

OUR COOLER MARTYRDOMS

BY ELLEN BURNS SHERMAN

WE generally think of a dictionary as a harmless and necessary volume, deservedly immune from the attacks of any watch and ward society. Yet it has furnished uniforms and ammunition for more public and private tragedies, written and unwritten, than any other book in the world. Like various industrial plants, which we are assured may be subverted over night to military uses, so the dictionary and all its silent cohorts, with the assistance of the press, may be embattled and subverted over night to thrust, wound and slay.

In both cases, the subversions are made under the leadership of destructive emotions. Cruder and more primeval upwellings of hate, greed and anger, use the more material weapons forged for the service of Mars, while the somewhat more evolved forms of those emotions equip their despoiling troops from the marvelous verbal arsenal, known as the dictionary. Nor let us forget that these rhetorically clad regiments, marching in the perfection of fatigue uniform, have powers of endurance, that sometimes make them infinitely more dangerous than any army trained to express hate with more material bullets, shell and gas.

Even before the days when the Press could at any time reinforce with ten million fresh recruits the verbally-clad troops of destruction, every nation had its poets and seers, who discerned how far a word might wing its poisoned arrow, or how deep its deadly sabre thrust might be.

“The boneless tongue, so small and weak
Can crush and kill”, declared the Greek.

“The tongue destroys a greater horde”

The Turk asserts, “than does the sword”.

“The tongue can speak a word whose speed”,

Says the Chinese, “outstrips the steed”.

Consider also the findings of biblical James, one of the most logically mellow of all advocates of practical Christianity: "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing", which is only a shorter and better way of saying that a peaceful industrial plant, like the mouth, can be transformed in less than a night to a deadly arsenal. "My brethren, these things ought not so to be" is the same conclusion of the gentle James, who further designates the ear-marks of wisdom from above, by saying, among other things, that it is gentle, easy to be entreated and full of mercy and good fruits.

If James could say that certain things ought not so to be in his day, when mouths had only a pop-gun power, compared with their present reinforcing power from press and radio, what would he tell us now when only our highest spiritual peaks and table lands have escaped the brackist post-bellum surges of war. The world has admitted without cavil, that our "rising tide of crime" is one of the sequels of war. But it has not as clearly discerned, that, shading off from that more palpable crime wave, has been a military back-wash, whose polluted waters have also touched the pulpit, press and forum.

If there were any method of gathering statistics on this more elusive phase of post-bellum barbarism, it might be found that the victims, maimed, wounded and slain, of the typographical sand-bagger were quite equal in number to those of his fellow-slug, who uses a bullet or dagger. Both are acts of violence.

Our recent heresy trials, alone, have furnished us with painful reminders of Lowell's admonishing lines,

"Fagot and stake were desperately sincere
Our cooler martyrdoms are done in type".

Tested, by genuine Christianity, how humiliating is the sight of a church, or part of it, pursuing an honest fearless heretic, in full chase, like a scarlet-clad master and his pack of hounds, running down a gentle hare!

And here is may be recorded that almost all heretics are gentle, for this simple reason. Their very condemnation rests upon the fact that they interpret Christianity by the warm heart-light of its Founder, rejecting the letter, which is the very yeast of heresy trials. John (of the epistles) himself could not escape the heretic-hunters, were he now with us offering, as he and Paul did, the one great test of Christianity: "*We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.*" Do the men who hunt heretics love the brethren? I have often wondered.

Again, we need to turn back to the prevision of Lowell, when he asked,

“Shall we treat Him as if He were a child, nor dare trust
 The Rock of Ages to their chemic test?
 Doubtless his church will be no hospital
 For superannuated forms and mumping shams
 No parlor where men issue policies
 Of Life assurance on the Eternal Mind.
 Some divine thing, large hearted, brotherly,
 Not nice in trifles.”

To just such a large-hearted and brotherly Christianity the great body of the church, and the unchurched arc, nevertheless, headed today, as all the movements toward church federation prove, and still more all the world efforts to end war. Yet single instances of heretical and military persecution still leave their foot-prints in our ecclesiastical and political stratum, like the bones and claw-prints of the last survivors of a previous geologic age.

Almost incredible tales, also, one occasionally hears of a few clergymen who have justified the name, “Coward’s Castle”, as applied to a pulpit, whose occupant uses the code of the Anonymous letter-writer by making covert thrusts at individuals, whom he would not dare confront, personally, man to man, with a fair chance for defense and return fire.

It was just such an un-Christian attack, from an unsportsmanlike pulpit, which drove James Whitcomb Riley out of the church forever. Quite other were the instructions laid down in the New Testament: *If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.*”

Another tale I once heard of a clergyman, timorous at short range, who administered with great gusto from his pulpit, most of his family discipline, even that slated for the wife of his bosom. Speaking James-wise, these things ought not so to be and I would wager, without a tremor, half the free verse of the last decade, that when James held up the mirror of perfection to Mrs. James, he did not go into the synagogue to do it.

An illustration of a clerical good-sport was furnished by the doughty English prelate who—with no anonymous shield before him—bravely sent to his sinful sovereign a Bible, with a certain commandment conspicuously marked for royal consideration.

Passing to the field of politics, we may find scores of examples

of the cooler martyrdoms done in type. Notable victims were Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Grant, Cleveland and Wilson. The last bore not only the heaviest burdens ever piled upon a presidential back, but was subjected to a typographical barrage of false accusations, which continued even after merciful death had rescued him from merciless men. One particular article on Wilson I recall, which haunted me for weeks after I read it, so cruel was its verbal vivisection by bungling and incompetent hands.

Added to all the more or less authoritative volleys leveled against him, he had to bear the irresponsible mosquito-like buzzings of all the insect-tribe of *genus homo*. Even Emerson, who was no reed before the storm of misrepresentation that blew his way, confessed that "when the unintelligent brute force that lies at the bottom of society is made to growl and mow, it needs the habit of magnanimity and religion to treat it God-like as a trifle of no concernment".

Yet this "unintelligent growling", multiplied and megaphoned by the press, often passes for a consensus, though the original growl that started it may have come from a man whose finite judgments were never submitted to the correcting referendum of a warm heart. Here, I am reminded that Shakespeare left little to be said on the subject of mercy as a proper flavoring for justice.

If, at some public gathering, a man should go up to another man and slap his face, or tweak his nose, the civilized world would be unanimous in its verdict on the outrage. But, strangely enough, if the slapping or tweaking is done with type, which may multiply by its publicity, the wrong done its victim, the offender generally escapes unchallenged, save by the Keeper of the Balance, who may still be trusted to preserve the score.

In the literary world, as in the political, the list of typographical casualties might well make the biblical James shake off his cerements and rise with fresh admonishings for the world. Not only have living authors and their works been typographically drawn and quartered, but the dead—as in Poe's case, disinterred and again and again subjected to traducing conjectures, against whose injustice the victims could make no appeal.

Comparing the records of typographical violence in prose and verse, we find that it has been very seldom that destructive emotions have been able to seduce the poets to lend them their wide-winged pinions. So pre-eminently is the poet the heaven-appointed laureate of love, that the world recoiled at the publication of The

Hymn of Hate. It seemed the same kind of perversion as the transformation into bullets of the great *Kaiserglocke*, originally made to sound the notes of peace. Who, now, would care to remember or recite a hymn dictated by hate, or any other venomous emotion? But the thousands of lays and odes dictated by love—from *Highland Mary* to *In School Days*—how tenderly still they echo in our hearts, and always will, while hearts and printing-presses endure.

So, too, all our most cherished hymns, that knit us into the higher fellowship of heaven found their inspiration in love. Nothing less than sacrilege it seems to proffer the poison of hate in the Holy Grail of poetry.

If we look through German, French, English and American poets we shall find very few of them violating the unwritten law that goes with the poet's gift. Lowell offended this law once or twice, as Longfellow and Whittier could not have done, and one of his victims was a woman, "who is no proper subject for that kind of thing", as a critic once justly observed; for one reason because the judicial dice of the world are always loaded in favor of men. Hence, the verdict of all the best critics on the treatment accorded a well-known actress by one lacking in chivalry. It is a question, also, how far a certain scientist was justified in so fully making the world his final confessional, since the facts he divulged would give poignant and permanent embarrassment to at least three living women and one man.

In all such personal problems, as well as those where the misuse of type may curdle up good feeling between nations, what safer rule could be followed than the one implied in Cardinal Newman's definition of a gentlemen, as "one who never willingly inflicts pain; one who never says by implication or innuendo anything which he would not say openly and directly." England, as Emerson so often was glad to chronicle, has been especially happy in her rich harvests of gentlemen, of the peerless school of Newman, Lewis Carroll, Arnold, Viscounts Bryce, Morley and Grey, and her output is still heavy.

In her latest civil and inter-national uses of the peace-making power, which is one of the by-products of a gentleman, she has proved how much more important than every other qualification in her leaders is that brand of celestial wisdom whose ingredients were so clearly tabulated by biblical James. What else was it, also, save the same kind of super-wisdom, which inspired the noble docu-

ment drawn up by the Oxford professors, who reached out to professional Germany a hand warmly pledged to forgiveness and kindly cooperation for all time to come.'

In the same mellow key of righteousness was Professor Palmer's recent Atlantic article on Forgiveness, and an earlier one by the late William Archer, who warned the world of the fuse-like power of bitter international criticism. *Punch*, with its long-held preference for the warm Indian summer tints of humor, rather than the chilling March wind of wit, is another witness to the mellow quality of English wisdom at its best.

It would not be fair, however, as the Locarno pact proved, to limit to any one nation, the production of men dowered with lubricating wisdom. Sharing Mr. Chamberlain's world glory, which belongs to the international peace-maker are Edward Benes, Luther, Stresemann and that repetendic hero, Briand, whose power to rise from his own ashes makes the old phoenix seem a trivial amateur. America, also, has plenty of men, some of them still undiscovered, who have the same negotiable brand of righteousness, which brought forth the Pact of Locarno. I shall leave their designation, however, to some discriminating foreigner, whose task we may not have sufficiently assisted. Let no one infer that this article is a plea for home-coddling of public men, to whose hands are entrusted the welfare and reputation of their nations. The press can be too tender to public officers, when their ignoble limitations give their country an ignoble reputation. Even the gentlest poets, at the call of outraged liberty or any other injustice, have always been ready to fire a typographical shot heard round the world. But the press may well consider before it lends its infinite power to fallible vivisectionists, who leave nothing for The Last Judgment, except justice.

It might be well for all human beings (including authors, editors, and clergymen) to keep close to their ink-stands a copy of Sill's *The Fool's Prayer*, the third chapter of James and the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians.