

WITHOUT PREJUDICE¹

BY MARGOT ASQUITH

SIR PERCY LORAINÉ told me this story about the Great War.

In 1917, an English friend of his, having been forbidden by his doctors to go on fighting, thought he would travel. He joined a caravan traveling down the pilgrim route which runs past Kermanshah through the mountain ranges of West Persia to the Mesopotamian frontier. His companions were men of all conditions and ages: merchants, rustics, turbaned tribesmen, muleteers, camel-drivers, mullahs and lesser dignitaries of what is called the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Shiah Islam.

Huddled together they talked freely among themselves as the long day waned.

One night under a cold moon some of the younger pilgrims were expressing their views upon the fortunes of the war — which was going badly for us.

'The British will be beaten all to nothing, and the Turk will be free,' said one of them; to which an old man replied: —

'If the Turk is beaten there is an end of all courage in the world.'

'Do not forget,' said another, 'that if the German is beaten that is an end of all science.'

A third said: —

'But if the English are beaten there is an end of all justice.'

Upon which an old mullah put his hand above his head and said: —

'In that case, my brother, God will not allow the British to be beaten.'

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Another story was told me of one of our youngest generals in Gallipoli.

He had been distressed at the straight shooting of one of the crack German officers in command of the Turk. Whenever the bravest of his young men exposed themselves they were picked off and shot dead with recurring accuracy. After much time and observation he succeeded, through his field glasses, in recognizing — by his great height and certain marks upon his uniform — his German enemy, and from that moment he decided he would kill him.

One night when the firing had ceased, and the fighting-lines were close, and every soldier was asleep, he observed by a brilliant moon the officer sitting erect under a tree at the end of the Turkish trench. Armed with his revolver he crept out among the high grasses, taking cover to avoid the light, and pausing for fear of the sound of dead leaves. He crawled noiselessly on his stomach till he was within a few yards of the trench, and lay still under the shadow while he took stock of the situation.

Drifts of cloud crossed the moon as he lay motionless, and when they cleared he saw his man was asleep with his head bent back against the trunk of the tree. He hesitated. Could he shoot a sleeping man? Pulling himself slowly on to the top of the trench, he put a heavy hand on the shoulder of the German, pointing his revolver at his forehead. He found that he was dead.

Arthur Rubinstein — whom I should have mentioned among the best racon-

teurs I ever met — was talking to us of the jealousy among great singers. He said that two tenors were chosen to take the same part on alternate nights in a new and arduous opera which was being produced in Milan. The first had such a dazzling success that the manager had not the courage to put the other on the stage, and the second tenor remained for ten days in obscurity and despair.

In the last scene of the opera the hero encounters a bear. He kills the bear, and standing on its dead body sings the final aria, which invariably brought down the house. The part of the bear was played by the theatrical hairdresser, and one day the second tenor persuaded the good-natured barber to let him take the part. When the final scene arrived, to the amazement of the audience the bear refused to be killed, and sparred with the hero to such good purpose that he felled him to the earth. Standing on his prostrate body, he flung off his disguise and sang the aria to a perplexed but enraptured audience.

Jealousy is not confined to opera-singers; you find it chiefly in soldiers and doctors. I think the only profession exempt from it, that I have encountered, — for what reason I do not know, — is the Bar.

Success affects men and women very differently. I have known a few who were improved by it; some made by it; but most get their heads turned and are ruined by it. I should much like to have experienced it — even for a short time — to know how it would have affected me; but I can affirm with truth that I have never been jealous of it. On the contrary I think life would be a drab place if we all walked the same pace, and I follow with joy every good thing that turns up for my friends.

Most of us want to arrive somewhere before we die, if we have any vitality;

and the difficulty that presents itself is the goal and the route.

To be cock of a small walk is not an object to aim at, and has transformed many otherwise lovable men and women into standard bores. Subscriptions raised for full-length portraits of fifth-rate people should be stopped by law; and those who are satisfied by being bosses at gatherings given to inferior men, or stringing platitudes upon Patriotism in after-dinner speeches, may earn our surprise but do not add to our amusement. If unrecognized success makes people bitter, I do not think we have lost much by not knowing them, as it denotes the kind of touchiness in men that goes with vanity. Vanity and conceit are very different qualities.

An American journalist asked me if I thought his people thought more of themselves than the British did. I said it was a nice point, and added: —

‘You do not think more of yourselves than we do, but you think more *about* yourselves. We live in an older and more interesting country than you do, but you won’t hear an Englishman ask any foreigner what he thinks of England; nor, I am afraid, — if an opinion either praising or adverse were volunteered, — would he care a rap for the reply.’

As a nation we are not touchy or vain, but we are conceited. Vanity undermines self-confidence, conceit stimulates it; and if success is the object aimed at, I do not know a defect more likely to ensure failure than vanity. If you refute this by citing the famous men who have been vain, you will find that their vanity did not cover the ground; it was redeemed by qualities of heart, head, or judgment rare even in the humble.

At the end of it all we are social beings, unable to do without one another, and keeping company is not confined to

servants. It is the company we keep that is going to help us to know ourselves as much as to know other people.

When you have passed the age when you want to be an engine-driver, a bus-conductor, or a bishop, you may have selected a profession which throws you into the companionship of those you would not otherwise have chosen; in the same manner as prowess at games may lead to intimacy with the limited or dull. Golf, cricket, bridge, and tennis-players, while increasing the quantity, may not add to the quality of your acquaintance — nor, may I say, will the society even of cathedral or university towns ensure you against meeting the narrow and dull. It is what you are YOURSELF, and what you contribute, that will ensure you against inferior companionship. Craving for excitement checks the growth of the kind of sensibility that enables you to distinguish between good and bad company, and I have seen both men and women who, having fallen from a higher to a lower status in life, could easily have retrieved their position had they not invariably preferred the society of the fallen. I dilate on this, as I think it one of the most perplexing problems in life.

I remember asking my sister Laura on her return from a fashionable dinner-party — to which she had been unexpectedly invited by an unknown hostess — whether she had enjoyed herself.

'The women and the flowers were lovely,' she replied, 'but I should not have enjoyed it if I had n't been there.'

No one of experience would choose the companionship of famous artists for his amusement. What is called Bohemian society is ultimately dull, and actors, actresses, and opera-singers have too little time for the realities of life to be good companions. Being a hero, a villain, or a clown does not help

you to find yourself or discover other people. There are, of course, notable exceptions. Mlle. Selly d'Aranyî — the famous violinist — is not only unspoilable, but is a woman of culture, character, and sympathy. Gerald du Maurier, Dame Clara Butt, Walter Rummel, M. Defau, M. and Mme. Kohanski, and Arthur Rubinstein I am proud to call my friends, but they have interests and affections rare even in unadvertised persons. Pressmen are usually vain; and excepting Mr. Spender, Mr. Gardiner, Mr. Clifford Sharp, Mr. Desmond McCarthy, and Mr. Masterman, I have hardly ever met one who does not imagine that what he writes influences everything except the climate. It is only fair to add that I know few journalists and am not a favorite; but on the rare occasions when the newspapers do praise me I ask myself uneasily what folly I can have committed.

Urged by Lord Morley, Mr. Texeira, and other friends, and greatly encouraged by Mr. Edmund Gosse, I once published a book, a harmless candid account of my own life. For weeks I was snowed under by press cuttings of the most virulent abuse — not so much by criticisms of my writing, as of my person. How dared I mention truth and beauty when I was a fright and a liar? How dared I allude to culture or refinement when I was vulgar and uneducated? The *Times* devoted columns to the attack, and one enterprising cleric took a volume into the pulpit to warn his congregation on no account to emulate so wicked a person. It is generally supposed that this helps the sale of a book, but in my case 11,500 copies were sold the first day, before the thoughtful press had informed its readers of the true nature of the author.

It matters so little in life whether you are praised or abused. It is what you think of other people more than what

they think of you that is important, and while clinging to your friends — since personal relations are life — you should enlarge your acquaintance and vary your occupations.

Having no profession and an empty nursery I endeavor to do this, but moving from middle life to young old age is a difficult matter, and one that no one has told us anything about. Jowett said: —

‘The truer, the safer, the better years of life are the later ones. We must find new ways of using them.’

I am not sure that I always choose the best way, but when I am not reading, writing, or planning to be with my children, I like enjoying myself. The House of Commons being what it is — so dull that except for the Prime Minister’s cryptic utterances there is nothing much to hear, read, or report — I blush to confess I spend some of my afternoons playing bridge. What is called the ‘card mind’ may or may not be an intellect to envy, but the cleverest men I know are baffling bridge-players, and the interesting ones are seldom free.

I have an exceptionally nice acquaintance with fashionable bridge-players. I play in beautiful houses with wonderful furniture and excellent teas. When my hand is down I look about for something to do. I cannot find a newspaper — but peering about among the bric-a-brac I pounce upon a finely bound book, only to find it holds cigarettes or scissors. The French writing-tables, though covered with flowers and photographs, bills or bonbons, have either no pens or no ink, or paper without envelopes, or envelopes without paper; and by the time I have struggled with drawers that have no handles and matches that will not strike, my partner has revoked.

I pull myself together and say I will change my habits and go to concerts.

Seeing a friend advertised to play ‘by request’ in Wigmore Hall for the last time, I feel my good resolution will be rewarded.

Being long-sighted and having no pockets, I do not take my goggles, but sit down in the dark after nodding to a few friends. Musicians in London do not play to audiences but to congregations, and without knowing the names I know most of the faces and many of the hats of the people who frequent the concert halls.

After settling comfortably into my red seat, I heard the next-door lady exclaim to her companion: —

‘Is n’t it glorious! no modern music and *nothing* but my favorite composer!’

Having thrown over my bridge and resisted the Rodeo, — an entertainment which for skill, courage, and good-humor I have never seen excelled, — my curiosity was excited. I said to myself, ‘That rules out Stravinsky, Prokofieff, Poulenc, Honegger, Hindemith, Lord Berners, Schönberg, and Szymanowski. Can it mean Wagner?’ The lady’s face encouraged me in thinking this might be true. No doubt it was a *façon de parler* to say only one composer: no one but a Bach or Beethoven expert would choose to play for two hours on a hot afternoon the works of a single composer. It could not be Handel or Haydn — could it be Schumann, Schubert, or Chopin? Who else could it be? I was interrupted in my reflections by clapping. The lights were turned down, and my handsome friend, bowing to the audience, adjusted the mechanical music-stool.

After a moment’s ecstatic pause, he lifted his hands above his head and struck a triumphant chord. Could it be? Was it true? Did I recognize the stage thunder, the northern lights, the Neapolitan ice, the banal romance of the ‘favorite composer’?

My heart sank, and as a pained smile flickered across the features of the dexterous performer I knew I was in for an afternoon of Liszt.

I slipped away as early as I could and remembered my many unanswered letters and the wedding presents that for weeks I had put off choosing.

My secretary having taken a day off, I found a pile of letters on my table and consoled myself by reflecting that there is a certain pleasure in putting one's duties behind one. I had no sooner begun than the telephone started. I am accustomed to being rung up in the middle of the night and asked if I will write on Mary Pickford's underwear, Brilliant Chang, banged hair, Byron, or birth-control, but this was the afternoon, and I resented it; so, after denouncing my servants for not switching me off, I returned to my correspondence and fell asleep.

When I was in Downing Street I never allowed my secretary to show me anonymous letters, but since leaving it I have occasionally looked at them. I will quote the last that I have received: —

DEAR MASCULINE MARGOT, —

There are a number of us who will attend the Pageant if you will wear a mask, for with that face of yours as Queen Elizabeth

the whole thing must prove a horrible fiasco. Run after Royalty if you will, but oh! why don't you wear pants?

Yours sorrowfully,

A REAL WOMAN

P.S. — I prefer not to append my signature, tho' I sincerely dislike anonymous letters.

She need not have revealed her sex. During the heroic campaign for that sacred cause I received thousands of threatening letters from earnest suffragettes which permanently enlightened me as to the difference between real women and real men. Even the lady Members of Parliament have not removed this distinction, and speaking for myself — I have seldom met a gentleman among my own sex.

I should like to have concluded on a note of hope, but will content myself by recording an historical event.

I was battling, bumping, and bruising my way last week through the streets of that thoughtful centre, the city of Oxford, when a fellow pusher, pointing to the posters, exclaimed: — 'Look! Why, the bells should be rung!!'

'Rung or tolled?' I asked as I read, printed in huge letters: —

THE BIGGEST SUCCESS SINCE
VERSAILLES

NORDIC OR NOT?¹

BY HILAIRE BELLOC

I

Behold, my child, the Nordic man,
And be as like him as you can:
His legs are long, his mind is slow,
His hair is lank and made of tow.

II

And here we have the Alpine race:
Oh! what a broad and brutal face!
His skin is of a dirty yellow.
He is a most unpleasant fellow.

III

The most degraded of them all
Mediterranean we call.
His hair is crisp, and even curls,
And he is saucy with the girls.

THIS translation is my own. I offer it with diffidence, for I recognize that it does not reproduce the deep organ-tones of the original. But it gives the substance of that fine poem, and it is only with the substance — I mean that description of the Race which it conveys — that I have here to deal.

I heard so much about the Nordic Man in these last few months that I was moved to collect recently a great mass of information upon him and to coördinate it. Upon the Alpine Man and the Mediterranean Man I am not so erudite; nor is it indeed to any great purpose that I should be — for they are clearly inferior. But the Nordic Man is worth anybody's trouble; and here is what I have found out about him.

He is the Conqueror and the Adventurer. He is the Lawgiver and the essentially Moral Man. He arranges the world as it should be arranged. He

does everything for his own good and for the good of others. He is a Natural Leader. Even those who hate him fear him; all respect him. The Alpine Man sits sullenly at his feet awaiting his orders; the Mediterranean Man flies in terror from his face.

But it is not enough to learn these general characters in the Nordic Man, pleasing though they are. No sound biologist could be content until he knew something intimate of his origin and habits — where he might be found, what he does, and how to tell him at sight.

This, then, is what I have found about the Nordic Man. I have space only for the most salient points, but I hope to complete the picture in detail when I shall have leisure to write my book on the species. It will be fully illustrated, and will have a very complete index.

The Nordic Man is born either in the West End of London or in a pleasant country-house, standing in its own parklike grounds. That is the general rule. He is, however, sometimes born in a parsonage, and rather more frequently in a deanery or a bishop's palace, or a canon's house in a close. Some of this type have been born in North Oxford; but none, that I can discover, in the provincial manufacturing-towns, and certainly none east of Charing Cross or south of the river.

The Nordic Man has a nurse to look after him while he is a baby, and she has another domestic at her service. He has a night and a day nursery, and he is full of amusing little tricks which

¹ From the *New Statesman* (London Independent weekly), January 17