

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

The Fourth in Salvador

O. HENRY

Page | 1

Like Mark Twain, the popular American short story writer O. Henry (William Sydney Porter, 1862–1910) often took a humorous, not to say irreverent, approach to subjects generally not treated lightly.¹ This story describes a celebration of the Fourth of July by a small group of Americans living in Salvador. It includes O. Henry’s trademark: a surprise ending.

What kind of characters are these Americans living abroad? What is Billy Casparis’ attitude toward patriotism? Toward the Fourth of July? Is he a credit to the United States? What effect does being or living abroad have on his—and, more importantly, on our—feelings for our homeland? Although the Americans are unaware of the fact that they are participating in another country’s revolution, is there any way in which their rambunctious celebration of the Fourth contributed to—or could be credited with—bringing freedom also to Salvador? Is the spirit of liberty contagious? Do Americans abroad spread it, wittingly or not? Do our celebrations of the Fourth of July help spread it? Is it clear that the revolution in Salvador will lead to a better life for the people? Are all revolutions undertaken in the name of liberty necessarily good for the people?

On a summer’s day, while the city was rocking with the din and red uproar of patriotism, Billy Casparis told me this story.

In his way, Billy is Ulysses, Jr.² Like Satan, he comes from going to and fro upon the earth and walking up and down in it. To-morrow morning while you are cracking your breakfast egg he may be off with his little alligator grip to boom a town site in the middle of Lake Okeechobee or to trade horses with the Patagonians.

¹ See, for example, his “Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen,” which we have anthologized in our volume on The Meaning of Thanksgiving: www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/guide-for-two-thanksgiving-day-gentlemen.

² Odysseus, also known by the Roman name Ulysses, was a legendary Greek king of Ithaca and a hero of Homer’s epic poem the *Odyssey*, which tells the story of the ten eventful years he took to return home after the Trojan War.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

We sat at a little, round table, and between us were glasses holding big lumps of ice, and above us leaned an artificial palm. And because our scene was set with the properties of the one they recalled to his mind, Billy was stirred to narrative.

“It reminds me,” said he, “of a Fourth I helped to celebrate down in Salvador. ’Twas while I was running an ice factory down there, after I unloaded that silver mine I had in Colorado. I had what they called a ‘conditional concession.’ They made me put up a thousand dollars cash forfeit that I would make ice continuously for six months. If I did that I could draw down my ante. If I failed to do so the government took the pot. So the inspectors kept dropping in, trying to catch me without the goods.

Page | 2

“One day when the thermometer was at 110, the clock at half-past one, and the calendar at July third, two of the little, brown, oily nosers in red trousers slid in to make an inspection. Now, the factory hadn’t turned out a pound of ice in three weeks, for a couple of reasons. The Salvador heathen wouldn’t buy it; they said it made things cold they put it in. And I couldn’t make any more, because I was broke. All I was holding on for was to get down my thousand so I could leave the country. The six months would be up on the sixth of July.

“Well, I showed ’em all the ice I had. I raised the lid of a darkish vat, and there was an elegant 100-pound block of ice, beautiful and convincing to the eye. I was about to close down the lid again when one of those brunette sleuths flops down on his red knees and lays a slanderous and violent hand on my guarantee of good faith. And in two minutes more they had dragged out on the floor that fine chunk of molded glass that had cost me fifty dollars to have shipped down from Frisco.

“‘Ice-y?’ says the fellow that played me the dishonourable trick; ‘verree warm ice-y. Yes. The day is that hot, *señor*. Yes. Maybeso it is of desirableness to leave him out to get the cool. Yes.’

“‘Yes,’ says I, ‘yes,’ for I knew they had me. ‘Touching’s believing, ain’t it, boys? Yes. Now there’s some might say the seats of your trousers are sky blue, but ’tis my opinion they are red. Let’s apply the tests of the laying on of hands and feet.’ And so I hoisted both those inspectors out the door on the toe of my shoe, and sat down to cool off on my block of disreputable glass.

“And, as I live without oats, while I sat there, homesick for money and without a cent to my ambition, there came on the breeze the most beautiful smell my nose had entered

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

for a year. God knows where it came from in that backyard of a country—it was a bouquet of soaked lemon peel, cigar stumps, and stale beer—exactly the smell of Goldbrick Charley’s place on Fourteenth Street where I used to play pinochle of afternoons with the third-rate actors. And that smell drove my troubles through me and clinched ’em at the back. I began to long for my country and feel sentiments about it; and I said words about Salvador that you wouldn’t think could come legitimate out of an ice factory.

Page | 3

“And while I was sitting there, down through the blazing sunshine in his clean, white clothes comes Maximilian Jones, an American interested in rubber and rosewood.

“‘Great carrambos!’ says I, when he stepped in, for I was in a bad temper, ‘didn’t I have catastrophes enough? I know what you want. You want to tell me that story again about Johnny Ammiger and the widow on the train. You’ve told it nine times already this month.’

“‘It must be the heat,’ says Jones, stopping in at the door, amazed. ‘Poor Billy. He’s got bugs. Sitting on ice, and calling his best friends pseudonyms. Hi!—*muchacho!*’ Jones called my force of employees, who was sitting in the sun, playing with his toes, and told him to put on his trousers and run for the doctor.

“‘Come back,’ says I. ‘Sit down, Maxy, and forget it. ’Tis not ice you see, nor a lunatic upon it. ’Tis only an exile full of homesickness sitting on a lump of glass that’s just cost him a thousand dollars. Now, what was it Johnny said to the widow first? I’d like to hear it again, Maxy—honest. Don’t mind what I said.’

“Maximilian Jones and I sat down and talked. He was about as sick of the country as I was, for the grafters were squeezing him for half the profits of his rosewood and rubber. Down in the bottom of a tank of water I had a dozen bottles of sticky Frisco beer; and I fished these up, and we fell to talking about home and the flag and Hail Columbia and home-fried potatoes; and the drivel we contributed would have sickened any man enjoying those blessings. But at that time we were out of ’em. You can’t appreciate home till you’ve left it, money till it’s spent, your wife till she’s joined a woman’s club, nor Old Glory till you see it hanging on a broomstick on the shanty of a consul in a foreign town.

“And sitting there me and Maximilian Jones, scratching at our prickly heat and kicking at the lizards on the floor, became afflicted with a dose of patriotism and

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

affection for our country. There was me, Billy Casparis, reduced from a capitalist to a pauper by over-addiction to my glass (in the lump), declares my troubles off for the present and myself to be an uncrowned sovereign of the greatest country on earth. And Maximilian Jones pours out whole drug stores of his wrath on oligarchies and potentates in red trousers and calico shoes. And we issues a declaration of interference in which we guarantee that the fourth day of July shall be celebrated in Salvador with all the kinds of salutes, explosions, honours of war, oratory, and liquids known to tradition. Yes, neither me nor Jones breathed with soul so dead. There shall be rucuses in Salvador, we say, and the monkeys had better climb the tallest cocoanut trees and the fire department get out its red sashes and two tin buckets.

Page | 4

“About this time into the factory steps a native man incriminated by the name of General Mary Esperanza Dingo. He was some pumpkin both in politics and colour, and the friend of me and Jones. He was full of politeness and a kind of intelligence, having picked up the latter and managed to preserve the former during a two years’ residence in Philadelphia studying medicine. For a Salvadorian he was not such a calamitous little man, though he always would play jack, queen, king, ace, deuce for a straight.

“General Mary sits with us and has a bottle. While he was in the States he had acquired a synopsis of the English language and the art of admiring our institutions. By and by the General gets up and tiptoes to the doors and windows and other stage entrances, remarking ‘Hist!’ at each one. They all do that in Salvador before they ask for a drink of water or the time of day, being conspirators from the cradle and matinee idols by proclamation.

“‘Hist!’ says General Dingo again, and then he lays his chest on the table quite like Gaspard the Miser.³ ‘Good friends, *señores*, to-morrow will be the great day of Liberty and Independence. The hearts of Americans and Salvadorians should beat together. Of your history and your great Washington I know. Is it not so?’

“Now, me and Jones thought that nice of the General to remember when the Fourth came. It made us feel good. He must have heard the news going round in Philadelphia about that disturbance we had with England.

³ A character from the 1876 operetta, *The Chimes of Normandy*, composed by Robert Planquette to a French libretto by Louis Clairville and Charles Gabet.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“‘Yes,’ says me and Maxy together, ‘we knew it. We were talking about it when you came in. And you can bet your bottom concession that there’ll be fuss and feathers in the air to-morrow. We are few in numbers, but the welkin may as well reach out to push the button, for it’s got to ring.’

Page | 5

“‘I, too, shall assist,’ says the General, thumping his collar-bone. ‘I, too, am on the side of Liberty. Noble Americans, we will make the day one to be never forgotten.’

“‘For us American whisky,’ says Jones—‘none of your Scotch smoke or anisada or Three Star Hennessey to-morrow. We’ll borrow the consul’s flag; old man Billfinger shall make orations, and we’ll have a barbecue on the plaza.’

“‘Fireworks,’ says I, ‘will be scarce; but we’ll have all the cartridges in the shops for our guns. I’ve got two navy sixes I brought from Denver.’

“‘There is one cannon,’ said the General; ‘one big cannon that will go “BOOM!” And three hundred men with rifles to shoot.’

“‘Oh, say!’ says Jones, ‘*Generalissimo*, you’re the real silk elastic. We’ll make it a joint international celebration. Please, General, get a white horse and a blue sash and be grand marshal.’

“‘With my sword,’ says the General, rolling his eyes. ‘I shall ride at the head of the brave men who gather in the name of Liberty.’

“‘And you might,’ we suggest ‘see the *commandante* and advise him that we are going to prize things up a bit. We Americans, you know, are accustomed to using municipal regulations for gun wadding when we line up to help the eagle scream. He might suspend the rules for one day. We don’t want to get in the calaboose for spanking his soldiers if they get in our way, do you see?’

“‘Hist!’ says General Mary. ‘The commandant is with us, heart and soul. He will aid us. He is one of us.’

“‘We made all the arrangements that afternoon. There was a buck coon from Georgia in Salvador who had drifted down there from a busted-up coloured colony that had been started on some possumless land in Mexico. As soon as he heard us say ‘barbecue’ he

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

wept for joy and groveled on the ground. He dug his trench on the plaza, and got half a beef on the coals for an all-night roast. Me and Maxy went to see the rest of the Americans in the town and they all sizzled like a seidlitz⁴ with joy at the idea of solemnizing an old-time Fourth.

Page | 6

“There were six of us all together—Martin Dillard, a coffee planter; Henry Barnes, a railroad man; old man Billfinger, an educated tintype taker; me and Jonesy, and Jerry, the boss of the barbecue. There was also an Englishman in town named Sterrett, who was there to write a book on Domestic Architecture of the Insect World. We felt some bashfulness about inviting a Britisher to help crow over his own country, but we decided to risk it, out of our personal regard for him.

“We found Sterrett in pajamas working at his manuscript with a bottle of brandy for a paper weight.

“‘Englishman,’ says Jones, ‘let us interrupt your disquisition on bug houses for a moment. To-morrow is the Fourth of July. We don’t want to hurt your feelings, but we’re going to commemorate the day when we licked you by a little refined debauchery and nonsense—something that can be heard above five miles off. If you are broad-gauged enough to taste whisky at your own wake, we’d be pleased to have you join us.’

“‘Do you know,’ says Sterrett, setting his glasses on his nose, ‘I like your cheek in asking me if I’ll join you; blast me if I don’t. You might have known I would, without asking. Not as a traitor to my own country, but for the intrinsic joy of a blooming row.’

“On the morning of the Fourth I woke up in that old shanty of an ice factory feeling sore. I looked around at the wreck of all I possessed, and my heart was full of bile. From where I lay on my cot I could look through the window and see the consul’s old ragged Stars and Stripes hanging over his shack. ‘You’re all kinds of a fool, Billy Casparis,’ I said to myself; ‘and of all your crimes against sense it does look like this idea of celebrating the Fourth should receive the award of demerit. Your business is busted up, your thousand dollars is gone into the kitty of this corrupt country on that last bluff you made, you’ve got just fifteen Chili dollars left, worth forty-six cents each at bedtime last night and steadily going down. To-day you’ll blow in your last cent hurraing for that flag, and to-morrow you’ll be living on bananas from the stalk and screwing your drinks

⁴ *Effervescing salts.*

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

out of your friends. What's the flag done for you? While you were under it you worked for what you got. You wore your finger nails down skinning suckers, and salting mines, and driving bears and alligators off your town lot additions. How much does patriotism count for on deposit when the little man with the green eye-shade in the savings-bank adds up your book? Suppose you were to get pinched over here in this irreligious country for some little crime or other, and appealed to your country for protection—what would it do for you? Turn your appeal over to a committee of one railroad man, an army officer, a member of each labour union, and a coloured man to investigate whether any of your ancestors were ever related to a cousin of Mark Hanna,⁵ and then file the papers in the Smithsonian Institution until after the next election. That's the kind of a sidetrack the Stars and Stripes would switch you onto.'

Page | 7

“You can see that I was feeling like an indigo plant; but after I washed my face in some cool water, and got out my navys and ammunition, and started up to the Saloon of the Immaculate Saints where we were to meet, I felt better. And when I saw those other American boys come swaggering into the trysting place—cool, easy, conspicuous fellows, ready to risk any kind of a one-card draw, or to fight grizzlies, fire, or extradition, I began to feel glad I was one of 'em. So, I says to myself again: ‘Billy, you've got fifteen dollars and a country left this morning—blow in the dollars and blow up the town as an American gentleman should on Independence Day.’

“It is my recollection that we began the day along conventional lines. The six of us—for Sterrett was along—made progress among the cantinas, divesting the bars as we went of all strong drink bearing American labels. We kept informing the atmosphere as to the glory and preeminence of the United States and its ability to subdue, outjump, and eradicate the other nations of the earth. And, as the findings of American labels grew more plentiful, we became more contaminated with patriotism. Maximilian Jones hopes that our late foe, Mr. Sterrett, will not take offense at our enthusiasm. He sets down his bottle and shakes Sterrett's hand. ‘As white man to white man,’ says he, ‘denude our uproar of the slightest taint of personality. Excuse us for Bunker Hill, Patrick Henry, and Waldorf Astor,⁶ and such grievances as might lie between us as nations.’

⁵ *Mark Hanna (1837–1904), a Republican US Senator from Ohio and political manager of President William McKinley. Hanna made millions as a businessman, and used his money and influence to successfully manage McKinley's presidential campaigns in 1896 and 1900.*

⁶ *Waldorf Astor, 2nd Viscount Astor (1879–1952), son of the American-born William Waldorf Astor, an English politician, and newspaper proprietor.*

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“Fellow hoodlums,’ says Sterrett, ‘on behalf of the Queen I ask you to cheese it. It is an honour to be a guest at disturbing the peace under the American flag. Let us chant the passionate strains of “Yankee Doodle” while the *señor* behind the bar mitigates the occasion with another round of cochineal and aqua fortis.’

Page | 8

“Old Man Billfinger, being charged with a kind of rhetoric, makes speeches every time we stop. We explained to such citizens as we happened to step on that we were celebrating the dawn of our own private brand of liberty, and to please enter such inhumanities as we might commit on the list of unavoidable casualties.

“About eleven o’clock our bulletins read: ‘A considerable rise in temperature, accompanied by thirst and other alarming symptoms.’ We hooked arms and stretched our line across the narrow streets, all of us armed with Winchesters and navys for purposes of noise and without malice. We stopped on a street corner and fired a dozen or so rounds, and began a serial assortment of United States whoops and yells, probably the first ever heard in that town.

“When we made that noise things began to liven up. We heard a pattering up a side street, and here came General Mary Esperanza Dingo on a white horse with a couple of hundred brown boys following him in red undershirts and bare feet, dragging guns ten feet long. Jones and me had forgot all about General Mary and his promise to help us celebrate. We fired another salute and gave another yell, while the General shook hands with us and waved his sword.

“Oh, General,’ shouts Jones, ‘this is great. This will be a real pleasure to the eagle. Get down and have a drink.’

“Drink?’ says the general. ‘No. There is no time to drink. *Vive la Libertad!*’

“Don’t forget *E Pluribus Unum!*’ says Henry Barnes

“*Viva* it good and strong,’ says I. ‘Likewise, *viva* George Washington. God save the Union, and,’ I says, bowing to Sterrett, ‘don’t discard the Queen.’

“Thanks,’ says Sterrett. ‘The next round’s mine. All in to the bar. Army, too.’

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“But we were deprived of Sterrett’s treat by a lot of gunshots several square sway, which General Dingo seemed to think he ought to look after. He spurred his old white plug up that way, and the soldiers scuttled along after him.

“‘Mary is a real tropical bird,’ says Jones. ‘He’s turned out the infantry to help us to honour to the Fourth. We’ll get that cannon he spoke of after a while and fire some window-breakers with it. But just now I want some of that barbecued beef. Let us on to the plaza.’

Page | 9

“There we found the meat gloriously done, and Jerry waiting, anxious. We sat around on the grass, and got hunks of it on our tin plates. Maximilian Jones, always made tender-hearted by drink, cried some because George Washington couldn’t be there to enjoy the day. ‘There was a man I love, Billy,’ he says, weeping on my shoulder. ‘Poor George! To think he’s gone, and missed the fireworks. A little more salt, please, Jerry.’

“From what we could hear, General Dingo seemed to be kindly contributing some noise while we feasted. There were guns going off around town, and pretty soon we heard that cannon go ‘BOOM!’ just as he said it would. And then men began to skim along the edge of the plaza, dodging in among the orange trees and houses. We certainly had things stirred up in Salvador. We felt proud of the occasion and grateful to General Dingo. Sterrett was about to take a bite off a juicy piece of rib when a bullet took it away from his mouth.

“‘Somebody’s celebrating with ball cartridges,’ says he, reaching for another piece. ‘Little over-zealous for a non-resident patriot, isn’t it?’

“‘Don’t mind it,’ I says to him. ‘’Twas an accident. They happen, you know, on the Fourth. After one reading of the Declaration of Independence in New York I’ve known the S. R. O. [*Standing Room Only*] sign to be hung out at all the hospitals and police stations.’

“But then Jerry gives a howl and jumps up with one hand clapped to the back of his leg where another bullet has acted over-zealous. And then comes a quantity of yells, and round a corner and across the plaza gallops General Mary Esperanza Dingo embracing the neck of his horse, with his men running behind him, mostly dropping their guns by way of discharging ballast. And chasing ’em all is a company of feverish little warriors wearing blue trousers and caps.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“Assistance, *amigos*,’ the General shouts, trying to stop his horse. ‘Assistance, in the name of Liberty!’

“That’s the *Campania Azul*, the President’s bodyguard,’ says Jones. ‘What a shame! They’ve jumped on poor old Mary just because he was helping us to celebrate. Come on, boys, it’s our Fourth;—do we let that little squad of A. D. T.’s break it up?’

Page | 10

“I vote No,’ says Martin Dillard, gathering his Winchester. ‘It’s the privilege of an American citizen to drink, drill, dress up, and be dreadful on the Fourth of July, no matter whose country he’s in.’

“Fellow citizens!’ says old man Billfinger, ‘In the darkest hour of Freedom’s birth, when our brave forefathers promulgated the principles of undying liberty, they never expected that a bunch of blue jays like that should be allowed to bust up an anniversary. Let us preserve and protect the Constitution.’

“We made it unanimous, and then we gathered our guns and assaulted the blue troops in force. We fired over their heads, and then charged ’em with a yell, and they broke and ran. We were irritated at having our barbecue disturbed, and we chased ’em a quarter of a mile. Some of ’em we caught and kicked hard. The General rallied his troops and joined in the chase. Finally they scattered in a thick banana grove, and we couldn’t flush a single one. So we sat down and rested.

“If I were to be put, severe, through the third degree, I wouldn’t be able to tell much about the rest of the day. I mind that we pervaded the town considerable, calling upon the people to bring out more armies for us to destroy. I remember seeing a crowd somewhere, and a tall man that wasn’t Billfinger making a Fourth of July speech from a balcony. And that was about all.

“Somebody must have hauled the old ice factory up to where I was, and put it around me, for there’s where I was when I woke up the next morning. As soon as I could recollect by name and address I got up and held an inquest. My last cent was gone. I was all in.

“And then a neat black carriage drives to the door, and out steps General Dingo and a bay man in a silk hat and tan shoes.

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“‘Yes,’ says I to myself, ‘I see it now. You’re the Chief de Policeos and High Lord Chamberlain of the Calaboosum; and you want Billy Casparis for excess of patriotism and assault with intent. All right. Might as well be in jail, anyhow.’”

“‘But it seems that General Mary is smiling, and the bay man shakes my hand, and speaks in the American dialect. Page | 11”

“‘General Dingo has informed me, *Señor* Casparis, of your gallant service in our cause. I desire to thank you with my person. The bravery of you and the other *señores Americanos* turned the struggle for liberty in our favour. Our party triumphed. The terrible battle will live forever in history.”

“‘Battle?’ says I; ‘what battle?’ and I ran my mind back along history, trying to think.”

“‘*Señor* Casparis is modest,’ says General Dingo. ‘He led his brave *compadres* into the thickest of the fearful conflict. Yes. Without their aid the revolution would have failed.’”

“‘Why, now,’ says I, ‘don’t tell me there was a revolution yesterday. That was only a Fourth of—’”

“‘But right there I abbreviated. It seemed to me it might be best.”

“‘After the terrible struggle,’ says the bay man, ‘President Bolano was forced to fly. To-day Caballo is President by proclamation. Ah, yes. Beneath the new administration I am the head of the Department of Mercantile Concessions. On my file I find one report, *Señor* Casparis, that you have not made ice in accord with your contract.’ And here the bay man smiles at me, ‘cute.”

“‘Oh, well,’ says I, ‘I guess the report’s straight. I know they caught me. That’s all there is to it.’”

“‘Do not say so,’ says the bay man. He pulls off a glove and goes over and lays his hand on that chunk of glass.”

“‘Ice,’ says he, nodding his head, solemn.”

WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song

“General Dingo also steps over and feels of it.

“‘Ice,’ says the General; ‘I’ll swear to it.’

“‘If *Señor Casparis*,’ says the bay man, ‘will present himself to the treasury on the sixth day of this month he will receive back the thousand dollars he did deposit as a forfeit. *Adios, señor.*’

Page | 12

“The General and the bay man bowed themselves out, and I bowed as often as they did.

“And when the carriage rolls away through the sand I bows once more, deeper than ever, till my hat touches the ground. But this time ’twas not intended for them. For, over their heads, I saw the old flag fluttering in the breeze above the consul’s roof; and ’twas to it I made my profoundest salute.”