

## Esthetic Essays on Esthetic Subjects

Wherein It Is Desired to know: "Who of Us are the Righteous?"

Who are the Righteous? When one gets into a speculative mood and tries to compound an answer to the above question definite conclusions are as hard to grasp as a hundred dollar job with optional vacations. Perhaps if we analyze a few standard types of character, we may reach some tangible idea as where a fair proportion of righteousness is centered—which task is made all the more difficult since modesty forbids us to consider ourselves in the search.

Is the righteous person the snivelling old hypocrite who sheds tears of repentance one moment and is up to all sorts of devilry the next; who gives freely of the refuse of his house to orphans and widows, and then in his great-heartedness cinches them out of their property with such winning grace that they worship him for evermore; who listens piously to the paroxysms of his spiritual guide and pastor on Sunday morning, and serves the prince of darkness with righteous zeal throughout the week; who talks of love and charity while he with true filial spirit allows his aged mother to starve to death in the upper chamber of his house, and who kisses the spoiled youngsters of patrician birth on the streets and thrashes his own at home in his concern for their spiritual welfare?

Is it the pitiful, unbalanced old creature, who drives her husband to the barn for his night's rest and then sails off to the revival meeting to rave and prevaricate on the benefits she has received since beholding the saving light; who considers her soul locked up in a fire-proof safe ready for shipment to the kingdom of Heaven, when that fortunate time does arrive; who knocks over the seats and turns springs and somersaults because she is saved; who raves of the golden crown and the gown of white—although it is safe to believe that she would prefer a \$25 hat and a new silk dress; who screeches in heart-rending tones her elation at receiving the healing grace and her compassion for those standing without in the darkness, and who hangs on the neck of the preacher, forgetting that his vertebrae is of bone and not steel?

Is it the man or woman, who in the language of the immortal Milton:

"Talks of liquids fiery red,  
And stamps the serpent on the head."  
Well sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't. Giving those who do due credit, and they are many who do good work in this line, let us proceed to the type who do not. Let us take up the cackling old goose who preaches abstinence after driving two husbands to the grave and who is now training the third for the insane asylum. What abominable stuff this liquor is! Wonder what it tastes like, anyhow? A person hears so much about it, that he would like to see if it is as bad as painted, and if he really can save the price of a ticket to the Zoo by investing in a bottle of whiskey and viewing the snakes at close quarters. The idea when forced upon one in such lurid shape is really attractive. But then, after all, a person feels kind of sicker when they think of the wrecked homes—the piles of debris, of mouldering cinders—of the broken-hearted wives who sit weeping in desolation and chewing the last crust, and of the hungry infants who cry in vain for nourishment. One doesn't hardly know how to feel when assailed by such logic—whether to cry or to say, "I don't believe it." Yet you might find room for reflection if you could see the way the old terror goes after any sort of a scandal that looms up and by airing it in the light of publicity raises a cloud of dust that is ten times worse than if she left the whole matter alone. If you could see her chasing her lord and protector to the uttermost confines of space when he has stirred up her indignation, and if you could hear her tongue working overtime in weaving a veil of misery around the poor old sinner that no ray of hope could ever penetrate!

But there are righteous people—right here in our own midst. Has anyone a surer hold on salvation than the professor who lets his classes out early and speeds the delinquents on to promotion in spite of lugubrious failures?

Can a more perfect type be imagined than the man who refused a rake-off at a class hop—the non-existent hero whose bust should shine from the top-most pinnacle of the observatory? Of course newspaper men need not be taken into consideration, for their eternity of punishment has been condensed to a limited space and they are working it out by plying their vocation. Yes, the righteous man exists, even if he doesn't hire a drum corps to proclaim the fact. He is present. He is tangible. Moreover he is righteous.

## Thanksgiving Story

"Oh, I wish I knew something to write about!"

"Do your themes allow an opportunity of including such an article as the unpleasant effects of a Thanksgiving dinner?"

"What? Oh, he doesn't want us to write up trite things like that. Besides Thanksgiving doesn't have a dinner any more. It's all football and theatre, so they say."

"Really; Trite subjects are excluded, indeed! Are there any reasons, then why your theme should not treat of me?"

"Of course not, if—are you a Senior?"

"Why, child, what a question! The Juniors have the honor of possessing me among their members."

"Well, I guess there is not much difference, but, I beg your pardon, anyway. What shall I say about you?"

"Then, my dear, I shall force you to the conviction that a Thanksgiving dinner is not so trite and worthy of being disregarded as some may think. A few evenings past I sat in my room thinking. Yes, Mary, I was reasoning on the peculiar incidents that sometimes come into our lives. I meditated on the strange feeling that passes over me when I see my bead belt, and creepy chills went over my skin even at the thought of it. I have confided to you, I believe, the dreadful scenes I went through to obtain it. How last summer, when bead belts were the rage and I was in the land of the red-skin, Miss Woods, daughter of the agent, and an old friend of mine, took me to the top of a high hill, where were the remnants of an ancient Cheyenne burial ground. How we burrowed in the paper-like blankets for elk's teeth and skulls (Do not ask me to go into details, of braids, knives, moccasins.) How we gathered up handfuls of fine beads and Iroquois from the floors of the warped pine boxes and took them down to the agent's brick mansion. How we hired a pretty Indian girl (Saints forgive me, did I say pretty!) to weave them into beads. I paid her \$2.00 for weaving mine too, how we left them with her and proudly went to dinner. That part is clear in my mind yet. For some reason Sadie's face had become pallid and my muscles felt untrustworthy, so we decided to recline upon the sand under a cottonwood sapling rather than go to dinner. It was like being a day and a half out at sea. I wondered what could be the matter, but later concluded it must be the associations of those beads and the bleached bones. I thought little of it at the time but how I have regretted the robbery since! I took my bead belt back to the little city where I dwelt during the summer and hung it where I could see it the first thing in the morning. But now, strange to tell, I hated it. I was positive that it carried a faint aroma of—of—what, I cannot tell. My relatives laughed and said it was the ghost of some Indian brave that I had robbed, come to haunt me, but it was nothing to laugh about, besides not being true. One night there was a wind storm. But in spite of that the moon shone full into my room, white as—as a bleached skull. I could see every pine tree and every rock on the ridge of hills three miles south, but spent little time gazing out over the charmed distances—they were too motionless—and desolate. When suddenly a harsh groan shivered through my room, and the belt hanging beside the window rattled, I fled.

They say history does not repeat itself, but this did. Every night for a week it repeated itself until some of my relatives brought a hammer and nail and fastened the window up a little tighter.

"Why, I thought this was going to be a real, true ghost story. What a failure! I don't see what it has to do with the time when you thought, the other evening, and with Thanksgiving dinner."

"Do you recall how the turtle arrived first?—and that ancient proverb which reads in this style: 'Patience is a virtue, or a monument. I forget which. The other evening I was wearing my bead belt when, as I remarked before, a chill passed over me, and I perceived again that strange sickening odor. I touched the long white beads. They seemed somehow to be alive, like clammy fingers. I would have been frightened only that I remembered that if an object can be scratched with the fingernail it had hardness once and must be limestone. You don't take geology yet, do you?"

"Then suddenly the air grew cold. I looked at the register, but it was still open. It could not be that. All at once my arms fell nerveless beside me, and my heart stopped beating, for between me and the register stood an Indian brave in all the glory of scarlet and yellow blanket and feathers, but not a bead was there upon his garments. I took it all in at a glance and wondered how I could ever get to the register to open it wider. He stood there blinking his wicked little eyes, then, slowly raising his right arm until his finger pointed at me he whispered in hoarse gutturals, "Nebraska! Nebraska! Nebraska!" What could he mean? The first thing that flashed through my mind was that he had come to congratulate our University on our victory over Illinois, because instead of feathers he was decorated in cornusks. I had not seen correctly at first. But that could not be right because he would not have come to me. So I determined to analyze his remarks according to the rules of literature, Element one, effects. Was this an effect or an interpretation? After due consideration I concluded that as it did not interpret anything it must be an effect—and it was surely direct, for was not the savage still pointing at me? And it was in degree, for it made shivers, that were not warm, dance over me. I concluded that it was an effect of his character and my mood. It surely was a force word, and, in his use of it, it contained rhythm, metre and rhyme. It was a beauty word, I knew, because I could not see any meaning in his use of it. I did not have time to find its types, but was sure they were mostly antitypal from the ferocious glare in his dark face. It was not a simile nor a metaphor—it must be an allegory,—but what did it mean? It was epithetic because it repeated un-

necessarily. It was associational, highly experiential, and figurative, being in the class three b, c minor.

I repeated all this aloud to myself in order to more thoroughly analyze the word, but I saw a look of horror slowly spread over the face of the brave. All at once he gave a yell as of fear. I heard a crash as of glass splintering, and he was gone. I fainted and did not regain consciousness until the next morning."

The Freshman gave an ironical laugh.

"Has your heart begun to beat yet? I still don't see any connection between your story and a Thanksgiving Dinner."

"Why, that is as readily perceived as—as anything. All this happened the evening following Thanksgiving Day. I have not entirely recovered yet. I have decided that I can not endure it any longer. I shall give away my bead belt to the first one who asks for it."

"Oh! Can I have it?"

A look of murky gloom settled over the countenance of the Junior. She replied in a pained voice: "When it wearies me more than some other things do."

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