

THE ARISTOCRATIC SPIRIT

BY HANFORD HENDERSON

AT such a critical moment as the present, when turmoil prevails everywhere, and the earth itself seems palpitating with violence, it is a strange situation, and somewhat sinister, that the one thing which would bring tranquillity and an almost passionate return to the beautiful arts of peace, is the very thing which on all sides is now being flouted and defamed—I mean the aristocratic spirit.

Those who were born to this spirit, or who have, by adoption, made it their own, must always marvel that its inspiration and devout rule of life have not been seized upon with greater eagerness and by larger numbers. It must be that in the hurry of every-day life its claims have been overlooked by some, and misunderstood by others. There are, I think, three specific reasons why the aristocratic spirit has not made headway against the more popular currents of the hour. They may properly be called the three antagonisms.

The most obvious and most excusable antagonism is also the most wide-spread. It is, like so many other antagonisms, the direct result of a quite complete misunderstanding. Men have been called aristocrats who were entirely untouched by anything so beneficent as the aristocratic spirit. Societies have been classed as aristocratic when in reality they were doing violence to the very fundamentals of that spirit. The term aristocracy has been made a term of reproach as the imputed possessor of the very qualities which it would itself be the first to repudiate. To answer the first antagonism, one has only to define the aristocratic spirit, but one must do it carefully. In reality, this spirit is subtle, pervasive, penetrating, but it is not complex. It is as delicately simple as a child, and as easily understood, provided, of course, that one has not oneself wandered too far from the kingdom. I should define the aristocratic spirit as the love of excellence for its own sake, or even more

simply as the disinterested, passionate love of excellence. The aristocrat, to deserve the name, must love excellence everywhere and in everything; he must love it in himself, in his own beautiful body, in his own alert mind, in his own illuminated spirit and he must love it in others; must love it in all human relations and occupations and activities, in all things in earth or sea or sky. And this love of his must be so passionate that he strives in all things to attain excellence, and so tireless that in the end he arrives. But not even the hope of Heaven may lure him. He must love and work disinterestedly, without the least thought of reward, enamored only of the transcendent beauty of excellence, and quite unregardful of himself. It is this impersonal requirement which makes salvation at once so simple and so paradoxical, for it is literally true that to save one's soul, one must lose it; one must go back to the kingdom of the child, where subject and object are one, and the unique reality is absorption in a universe.

If one accepts this simple and true definition of the aristocratic spirit, it becomes quite obvious that aristocracy is an attitude of mind, a religion, and not a social group. Aristocrats do not constitute a social class in the concrete sense that laborers, or artisans, or professional men, or capitalists do. At most, aristocrats may be said to make up a party, since they are found in all classes of society. To be an aristocrat one must be the unselfish devotee of excellence, and happily such devotees are found in every walk of life, from the humblest to the most exalted. It is a grave mistake to confound aristocracy with social station, or with any other outer trapping. In the hot crucible of events, tinsel withers, while gold refines. The Great War has been such a crucible and it has put kings as well as commoners to the test. To love excellence, not the appearance of excellence, and to love it disinterestedly, and not for the sake of the loaves and fishes—this is the whole creed of the aristocrat.

When it is urged against the so-called aristocracies of the past that they were the class of privilege and prided themselves upon their exclusiveness, the criticism is perfectly just, but is not a criticism of the aristocratic spirit; it is evidence that this high spirit was sadly lacking. Greed, arrogance, snobbishness, cruelty can never be the qualities of an aristocrat, for the excellence which he seeks in the great outer world, he seeks still more passionately in him-

self. It is a contradiction to say that aristocracy asks privilege or seeks exclusiveness. Such a policy is contrary to the doctrine of perfection. What the aristocrat wants, and wants passionately, is that all the world shall come into that same love of excellence which makes his own life such a profound delight. He may accept nothing which others may not have upon precisely the same terms, and the terms are unremitting, passionate effort. The injunction, *Be ye perfect*, was not addressed to any class or any group—it was addressed to mankind. To strive without thought of reward, to love the good, the true, the beautiful for their own sake—the man who does that is an aristocrat. He may be a day-laborer, an artisan, a shop-keeper, a professional man, a writer, a statesman. It is not a matter of birth, or occupation, or education. It is an attitude of mind carried into daily action, that is to say, a religion. Aristocrats form a world-wide party, a party with wide-open doors, but they do not constitute a social class. And if at times they seem to be exclusive, it is simply because they decline to call excellent the things that are not excellent. They demand of others what they demand of themselves, obedience to a difficult and severe discipline.

The second antagonism to the aristocratic spirit is the antagonism of antithesis. Democracy is set over against aristocracy. They are commonly presented as the opposite poles of the social creed. It is quite natural, therefore, that the current over-praise of democracy should involve, by implication, a corresponding dispraise of aristocracy. At the present moment it does not seem to occur to anyone to defend or even indeed to define democracy. Its merits and its nature are alike taken for granted. For many it sums up all that is most desirable in human affairs. When one wishes to praise a man, whether he be king or commoner, landlord or tenant, one has only to call him democratic and the praise is bestowed. When Mr. Wilson coined his now famous phrase, "To make the world safe for democracy," the poor old world went quite wild with enthusiasm. The phrase has been repeated by such multitudes, and so ceaselessly that even its friends have grown a bit sick of it. It is no longer a phrase to conjure with. Yet the poor old world still insists that democracy is what it believes in, and what it wants, and still takes it for granted that democracy needs neither defense nor definition. There is something

strangely touching in this simple faith in the saving power of democracy, and something equally pitiful in the current ignorance of what democracy really is. It sounds like a passionate, heart-broken cry to the unknown gods, and the pity of it is that the unknown gods do not answer, and the hungry multitudes show signs of bitterness and disillusionment. All human terms are vague, for they must be defined in terms of other terms. Our most precise language is only approximate. This is one of the many reasons why emotion transcends in validity the nicest academic phrase; why our swift intuition eternally outvalues the most labored statement. We can genuinely share another man's feeling, while at best we can only approximate his language. In the matter of vagueness, the term "democratic" is particularly unfortunate. It has two quite different meanings, one social and one political, and to the masses at least it has a third and confusing connotation as the name of an active political party which may in reality be more or less democratic than its several rivals. To the man in the street, all this is certainly confusing, and when he shouts for democracy and to have the world made safe for democracy, he is, for the most part, simply making a noise.

Bearing in mind the unlimited praise of democracy that one hears on all sides from persons important and unimportant, one would naturally expect it to offer some rule of life which would satisfy a universal aspiration of the human heart. But in reality this very natural expectation is never realized. The result of any effort to get at the inner heart of democracy is amazingly disappointing. One finds indeed that strictly speaking it has no inner heart, no genuine content, no sufficient ground on which to build either creed or ideal. It offers no rule of life that the earnest seeker after righteousness can lay hold of and apply. Whether one use the term democracy in its social or its political sense, it offers no discernible goal. The amazing, disquieting thing which such a penetrating scrutiny reveals is that a democratic society is totally without compass. It may face in any direction whatsoever, toward heaven or toward hell. And a democratic state is equally at the mercy of chance tides. One finds in democracy no goal either expressed or implied. What one does find is simply a method. I am not arguing that this method, when applied to suitable goals, is not extremely valuable, but what I am

pointing out is that democracy itself does not supply these goals. It supplies merely a highly generalized method. When, therefore, one offers democracy to a grief-smitten, heart-broken world as a panacea for its mortal pain, and such empty phrases as "to make the world safe for democracy" as the slogan for its effort, one offers a stone instead of life-giving bread.

What then is the method of democracy? I should say in a large way that the method of democracy is the method of the whole. Its major characteristic is that everybody shall be included. This is the wholly admirable element in democracy, and one can hardly overpraise it, for this inclusiveness is at least the beginning of justice. But mischief enters almost as soon as the method begins to be used, for this is commonly done without discrimination, and ends by setting up a quite hopeless confusion of values. Once more I am tempted to quote those wise words of the blessed Bhagavad-Gîtâ, that he who loses discrimination, loses everything. The composite whole for which democracy so resolutely and so loyally stands may be complete and all-inclusive without the false assumption that its component parts are either alike or equal. But democracy makes this false assumption in practically every case, and so vitiates an otherwise admirable method.

It is this curious lack of discrimination which has made the social method of democracy so conspicuous a failure. The method pre-supposes a similarity of taste and an equality in spiritual and intellectual development not borne out by the most rudimentary social experience. As Miss Etchingham remarks, people are only amused by what amuses them. Happily for the world, they are amused by very different things; and it is one step in toleration when I realize that my neighbor has as valid a right to his amusements as I have to mine, provided of course that neither one of us interferes with the other. The democratic ideal of having everybody join in would make for an excessively dull time, for half of the players would not know what the other half were up to, and the game would fall very flat. When I was a small boy I noticed that certain of my relatives always bored me, but having a well developed family conscience I still felt it my duty at stated intervals to go to see them. One day, however, I had an illuminating thought. It was simply this, that if they bored me so persistently, in

all probability I bored them equally or even more, and after that my conscience was quite clear. The same obvious principle applies, I think, to larger groups and more serious affairs.

Even more mischievous than this insistence upon an alikeness which does not exist is the democratic insistence upon an equality which is also unreal. That all men are created free and equal is a sufficiently accurate statement of legal status, but a deplorably inaccurate statement of our actual experience of human quality. It requires very slight reflection to see that large numbers of men are distinctly inferior to one's self, and that goodly numbers are superior. But one need not go outside of one's self for the material of such a comparison. One has only to contrast the man of today with the same man, ten, twenty, thirty years ago to be acutely aware of their inequality. And it would be profoundly discouraging if these long, arduous years of effort brought no result. The doctrine of equality calls in question the whole evolutionary process, the Pauline doctrine of growing in grace, the heroic individual struggle for perfection, all the forces that press men on towards righteousness. If after all is done and said, the man who tried is no better than the man who didn't, the whole process of human life is a ghastly tragedy. One would be quite justified in saying that the game is not worth the candle.

That social democracy makes for a sense of brotherhood, and a friendly, human intercourse among all sorts and conditions of men is its one practical glory, but it is not unique in this. Common sense, mere every-day decency, the most elementary good breeding make for an equally gracious intercourse. Certainly no true aristocrat falls short in this respect, for the idealizing of all human relations forms an integral part of his passionate quest of excellence. As a matter of fact, equality among men is mere eighteenth century theorizing. The observed fact is a profound, inescapable, much-to-be-desired inequality. It is the very condition of progress. It would be a poor world without leadership, and leadership implies a larger vision and a greater power.

In politics, the democratic method is the method of the whole carried to the extreme. Its doctrine of equality, denied social expression by the common sense of all concerned, finds political expression in universal suffrage, and

harms even those whom it is supposed to benefit. To give every man and woman a vote, and to declare these votes equally important and significant is both unsound and mischievous. The man who has no property stake in the community, who assumes no duties for the maintenance and defense of the state, who is ignorant of its history and institutions and literature, who does not perhaps even speak its language fluently, may indeed be a man, but he is certainly not a qualified citizen, and has no moral right to a voice in government. Mr. Lincoln, in spite of his greatness, made the signal mistake of giving the vote to the ignorant freedmen of the South. Subsequent statesmen, less great, have made an equal or even larger mistake in extending it to still less desirable aliens. Universal suffrage is a characteristic example of the democratic failure in discrimination. Desiring all men to be equal, the democratic spirit asserts that they *are* equal, and *if* equal, are entitled to identical privileges. Universal suffrage may properly be the goal of every civilized and progressive state, but it is a political and social crime to bestow the suffrage before it is honestly won. An electorate not properly qualified is an ever-present public danger. An ignorant democracy soon ceases to be a democracy, soon finds it inconvenient to represent and include the whole, and becomes that obnoxious form of tyranny, a dictatorship of the proletariat.

But passing over these grave objections to the democratic insistence upon equality, and accepting for the moment the accomplished fact of universal suffrage, we moderns stand face to face with a new danger, or perhaps an old danger now immensely augmented, which is a direct and inevitable outcome of the method of the whole when carried politically to the extreme. I mean the substitution of impulsive mob rule for a more judicial and temperate representative government. It is entirely possible, even in the complete democracy resulting from an unrestrained suffrage to have such a government, but it pre-supposes an intelligent electorate which recognizes that government is both an art and a science, and requires for its proper administration a preparation quite as thorough and complete as is required by law or medicine or theology. In this view of things, government, to be successful, requires expert service, is overwhelmingly a matter for experts, and may not be left to the casual whims of the man in the street. But the demo-

cratic doctrine of equality, with its method of the whole, has recently shown a disposition, in the referendum and recall, and still more radical measures of popular appeal, to withdraw the government function from the hands of its own chosen representatives and experts, and to place it, in spite of its delicacy and complexity, directly in the hands of the mob. It is not a method which promises wise counsels. This same disposition to ignore the chosen representatives of government, and to appeal over their heads directly to the people is discernible in certain popular leaders in both America and England. It is a tendency much to be regretted, and is largely responsible for the growing disregard of law and order, and the too great readiness of both individuals and groups to take the law into their own hands. The President himself has set the world an unfortunate example. In appealing to the Italian people over the heads of their chosen spokesmen, he committed not only a grave international impropriety, but he gave countenance to a procedure which in his more judicial moments he would presumably be among the first to deprecate.

I have spoken at such length about democracy because I have wanted to make it abundantly clear that there is no possible antithesis between aristocracy and democracy since they do not belong in the same category. Aristocracy is a flaming ideal, a defensible goal, a devout rule of life; while democracy has nothing to offer in the way of ends, and in the way of means, offers a method which in spite of a certain bigness, is quite as likely to land one in a morass as on the mountain.

The third antagonism to the aristocratic spirit is the least creditable of all since it shows humanity at something like its worst. It is the antagonism of resentment. There are few indeed who have not noticed this resentment,—the sneering, ill-tempered resentment which a self-conscious, uncomfortable inferiority feels in the presence of every superiority. Many men and women, in all walks of life, have the intelligence to recognize the beauty of righteousness, but have not the character to make that beauty their own. They are the people “who see the right and yet the wrong pursue.” In the last analysis, of course, they do not really see the right—they only half see it—for no mortal, I honestly believe, can have the full vision of righteousness and not ever afterwards be constrained to follow

it. He may go haltingly; he may stumble and fall; he may be blinded and seduced by false lights and siren voices, but always in his heart of hearts, the great loyalty persists, and here or elsewhere, he will arrive. The aristocrat is not disposed of by calling him, however derisively, a very superior person, for that is precisely what he sets out to be, under the belief that a world of very superior persons is much more worth while than a world of rowdies and toughs. If he is sometimes irritating, it must be remembered that any self-complacency represents a failure to carry out his own ideal, and is not a part of the ideal itself. No one is more conscious of failure than the aristocrat himself,—he is his own most severe critic—but he has the courage to risk this failure, for he knows that we only learn to walk by falling down. And often he is constrained to say with Rabbi Ben Ezra, “What I would be, and am not, comforts me.”

The strength of this third antagonism must not be underestimated. Like the conscience, the aristocratic spirit calls much in question, and does it so silently, so persistently, so accusingly that meaner spirits chafe under the condemnation, and feel a resentment which rapidly mounts to the pitch of antagonism. The defensive attitude which we all put up when we are tempted to do a second-rate thing and to brave it out is an all too common illustration. *Qui s'ex-cuse s'accuse.*

As I said in the beginning, the artistocratic spirit is the one thing in these very troubled times which would bring tranquillity and an almost passionate return to the beautiful arts of peace. It would do this great thing because it is not an empty phrase, but a flaming ideal, a devout rule of life, a religion, and as such is the inevitable producer of results. The aristocrat is a devotee, a seeker after perfection, a knight-errant bent upon a tireless quest. Let us inquire, then, very briefly, how the aristocratic spirit meets some of the hot questions of the hour. We shall find that contrary to popular impression this spirit stands aloof from no human issue, but concerns itself with all, from the smallest to the greatest. On none of these issues does it speak with hesitation or equivocation. There is no empty beating of the air, no phrase making. Its verdicts are simple, direct, understandable; and each verdict may be turned at once into practical action.

Let us begin with the most profound of all human concerns, with religion. The status of religion at the present moment is in dispute. The tragic bereavement brought about by the War, the untimely death of such a goodly number of young men, has turned the attention of millions of persons to spiritual matters and to the consolations offered by religion. Rachel, mourning for her children, yearns to be comforted, and spiritualism has come into its own. Whether this is a passing phase, or the herald of a more genuine religious revival, remains to be seen. But meanwhile it is regrettably true that other multitudes have openly thrown aside the decencies imposed by religion, and that wave after wave of crime sweeps over communities once orderly and law-abiding. One could easily believe, after reading the morning's paper, that the world stands face to face with a recurrent Dark Age brought about, as always, by our many sins. In the midst of all this chaos, on the one side excessively personal demands and on the other contemptuous indifference and denial, the aristocratic spirit stands serene, and in a very deep sense, untroubled. It is itself a religion, but while it joins with all those forms of religion which seek the perfect way, it differs from many of them in seeking it with utter disinterestedness. The aristocrat is content to worship and adore, asking nothing of the gods that they have not already given him in the resplendent moral fabric of the world. He is not concerned with personal salvation any more than he is concerned with the impression which he makes upon other persons. He does not keep one eye upon the gods any more than he does upon his fellows. His one passion is the artist passion for perfection. So far as his prayer is articulate, he prays with Plato: "O Jove, give us that which is good for us, whether we pray for it or not; and withhold that which is evil, even though we pray for it." The aristocrat has, of course, nothing in common with those commercial schemes of salvation which offer large rewards for the exercise of small virtues. Righteousness is to him an end in itself, its own reward. Like any faithful knight of old, his whole heart is filled with the glorious vision which represents his chosen service. It is so great a thing to stand face to face with God, to live constantly day by day, in the divine presence, that one can be occupied with no thought of the self.

Next in importance to religion, to one's general attitude towards life, stands a man's family. The domestic relations are not only the most beautiful of our human relations, but they are also the most delicate. To be a member of a family group is an immense privilege and it should be handled as an integral part of a man's religion. But it is also a severe test of his breeding and on all sides one sees innumerable shipwrecks, shipwrecks brought about for the most part by the vulgar pressing of personal demands. In the face of these daily assaults, the aristocratic spirit may waver and grow faint, but so long as it persists, no permanent disaster is possible. An aristocrat loves his wife, not for the comfort and pleasure she can give him, but for the glory of her perfection as a woman and a wife and a mother. There is about his love a large element of worship, and worship is always unselfish. And the aristocrat loves his children, not because they add to the sense of reality and the importance of his own life, but for the finer and less personal reason that wholesome, well-bred children are adorable for their own sakes, and worthy of all the love the grown-up world can give them. And the aristocrat loves his other relatives and his neighbors and associates, not for the service they can render him, but simply for their own manifold excellence. In these delicate human relations, as in his more formal religion, he has no thought of reward. But quite inevitably the reward is his. It is the large reward of all disinterestedness,—when one asks nothing, one receives everything.

In the domain of politics, the aristocratic spirit occupies a position which is equally characteristic. It is opposed to all forms of mob rule, under whatever name they may be put forward, and to that application of the democratic method of the whole which assumes that every man is qualified to be a legislator, and to solve, off-hand, the delicate and intricate problems of government. On the contrary, the aristocrat is a believer in trained and competent experts, that is to say, in a carefully chosen representative government. He believes in a restricted suffrage, a suffrage limited to qualified voters, to men and women who can pass the test of intelligent and participating citizenship. He does not for one moment believe that every chance adventurer who finds himself in our midst, and who goes through certain slender formalities, or who comes here

perhaps with the express purpose of stirring up trouble, should have a hand in our American political life. It is not enough that a man has reached twenty-one years; he must have reached a number of other attributes as well before he may properly be classified as a qualified voter. America, in the view of the aristocrat belongs to Americans, to the men and women who have made the country what it is, and who desire passionately to make it more admirable, not less admirable. It seems to him a grave political and social crime to hand over such a heritage to any rabble to desecrate and disintegrate, whether it be done in the name of democracy or socialism or communism or syndicalism or organized labor. The aristocrat, in a word, believes in nationalism as against internationalism, in a representative government conducted by the best experts, as against a mob rule conducted, on principle, by the incompetent. As a lover of excellence, he wishes to be represented by men wiser than himself, better trained in law and politics and history, and gifted by Nature with the quality of leadership. It is only through such men that excellence in government can be attained. One does not wish to have one's portrait painted by a sign-painter, or one's life put in danger by a quack, or one's business affairs mismanaged by an ignoramus. I do not see why one should be less wise in one's choice of the instruments of government. The aristocratic scheme, let me repeat, is not, as commonly stated, a government of the many by the few,—that is an autocracy—but it is a government of all by representative experts chosen by a qualified electorate. The aristocrat firmly believes that the grave affairs of life should be entrusted to trained experts, and not to novices and experimenters. And government, as the Great War has once more shown, is one of the very gravest of all human affairs.

In education and in industry, the aristocratic spirit has an immense theatre for its application. One might say in a broad way that the quest of excellence is the goal of both the school and the factory. But unfortunately one may not add, save in exceptional cases, that the quest is disinterested. It is the absence of disinterestedness which in both cases vitiates the goal and ends by making it more specious than real. When excellence is sought, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the loaves and fishes, it soon ceases to be

sought at all, and a cheaper substitute takes its place,—the appearance of excellence. This is true, even in education. In few secondary schools is knowledge sought for its own fair sake, but in nearly every case from some ulterior motive. Boys go to school for the sports, for the companionship, to make a better living, to get into college. These are worthy ends,—the fault lies wholly in the emphasis. They should be taken casually and ought not to obscure the major end of education,—the unfolding and perfecting of the human spirit. And among collegians, themselves, an impartial observer finds little culture and much insincerity. Even in education, the democratic fallacy of likeness and equality finds frequent and vociferous expression. But the aristocratic spirit seeks excellence in variety. Instead of asking all children to attend the same school and engage in the same studies, it would encourage a wholesome competition among schools, and would help each child to select the one best suited to its own individual needs. In spite of all that has been written about sex, its supreme significance has not, I think, been sufficiently remarked and sufficiently acted upon. And that significance is simply this, that Nature, in providing that each child must have two parents, a father and a mother, bestowed two distinct lines of heredity, and with them the possibility of beneficent variation, and the appearance of a new and more desirable type. Yet education, in spite of this obvious and vital lesson, is forever seeking uniformity and all the drab monotony of democratic sameness. The aristocratic spirit resists this tendency to the death, and seeks, instead, a multiform and varied excellence. The aristocratic world is not one of dead levels, but a world of varied interests and constant promise and unfaltering progress. It is, in a word, the world of evolution.

In his industrial life, the aristocrat may occupy any post from the very lowest to the very highest. But whatever the job, he must do it well and he must love it for its own sake. He may not, then, engage in any work where the conditions make excellence impossible, nor may he take part in meaningless toil. It will be easy to define his position towards organized labor and syndicalism and all similar movements that are ready to do evil in order that good may come of it. These modern forms of Jesuit teaching, that the end justifies the means, are not in harmony with

the aristocratic spirit,—the whole event must be excellent, the means, as well as the end. And equally at variance with that spirit is the tendency of organized labor to lessen individual responsibility and initiative, to kill the passionate love of excellence, and to substitute for it the smaller efficiency and lower standards of the average worker. Being disinterested and having something excellent to offer, the aristocratic worker stands on his own feet and does not seek to be bolstered up by union or organization. He realizes that salvation is an individual adventure and not a mass movement. In industry as in government, he asks the largest possible individual freedom and the least amount of prescription. He repudiates with vigor all class consciousness, all class distinctions, all class warfare, as wholly inconsistent with that common effort towards righteousness which he conceives all high-minded persons to have entered upon. Perhaps I sum it all up in saying that the aristocratic worker is an uncompromising individualist, and so opposes the major currents of the hour. It is only in the disinterested quest of excellence that anything notable can be accomplished in industry. The case is precisely similar to the case of religion, of family life, of politics, of education, of art. It is not enough to go through the motions,—the work in hand must engage the individual spirit or it cannot possibly be well done. The fatal defect in the present excessive desire to organize the world is that it does not appeal to this love of excellence, but to a narrow and disabling self-interest. It may seem over-optimistic, but the aristocrat, both from his own personal experience, his own experiments in selfishness, and from the tragic lessons of the Great War, is bound to believe that this specialized self-interest always leads to failure, while disinterestedness is the essential condition of success.

One cannot in a series of brief paragraphs say anything much worth saying upon such tremendous themes as religion, family life, politics, education, industry, but what I have tried to indicate is that the aristocratic spirit, being an habitual attitude of mind, a religion, is competent to meet and solve these typical problems of our modern, complicated daily life, and to do it without hesitation or equivocation. The aristocrat sees life in a definite, clear-cut way; he knows what to do both in the ordinary day's work and

in the multiform emergencies of life, and as he is true to form, he does it simply, honestly and well. The immense practical value of such an inclusive formula is that it leads to prompt decision and equally prompt action. It does away with all evasion and subterfuge. When a man speaks the truth, it is easy to speak; when he intends to do right, it is easy to act. *Noblesse oblige*.

I am presenting, I know, an unpopular view of life, since it recognizes human inequality, and is in effect a doctrine of perfection. It will meet with little sympathy from those extreme modernists who scorn our feeble individual efforts towards righteousness, and who profess to find in the masses, virtues and qualities not discoverable in the component units. But it is a view which stands the test of application and has stood it for centuries. The aristocratic spirit has led to the achievement of worthy tasks, and consequently to individual satisfaction and happiness. The aristocrat is one of the few men who can stand alone. He does not have to wait for others to act, or for the coming of favorable circumstance. His own task is always at hand, his own quest is always on. It may be tragic, but it is nevertheless true that in the serious affairs of life, a man must be able, thus resolutely, to stand alone and in the final great adventure of death. Destiny brings curious gifts, but in the face of the most difficult of them, the true aristocrat is unafraid and victorious.

HANFORD HENDERSON.

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF MY ELDERS

BY ST. JOHN ERVINE

II—W. B. YEATS

I SAW Yeats many times after that first visit. He told me that he was always at home to his friends on Monday evening, and he invited me to dine with him on the Monday immediately following after that Sunday on which I first met him. No one came on that evening. He talked about acting and the theatre, and I said something that pleased him, and he complimented me in his grave, courteous manner. "That was well said," he exclaimed, and I flushed with pleasure. The praise of one distinguished man is more than the applause of a multitude of common men. Yeats's talk about the theatre, though interesting, was often remote from reality. He was then much interested in the more esoteric forms of drama, and was eager to put masks on the actors' faces. He wished to eliminate the personality of the player from the play, and had borrowed some foolish notions from Mr. Gordon Craig about lighting and scenery and de-humanised actors. He had a model of the Abbey Theatre in his rooms and was fond of experimenting with it. There was some inconsistency in his talk about acting: at one moment he was anxious for anonymous, masked players, "freed" from personality, and at the next moment, he was demanding that players should act with their entire bodies, not merely with their voices and faces. Hazlitt, in one of his essays, advocates anonymity on the stage, and when one considers how excessive is the regard paid today to the actor in comparison with that paid to the play, one is tempted to support Hazlitt's demand; but I have never understood why one should decline to exploit a personality that is rare.

There is a school of thinkers which holds that the best theatre is that one in which a player may be the hero of the piece tonight and the "voice off" tomorrow night. This is a ridiculous theory. Even if it were practicable, which it is