The Greatest Ever

By FANNIE HURST

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FOR twenty years the woman known as "Aunt Em" had sold newspapers in the doorway of a haberdasher's shop in the theater section of New York's Broadway.

A broker who bought papers from her on the fly had nicknamed her that because she reminded him of an "Aunt Em" who had reared him.

Like most happy misnomers, it stuck. Aunt Em's real name was—well, no matter. There was something short and stout and matronly about the appellation "Aunt Em." Something kind and wholesome. The name fitted the little woman in the decent black and the straw poke bonnet which she wore both winter and summer as she sold newspapers to the flying world that hurtled past her doorway.

Every evening at five, rain, snow, shine, storm, Aunt Em stood shouting her wares in her doorway. When the last theater light blinked out, she wrapped up her loose change in a red handkerchief, tucked under her folding camp chair for that purpose and with her daughter, Wenda, who called for her, marched her way home.

In a way, Aunt Em was quite a character about that busy neighborhood. In the quick tide of its ebb and flow she had known great people by sight (some as customers), and hundreds of clerks and petty folk on their way to subway and tram nodded Aunt Em their good morrow as they tossed their pennies, snatched their dailies, and ran.

That little tucked-in corner in the doorway had yielded Aunt Em twenty years of livelihood. Enough, mind you, to rear into successful maturity six offspring with whom she had struggled, a widow, through years so lean, some of them, that the gutters in her face still showed the ravages of pain, deprivation, even hunger.

All that was changed now. Five of the six children had left the nest, three sons and two daughters, married, and were on their own. A fairly prosperous little flock of petty trades people, set up here and there about the great city in such small enterprises as stationer's shop, fruit stand or notion store. All of them given their start, too, by willing, if lean contributions from the old lady's change handkerchief.

When she was sixty Aunt Em might well have felt entitled to sit back and let those for whom she had toiled through the years do some of the toiling for her.

That was what lay heavily on the heart of Wenda, the only unmarried one of the flock. Of course the others all offered to contribute to the upkeep of the old woman, but somehow, to Wenda, who felt passionately about it, there was something half-hearted about the profferings of the sons and daughters and the in-laws.

In her heart, Wenda felt bitter toward these brothers and sisters. It did not seem to twist their hearts the way it did hers to see the old woman standing humped in her doorway, shouting.

Not that the old woman could be easily dissuaded from her labors. On the contrary, Wenda had occasion to know that all too emphatically. After all, on her own earnings as stenographer at twenty-eight dollars a week, Wenda was well able to take the burden of the labor of long hours, outdoor exposure, to say nothing of the menial aspect of the work, off her mother's shoulders.

Night after night, calling for her mother after theater hours, Wenda argued with her along these lines. It was rather an incongruous spectacle to see the girl and the woman huddled there together in the doorway. Wenda, who had a pretty, eager sort of face, as if she were smelling at a star, and who was attired in all the mock splendor of the New York office girl, wrapping the old news woman carefully across the shoulders in the knitted jacket she had worn for years and stacking the unsold newspapers in their corner of the doorway where, by arrangement, a small boy called for them before sun up.

Sometimes Wenda had to admit to herself that it was the sting of the social stigma that went with her mother's occupation, almost as much as the desire to spare her effort, that prodded her on to remonstrance.

"Mamma, how do you think a girl feels having a newsboy for a mother?"

"Go along! A newsboy for a mother was what kept enough warm milk in your baby bottle to make you what you are."

"You're entitled to rest now."

"Yes? My boys and girls got enough struggle to raise their own families."

"I'll never marry. What fellow, the kind I'd like, if I like any, would marry into a newsgirl's family? On my salary I could come home evenings to a home with a supper on the table instead of having to know my mother is out newsboying!"

"You're a good girl, but I'm a good newsboy."

"Don't you think—a—a girl in an office, meeting the kinda people I do all day—kinda—feels it—having a newsboy for a mother? It's not like with the others. They never got out in the world. A newsboy mother don't help a girl's social position."

"Not if she's an honest newsboy?"

"Mamma, let me take care of you."

"Go 'long. I won't be made a granny of. When I haven't got any more chicks to take care of, at least, I can take care of myself. You've got your own life. Live it."

"I tell you I'll never marry."

But of course one day Wenda, who was stenographer in a lawyer's office, did meet a young clerk named Laddie Evans, to whom her little, young moon of a face was beauty and delight.

He was a straw-colored young man with a lithe, athletic body, great, square, white, healthy young teeth and a hand grip that was youth and vitality in one.

In the office they met, these two, and life suddenly became something to tingle and flush over. New impulses to cry, to laugh, to dance, to shiver ecstatically, raced over Wenda all of a morning. When Laddie Evans passed her type-writing machine goose flesh popped out over him like little bells ringing.

Yet Wenda had a head on her. The daughter who had a mother-who-was-a-newsboy looked back into the eyes of Laddie with her heart crying, but her lips firm.

It was hard, because, almost from the first day that they had begun to be conscious of one another, Laddie was for plunging into the heart of the affair. He hung over her desk at noon time and importuned her to go to an automat for lunch. He slid little paper bags of cherries which he had purchased off a push cart into her lap. He waited for her at closing, and she evaded him by sneaking out of a side door.

One day—he was a bold youth—he wrote her a note in long hand, sending it in to her by an office boy.

"Why won't you go out to dinner with me tonight and give me the chance to tell you that I love you? You might as well give in and get it over with. I'll get you yet. I love you.—Laddie."

With her lips quite firm, Wenda wrote him back:

"Yes, I'll have dinner with you."

They met down in the gulch of Forty-fifth street, after office hours. There was something really lovely about Wenda. The dewiness of tears shining behind her beauty. And Laddie was like a god. Heady with the wine of new love.

"Wenda," he said, "why have you been so cruel? Nothing can stop the thing between us."

She looked at him with her eyes dry and her heart crying.

"You must work," she said, "and not indulge in nonsense. Some day you will be a big lawyer."

"I know I will if you help me. Come, Wenda, let's go to dinner—we've all of life to plan."

"No—yes—but first—I must stop by and see—my mother—have you a mother? Where is your mother?"

"Sure I've a mother. The greatest ever."

"Where—is—she—"

"Oh, she's home. We've a little house up near Spring lake."

"A mother in a little house up near Spring Lake? Well, we must see my mother—first—"

There she was in the doorway, ending her little old voice, fluty with the years, out into the jam of the traffic:

"Poiper—Evening Woild—Telegram—Sun and Post—"

"Mamma—this is my friend—Mr. Evans—we're on our way out for a bite of supper—"

"Well, if it isn't young Evans. You managed it, did you?"

"He—what—?"

"Here's a young fellow's been pestering me to fix it for him to meet you every time he seen you calling for me evenings on his way home from the law library and I told him to shuffle for himself."

"You mean—?"

"I got myself a job in the office where she works. That's what I call shuffling for myself, Aunt Em."

"Why—you—why, you darling," said Wenda and looked at him with her young moon of a face.

"You're a darling yourself," said Laddie.

"You're both darlings," said Aunt Em. "And now rustle yourselves along; you interfere with my business."

Chickens Supply Millinery

No one can reasonably make objection to the present fashion of wearing feathers on the feminine head covering, for no matter how brilliant they may be, they originate in the barnyard. In former days many of the feathers worn by women represented ruthless slaughter of useful and beautiful birds, but such a sentiment was worked up in opposition to this that feathers went entirely out of fashion. Now, however, these millinery decorations originate with the barnyard fowls which have also decorated the dining table. Many ingenious processes have been devised for securing the brilliant effect called for, and no birds have been sacrificed merely to supply the feathers for milady's hat.

Truth About Octopus

The octopus is found in tropical seas near coral reefs. Some forms spread their limbs 12 or 14 feet like great spiders and might, under favorable circumstances, hold under water persons whom they had seized until they had drowned, at the same time biting them with their horny parrotlike jaws; no doubt such accidents have occasionally happened to pearl divers and the like. Ordinarily, however, the octopus does not attain one-half these dimensions and many species have bodies no longer than an ordinary pear.

FAR-FETCHED TRANSLATION

"What is the meaning of 'alter ego'?" asked the teacher of the beginners' class in Latin.

"It means the other I," responded a pupil.

"Give me a sentence containing the phrase."

"He winked his alter ego."

THERE'S SOMETHING TO IT

A colored porter in a hotel was asked why rich men usually gave him small tips, while poor men were liberal.

"Well, suh, boss I don't know, 'cept the rich man don't want nobody t' know he's rich, and the po' man don't want nobody t' know he's po'."

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VEST POCKET ESSAY

A VEST POCKET ESSAY ON STRANGE INVENTIONS

"Conditions is gettin' better," said Uncle Eb, "cause I ain't had no fellers tryin' to sell me stock that would make me rich goin' on three year now. The last one had a new kind of tooth brush built like a capital S. It had bristles on the outside of one curve an' the inside of the other, so as to properly brush the outside an' inner side of a feller's teeth. I didn't mind his talkin' about patent rights, sales resistance, an' tariff on pigs bristles, cause I was just cutin' seed pertater anyway, an' he was right sociable. After a while, when he got to the dotted line and John Hancock stage, I up an' told him I was savin' my cash to permote my own invention for havin' cows milk themselves. 'Didja ever realize,' I orated, 'that when a cow chews her cud that natural force could be put to use for the good of mankind? Think of the tremendous pressure necessary to take dry hay an' grind it into small bits so the delicate membranes of the stomach an' intestines can digest it an' transform it into sweet flowin' milk. If we harness the lost motion of only 10,000,000 of our cud chewin' cows in this broad land, we have harnessed a force more powerful than the mighty Niagara Falls, plus a couple of Hoover Dams. Now my advice is just a start at tappin' this power. It's just a strap and spring that goes around her jaw with a doctor's syringe on it. When she chews her cud, the piston of the syringe works up and down, generatin' a vacuum or a pressure just as you like. I'm tryin' to make it generate a vacuum now, like a milkin' machine does, so all the cows will milk themselves while chewin' their cuds. How much will you gimme for my patent rights, if I get 'em Mister, an' let you in on the ground floor?' Well sir, all he give me was a dirty look as he slamed the cellar door an' went out. That's what they usually do, though.

"There lots of starnge things come out that has their day, like mah jong that made you feel like a hunter, chasin' dragons and strange gods, or miniature golf courses that erupted like pimples on the face of the earth. When it comes to protectin' live stock from losses, you gotta use the same methods you use in protectin' cash money—don't take foolish chances on losin' it. Hogs in p'ticular can be kept from disease by proper feedin' to give good big bone on which the meat can be hung later at a real profit, but mainly by usin' good sanitation to prevent hog cholera. Years ago, I cut out of the paper the four rules I follow to keep cholera off my place, an' here they are:

1. Do not feed hogs anything that mipht contain bones, rinds, scraps or washings from pork.

2. Do not permit any hogs to be brought to your place unless you know that they have not been exposed to cholera.

3. Keep your hogs confined so that stray hogs cannot come in contact with them.

4. Bury the carcasses of all animals that die on your premises."

HER DAILY GOOD TURN

Jean had been naughty and had been sent into the den to "think things over." After a while she came out all smiles and said, "I thought and I prayed."

"Fine!" said her mother. "That will help to be good."

"Oh, I didn't ask God to help me to be good," said the child. "I just told Him to help you put up with me."

Melvin Traylor Asks Curb on Mounting Cost of Government

Chicago Banker Shows Need of Caution in Spending Taxpayers' Money

Would Reform Tax Methods

Speaking before the International Chamber of Commerce at Washington, Melvin A. Traylor, President of the First National Bank of Chicago, said in part:

Another field in which those responsible for leadership must do some hard, sound thinking if we are to avoid disaster is that of public expenditures.

Melvin Traylor

In this country, government is supposed to abide with the people, and yet we know that in no other field does leadership exert so great an influence upon the thought and action of the people as in the political sphere. In the fifteen-year period, from 1913 to 1928, our national income was estimated to have increased from about 34½ billion dollars to 81 billion dollars annually, or 135 per cent; in the same period the expenditures of all governmental divisions in the United States have increased from a little less than three billion dollars to more than 12½ billion dollars, or approximately 300 per cent.

It is perfectly true, of course, that insofar as the Federal Government is concerned, the major part of the increase in that direction is accounted for by our participation in the World War; but it is interestng to observe that for the fiscal year ending in 1928, Federal expenditures were only 31½ per cent of the combined outlay for all political administration in the United States.

Local Expenditures Big Item

Figures are not available for the years following 1928, except for the Federal Government, whose expenditures increased 10.7 per cent for the fiscal year ending in 1929, and 6 per cent in 1930. It may be assumed that like increases have occurred in other political subdivisions of the country. For the year ending in 1928, the cost of administration of State Governments amounted to 14½ per cent of the total; of the remainder, over 54 per cent went to sustain local governments.

Naturally, those responsible for government desire to give their constituency the finest educational facilities, the best roads, streets, public parks, playgrounds, and other facilities obtainable, but, after all, there is no denying the fact that expenditures for such purposes bear a very close relation to the individual, because they mortgage his future earnings for consumable and rapidly deteriorating goods.

Every bond issue for the public welfare is an installment debt on the earning capacity of every individual and enterprise in the community affected. Not only does it involve installment amortization of the debt itself, but a constantly increasing charge for maintenance and upkeep if the improvement is to be preserved against early deterioration and quick ruin.

Most of the taxing machinery of the country was created at a time when the present volume of public debt was not thought possible; and it is, therefore, inadequately and inequitably adjusted to meet the emergencies of the present burden.

The consequences is that in almost every major political subdivision of the country certain classes of wealth escape taxation, or pay little, while other types of property are charged with an unbearable obligation.

The duty of leadership, therefore, in this field is two-fold. First, and most important of all, a greater degree of caution must be exercised in the creation of government obligations; and, second, an immediate reform in taxing machinery must be undertaken.

Effects of "Federal Aid"

In connecton with the creation of indebtedness, it is high time that those responsible for State administration consider the pernicious and seductive influence of so-called Federal aid for public improvements.

In many instances, this policy of public expenditure approaches closely to political bribery and in almost every case, lends itself to political log-rolling, the surrender of state sovereignty, and a gradual impoverishment of fiscal units. Moreover, we have said nothing of the proposal and promotion of undertakings which in many instances are not justified by the necessity of the situation or by the utilization of the facilities contemplated. Let there be no mistake in this respect.

Let us face the facts. Unless there is a return to sanity in the matter of public expenditures, default and repudiation of public obligations cannot be much longer avoided.

PERCY SHELLEY

"The trumpet of a prophecy! Oh, Wind, if Winter comes can Spring be far behind?"

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