

FORTY YEARS OF IT

**BY
BRAND WHITLOCK**

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TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FATHER

ELIAS D. WHITLOCK

WHO DIED DECEMBER 23, 1913

A MINISTER OF THE SANCTUARY, AND
OF THE TRUE TABERNACLE, WHICH
THE LORD PITCHED, AND NOT MAN

INTRODUCTION

The history of democracy's progress in a mid-Western city—so, to introduce this book in specific terms, one perhaps inevitably must call it. Yet in using the word *democracy*, one must plead for a distinction, or, better, a reversion, indicated by the curious anchylosis that, at a certain point in their maturity, usually sets in upon words newly put in use to express some august and large spiritual reality. We all know how this materializing tendency, if one may call it that, has affected our notion and our use of the commonest religious terms like *faith*, *grace*, *salvation*, for instance. Their connotation, originally fluid, spiritual and subjective, has become concrete, limited, partial, ignoble. So, too, in our common speech, even above the catchpenny vocabulary of the demagogue or politician, the word *democracy* has taken on the limited, partial and ignoble connotation of more or less incidental and provisional forms of democracy's practical outcome; or even of by-products not directly traceable to the action of democracy itself. How often, for example, do we see direct primaries, the single tax, the initiative and referendum posed in a kind of sacramental relation to "fundamental democracy"; or the "essential movement of democracy" measured, say, by the increased returns on the Socialist ticket at some local election!

The permanent value of this book is that it proceeds out of a truly adequate and philosophical conception of democracy. That the collective human spirit should know itself, καταμαθεῖν τὴν φύσιν καὶ ταύτη ἔπεσθαι, that the state, the

communal unit, should be, in Mr. Arnold's phrase, "the expression of our best self, which is not manifold and vulgar and unstable and contentious and ever varying, but one and noble and secure and peaceful and the same for all mankind"; here we have in outline the operation of democracy. One could not give this volume higher praise than to say, as in justice one must say, that it clearly discerns and abundantly conveys the spirit which works in human nature toward this end.

How important it is to maintain this fluid, philosophical and spiritual view of democracy may be seen when we look about us and consider the plight of those—especially the many now concerned in politics, whether professionally or as eager amateurs—who for lack of it confuse various aspects of the political problem of liberty with the social problem of equality. With political liberty or with self-expression of the individual in politics, democracy has, and ever has had, very little to do. It is our turbid thought about democracy that prevents our seeing this. The aristocratic and truculent barons did more for the political freedom of Englishmen than was ever done by democracy; a selfish and sensual king did more to gain the individual Englishman his freedom of self-expression in politics. In our own country it is matter of open and notorious fact that a political party whose every sentiment and tendency is aristocratic has been the one to bring about the largest measures of political enfranchisement. Now, surely, one may heartily welcome every enlargement of political liberty, but if one attributes them to a parentage which is not theirs, if one relates them under *democracy*, the penalty which nature inexorably imposes upon error is sure to follow. If, therefore, in the following pages the author seems occasionally lukewarm

toward certain enfranchising measures, I do not understand that he disparages them, but only that he sees—as their advocates, firmly set in the confusion we speak of, cannot see—that their connection with democracy is extremely indistinct and remote. *Equality*—a social problem, not to be worked out by the mechanics of politics, but appealing wholly to the best self, the best reason and spirit of man,—this is democracy's concern, democracy's chief interest. It is to our author's praise, again, that he sees this clearly and expresses it convincingly.

By far the most admirable and impressive picture in this book appears to me to be that which the author has all unconsciously drawn of himself. It reveals once more that tragedy—the most profound, most common and most neglected of all the multitude of useless tragedies that our weak and wasteful civilization by sheer indifference permits—the tragedy of a richly gifted nature denied the opportunity of congenial self-expression. What by comparison is the tragedy of starvation, since so very many willingly starve, if haply they may find this opportunity? The author is an artist, a born artist. His natural place is in a world unknown and undreamed of by us children of an age commissioned to carry out the great idea of industrial and political development. He belongs by birthright in the eternal realm of divine impossibilities, of sublime and delightful inconsistencies. Greatly might he have fulfilled his destiny in music, in poetry, in painting had he been born at one of those periods when spiritual activity was all but universal, when spiritual ideas were popular and dominant, *volitantes per ora virum*, part of the very air one breathed—in the Greece of Pericles, the England of Elizabeth, or on the

Tuscan hills at the time of the Florentine Renaissance! But this was not to be. An admirer, jealous of every possible qualification, reminds me that I should call him at least a philosophical artist; yes, but not by nature even that. The toga did not drop upon him readymade from a celestial loom. It was woven and fitted laboriously by his own hands. He sought philosophical consistency and found it and established himself in it; but only as part of the difficult general discipline of an alien life.

What an iron discipline, and how thoroughly alien a life, stands revealed to the eye of poetic insight and the spirit of sympathetic delicacy, on every page of these memoirs. For the over-refined (as we say), the oversensitive soul of a born artist—think of the experience, think of the achievement! The very opposite of all that makes a politician, appraising politics always at their precise value, yet patiently spending all the formative years of his life in the debilitating air of politics for the sake of what he might indirectly accomplish. Not an executive, yet incessantly occupied with tedious details of administrative work, for the satisfaction of knowing them well done. Not a philosopher, yet laboriously making himself what Glanvil quaintly calls “one of those larger souls who have traveled the divers climates of opinion” until he acquired a social philosophy that should meet his own exacting demands.

Is it too much, then, that I invite the reader’s forbearance with these paragraphs to show why our author should himself take rank and estimation with the great men whom he reverently pictures? He tells the story of Altgeld and of Johnson, energetic champions of the newer political freedom. He tells the story of

Jones, the incomparable true democrat, one of the children of light and sons of the Resurrection, such as appear but once in an era. And in the telling of these men and of himself as the alien and, in his own view, largely accidental continuator of their work, it seems to me that he indicates the process by which he too has worked out his own position among them as “one of those consoling and hope-inspiring marks which stand forever to remind our weak and easily discouraged race how high human goodness and perseverance have once been carried and may be carried again.”

ALBERT JAY NOCK.

THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE,
NEW YORK.

FORTY YEARS OF IT

FORTY YEARS OF IT

I

One hot afternoon in the summer of my tenth year, my grandfather, having finished the nap he was accustomed to take after the heavy dinner which, in those days, was served at noon in his house, told me that I might go up town with him. This was not only a relief, but a prospect of adventure. It was a relief to have him finish his nap, because while he was taking his nap, my grandmother drew down at all the windows the heavy green shades, which, brought home by the family after a residence in Nuremberg, were decorated at the bottom with a frieze depicting scenes along the Rhine, and a heavy and somnolent silence was imposed on all the house. When my grandfather took his nap, life seemed to pause, all activities were held in suspense.

And the prospect was as a pleasant adventure, because whenever my grandfather let me go up town with him he always made me a present, which was sure to be more valuable, more expensive, than those little gifts at home, bestowed as rewards of various merits and sacrifices related to that institution of the afternoon nap, and forthcoming if he got through the nap satisfactorily, that is, without being awakened. They consisted of mere money, the little five or ten cent notes of green scrip; "shin-plasters" they were called, I believe, in those days.

When my grandfather had rearranged his toilet, combing his thick white hair and then immediately running his fingers through it to rumple it up and give him a savage aspect, we set forth.

He wore broad polished shoes, low, and fastened with buckles, and against the black of his attire his stiffly starched, immaculate white waistcoat was conspicuous. Only a few of its lower buttons of pearl were fastened; above that it was open, and from one of the buttonholes, the second from the top, his long gold watch-chain hung from its large gold hook. The black cravat was not hidden by his white beard, which he did not wear as long as many Ohio gentlemen of that day, and he was crowned by a large Panama hat, yellowed by years of summer service, and bisected by a ridge that began at the middle of the broad brim directly in front, ran back, climbed and surmounted the large high crown, and then, descending, ended its impressive career at the middle of the broad brim behind.

I was walking on his left hand, near the fence, but as we entered the shade of the elms and shrubbery of the Swedenborgian churchyard, I went around to his other side, because a ghost dwelt in the Swedenborgian churchyard. My cousin had pointed it out to me, and once I had seen it distinctly.

The precaution was unnecessary, for I had long known my grandfather for a brave man. He had been a soldier, and many persons in Urbana still saluted him as major, though at that time he was mayor; going up town, in fact, meant to go to the town hall before going anywhere else. In the shade he removed

his hat, and taking out a large silk handkerchief, passed it several times over his red, perspiring face.

It was, as I have said, a hot afternoon, even for an August afternoon in Ohio, and it was the hottest hour of the afternoon. Main Street, when we turned into it presently, was deserted, and wore an unreal appearance, like the street of the dead town that was painted on the scene at the “opera-house.” Far to the south it stretched its interminable length in white dust, until its trees came together in that mysterious distance where the fairgrounds were, and to the north its vista was closed by the bronze figure of the cavalryman standing on his pedestal in the Square, his head bowed in sad meditation, one gauntleted hand resting on his hip, the other on his saber-hilt. Out over the thick dust of the street the heat quivered and vibrated, and if you squinted in the sun at the cavalryman, he seemed to move, to tremble, in the shimmer of that choking atmosphere.

The town hall stood in Market Square; for, in addition to *the* Square, where the bronze cavalryman stood on his pedestal, there was Market Square, the day of civic centers not having dawned on Urbana in that time, nor, doubtless, in this.

Market Square was not a square, however, but a parallelogram, and on one side of it, fronting Main Street, was the town hall, a low building of brick, representing in itself an amazing unity of municipal functions—the germ of the group plan, no doubt, and, after all, in its little way, a civic center indeed. For there, in an auditorium, plays were staged before a populace innocent of the fact that it had a municipal theater, and in another room the city council sat, with representatives from Lighttown, and Gooseville, and Guinea, and the other *faubourgs* of our little

municipality. Under that long low roof, too, were the “calaboose” and the headquarters of the fire department. Back of these the structure sloped away into a market-house of some sort, with a public scales, and broad, low, overhanging eaves, in the shade of which firemen, and the city marshal, and other officials, in the dim retrospect, seem to have devoted their leisure to the game of checkers.

On the opposite side of Market Square there was a line of brick buildings, painted once, perhaps, and now of a faint pink or cerise which certain of the higher and more artistic grades of calcimining assume, and there seems to have been a series, almost interminable, of small saloons—declining and fading away somewhere to the east, in the dark purlieu of Guinea.

Here, along this line of saloons, if it was a line of saloons, or, if it was not, along the side of the principal saloon which in those wet days commanded that corner, there were always several carts, driven by Irishmen from Lighttown, smoking short clay pipes, and two-wheeled drays driven by negroes from Guinea or Gooseville. These negro drivers were burly men with shining black skins and gleaming eyes and teeth, whose merry laughter was almost belied by the ferocious, brutal whips they carried—whips precisely like that *Simon Legree* had wielded in the play in the theater just across the Square, now, by a stroke of poetic justice, in the hands of *Uncle Tom* himself. But on this day the firemen were not to be seen under the eaves of the market-house; their checker-boards were quite abandoned. The mules between the shafts of these two-wheeled drays hung their heads and their long ears drooped under the heat, and their black masters were curled up on the sidewalk against

the wall of the saloon, asleep. The Irishmen were nowhere to be seen, and Market Square was empty, deserted, and sprawled there reflecting the light in a blinding way, while from the yellow, dusty level of its cobbled surface rose, wave on wave, palpably, that trembling, shimmering, vibrating heat. And yet, there was one waking, living thing in sight. There, out in the middle of the Square he stood, a dusty, drab figure, with an old felt hat on a head that must have ached and throbbled in that implacable heat, with a mass of rags upon him, his frayed trousers gathered at his ankles and bound about by irons, and a ball and chain to bind him to that spot. He had a broom in his hands, and was aimlessly making a little smudge of dust, doing his part in the observance of an old, cruel, and hideous superstition.

I knew, of course, that he was a prisoner. Usually there were three or four, sometimes half a dozen, such as he. They were the chain-gang, and they were Bad—made so by Rum. I knew that they were brought out of the calaboose, that damp, dark place under the roof of the market-house, somewhere between the office of the mayor and the headquarters of the fire department; and glimpses were to be caught now and then of their faces pressed against those bars.

When, under the shade of the broad eaves, we were about to enter the mayor's office, my grandfather motioned to the prisoner out there in the center of the Square, who with a new alacrity dropped his broom, picked up his ball, and lugging it in his arms, came up close to us, so very close that I could see the sweat that drenched his forehead, stood in great beads on his upper lip, matted the hair on his forearms, stained with dark

splashes his old shirt, and glistened on his throat and breast, burned red by the sun. He dropped his ball, took off that rag of a hat, raised eyelids that were powdered with dust, and looked at my grandfather.

“How many days did I give you?” my grandfather asked him.

“Fifteen, your honor,” he said.

“How long have you been in?”

“Three days, your honor.”

“Are you the only one in there?”

“Yes, your honor.”

My grandfather paused and looked at him.

“Pretty hot out there, isn’t it?” asked my grandfather.

The prisoner smiled, a smile exactly like that anyone would have for such a question, but the smile flickered from his face, as he said:

“Yes, your honor.”

My grandfather looked out over the Square and up and down. There was no one anywhere to be seen.

“Well, come on into the office.”

The prisoner picked up his ball, and followed my grandfather into the mayor’s office. My grandfather went to a desk, drew out a drawer, fumbled in it, found a key, and with this he stooped and unlocked the irons on the prisoner’s ankles. But

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