

Professor Walter Murdoch (later Sir Walter), accomplished essayist and the namesake of Murdoch University was the Patron of The Douglas Social Credit Movement of Western Australia in 1936. The following wonderful essay is a challenge to all of us who may have wondered if the fight is worth our trouble, or perhaps, if we do enough to pick our share.

ON HAVING ENEMIES

BY WALTER MURDOCH

THE most objectionable thing I know about my enemies is that there are not enough of them...

To this you obligingly reply, "Do not distress yourself; there are more of us than you suppose, but you can hardly expect us all to take the trouble to write and tell you how much we detest you."

Thank you very much; the consolation is kindly meant; but I am unable to accept it, because a mere feeling of personal detestation is not at all what I had in mind. The enmity I refer to is something far above such petty aversions. Mere dislike does not enter into the matter at all. My worst enemy is a man whom I would rather dine with than with many of my friends. We get on with one another very well, on the perfectly frank and clear understanding that he wants my blood, and that his head served up on a charger would be a sweeter sight to me than bowls of primroses. In fact—I suppose everybody must have felt this— one of the embarrassing facts about one's enemies is that many of them are such likeable fellows. But I am straying from the point.

It is pleasant to know that you have troops of friends; but you can hardly feel at ease in your conscience unless you also know that you have regiments of enemies. The more the merrier. Nothing is more repulsive than to hear well-meaning but muddle-headed people say, when a man is just dead, "He had no enemies." They might, one feels inclined to say to them, refrain from speaking evil of him until after the funeral at least. To say that a man had had no enemies is as much as to say that he has consistently shirked his duty. It is to accuse him of all sorts of cowardly compromises and mean capitulations. The planet on which we live is not a place where a man can do the right thing without making enemies. Perhaps it would be a duller planet if it were; at all events, it would be a different one. Someday, it may be, all the problems will be solved and all the quarrels settled—but not in our time, thank God. At the present stage of affairs, life has to be thought of in terms of battle; and to say that a man, in the course of his earthly pilgrimage, has had no enemies is to say that he has never played the man, but has always slunk from the field, deaf to the summoning drums of duty and a traitor to all that lends a glory to human life. It is to include him in that caitiff crew

mentioned by Dante, *a Dio spiacenti ed ai nemici sui*, hateful to God and to the enemies of God; of whom Dante adds, in his terrible way, that they were never alive.

I can think of only one man in all history of whom it could be said, in an entirely honourable sense, that when he died he left no enemies behind him. When Marshal Narvaez was on his deathbed, his father-confessor asked him whether he had forgiven his enemies. "I have no enemies," the old soldier answered, with equal piety and simplicity; "I have killed them all."

You may object that this was the reply of a pagan, or that at least it falls a little short of the Christian spirit; but are you quite sure? Christianity does by no means command us to have no enemies; quite the contrary; for it bids us love our enemies, and how can we love our enemies if we have none to love? Critics of the Christian religion, such as Nietzsche, have made a terrible blunder when they have dwelt on its meekness and submissiveness and forgotten its unquenchable pugnacity. It sends men out upon crusades. It bids you fight to the death for the cause you believe in. Fight, it says, and give no quarter; only beware, when you are fighting, lest you defile your good cause with personal ill-will. Beware of staining your sword with hatred; for hatred is of the Devil, and your sword is of God, lent you for use in His wars: that, I take it, is the high Christian doctrine, and I dare say none of us can live up to it, but I suppose we can try. That is, if we agree with it—for it is a doctrine with which it is very possible to disagree.

But I have strayed from the point again. The point is that enemies, whether you love them or hate them, are a necessary part of a man's life if he is to keep his self-respect. "It is our business," says Burke, "to cultivate friendships and to incur enmities"; and nobly did he practice what he preached, not neglecting either half of life's business. Beware of the world when it wears a smiling face; and faithfully ask yourself whether its smiles are not the result of your ignoble truckling to the world. Mistrust popularity, the rock on which many a good man has wrecked his soul. Every night, before falling asleep, count your enemies, and make sure that the number is sufficient to earn for you a night's repose.

Whose biographies do you care to read? Not, assuredly, those of the placid, peaceful, placable people; but always of the fighters. The lives of the others may or may not have been worth living; but they are not worth reading about. I am not speaking of men of action only, but of all men whom we call great; your Michelangelos, your Beethovens, your Tolstoys, were men of war, every man of them—and every woman too: Saint Joan bore arms, and Florence Nightingale has been described by her latest biographer as a battering-ram.

When you express the hope that you will die in harness, you mean—I hope you mean—not the harness of a yoked beast, but harness in the ancient and honourable sense,

the harness in which Horatius threw himself into the Tiber.

But there is another side to the medal. The words I quoted from Burke are not all; he adds that it is our business “to have both strong, and both selected.” You must select your enemies; you must choose them wisely, and even with a certain fastidiousness. It does not matter much—this is what you really ought to have said to me by way of consolation at the outset—if your enemies are few, so long as they are well chosen. To have an indiscriminate multitude of foes may mean a fatal dilution of your energy. Select, and then concentrate: that is the true strategy. Do not try to fight upon too many fronts.

It is terribly easy to scatter one’s forces, and so to become an ineffective fighter. “In Hell,” said the Scottish preacher, “there are mair deevils than we can ask or think.” On earth at the present day there are devils enough and to spare; it is no use taking one’s bow and spear and going out to do battle with the lot. There is so much evil in the world that you can easily dash yourself in pieces against its serried mass without anybody’s being a penny the worse for all your indomitable and misguided courage. Even in our own Australia, believe me, you cannot hope to fight effectively, single-handed, against all that you see to be thoroughly detestable. We have to organize the forces of decency, and insist that each man stick to his allotted job. If I, for instance, were to sally out to assail all that I hold abominable, how much damage would I do to anyone? If I hurled my puny body against the armament firms that are doing their best to wreck the hope of peace, and **the high finance that is keeping the world in misery, and the economists who are using their brains to support high finance**, and the people who believe the world can be saved by tariffs, and the people who are making money out of fostering the gambling spirit in the community, and the dull and stodgy people who are sterilizing education, and the people who bawl “Communist” at you if you want to change anything, and the politicians who are introducing graft into our public life, and the people who debauch the public mind with despicable films, and the people who make horrible cacophonies and call them music, and the humbugs and the limelighters and the puritans and the rogues—good heavens! the list will never end—what good would I do? Not the smallest shadow of a particle.

Yes, it is plain, a man can have too many enemies. But that is better, a thousand times better, than having none. It is better than to sink into the condition of the man who thinks public affairs must go their own way without his intervention, and to whom, in the end, the defeat of the English cricketers comes to be of more moment **than the defeat of an evil economic system**. When this happens to you, you may know that you have ceased to be a man. I am not quite sure what you have become.

Am I preaching? If so, it is to myself. The writer of essays is always talking to himself. The readers are eavesdroppers, overhearing a private conversation between the essayist and his

troublesome conscience. I have been asking myself two intimate questions: have I enough enemies for my self-respect?—and do I, in my enmities, rise above paltry personal considerations? That second question sounds priggish and absurd in prose; I can only express it by breaking, for once, into verse.

Diligite Inimicos Vestros

I hated him when we began . . .
At the first clash of steel, we knew
T'was die who must and live who can:
Too small the world to hold us two.

His life or mine—the prize was life
For which with thirsting blades we fought;
Yet in my heart, amid the strife,
There flamed a strange and secret thought.

I knew him for a splendid foe
That fronted death with eyes serene:
He was my enemy; but oh,
How brave a friend he might have been!

Within the secret soul of man
What depths unplumbed, what runes unread!
I hated him when we began:
I loved him as I struck him dead.