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The STORY of GREENWICH VILLAGE

Compiled from most original sources and written comprehensible to both morons & other artistic folk.

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The Story of Greenwich Village

Part XII

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Having finished with the depressing effect of the works of Sigmund Freud on the literature of Greenwich Village and hence of America, we will with profound relief, pass on to a few of the other bad influences of Greenwich Village. Then we will consider the good boys. After reading Dreiser, Dell and naughty little Edna Millay, one might wonder if anything really proper and moral ever came out of the Village. And then a lot of rough characters used to hang around Frank Shay's Book Shop. Seamen like Will McFee, hard eggs like Johnny Weaver and Don Marquis apparently went to Frank for encouragement in their literary work. As one reviews the situation, the roistering Shay seems to be almost as bad an influence as Freud, for did he not continually thumb his nose at good Bro. Sumner, without

whom there would be no kick left in dubiety, and his respect for Volstead was not profound.

Harry Kemp

Before taking up the un-Freuded good boys we must mention one conspicuous bad boy who has always been just a little bit impish, and in such a way that it has never advanced his fame. He is perhaps among the greatest poets of our time, and a profound scholar. Unfortunately, he has as well a sort of P.T. Barnum complex, which does make him the despair of those who would like to conform, conventionalize and cause him to proceed according to the usual decorum of poets. This Harry Kemp first became advertised as a "Tramp Poet." That might not have been a bad publicity stunt, if the bard were preparing a vaudeville appearance. When Kemp writes verse it is sound, sane and almost traditional in its perfect workmanship–anything but what you would expect from a "Tramp Poet" (if there ever was such a being). Furthermore, Kemp still thinks the public can be shocked. We are now as unshockable as the Elizabethans, except per-

haps the Methodists and the Baptists, who are too busy saving souls to read. And such of them as do read get the greatest enjoyment out of the little sallies of filth our modern writers inject to give pungency to their thin creations. Inasmuch as the respectable deacons dare not read shocking books, except under the pretext of seeing whether they are fit to read, there is no great commercial or artistic call for that stupid type of writing, which neither shocks the prurient or thrills the blasé. When a man reads a book to see if it is fit for the young he admits he can't be shocked. Harry Kemp, when he writes prose, has a tremendous appeal to the romantic and the homely interests in life. When he gets over being a bad boy and trying to shock the unshockable, he will be tremendously celebrated.

Sinclair Lewis

Red Lewis, the apostate, or Sinclair Lewis, as he is known in the street of his creation, must be grudgingly included in the list of good boys. His first effort to get before the public, after the appearance of a forgotten novel, was the production of his

play, “Hobohemia” (name swiped from Don Marquis) purporting to satirize the environment that put up with him while he was boring his neighbors learning to write. Many kind lady writers suffered from the story of his ambitions and patiently told him the secrets of fabricating literature by a process analogous to photography. So Lewis chose a subject dear to the policies of the popular magazines—the almost sure fire stuff of making the Villagers out to be the wild asses of Hebron, in contrast to the sturdy, safe and sane 100-per-centers who pay five cents a ream for their reading matter. Then, to cap the climax he put on this impossible “Hobohemia,” a satire of a people that never existed except in the pages of commercial magazines, but somehow this was not awfully convincing to the public. They did not come to see it very often. In a magazine, editorial misconceptions of what the public wants go on perennially, unchecked by popular disapproval, for very few voice their discontent in letter writing. On the stage there is no doubt about what the public does not want, and no advertising will convert them. So “Hobohemia” died before a

fusillade of defunct vegetables were showered upon its bier. "Red" left the Village then on the money he got out of America's most colossal weekly, and went to live in a drab Western place. There, in his despair and hunger for the dear old Village, he had so shamelessly lampooned, he wrote "Main Street." This tedious proceeding helped to keep him out of the madhouse, for the life in the clean, open spaces, which he held up as a contrast to the pseudo-village created for his editorial customer, this great middle West, rather palled upon him. Now the booksellers, realizing that "Main Street" might poke up the small towns to spending a little money on books, saw to it that Lewis' book was a "best seller."

Still, we must put Lewis on the list of the good boys, for did he not stand with the corn-fed, with the Bourgeoisers, and with all those who yell "freak" in the name of morality at such gentle wastrels who write verses, or make other sporadic efforts at the unstereotyped? The fact that Lewis again turned from the "Main Street" respectables does not exonerate him from the list of good anti-Freud boys. Lewis cannot help apostating. He has

that gift of turning and rending any unfortunate environment that happens to shelter him for the time being.

Hendrik van Loon

The really good boy of Greenwich Village came from Holland originally, with his fiddle under his arm. It was a long time before anybody in the Village knew he had any other accomplishment. We knew he had fiddled informally in every country in Europe and the Levant, and we used to wonder how he got away with it. It was with the greatest relief that we noted that our friend had a new hobby. One evening he appeared at the Mad Hatter with a pocket full of trick fountain pens. Some were

Van Loon's Fiddle in the Mad Hatter

large, holding bottles of the blackest ink, and others delicate and made of bakelite. Some were finely pointed and others with majestic crudities of delineation. Some drew curved lines, some drew fuzzy lines. He had them in every pocket. He began to scribble on bits of paper and the walls of the Hatter. We were fascinated. The whole coterie were at once charmed and thrilled by the attractive personality of the man whose fiddle of discord had so tarnished our pleasant relations. As he scribbled wooly things we could make nothing out of, he began to tell us stories he had read in the Encyclopedia of the Phoenicians, the Visigoths, and Neolithic warriors till we were spellbound. Gradually he began to make some progress with his scribbles. Soon we were able to recognize the King of England among a bunch of Phileocene warriors. One evening a person who was accustomed to play the uke to people whether they wished it or no, and who greatly resented the fiddle we have mentioned, said (perhaps with craft or maybe with sincerity—history will never tell): "Han, why don't you write all this up about the Phoenicians for the children, and draw

them with your trick pens?" "Not a bad idea," the Hollander is reported to have answered. After that he was absent from the Hatter except for brief intervals. The rasp of his casual but vigorous fiddle no longer disturbed the jealous musicians of the Village. The result was as you may have guessed– Hendrik Willem van Loon's "History of Mankind." When we mention van Loon among the good boys of the Village we do not wish to hand the halo of aspersion about him. He, at least, cannot be said to have been influenced by Freud. And when he made fabulous sums out of the book he so unconsciously produced, the whole Village rejoiced, for they knew how great was his sacrifice in putting up his fiddle for the pen. Nor did he ever betray cognizance of any change in the attitude of the world toward him. Fame sits comfortably upon him, and he never brings her with him to the Hatter.

(To be continued)