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THE RUTHLESS NEWSPAPERMAN CHOSE LIFE OF SERVICE

Two faces of Peter Howard

THERE were two faces to Peter Howard, leader of Moral Rearmament, and I saw them both.

Conjured up by the news of his sudden death last week at the age of 56 in Lima, Peru, where he was stricken with virus pneumonia while on a goodwill visit, is the cynical face of Peter Howard, the journalist.

Darkly handsome, but with a mocking smile in which lurked more than a touch of malice . . .

Malice, to be sure, flowed through his veins and came out of his pen—mostly gall and often pure vitriol—in the days when he laboured for Lord Beaverbrook's newspapers as a political correspondent.

Or again, there comes to the mind's eye the face of Peter Howard in the days when he turned his back on London's Fleet Street and a whisking salary to throw in his lot with Frank Buchman, whom he later succeeded as chief of M.R.A.

The malice and the mockery had been wiped away. Here, if ever I saw one, was the face of a man filled with serenity and sincerity—two virtues that were strangers to the Peter Howard of the rumbustious old days.

Affliction

HEREBABOUTS, perhaps, is the moment to say that I am writing only about the Peter Howard I knew, not thumping a big drum for Moral Rearmament and the Buchmanites. They are not for me.

Yet, quite obviously, they were for my old friend Peter. Among them he found that peace and happiness which were never his at the time he dug eager fingers into the flashpots of journalism.

Let's start at the beginning. And the Howard story as I

By

PAUL IRWIN

know it opens with the cruel affliction that shadowed his early life.

He was born with his left ankle touching the inside of his knee. His leg was little thicker than his wrist, and though massage and manipulative surgery straightened it, it remained a thin, pathetic shank.

That crippled leg did something to his mental make-up. It made him combative and aggressive; bitterly aggressive in spite of an outward seeming of rollicking humour.

Sheer guts and courage enabled him to conquer this infirmity, but it left him just that bit warped. Just how warped you only began to realise by working alongside him, as I once did on Beaverbrook's London Sunday Express.

Rugby

AT the age of seven he sprained this game leg while playing football at his "prep" school.

"Cricket's the game for you, not football," said the doctor who examined the sprain. "Stick to cricket, Peter, there's a good boy."

So what did young Peter Howard do? From that moment he bent his will and his immense physical strength—he was a big boy and a big man, every bit of 6 ft. 2 in. tall and with a body to match—to playing Rugby football.

Sheer cussedness, if you like, but he went on to get his Rugger Blue at Oxford University and play eight times for England.

Peter was a loose forward, a great loose forward. In spite of that spindle-leg, he covered a lot of ground in quick time with a curious lurching run.

I can see him now as I saw him in the days of his footballing glory, crashing upfield with huge leaping strides.

He got his first game for England against Ireland in Dublin 35 years ago. England lost a duel they should have won by a solitary point, but all the headlines were for Howard.

"From that moment any regret at the loss of the match disappeared from my heart," he confessed some years later. "Other folk on the side stayed glum. I pretended to stay glum. Yet inwardly I glowed."

It was then that he learned a fact which remained true throughout his football days. Listen to him:

"I always would rather be the star on a losing side than blush unseen in a winning one."

Deep in his heart he knew that his own success and fame were the things he really hunted—not only on the Rugby field.

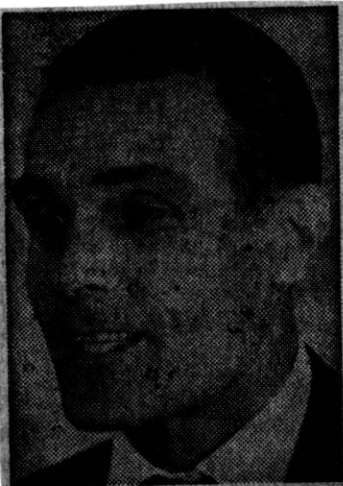
In short, Peter of the first face was all for Peter Howard. He was out for glory and gold, not minding how he got it.

Beaverbrook and his newspapers were made to measure for him. Whatever tune was called by the impish Beaver, Peter would play it.

Ruthless

GEORGE MALCOLM THOMSON, one of his former colleagues, says many people remember him as a ruthless and buccaneer political journalist.

Ruthless he certainly was. Why, he seemed to love malice



PETER HOWARD . . .
cripple who became Rugby international.

for malice's sake. He used his pen (never once did I see him at the typewriter) like a dagger.

He would say of some politician he was attacking, and he was a master of invective: "I pin him wriggling on the point of my pen."

He really meant it.

He relished office intrigue and office gossip, looting over a glass of beer or sprawling in his chair, a cynical grin on his good-looking face as he relayed the latest bit of poison.

And then, one day, a change began. I first sensed it one morning in the Sunday Express editorial room as I sought out Peter as the ideal audience for a blast at a colleague who had caught me on the raw.

"Y'know, Paul," said Peter, "you're just seeing things cockeyed. You're seeing 'em your way. Try to see the other chap's point of view. Really, he's a good fellow. Look for the good in him."

"You of all people looking for the good in mankind," I gasped with surprise. "What's come over you, Peter?"

Well, he didn't give me an answer that morning, but it wasn't long before his secret was out. He was dickering with the Buchmanites, but, as he confessed later, just hadn't the courage to say so—then.

He was like a swimmer testing the temperature of the water with his big toe before taking the plunge.

When he did so, the mighty splash was heard all over the big building of black marble and glass that houses the Beaverbrook newspapers.

His style of writing changed. "Whereas I would have written anything for the sake of the story beforehand, there were now certain things I would not write, even if it suited the convenience of the Express for me to do so."

Peter always said he wrote better, more honestly. Perhaps so, but most of his office colleagues didn't agree.

"Howard's gone soft," they said. "The Beaver won't stand much more of this sweetness and light stuff. You just wait and see."

The choice

THE crisis arrived in 1941. Peter Howard decided to write a book about the Oxford Group as Moral Re-armament was then known. Like all of us, his contract called for him to seek permission to do extraneous work.

He was told that if he wanted to write a book in support of Frank Buchman and his Group, he would have to leave the Beaverbrook organisation.

What next? He picked up his hat and walked out of Fleet Street—to nothing. Or, at least, to a run-down farm in Suffolk he was trying to re-establish with liberal injections from one of journalism's biggest pay packets until the break came.

He did build up that farm till it became one of the wartime showpieces of the Ministry of Agriculture. Don't ask me how he turned the trick. Faith must have played a large part in the operation. Faith and hard work.

Not long after World War II, and back with the London Sunday Express after serving overseas, I met Peter Howard by accident in a Glasgow hotel.

I couldn't believe he was the man I used to know. The change shone in his face. You could see it in those dark eyes under the beetling eyebrows.

It was the second face of Peter Howard, now heart and soul in the work of Moral Rearmament. The face of a man who had come to the end of an old journey and was embarked on the new.

Peter Howard put it this way: "I saw where I and millions like me had lost our way and also how we could begin forthwith to build the sort of world all men and nations long for."

He said, also, he had discovered an idea bigger than all the rest . . . Alas, like jesting Pilate, I did not wait food the answer to that one. Sometimes, when I recall that second face of Peter Howard, I wish that I had.