

THE RIGHT FREEDOM FOR THE RIGHT PEOPLE, IN THE RIGHT PLACE, AT THE RIGHT TIME.

By Walt Kelly

liberty was one of the first acts in this country by some of us who had migrated in the name of religious freedom. You remember, we hanged a number of non-conformists to the trees in Salem and preserved purity and peace.

The things to keep in mind in this case and the others which might outrage our spectator sensitivities are that we, too, were and are involved in every injustice with which the world is beset.

Of course this is hard to remember when some scraggly strangers in a far off country decide that they are justified in hanging a citizen of one's own land. Or perhaps some characters armed with knives and grenades take away the freedom of a rice-economy village by the simple process of cutting the villagers' throats and blowing up the huts. These things go against a man's grain as he sits in the quiet of his parlor fuming into a highball and reading the evening paper.

Completely beside himself this same gentleman rushes out of the house and into a 250 horsepower automobile, capable of throwing three tons of shrapnel around the moon, and roars into gear. Scattering neighborhood dogs, children, innocent old ladies (they are always innocent), and other damned fool pedestrians out of his way, our hero fights his way to a parking spot near his club or favorite saloon.

Bumping the car ahead of him, scraping the one behind, the angry man leaps from his auto, trips over the fireplug which some ignorant city department has placed at the very door of his car, and rushes indoors, wounded but game.

"It is a damned outrage!" he roars, thumping the bar so that an innocent old man's beer is sloshed over his shirt front. For an hour he explains what boors and cannibals are the dastardly foreigners who perpetrate foul deeds. Eventually the man is led home by two friends, at least one of whom he scolds the next day for having forgotten to bring along his hat.

This same man and many like him will stand, misty eyed, at attention while a bugler plays taps on some

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It is one of our harmless fancies that we are a humorous people constantly sustained by our ability to laugh at ourselves in merry understanding, shaking our heads and chuckling at each endearing and cherished fault. Such frailties as we

recognize, we willingly admit in a magnanimous gesture born of security and the freedom we feel therein.

All of this involved talk merely means that we are a pack of myopic bums. We have faults which we have hardly used yet.

But we are getting around to them. Typical of our usual conception of



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national holiday, taps for the men who died in a war brought about by other hasty people in high places. If you ask this man to think not so much of the past as of the future, he, in a welter of beetle-headed misunderstanding and misplaced sentimentality, will denounce you as several kinds of a fool and defiler of Holy Writ.

He sees no connection between bustling onto a bus ahead of others who have been waiting longer than he and the swinging of a bloody sword against a child's head in some town in a country impossible to spell. It is only the dirty foreigners and associated villains (members of the opposition political party, or opposing [sic] church), whom he can readily identify as the enemy.

You must recall that during World War II there was some extensive and completely serious talk on the subject of identifying the enemy. It was pointed out by worried thinkers

that to the uninitiated the Japanese and the Chinese looked a great deal alike. Somehow, through some Herculean churning of the cerebral pot, these thinkers must have realized that the Germans are hard to distinguish from the English or the French at 1,500 feet or even in the next hospital bed; and so that problem was finally abandoned. It is to be hoped that these same worries will not find it necessary to conjecture again. Such mental harassment could conceivably drive us so far out of our minds that we might be forced to forego our periodic international struggles.

Our safe way of figuring which is the enemy and which is not might be to assume that everybody is on your side. But this would be a heresy so rank that many of us would be so busy holding our noses that we would not have a free hand with which to fight.

We nourish and fondle our preconceptions about everything because it gives a sense of security. Individually each of us at one time, and probably constantly, must think of himself as a pretty fine type of clean-cut boy, and in some cases this could be true. We ignore the opinion of others on this subject partly because it is not usually relayed to us and partly because a converse judgment would be absolutely incredible. Indeed, you'll get poor marks on any psychiatrist's couch if you talk about yourself in terms reserved for others. You are not supposed to think of yourself as a no-good bum, though it may be a fact known even unto the least child in Borneo.

Thinking of yourself like this tends to make you insecure and then people worry about you. "Jerome is insecure!" they say, as if Jerome had a disease picked up in Port Said. Jerome goes around being pretty mousey, it must be admitted, but he does not pound on bars and upset the beer of innocent old parties who never did any harm except maybe shill a college boy into a dice game. It is possible to be aware of your faults and yet not cause others to worry about you, but few of us manage it. For the most part we either creep around under a cloud of self-

perception or we ignore the glaring truth that we are as full of holes as a French constitution.

This results in the current game of attributing all the faults and frailties in the world to several hundred millions of scapegoats, all of whom live outside our borders. Preconceptions flourish in this field for it gets pretty dull if some joker in the discussion says, "Ah, but you do not really know the Patagonians. A little education and they would never have burned down the Eiffel Tower. Actually, they are lovely people."



Obviously this fellow is a spoil-sport. There is some chance that he is a Communist, but at any rate he is out to gum up the game. Presently he finds himself ignored by the well-bred and involved in muscular struggles with the types who wear sports shirts and cigars to racetracks. It is apparent that the crowd at the bar was pleased with its preconceptions. This leads to the conclusion that in order to keep from hating each other at the bar it is necessary for the crowd to find an outside object. Properly played, the game can lead to all kinds of happy hatreds. Barring all else, if women of heady fragrance are not within noseshot, the talk can lead around to what imbeciles this subspecies be.

To play fair and clean at this game is practically impossible. Fairly, the player would have to reduce the scapegoats to the logical end, until he would find himself staring into the

bar mirror and muttering threats. A person like this is finally taken in tow by authorities in white jackets and subjected to shock treatment. It is figured that the fellow will do himself harm (though if harm is to be done who can say where a better place to start might be?). He is watched carefully and at last when he complains about the food and curses the nurse, they know he is returning to normal.

Essentially what we are trying to do when we find fault with others is to reduce the load on ourselves. When we stop and think about it, we realize that there are a number of injustices rampant in the world and we know for a positive fact the break you get by being born free, white, and an American is roughly equivalent to having heaven fashioned to your specifications.

(It should be noted here without further comment that the phrase, "free, white and an American" was chosen with some care.)

Too many of us, however, wish to ascribe the bad luck of others to some personal fault such as dementia, meanness of spirit, racial lunkheadedness, traditionally bad table manners, or the inability to hit curve-ball pitching.

All of these frailties are deplorable it is true, nothing being worse than the last, as any real fan will tell you any time in September. The fact that we may have the same faults is somewhat beside the point in our usual consideration because, without luck, these faults have led, so far, to practically nothing but peace, security, happiness, and tree-lined streets with twenty-four-hour sunshine. We can admit that we, too know the pangs of hunger, usually about 11:30 a.m. and again at approximately a quarter of six, some sufferers being afflicted about midnight also. We know about the ill-clothed; the wife's hats will just about drive a man mad. Education is poor here; they don't teach arithmetic like they did when we were boys.

So it can be seen that, though we have many adversities, we struggle through; therefore, our faults cannot really be so bad.

Having decided that others are inferior to us, it becomes incumbent upon us to pass judgment upon these

same to the extent that we can tell who is ready for what. Certain rights and privileges, we say, are only for certain people. This is but half true. Privileges are always for certain people. Rights are for everybody; otherwise they, too, become privileges and nobody has any rights.

It is actually as simple as that. Unless rights are extended to everyone, there remains nothing but privilege. Operating on the basis of privilege, all organizations become private clubs. Strangely enough there are a great many who detest private clubs, and that bit of information will serve to confirm all private club members in their curious private practices.

To the bleary eyed person who, understandably, has not been paying attention as we've journeyed through this section of the sewer system, the stalagmites and stalactites of sarcasm may not have been discernible. Therefore much of the foregoing should be explained as having been a beery, dreary attack upon things human. Let us turn here, where the vines reach flowery fingers into the cool of our lagoon, and explore the possibility of being unhuman.

You will notice there in that bower on the bank an unshaven gentleman with a wine breath listening attentively to an extremely reasonable fellow with a face on him like an angel, who is describing in soft tones why the Patagonians burned down the Eiffel Tower. He finishes and there is a burst of applause. Scrub women with faces on *them* like angels rush forward and from their buckets they fling handfuls of flowers upon the Reasonable Fellow.

"Gosh, Reasonable Fellow," says the Wine Breath, "you have impressed and converted us all. We all love the Patagonians now, don't we, maids and men?"

Fellows in sports shirts douse their cigars and rush, hair armed, into the foreground, where, together with the Scrub Girls, they sing: "My Love, a Maiden Blue, is Wine Enough for Me." (Being Patagonian.)

At this point the loud man who owned the 250 cylinder (or was it horsepower?) car strides from the wings carrying a plan for dropping an

airlift or something else big and loud on the devilish natives.

"We can wipe them from the face of the earth and never again will they spit on the floor of the Deveryly-Plancton Hotel in Upper Grantch," he points out (in a bass song called, "Hey!").

Quickly the scrub people gather 'round while the Reasonable Man sings a tenor explanation of everything that's gone up till now. This converts and streamlines the Loud Man and he leaves, barefoot, (giving his clothes away to the poor as he goes) for Upper Grantch to personally wash the floor of the Deveryly-Plancton.

Deeply moved, we cannot help but be reflective as our craft splits, with silvery ripples, the purple and flame reflection of the sunset. Peace is everywhere; the drone of summer insects reaches our ears; the world is quiet and lovely.

Suddenly from the bow the voice of a child rings out with metallic clarity: "Anybody spits on my floor gets a poke in the nose."

At this our spirits rise and, happily squabbling over the sandwiches, we head for shore, hating the mosquitoes.

For in a choice between the perfection of a truly beautiful world and the towering babel of nonsense we know and love so well, we must go for win, place, and show on the latter. It goes very big in the mud and there's not a dry track in the house.



"Anybody spits on MY floor
gets a poke in the nose!"