

# The Historian's Calling

By DONNELL M. OWINGS

I must own it was with some trepidation that I agreed to address so distinguished a gathering. I should be bolder than I am if I now ventured upon any matter save that wherein I have personal knowledge and an abiding interest. That matter is history. I have chosen to discuss with you one aspect of it, namely the present work of historians and their role among us today.

The subject is not, I hope, so parochial as it may at first appear. True, the greater number of you are not immediately concerned in this discipline, and your acquaintance with it has been, in some cases, rather casual. Yet the very circumstance that we are gathered together here tonight suggests that all of us, historians and others, have something in common. To put the matter rather high, that something is our common involvement in a great adventure. Western man has raised himself from barbarism; he has created a complex civilization; and he is now concerned that his culture may not only be maintained, in these troubled times, but may be brought to yet higher levels. In this adventure, I say, we must all be deeply concerned, and in this concern we are all of us one.

Now there is an Arabic saying that man's culture rests, as it were, upon four pillars: justice, learning, righteousness, and valor. Should one of these crumble the whole structure must fall and must crush those within it. So here we have a more particular matter in common: all of us are scholars or the friends of scholars—we have sought learning. We know that but for ourselves man's long adventure must bring him to disaster, and the temple he has constructed must collapse. Here again, and in a more specific way, we are all of us one.

We have indeed found it convenient to divide the sum of knowledge into separate parts. And as our years are mortal, we have seldom tried to master fields outside our own. Yet while we have pursued, each of us, his particular mission, we have been often reminded that truth and learning are whole, that the lines which divide one discipline from others are but concessions to our poor capacity; that each must borrow from its neighbors. Without mathematics

the natural sciences must perish. And without science the humanities are vain. I venture then to suggest that, however apparently unrelated your own field, my present subject matter cannot be void of interest to you.

Now as the term History has different meanings, I must tell you that we shall not discuss tonight History as Actuality; that is to say, what happened in the past. Rather we are going to deal with History as Record; our present knowledge of the past. For here, you see, the role of the historian is involved. It is his business to maintain such learning, to augment it, and to disseminate it. This has been his special task from earliest times, and with it he is still concerned.

For such knowledge an historian is obliged to turn to what we call "sources." In the antiquity of our race these were apt to be no more than an oral tradition of his elders. But from an early time he learned to augment this store of data by a study of artifacts—things made by hand, however great or small—and of documents—things written on, whatever the substance or the matter. These three kinds of sources, in their varied forms, are still our raw materials today.

Once, long ago, historians, in their capacity as bards, did no more than pass on their learning, by word of mouth, to those who chose to listen. This is of course still our chief activity. We spend most of our waking hours lecturing or preparing to lecture, in or out of classrooms. However, we historians early learned the necessity of writing down what we knew, for only so could our knowledge be certainly preserved and one generation build surely upon another. Thus from a remote time historians have written books. Some have been content with no more than the editing of earlier documents. Others have written monographs, that is intensive studies of restricted scope. Yet others, and these the boldest, using edited records and monographs prepared for them, have ventured upon histories of whole nations or races.

Now we may very properly ask why all

this activity is carried on at all. Manifestly we live in the present; and the present is the only reality we shall ever know. Why then all this concern with a time we did not live in, with an age which, for all our learned efforts, we can not recover?

Let us confess that history is less aesthetically satisfying, and less immediately useful, than certain other branches of learning. It has not, for instance, the nice precision and the serene certainty of mathematics. We cannot produce for you a single statement that will rival two-and-two-make-four either in exactness or in its manifest and universal truth. Nor is our subject matter so neat to handle as that of the natural sciences. We resort in vain to laboratories. For what we must bring cannot be weighed or measured or subjected to controlled experiment. As for immediate use, there is of course hardly a moment of our lives when we must not summon to our aid the mathematics. And the natural sciences have enormously justified themselves by saving our time and muscle, discomfiting our enemies, and curing our afflictions. Why then indeed should anybody turn to history, a discipline admittedly diffuse, vague, difficult to master, and apparently of the slightest practical application? Why indeed?

The answer is simply this: that history is the memory of mankind, and historians are the custodians of that memory.

A society without history is a society afflicted with amnesia. Morally it must wander as a vagrant. It can never know itself. For the picture of ourselves we live by is but the picture of our past. Without history we have no traditions, no values, no principles. For the past created these, and if we know not the past, how shall we know these either? Without history we have no soul: for what is soul but the body of our deeper sensibilities derived from our experience? The present is mostly memory of the past. Our spiritual and intellectual mastery of that present, our grasp of it, and all its sundry aspects, is apt to be just in proportion to our awareness of what has gone before.

But to be more particular, history is our chief tool for understanding that animal which we are, namely Man. The natural sciences may indeed here aid us very greatly. For they can take him apart and examine his separate attributes. From them we may learn his chemical composition, the mechanical function of his bones and muscles, the processes of his metabolism, even some traits of his mind. But it is by history that we see him whole in all his ways, not only in the present but in the long sweep of his development.

Indeed so vast are its possibilities in this

direction that it has had to delegate portions of this function to a great family of humanistic studies. Political Science studies Man as he tries to govern himself; Sociology, Man in relation to his neighbors; Economics, Man as he tries to feed and clothe himself; Anthropology, Man in his rise from the brute creation. To all of these, history bears a relation somewhat like that of mathematics to the natural sciences—it is both mother and servant. For it gave birth to these disciplines. It supplies the material of their subject matter. And it examines their conclusions against known events.

If then history is our chief aid for knowing the present and understanding ourselves, it would seem to follow that a knowledge of the past ought to be rather generally diffused in society, and that such History ought to be good History; that is to say, not only accurate in detail but substantially truthful in its larger assertions.

Statesmen and politicians have in fact generally witnessed to the value and power of history, each in his own way. In this country, for instance, from an early time, legislatures have put it into our school curricula, for they have rightly feared the vagaries of a people grown up in ignorance of their tradition. More recently they have paid us, the historians, the compliment of their deep suspicion. They have feared that we might emasculate the people by belittling their past or mislead them by corrupting the record.

True it is that falsification of History is a usual tool of subversive elements here; and abroad it has been among the first acts of dictators and usurpers. They know that, if people are to accept despotism, they must be taught that the past was somehow worse than the present. They know too that, if young men are to be led unprotesting to the battlefield, they must first be taught that they were always invincible. Indeed, through the corruption of their History, a people may be deprived not only of the recollection of their liberties, but of that cul-

tivated taste for freedom which among nations is the fruit of a past well spent and well remembered.

Thus it arises that from the state of their historical scholarship we may infer the extent of a people's liberties. Where historians have access to uncorrupted sources, where what they write is dispassionate and objective, where knowledge of the past is as full and as true as surviving records permit, there men are free and are masters of their destiny. Where historians are turned away from the archives, or where those archives have themselves been looted or been stuffed with forgeries, where that which passes for history is a tissue of prejudice and falsehood, there men have lost their freedom and have been enslaved.

Good history is then both an index of liberty and a bulwark in its defense. Now as we are presently concerned about our freedom, we may very well inquire into the state of American History among us, into the character of our historians and the nature of their work. We might begin by observing that the two desiderata earlier mentioned have been quite generally realized. Our educated people have always been more or less historically minded. The principal events of our past have long been pretty generally known to them. And much of what they have known has been substantially true. For this happy circumstance we may thank our public schools, and our historians.

These writers have achieved an enviable record for their skill, their diligence, and their honesty. Indeed they have commonly been guilty of no more than the innocent enthusiasm of a Parson Weems, for whom the Father of his Country could do no wrong, or of a George Bancroft, whose every volume, we are told, voted for President Jackson. More recently, they have been guilty of no more than that almost equally innocent "debunking" of the twenties—to

please a generation then in revolt against its elders. Today, save among scholars dealing chiefly with the present, our general level of fairness and truth is a high one. It has never been higher.

The problem before American historians is then not one of reaching the people *de novo* but of reaching them more adequately; not one of presenting truth but of presenting a truth more subtle and more abundant. To these ends we need both the teacher and popularizer on the one hand and the scholarly investigator on the other. Both functions have in fact quite often been embodied in the same person, and they require like qualifications.

We may best view the state of American History today in the light of its own progress, and we shall find a convenient starting point in the year 1851, just a century ago. At that time our discipline was wholly in the hands of three great Brahmin amateurs, William Hickling Prescott, John Lothrop Motley, and Francis Parkman. The youngest and ablest of these, Francis Parkman, had just brought out his *Conspiracy of Pontiac*. It proved to be the first element in a magnificent epic of the forest, which was to comprise eight volumes, whereof the last would not appear till 1892.

Here we have the highest achievement of what one may call the older American History. Let us pause to examine it, and the man who produced it. In his character and situation Parkman resembled his great contemporaries. He embodied the Puritan tradition at its most humane and generous. He had been carefully educated both in the realm of books and in the world of affairs. He possessed unlimited leisure and almost unlimited means. These extraordinary advantages are reflected in an achievement no less extraordinary. His research, carried on under singular difficulties, was so sound that most of his conclusions are valid today. His work is well conceived, and his style, after the passage of a full century, is yet fresh and vivid. Moreover beneath the style we sense the man: an interesting man, a good man, and in some ways perhaps a great one.

Yet the fact is that Parkman is out of date. From every standpoint but an aesthetic one the reader to today must find his work inadequate.

The events which were to make it so began three-quarters of a century ago when a graduate school was opened at Johns Hopkins. At that moment the guild of historians was best represented by a galaxy of young professors, men who were rapidly to change the character both of our history and of those who would cultivate it. Typical of this group were Charles K. Adams at Michigan, John W. Burgess at Columbia, and Herbert Baxter Adams at Johns Hop-

#### About the Author

*Dr. Owings is a specialist in Colonial American history. The title of his doctoral dissertation, at Harvard, 1942, was "His Lordship's Favour: a Treatise on Office-holding in Maryland, 1634-1774"; and he was a Research Associate, Colonial Williamsburg, 1941-42. He served in the Army Air Force from 1942 to 1945, and joined the staff of the Department of History in 1946. At present he is also associate dean of the Graduate College. This paper was read at the annual meeting of the University chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, December, 1951.*



kins. All had studied in Germany and become imbued with German methods and German ideas. They came upon the scene just as our Centennial Exposition, and a host of lesser centennials, revived a general interest in history. And they were now able to direct that interest toward ends they thought good.

One of their earliest achievements was to professionalize their own field. History now quite generally ceased to be a genteel avocation, and its chief practitioners were no longer to be gentlemen of wealth and leisure, working alone. They were rather to be college professors; they were to band together in learned societies; and they were to acquire a marked sense of their common interests.

Now this meant that historical research would be pursued in a more systematic way. It meant that our general level of scholarship could be elevated. And our assault upon the past would now operate on a wider front with better liaison among the attacking parties. It was not, however, an unmixed blessing; for a college professor has not the abundant leisure of a wealthy amateur, he seldom acquires an adequate general culture, and he has got the name of being a rather dull fellow. Moreover, his learned societies produce orthodoxy and are apt to be hostile to new ideas.

A happier effect of their work was to make the sources of historical knowledge more generally available. Here the historian of today is much better off than was Parkman; for with all his great effort Parkman could exploit only a portion of those materials now open to less gifted and less fortunate men. The business of collecting, listing, and publishing our basic documents, which had gone on for many years, could now proceed more rapidly. Local societies redoubled their efforts and widened their interests. European techniques of restoring, preserving, and surveying documents were imported and naturalized. Our state and federal governments published their old records in greater quantity and with a scholarly apparatus ever more sophisticated. Very recently the devices of photostating and microfilming have enabled us, not only better to preserve our mouldering documents, but to make them widely available to scholars.

Moreover, this interest no longer confines itself to old materials but is now concerned too with contemporary documents of all kinds, the proper sources for future historians. Produced in unprecedented quantities, such records are often preserved with loving care. Thus while scholars of today are hampered by a paucity of documents relating to our past, it may very well

be that the historian of tomorrow, when he tries to assess the events of our own time, will be as greatly hindered by a plethora of materials whose very mass will complicate his labors.

And while the study of history was becoming a learned profession, and while those documents essential to it were becoming widely accessible, a number of new ideas were coming in. These are linked with the names of four eminent Europeans: Leopold von Ranke, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, and John Richard Green.

Those scholars who in the 1870's revitalized history among us were all the intellectual children of von Ranke; for they had been trained by him or by his former students. Ranke's most enduring legacy has indeed been a method for training historians: the seminar method. We use it today virtually unchanged. Parkman and his contemporaries had undergone no systematic preparation and had had to find their way very much by their own light. But now young men were early to be introduced to the documents, to be taught to interpret these materials, and to embody their findings in learned papers. They were moreover assured that the same method, pursued on a larger scale, would produce major extensions of our knowledge. This operation bred its own confidence and fostered its own presuppositions—that we may know the facts of the past, just as it was, and that these facts may speak for themselves, requiring of the historian neither insight nor literary skill. To this extent was Ranke the father of what we now call "scientific" history.

His name is further associated with a certain enlargement of scope. Parkman's History had been cloak and dagger history: very colorful, often thrilling to read, but not particularly enlightening. It left all but the sparkle and clamor of the past untold. Von Ranke and his pupils, here and abroad, were now to add the rise and progress of institutions, particularly political ones. We were to know, not only how and why men fought and died, but how they governed themselves, how they reached collective decisions, and so led lives more orderly, if less picturesque. Now this sort of thing is unhappily often dull, but like other dull things it is often very important. Perhaps oddly, Ranke's students, who had written this "new history" in their own day, were to be rather hostile when younger men introduced a history yet newer with a scope yet more enlarged.

Meanwhile they had absorbed the teachings of an English scholar, Charles Darwin (interpreted indeed by Herbert

Spencer and our own John Fiske) and that the more readily because Darwin's ideas seemed to fit so well their preconceptions. Darwin had taught that highly specialized biological organisms evolved from earlier and simpler forms. This was quite acceptable to men who could trace the origins of Congress back to a German folk moot. Darwin had taught the survival of favored varieties among animals; and this appealed to those who assumed a favored race among men, the Teutonic, a favored body of political institutions, the Anglo-Saxon, and a favored religion, the Protestant.

Yet Darwinism was to prove a Trojan horse, for in it lay concealed an idea that would unsettle one of their dearest fancies. They had supposed that an historian has no more to do than gather facts, verify them, and then present them naked to the public. Such facts would speak for themselves. To evolve a theory in the presence of data was a venal sin; to have an hypothesis **before** the facts were in was mortal. Now Darwin had had such an hypothesis. He had merely verified it by gathering up his facts. And these facts did not speak for themselves; he spoke for them, eloquently, persuasively, and with great felicity of style.

Hardly had a scientific use of the hypothesis been brought home to our historians, than another scholar stood ready to hand them one, which he claimed was already verified by data. This was Karl Marx whose first volume had appeared in 1867. It was not a very readable work, and as the fellow's matter and manner were somewhat offensive, the appearance of Marxian history among us was retarded. Its first respectable monument was to be the young Charles A. Beard's **Economic Interpretation of the Constitution** in 1913.

Today the Marxian influence is pervasive. This is not to say that historians have gone communist. It is rather that we have all converted to our own use two Marxian ideas: economic determinism and the theory of the class struggle. These would teach us, first, that the character of any society, and the line of progress it must follow, are determined by economic circumstances; secondly, that the motive power behind the movement (what makes the wheels go round) is an effort of the haves-nots to despoil the haves. Now to a few this doctrine has provided a full theoretical underpinning. But to the rest of us it has brought merely another addition to the scope of history, by adding economic matters, together with an increased awareness of class values and class struggle.

Five years after Marx's first volume John Richard Green published his **Short History of the English People**. It was the first embodiment in our language of what the Ger-

mans call by an unlovely name, *Kulturgeschichte*, social and cultural history. Implicit in Green's work was the idea that Man is not just a fighting animal à la Parkman, or a political animal, à la Ranke, or even a money making animal, à la Marx. For he lives with other men in society, he worships God, he creates beautiful things, and he evolves philosophy. No account of his past may be adequate unless we can see him doing all these things.

To the young men of the seventies, who had become old men before they knew the full impact of his teaching, the effect of Green's heresy was catastrophic. For at once the neat boundaries of their discipline, within which it could be so exquisitely cultivated, were swept away. Their subject matter was incalculably expanded, and their work, spread thin over the whole, was apt to become unconscionably diffuse.

Small wonder that this, the most recent of the "new" histories was long vigorously opposed within the profession and has been generally accepted only within our own time. Its principal monument is the thirteen volume Fox and Schlesinger *History of American Life*, whereof the earlier parts appeared in 1927. Its chief exponents today are Merle Curti and the older Schlesinger. With it our work has become more comprehensive, more significant, and, what is just as well, vastly more interesting.

We have come a long way since Parkman's time. Then our chief historians were a few wealthy amateurs, working by themselves, without special training for their labors. Source materials were scattered, mostly unpublished, and hard to get at. The annual crop of studies could not be large, and such as did appear sought to do little more than tell a story, which it was hoped might be edifying, or at least instructive.

Today most of our historians are busy college professors, working closely with their colleagues, organized into learned societies, and highly trained in the technical parts of their job. Quantities of the major sources have been published. Those still in manuscript have for the most part been gathered into a few depositories, repaired, arranged, catalogued, and in some instances microfilmed. The annual list of contributions is a long one and would indeed be longer were printing less costly. Much that does appear embodies a far more adequate recovery of the past than Parkman and his colleagues could have envisioned. Indeed in the hands of a Samuel Eliot Morison, a Van Wyck Brooks, or an Allan Nevins its scope is as broad as human consciousness. It is no longer reconstruction; it is resurrection.

And how much of it attains such qual-

ity? Not of course very much. Historians, no more than others, are exempt from old John Winthrop's dictum that "the best part is always the least, and of that best part the wiser is always the lesser." We must recognize, moreover, the difficult character of history as an intellectual discipline.

Now that difficulty does not arise from its technical processes. Skill in the gathering and analysis of sources, and in the ordering of facts derived from them, may be readily taught. We will in fact undertake to make a productive scholar of sorts out of anyone who brings to us diligence and good natural parts.

It lies rather in the hybrid character of history and in its potential scope. Long regarded as a branch of literature, it has lately taken on some attributes of science. Its scientific aspects demand nicety of mind, a critical spirit, and a habit of noticing details. Its literary character requires a refractive quality of intellect, intuitive skill in organizing, and a sense of style. As for its scope, history is now, as S. E. Morison used to say, "the most humane of the arts." That is, everything is grist to its mill, and we must have culture and experience to handle it.

A good historian is then necessarily a rather unusual person. But the fact is we should have more of them if our public schools did not strangle many in their cradle and our universities exhaust others in their youth.

Take the public schools. If we are to make an historian of parts, what we must teach him, right at the start, is to love learning. Let me repeat, to love learning. Now this is what our public school teachers are singularly ill equipped to do. It is not their fault but the fault of their training and of the ideas they are taught to live by. We carefully insulate them from cultural matters by filling their college time with courses in pedagogy. Moreover, these professional studies are apt to leave them so pragmatic, so obsessed with the here and now, that they can take little interest in matters not tangibly useful this very day. They come out indeed like so many priests whom we have taught the rubic by heart but have neglected to convert.

Perhaps it is as well, for our system would thwart them in any case. If I wanted a child to love learning, I should expose him to it. I should teach him a few things well, and should make him work hard in the process. He would then know what learning is, how dearly it is bought, and how satisfying is its possession. The things I should teach him would be those of an exalted practicality, the tools of more learning to come; they would be languages,

mathematics, and the natural sciences. Now of course what we do is teach many things badly and those often terminal, incapable of opening other intellectual gates. How could we better devise a system to bring learning into contempt among our children?

Or take the universities. I do not here speak of the students but rather of young scholars, specifically young historians, who are near the beginning of their careers. They are fortunate who do not find themselves involved in a competition among schools which is destructive to scholarly values. Ideally, a seat of higher learning ought not to care whether anybody comes or not. But many institutions are obliged to care a great deal.

They are then sorely tempted to multiply the hallmarks of greatness while debasing its substance. Magnificent buildings are erected. The football team wins all its games. Graduate degrees appear in great profusion. And the faculty must all be productive scholars, that is, must augment the world's store of printed matter as fast as ever they can. Meanwhile they may be judged, as teachers, by the proportion of students passed, and as writers, by the inert mass of their product. Those in authority may not read what they write, or care whether it is fit to read.

What then must we do? We are of course not deceived among ourselves. We know that good books and good lectures require time and very loving care. They have their period of gestation, and we tamper with it at our peril. Moreover, they are the fruit of good living, and good living can not be anxious and hurried living. We must make haste slowly, we must read, we must experience, we must reflect. For when we deny ourselves these things, or let others deny them to us, we impoverish our spirits and stultify our culture. Nor can it be long concealed; it will be apparent in the classroom and will show up in our writings.

I am going to suggest that we ought to resist frivolous demands upon our time, resist specialization, and resist—if we can—the promptings of ambition. The serious scholar will avoid, gracefully if he can and stubbornly if he must, a host of trivial obligations which will be pressed upon him, but which others could do as well. The good historian, knowing the character of his work, will keep his interests wide, maintaining and improving his acquaintance in the realms of art, and literature, and music. He will also exercise a decent restraint in the production of his pen.

As we are commonly endowed with families to support, we must all, I suppose, expect to do some bowing in the courts of Rimmon. But as we value the world's peace

and our forest trees, let us not, pray, turn out those "contributions" which have no purpose but to get ourselves promoted. Here I trust the publishers will aid us by declining to print what we should not have written. If the great work is in us, it will be done for love. If it is not there, let us live in an obscurity which will at least be harmless.

I am going to say one thing more, which is specific to our times. All of us are justly anxious for the state of the world, which now moves, seemingly helpless, from crisis to crisis while disaster lurks around the corner. The historian will take what comfort he can, remembering that the barbarians have been always with us, and that the assault on liberty has been perennial. But he is more vulnerable than most, for his heart is more involved. His life is committed to inherited values now gravely threatened. He has formed a professional attachment for monuments and archives which he knows are too often the first victims of war. The center of his world is apt to be Oxford or Paris, and he knows that next time it may be this place, his own private Jerusalem, which is destroyed.

Yet he has work to do, and it is important work. To do it he must discover, somehow, a Stoic peace of mind. Here, by way of suggesting that our plight is not unprecedented, I am going to close by quoting—with the change of a single word—part of a message by Governor DeWitt Clinton to the New York legislators in 1814. They were asked to vote money for the ordering of their archives and the copying of relevant documents abroad. Meanwhile their state was about to be invaded by British troops.

Clinton wrote, "Genuine greatness never appears in a more resplendent light, or in a more sublime attitude, than in that buoyancy of character which rises superior to danger and difficulty; in that magnanimity of soul which cultivates the arts and sciences amidst the danger of war; and in that comprehension of mind which cherishes all the cardinal interests of a country, without being distracted or diverted by the most appalling considerations."

As Clinton then, so we now, must embody in our work an act of faith. Faith in these labors, that they will be relevant to our children. Faith in ourselves, that we shall somehow guide the present. Faith in our inherited ideals, that they will possess the future. For by the light of faith we shall find courage in our hearts now. And in the strength of inward peace we shall yet, as I trust, break through the way to some outward and material peace for our descendants.

# Books

*DISCOURSES ON RELIGION.* By Gustav E. Mueller. Bookman Associates, New York, 1951.

## The Significance of Religion in Human Experience

By J. CLAYTON FEAVER

*Discourses on Religion* is made up ostensibly of five monologues, but it soon becomes apparent that it is basically five dialogues, each speaker in dialogue with the one before him or with the reader. In its monologue form, the speaker voices his response to and understanding—sometimes misunderstanding—of religion. In its dialogue form, each succeeding speaker examines and makes reply to the questions, doubts, and objectives of the preceding speaker. Also each speaker seems to be conversing with the reader. As I read these discourses, I found myself engaged in conversation with the speaker. Sometimes the conversation took the form of a sharp debate: I disagreed with the speaker or pleaded for clarification. At other times I agreed with his point of view, or was amused with his illustration, or was thrilled with his insight. Whatever the turn of my response, however, I was stimulated to carry on a conversation, as it were, with each of the five participants.

Probably the chief design of the *Discourses* is to stimulate interest and thought in the field of religion. The book is not primarily a source reference, though it speaks wide study and knowledge of religion. It is not a history of religion or an analysis or defense of religious practices and ideas. Rather I believe it might best be described as a poet's effort to make articulate deep insight into the meaning and significance of religion in human experience. To be sure, Dr. Mueller has injected a good

bit of constructive criticism into his *Discourses*; but his main accomplishment, achieved with enthusiasm and good humor, lies in his ability to prompt in the reader both a feeling for religious truth and a decision to investigate its importance to human life and achievement. I should judge that the book will appeal both to those with extensive training in religion and to laymen. Those with special training will find a certain fascination in the wide variety of religious experience which the *Discourses* suggest, and the layman will be stimulated to re-think his own religious presuppositions and to open his mind to wider interpretations.

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## The Poet's Birthday . . .

in 1592. Sonnet LX was likely written c. 1592–1593. If he were forty years old then, Spenser was born in 1552 or 1553.

Chaucer had been dead for a hundred and fifty years, and the state of English poetry was so deplorable that some questioned whether great poetry could be written in the English language. *The Shepherdes Calendar*, in 1579, helped to put an end to such conjecture. In an epistle prefixed to the twelve pastorals which make up *The Calendar*, Spenser is called "the new poet," a title which has followed him down the centuries because of its appropriateness; for, Spenser, from his first verses to his last, was an experimental poet. He never ceased to innovate. His experiments in language, rhythmic patterns, and subject matter not only re-invigorated English poetry but changed its trend completely. Is it so surprising, then, that he should have believed that he could move the hearts of his countrymen to greatness in living through the beauty of poetry?

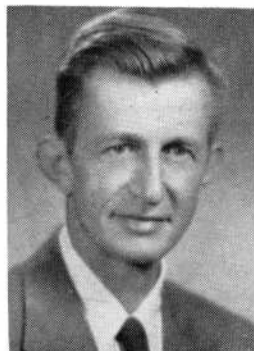
Of Chaucer, Spenser said,

*well of English undefyled,*

*On Fames eternall beadroll worthie to be fyled.*

What better could we say of Spenser on his four-hundredth anniversary?

### About the Author



*Dr. Feaver joined the faculty in 1951 as Kingfisher College Associate Professor of the Philosophy of Ethics and Religion, the first endowed professorship in the University. He had previously held the pastorate of the Bridgeport Memorial Church, Bridgeport, Connecticut, and had taught at Berea College. Dr. Mueller is a poet and philosopher with many publications to his credit both in the United States and Europe.*