

# Security May Betray Us

Archibald Rutledge

I LIVE on a great river, and westward from my place, for some 60 miles, there is not a human habitation. Not far from where I live is a plantation, the owner of which is not satisfied with the size of the deer on his property. So he imported from Michigan a huge security-reared stag. This buck was kept for some time in an enclosure on the plantation, inside a 7½-foot wire fence. It was in the autumn, the mating season of the deer. A native buck from the man's own place jumped that wire fence at night, killed the great stag more than twice his size, and, once more leaping the fence, escaped into the wilds again.

When wild creatures are given the artificial security of parks, zoos, and circuses, they never fail to deteriorate — certainly in a physical way, and, in a sense, in a moral way as well. They become soft, careless, dull-witted, degenerate. All the incentive for them to achieve and to maintain physical perfection and mental alertness has been withdrawn. They have been made to pay a fearful price for their safety.

IN HUMAN LIFE, a review of the lives of most men of real eminence reveals that they had to overcome the obstacles and perils of insecurity. But for these insecurities, they probably would have remained mediocre. The greatest foe of attainment is *security*, which is foe to the constant exercise and development of courage, aspiration, and effort. Many men and women who are buds of genius never flower because they are protected from ever having to really exert themselves; they lose that vital spark.

It would be vain to hope to find the heroes and heroines of the race on bathing beaches, in night clubs, in any of the resorts of ease and of pleasure. We always find them in life's front-line trenches, on the perilous frontiers of uncertainty.

RARELY except in affliction are we awakened to a sense of our own weakness and folly, or come to realize how little all our acquisitions can conduce to our peace of heart, which perhaps is the only real triumph in life. By some kind of negative logic, hardship, which we are accustomed universally to lament, is a blessing; and security, for which we long so ardently and strive for so unremittingly, may betray us.

Whenever I hear that the *government* is helping someone, I feel sorry for that person. Or whenever I find that someone, by a monopoly grant of power, has a sure market or a sure job, I feel sorry for him too. Even helping a person to help himself may be a disservice to him; for you will probably — perhaps unconsciously — compel him to do it your way. Charity, if needlessly bestowed, probably will have a vicious effect. People who are promised support will hardly work. All grants, all subsidies, all rewards for services not rendered have a deleterious effect on character; and if character is not of foremost consideration, what is?

I HAVE an old friend who is a cabinetmaker, a master craftsman of the ancient sort. He knows his woods. Whenever I want anything special in the way of a piece of cabinet wood, I go to him. One day I asked him for the very strongest piece of oak he had. As he gave it to me, he said, "I cut it on a bare hilltop. It has stood all the storms — alone, and without leaning on any other tree." I often think of that when considering the best person for a job, or when I hear fond parents say, "I am going to spare my child all the hardships I had to endure."

Mr. Rutledge is the noted author, and owner of Hampton Plantation, McClellanville, South Carolina.