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HAROLD NEWMAN'S CLOUDY CRYSTAL BALL

"How happy is he born and taught
that serveth not anothers will;
Whose armour is his honest thought
And simple truth his utmost skill!"

From: Sir Henry Wotton
1568-1639

"Character of a Happy Life"

"Cluny and Clunford, Clungenford and Clun, are the sleepest places under the sun!" But England has many sleepy hamlets and villages. Among them is Helsby, near where the borders of Cheshire and Lancashire meet. Perhaps during the Wars of the Roses some local squire pinned the Red Rose of the House of Lancaster and the village heard the clash of battle and echoed to the cries of knights, yeomen, and archers. We may conjecture that Helsby village, once Yorkist and Lancastrian were exhausted, went to sleep again for another two hundred years until the villagers heard the trumpets and the kettledrums of Cromwell's triumphant New Model Army chasing Prince Rupert's royalist forces after Marston Moor. Then, once more, peace and quiet settled upon the North English countryside. But one energetic lad bearing the name of Helsby, and presumably a member of the squirearchy of the region, departed for America. He settled on Maryland's Eastern Shore and whatever else he brought to the New World, he did carry the family crest which displays a lion on a honeycomb and the motto "PHOENAM HABEO."

But it is not of foreign forebears that we write, but of a current holder of the name, Robert Davis Helsby, born 59 years ago this month, to a moneyless Methodist minister and his wife in a town on that same Maryland shore to which the English ancestor had come long ago. We refrain in these columns from the celebration of individuals. We state, however, without embarrassment or unease that no individual has had more impact on the shape and philosophy and administration of public sector collective negotiations in the United States these past ten years, than has our Robert. He has resigned as Chairman of the New York State PERB to undertake new challenges having to do with the training and utilization of neutrals in public sector bargaining disputes. He is armed with a Carnegie grant that will enable him to do it. Bob Helsby's works with PERB, ALMA, SPIDR, etc., need no retelling here. Because of our affection for him and because it is perhaps a less familiar subject--we would here treat of the man, not his work.

Many Americans seek to get as far away as possible from reality and from feeling. We consume more pills in this country to make us feel either "high" or "tranquil" than does the rest of the world put together. We consume great quantities of alcohol to achieve the same goals. Numbers of us embrace meditation. This insures, if it does nothing else, that occupation with staring at one's navel will preclude contact with someone else's face. "Religious" pitchmen are swamped with eager crowds seeking instant salvation and redemption in an aura of circus sawdust. Others join "encounter" groups that shield the participant from having to establish a meaningful relationship and still others visit pseudo-science practitioners whose *deus ex machina* is God through computer. What all these groups have in common is that they keep the true believer from contact with reality or his own humanity.

Bob Helsby chewed "give a darn" pills with his baby porridge and grew up not desiring to "drop out," but to live, move, whoop and laugh every vital and vibrant minute. We have learned so much to look for deviousness and dissembling among those we meet that strangers are sometimes made uneasy by the candor and directness of RDH. They look for the subtlety that is not there. He has often proclaimed that Norman Rockwell is his favorite painter. Rockwell??!! Why that man never made a subtle brushstroke in his life. "Trompe l'oeil" to him might be a fancy dish in an expensive restaurant. But Norman Rockwell had to be Bob Helsby's favorite painter. He, himself, is a figure from a score

of Norman Rockwell paintings. Throughout his life he has delineated a Saturday Evening Post vision of American boyhood, American youth and American manhood. Such visions are so old fashioned as to be almost funny and we find those SEP values an embarrassment nowadays. One of his staff, goaded to total impatience by a Helsbyian unwillingness to be even mildly devious in his own best interest, once exploded at him. "You are a Saturday Evening Post American!" It is doubtful that Bob understood this as criticism.

Here, perhaps a cautionary word. There is a difference between straight-forwardness and lack of intelligence. Bob Helsby is bright enough to have been seriously considered, not long ago, for the Chairmanship of the National Labor Relations Board. The responsibilities he has carried in academe and in State government attest to his intelligence and the breadth of knowledge and talent. But he appreciates both the simple and the complex. Let him pass a piece of machinery and he will stop to admire its design and try to understand how it works. He crows with delight over a birdie on the golf course and is simply euphoric if he is chewing a hot dog in the grandstand at a major league baseball game. Bob Helsby is fascinated with natural science and especially with space science. He is excited every time he thinks about the future yet never forgets his links and all of our links to the past. Perhaps this is why he is always happily coping with the present. And that is perhaps the most useful thing we can learn from Bob Helsby.

We are a nation impatient with the old. This applies especially, to our treatment of our elderly citizens. But this takes many forms. Fine buildings, whose architecture and design gladden the soul and the spirit, are torn down for more profitable high rise boxes that insult the eye as they block the heavens. Television hucksters who have pressed us for years to buy some product are to be found pushing a version of the same product at a somewhat higher price. Bob Helsby cares about the old and remembers the past. He recalls religious history and American history and cares about preservation of ethical and moral values. We suspect though that he never consciously thought about it too much. He was having such a good time bantering with his colleagues across the country or over-praising his staff to them, or enjoying his delightful family. But it is true anyway.

That Methodist minister's lad down in Maryland fifty years ago must have heard the errant Baptists singing in their own church down the street, "Brighten the Corner in Which You Dwell." Bob Helsby took that advice and we are all in his debt because we shared his corner.

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