

January 1935

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Recommended Citation

Anonymous Contributor, About Ben Hilliard, 12 Dicta 138 (1935).

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About Ben Hilliard

ABOU BEN HILLIARD

By an Anonymous Contributor

ON April 6, 1917, the American Congress debated a resolution to engage in the World War. At that time the Central Powers had resorted to unrestricted submarine warfare and it was only a question of time when the supplies of food to the Allies would be cut off by a tremendously effective under-seas blockade. We were expected to come to the rescue. Inflammatory propaganda had been steadily at work disseminating lies concerning German atrocities. Only fifty members of Congress and six senators voted against war. Among them was Ben C. Hilliard of Colorado. Orders were at once given for the political stretcher bearers to convey Ben's remains out of the party boundaries. He was pronounced politically dead. He returned home and became a candidate again but was easily defeated. Members of his own party would have none of him. Eggs were a dollar a dozen or his public appearances might have had unpleasant consequences. He ran for Congress twice more and finally seemed swallowed up in political oblivion. There were none so poor as to do him justice.

Then, lo! A change came. Woodrow Wilson went to France and wrote the preamble of the Peace Treaty and stated explicitly therein the reason the Allies went to war was because Germany violated the boundaries of Belgium. Men inquired if that was true why we had not objected at the time? Wilson was then President. Prompt notice to the Central Powers that the high offense against treaty obligations would cause us to send two million men overseas would have prevented war. But Bryan was booked solid for the fall and winter with his Prince of Peace lecture which would not go so well if he appeared on the platform with a battleship under his arm. Eight million men went to their deaths; more than twenty-three billion dollars was checked out of the United States Treasury for war; we loaned eleven billions more to the Allies. Was it possible that, after all, the fifty members of Congress could have been right?

Only one lone congressman went into the army. Johnson from South Dakota served as a private after voting no. Congressman Hilliard's sons went and so did sons of other congressmen who voted against war.

And now by a turn of fortune's wheel the same forces of public opinion that denounced Congressman Hilliard render him praise akin to homage! Why? It is the same Ben Hilliard. He has courageously stood by his guns all through, honor and truth and high principle his only consolation. If he suffered he let concealment, like a worm i' th' bud, keep the secret. Time has not changed him: it seems to have changed us.

How keen are the sufferings of those whose hearts are made sick by hope deferred! Napoleon's dust laid twenty years on a dismal rock in a lonely sea before France took him to her heart again. John Howard Payne, who wrote *Home, Sweet Home*, laid in a neglected grave in a foreign land for nearly a generation. Lincoln bravely introduced the "spot resolutions" in Congress and President Polk's followers gleefully conducted his political obsequies. The flattery that we are told cannot soothe the dull, cold ear of death could do the soldier or the poet little good. In the case of Lincoln his elevation to the presidency must have been exceedingly gratifying coming as it did when the stone was rolled from his political sepulchre.

Eighteen years is a long time. The law of compensation enters up judgment after great delay. Ben Hilliard with these tardy laurels on his brow and the stars of glory on his breast must find something extremely amusing in it all. He possesses an exquisite sense of humor. Laughing last he laughs best. The general impression seems to be that he ought to be extremely gratified. If he is it is probably at learning that his fellow citizens can finally come to their senses, given time. After eighteen years we conclude that instead of a pro-German slacker and traitor to his country, Judge Ben C. Hilliard is a right honorable gentleman who loves his fellowmen. He must have been aware all the time what he was and what we were.

About Ben Hilliard may his tribe increase!