

Between You and Me

"Common sense is the most
uncommon kind of sense."

By HAROLD BELL WRIGHT

Best People

"I ain't never seen a whale myself, but just the same there ain't no cow-down, onery, old catfish goin' to pass himself off on me as a whale so long as I'm sober."—Preachin' Bill.

I THINK it over.
I say, it is a good thing for all of us that most of us are a lot better than the rest of us.

A person without a saving sense of superiority would be a poor sort of human being.

If I were not very certain that I am a better man than some I would simply quit trying. I admit I am not much to be proud of. I never took any prizes for anything. I don't even claim to be one of the Best People. But if I were no better than some of the worthless, mean, lying, cheating, thieving, heartless, cruel, vicious, degenerate, murdering folk that I know about, I would shave in the dark for fear if I met myself face to face in a mirror I would be forced to cut my own throat.

Between you and me I suspect that coroner's juries might more often than we know render the verdict: "Suicide in self-defense."

I wonder who started this equality thing, anyhow. I tell you it is dangerous.

Professor Drummond rang the bell when he said: "The immediate need of the world is not more of us but, if I may use the expression, a better brand of us."

The trouble is, our ideas about this better brand of us are so hazy.

The most popular brand of Best People are distinguished from the vulgar herd by their money. I am not speaking of small change.

No I do not say that we all look upon any person with money as one of

You and I know very well that a person may possess great wealth and be not one of the Best People but one of the worst.

The test should be not how much have you, but where did you get it and what use are you making of that which you have?

The test should be not who were your ancestors, or who are your relatives, but what good are you?

Even though I am not educated I know enough not to accept every graduate at his own valuation.

I would rather receive a great, vital, living truth from an illiterate backwoodsman, who violates every rule of grammar, than to have a university president lie to me in perfect English.

It is the usefulness of the graduate, not the graduation, which counts.

It is not enough to be good; one must be good for something.

our Best People. I say that money is quite commonly held to set one apart from the common crowd. You know exactly what I mean.

Why, certainly! To possess money for which one has rendered a real service is good. But you will notice that it is not the service rendered which brands certain people of wealth. In their own eyes, and in the eyes of those who look up to them, as superior to the rest of us—it is the mere fact that they do actually possess the coin. How they got it or what they do with it seems to have nothing to do with the case.

Some wealthy people are, in truth, salt of the earth. They spend millions to make life more endurable for the rest of us. But still, the brand which distinguishes them is not that they do good with their money but that they have the millions to spend.

Indeed, the strangest, most ridiculous, most humiliating phenomenon about the possession of much money is this: The less one does to gain it, and the less one does with it for others, the higher one seems to rank among this brand of Best People. Witness how those who have come into possession of their fortunes with no more personal effort than they expended in acquiring the color of their eyes, look down from those topmost heights of gilded uselessness with sneers of superiority upon those, who by the magnitude of the service they have rendered, by years of grilling labor and personal sacrifice, or by the sheer power of their genius and industry, have earned their fortunes.

You and I know very well that a person may possess great wealth and be not one of the Best People but one of the worst. Judas, for instance, made more money out of a certain transaction than all the other disciples together.

It would seem that the test should be not how much have you, but where did you get it and what use are you making of that which you have?

Oh, no indeed, money is not the only brand which is supposed to mark

brand is quite distinguishing—on, quite!

Why, of course, it is a good thing to have ancestors. As you may have noticed most of us do have them—of one sort or another. One may even say that to have ancestors is more or less necessary—if one wishes to get on. But a walk in the woods will convince even the most indifferent observer that there are many of these old family trees whose withered and fruitless branches are so nearly dead that they have barely life enough to keep their hold on the ancient and sapless trunk. And they are poor timber, these so nearly dead limbs—good for neither the hearth nor the shop.

You are right, no one of common sense will discount breeding. A grand old family is a grand old thing. It is a very real and tangible asset. That is, it is an asset if the strength and glory which made it great in the past are real and tangible in the present.

But what about these useless tag-ends of grand old families that have petered out? What of these well-bred imbeciles and noble idiots—these social parasites who cling so precariously to the edges of what, to them, is the best society? Is a pitiful Mr. or Mrs. Lazarus, hanging around the doorstep of a certain house, hoping against hope for entree, while feeding on the social crumbs which fall from the table of some society diva—is such a person, in fact, one of our Best People?

Again, it would seem that the test should be not who were your ancestors, or who are your relatives, but what good are you? Then consider the brand Education. I mean the idea that one's rating in life is determined by the school or schools which one attended.

To pronounce words correctly, with the proper accent, and everything, is of importance. I wish I could. But even though I am not educated I know enough not to accept every graduate at his own valuation.

To hold that people who have been to certain schools are therefore our Best People, regardless of how they do, or do not use their education, is to keep the shell and throw the milk and meat of the coconut to the monkeys.

As I have said before, I would rather receive a great, vital, living truth from an illiterate backwoodsman, who violates every rule of grammar, than to have a university president lie to me in perfect English.

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Oh, yes, and there is the brand of Goodness.

Are not religious people, church people—those who make it their business to be good—are not these our Best People?

Well, not necessarily. Religion, you see, is not primarily something to "get" or something to "be." It is something to use. If one makes no use of religion one simply has no religion to use.

"You ought to see my boy, John," said a fond parent. "He doesn't smoke, he doesn't chew, he doesn't swear, he doesn't drink, he doesn't do anything."

It is not enough to be good; one must be good for something.

By all of which I am merely trying to say that to the Certified Accountant of Life it is not what we have—financially, socially, intellectually, or religiously—but what we do with it that determines our rating.

When one's balance sheet shows a gain of 99 per cent in service rendered, against 1 per cent in service rendered, that one is headed straight toward bankruptcy. That despicable toadies and social bums make much of such insolvent individuals does not alter their credit with those who know.

After all, it really matters very little that comparatively small groups of people, for one reason or another, consider themselves our Best People.

A gentlemanly stranger says to me: "This brick is solid gold, eighteen karats." Then he explains carefully why he is giving me an opportunity to purchase this gold brick at less than half its value. For all I know, the man may honestly believe that the brick is gold. If honestly believing things to be of value actually made them of value we would all be rich. Well, all that the gentlemanly stranger believes and says about his gold brick is very interesting and harmlessly amusing to me so long as I know the brick is not gold. But the moment I accept his estimate of the brick and purchase it at his valuation, that moment I am hooked.

It does matter greatly that so many of the rest of us are ready to accept these gold brick Best People at their own valuation.

We always have had our Cains and Judases, and I suppose we shall always have our moneyed degenerates, our social freaks, our educated incompetents, our religious defectives. But is there any reason why the rest of us should brand them our Best People?

There is only one standard by which Life measures a life; usefulness.

If you were a castaway on a desert island, in the last stages of starvation, and found an oyster containing a pearl of great value—which would you throw aside, the ornament or the edible?

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Huge Monument for Flyers

Huge likenesses in stone of Nungesser and Galt, who were lost in an attempt to fly the Atlantic, are to be erected on the Cliffs at Etretat, near Le Havre, France. Back of them will be a tall shaft of stone in an unusual design, and in the foreground steps and seats for the public.

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