

**“SO PRESENTLY THEY BOTH KNEW THAT THEY WERE BLOCKED OUT OF ONE ANOTHER’S HOUSES FOR SOME TIME TO COME”: JOHN STUART MILL AND ENGAGING OTHER OPINIONS**

Dean Drone and Dr. Gallagher converse while on the Mariposa Belle. Dean Drone talks about Greek history and Dr. Gallagher talks about Canadian history. Neither man seems particularly interested in what the other has to say:

And then after that they fell talking of relics and traces of the past, and Dr. Gallagher said that if Dean Drone would come round to his house some night he would show him some Indian arrow heads that he had dug up in his garden. And Dean Drone said that if Dr. Gallagher would come round to the rectory any afternoon he would show him a map of Xerxes’ invasion of Greece. Only he must come some time between the Infant Class and the Mothers’ Auxiliary.

So presently they both knew that they were blocked out of one another’s houses for some time to come. (56-57)

The lack of interest that Dean Drone and Dr. Gallagher show towards each other could be seen as reflective of John Stuart Mill’s critique about knowing the perspectives of others.

John Stuart Mill was a liberal philosopher whose ideas interested Leacock. Mill’s book *On Liberty* considers the importance of hearing out all viewpoints. According to Mill, if you only listen to people who agree with you, then you have no grounds to reject the arguments of people who disagree with you:

He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side; if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion.<sup>3</sup>

Mill goes on to say that it is vital to hear counterarguments from the actual source:

Nor is it enough that he should hear the arguments of adversaries from his own teachers, presented as they state them, and accompanied by what they offer as refutations. [Instead] he must be able to hear them from persons who actually believe them.<sup>4</sup>

Mill believes that people must hear out all viewpoints. This is the only way to come to a rational conclusion.

1. Do you agree? Does a person who only knows their own side of a case truly know the situation?
2. How can you ensure that you have all the information you need to form a valid opinion?

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3 Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*. Penguin Classics, 1974, p. 98.

4 Mill, p. 99.