

TOLERANCE MUST BE MORE THAN A PIOUS WISH

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Tolerance is important, no one can deny that, and if it is talked about so that people dispute what it is, or isn't, its importance should be maintained or increased.

Let me therefore set up an Aunt Sally. Aunt Sallys are not as common in my country* as they were, and for all I know they may have never crossed the Atlantic. Certainly I cannot imagine one on the Mayflower. So I had better define, and definition in this case is not so difficult. Aunt Sally is, or was, an elderly doll who was set up on a fairground to be shied at. She was tied to a stick or attached to a hinge. Three shies for a penny at Aunt Sally! Perhaps there was a prize if one hit her; perhaps the pleasure of bashing her face in was in itself sufficient reward. I forget. But she has become a symbol for the

* United Kingdom.

tentative definition. Knock her over if you can.

Let me define tolerance as tolerating other people even when they don't tolerate you.

Risks Are Required

It is an austere definition. No politician would accept it. But if tolerance is to play any practical part in the modern world, if any headway is to be made against fanaticism, if there is to be any easing of the tensions between class and class, race and race, country and country, then tolerance must be more than a pious wish, more than a woolly assertion of good-will. It must have courage, and it must be prepared to take risks.

At this point someone shies a ball at my Aunt Sally. It hits her. She staggers.

Someone has in effect said: "The modern world is indeed dangerous, and that is

exactly why one can't take risks in it. It is so dangerous that tolerance is a luxury, which we can only indulge with those who reciprocate it. I don't like the color of so-and-so's face — it's green and I dislike faces — still I'll put up with his face if he'll put up with mine. Mine is, of course, blue, the proper color for faces, and if he complains of it, if he threatens it, then my only remedy is to drop a bomb on him before he drops one on me. Tolerance is all very well, but there is such a thing as self-preservation."

Monotony

Tolerance is not only needed to avoid disaster. It is also needed in peace conditions, if a community is to remain healthy and creative. An intolerant community, exacting the "right point of view" is condemned to monotony, even if the right point of view is a good one. Its citizens would lack curiosity. They would tend to be all alike for the sake

of avoiding friction. They would educate their children the same way, eat the same food at the same time, laugh at the same jokes, succumb to the same advertisements, go to the same places in the same planes, and they would denounce as subversive any one who criticized them. Money — any money alone — would distinguish one human being in that community from another and the spiritual tyranny of the income-bracket would triumph.

I would certainly sooner live in a monotonous community than in a world of universal war, but I would sooner be dead than live in either of them. My heart is in the world of today, with its varieties and contrasts, its blue and green faces, and my hope is that, through courageous tolerance, the world of today may be preserved. Risks must be taken. It's difficult. Aunt Sally trembles on her perch as the well-directed missiles hit her. But what's your alternative? — *The New York Times*, February 22, 1953.