

The thorny road of honor

There is an old fairy tale: "The Thorny Road of Honor was trodden by a marksman named Bryde, to whom came great honor and dignity, but not until after manifold adversities and peril of life." More than one of us had heard that tale in childhood, and perhaps read it in later years, and thought of his own unsung "thorny road" and "manifold adversities." Romance and reality are very nearly alike, but romance has its harmonious ending here on earth, while reality more often delays it and leads us to time and eternity.

The history of the world is a magic lantern, showing us picture slides against the dark backgrounds of the ages, of how the benefactors of mankind, the martyrs of progress, have trodden their Thorny Roads of Honor.

From all times, from all lands, these pictures of splendor come to us; each picture lasts a moment only, yet it is a whole lifetime of struggles and triumphs. Let us glance at a few in the ranks of the martyrs (NB= martyrs), those ranks which will never be filled until earth itself shall pass a way.

We see a crowded theater! The Clouds of Aristophanes is sending forth to the audience a river of mirth and mockery; the stage of Athens is ridiculing, in both body and mind, her most remarkable man, who was the shield and defense of the people against the Thirty Tyrants. Socrates, who in the heat of battle rescued Alcibiades and Xenophon, whose spirit soared above the deities of the ancient world, is here in person. He has risen from the spectators' bench and has stepped forward, so that the mocking Athenians may decide whether he and the stage caricature resemble each other. There he stands erect before them, and in high spirit he is high above them.

You green, juicy, poisonous hemlock, be you, and not the olive tree, the shadowy symbol of this Athens!

Seven cities claimed to be the birthplace of Homer—that is, after he was dead. But look at him in his lifetime! Through these same cities he wanders, reciting his verses for a pittance. Care for the morrow turns his hair gray. He, mightiest of seers, is blind and alone; and the sharp thorns tear the mantle of the king of poesy.

His songs yet live, and in them alone live still the gods and heroes of olden times.

Picture after picture leaps forth from the morning land

and the evening land, far separated by time and space, yet all with the same thorny path, where the thistle never bears blossoms till it adorns the grave.

Under the palm trees walk swaying camels, laden with indigo and other precious gifts, sent by the ruler of the land to him whose songs are the people's delight and the country's pride. He whom spite and slander drove into exile is found again, for the caravan draws near the little town where he has taken refuge. But a poor corpse is being carried out of the gate, and the caravan is stopped. The dead is the very man they seek, Firdausi; ended is his Thorny Road of Honor.

There sits an African Negro, with blunt features, thick lips, and black kinky hair, begging on the marble steps of the palace in Portugal's capital; he is the faithful slave of Camöens. If it were not for him and the coppers that he begs, his master, the singer of The Lusiad, would have starved to death. Now an expensive monument rises over the grave of Camöens. Still another picture. Behind iron bars a man appears, ghostly white, with a long and matted beard. "I have made an invention!" he cries. "The greatest in centuries; and for more than twenty years they have kept me caged up here!"

"Who is he?"

"A lunatic," replies the keeper. "What crazy ideas a man may get! He thinks people could move along by steam power!" It is Salomon de Caus, inventor of the steam engine. His prophetic words have not been clear enough for a Richelieu, and he dies imprisoned in a madhouse.

Here stands Columbus, whom once street boys pursued and mocked at, because he would discover a new world. He has discovered it! The bells of jubilation ring at his triumphant return; but soon the bells of envy sound more loudly still. The world discoverer, who raised the American land of gold from the ocean and gave it to his king, is rewarded with chains of iron. He asks that they be laid in his coffin, to show the world how a man is valued in his own age. Picture rushes after picture, for rich is the Thorny Road of Honor.

Here in dismal gloom sits he who measured the heights of the moon mountains, who forced his way out among the planets and stars of space-mighty

Galileo, who could see and hear the earth itself turning beneath him. Blind and deaf he sits now in his old age, suffering wracking pain and neglect, hardly able to lift his foot-that foot which once, when the words of truth were blotted out, he stamped on the earth in mental agony, crying out, "Yet it moves!"

Here stands a woman with the heart of a child, with inspiration and faith. She bears her banner before the fighting army and brings victory and freedom to her motherland. There is shouting-and the fire burns high; Joan of Arc, the witch, is burned at the stake. Yes, the coming age will spit upon the white lily; Voltaire, wit's own satyr, will sing of La Pucelle.

At the Viborg-Thing the nobles of Denmark are burning the king's laws; they burst into flames that light up both age and lawmaker and send a flash of glory into a dark dungeon tower. There he sits, gray-haired, bent, digging at the stone table with his fingers. Once he ruled over three kingdoms, the popular leader, friend of townfolk and peasant alike, Christian II- he of the hard will in a hard age. Enemies wrote his story. Twenty-seven long years of prison, let us remember, when we think of his blood guilt.

There sails a ship from Denmark, and a man stands beside the tall mast; for the last time he looks upon Hveen, Tycho Brahe, who lifted Denmark's name to the stars themselves and was repaid with scorn and mockery, is setting forth to a foreign land. "Heaven is everywhere; what more do I want?" Those are his words as he sails away, our most famous man, sure in foreign lands of being honored and free.

"Yes, free! Ah, if only free from the intolerable pains of this body!" sighs a voice to us from across the centuries. What a picture! Griffenfeld, the Danish Prometheus, chained to Munkholm's rocky isle.

Now we are in America, beside a large river. A great crowd has gathered there, for it is said that a ship is to sail against wind and tide, to be itself a power against the elements. Robert Fulton is the name of the man who thinks he can do this strange thing. The ship begins its trip, but suddenly it stops. The crowd laughs, whistles, and mocks; his own father mocks with them. "Conceit! Madness! He has got what was coming to him! Put the crackbrain under lock and key!" Then a small nail rattles loose-for a moment it had stopped the machinery-the engines turn the paddle wheels again and cut through the opposition of the waves-the ship moves!

The weaver shuttle of steam turns hours into minutes

between all the lands of the world.

Mankind, can you realize the happiness of that moment of assurance when the soul understands its mission? That moment, when the sorest wounds from the Thorny Road of Honor, even if caused by one's own fault, are healed and forgotten in spiritual health and strength and freedom. When all discords melt into harmony, and men perceive a revelation of God's grace, granted to one alone, and by him made known to all!

Then the Thorny Road of Honor shines like a path of glory around the earth. Happy is he who is chosen to be a pilgrim on that road and, through no merit of his own, is made one of the master builders of the bridge between God and man.

The Genius of History wings his mighty way down through the ages and gives us comfort and good cheer and thoughtful peace of mind by showing us, in brilliant pictures against nightdark backgrounds, the Thorny Road of Honor-not a path that ends, like a fairy tale, in gladness and triumph here on earth, but one that leads onward and upward, far into time and eternity.

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