GUSTAVE MAURICE HECKSCHER, JR.

1934

"Seek not too eagerly to come of age,
Ask not impatiently all things to know,
Lest in your hurrying you lose these years
And fail to grieve their passing when they go.

"Seek not too eagerly to come of age.
We will grow wise and sane and sage.
But look instead to Youth now ere he die,
(For he is ever dying, ever being born).
It is his laugh, full to the broad face of the sky,
Which shakes the timid from beliefs outworn.
He, the outspoken hater of the lie,
Destroys the peace of men by his brave scorn;
And by his boastful words and fire
Revives ambition, keeps alive desire;
And by his plans to overturn the earth,
The world creeps slowly higher."

These verses of Maury Heckscher's, from a poem he read at the Library Supper in his Sixth Form year, help one remember what he was like as a boy.

In 1935, during a vacation, he took a walking trip in Ireland. He spent three weeks in the cottage of a fisherman in a little village on the Galway coast, "a wild, desolate place," fishing and farming

during the day, and, in the evenings, talking, singing, dancing, with his hosts and their neighbours, and playing the recorder he had brought with him.

"Then the last night came. I must tell you first how much I had got to like these people. They had asked me often whether I was lonely, and they asked me most often to sing 'My Old Kentucky Home, far away.' . . . They came every one of them that night, so that there was only left a space no bigger than a hoop in the middle of them to dance in. And everyone who could sing at all sang a song for my going. I had a song for them, too, made to the tune of 'I learned about women from her.' It wasn't meant to be a sad song, but I knew after the first verse that they would take it sadly, whether it were sad or gay. . . .

"There's a song that my heart is singing
'Bout a grand fine place I know,
A place that's to me
Like my own country,
The place that they call Carraroe. . . ."

Heckscher graduated from Oxford with high honors in 1937. Then he studied at Vienna, worked on a communal farm in Russia, spent a year at Harvard, hired himself out to a Missouri tenant farmer, worked on newspapers in Louisville, Kentucky and Auburn, New York, and wrote a novel.

In 1942, a private in the Army, he wrote from Fort Niagara: "At 11 o'clock we arrived, were finally fed, had our bedding issued —and were a last time stripped and examined. Curiously, I find these things—this lack of privacy, this enforced anonymity—not at all degrading as it would be in civilian life. For some reason I can't yet explain, you are proud in proportion as you lose your identity—probably because you are gaining a new identity with the army. . . . Could you send me the small accordion. The Sergeant thinks it would be a good idea in the barracks."

At the close of basic training at Fort Bragg, the trainees conducted a dress parade before their instructors. Heckscher was chosen to play the part of adjutant, "It was a disturbing experience—a feeling of being cut off from men I had thought myself so near—as though I were caught by this masquerade midway between the rookie and the officer I might soon become. And I disliked this estrangement, knowing that in those faces, most of them undistinguished, plain, I was seeing the real army; knowing that never again would I be quite one with them as I have been in these past weeks, knowing it would be my loss and my uprooting. And I determined then that no matter

what my position might become, my real job would be not to direct so much as to represent; for the army had simply reaffirmed for me in another sphere something I'd already known—that a nation or a people or an army is not its leaders or its intelligentsia, but the common qualities of the average run of men."

On April 25, 1944, Heckscher died of spinal meningitis at Camp Luis Obispo. He was then a First Lieutenant, Assistant Adjutant and Morale Officer on the staff of the commanding general of the 96th Division, which had just finished its amphibious training and was about to leave for the Pacific.

The *Citizen-Advertiser* of Auburn, New York, on whose staff Heckscher had worked for the year and a half before he enlisted, published an editorial about him entitled "Maury." After speaking with feeling of his sincerity, his vital and generous interest in the town of Auburn,—to which he had come on an impulse, as to Carraroe,—the editorial concluded: "The present is claiming the leaders of the future: only if those who remain have caught something of their spirit can the hope for a brave new world be realized."