

"THE LEAP OF MARCUS CURTIUS"

By A. SAGGITARIUS

A PICTURE that interested, more, fascinated me as a boy, bore the title under which this article is written—"The Leap of Marcus Curtius."

The artist depicted a Roman youth, clad in full armor and mounted on a gray charger, at the moment before his leap sent him crashing into the yawning abyss that awaited his earthly remains.

The act was heroic and I hastened to learn the cause of so unusual a deed. History states that in 362 B. C., a chasm suddenly opened in The Forum of Rome. Following the custom of the time, the oracles were consulted as regards the best method of closing it. The reply evoked was that it would continue to gape until it had received the most precious possession of Rome. Marcus Curtius, a young and patriotic Roman, armed himself fully and mounting his charger, exclaimed, "Rome has no richer possession than valor and arms." He leaped into the chasm which was subsequently filled by offerings to his memory. He had sacrificed his life for the greatest interest of his country.

An adoring public, ever ready to follow the hero of the moment, had offered tribute to his courage. The prophecy of the oracles was fulfilled.

Viewed from the knowledge of today, one may be inclined to question the wisdom of the act. The feeling—that of self-sacrifice, however,—which prompted the deed, can bear comparison with the best and needs no apologist. It is the spirit of the pioneer, of a Moses, of a Christ, of a John Brown directed against great odds to remedy existing ills. The favorable impression made on me by the daring act of the youthful Roman has never abated. Whenever I hear of a deed of self-sacrifice, the picture, with its title, flashes athwart my mental screen.

The words spoken by Marcus Curtius, just before his leap, were quite correct. In his time great physical courage was the goal to which men aspired and the coward and weakling had little part in the national life. Great spectacular acts, having laudable motives for their aims, elicited the plaudits of the crowd, the talents of the bards and poets and praises of the historian. Yet, the courage, sacrifice, faith and energy called into play in the accomplishment of gigantic tasks and reforms extending over periods of years sometimes received scant attention. As greater sacrifices are made in the mental and spiritual worlds less is necessary in the physical.

Let us imagine that this chasm had opened in 1927 A. D. instead of 362 B. C., and in Madison Square Garden in place of the Forum Romanum. Far from consulting the super-physical oracles, the knowledge gained through years of hard studies and fierce battles with the forces of nature would be invoked. Armed with the wealth of scientific information of today those in authority would soon find the cause for the

opening. The rest would be easy and the Leap of Martius Curtius unnecessary. Throughout the ages, these leaps have been made by individuals, groups, tribes and nations. In religion, in arts, in science, forces are, from time to time, released that propel advancing humanity into the realms of the unknown if its place in the universal march is to be maintained. There are, generally, volunteers, like Curtius, who give their lives in making it easier for the masses,—in preparing the way.

There is no scarcity of worlds to conquer and as one level is reached the vision of the crusader is blessed by an ever widening vista. The lot of the conquering hero is not always his. The cell of the lunatic, the torture of the heretic or the scorn and persecution of the masses may mark his path. Even though intense suffering is caused by the very ones most in need of help, the brave spirit feels neither anger nor the desire for reprisals. On the contrary, a great pity for the ignorance, lack of vision and inertia of their centres of consciousness is brought out. The desire to aid their faltering footsteps to a higher level where the vision will be less blurred becomes more persistent. Thereby progress moves apace.

In our present time it will be noticed that humanity is becoming more self-reliant. It is not that his faith in the super-physical powers is less; but his work in the physical, mental and spiritual planes is more. In other words he has taken the advice given by Hercules to the carter. He is putting his shoulders to the wheel before praying and the result is marvelous. The realms now entered by adventurous seekers after truth are multiplying daily. Fallacies long tolerated as truths are exposed to the pitiless torch of reason and are fast disappearing as mist before the warmth of sunlight.

The New Negro has placed himself abreast this marching line of progress. He is holding his own in science, art, literature and latterly in economics.

Bit by bit the inferiority complex that had chained him within the confines of a stultifying circle is being broken down. No longer is he following dog-like his master's footsteps and without ambition accepting the end of the feast. No longer does he listen to the voice of those so-called leaders who warn him against self-assertion and self-determination. No longer does the fear of consequences to himself deter him from the action that will benefit his group or his race. He has taken "The Leap of Marcus Curtius" and his once enclined mentality and spirituality is being rewarded by the gain of added consciousness.

Pleasing as the result of Negro progress is, there is plenty of work to be done in solidifying all groups. Raised racial consciousness brought into play by honest and fearless leaders, through a campaign of education, will have a salutary effect.

Literature that causes men to think for themselves and which exposes those who would hold the masses quiescent to enhance their own gains and importance will be also of great value.

Evolving life and consciousness are slow processes. Results become perceptible only when, in concert and intensity of desire, the spirit of humanity moves in a given direction. Thus real progress is from within stimulated into action by outside agencies working on the centers of consciousness. Man, a product of nature, receives help or hindrance from that source. The law of attraction or repulsion is evoked as he allies himself with the cause of truth or against it. Consequently the reason for the winning of small minorities seeking justice, over large majorities withholding justice, becomes obvious.

When the intensity of the desires of a group becomes focused on reform and they are willing to take "The Leap of Marcus Curtius," forces of great power are automatically released to become their allies.

The rights of the weak will always be violated. Negroes will always be lynched and mistreated until bitter adversity has prepared a sufficient number to perceive the yawning chasm and crystallize their decision to take "The Leap of Marcus Curtius."

A very significant movement today in the world of economics is the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and Maids. This movement, the outcome of low wages and miserably low working conditions, which are the children of unorganized labor, is blazing a trail destined to usher in a fairer day for Negroes throughout the world. That it has started in this specific group is merely an incident. The issue is the focusing of scattered energy, now wasted by Negro workers, through the medium of labor unions. The importance of the movement can be seen when notice is taken of the general interest it has aroused. The talent and help it has attracted to its ranks and its recognition before the Mediation Board.

There is nothing spectacular or ephemeral about the awakening. It has been brought about through natural channels, and leaders and followers are pursuing safe, sane, wise and progressive methods. Each step is considered before taken and "Justice to all" is the watch-word. Strangely enough, the greatest opposition is not coming from a side frankly antagonistic to us; but from the very ones who would benefit most from a successful issue. They are stragglers in an enlightened age and a relic of slavery and its psychology-unconsciousness in an age of consciousness. However, we consider and await them as brothers. Education will, in the long run, dispel the fog through which they are floundering, and like their advancing brothers and sisters they too will take "The Leap of Marcus Curtius."