



HEROISM

THAT which takes my fancy most in the heroic class is the good-humor and hilarity they exhibit. It is a height to which common duty can very well attain, to suffer and to dare with solemnity. But these rare souls set opinion, success, and life at so cheap a rate that they will not soothe their enemies by petitions, or the show of sorrow, but wear their own habitual greatness.

The great will not condescend to take anything seriously; all must be as gay as the song of a canary, though it were the building of cities or the eradication of old and foolish churches and nations which have cumbered the earth long thousands of years. Simple hearts put all the history and customs of this world behind them, and play their own game in innocent defiance of the Blue Laws of the world; and such would appear, could we see the human race assembled in vision, like little children frolicking together, though to the eyes of mankind at large they wear a stately and solemn garb of works and influences.

The interest these fine stories have for us, the power of a romance over the boy who grasps the forbidden book under his bench at school, our delight in the hero, is the main fact to our purpose. All these great and transcendent properties are ours. Where the heart is, there the muses, there the gods sojourn, and not in any geography of fame. Massachusetts, Connecticut River, and Boston Bay you think paltry places, and the ear loves names of foreign and classic topography. But here we are; and, if we will tarry a little, we may come to learn that here is best. See to it only that thyself is here, and art and nature, hope and fate, friends, angels, and the Supreme Being shall not be absent from the chamber where thou sittest. Epaminondas, brave and affectionate, does not seem to us to need Olympus to die upon, nor the Syrian sunshine. He lies very well where he

is. The Jerseys were handsome ground enough for Washington to tread, and London streets for the feet of Milton. A great man makes his climate genial in the imagination of men, and its air the beloved element of all delicate spirits. That country is the fairest which is inhabited by the noblest minds.

The characteristic of heroism is its persistency. All men have wandering impulses, fits and starts of generosity. But when you have chosen your part, abide by it, and do not weakly try to reconcile yourself with the world. The heroic cannot be the common, nor the common the heroic. Yet we have the weakness to expect the sympathy of people in those actions whose excellence is that they outrun sympathy and appeal to a tardy justice. If you would serve your brother, because it is fit for you to serve him, do not take back your words when you find that prudent people do not commend you. Adhere to your own act, and congratulate yourself if you have done something strange and extravagant and broken the monotony of a decorous age. It was a high counsel that I once heard given to a young person—"Always do what you are afraid to do." A simple, manly character need never make an apology.

To speak the truth, even with some

austerity, to live with some rigor of temperance, or some extremes of generosity, seems to be an ascetism which common good-nature would appoint to those who are at ease and in plenty, in sign that they feel a brotherhood with the great multitude of suffering men.

Times of heroism are generally times of terror, but the day never shines in which this element may not work. The circumstances of man, we say, are historically somewhat better in this country and at this hour than perhaps ever before. More freedom exists for culture. It will not now run against an axe at the first step out of the beaten track of opinion. But whoso is heroic will always find crises to try his edge. Human virtue demands her champions and martyrs, and the trial of persecution always proceeds.

I see not any road of perfect peace which a man can walk, but after the counsel of his own bosom. The unpremitting retention of simple and high sentiments in obscure duties is hardening the character to that temper which will work with honor, if need be in the tumult, or on the scaffold.

The author of this week's guest editorial is Ralph Waldo Emerson. The essay from which these passages are drawn was first published in 1841 under the same title.

The Ballad of the Golden Bowl

By Sara Henderson Hay

"And they brought Him gifts of gold, and frankinsense, and myrrh. . . ."

"WHAT is this golden bowl,
mother,
With its strange design?
It is not like our other things,
But foreign, and fine. . . ."

"It came out of the east, child,
A long time ago.
Your grandmother gave it to us.
This is all we know:

When your father's brother was born
On a winter's night,
A new star stood in the skies—
It was a great sight—

And three kings came from afar
To kneel at his bed.
They were seeking a greater King,
Or so they said. . . ."

"And was he a king, mother,
My father's kin?"
"No, child, it was all a mistake.
It must have been. . . ."

For they went away, those three,
And they came no more.

And he had a sad life, child,
He died poor."

"Had he a wife, mother,
And a boy of his own?"
"He had neither chick nor child,
darling,
He was all alone.

He was a good man,
But he came to grief.
And they hanged him on a cross
Like a common thief."

"But why, mother, why,
If he was kind and good?"
"It was a plot of some sort, child,
We never understood. . . ."

There was nothing we could do,
Being humble folk,
He was your grandmother's favorite—
Her heart broke.

She gave us this golden bowl
When she came to die.
It is sad—it is all we have
To remember him by. . . ."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Search for Wimsey

SIR: Bernice Green's letter on the whereabouts of Lord Peter Wimsey must have interested a lot of Sayers fans besides myself. For them as well as for her I send the following meagre data, all that I could unearth. First, to answer the question, "Are there any Wimsey stories of which I'm ignorant?" In the *Mercury Mysteries* (25c) there is "Hangman's Holiday," ten stories originally published in 1933 but new to me. Only four concern Wimsey, but they are worth the quarter, and then you have the Montague Egg stories thrown in.

But for a proper full-length book there seems no hope. Some one who had seen Dorothy Sayers during the first part of the war told me that she had said she couldn't go on writing detective stories at such a time. Since then she has published "Begin Here; A Statement of Faith," "Mind of the Maker," and several war pamphlets. However, before Lord Peter dropped completely from sight, there was a spirited correspondence in the *London Spectator* called "Wimsey Papers (being the war time letters and documents of the Wimsey family)."

Wimsey in the Army was not a good guess. His mother writes: "Talking of Peter, I can't really tell you where he is, because he's gone back to his old job, and everything comes without any proper address through the Foreign Office. I rather fancy he may have been in Turkey a little while ago, from something he said about the coffee being good; I can't think of any other place where that would be likely to happen. . . . Wherever it was, he isn't there now, and that makes me think it *must* have been Turkey, because they seem to have settled everything splendidly there. . . . Harriet has gone down to Tallboys with the children—I enclose a photograph of little Paul, he's nearly a year old now, and Bredon just three, how time flies!"

HELEN R. GALLAND.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

The Incurable Controversy

SIR: I have decided to take no part in the revived "Incurable Controversy" except in those cases where the letter you publish contains slanderous and inaccurate attacks upon me personally. Since this is the case with the letter of Mr. W. L. Keene in your issue of December 18th, I shall reply to his onslaught.

The occasion to which he refers is very clear in my mind. It was a gathering of the faculty of the Eastern State College of Kentucky at Richmond, which met at the home of President Herman Donovan just before I was about to start a series of lectures there.



"Ask him whether it's a good book."

"He wouldn't know. All he is interested in are the typographical errors."

Since this was just on the heels of Dunkirk and the fall of France the faculty plied me with questions about what was going to happen next. I disclaimed any divine revelations, but said that if Hitler threw all he had against Britain at once he would probably occupy the British Isles by Labor Day. Since that time, statements by Winston Churchill and other responsible British leaders have made my prediction a qualified entry for the "Department of Understatement" in *The New Yorker*. The British admit that Hitler could have moved in virtually unopposed in July, 1940.

I was asked what kind of system Hitler would set up in Europe if he were victorious. I replied that it would probably be a regime of "bread and circuses," a common description of the Fascist social economy which has been widely used by the most fiercely anti-Fascist writers. I went to some pains to point out that, being an extreme libertarian, such a system is especially repugnant to me.

As to the jack-knife analogy, I do not recall making any such statement, but in case I did I would have no apology for it. With Hitler in occupation of the British Isles and victorious in Europe, no American Navy would have made much headway in trying to dislodge him.

The only bold and unqualified prediction I made that evening was that, if Hitler attacked Russia, he would have the fight of his life on his hands, with no assurance of ultimate victory. For this statement I was regarded as somewhat less than moronic, all but imbecilic, in my intelligence level.

With respect to the extent of participation in war as a test of warlike tendencies, I would like to quote from the lead article in *The Progressive* of December 20, 1943, by President Felix Morley of Haverford College: "The only objective test of whether a nation is 'peace loving' is afforded by an analysis of the number of wars in which, over a period of time, its government has become engaged." Like me, he proceeds to quote Quincy Wright to the effect that Eng-

land has been the most frequent participant in war since the close of the Middle Ages. If my criterion of "war-likeness" is cockeyed, I am at least happy to be in such distinguished company.

HARRY E. BARNES.

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Britain's Colonial Policy

SIR: I read *The Saturday Review of Literature* and appreciate the frank, fearless, discriminating reviews. No matter how great the author's reputation may be, so far, I have failed to notice any "sacred cows" who are immune from criticism.

My reason for writing is a recent review of Pearl Buck's latest book, "The Promise," by Struthers Burt. While I agree in the main with his timely comments, I was riled a little by his statement, "There is no doubt that the English have been idiots in their handling of foreigners."

That Britain's colonial policy has not been perfect is cheerfully conceded, but everything in this world is comparative, and I would be grateful to Mr. Burt if he would cite any other nation in the world whose handling of foreigners (or native races, which I presume is what he means) has been more intelligent, humane, just, and wise in the long view. Certainly the limited amount of experience the United States has had in such matters does not place our friendly neighbor to the South on any such pedestal.

If the British had been such idiots in handling foreigners as Mr. Burt states, would South Africa be fighting side by side with Britain? And India, the subject of so much misinformed criticism (some of it from Pearl Buck), has thousands of its native population fighting with the Allies. Why? There is no compulsion. And the Canadian Army has literally thousands of foreigners in its ranks.

Certainly no other nation has a record at all comparable to that of the British people.

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