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ANTINOUS 1965

When Marguerite Yourcenar first published her version of my imperial love in «Hadrian's Memoirs», the novelized story of my one great passion roused in the minds of yearning homosexuals throughout the world a quiver of envy. They dreamed, both the mature and the immature, of being partners in such a high romance as that which befell me when I, in my full Roman maturity of forty-nine, met the lovely Greek shepherd boy who became the crown and fulfillment of my personal life and whom I later had immortalized after his Egyptian passing in multiple statues, and even in the name of a city.

Today, travellers who have and travellers who have not read Miss Yourcenar's sincere and touching effort to tell my story still visit my villa outside Rome and behold the counterpart of that Canopus which was the doom of my young beloved; they still journey yet further to his native land and stand rapt in front of the ruined image of his dreaming face in the museums at Olympia and at Delphi. Only fragments of his cherished body remain at Olympia, but at Delphi the whole glory of his wide-shouldered, narrow-hipped beauty may be admired.

And yet, when, as a spectral figure, I return from afar, from dreams, and watch these modern spectators of the images of my love, I marvel and I mourn that my kind of autumn romance is so rarely to be witnessed in the twentieth century and I wonder in what strange world of vanity you mortals of this later time must abide that this is so. I perceive without knowing your times well enough to judge them, many Hadrians ready to give love and protection and advantage to modern youths, but hardly any Antinouses to answer the call, and I ask myself in puzzlement why there are so few young men in your contemporary world who wish to play the role in a man's ripened life that my dear lad played in my life. True, our romance came to an untimely end, for which Miss Yourcenar has ventured to say that I bear the blame, and yet, while it endured, it was the shimmering idyll of an empire, and now, so many centuries later, it remains a cherished fable. Our love was well worth whatever danger and pain it cost, and I look with sadness at the spectacle of a modern world in which the youths are not willing to seek the fulfillment of life in such an embrace, and instead fritter away their tenderest years in empty and superficial cavortings.

So, in disturbed anxiety, I have asked a modern man of something my own years in that sweetest time of my life, and of something my own disposition of mind, to try and set down his conjectures as to the cause of this decline of love between spring and autumn. While he is no Emperor, and therefore cannot gaze down on a whole world as I did nor command whatever he may wish, still his position is neither low nor obscure; and in some degree he could also offer to a modern Antinous the advantages I extended to my favorite. I will withdraw now, and let him speak to you in the idiom of your own times.

*

Honorable Predecessor, I cannot promise you that I will explain to the satisfaction of all who read this the causes for the modern dilemma you have so accurately observed, but I will attempt some speculation on the subject.

First, I want to talk about the times. The times are rich times, boom times. It is twenty years since the end of the last war, and, although the population explosion here in Europe today has reached a point that is frightening, even to the clergy of the Vatican, and, although this economic prosperity may not last, still the youth of today are behaving as they do in response to a situation of ease and plenty. All over the Caucasian world one hears the same complaint from sociological observers: that modern youth is spoiled, selfish, pleasure-loving and self-indulgent, without discipline, without a sense of hard realities, without respect for their elders, and absorbed in the search for speed, sensation and material values. I must tell you with regret that even in Greece, the onetime home of your Antinous, the adolescents of today are as badly spoiled in the capital city of Athens, and its suburbs, as they are even in America, a land famous throughout the world for ruining its children by not punishing them for their misbehaviour, but, in fact, rewarding them with gifts.

The men who are of the age you were when you met Antinous are necessarily of a different sort altogether because of the harder times which forged their character—times of depression, times of war, times of occupation, times of torture. But modern youth knows little or nothing of this. American parents between forty-five and sixty who lived through the American depression and learned the financial disciplines of despair have not passed on this knowledge to their children. The children who go to American colleges and universities have been living in what is called a Sellers' Market. Scouts from large corporations come to the college campuses and offer them jobs beginning at salaries of \$75 a week. These children have no conception of the fact that their fathers who left the campuses between 1930 and 1940 were fortunate if they could obtain work for \$12 or \$15 a week.

This determination to conceal the grim past from the younger generation, however, is not solely an American fault. In Europe today, I must tell you that German children are taught next to nothing in their history courses of the brutality which prevailed in their country under the sign of the swastika. This entire period is jumped over as if it had not existed. The children do not even recognize and respect the evidence before their very eyes of the price of war. In a Schwimmbad in Germany today you could see brawling adolescents crudely and selfishly pushing aside a man who has lost a leg in the last war, as you can see similar happenings all over the world.

A generation has grown up on both sides of the Atlantic which has known only soft times, and such times blind all but the intelligent to the truth of the words the English bard wrote: «Security is mortal's chiefest enemy.» Homosexuals as a group are not more intelligent than heterosexuals as a group. Indeed, if you were to visit what we today call «gay bars» and study the young faces, whether you were in San Francisco or

in Zurich, the one quality you would see most of all lacking in these young faces is intelligence.

Your Antinous had this intelligence. He saw your value as a human being, and he obviously saw the worldly value which a connection with you could offer him. As we say today, though he was only a shepherd boy, he did not miss the boat. But you must remember that he was not the over-indulged son of middle-class, twentieth-century parents, nourished on jazz, twist ecstasy, his own Lambretta and a five day a week job to which, in any case, he does not give his best efforts since he believes that the hire must be worthy of the labourer, but the labourer need not be worthy of the hire.

The Antinouses of today are not looking for Hadrians. They are deluded by the ease in which they have been reared so far and they think the whole of the future will be equally prosperous. Vanity makes most of them imagine they can win for themselves all the perquisites of pleasure, even if they lack the talent or the intelligence to bring this about without the helping hand of someone older and more established. They are involved with themselves, involved in the worship of their own youngness. Adults in their eyes are persons who are to be tolerated in many cases only in so far as they provide convenient funds.

In such a social climate, do you now begin to perceive why the story of Hadrian and Antinous can scarcely ever take place? It is true that, if all this prosperity collapses or, if, in spite of all the best efforts of Summit Conferences, the mortal world is plunged into another holocaust, youth will suddenly and brutally be confronted with a general situation with which it is not prepared to cope.

I do not wish to deceive you into thinking that there are not autumn and spring combinations, but they are far rarer than one would think possible in a world which perhaps has as high a percentage of homosexuals as did the times in which you lived, or even higher. The fault, however, does not lie with the Hadrians of today. One can see them everywhere, lonely and bewildered by their doom, in many cases unable to find the solace you did because there are so rarely any Antinouses of today intelligent enough to respond to their appeal, to understand the value of an association with an older and wiser person, or to realize that the hand is once more writing on the wall MENE MENE TEKEL UPHARSIN, which might be translated in Hollywood terms as «The Days of Wine and Roses are Going Down the Drain.»

There may be others, Esteemed Predecessor, who would offer you an explanation based not on economic conditions so much as on the dominance of the Freudian theory, and the psychoanalytical view of life which has replaced the duty principle with the pleasure principle as a guide to living, or upon other considerations, but I am not a Toynbee, and can offer you only my own analysis, a poor thing mayhap, but my own.

This answer is given to you in a spirit of dismay rather than of accusation. In the end, I must confess to you as my parting words that, if there be a true Antinous, 1965, I, after many journeys, did not find him.

by HADRIAN

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