of Japan and if we had heeded his call to Christianize that land, there would have been no Pearl Harbor. If we had shared his ecumenical spirit, there would be no Iron Curtain between Orient and Occident today.

But for us to look back pensively and picture what might have been is hardly in keeping with Dr. Mott's character. I do not know of his ever speaking in the recriminatory vein of "I told you so." I never heard him bemoan the passing of "the good old days." He was always looking forward to the golden age ahead. Like "Rabbi Ben Ezra" his invitation was always out:

"Grow old along with me,
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made.
Trust God, see all, nor be afraid."

He never complained, saying, "What's the world coming to." He was ever proclaiming what had come to the world in Christ. He was an ambassador of Jesus Christ.

And not only did John R. Mott follow Christ as a humble servant and represent him as an ambassador. He was a creator with Christ. Some persons write books which serve to prolong their memory. Others erect buildings which continue their work. But Dr. Mott is memorialized in living movements. If institutions are but the lengthened shadows of men, then his shadow is immeasurable because it is ever growing. Ponder the organizations and movements listed in this program:

The Student Volunteer Movement
The World's Student Christian Federation
The International Missionary Council
The World's Alliance of YMCA's
The World Council of Churches
The National Council of Churches
The Inter-Seminary Movement
The United Student Christian Council

— all these and many others were blessed by his leadership and many more born of his brain. The Young Men's Christian Association was his first love because it was his spiritual parent, but with that as a fulcrum and Christ-like love as a lever he helped to "lift" the world. The Methodist Church was his ecclesiastical home, but he belonged to the Church Universal, the Body of Christ.

The inclusiveness of his spirit and the immortality of his influence can not be better expressed than by the citation given to John R. Mott at the Centennial International Convention of YMCA's in 1951:

"Devoted servant of the cause of Christ, pioneer of worldwide Christian movements, brother of men of all races, ceaseless worker in behalf of world peace, welcome guest on all continents, renowned long-time leader and honored statesman of the Young Men's Christian Associations of all countries, friend of youth of all lands."

How could one man's magnetism be felt in so many directions and to such vast distances? There can be only one answer to the

secret. He was so superbly a master of men because he was so truly a servant of God.

Dr. Mott demonstrated the double principle of divine trusteeship. He was so successful in handling the talents committed to him that he was made trustee of ever larger interests. But he also illustrated that other principle which Christ expressed when he said, "If you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own?" By his fidelity in guarding the interests of others, he received the rich blessings which belonged to him. A score or more of universities honored him. He was given the Distinguished Service Medal by his own beloved country and was decorated by fifteen other governments. He richly deserved the Nobel Peace Prize awarded him in 1946 because he had worked for unity within the churches as well as between governments. He recognized that a divided church could not honestly call for a united world. And he realized that religion offers the greatest channel of hope for world peace because it reminds men of their common membership in God's family.

Some years ago Henry Van Dyke, speaking at the Hall of Fame, gave this definition: "Fame is durable good renown, won by service, approved by the wise, applauded by the common voice." When we look at John Mott we see the embodiment of what the thoughtful American mind calls fame. We see beyond Mott the man the mighty movements which he served. We see towering above him the figure of Christ whose apostle he was. We catch a vision of the better world he dreamed. And the world which can produce a John R. Mott must be God's world.

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