

The Ghost of the Good Samaritan *The spirit of brotherly love*

By WAINWRIGHT EVANS

IT WAS THE MIDDLE of the terrible winter of 1917-18; the first World War still had 10 months to run; thousands were dying of the flu; there was a coal shortage. Trains were crowded, and they didn't always run on time.

I arrived in Philadelphia from Washington, D. C., at 1 in the morning. The hotels were full.

I walked the snow-clogged, wind-swept streets for an hour before I found one where the night clerk let me stretch out on a sofa in a corner of the poorly heated lobby. Wrapped in my overcoat, I managed to fall into a chilly sleep.

I woke with the light of dawn coming in faintly.

But suddenly I realized that, however cold the place, I was warm and comfortable. I moved my head sleepily; something rough and woolly brushed against my face and brought me fully awake. I raised my head for a look

Somebody had thoughtfully brought a blanket, laid it over me softly so as not to awaken me, and had even tucked me in!

That blanket did more than warm my body; it warmed my heart: it still does whenever I think of it. Here was one of those tremendous trifles that everybody can remember in his life, trifles that grow in meaning as you think of them. Here was one of those acts of good will that feels, in this harsh world, like the brush of an angel's wing.

Who did it, I'll never know, but something good had come there while I slept. That is why I am telling about it here; I want to share my blanket with someone else who may be feeling chilly.

SINCE THAT far-off day I have many times sensed the same spirit of kindness, so unmistakably abroad in this world of ours, like a whiff of faint perfume. Only the other day I felt it like a presence, and yet all I could see with my eyes was an ordinary-looking man, standing in front of me as I waited to pay my check in a restaurant.

Near the edge of the cashier's desk lay a letter, addressed but unstamped. Somebody, paying the cashier, had evidently laid it down and forgotten it. The man ahead of me picked it up. Over his shoulder I could see that it was addressed to someone in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

He fumbled in his pocket, came up with some stamps; then, for good measure, he wrote "Air Mail" on the envelope in an emphatic hand. A moment later I saw him post the letter.

It had cost him the price of an air-mail stamp, but who can measure the power of such an act? As the stranger vanished in the crowd, my mind returned to the glow of warmth I had experienced in the lobby of that Philadelphia hotel.

I like to collect memories like these; they revive one's faith in people. Once I left my overcoat in the caboose of a cattle train, in which I had ridden from Montana to Chicago on my way east to college—a common way Western boys traveled then. There happened to be a letter in one of the pockets.

A week later, just as I was on the point of buying a new coat, the old one arrived by mail. There was no return address on it, though I searched every inch of the wrapping for a clue.

Things like that happen to other people, too. The late Clifford Beers, whose book, "The Mind That Found Itself," worked something of a revolution in the treatment of the insane, told how, when confined in an institution in Connecticut long after he had recovered from manic-depressive psychosis, he wrote the governor of the state a long account of the appalling abuses that he and other patients had been subjected to. His problem was to mail that letter without its being discovered and confiscated by the institution authorities. He had to guess the postage, and fairly covered the envelope with two-cent stamps.

Then, one day, when he was taken for a walk by one of the attendants, he managed to slip the letter under a pile of newspapers in a drugstore, on the chance that somebody would find it and mail it. Somebody did!

The governor got the letter; Beers was released.

still walks the earth—for those whose eyes, and hearts, are open

He wrote his book, founded the American Society for Mental Hygiene, and what he accomplished became a landmark in the history of psychiatry.

"I wish I knew who mailed that letter for me," he said when I interviewed him years later.

ONE EVENING as I was having dinner in New York, I had another of what I call my restaurant adventures. I noticed a girl sitting at a table next to mine. There was a substantial meal in front of her, but she wasn't eating. She simply sat, staring straight ahead. Suddenly she just toppled over.

I reached out and caught her before she struck the floor. In her handbag the manager and I found a card bearing the words, "My Mother!" and then the mother's name and address in Georgia. There was also an almost-empty bottle of barbiturate pills—but not a cent.

A plain case of a young girl from the country, up against it in the big city. In fleeing from miseries and fears, she had taken too many pills.

"She asked for a meal," the manager explained. "I let her order on the house, the poor kid!"

When the ambulance came and they took her out, I saw the manager quietly slip a five-dollar bill into her handbag. He didn't know I saw him.

These are trivial examples, if you like, of stories almost anyone could tell—stories of the good things people do merely because they like to do them; stories of

... that best portion of a good man's life, His little, nameless, unremembered acts Of kindness and of love."

You don't have to turn to the Gospel of St. Luke to find the Good Samaritan. He is still journeying up and down the highways of the world. That stranger crossing your path may be he!



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