

NUMBER ONE AND THE OTHER FELLOW

A Self-Denial Fragment

The engine pulled up with a jerk, and the subdued conversation of the passengers became suddenly and embarrassingly audible. I was startlingly conscious of the sound of my own voice as the unexpected halt caught me in the middle of the sentence I was dictating to my secretary.

From a confidential colloquy behind two befeathered hats in front there floated back: "She said it cost her that for goods alone, but I brought her down to \$3.98."

"A bit more dough will put our man in" – this from a political-looking personage across the aisle.

"I don't care what ma says, I think that show is a perfectly dandy one, and I am going to see – "

The insertion of a chocolate cream devoured the remainder.

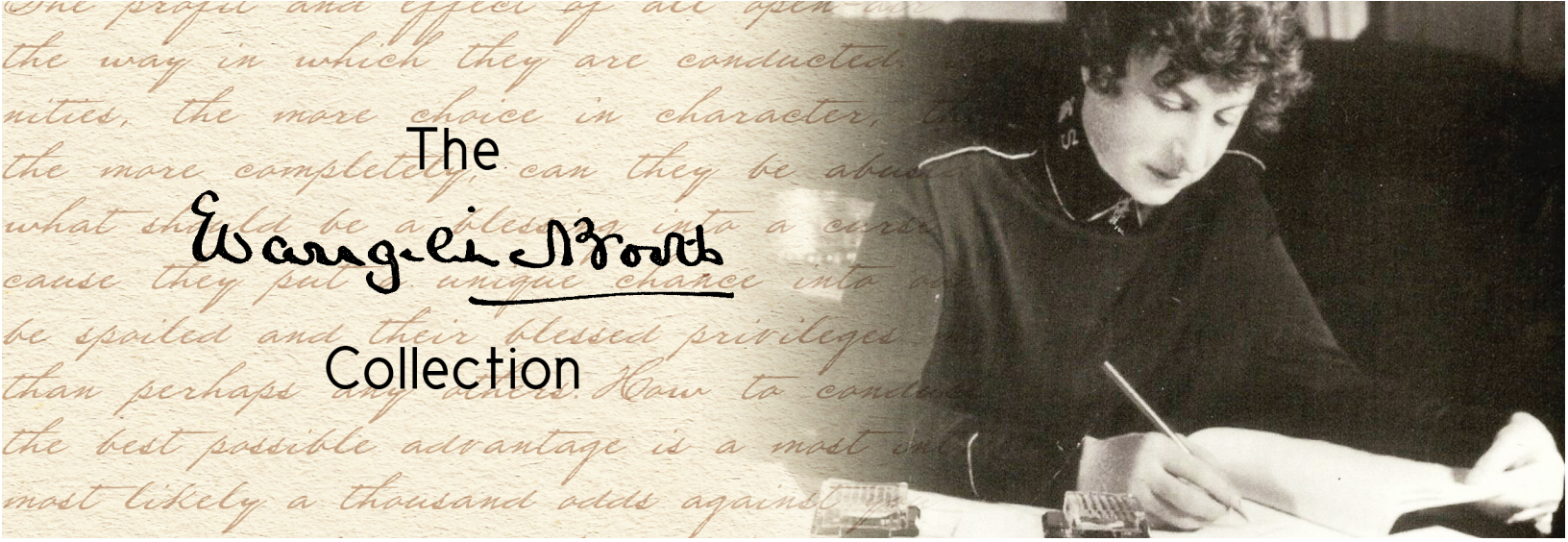
"Prunes and prisons is what I'd like to feed her!" The stage whisper issued from a bonnet both antiquated and aggressive.

A big fist waved around a bullet-shaped head, and a stentorian voice exclaimed:

"What I says is, Down with capitalists! Make 'em bite the dust! Smash 'em, and up with —!"

But here the whistles signaled the train to move out again, and in its chug-a-chug, chug-a-chug, I did not hear just what or who was to be elevated, but as the speaker's fist remained at an altitude it did not seem likely that society's altered condition would be a peaceable one.

All this I heard with some amusement and but passing impression, but one sentence, rasped out in a man's metallic voice behind me, forged an unpleasant mark upon memory which time has not yet been able to efface; the words were these:



"Well, I look well after number one, and then, if there is any time left, I look out for the other fellow."

I did not turn my head; I did not want to look upon the hard lines I knew the face of the speaker must wear. A feeling of almost physical loathing for such a sentence took possession of me. I thought how far, indeed, must a man have gone, and how much must he have done, to have so far obliterated the Divine Image in his own craven soul that he could sink to such a low standard of life and responsibility!

And yet, looking back upon the incident, it seems to me that perhaps I should not have thus singled out the speaker as the object of righteous indignation. May he not have put into words what others in that car put into their lives? Possibly fluffy ruffles and feathers and fist and archaic bonnet, to say nothing of political-looking personages, were equally culpable, so far as self-interest was concerned.

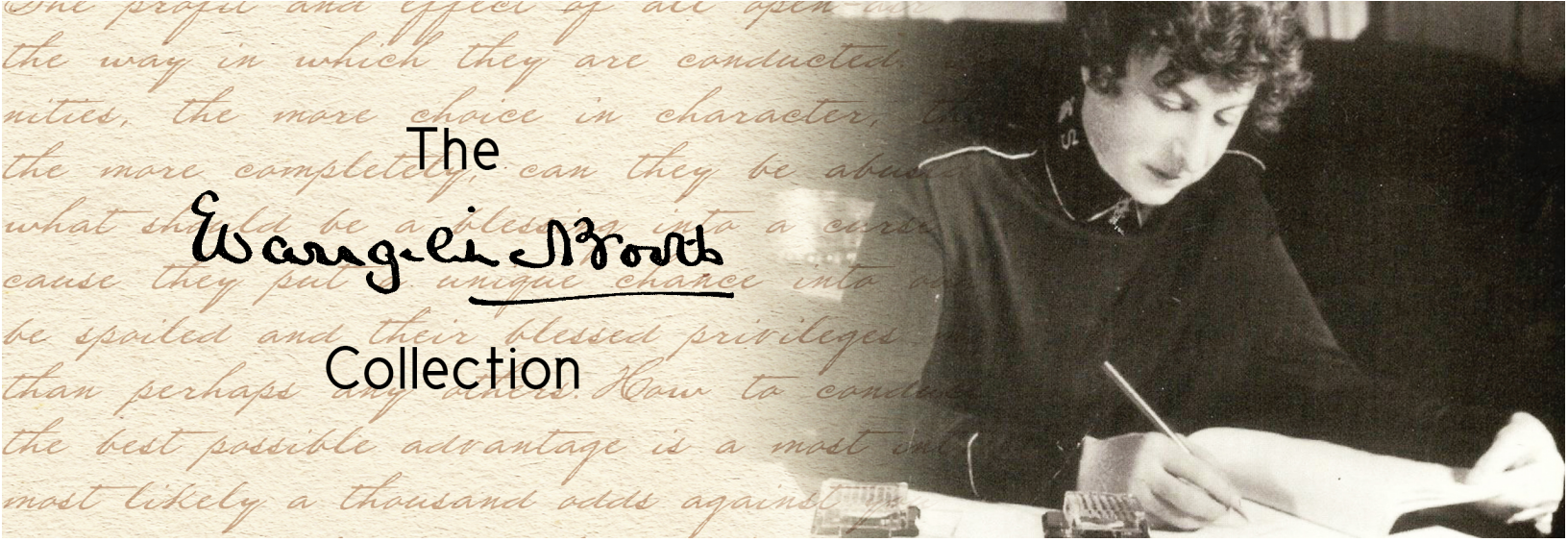
This is an altruistic age, and a show of respect for the feelings and affairs of others is more or less fashionable and profitable. But down in the depths of the unregenerate nature, over which a new culture or a new coat has no power, how many would be found guilty of a like circumscription of interest, a like concentration of all energy and time upon the interests of self, with only what can be used for naught else at the disposal of the interests of others!

Then through the holes of memory there echoed other voices of men.

John Wesley's, as he had worn out horse and health in preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom – "The world is my parish."

Francis Xavier's, as in a vision he saw some of the hardships and sufferings which his mission to the new world would cost him – "Yet more, O Lord; yet more!"

Henry Martyn's, as he lay shaking with ague in a Persian hut surrounded by Mohammedan revilers – "All hail reproach, and welcome shame, if Thou remember me!"



Dr. Mott's, as he refused the honors of an ambassador to continue his evangel among the colleges – "The Gospel has made the world our great neighborhood."

My glorified father's, William Booth's – "Never mind what we suffer as long as we save others."

And thrilling through these and all like utterances the echo of a Divine voice:

"The Son of Man came not to minister unto Himself, but to others."

Neither time nor strength will permit me to write a lengthy comment upon the above; perhaps comment is unnecessary. Surely the contrast is compelling enough! I only want to enlarge upon it to the extent of the following words, as regards the difference of the two qualities: cripples the mind, and it limits the sphere.

Selflessness, on the contrary, is the greatest developer as well as the greatest beautifier of humanity. It makes the unlovely comely, it widens the vision and it enlightens and quickens the mind. It is said that "Necessity is the mother of invention," but how often has the inventive faculty been born in a man to the degree of genius as the result of a great concern and care for others! Every Bible student knows what was the effect upon himself and others when Moses looked upon the children of Israel and saw their burdens. Every student of philanthropy knows what was the outcome when my father went down into the underworld, and looking upon the woes and wants of the unchurched masses he conceived the first idea of this mighty organization. Selflessness always enlarges the sphere. Oh, out of what small and insignificant places into great and influential ones has the spirit of self-denial led!

God has great things for that man's life, for that man's powers, for that man's possessions, who will put others first and self, last. God can promise nothing to that man who seeks first the interest of "Number One," and for the "Other Fellow" can only spare his left-overs.

(April 4th, 1914)