

woke to hear Frank Harris, with a low and intense intonation like a king cobra striking, saying these words:

"I have often thought that the story of Jesus might have been yet more poignant, more true to nature. It should not have been Judas, the stranger, the man of Kerioth, who betrayed his Master; it should have been the man on whose bosom Jesus leaned, John, the beloved disciple. It is only those we love who can betray us and they do it—with a kiss!"

He ceased. There was a dreadful stillness in the hotel; Belshazzar's feast was not struck dumb as this was struck. Probably more than half of the guests were friends and acquaintances of Alfred Douglas; of the traitor whom Oscar Wilde had loved, and who was not there that night.

I do not know how long the silence lasted, but the banquet broke up amidst wild cheering. I was myself in Harris' party, though sitting at a distant table. I walked across to join him—he was pale and exhausted. In his passion of indignation he had not touched his dinner. But he had automatically sipped champagne, and the wine had produced a sort of nervous rigidity, like that of a mystic in trance. I helped him into his automobile. He leaned heavily on me. At that moment, by chance, Richard Middleton, a half-starved poet of promise, a big, soft, tame creature who always reminded me of a Newfoundland dog, passed on the pavement. Harris broke away from me, and caught Middleton with a leap like a leopard. Worn as he himself was, he knew that the boy was famished, and he carried him off with us to a supper at the Savoy.

I think that incident gives more of the real Frank Harris than any amount of psychological analysis.

When I met Frank Harris, I was very much afraid of what was going to happen to me. Imagine how I felt when he treated me like an old friend on the first word, put me at my ease with a courtesy which I can only describe as caressing, asked to see my poems, and made me sit with him at his desk as if we were partners in consultation. Something obscured his literary judgment so much that he stamped and thumped in his enthusiasm of my verses, some of which he declared first rate. I remember his swearing one passage was worthy of Goethe.

Imagine how ashamed I was to own that I had not read any of his books. He gave me copies of several, inscribed briefly and charmingly. One of them reads, "In token of immediate sympathy." Since adjectives must be, what a miraculous choice!

Could Flaubert have found such a "mot juste" in all the volumes of his dictionary? Another, simpler still, reads: "Friend & Poet." The two holiest words in the language, offered, as simply as a child brings one wild flower, to meed little me! His letters are all in the same spirit. Despite his fame, he never treated my insignificance with condescension.

Those letters of his have been locked away for many a year. I am ashamed to say that I did not realize at the time what wealth of heart was in that Doric style: simplex munditiis.

Just one more incident. Sick, almost friendless, misunderstood even by many of his friends, the envy of the literary jackals and the rancor of the social hyenas all let loose on him as he lay in his house in New York. He was past sixty. His constitution undermined by constant illness, he was now struck down by pleurisy so severe that none of us thought he could live through it. He asked me for a book of my poems which he had not yet seen, and the next thing I got was half a page written from his sick bed. It was a lyric of closely-pencilled praise, not fulsome, but discriminating. With that paper in my possession I seek no other patent of nobility; though, in truth, the greater honor goes to him who wrote it.

I was astounded at the quality of the books which Harris sent me; as for the quantity of them—that was the wrong way round. Each item was unique and individual, almost unrivalled in its particular kind. An astounding feature was that he never repeated himself. In our times, practically all successful writers are compelled by the pressure of their publishers and the exiguity of their invention to imitate the productions which have met with popular favor. The greatest hardly dare to get out of their groove. But Frank Harris, having done one thing surpassingly well, dismisses the subject, and looks for new worlds to conquer. That trait, by the way, is equally evident in his talking. I must have listened to him hundreds of times; my memory is excellent; and I have hardly ever heard him tell a story twice. (Physiologically amazing, this, in any man past middle age!)

"The Bomb" is a story of the Haymarket affair in Chicago in 1882, and Frank Harris makes the man who flung the bomb tell the story.

Every figure in the book is a masterpiece of portraiture; I think Holbein and the two great Dutchmen are the only rivals to Frank Harris in this art of making men live. He does this at the cost of what in a narrator is called suavity, and to some ex-