



UNDER THIRTY

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UNDER THIRTY

An Anthology

Edited by

MICHAEL HARRISON

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All the stories in this collection were written by their authors before attaining their thirty-first year.



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FOREWORD

BY MICHAEL HARRISON

SEVERAL times within the last few weeks people have asked me : But why *thirty*? Why not twenty-five? they say, reminding me that there is a literary precedent for selecting that age ; or three-score years and ten? for which a literary precedent (though not, even with the help of Messrs. Heinemann, quite so important a precedent) exists. And when they asked, I could only shrug my shoulders, unable to answer ; nor, indeed, until I had sat down to write this foreword, had I realized that there might well be something more than caprice in the determining the age-limit of my contributors. To-night I stumbled on the truth, remembering that it was in 1935 that the idea of this anthology first came to me. In 1935, when I was twenty-seven.

* * *

A little personal history :

On my seventh birthday I awakened to a sense of expectation, as I had awakened (since consciousness had first supervened) on every previous birthday. But on this, my seventh birthday, although I was to awaken with the old expectancy, I was soon to know the added sense of responsibility.

On the little table by my bed was a variety of objects, among which a cap-firing pistol of pressed tinware looms most memorable in my recollection. There was also a picture-postcard, addressed to me, and wishing me 'many happy returns of the day.' I think that I remember this with a preternatural clarity because of the fact that my nurse had purchased it on the afternoon before, concealing its

true destination with that pathetic secretiveness which, in persons of her nature, proclaims all of a secret but its identity.

We had gone into a little general stores that lay at the end of a long country lane, bordered with tall elms, where are now little villas : Windermere, Braeside, Mon Abri, Le Châlet, and I don't know what else besides. And while the stores is there yet, and still called a stores, and the generalness of it has been not reduced, but rather multiplied a thousandfold, it is little no more, and the brick aprons of its tall sash windows have been bitten into by the leaden edging which protects the bravery of its too-familiar red-and-gold fascia. So all things, as was graven on the temple of the Holy Bottle, move to their end. . . .

But all these changes, these evidences of progress, were undreamt of on that far-off spring day ; and I, in common with a million other little English boys, was growing up in the calm, unquestioning acceptance of that vanished world's unchangeableness ; even though that world was (had we had the wit to perceive it) already gone. And here, although this reflexion belongs more properly to a later part of this essay, I feel compelled to point out that where we shall differ essentially from our children (if the thermite bombs permit them to reach an adult condition), and differ in an even greater degree from our grandchildren, is in the fact that, physically at least, our youth was passed in the old world. Whatever our adolescence may have brought, we were born into sights and sounds which had more affinity with the eighteenth than with the twentieth century. All but the very youngest of us here passed our childhood in a world that differed only in insignificances from the world of our great-grandfathers. Some of the carriages, of course, were driven by internal combustion engines, as some of the carriages of the eighteen-twenties and eighteen-thirties were driven by steam engines, until the bribing of Members of Parliament by the railway interests re-established the monopoly of the horse for a further sixty years. As a child I have seen the sweeps dancing on May Day in their leaf-covered wicker frames, before Mr. Gollancz and the Left Book Club made us conscious of this day's pro-

founder significance. And even eight years ago (and, for all that I know, he may be there to this day), there was, in Maidstone, an old carpenter who might, from his dress, have been the very person who walked with the Lobster, talking of cabbages and kings. Which among our children will have seen a carpenter in a cap of folded brown paper, or eaten locust, or tiger-nuts, or seen pearly-clad costers not merely cadging for unspecified charities, or sable-plumed horses between the shafts of hearses, or one-man bands, or incredible old beggars, or unshod children, or those same children selling their buckets of horse-dung at the garden gate, or any one of those thousand vanished things that made up the fabric of our childish everyday? In our childhood there were telephones, of course, as there had been telephones since twenty years before Graham Bell had 'invented' them, and wireless, as there had been wireless since forty years before Marconi had 'invented' that. And there were Pearl White and Flora Finch and John Bunny at the picture-palace, and Charlie Chaplin, too, although he wore the trappings of a stage French count. But all these benefits had, in 1914, only the rank of novelties, amusements, luxuries—what you will. They had not yet affected, as to-day they so profoundly affect, the vital structure of existence. In 1914, when I was seven, it was still the old world. Only yesterday did the old order give place to the new: when the grey repetitions of Euston and Paddington and Hammersmith began to crumble beneath the pick of the housebreaker's men, to reform in the higher, whiter glory of the block of flats: Eureka Court, Borborygm Feilde, Mount Byzantium. O tempora, O mores . . . !

Until a lustrum since, it was possible to find whole towns whose architecture had known no change nor addition since the eighteenth century, and even with those of us to whom the advantage of the Woolworth Stores came early, we grew up to accept as commonplaces the restrained fancies of Georgian and Regency architects, and often of builders even more ancient. I think that this factor is too frequently ignored in estimating the curious temperament manifest in our young men, who grew up in the fag-end of a civiliza-

tion, and are not (as too many of them think) the vanguard of a newer existence, but rather the rearguard—the stragglers, if you like—of an older way of living.

* * *

Well, to get back to that long, elm-bordered lane. My nurse bought a picture-postcard at the little general stores : a glutinous affair of roses and tinsel, with two simpering faces and a 'poem.' The following morning I awoke to find its sickly charms adorning the little mound of gifts.

Nannie said, on entering the bedroom :

“Many happy returns !”

I thanked her for her good wishes. I said, observing, with the clear eye of childhood, her hardly concealed diffidence :

“Is this the postcard that you bought yesterday afternoon ?”

“What if it is ?”

“Well, but, Nannie, *is* it ?”

“Ask no questions, hear no lies,” was the reply.

There was no answer to that. I was, in truth, more excited than I had cared to confess, for she was a pretty girl, and the romantic passion that I had already conceived for Miss Pearl White had rendered me more than susceptible to a generalization of the sentiment. She said, with a mock severity that I found quite enchanting :

“A gentleman doesn't ask a lady where she bought whatever it was she sent him !”

“Oh !” said I, “I don't *really* want to know.”

Mollified :

“Well, that's good. And to-day you've got to be a good boy. Extra-specially good, I mean.”

I asked why. I have always asked why. She explained :

“Because you're seven. And that,” she said with a seriousness which I might not altogether disregard, “is the First Milestone. Seven, fourteen, twenty-one. . . . Like that. . . .”

“Like what ?”

“Like what I said. Seven. And another seven years.

And that makes fourteen. And another seven makes twenty-one. And then you're a man. Do you see?"

* * *

I saw. Indeed, the origin of what Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge has called my 'romantic discontent' lies in nothing more than the inability to look backward except with regret for the past, and forward but to grow fearful for what new 'improvement' lies before me. This has ever been my way—at least, since Nannie first called my attention to the swift passage of the years. I can remember a tearful little boy, in 1915, almost inconsolable because 1912 was already three years distant and would never be any nearer. Why, out of all the years in human history, I should have selected that as the very limit of the Golden Age I have still not discovered, but 1912, in my childhood, marked for me the end of that existence that was worth living. I don't know why: my Celtic blood has, no doubt, much to do with this reluctance to accept the present. After all, in accommodation there is a savour of self-discipline, and self-discipline, like every other form of discipline, is abhorrent to the Celtic soul. I have not the least doubt that a psychologist could tell me—for what is there a psychologist will not tell you, if you give him half a chance? Yet, curiously enough, I am not over desirous of discovering why I suffer from this odd sort of hyperæsthesia in regard to time: it is enough for me to realize that it is part of my nature, and that no to-day will ever possess a tenth of the charm that the day before yesterday holds for me.

* * *

Now, thirty is no multiple of seven, but there is, for all that, a great deal more definite in its implications compared with twenty-eight. I talk now of ages. Thirty seems to me to be a dividing between youth and manhood so adequate and justified that, compared with it, the selection of twenty-one appears almost speciously arbitrary: an excuse for trustees to throw off the burden of their trusteeship, for wards to assume the burden of their own bills, and

for politicians and parents to begin to recoup themselves for the work that they have put to the turning quite intelligent young men into breadwinners and dupes. So much for the Third Milestone. But thirty is a different sort of proposition. At thirty one is, of course, still a young man, but even the newspapers make tacit admission that one has reached an age when maturity is imminent, and at thirty, one has to bludgeon the elderly husband of one's middle-aged mistress before the newspapers will call one 'a boy.' No, there are thousands besides Mr. Godfrey Winn for whom the cry: 'I'll never be thirty again!' holds an almost intolerable poignancy.

* * *

The year 1935 will always be memorable for me by reason of a curious phenomenon: the extraordinary number of young writers of the first class who achieved a noteworthy success, some with first novels, others with seconds and thirds. There was Mr. Anthony Thorne, for instance, whose wholly admirable *Delay in the Sun* earned him an *Evening Standard* choice, but which would have established him as a serious writer even without that gratifying commendation. There was Mr. Hugh Talbot, another of Mr. Howard Spring's selections. In Mr. Talbot, it was evident that we had a romantic historian that one day would achieve the quality of a Dumas or a Quiller-Couch, and in Mr. Richard Blake-Brown's wayward fancies the material that would most certainly enable him to fill the gap left by Ronald Firbank's death. Then again, we had Mr. Hugh Brooke, whose novels, *Man Made Angry* and *Miss Mitchell*, while neurotic with a most sinister intensity, are constructed with a balance and clarity of thinking that partakes nothing of the abnormal emotions of which they treat. Nor in considering the list of notable young writers must mention fail to be made of Mr. John Collier, Mr. Wynyard Browne, and Mr. R. G. Goodyear, whose *I Lie Alone* marked him as a novelist of powers already mature. Then there were others of established reputations, but who had published works during the year which had not lessened those reputations: Mr. Evelyn

Waugh and his brother Alec, Mr. John Heygate, Mr. John Betjeman. In the world of the theatre my friend Roddy Ackland was consolidating his position after one temporary set-back, and another young writer had abandoned the theatre for the novel : Mr. Laurence Miller, whose play, *Head-on Crash*, in which Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Miss Flora Robson, and the late Mr. Cronin-Wilson acted, many readers will remember. Mr. James Agate said of this play : ' This piece is a failure on an extraordinary high level, and worthier of respect than fifty abject successes.' The writer, in acknowledging Mr. Agate's epigrammatic neatness of expression, would apply the same criticism to Mr. Miller's first novel. It was not a success, and, if Mr. Miller will forgive my saying so, it did not really deserve to be, but its publication, from the author's point of view, was justified in that it demonstrated his ability in the technique of the novel. One of Mr. Miller's short stories is included in the present collection, but I shall have more to say of the contributors later. Nor, in ending this survey of young authorship in 1935 must I overlook Mr. H. E. Bates, adding fresh laurels to an already over-burdened crown ; Mr. Arthur Calder-Marshall, busy emerging from the chrysalis stage of creativeness in a manner which he describes in the following pages far better than lies within my power ; and, lastly, Mr. Gawen Brownrigg, whose *Star against Star* is a *tour-de-force* of youthful competence, almost unbelievable in its precocious understanding of the feminine mind. I could go on giving names far beyond the space at my disposal, and if I have omitted names that deserved inclusion the reader will understand that only the exigencies of brevity prevent their mention. But I have enumerated enough to show that that year was, indeed, a most memorable year where youthful talent was concerned. Youth forced itself on one's notice ; did not allow itself to be overlooked or ignored, and I wondered a little, in considering this eruption of the creative spirit, if, indeed, the consciousness of imminent eld was not the motive force behind all this tremendous activity ? From that thought, it was easy enough to progress to a curiosity that permitted me no

repose until I had discovered something of the writers themselves, and the satisfying curiosity in a small degree elicited the astonishing fact that the ages of most were nearly identical : that is, between twenty-five and thirty. Was it, I was forced to ask myself, that in the attaining that age reposed some undeniable compulsion to declare one's talent or for ever hold one's peace? Or, missing that earlier tide, must one wait until the St. Martin's Summer of intellectuality and let one's genius flower only as some late Autumn crocus, in the manner of William de Morgan? Only in examining my own heart have I seemed to find an answer to these deep questions, and while the identity of the songs that the Sirens sang or that name that Achilles assumed when he played among the women, are to be discovered, so they say, with proper searching, such research lies beyond both my skill and my patience, and so it is with this metaphysical property of thirty. I can only fly to vague surmise and speculation.

* * *

The reader will understand how, from this inordinate interest in the younger writer, it was but a short step to my wishing to make a permanent record of so transient, so ephemeral a condition as that which those writers enjoyed. In ten years time the majority of them would, please God ! be still with us, but they would be approaching the Lesser Climacteric, and what they had thought of that brief phase through which they were now passing, while clear enough, no doubt, in their minds, would be so tintured by all the trials and achievements, the failures and successes of ten years, that one might not rely on them for a true picture of what they had thought as they rushed headlong for their thirtieth year.

I determined then that I would make a collection of these young writers : their histories, their views and their work. If one should ask me what more I hoped, in making this collection, to justify than a personal curiosity, I can only reply that on the shoulders of the young man who is thirty to-day rests the heavy burden of the world. When older

and younger are shivering within their fortresses of reinforced concrete, we shall be tainting the mud with our purulent corpses, or dropping from the bomb-starred skies as a leaf falls, but faster and less tranquilly, and in no hope of some regenerate Spring. . . .

I like to think that when a mile-deep Whitehall trembles to the distant concussion of the bombs, and through the barren earth distills the poison that is less deadly than the evil which brought it into being, some 'statesman,' of worth too precious to risk amid the thermite and lewisite and hail of metal shards and gangrenous vapours above, may reach for a book to while away the shivering hours of waiting and find this volume. For here are other things than war ; than the whining cadence of the shell against the deep chiaroscuro of the barrage, and what songs we have to sing are sung to a different metre than is provided by the petulant rattle of the Brens and the Hotchkisses. There are unheroic things here, and things about which no one but us could have sung. There is the story of the child who went barefooted to seek the pint of soup that had been refused his parents, and, because he had no other receptacle, took a chamber-pot, the only sound vessel remaining to his stricken household. Mr. Parker, the author of this moving little story, will tell you in his autobiographical note that he is a Communist. I am no Communist myself, and, indeed, I am not at all certain what are the qualifications for the right to describe oneself as a Communist, but Mr. Parker's story will help the reader to *understand* what may be an unfamiliar and possibly repugnant viewpoint far better than a dozen volumes of the *Das Kapital* and *Anti-Dühring* type.

* * *

I mentioned the idea to the son of a well-known publisher : one night, at a cocktail party. A literary cocktail party. He confessed himself much taken with the notion, and gave me formal permission to proceed with the collection of the stories.

It was amusing work, and arduous work, too ; for in

all I read more than a hundred manuscripts ; and letters, in the true literary tradition, went a long time without an answer. It hardly matters now to whom I applied for tales and histories ; after the first half-dozen letters had gone out, answers began to come in unsolicited. With that kindly spirit which distinguishes your true artist—to whom accomplishment is not to be reckoned primarily in terms of material gain—Mr. Edward O'Brien sent me a number of names suitable for my list. In the end I had reluctantly to inform a number of most worthy applicants that I was unable to accept any more stories, either for perusal or for inclusion. When the volume was complete, I was informed that the publishers had changed their mind. Once more I had to write to my young men, and this time to tell them that the collection was indefinitely shelved.

* * *

It is one of the commoner superstitions of the publishing world that upon the collection of short stories rests a hoodoo, which neither the quality of the story nor the prestige of the author (or authors) has power to cast off. When the publishers, after what they called ' careful consideration,' decided against publication, their action was only in deference to this inherent suspicion of the omnibus's virtue. But their answer was final.

Still, I had had a great deal of fun making the collection, and disappointed as I was at failing to achieve publication, I had, in truth, the satisfaction of knowing that I had succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectations. For, of thirty young men, eight who were unknown when I picked out their stories from the hundred sent me, have since appeared in the publishers' lists, and of the rest, not one but has confirmed the promise implicit in the one or two works whose writing impelled me to invite him to contribute to my collection.

* * *

And what an extraordinary collection it was, in which every trade but that of the professional writer was repre-

sented ! (It's different to-day, as you may see by the autobiographical notes ; for several of the authors have gone into journalism for a living.) There was Walter Brierley, who left his elementary school at the age of thirteen to go down the mine, and wrote two stories that gained him the Arthur Markham Memorial Prize while enjoying the rich experience that only a labour exchange may afford. There was John Heygate, heir to a baronetcy, and almost a professional journalist (he was in the film business then), and Gawen Brownrigg, heir to another baronetcy, who had the closest connection with the business of letters of any of us, for he was in a publisher's office. At the time of his recent death he was in Kenya, on a paper : another one who turned journalist in earnest. Tangye Lean contributed to *Isis*, I believe, and was about to turn journalist as seriously as Brownrigg ; in his case, on the literary side of the *News Chronicle*. I was secretary to a doctor in those days : Fleet Street was yet distant ; and several of my young men, I suspect, were doing nothing at all. One of the best stories submitted, *The Song of the Scythe*, came from a young man who lived in Northampton, Douglas Boyd. I have since had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Boyd, who gave me the technical name of his occupation. I have forgotten it, but Mr. H. E. Bates could tell me, no doubt, as that was his occupation for a time : I mean the business of making boots. No profession seems to cast a blight over the astonishing ambition of these young men : I had not, in those days, heard of Mr. Richard Parker, but his case will serve as an excellent example of what I intend to point out. Among the many occupations with which Mr. Parker has busied himself is that of pig-gelder. *Verb sap.*, as the old phrase has it !

I realize that it will be a tremendous comfort to all reactionaries—members of the Labour Party and so forth—to observe how many of my contributors received their education in the State schools. Such people will point to this undeniable fact as proof of the worth of the compulsory educational system. They are welcome to the satisfaction that such 'proof' brings them. For myself, I realize, and

so do all my collaborators, that the only education that is worth a damn is the education which one provides oneself, so that undue importance should not be attached to the fact that the public schools have a bad showing in my list.

Through Mr. O'Brien's kindness I made the acquaintance of what (something against their wishes, I believe) has come to be known as the Birmingham Group. Peter Chamberlain, whom the Birmingham *Sunday Mercury* called, somewhat ambiguously, the 'sophisticated' member of the group, is the grandson of a former Lord Mayor of Birmingham, while Leslie Halward, one of the finest short-story writers of our day, has been a plasterer's labourer, and has known the rigours of the Means Test. Walter Allen, youngest of the group, has been a schoolmaster (experience turned to excellent use in *The Geography Master*) and has lectured on English in the State University of Iowa. John Hampson, whose *Sunday Night at the Greyhound*, which you can now buy in the Penguin edition for a tanner—and you most certainly should—is as good as anything of its kind, is the grandson of another famous Birmingham figure: Mercer Simpson, who managed the Birmingham Theatre Royal in Victorian days. And I have just remembered that Peter Chamberlain was a journalist: he is a motor-cyclist of experience, and did the sports column for a time on a motor-cycling paper.

Who else was there? Laurence Miller, whom I have mentioned: son of a doctor, and victor over great physical handicaps that have never touched his calm outlook. That astonishing child, David Gascoyne (he is, even to-day, only twenty-one). What he was doing for a living, I don't quite know; but he was writing well enough to have justified considerable inactivity. John Lindsey, at twenty-five or so, was completing his twenty-somethingth novel, and earning the money that they failed to provide in teaching nasty little boys, *amo*, *amas*, *amat*, and the rest of it. He's still doing it, poor chap!

But Lord! I can't go on like this. There are too many of them, and the life stories grow even more fantastic. But the collection was off, and I wrote to tell them so. They

passed out of my ken : back to schoolroom and racing-track and plasterer's trowel and (who knows?) gelding-knife and labour exchange. . . .

* * *

And there the matter remained until the beginning of this year. But sometime in the Autumn of last year I found myself becoming only too uncomfortably aware of Time's wingèd chariot's rumbling tread. Rumbling? Say, rather : *rushing!* I turned up the old letters ; read once more the old words of understanding and commiseration with which all had soothed the harshness of failure. "My God!" said Mr. Wynyard Browne, writing from a Norfolk vicarage, "what a racket!" and in some other condolences the elegancies were even less lightly observed.

Well, I read all the old letters, and my mind was made up. Within a few months the ominous age should have engulfed most of us (some, indeed, having already crossed the fateful border) and soon we should have forgotten what it was about that earlier age that was so different from the age that so shortly we should own. I wrote to the original contributors : some answered—most of them—and a few did not, but whether that was because authors are always changing their addresses (landlords being what they are!) or because there is still a lot of truth in the saying that a burnt child fears the fire, I shall never know. But, as on that previous occasion, far more applied than were applied to, and once more I found myself with over a hundred stories to read. I read them : I made my selection. It fills the pages following this preface. I found a publisher, by whose courage I am permitted to address you from this safest of rostra, to which no eggs or moribund tomatoes may ever penetrate. Now, all that remains for me to find is the sympathetic reader.

* * *

I mentioned just now that I had had through my hands the better part of two hundred short stories, so that the reader may well wonder which principle I followed in select-

ing, out of that large number, no more than twenty-nine. First of all, let me say that I am not offering these thirty stories as the finest that have ever been written; not even as the finest that have been written by young men under thirty; not even, in truth, as the finest out of all those stories that were sent to me. I did not set out to compile a *Best Short Stories of 1938*. Why should I? Mr. O'Brien does, has been doing, that sort of thing for a number of years, and he does it too well that anyone should hope to improve on his efforts. No, what I wanted to do was to prepare what *Time and Tide* I am sure would call a 'conspicuous' of the world of the younger writer: a conspectus whose survey should include both the man and his work, treating the two interests as inseparable—as, indeed, they should always be treated. I have, therefore, in making my selection, imposed this condition: that each member of my little band shall be representative of his type, and that his story shall be interpretative of himself. I hope that that's clear enough? I do hope so, indeed; for only in the making this clear can I look for understanding in the reader of the principle involved in my selection.

And if one looks for some uniting sentiment among all these young men; some sentiment, that is to say, other than their love of the pen, I think that it will be found in the note of protest with which each story is informed, whether it be Mr. Parker voicing his discontent with the system that makes a grudging and insolently administered privilege out of what should be an inalienable right, or Mr. Betjeman, sighing for a world in which progress is measured by other standards than the centralization of the distributive trades (What now, Mr. Betjeman? Is it to be *G. K.'s Weekly* or *The British Union*?), or Mr. Philip Scott, almost the only representative of the pure traditionalist in my collection, gently bemoaning the unequal partition of charm, and the dispensation by which the romantic impulse must be stifled through the accident of the unromantic presence. I suppose that this discontent with established custom; this reluctance to settle down into that acceptance

which is the most notable characteristic of the old age for which we are so rapidly heading, has always been the index and the sigil of youth. But never, surely, was it so important a factor of the youthful spirit as it is to-day.

And what should that signify? That in the elements of this questioning discontent repose the seeds of a new and better order of living? The seeds, yes: but it would be a bolder man than I who might dare affirm that those seeds will ever germinate, sown as they are in the arid soil of resignation and watered by no gentle dew of hope. Let this volume, then, remain as the testament of what we thought of a world after a thousand gods and a score of saviours and, of wise men, the number of the sands upon the seashore: after all these had done their wordy damnedest, and we have risen on stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things. Do we find it good? Curiously enough, yes, The world, that is to say. But of those capricious ordinances which spring from the prejudices or venalities of kings and prime ministers, or from the migraines of livery judges, we remain distressingly contemptuous.

Ungrateful little things! For where should we be: where indeed? if there were no one to look after us; to regulate every hour of our waking (and much of our sleeping) hours. Where indeed!

* * *

No, for all that we indulge a respectful envy for those talents by which a man can abandon some trivial, unremunerative occupation (a small provincial solicitor's practice, say, or the secretaryship of some second-rate trade union) and, taking on the care of the public weal at a salary which every newspaper reader knows to be grossly inadequate, can yet contrive to achieve an easy competence (to say nothing of the earldom) so that, in the fullness of time, some of us can write his memoirs for him at a guinea a thousand—pale Ghosts, more wan and spectral than those who chased Odysseus from the gates of Hell!—for these talents we have envy enough. But would we change;

and has that respectful envy reconciled us to our bondage?
Ah-ha. . . .!

* * *

So perhaps, after all, it is not surprising that a curious egotism seems manifest in our young men: the sort of egotism that consists rather in looking to oneself for assistance than in believing oneself to be wiser or better or more deserving than one's neighbour. Of this latter (and odious) sort our young men are happily free. They are not self-centred so much as self-contained, and their interest in the world around them is both lively and continuous, nor are their compassions shy of stirring. But—and this is where their generation differs fundamentally from every preceding generation—they have lost faith in everything but themselves, nor does this turning to themselves for the only help they may command spring from a certitude of their own ability, but rather from the certitude that the old guides and the old prophets guided only themselves; prophesied only with the windy inanities of Delphi. For—and we are the first to regret it—we have rumbled the old men, and through them and *because* of them, we have learnt to mistrust the old standard. Those garrulous old men, who have told us that little boys should be seen and not heard! We might have respected the injunction had they perserved an equal reticence. But what did they do? Did their cynicism go as far as to permit them to think that we should miss the implications of their self-justificatory memoirs; their 'explanations'; their countless 'true versions' of this disaster and that betrayal; screaming their several protests against misunderstanding, the while their dirty linen—and how dirty it is only a reader of a politician's memoirs can know—pollutes the air. The War. . . . Who started that? Please, Teacher, it wasn't me! I think it must have been *him*. . . .! But as we both got the same reward, hero and discredited failure, what the hell, children, what the sweet hell!

The Marne, Kut, Jutland, Passchendaele, Versailles. . . .
Do you want to know about them, and who was to blame

for what went wrong? Well, a thousand innocent victims of misrepresentation will tell you, at half a guinea to eighteen bob the volume.

No, we shall stick to our writing, hoping perhaps that through it may come the material and spiritual assistance that we require. For no one can help us but ourselves, and the cynical plundering of our natural birthright has made us—understandably, do you think?—not inclined to patch-up the crumbling fabric of our ‘civilization,’ which was never our civilization, anyway. And that is what you will find in the succeeding pages: that the old magic has gone. We don’t believe in the old tales, and we cannot accept the legend of god-like omniscience in our rulers. For, whatever myths you will find in the ancient cosmogonies—Hebrew, Greek, Hindu, Aztec—you will never there find a god who apologized for having been led astray. Well, we have been told; and if we ever, in the future, should fall into the errors of trusting those to whom trust may never be more than the occasion of betrayal, or respect those who cannot even respect themselves, then we shall deserve all that will most surely come to us. So, to your pen, my brave young men! who have left your coal mines and carpenter’s benches and church organs and insurance offices for the less certain prospects of the pen; your regular, safe jobs, with the Staff Superannuation Fund and the little maisonette at Sidcup, for the Barmecide feasts of literary cocktail parties and the lairs of the literary agents, strewn with the whitened bones of a multitude of ambitions. . . .

Scribble away, fledgling neophytes of Apollo, and your reward may not be the hollow vanity that men would have you think it, for all that your names will even in the end be plain Mr. Brierley and plain Mr. Halward, and plain Mr. Hampson, unamplified by titles that ring with the sonorous majesty of a *Te Deum*, nor ever will your chests know the bravery of orders that shine with the glory of the sun-in-splendour. Though, indeed, there may be one of our company smug enough to earn himself a knighthood. . . . But I doubt it; I doubt it. . . .

Shall we be cast down by this insufficiency? Shall we,

young men? Or shall we value more what perhaps may with justice be said of us, that was said of another of our company :

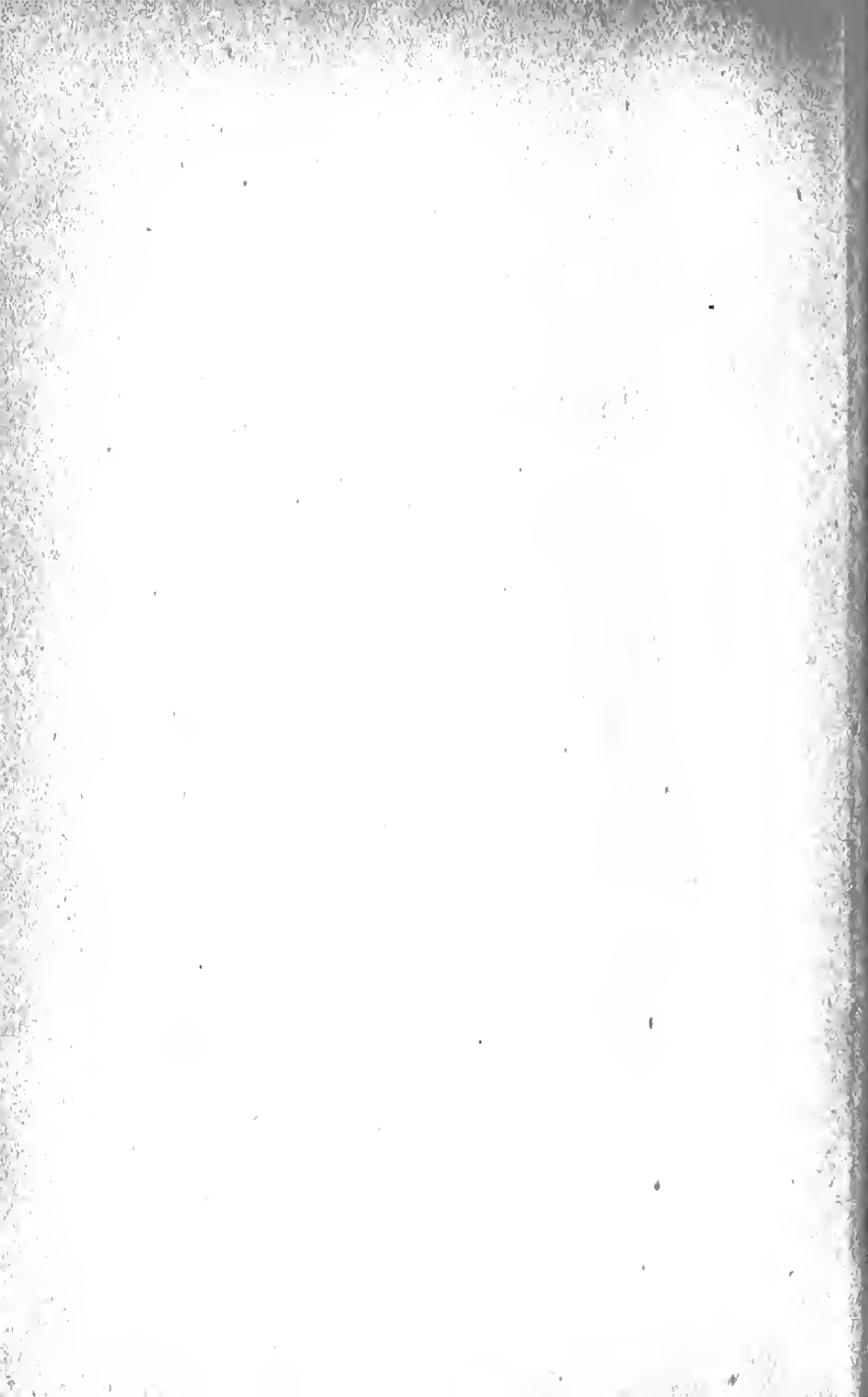
ἦν γὰρ παρῆ φιλανθρωπία παρεστι καὶ φιλοτεχνία.

(“Where the love of man is, there also is love of the art”)?

WALTER ALLEN

★

The Geography Master



I WAS born at Aston, Birmingham, on 23 February 1911, and if there were any justice in the world I should now just about be retiring from professional football to grow fat in my own pub ; because, until I was eleven I went to the local elementary school where, inspired by the Villa, I played football in the playground every dinner-hour. I was the worst footballer in the school. I won a scholarship to Aston Grammar School, where I became the worst rugger player in the school. I disliked school, but since I became an adept at running with the hare and hunting with the hounds and always made my friends among the toughest boys, because I was most afraid of these, I did not have too bad a time.

In 1929 I won an open entrance scholarship at Birmingham University, where I read English. I cut as many lectures as I could, filled the University magazine with imitations of Joyce, Edgell Rickword, Eliot and Auden, a policy which resulted in a new low in sales, and got a better degree than I deserved.

When I went down I started free-lancing. Also I lectured for the W.E.A., wrote and read children's stories from Midland Regional, and began to write short stories and criticism. Then for six months I was a temporary master at my old school. I found I disliked being a schoolmaster as much as I'd disliked being a schoolboy.

In 1935 I went to the States to lecture on modern literature in the summer session of Iowa University. I was in America six months, spent all the money I had made in the Middle West in Kansas City, Chicago and New York, and came back to England on a cargo boat, a voyage memorable because the skipper was sea-sick the whole time.

For eighteen months I worked as a feature-writer in a Birmingham news agency. Then Michael Joseph accepted my novel, *Innocence Is Drowned*, and I came to London. I

am now reviewing, reading for films, and working on a new novel.

I feel I have been particularly lucky in the sympathy and encouragement I have received from my father and from other and older writers, especially from my friends John Hampson, Edward J. O'Brien, and H. S. Cater, who tried to make a newspaperman out of me but caught me too late.

I have contributed to *The Spectator*, *The Listener*, *New Stories*, *Night and Day*, *The Bookman*, *The Radio Times*, *The New English Weekly*, *The New Republic*, and *American Prefaces*.

WALTER ALLEN.

THE GEOGRAPHY MASTER

FOR the third morning in succession Dryden stayed in the empty form-room at break instead of going into the Common Room. On the desk lay his open mark-book and beside it the Remove's test papers. They were disgraceful ; and the School Certificate examination was only three months away. Not one of them would pass in Geography. Dryden felt very sorry for himself : the blame would fall on him. I am a failure, he muttered miserably to himself. He had always been terrified of failure, and he was sure that they discussed him already in the Common Room. " Ah, Dryden ! Nice fellow and a scholar, but a failure as a schoolmaster. Can't keep discipline. Pity ! "

A failure. The word bit into his brain as though written in acid. He saw himself : a rock half-buried in sea-sand ; gaily the advancing waves pranced at the rock's black base, impertinently flicked spray over the glistening sable escarpment. One day they would submerge it.

He turned back the pages of the mark-book until he came to those devoted to his own form, 3a. He knew the names by heart : Adderley, Anderson, Andrews, Belpar, the thirty of them down to the little Jewboy Zukovsky. The desks in front of him were filled with their shades spread out fanwise before him, their hub and focal point. They were his boys, each one of them known and noted, their futures stamped on them already, the happy-go-lucky, the close business man, the secret drinker, the shyster, the wheedler, the square peg in the round hole, the successful whose strength was in the exploitation of his weakness. In the middle of them was young Fearon ; and then the shadows assumed solidity, the room was alive again. Dryden bent over his papers. There was silence in the

room. Then a desk-lid clattered down and Dryden started suddenly, jerking his head sideways like a shying horse.

“Who banged that desk-lid?”

Angrily his eyes swept over the thirty upturned faces, faces like flowers ranged in a formal garden, innocent, decorous, bright; faces on which lurked scarcely suppressed grins. There was silence.

“Fearon. Was it you?” Feeling himself flushed, his hands trembling.

Fearon shot up from his seat. A grotesque harelip seared his mouth like a purple weal; so the face was gnome-like and malicious in expression. He grinned twistedly, happily, gripping the ledge of the desk and looking first at his feet and then at the master; writhing. The class leaned forward, expectant and happy.

“Well?” snapped Dryden.

“Meesir? Nosir!” The words slobbered from the mouth that was as misshapen as the painted grin on a clown’s face. He gazed at Dryden with big brown lustrous eyes, beautiful eyes above the tortured lips. They were eyes soft with innocence.

“All right. Sit down.”

Dryden spoke wearily. It was hopeless. But he knew it had been Fearon. Then the bell rang and there was a banging of desks and a scurry of feet towards the door. “Quietly!” he protested against the din. But no one heard him; he was submerged. Then there was silence; he was left suddenly high and dry above the spate.

Fearon. Fearon. The boy obsessed him. He had ruined the discipline of the form. He exploited his defect, revelled in his slobbering speech like a cretin’s and used it as a device for comedy. Now Dryden hated to have the boy approach him; he smelled with the sickeningly sweet stench of the children of the very poor; miasma of underclothes too rarely washed and changed. But he was a happy little boy, and he had turned the class against Dryden. When he turned to write upon the blackboard Dryden was conscious of thirty pairs of eyes ironically scrutinizing him. At night he dreamed of those eyes boring into him,

and in the centre of them were Fearon's eyes, big, brown, beautiful, shining softly and maliciously. The face loomed through his dreams like the face of the Cheshire Cat. Then the whole class was upon him, laughing at his threats. "Quietly! Quietly!" His lips framed the words, but no sounds came. The din was too great, and no one heard him.

He was a failure. He hated himself for the humiliation he had brought upon himself. He saw himself in thirty years' time: a second 'Stinker,' as the German master at his old school had been called, shuffling along the corridors like a broken horse on its way to the knackers, head on one side, muttering to himself, ignorant of the sheet of paper, 'Stinker,' pinned to the back of his tattered gown; and then squinting about him with suspicious eyes and suddenly letting fly at a passing boy's head with a chubby paw: "Gerrout of my way, you young *lout!*" A comic figure, enemy of boys and butt for boys. Grimly riding a push-bike through Bavaria in the summer holidays, exploring the beauties of church architecture and muttering to himself.

He was twenty-three; and he wondered whether there was still time to enter another profession. But what? His degree was not good enough for him to get a position in a university; and he believed that teaching was a mission and that in the understanding of the principles of Geography lay the key to the problems of the modern world. If it were only Dartington Hall! But it was Marl Hill Secondary School, and his job was to help the sons of honest artisans to rise above their fathers by qualifying for posts as clerks.

A bell rang, and the noise in the playground outside flared up. There was a clattering in corridors. Dryden pulled himself up, feeling his face strained and severe. He waited for Remove. Their work was disgraceful, their knowledge of the geography of the United States appalling; and the School Certificate exam. was only three months ahead.

One by one the boys sauntered into the room. They were at that age when boys are boys no longer and yet are

still remote from manhood. Their faces were pimply ; incipient hair smeared their upper lips. In his few months of teaching Dryden had watched their progress from knickers and tousled hair to trousers and hair stiff and shiny and malodorous with cheap brilliantine. Watching, Dryden pitied them. Skulking behind their atlases they drew pictures of motor bikes and designed wireless sets ; in Divinity they giggled over Deuteronomy. But Dryden's job was to teach them the geography of the United States so that they might qualify for posts as municipal clerks and wear plus-fours on Sundays.

He got up from his desk and drew a sketch-map of the Great Lakes on the blackboard. Behind him, voices were loudly insolent. He felt himself flush. But he would wait. Slowly the boys sat down and, turning, Dryden was just in time to see a desk carefully upset by a cunning foot. The lid opened and half a dozen books fell on to the floor.

"Who did that?" asked Dryden, pointing to the desk. His voice was level, but he felt himself shaking. There was a confused chorus : "Pleasesir, Thompson. Nosir, Phillips. That's a lie, sir, it was Smith, sir. . . . Nosir, Bargee, I mean Bartholomew, sir. . . ."

"All right, all right. I'll find out later." The din was unendurable. "You, Smith, put the desk in its proper position. Help him, Ricketts!" Three other boys also darted forward, and the desk was hauled into its place by over-zealous hands. Dryden watched ; the hubbub flowed over him in waves ; he was passive. He saw how one of them in hauling up the desk was careful to flick the ink-well out of its socket with his little finger ; the ink lay in a gleaming pool upon the floor. But he said nothing ; he was content to be a spectator. He saw how self-consciously they behaved, glancing first at him and then at their fellows, posing continually for one another's approval. They swaggered back to their seats, talking casually to the boys they passed. Seated, they hitched up their trousers at the knee, crossed their legs or shot them out under the desk, yawning elaborately, leaned back. Parodies of men.

Dryden waited.

At last there was something like silence. Dryden held up the test papers. There were cries of: "Ooh, our tests! . . . How many have I got, sir? . . . You got a duck, I bet! . . ." He waited again; now he was getting impatient. Why bother to turn them into municipal clerks? Why intervene at all? Why not let them be butcher-boys and labourers, with the dole waiting for them when they were twenty-one and expecting men's wages?

"I may as well tell you straight away," he said, "that these papers are disgraceful. Without exception. You'll all do them again, for to-morrow morning. There'll be detention for anyone who fails to bring his work to me at nine o'clock."

Murmurs of resentment. "Shut up!" he shouted. He saw through narrowed eyes the comic fear they displayed at his threat. He was angry. The young fools! But he controlled himself. "That's enough," he said. "And in case you are under a misunderstanding and think you've done well, let me tell you the maximum mark was a hundred and not fifty!" He stopped for a moment. "Now you know what work you have to do. Get on with it."

He walked along the rows, returning papers, pointing out errors, answering questions. The boys settled down to their work, and Dryden leaned for a few moments against his desk watching them. They were pitifully awkward; everything had to be explained to them a dozen times. But for once they weren't working at all badly. He turned away to the blackboard and began a sketch-map of the Appalachian system. This period was going better than he had expected; but for all that he decided he would get out of teaching. He was still young enough to sit for the Civil Service. Perhaps the Colonial Office. . . .

"Please, sir."

He wheeled round, chalk held poised in his hand, his fair hair sweeping over his forehead. It was Bartholomew, 'Bargee,' a hulking youth too big for his age, sullen and uncivil, with a heavy jowl and heavy fists that dangled down at his sides as he walked. Now, the jowl was yet heavier. He proffered Dryden his test paper.

“ Well, Bartholomew ? ”

The boy growled surlily. “ Please, sir, my marks are wrong ! ”

“ Well ? ”

“ I should have twenty-two and you’ve only given me eighteen. ”

The boy’s tone annoyed Dryden. He spoke contemptuously : “ Since the maximum was a hundred, three more or less won’t make much difference on *your* paper. Sit down and get on with your work. ”

The boy stared at him with puzzled eyes. Marks were sacrosanct. “ Aren’t you going to alter them ? ” he asked.

Sudden anger flared up in Dryden : the boy was being insolent ! He struggled to control himself, leaned forward on his hands pressed downward on the desk.

“ Did you hear what I said ? ” His voice rose in a sudden yell. “ Sit down ! ” The loudness of his voice startled him, and he gripped the desk to check the trembling of his body. Muttering, the boy shambled away. Dryden watched him ; all his hatred was now fused in the ungainly lumbering boy.

As he sat down Bartholomew glared at him and mumbled something to his neighbour.

Dryden leaped down from the platform. Rage shook him ; the room was suddenly misty, like a blurred photograph. “ What did you say ? What did you say ? ” he shouted. Eyes were turned curiously upon him, eyes flowering out of the mist.

“ I said it wasn’t fair, ” the boy muttered.

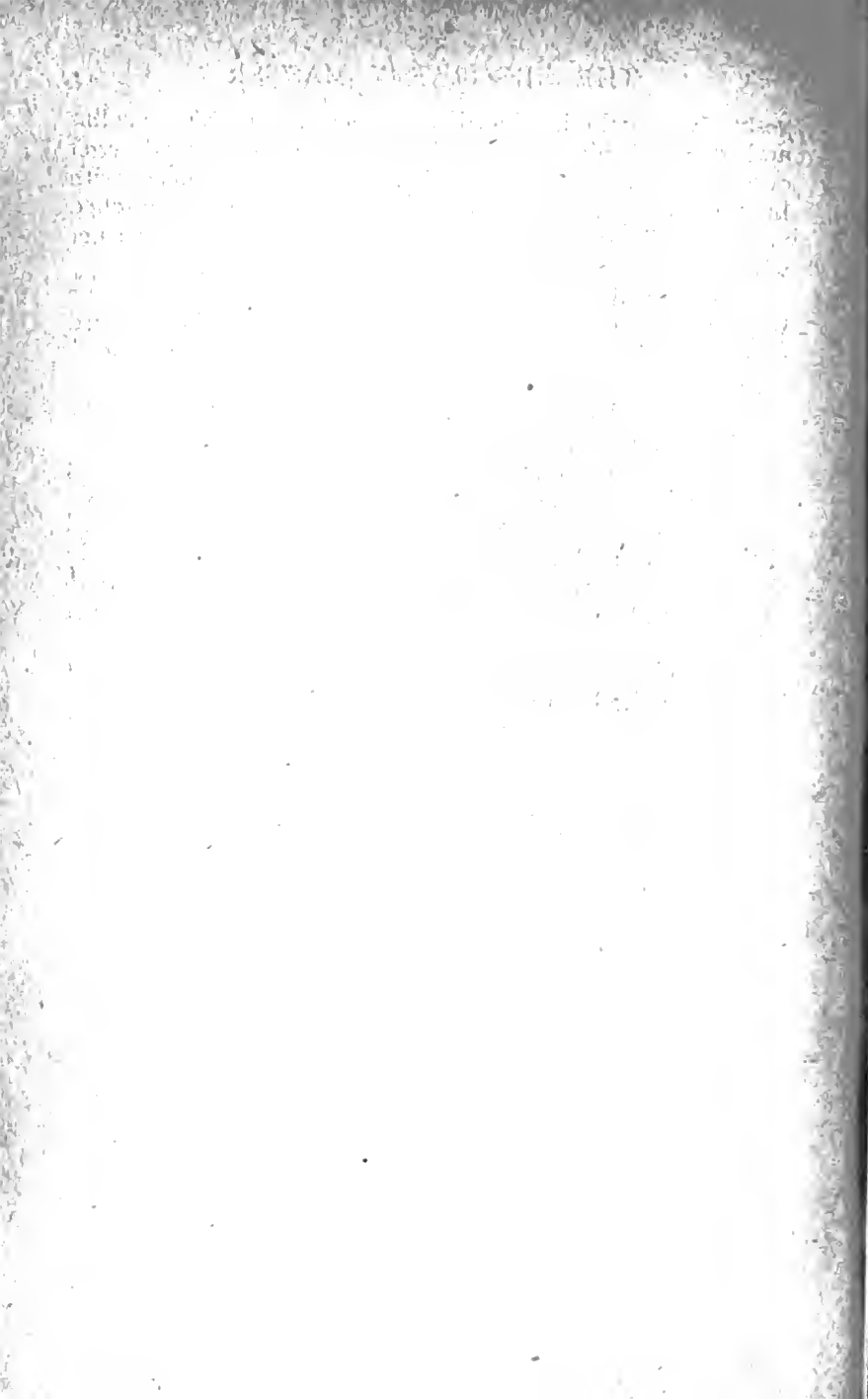
Dryden stared at him uncertainly. The room was overpoweringly hot ; his skull was clamped between constricting bands. As though buffeted in a high wind his body shook. Suddenly he snorted, and his head ducked. He took a step forward and found himself towering above the boy. “ You said *what* ? ” he yelled ; and as his voice soared in passion he rained blow after blow at the boy’s head, his arms like flails. Power flowed in him, delicious and intoxicating. He would kill the boy. Bartholomew lifted up his hands to protect himself, the knuckles red and bony. The

gesture was pathetic. Dryden grabbed the boy by the collar and dragged him out of the desk. "Get outside, get outside!" he shouted, and beating the boy's head with his fists, he drove him to the door. Bartholomew clutched at the handle and turned for a second to stare at the master with a look of pure astonishment: his face was white.

"Get outside," Dryden bawled frenziedly. And as the boy edged through the door he lunged his shoe forward and heard the click of its impact with the base of the boy's spine.

He slammed the door and leaned heavily against it, like a wilted plant. He was shuddering as though in fever; the faces of the boys were white horrified ovals. So he stood; until passion ebbed, and then his whole body was deliciously weak, as after an orgasm. One by one the boys dropped their eyes from him and were bowed over their work in silence. There was no sound in the room. He walked to his desk and sat down trembling. His forehead was wet with sweat.

"Open the window," he said. He wondered what it was that he had done.



FRANK BAKER

★

The Cat comes Home

FRANK M. WELLS

The Fall of the House of Usher

BORN in London in 1908. A chorister at Winchester Cathedral from 1919 to 1924. From 1924 to 1929 an insurance clerk in the City of London. During this period I wrote several plays under the influence of Ibsen, Tchekov, Wilde, and Shaw. These have now gone the way of adolescent works.

Was organist successively at two London churches ; intended to work for a music degree, but had little time for study. In 1929 resigned my job in the City in order to take secretarial work at an ecclesiastical music school where I hoped to make a career of music. Lived for a time in a collegiate atmosphere where young men learnt all about Fayrfax and plain chant subtleties. Was also organist at a third City church.

Neither I nor the academic mind could thrive harmoniously together. I abandoned musical studies and went to St. Just on the west coast of Cornwall, where I became organist of the village church, lived alone in a stone cottage, and suddenly discovered that I knew the name of hardly a single wild or cultivated flower, and that birds and trees had always simply been birds and trees. I grew up discovering a life my forefathers had known.

Wrote first novel (drearily autobiographical) which naturally nobody would publish. The acceptance of some musical articles by the *Radio Times* ; the good advice of George Manning-Sanders, Bernard Walke (who was then Vicar of St. Hilary Church) and Edward Garnett, encouraged me to believe I was a writer, not a musician. In spite of this I was constantly side-tracked by music and wrote many songs which pleased musician friends but not publishers. Achieved little success in literature, except for the publication of a few tales and musical articles, until in June 1935 Peter Davies published my second novel, *The Twisted Tree*. This had previously been rejected by nine publishers

and one famous literary agent who asked me to send a shilling for its return. It was well received by reviewers, though most agreed it was over-written.

From 1930 onwards lived in St. Just ; Bramshaw, New Forest ; St. Hilary, Cornwall (where I became organist of the church) and Hedsor, Bucks. I increasingly dislike playing or listening to organs but cannot avoid it.

Third novel was written in New Forest, but has not been published. Fourth novel, *The Birds*, written at St. Hilary and published by Davies. It was a failure.

Works, published or unpublished, include about forty-five short stories (turned down by all editors, lowbrow or highbrow) ; five novels ; seven plays ; various articles in musical criticism, and about a hundred poems.

Financially unsuccessful. But I still enjoy it.

FRANK BAKER.

THE CAT COMES HOME

THE soft autumn sunlight fell slowly along the dairy door and slanted across layers of butter on stone slabs. A great pan of cream, thick and unbroken, was caught in its light ; the pallid curves of eggs in a basket, enriched by its touch. Nothing else moved in the long silence of afternoon. The sun, serene in its journey, fell as the season fell ; towards evening, towards winter.

Outside in the yard a withered old tabby-cat paused warily on the rim of a dustbin. She saw a tawny cattle-dog slink and shake himself by the side of a sunny wall where pennywort spired in mossy crevices. She had no fear of him, but she paused in her scavenging because he had lit the fires of her memory. She saw dahlias, russet and sulphur, dark-rose and saffron-coloured, and the colours formulated to a pattern in her mind, until they fell to the design of a rich rug she had habitually slept on, earlier in her days. There had been a fire—a fire in the slab beyond the rug. She remembered how she had loved fire ; how, as a kitten, she had often tried to attack the ribbons of flame that flared from beneath a half-consumed log. Like strands of silk from her old mistress's work-basket, she had thought that fire also could be captured and teased to destruction. One day she had found her mistake, for a flame licked the tip of her nose and made her jump away, trembling with fear and anger. So began the long series of disillusionments that changed her from a kitten into a cat, and made her a creature dependent upon no human person for companionship—living a subtle life wherein fish and milk varied the sweet monotony of sleep. There had been a sheep-dog also in the house. She had watched him with disdain as he fawned on his mistress. That dog, she reflected, would

pine and fall ill if the woman were to leave him. But she, alone in her secret life, would never need anyone to look after her.

So she had thought in those easy days before the fire, when nothing had happened to check the placid flow of her days except the birth and nourishment of kittens. At first she resented this momentous distribution of her own identity, but later she learnt to accept her fate ; as years went on, resigned herself patiently to the advent of each litter, and did not even greatly care when all, except one, were dipped and drowned in a pail. Why should they leave that one, she had even sometimes asked herself? She thought that the whole business was a waste of time, and realizing that these periods of fruitfulness were due to the attentions of a certain tom-cat, she decided that the ecstasy of love was little compensation for the discomfort of bearing young. She kept away from the tom, receded more and more into the vast world of her soul, and regarded life with a wise and enigmatic eye. She knew what to avoid and when to be avoided ; where to find a dish of milk and when to expect fish for her dinner. There was no calendar to her life, no seasons. She did not tear off month after month and say to herself : " Oh, how I wish summer would come ! " For it was all much the same. Sometimes there were bright flowers against the house wall ; sometimes a wedge of thin snow. But the changeless order of the placid household suffered no reform. The fire in the kitchen was always alight ; her friend, now that she understood it. And the rug, though worn to a discoloured patch where she had so often slept, was warm with the warmth she daily gave and borrowed from it.

She did not know she had grown old until one day, upstairs in the wistaria-scented room where the old woman slept, a doctor and a nurse crept on careful feet. The laws of the house were altered. Strange people came. At evening time the hearth was littered with grey sucked stubs of paper ; the room full of coiling blue smoke, sour and stinging. It was winter and wild weather. Nobody regarded the old cat except to kick her away from the rug.

For eleven years she had suffered no such outrage. At first she rebelled against this invasion and humped her back sullenly upon the intruders. The sheep-dog with his despicable skill had found favour in the hearts of the strangers ; but the cat had no tricks to amuse them.

One day her saucer of milk was not in its proper place. Again, when she expected fish for dinner, she was given watery milk with sopped crusts of tasteless bread. She came slowly to accept this violation of her laws ; she even found in her new manner of life a certain quality of adventure which she had not known for years.

In this spirit, she went out one day, her body tingling with life, a strange impatience in her loins. She saw her reflection in a pail of water and looked at it equivocally. A massive tom-cat stole up, looked at her, then walked casually away. She followed him. But he turned suddenly, snarled at her with bared teeth, and ran away.

It was then that she realized that something decadent had invaded her ; something to which she could give no name ; something that changed the comfort of her home and made the sun's descent seem shallow and tepid. Anxiously, now, the old cat began to hope for a day when the strangers should be gone, her dish of milk in its proper place, her life easy as it had been before. A day when her mistress would walk down the stairs and wind the clock in the hall, so that the pendulum should sway and time be even again.

But that day never came. Instead, a terrible thing happened. A great glass carriage drew up before the door of the house and, creaking in the snow, sad men carried away a heavy wooden box covered with chrysanthemums. So they drove away with many people following after. When they had gone, the cat ran upstairs. She was alone in the house ; even the sheep-dog had gone with the strangers behind the carriage.

In the familiar room all was still and tidy. The bed was covered as though nobody would ever sleep in it again. Her mistress was not there.

She shivered and ran downstairs. A mouse squeaked in

the wall ; she did not hear it. In the kitchen the fire had died and the afternoon died with it. Night mounted the walls, sombre and gradual. The shadows faded and the eyes of a dark day closed, one by one. It grew very cold.

The strangers came back, and still she was disregarded. They talked till very late and seemed to have many jokes to tell one another. A man came one day, with a bundle of papers, and while they all sat at a table, he read to them. He wore little spectacles, and his voice was clipped short like his hair. There were spats on his feet and his shoes were so bright that the cat could see her paws in them. The strangers quarrelled and shouted at one another.

Soon, they left, and the house was inhabited only by a long, sour man and his daughter. A van, larger than the carriage, came to the door and three clumsy men with heavy feet clumped into the house. Methodically and swiftly they began to carry out chairs, tables, beds, and china. Very soon all those comfortable corners which had varied the old cat's sleep were cold and empty. The rug was whisked from the floor and all that was left of it was an outline of hairy dust. The rooms were no longer gracious with curves but stark with angles where thin winds crept.

The old cat went outside and sat on a water butt, an expression of dignified disinterest on her face. There was yet, she thought, something that could change all this. The house still stood there ; was it possible they could take that away as well ? Hungry and tired—for there had been no food and no place to rest all day—she sat on the water butt and turned her back on the house.

Presently, she went inside. The men had gone away and the rooms were quite empty. The man stood by the door with his daughter, and bags all around them.

“ Father,” she said, “ what about this old cat ? ” “ Oh, she's too old to take away. Besides, cats like places more than people. She'll be all right.”

They went away with their baggage, the sheep-dog following them, carrying a parcel in his teeth. As he passed the cat she arched her back in sudden anger. He ran on with his tail between his legs and did not look back.

Left alone, the cat now made no attempt to hide her anxiety. The doors of the house were locked and the windows barred. Even if she could have got in, what waited for her inside? She sat down on the path and cleaned herself, so as to be able to think more clearly. In the bewildered twilight of her old brain, one thing stood out, clear and insistent. She must eat and she must drink.

Slowly she went over to a neighbouring farm and watched a woman throwing bread to some fowls. As though they had been clockwork figures, they ran about and pecked at the food. When the woman had gone in, the cat cautiously came into the yard, seized a crust and made for an old barn. Here, amongst oil cans, washing tubs, old pots and pails, she caught savagely at the bread with no relish for its savourlessness: for the first time in her life, eating only that her belly might be lined.

Sleep came. Shivering and weary, her eyes closed and her mind went back to the kitchen fire.

So began weeks and months of wandering. Still strong, for she had eaten well for many years, she went from place to place. Hated by the lean farm cats, who lived a wilder life than she had ever known, she could find no home. She went across some moors to a neighbouring village. Here, unknown, and tormented by school children, she passed her days near dustbins and backyards, or wherever a crust or a scrap of meat could be found. Sleep in the daytime became a forgotten luxury; sleep at night only a necessity. There was little pleasure left in either.

Summer came, and for the first time she was fully aware of it. The sun scorched her drooping back and drove a sharp pain into her pitted haunches. Yet, at times, she would lie in some shade, and the old peace would enfold her. She was quite alone; as alone as any living creature could be. She would sit in those summer days, watching butterflies pursue one another in their hilarious flights; watching cows fondle one another; hearing the tethered donkeys calling from hill-side to hill-side. She would see the swallows swoop and breast the hedges, and watch them

as evening came and they returned to their nests. She would see farm labourers at their work, and watch them at evening time as they walked slowly back to their homes and their food.

In August the sun rose softer and the first stale hint of autumn tinged the trees. The brown limbs of the boys ran to the sea and the village was silent under the spell of indolence. The cat was happy now in some static way. A calm mood of resignation held her. Every morning when she awoke with the sun, her first thought would be of food ; but since she had hardened herself to living on any old scrap or morsel she could find, her life was not so difficult as it had been at first. Having found enough to stay her hunger, she would venture forth and seek out some hidden place of comfort. In an old cart or stretched out on a lichenous stone, she would lie with her thoughts.

In autumn she found a hayrick where she could rest undisturbed. From its warm bosom she could hear the voices of the men in the fields, listen to the patient sound of the threshing machine and, at night, move her shadow in the light of a red moon. The nights grew colder, the days shorter. The sun seemed bigger yet more distant ; faintly she was aware of the passing of a season.

One day she could not find any food, and desperately moaned her way along a rough and dusty lane. A man passed and called to her. She paused with surprise ; then, shooting up her tail, ran to him with a cry of delight. But the sound of her own harsh voice frightened both her and the man. He passed on quickly. She never cried again. She forgot the cracked tones of her voice as she had by now forgotten the meagre shape of her body.

October drew on and the sun grew less and less clear, the days more misty and the ground damp. And on an afternoon of strange quietness she wandered wearily into the yard of a house and made for a dustbin.

There she saw the cattle-dog and stopped, overcome with memory. The wine-dark dahlias in the garden, the helleniums and geraniums—these were old colours of a past life. Hardly daring to trust her memory she peered cautiously

round the dairy door. Inside, the sun sent his slanting arm over cream, butter, and eggs.

It was the same house. Everything but the shell had changed, but it was the same house. The wistaria still clung above her mistress's window.

Very weakly and yet eagerly, she went into the dairy, and listened with head on one side for the sound of footsteps. She heard nothing. But she saw a sight so lovely that she could barely move for pure joy. A pan of unbroken cream, gold and rich and still in the falling sun. With a great effort she clambered up to the slate slab on which it rested and for a moment stood with her chin above the pan.

The sun caught her. Cream and old cat together were held in the autumn sun. And no sound at all in the long afternoon.

For a moment only she paused, then suddenly lowered her head and fell upon the wrinkled surface. She rested her paws upon the pan in an effort to drink deeper. Her whole face was inside it. In her soul ran a sweet stream of joy; her body thrilled and arched with pleasure. Down deep and deeper still she drank, until drowsiness overcame her and she fell heavily to the ground.

Unsteadily she went into the kitchen and knew vaguely that it was the room which she had loved so much. The furniture was unfamiliar but the fire still slumbered in the slab as though it had never gone out. She fell down before it, stretched her limbs, and weakly licked her chops. The sun lay upon a patch of the wall; this and the firelight charged the room with copper light. Half awake, the cat watched the shadows change and heard the clock strike. Her mind went back to the past. Evening would come and the lamp be lit. Soon her mistress would call: "Jinny! Jinny! Time for you to go to bed, dear."

The fire crackled and the flames spluttered lower. The old cat lay quite still in a firmament of cream and firelight and autumn sun. . . .

. . . . when it was dark, the door opened and a young woman came in. Lighting the lamp she saw the cat and called to her husband.

“ I say, you—here’s a darned old cat asleep.”

“ Drive ’e out. Us don’t want stray cats.”

She touched Jinny with her foot, then bent down to look at her more closely.

“ It don’t move at all,” she said. “ Reckon she’s sick.” Her husband came in. “ I’ll move ’e,” he said, and kicked her roughly.

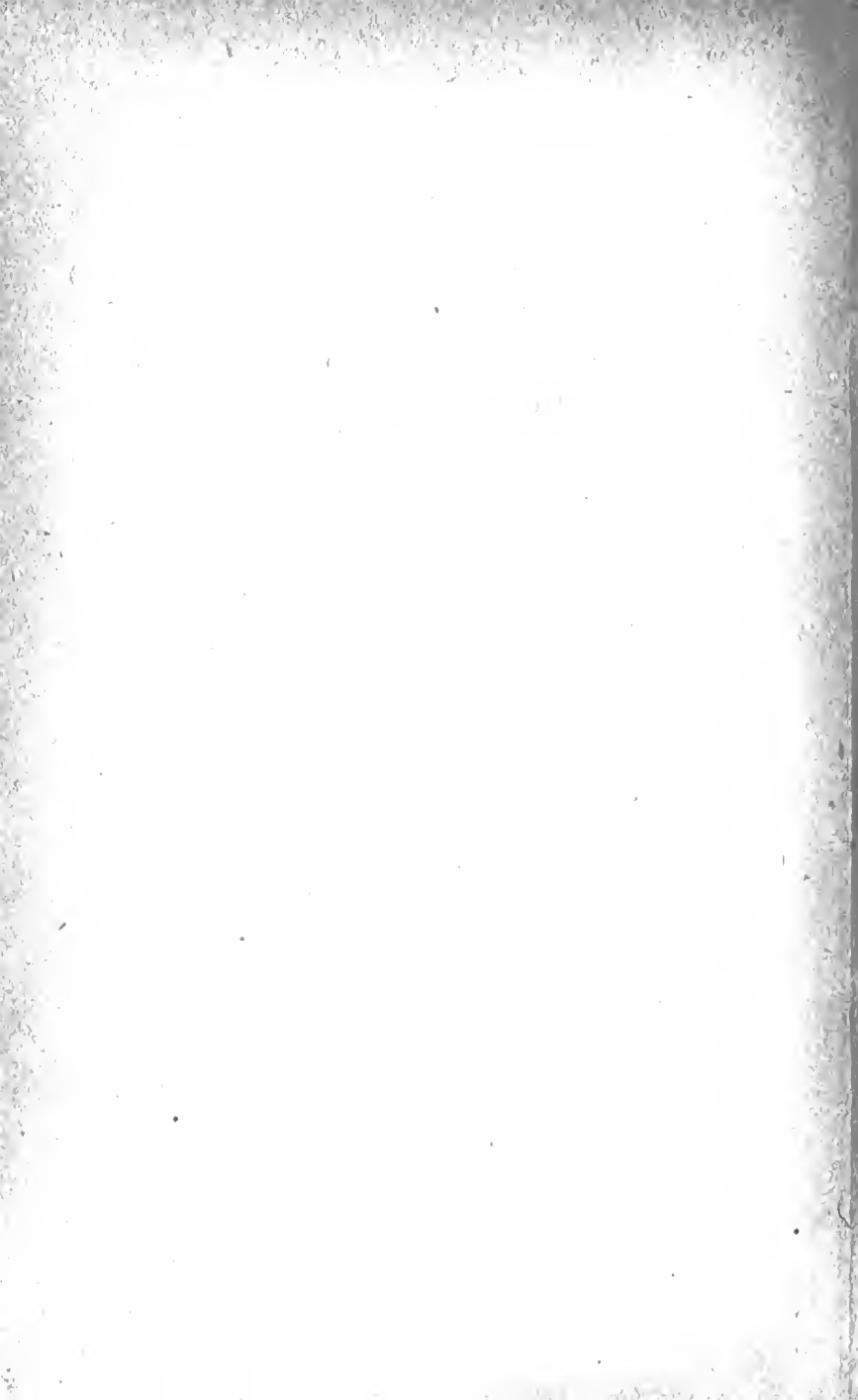
The woman was in the dairy.

“ By gosh ! ” she called. “ She’s stuffed herself that full of cream I d’tenk she’ll never move no more at all.”

H. E. BATES

★

The Machine



BORN in 1905, on the borders of Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire, the country that is now the scene of much of his work ; worked without any distinction at all as a junior reporter on a Northampton newspaper at the age of seventeen ; left the newspaper—graduated to a warehouse dealing in nails, linen-thread, eyelets, stiffeners, calico-linings, leather, hessian, buckram, rivets, sprigs, heels, tapes, besides Heaven knows how many other things that are used in the making of a boot. Managed to find time to write (in the warehouse's time, not his own) scores of stories, poems, some one-act plays, and two novels. Rewrote one of these novels : *The Two Sisters* ; submitted it without success to nine publishers, and saw it accepted by the tenth and subsequent publisher, with a preface by Edward Garnett. He (i.e. the author) was then twenty. Under Garnett's influence, turned his attention to the short story, and wrote prolifically, destroying nightly fifty per cent of all he wrote. Owed everything to Garnett, who read, criticized, praised, damned, and advised on all he wrote at that time. Married in 1931 ; went to live in Kent, and proceeded to assist maternity in the creation of two daughters and a son. In the country, became more interested in the country he had left, and began to write books about the country. In these books, delivered attacks on the current fashion of sentimentalizing the country, on gamekeepers, blood-sports, and local squirearchies, all of which did not prevent his becoming, in 1937, chairman of the parish council. This fact, in turn, did not prevent his being captain of the local football team, a member of the local cricket team, or hundred yards champion, in his socks, of the local sports. Would almost rather, in fact, have been an athlete than a writer. Has now written, besides novels, something like a hundred and fifty short stories, which are collected mainly

in seven volumes : *Day's End*, *Seven Tales and Alexander*, *The Black Boxer*, *The Woman who had Imagination*, *Thirty Tales*, *Cut and Come Again*, and *Something Short and Sweet*. Has been anthologized in something like fifty English and American anthologies, and holds the record for appearances in *The Best Short Stories* with ten stories, technically eleven, since he is apparently the only writer to have two stories chosen, by a mistake, in one year. Has nearly finished a play, *Carrie and Cleopatra*, in four acts, and is now at work on a novel. Writes generally very quickly, and out of doors (all the year round).

H. E. BATES.

THE MACHINE

EVERY evening, up at the farm, we saw the same men go past, out towards the villages, at the same time. They were coming home from the factories down in the valley ; men escaping from the machine.

And though we got to know them well by sight, first the young chaps, racing hard, with flying mufflers, then the old stagers, the old tough shoe-finishers still wearing polish blackened aprons, then the man with the black cork-leg and only one pedal to his bicycle, there was one we knew really well. His name was Simmons. We called him Waddo.

When Waddo went past we lifted hands from hoes or rakes, or even waved a cabbage that we might be cutting, and hailed him. "Way up !" we called.

"Waddo !" he shouted, and sailed on.

But three times a year, at hay-time, harvest, and threshing, when we needed extra hands, he stopped to help us. He rode his pink-tyred semi-racing bike into the stack yard, unstrapped his dinner-basket, rolled up his sleeves, and looked round at us, as we stood stacking corn or unloading hay, with a look of tolerant contempt. As though to say : "You poor miserable devils. Bin here since morning and all you done is stack up three ha'porth o' hay. Well, spit on me big toe, spit on it. If you ain't a bleedin' limit." It was the look of a giant for a degenerate collection of pitch-fork pigmies. Waddo himself stood five feet three.

But when he came into that yard we were transformed. He flung himself to work with an almost daemonic fury of strength. The muscles of his small arms were tight as clock-work springs under the white factory-blanchéd flesh. His little head, with thin wire-brush hair worn bald at the

temples, was like a bullet that might have gone off at any moment with an explosive bang of enthusiasm or disgust. He worked swiftly, with the slight puffed swagger of a man of mountainous physique, incessantly talking, always comic, spitting mouthfuls of patient disgust for us who worked so hard all day and did nothing. There was some extra volcanic force in Waddo, who never tired, never gave up, and was never beaten. Coming from the machines, he was like a machine himself. "Waddo," we'd say to him, "blowed if you don't go on wheels."

"I bleedin' well have to," he'd say. "Don't I?" And we knew, with his five-mile ride to work and his five miles back, his eight-hour day holding boots to the jaws of a stitcher in the factory, his seven children, his readiness to mow with his own hands, in his spare time, every blade of grass and every standing acre of corn in the parish, how true it was. "I got a day's work to git through in half," he'd say. "Not like some folks."

"What you need on this place," he'd say at last, "is machinery."

In any discussion of the machines Waddo held us as it were at arm's length, in contempt. "Call yourself bleedin' farmers, and ain't got a machine in the place. No binder, no hay-turner, no root-cutter. No tater-riddle, no nothing. Blimey, spit on me big toe, spit on it. Ain't you up-to-date? Here you are scrattin' about like old hens scrattin' for daylight, when a couple o' machines'd bring you right bang-slap up with the times. Machines—that's what you want. Save yourself time and money. See! They do away with the men."

The machine was his god. It was exemplified in his racing bike, in the stitcher which he fed all day with boots, like some omnivorous steel brute, at the factory, in the threshing-drum we hired once every winter. Working so beautifully, swiftly, and naturally with his own hands, he exalted the mechanism that could have cut out the element of man. It fed his devotion with the same daemonic energy as he worked, so that he preached at us with one hand on the futility of a machineless world and showed us, with the

other, how incomparable and effective it could be. With the machinery of his two hands he swung a scythe with a mastery and precise beauty that no machine could ever have shown.

And at heart, I think, he knew it. He mowed very fast, as though carelessly, off-hand, apparently indifferent. He was often not so tall, by a foot, as the corn he cut. Head down, he had a certain air of detached dreaminess, as though the whole thing meant nothing to him at all.

Then, at the end of the swathe, he would turn and look back ; and we would see, for a moment, the beauty of the work recaptured in his own eye, the small light of pleasure glinting out as though a bead of sweat had been caught in the pupil. He gazed, as we did, at the level alleys of stubble, short and straight as though the corn were sprouting up white again, the golden-white corn stalks shining as if sun-oiled, the sienna-gold sweep of ears and the straight wall of standing corn, and he must have known that he was a master hand.

But always, in time, the obsession of the machine caught him up again. "How many acres o' wheat you got here? Ten? Gonna take us a week to move it. Now with a binder——"

We would say something about expense.

"Expense! Spit on me big toe. You can't see for looking. Expense! You can save the bleedin' cost of the thing in a couple o' years. Save money, save men. Don't you see?"

And he would work on sometimes into the still August moonlight, tireless as a machine himself, mowing, whetting the scythe, dropping the scythe to fall flat on some escaping leveret, mowing again, still arguing, still abusing us, then biking off, at last, across the moon-dewed land with the energy of a man just beginning a cycle race.

"Don't you want a light?" we'd say to him.

"Light? Spit on me big toe, I s'll be home and in bed with the missus afore you can strike a match."

He abused and decried us all through harvest and hay-making. At threshing he got his reward. In the engine and

drum he saw, at last, a sensible interpretation of life : a complicated system of power and steam, a miracle, a single unit doing the work of scores of men. "Some sense," he'd say, "at last."

He took a day off from the factory, then, to help us, arriving at six in the morning, and we saw then that we had never seen him except as a tired man. He skidded into the yard at full speed, bounced off his bicycle, seized his pitch-fork as though ready to lift a complete corn-stack with one finger. He argued vociferously, held us at the usual arm's length of contempt, laughed and joked and worked as always with the same casual and yet explosive and masterly rhythm. Working high up in the drum, on the edge of a maelstrom, he bawled down to us below with gigantic accents, though nobody could hear, feeding sheaves to the drum with the pleasure of a man feeding a favourite beast.

We threshed, one year, in November. The wind came down on us from the north-east, with intermittent bites of ice-rain, across bare land. The power of the wind roaring under the drum spouted up a terrific blast of chaff, all day long, that was like hail on the naked eyes. Above, chaff and chaff-dust were winnowed from the cracks of the drum in fierce little clouds, as though she were spitting ice vapour. Higher still, on the roof of the drum, the men caught by the full force of the wind and up-blown chaff and wind-flashed straw worked all day half-blinded.

Waddo was on the drum. Exhilarant in that terrific wind, he worked as though the wind shot him new energy. He bawled down at us with a mouth that, against the roar of drum and engine and wind, was quite soundless. But we understood, we felt the words in his gestures of contemptuous triumph. "See? Didn't I tell you? Spit on me toe—didn't I tell you what a machine could save you?"

That day the rats began to run out of the first stack about eleven o'clock. We pursued and hemmed and cornered them, smashing them to lumps of grey-red jelly in the wind-littered straw. From above Waddo looked down on us like a director of operations, yelling and waving his fork.

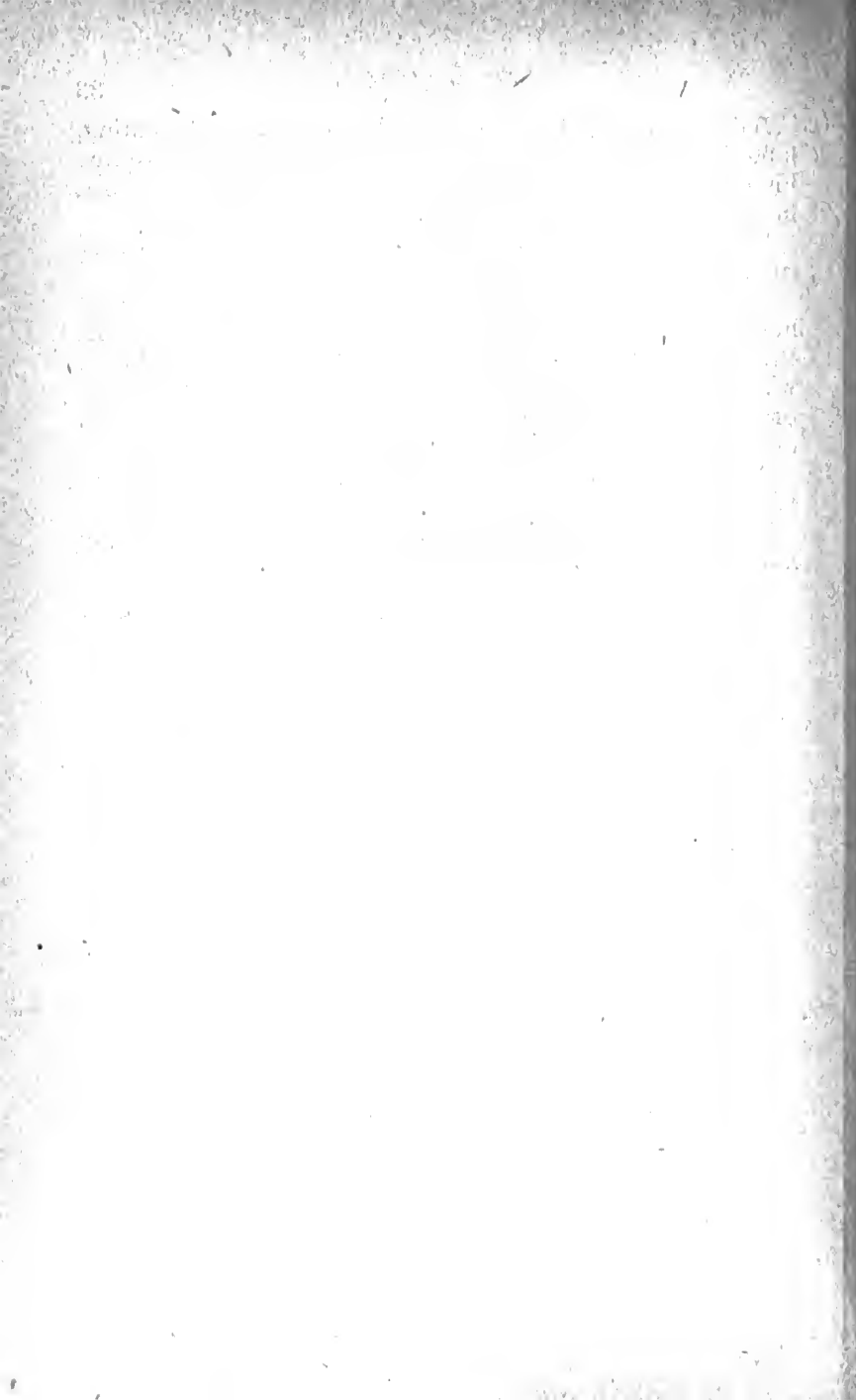
As he stood there, jack-in-the-boxing, gesticulating, laughing, a rat leapt out of a sheaf he was lifting. We saw his own leap of energetic excitement and knew the words he yelled by long habit and the shaping of his lips :

“Spit on me big toe, spit on it ! Waddo ! Spit on me——”

We saw him slip. We knew how the iron-shod boots must have slid on the loose kernels of polished grain, on the straw-smoothed roof of the drum. He lifted a wild hand. We yelled and shouted. The engine-man threw on the brakes and we heard the shriek and moan of stopped machinery.

“Waddo !” we yelled. “Waddo. For Christ’s sake ! Waddo !”

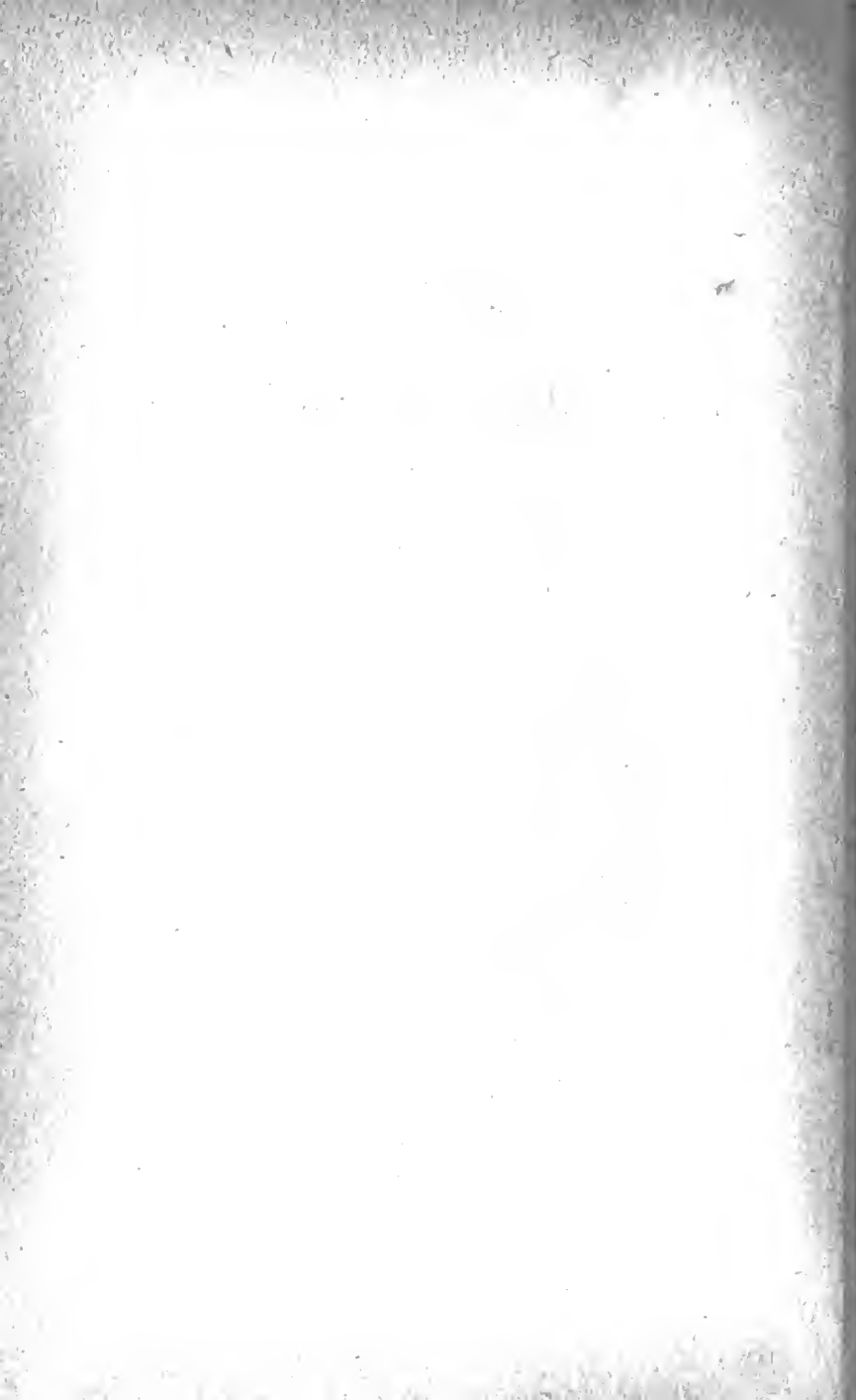
There was no answer ; and in a world that stood still we knew that the machine had claimed him.



W. J. BEAMOND

★

History of Oscar



W. J. BEAMOND is twenty-four. He was born in Cheshire and attended council school until eleven, when he gained a scholarship to the Wallasey Grammar School. At fourteen he was reading Dostoievsky and Strindberg, his mind already saturated with Shaw and Wells. He now reads Proust and Virginia Woolf and studies Joyce, and spends 35 per cent of his income on books. He is at present engaged in business in Liverpool, but his real interest is, of course, in writing. He is addicted to all aspects of literature and has done a large amount of private criticism.

He has been writing since boyhood. The only instruction he has received was at eighteen, when he wrote to Bernard Shaw, explaining his ideas and asking how to become a writer. Shaw advised him to 'write a thousand words a day for five years to get executive skill, and then carry out your plans. To discuss them beforehand is to invite their annexation by some competent executant.' This was quite the best advice he could have been given, and he regrets only that there have been many days when he was prevented from carrying it out to the letter.

His work appeared first in the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Herald*. Later he contributed to *New Stories* and *Lovat Dickson's Magazine*, and to *No Want of Meat, Sir!* (Grayson & Grayson). He was represented in O'Brien's collection of *The Best Short Stories of 1934* (Cape) with a story he wrote when he was twenty. This was the well-known 'Funeral Service Over A Dead Monkey,' which he says 'wrote itself.' He is now working upon a novel to be called *Women Must Weep*, and has plans for a dozen more.

The greatest difficulty he experiences in writing is the abundance of ideas that fill his mind. He has, at the present time, exactly 147 short-story ideas, each duly tabulated and clamouring emulatively for his attention.

Normally he writes several stories together as this 'uses up odd minutes.' He has, however, no original idea about the short story because, he says, it can be almost anything.

His other interests are music, which he feels to be the greatest of the arts, painting, which to him means only the Impressionists, wood engraving, ballet, and (so his friends declare) arguing.

He considers the three greatest English contemporary short stories to be Manhood's 'Lonely Camp,' Lawrence's 'The Fox,' and Joyce's 'The Dead.'

He would specially like mentioned here the kindness and encouragement he has received in the recent past from other writers, notably L. A. Pavey, H. A. Manhood, and H. E. Bates.

W. J. BEAMOND.

HISTORY OF OSCAR

THE History of Oscar properly begins with Mr. Marshall, for it was he who first discovered and divined in Oscar those qualities and peculiarities which here justify his claim to fame. Moreover, one might say that until Mr. Marshall met Oscar, Oscar had no history. For the important and accessible details of Oscar's life are to be found only in his association with the rich old gentleman. His career before that time must remain hidden for ever in the darkest waters.

Mr. Marshall lived in a handsome Georgian house in a forgotten square in London—one of the few such houses that had not been turned into business offices and the tranquillity of the square invaded by trolley-buses and trackless trams. It was a large house, encumbered with glass-domed clocks, framed lithographs, and cabinets of old silver.

Many of the rooms were kept closed, because Mrs. Winterthorpe, Mr. Marshall's housekeeper, wished it so. A formidable lady in the middle-forties, she looked after Mr. Marshall with a fierce regard for his health, digestion, and little eccentricities. Alternately she browbeat and mothered him, and always had her way; he really could not do without her.

Though his hair was white and his trim figure slightly stooping, Mr. Marshall looked rather less than his seventy-two years. His fine high forehead was deeply lined from the nervous uplifting of the left eyebrow. His eyes were becoming pale and less confident; there was an increasing tinge of asperity in his voice, a sharper twinge of pain in his sciatica. He reckoned he had another ten years.

Mr. Marshall made no use at all of his leisure. He was, as became his years, of a retiring disposition; a man of settled views, living almost outside life. He habited a

warm-smelling, triangular room at the back of the house, cluttered up with his books and pictures and music. He was a great lover of character and read Thackeray, Dickens, Eliot with whole-hearted admiration.

Occasionally, however, these failed him and life assumed the pall of weary waiting, and he yearned to experience the disturbing emotions of joy, fear and excitement.

All of which was perfectly satisfactory in the man to whose care Oscar was fated to be entrusted.

It was his habit to go for a walk every afternoon while Mrs. Winterthorpe 'did over.' Then, in the evening, after a little music and a glance at some prints, he would settle down with a book, a mild whisky and soda, and much pondering upon the absorbing mystery of Character.

The intoxicant was an ingrained habit. The respective quantities of whisky and soda never varied, because Mrs. Winterthorpe kept the key of the cupboard and knew just how much was good for him. No argument, however vital, could have been brought to bear against her.

Mr. Marshall had been on an expedition one day after a Currier and Ives he did not possess and was returning home past an aquaria dealer's, when he suddenly found his progress barred by a plank resting on some trestles. On the plank were six bowls of goldfish, and above it a notice : 'Goldfish 2s. 6d. each.'

Mr. Marshall skirted the plank, then stopped, intrigued. Five of the bowls contained three or four fish each ; the sixth contained only one fish. Mr. Marshall frowned heavily at the single occupant of the sixth bowl.

It was Oscar.

Oscar had already spotted Mr. Marshall. He had spent three dull days outside the shop without anyone taking the slightest notice of him, and he was ineffably bored. His gimlet eyes fastened upon Mr. Marshall's quiet figure and the thrill of ecstasy that passed along his spine surprised him pleurably. He turned and swam rapidly round and round the confines of his bowl, becoming almost delirious with excitement when the amiable old gentleman bent down towards him.

Mr. Marshall adjusted his spectacles and stared meditatively. Oscar stopped gyrating and stared back, unblinking. For a moment nothing happened ; then in their joined gaze something passed between them that set Mr. Marshall's left eyebrow twitching furiously.

He bent his head close to the bowl, and Oscar trembled. His beautiful body shone, his tail swished slightly, coquettishly, and he pressed his snout against the glass with an eager intensity. There was no mistaking the expression on his wise little face.

Mr. Marshall, in a daze, paid his half-crown.

Though later he swore that he had at once evinced Oscar's varied qualities, it is plain that he did not have an inkling of the effect that Oscar's entry was to have on his affairs.

For Oscar quickly made it apparent that he was no ordinary goldfish, and therefore no ordinary treatment would suffice. Unless he received due attention he became very impatient and irritable and took on the expression of a neglected old woman.

True, he belonged to the common golden-red carp variety, was less than three inches long, with curious black markings on his body ; but there was no mistaking the amazing range of moods and unusual sensitiveness he was wont to display from time to time. Oscar, Mr. Marshall made the momentous discovery, had Character. The old gentleman was therefore able to bring a rare understanding to the exacting needs of his companion.

These were far from simple. There was the business of feeding. Any preconceived ideas, such as ants' eggs that Mr. Marshall had held, had to be radically altered. Oscar disdained ants' eggs. In this Mr. Marshall agreed ; it would have lowered his prestige to live for a week on a penny packet of such puerile food. Mr. Marshall, not risking independent experimentation, sought expert advice.

He exerted himself to the full, interrogating aquaria dealers and ransacking libraries until he had gathered quite a compendium of information. Mosquito larvæ, earth-worms, and water-fleas began to find their way into Oscar's

bowl, followed by some decorative coarse sand and a few choice weeds.

Oscar, on his stand in a corner of Mr. Marshall's room, was grateful for all this, and when Oscar was grateful he was wholly charming. He would preen himself under his master's admiring glances, then at a nod from Mr. Marshall flick his tail and glide beautifully and in his best style.

The room, the whole house, life itself took on a brighter habiliment from his presence. Mr. Marshall could disregard Mrs. Winterthorpe's deprecations of 'that fish' in the sleekness of Oscar's body and lithe movements, and in the thrill of some new facet of his variegated character.

Yet, though treated royally until he became almost barrel-shaped, Oscar was at times difficult. Aggressive and ever-demanding he might be, and Mr. Marshall could satisfy, even encourage him; but what was he to do when Oscar sulked and moped and on his approach retreated crossly to the farther side of the bowl? When he paid no heed to the little flatteries and coaxing tones of his anxious master, or to the finger poked playfully at the side of the bowl?

Mr. Marshall made a careful study of the classified diseases, exhausted his accumulated knowledge and was at his wits' end when it came to him that his pet was fretting. Why? There could be only one reason.

Oscar was lonely. He was pining for his kind.

The next day Mr. Marshall purchased three goldfish and introduced them into Oscar's bowl—and each morning for three days he removed the dead body of a goldfish. There was nothing to show how they had met their deaths.

Mr. Marshall pondered the matter deeply. Oscar had taken no notice of the companion goldfish—perhaps from social reasons or sheer contrariness—but as each one had died, he had become perkier and sprier and now seemed very well pleased with himself.

Oscar, for all his demureness, was a Killer.

Mr. Marshall wondered what would happen when Oscar next lusted after blood, and lived in a state of nervous

apprehension. Not for anything would he put more fish at Oscar's tender mercies ; it would be diabolically cruel. It would be murder.

He winced, and scrutinized Oscar long and carefully each morning. When less than a month later Oscar again showed signs of restlessness, Mr. Marshall almost wept in distress.

He conducted a series of extensive enquiries, but the delicate and cautious manner in which these were carried out (for Mr. Marshall believed that most fanciers would consider a 'killer' goldfish better dead, character or no character), defeated his efforts. *Tropical Fish Monthly* could make nothing of his letter and did not bother to reply. The dealers were interested only in selling him more fish.

Then someone advised him to try whisky ! He treated the idea in the manner it had been given, as a joke. Meanwhile, Oscar slowly languished, refusing even chopped-up oyster. After much hesitation, not quite himself, Mr. Marshall tentatively yielded to the suggestion.

He was amazed to find that it worked !

From that moment Oscar never looked back.

The apportioning of the last half-inch of his evening whisky and soda to Oscar's bowl had within a month become a daily rite. While Mr. Marshall sipped at his glass, Oscar, having eyed him roguishly, would swim about in a sort of restrained, eager anticipation. Then as Mr. Marshall drew near, smiling, glass in hand, Oscar would sidle gently towards him and rise to the surface of the water. He would float there, his little body tense and still, waiting for the raised glass to be tipped.

As the yellowy liquid passed over his gleaming form he would tremble, almost faint with joy, from the tip of his snout to the base of his tail. His sharp eyes would shine with a wicked happiness, then away he would dart round and round the bowl, flashing to the top, sharp as a knife-thrust, then plunging madly, his movements swift and direct, displaying not the least sign of grogginess. He was a tough little beggar.

And Mr. Marshall would lean over the bowl, cocking his left eyebrow and chuckling with gay admonishment.

This went on for over four months, until one night Mr. Marshall strayed during an after-tea saunter and returned home an hour late.

He was both very tired and thirsty as he let himself down into his chair, his glass of whisky and soda grasped firmly in his right hand. He sipped appreciatively, kicked off his slippers, and before he was aware of it had absent-mindedly drunk off his glass !

He stared, first incredulously, then in growing alarm, at the empty tumbler. He restrained himself, however, with a commendable presence of mind, glancing casually at the bowl. Oscar caught the look and swam nearer. Mr. Marshall put his hand furtively round the bottom of the tumbler and smiled. Oscar hesitated for a second, then wriggled himself playfully and swam away blithely.

Mr. Marshall mopped his brow. If only he had the courage of an Oliver Twist to ask for more. . . . But even if he dared approach Mrs. Winterthorpe for more whisky, it would be of no avail. Nothing would move her, and certainly nothing in favour of Oscar.

Now he knew Oscar's general characteristics pretty well. He knew what the little fellow liked and what he contemptuously swished his tail at. But of the heart that beat beneath his golden-red scaly skin, Mr. Marshall knew nothing. The fundamental Oscar was denied him, had resisted his most subtle efforts.

Mr. Marshall saw now that here was his opportunity of probing the inner depths of the slayer and sybarite, of revealing in one stroke the true nature of Oscar's heart.

He would tip the empty tumbler and *pretend* to pour whisky over Oscar's body.

What Oscar would do when he realized the deception, Mr. Marshall did not falter and ask himself. He would have to risk even his failing him. There could be no illusions between them.

Oscar stopped torpedoing around his domains and rammed his snout against the side of the bowl as Mr. Marshall

approached, his hand concealing the last half-inch of the tumbler. Oscar swam to within an inch of the surface of the water and lay there, immovable.

Mr. Marshall slowly tilted the glass.

Oscar quivered in eager expectation. He waited confidently, happily. He waited. . . . Then his eyes stared wide and open. Bewilderment rippled along his spine, his snout twitched with consternation, and slowly he rose to the surface.

Mr. Marshall breathed tensely, fascinated.

Oscar raised his little red snout out of the water and made low, sucking noises.

Mr. Marshall gripped the bowl feverishly.

Oscar gave voice again, and this time the sounds were unmistakable.

Mr. Marshall's spectacles became misted over and he could not see. His throat was choking. He turned away; he could not bear it. *Oscar, with the heart of a child, was crying. . . .*

He rushed convulsively for the door, waving the empty tumbler, bawling peremptorily, at the top of his voice, for Mrs. Winterthorpe and the key.

The History of Oscar does not end here, however, for his triumph was to have repercussions in his master's life. Mrs. Winterthorpe did not like having her authority thwarted by a goldfish, and a few days later she left Mr. Marshall for a widowed sea captain who decently scorned anything smaller than a whale. Not long after this Mr. Marshall died, and Oscar found his way through devious channels to the bosom of a Socialist family where he had rather a lean time of it.

He was put in a round bowl of distorted glass with two other goldfish. Through the glass the black markings on his body appeared enormous and he was re-named Black Joe.

But Oscar, or Black Joe, did not share the family's views on collectivism, and there were two mysterious deaths in the bowl.

Then one day he himself disappeared. He left no trace. Several fantastic surmises were put forward of his end, but the most commonplace happened to be the true one.

The family had a cat . . . and the cat had been having rather a lean time of it, too.

JOHN BETJEMAN

★

Move with the Times

1870

1871

BORN : London, 1906, but this story was written three years ago. That is why I am in the running for 'Under Thirty.'

Chief interests : Ecclesiastical architecture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries ; box-pews and three-decker pulpits ; Irish peers and Irish architecture and pre-Celtic-Twilight Irish poetry, written in English ; Salkeld's catalogue ; branch railways ; suburbs ; provincial towns ; steam trams ; gas light ; decay and squalor in all their forms ; Georgian and Victorian architecture.

Dislikes : Aeroplanes ; main roads ; insurance companies ; 'development' ; local councils ; materialism, dialectical or otherwise ; a Mr. Wilkinson who is a scar on my mind left by schooldays ; wireless in motor cars ; pseudo-modern and pseudo-Queen Anne, Renascence, Tudor and Swedish building.

Hopes : Triumph of Christianity ; a town plan for England.

* * *

This has cost me sweat and blood. I cannot write about myself, just as some people can't sign their names. If it is inadequate, get someone else to do it, or leave it out altogether.

JOHN BETJEMAN.

MOVE WITH THE TIMES

“**N**OW 'oo was the ole boy as used to be with Consolidated Dried Fruits before Lemon come on? Grogson was it?”

“No, not Grogson—let me think—it must have been Gregory.”

“No, not Gregory—shorter name than that—a little bald feller 'e was, with bright eyes.”

“Yers, I know 'oo you mean.”

By this time the rest of the table was interested. Macpherson of Autopolishes put down his cup of tea. Before helping himself to some more beetroot with his corned beef, he put in : “Died, didn't he? I remember there was talk of giving him something out of the Benevolent, but he had passed on before we passed the order.”

“Ah, yes, we must all pass on.”

“That's it—come to-day and gone to-morrow, as the lodger said owin' two months' rent.”

A laugh went up at Crossman's remark. Crossman could always be counted on for a laugh. D'you remember his one about the schoolmistress and the house-painter? Clever chap, Crossman. Go-ahead, too. Knew a good thing when he was on one. Doubled the orders for Youneedawear Slumber Suits in Barnstaple alone. “I oughta recollek the name—be fergettin' me own next—perhaps Our Friend at the top of the table can inform us?”

Our Friend at the top of the table had been paying no apparent attention to the conversation. He had got through a cut off the roast, well soaked in H.P. Sauce, passed on to apple tart, and was contemplating bread and marmalade with some of the cream for which Mrs. Yeo's hotel was famous. After that he would have cheese.

All the table waited on Our Friend's words. Anything to do with the past and Our Friend knew it. Forty-five years in business and still going strong. There had been an attempt to nickname him Johnnie Walker, but the name hadn't stuck. It was undignified. For years now Our Friend had been called the Admiral, and the Admiral he remained, for indeed there was something at once nautical and commanding about his neat appearance.

Our Friend deliberately took up his third cup of tea. Before drinking he cleared his throat. All attention was riveted. Even Gutteridge and Verschoyle paused in discussing the merits of Morris and Ford.

"Grigson was the name. Gregory Grigson."

"That's right, Grigson."

"Grigson."

"'Course. Can't think 'ow I forgot it."

Tension relaxed. There was a renewed noise of knives and forks scraping on plates and of suction something like a vacuum cleaner imbibing water as the gentleman ate and drank.

In groups they left the table, some to gaslit bedrooms, some to various sitting-rooms, all to sit with pen, paper, and a little attaché-case writing off to the firm, reporting progress, arranging for a room in another town next week.

Our Friend the Admiral was the last to leave as he had been the last to enter the room. He was a gentleman, and liked to make his meal approach as nearly the time of a gentleman's dinner without inconveniencing Mrs. Yeo.

"Your table in the back room is cleared, Mr. Battersby, as soon as you are ready for it."

"Thank you, Mrs. Yeo. I shall be proceeding thence so soon as I have finished this delicious lemon-curd tartlet."

"Ah, now, they're my sister's. She knew you liked them. There was a time when I could put a plate of those lemon-curd tartlets as high as the centre vase on the table and it would be cleared before the meal was over. But the gentlemen don't seem to eat nowadays like they used to . . ."

"No, it's not like it used to be. Eheu fugaces, Mrs. Yeo, eheu fugaces! Nervous excitement. They're on the move too much. Too anxious to get away. They haven't their

hearts in their work. Now I am rarely finished before a Saturday morning. But these young fellows scramble through their orders to be off on a Thursday evening. Hurry—hurry—hurry. It ruins the digestion.”

“That’s so, Mr. Battersby, just as you say. But we must keep up with the times, mustn’t we? I’m trying to get the Council to let me turn the backyard into a garage.”

“Ah, you study your guests *too* much, Mrs. Yeo. Why can’t they be content with the railways instead of having these motors? The South, the Great, and the Midland. They’ve always been good enough for me—though, of course, we keep a car at home for joy-riding.”

What harm was there in a little white lie like the last? One must keep up appearances if one is to keep up with the times.

2

Nice woman, Mrs. Yeo. Quite a lady, and had worked Godolphin’s up from next to nothing. Twenty-eight years she’d been here, and he’d been once a month almost every year since then—except the time, three years ago, when he underwent that eye operation. Funny how the old trouble seemed to be coming back again. After a long day naturally your eyes get tired at sixty-eight. Perhaps it was just *anno Domini*.

Nice of them to let him have this room to himself.

Don’t feel like work this evening. Turn in and get a good sleep. Probably be all right in the morning. Deal with correspondence then. No, there was that eight forty-five post to catch. Some pressing matters to attend to. And he must drop a line to Kate.

Mr. Battersby opened a letter.

WILLIAMSON & SON
THE QUALITY SHOP

High Street,
Exchester,
Devon.

JEWELLERY
NOVELTY GOODS
SILVERWARE
ART STONWORK
REPAIRS EXECUTED

DEAR SIR,

I beg to state that my father, Mr. Joseph Williamson, Senior, passed peacefully away in his sleep last Tuesday.

It was a tranquil end of an esteemed parent. He had been ailing for some months.

Why do these young people use the typewriter? So difficult to read. Why not a good copperplate hand like his own? Or was this a circular letter to the trade? He hoped not. It would have been civil of young Williamson to have written personally to an old friend of his father's. He brought his eyes into focus once again.

I take this opportunity of also intimating to you with reference to the decease of the above, that the negotiations pending the illness of Mr. Williamson, Senior, *re* the amalgamation of this firm with a larger concern are now almost completed. We are, under the circumstances, not renewing our stock just at present, and are anxious to save you an unnecessary call.

Yours faithfully,

JOS. WILLIAMSON.'

Ah! Incorporated Art Gifts, Ltd., buying them up, of course. Eheu fugaces! Not a very civil letter, and there was another good customer gone. He'd heard enough of the Incorporated. They'd bought up Puxley's in the High Street here. It had been a sound little concern on the old lines, and now they'd taken down the old premises, put in one of their great blazing shop fronts, and filled the windows with flashy, cheap trinkets not worth the price of carriage.

Mr. Battersby was senior West Country representative of Messrs. Netherton and Goldberg, fancy goods manufacturers and silversmiths, Dalston Lane, E. He used to look almost lovingly at the bag of stock on a chair near him. At least he could offer his clients a quality article. He would never forget the time he had gone into one of the Incorporated shops in an effort to get a little extra business. "Traveller? Not to-day, thank you. We've got enough to see to as it is. Quite enough stock, and up-to-date, too. Netherton and Goldberg? Never heard of them. Ah, they may be old established. I'm not saying they aren't. A

damn sight too old established. Try the Tower of London, old man."

A gratuitous insult. And from a young fellow who was obviously no gentleman. In his day, a gentlemanly bearing had been an essential of good business. Hullo, 7.45! Post goes in an hour.

With aching eyes Mr. Battersby plied on in his neat copper-plate, checking his order book and writing letters.

The gas seemed to be burning less brightly. Funny how gas can't be relied upon for light nowadays. Or was it his sight?

Well, he must drop that line to Kate. Thank goodness he had a good wife at home. He was not a man to go carrying on with the chambermaids at every house on the road like Crossman and the rest of them. Kate wouldn't mind a few words left out here and there and a little illegibility. She knew about his eyes. And hadn't she had her troubles, too? When she had that cancer in the throat they all said she would never recover.

He'd lost a lot of business then worrying about her at home and him miles away on the road. Anything might have happened. Thank the dear Lord he'd always been a good churchman. The Lord provides in his own good time and the Lord had provided for him.

By denying them children, He had enabled them to save enough money to pay the best doctors and surgeons, and Kate was with him still. The old trouble hadn't returned, though she'd never picked up her strength somehow. But the rent of the house was not much—an advantage of living in the provinces. A nice little place built just before the war and therefore sound. Outside Devizes. As Kate had said: "In the town, yet not in it. A regular camelia." And he had laughed and replied: "Chameleon, my dear, chamelcon." How they had laughed! Always a little joke.

It would have surprised Spender and the rest of them if they had known what a jolly old boy the Admiral was at home. The Admiral in the messroom, eh? Well, here goes.

GODOLPHIN'S COMMERCIAL HOTEL,

FORE STREET, BIDWORTHY,

NORTH DEVON.

MY DEAR KATE,

Only a line. I enclose p.o. for 5s. 4d. (five shillings and fourpence) towards the car. Put it away carefully. Business is not picking up yet, but times are bad. The eyes are none too good. Back by the late on Sat.

Yours affectionately,
ALFRED.

N.B.—Poor old Williamson of Excheater is dead. You will remember I took you to look him up that time we were at Sidmouth.

3

The gas was full on in the commercial room. Price was packing up. He'd get off to-night. A row of coat-hangers in his Essex saloon showed you he was in the robes and mantles line. The Admiral came out with his letters.

"Drop you at the P.O.?"

"Thank you no, sir. A little air will do me good."

"The old Admiral's showing his age a bit," said Crossman, who was having a last pipe in the hotel doorway. "D'you notice 'e doesn't seem to see straight. Look at 'im goin' down the street there. Quite unsteady. Yet he's T.T. as Pussyfoot himself."

"Yes, the old boy's cracking up. 'Bout time 'e retired. I'll bet he's feathered 'is nest all right."

"Too damn superior fer me," said Huggins of Esivacs, who had joined the group at the door. "Oi've no use fer a feller as lords it over yer when yer know 'e's got about as much business as could be put in a kangaroo's pocket."

"I 'ear the Incorporated is buying up Netherton's," said Crossman. "Wonder if the ole boy knows?" Crossman knew everything, other people's business as well as his own.

When the Admiral returned, he popped into the com-

mercial room, as was his custom, to say good night. Collins of International Pearl Collar Studs sang out : " Seen the letter from Williamson's, Mr. Battersby? That'll be a blow to your business. The Incorporated's taking them over."

" Yes, Young Williamson wrote me," but he noticed that Collins' letter was identical with his own, and he knew for a fact that Collins didn't go to Williamson's more than once a year. " Good night, gentlemen."

Mr. Battersby once more to-night consoled himself with the thought that he at least had a quality article to offer to his clients. He turned down the bedroom gas. Eheu fugaces ! Home soon now.

4

The car arrived from the Motor Supplies Co. Kate was delighted. The young man accompanying it, quite a gentleman, offered to give her a lesson. " I shall be able to learn while you are away, Alfred," she said. " No carrying on now," said Mr. Battersby, with a jolly twinkle at the young man. But somehow, as the weeks passed, Kate hadn't picked up enough strength to get about and learn to drive the car.

In early March a surprise awaited Mr. Battersby at Godolphin's. " Yes, we've had the electric light put in," said Mrs. Yeo. " We've got a lovely new fixture in your sitting-room." He beheld a pink glass shade which deflected the light in a glaring circle from the ceiling to the table. He did not say that he had refused to have the electric light at home because it hurt his eyes. Mrs. Yeo took him on a tour of inspection of all the switches and fixtures, an honour meet for him as senior hotel guest. But all Mr. Battersby could bring himself to say was " Eheu fugaces ! " " Yes, Mr. Battersby, just as you say. We must move with the times, that's what I say." She understood Latin even less than Mr. Battersby.

At the end of that week he received a further surprise, in the form of a letter from Netherton's head office in London. This was out of order. Their letters generally arrived at the beginning of the week.

DEAR MR. BATTERSBY,

You will no doubt be surprised to hear that we have amalgamated with Incorporated Art Gifts, Ltd. Naturally for the good of the firm we must move with the times, and although the decision was not unexpected it was more sudden than many anticipated.

The Incorporated Art Gifts Company is a big firm, and of course they expect to reorganize our own concern. I am therefore taking this opportunity of thanking you very sincerely for your long and loyal service to the old firm. It is largely due to the loyal support of such servants as yourself that our high reputation has been maintained.

As I am retiring myself I am not in a position to do anything but advise. I shall naturally advise the reorganized company—if my advice is worth anything—to endeavour to retain your services. Although on consulting the books I see that your order list has somewhat decreased lately, I well understand that this is possibly due to the keen competition of Art Gifts, Ltd., themselves, a position that will now be obviated by amalgamation.

I wish I could hold out some hopes for you, but I understand that the system of representatives employed by the amalgamators is different from our own. Again believe me when I say that your long and loyal services have been deeply appreciated by Mr. Goldberg and myself.

Yours sincerely,

JAS. NETHERTON,
Sales and General Manager.

A very civil letter and in his own handwriting too. Of course he'd heard rumours, but this was obviously the sack. A very gentlemanly way of putting it. Let's see, £1000 in the bank, and take off another fifty for the car. Not enough to last long with the possibility of more doctor's bills. His sight didn't seem to be improving either. A guffaw echoed from the commercial room. Put himself on the Benevolent like poor old Gregory Grigson? Have his private affairs discussed? Not he! The old Admiral reduced to the ranks.

Some joke that would be. Impossible! He would say he was retiring to that feathered nest which they all supposed he'd got. Meanwhile business as usual and get on with the week's work. What was that they used to sing in the trenches? 'Old soldiers never die.' He wished he'd been young enough to go.

It was a wet Saturday when Mr. Battersby returned to Devizes after that eventful week. He must save money now. Not take the bus, but walk to the station.

There was no light in the front room. Funny. Not like Kate to be out on a Saturday. Flo, the daily, answered the door.

"Oh, sir, I waited behind to tell yew, sir—they've taken Mrs. Battersby to 'orspital. She'd been poorly all the week. It's the old trouble, they say, sir."

5

Father Bengs, Father Wilkinson, and Father Lewis were having a hurried fish lunch in Saint Aidan's Clergy House, Crawley Street, E. 14.

"There's a gentleman to see you, Father," said Herbert, the young servant.

"Who is he and what does he want?"

"He won't give no name, Father, and says it's an important personal matter."

"The usual, I suppose," said Father Simpson. "Who's going to see him? It's your turn, Father."

Father Lewis went to the clergy house door which was also the door to the church.

"I am a gentleman, sir, and a good churchman. Through no fault of my own, sir, I am temporarily out of employment. Rather I should put it down to 'cheu fugaces'—if one may say so. I should be obliged to you, sir, if you would inform me whether you are in need of someone to do clerical work."

"I am afraid not. I advise you to try your local employment exchange. You should have read the notice in the church porch, you know."

Father Lewis was not an unkind man. But one must be

practical. In the church especially it is essential to move with the times. The notice in the church porch ran : ' The Vicar regrets that he is unable to offer financial assistance to any but parishioners.' Luckily Mr. Battersby's sight did not permit of his reading that notice.

"I always mistrust the ones that try to put over the gentlemanly act." Father Lewis returned to his cooling fish-cake.

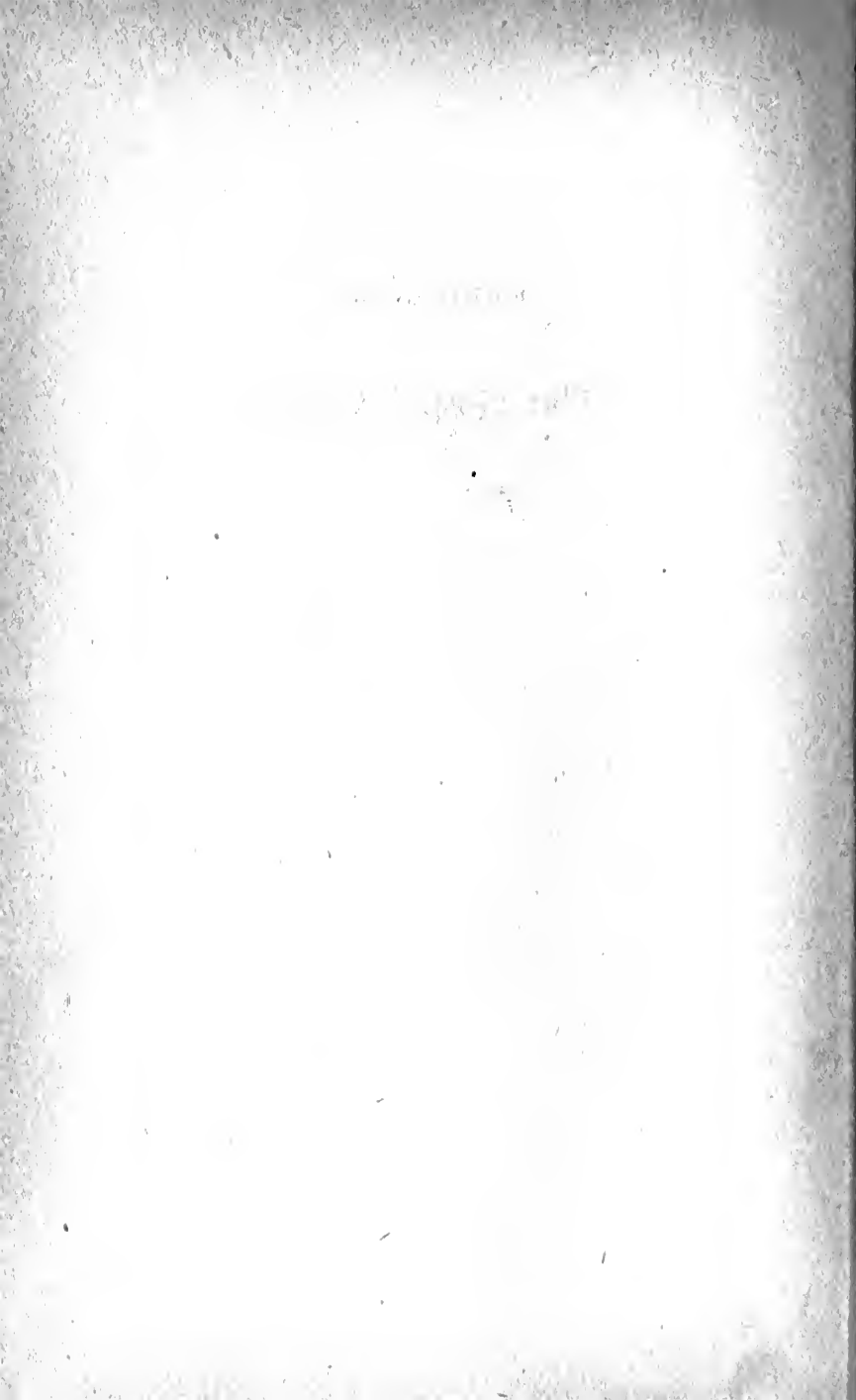
THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES

The first part of the history of the United States is the period of the early settlement of the colonies. This period is characterized by the struggle for independence from Great Britain. The second part of the history is the period of the American Revolution. This period is characterized by the struggle for independence from Great Britain. The third part of the history is the period of the American Civil War. This period is characterized by the struggle between the North and the South. The fourth part of the history is the period of Reconstruction. This period is characterized by the struggle to rebuild the South after the Civil War. The fifth part of the history is the period of the Gilded Age. This period is characterized by the rise of industrialization and the growth of the middle class. The sixth part of the history is the period of the Progressive Era. This period is characterized by the rise of the Progressive movement and the reform of government. The seventh part of the history is the period of World War I. This period is characterized by the United States' entry into the war and the emergence of the United States as a world power. The eighth part of the history is the period of the Roaring Twenties. This period is characterized by the economic boom and the rise of Prohibition. The ninth part of the history is the period of the Great Depression. This period is characterized by the economic crisis and the rise of the New Deal. The tenth part of the history is the period of World War II. This period is characterized by the United States' entry into the war and the emergence of the United States as a world power. The eleventh part of the history is the period of the Cold War. This period is characterized by the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union. The twelfth part of the history is the period of the Vietnam War. This period is characterized by the United States' involvement in the war and the rise of the anti-war movement. The thirteenth part of the history is the period of the Watergate scandal. This period is characterized by the resignation of President Richard Nixon. The fourteenth part of the history is the period of the Reagan Revolution. This period is characterized by the rise of Ronald Reagan and the conservative movement. The fifteenth part of the history is the period of the Clinton years. This period is characterized by the rise of Bill Clinton and the end of the Cold War. The sixteenth part of the history is the period of the Bush years. This period is characterized by the rise of George W. Bush and the September 11 attacks. The seventeenth part of the history is the period of the Obama years. This period is characterized by the rise of Barack Obama and the economic recovery. The eighteenth part of the history is the period of the Trump years. This period is characterized by the rise of Donald Trump and the 2020 election. The nineteenth part of the history is the period of the Biden years. This period is characterized by the rise of Joe Biden and the 2020 election. The twentieth part of the history is the period of the future. This period is characterized by the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

DOUGLAS BOYD

★

The Gospel Chariot



I WAS born in 1902. My earliest, most vivid recollection of association with books is my father standing for long periods at the second-hand bookshops in Charing Cross Road, with me, a very small boy, hanging patiently to his coat-tails. My father was then contributing to such well-known periodicals as *Chambers's Journal*. My first venture into the realms of literature was with a short article, for which I received fifteen shillings, printed in *The Weekly Telegraph*.

In the ten years following I wrote frequently till four o'clock in the morning, going to bed to snatch a few hours' sleep when farm labourers were on their way through the fields to bring the cows to the milking sheds, but nothing that I wrote was published. I made the mistake common to would-be authors, writing of things of which I knew very little when material for countless stories was close at hand.

Meanwhile, I lived for one year in the East End of London, renting one small room, my furniture consisting of a camp-bed, a table, one chair, and a gas-ring. Returning to the Midlands, I passed from being a leather sorter to a position, in a boot manufacturer's office, that combined all the qualifications of an office-boy to that of a secretary, and, to some extent, manager of the factory as well; for the principal of the firm was travelling for orders five days of the week.

But at night I always returned to the little village in which I resided, exchanging the heat of the factory and the smell of burning oil for the cooler, sweeter air of the country, leaving behind me shining shoes still on the last for the sight of the muddy boots of the villagers returning from the fields.

I then contributed to the *Northamptonshire County Magazine* a series of short stories dealing with county characters, but I did not receive higher recognition until one of my short

stories was accepted by the editor of one of the best literary monthlies. It was acclaimed to be one of the best stories published in that year. Since then my stories have twice been included in *Best Short Stories of the Year*, edited by Edward J. O'Brien, and others have been included in five anthologies. I have contributed to many of the leading literary weeklies and monthlies and to newspapers in all parts of the country; and some of my stories have been published in Denmark, Sweden, South Africa, and Australia.

I am now engaged on a novel, the scene of which is laid principally in a small, pretty village in the midst of the Northamptonshire uplands.

In a criticism of my work Edward J. O'Brien says :

'A native of Northamptonshire, his deep sense of the land is instinctive. He is a faithful imaginative chronicler of that county and its people. He shares with H. E. Bates the distinction of being one of the two most distinguished story writers of English rural life.'

DOUGLAS BOYD.

THE GOSPEL CHARIOT

THERE was a restful stillness in the air, a silence broken only by the sound of the steel bit between the pony's jaws and the occasional rattle of the harness as she shook the flies away from her glossy skin. The sun had gone down behind Calloway Hill, throwing around it all the splendour of a golden sunset before it reached the horizon ; for to the south it still spread with a soft warm glow over the lowlands, touching the fields with yellow, burnishing the harsh green of the tree-tops.

The pony stood patiently between the shafts of a small trap just outside the gabled porch of the Bull Inn. The innkeeper was at her head, loosely holding the reins and gently stroking her neck with his free hand.

A man, wearing a shabby suit of black and a shapeless black hat, was walking toward them on the cobbled pavement. He was a little over average height, but his back was slightly bent as though continual stooping at some task had permanently curved his spine. About his shrunken neck the brown coarse skin was loose ; and he held his head forward from his body with his thin face raised, so that he had the appearance of one always peering anxiously ahead. As he approached, the innkeeper smiled a welcome.

"Here ye are, an' the Gospel Chariot all ready."

"Aye—the Gospel Chariot."

"All ready for its journey," said the innkeeper, giving the pony a final caress.

"Thank'ee, Silas. Here's a bunch o' watercress for your wife. Thought she'd like some for her tea."

"Very good on you, I'm sure. How's the beds ? "

"Lookin' fine."

“Where are ye makin’ for to-night?”

“Upper Wreyford. Parson Gilchrist should ha’ gone, but he fell sick an’ he called on me at the last moment. Now, I maybe c’n sing a bit, bein’ accustomed to lead the singin’ in chapel, but he knows I can’t say owt. But he would ha’ none on it. ‘Put your armour on,’ he says; which I ’ave done, as ye c’n see; ‘an’ pray to the Lord that He put His precious words into thy mouth.’ An’, by Jimmy, that He will ’ave to do, for though I c’n praise Him in song wi’ all me heart an’ all me soul, it looks like as if my tongue will be dumb to-night.”

He put his boot on the step and pulled himself into the trap. He took the reins the innkeeper held up to him.

“Thank’ee, Silas. Good evenin’.”

He shook the reins and the pony started off at a walking pace, but when they had left the village and reached the high road he gently slapped her back with a loose rein and she broke into a steady trot. Within a few minutes they reached a point where another road crossed.

Standing beside the sign-post were four men, watching the approach of the trap.

Three of them were also dressed in black. One was a small, thin man with a quick, bird-like expression, and he wore a black cut-away coat, buttoned high on his chest and falling away from his hips into two tails, and when he walked he looked like a strutting blackbird. The other two were short, stout men, with small eyes set in thick, heavy features; one had steel-rimmed spectacles balanced unevenly on the large bridge of his nose, and the other had a massive gold chain drooped twice across his broad chest; both wore straight frock-coats with silk facings. They were square-jawed and austere, but the thin man had an air of nervousness.

The fourth man was sturdily built. He wore a dirty tweed jacket, one pocket of which bulged. His bowed legs were clothed in corduroy breeches, brown leather gaiters, and heavy brown boots. When he opened his mouth it was to its widest extent, exposing large white teeth. His neck was a dark purple colour, and his red face with its robust

health and good-humour contrasted oddly with the other faces about him, stern and aloof.

“ Ah, here we are ! ” he bawled, slapping his gaiters with his stick. “ The Gospel Chariot ! Gum, I’m in good company to-night, eh ? ” The thin man started as a thick thumb was poked into the small of his back. “ Fust time I’ve ever travelled with the cloth, so to speak. An’ what do you think my wife’ll say when she sees me a-steppin’ outer this ’ere ? ‘ Bill Pike ’—that’s my name, for the hinforma-tion of you reverend gentlemen—‘ Bill Pike,’ she’ll say, ‘ what’s come over ye ? ’ What’ll I say ? I’ll pull her fat leg, see if I don’t. I’ll say, sanctimonious-like, ‘ Martha, I’ve turned over a new leaf, an’ all. A man is known by the company that he keeps.’ An’ what do you think she’ll say to that, eh ? ”

He looked at them, waiting for them to betray some sign of interest, but they stood stiffly erect, with faces unmoved.

“ What do you think she’ll say ? I’ll tell’ee,” he said, solemnly. “ ‘ Bill Pike,’ she’ll say, ‘ I’d almos’ believe ’ee if I didn’t know ye fer such a lousy liar ! ’ ” And he burst into a loud roar, doubling up with mirth and slapping his gaiters with his stick every time he straightened himself.

The man with the gold chain turned quietly to the driver of the trap.

“ Where is Samuel Gilchrist ? I thought he was coming.”

“ So he was, Mr. Burbidge. He took sick an’ sent for me this afternoon, just as I was off to take a walk an’ a look over my watercress beds. It’s too late, ’e says, to get anyone else, an’ I must go instead. But what, says I, o’ the singin’ in chapel to-night ? Who’s goin’ to lead ’em ? They must do without ’ee, ’e says. But, says I, thee knows I can’t talk, though maybe I c’n sing a bit. Pray, ’e says, an’ the Lord’ll put His precious words into thy mouth. None o’ them has come into my head yet, an——”

“ Where are you going, then ? ” asked the man with the spectacles.

“ Upper Wreyford, Mr. Shaw, sir.”

“ Then that means you will have to drive. I’m preaching

at Nenbury, John Burbidge at Borbrooke, and William Dunn at Lower Wreyford."

They climbed into the trap, seating themselves one beside the driver, the other two opposite. Placing a heavy boot on the step, the man in the tweed jacket plunged after them and stood between their knees, looking down on them.

"It's real good of you gentlemen to offer me a lift. Now, which side o' this 'ere tub am I to sit? There's barely room for more than two aside, is there? Tell you what," he said cheerfully, "let me sit on the shafts an' drive. I'm used to it, I am."

One of them glanced up and said shortly :

"There is no need. The one who goes the farthest always drives the horse."

"Oh, that's the arrangement, is it? An' a very good arrangement it is, too. An' the gent driving now is going to Upper Wreyford, which is near where I'm going. Well, it's heads this side, tails t'other." He took a coin from his pocket and tossed it. Then he grinned at the two seated opposite the driver. "'Tis hard luck on ye, sure," he said ; and squeezed himself on the seat. "Right away, ma beauty ! Step it out !" He leaned back as far as he was able and relapsed into silence.

They turned off the high road, taking the narrower road to the right. The church clock in the village behind them struck five ; then, as though its quick clear notes were a sign to them, others in neighbouring villages began to chime the hour, but sleepily, as though they would have forgotten but for that sharp warning.

On the right the gentle slopes of the hills with their scattered clumps of gorse became more and more indistinct, leaving only dark ridges sharply outlined against the purple sky ; on the left the valley spread, the hedges losing their shapelessness, becoming vague black lines drawn across the smooth pasture land. The river parted the meadows, twisting and turning between marshy banks, its silver light interrupted here and there by shadowy drooping willows.

Bill Pike stared about him, seeing everything that was to be seen, every now and then giving cries of encourage-

ment to the pony: "Gee hup, lassie! Step a-long, ma beauty! Come now, pick 'em hup!" Cries to which she instantly responded.

His presence seemed to take away from the others any desire for conversation between themselves. The man with the gold chain fingered it unceasingly, the one with the spectacles sat with his hands clasped over his stomach, and the thin man sat with his fingers splayed on his trousers just above the knees as though that attitude would assist him to rise at any moment. Only the driver's voice was heard, a low muttering not distinguishable to his companions and sometimes accompanied by the raising of his right hand as though in benediction on the pony's jogging buttocks.

"Nice pony you've got," said Bill Pike suddenly. "She steps like a thoroughbred. An' talking o' mares, do you know where I've bin to-day? You don't? Well, I'll tell you. You know old Carson—Carson the grazier—'im what lives down on that farm near Upton—well, I've bin there. On a errand o' mercy, like. His mare was sick an' he sent fer me to see if there was anything the matter an' to see if I could do anything for her. There was. I shot her. An' do you know fer why? You don't? Well, she'd got something in her belly—a disease, genelmen, a disease. Do you know what it was? You don't? Well, I'll tell you, if you like."

He looked round at the other men, but they appeared not to have heard him.

"Well," he went on, "perhaps it ain't of no concern to you genelmen, horses not 'avin' souls. It 'ad bin getting worse fer some time, but old Carson is old an' he either didn't see it or didn't want. Cried like a babby when he knowed what I'd done. But in pain, she were, turrible. Very 'umane o' me. Errand o' mercy."

He relapsed once more into momentary silence, and then continued animatedly, as though he had thought of a topic that would be of greater interest.

"What might be the meaning o' this 'ere Gospel Chariot, Mr. Burbidge, sir? When you said you'd be pleased to give me a lift in it, I thought you meant a gilded car, like

on a merry-go-round, pulled by four white horses an' going up to Heaven."

The man with the gold chain looked at him.

"There are four occasions in the year when all ministers and local preachers in the district pay a visit to one another's chapels, a practice begun ten years ago and which has been faithfully kept up. My friends, here, and the Reverend Samuel Gilchrist, who, unfortunately, is not with us tonight, hire this trap to convey us to the chapels at Nenbury, Borbrooke, Lower and Upper Wreyford, with whom we are accustomed to exchange pulpits. We call this trap 'The Gospel Chariot' for that reason. It is known as such in all the neighbouring villages." He lifted his eyes and looked over Bill Pike's head. "It carries four ministers of the Gospel, whose mission it is to lead sinful men into the paths of righteousness."

"That means you'll be getting off, one here and one there, like. But what about the pony?"

"As we have told you, he who goes the farthest drives the horse and sees to it that she is made comfortable during the service. Afterward, he has to harness her, and pick us up on the return journey."

"An' a very good arrangement it is, as I said afore. Especially," Bill Pike added, with a sly wink, "for you other gentlemen." He was quiet for a moment; then his face widened into a grin and suddenly he broke into another roar of laughter. Louder and louder it grew, until he could not restrain himself and he threw back his head in uncontrollable mirth, the tears welling to his eyes and dropping down his red cheeks; for it seemed to him that nothing could be so funny as the picture of Bill Pike sitting solemnly among four hymn-singing parsons.

"What'll my wife say when she sees me? I c'n see her—I c'n see her—coming out the cottage an' staring at me like as if I was a blasted angel. 'Tis only me, your own Bill Pike,' I'll say, flapping me wings! Oh, Lord!" he shouted, slapping his coarse big hands upon the knees of his breeches.

His laughter was a strange sound on the lonely road,

now almost in darkness. It went on in front of the trap, echoing beneath the overhanging branches of the trees frightening the birds from the hedgerows, so that they flew in short sharp spurts farther behind them, and startling a hare from the ditch, so that it sped swiftly along the side of the road ahead of them, and then vanished as though it had not been.

The three preachers looked at him with frowning, hostile faces. His laughter ceased abruptly. With an apologetic expression he glanced from one to another.

"No irreverence intended, genelmen, begging your pardon, I'm sure."

The man driving appeared to have no interest in what was going on behind him. It seemed that his thoughts were concerned only with the task he had undertaken, his faith in himself becoming less with every mile they covered. Sometimes his indistinct muttering ceased and then he would speak in a louder, protesting voice.

"Lord help me—I don't know what to say! It was wrong o' Parson Gilchrist to ask me. I can't do it—I know I can't. Maybe I c'n sing a bit, but I can't preach. I can't think o' nothin'—nothin' at all! Lord help me!" And then he would resume muttering, and it sounded as though it came from an entirely different person.

Bill Pike's hand moved cautiously to the bulge in his pocket. With a look of surprise, as though he had hitherto forgotten what was there, he pulled out a black bottle.

"Hoping you don't mind if I takes a pull at this 'ere," he said, hesitatingly. He received no answer, and taking their silence for acquiescence he took out the cork, lifted the bottle to his lips, and gulped, rapidly. As the trap rolled with a hollow sound over a stone bridge and the road widened between thatched cottages, the smell of beer mingled with the cool sweet air. He replaced the cork and put the bottle back in his pocket. Then he breathed heavily and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand—carefully, as though it were expected of him by the kind of people with whom he was travelling. The man with the spectacles touched the driver on the shoulder.

"I get out here," he said ; and, when the trap stopped, he alighted.

"God be with you," he said.

"God be with you, Adam," they answered.

"Shaw !" grinned Bill Pike, affably.

The pony went off at a trot again, but Bill Pike suddenly stood up and shouted :

"Hi ! There's a woman there. Rein the pony in. Give 'er a lift, what ? The woman, I mean, not the pony." He laughed excitedly. "Whoa, ma beauty ! Whoa, there ! Steady, steady."

At the sound of his voice the pony stopped obediently. Near the foot of a giant oak stood a woman. So heavy with leaf were the branches that, although all other shadows had long since merged into the darkness, there it seemed darker still. Bill Pike sprang down and walked up to her.

"Why," he said, "if it ain't a gel ! An' a babe ! Where may you be going, lassie ?"

The girl glanced at him fearfully, and drew the scarf about her head a little closer.

"I'm walking to Upper Wreyford," she said in a low voice, as though her words were meant for him alone. "To my aunt's."

"That's a bit beyond where I'm going to, but I believe 'im as is driving is going that far. Come on, hup you git," he said in louder tones, as though to kill, before it was uttered, any protest from those in the trap. "I'll hold the babby."

"Thank you, sir."

"My name's Pike—Bill Pike. An' 'ere," he added, as, with one hand clasping the child, he pulled himself into the trap with the other. "I'm more used to holding horses than holding babbies."

With rough gentleness he laid the bundle in her arms.

"Tickle, ickle, pickle," he said, with an approaching forefinger. "Oh, it's asleep." He withdrew his finger hastily. "Fancy me not noticing that."

The young woman sat beside the driver, sheltered a little by his black hunched-up back from the slight breeze caused

by the motion of the trap. She was huddled in the corner with the scarf covering her face. The child was so closely wrapped in its soft woollen shawl that none of it was visible, and she held it tightly to her breast so that she might impart to the child the warmth of her own body. In her occasional sidelong glances at the two preachers there was a look of mistrust and a certain apprehension which their apparent indifference to her presence did not allay.

Bill Pike, sitting in the corner opposite her, with the two preachers beside him, seemed unable to keep either his hands or his voice still for very long, slapping his knees and frequently calling to the pony: "Git hup! Git hup! What's the matter wi' ye? Pick 'em hup, old gel!"

They passed a church, a long low structure built of crumbling, damp-marked sandstone. From its low square embattled tower the tenor bell peeled once, and then twice, quickly; was followed by other bells one after another, all jangling and wrangling; then slowly they sorted themselves out of the muddle, one late apologetic bell hurrying into a perfect single run. Gradually their pealing grew fainter; but over the dark fields came the sound of other bells breaking clear but harsh, then fading softly and sweetly, as if a gentle wind had caught them up and was bearing them farther away.

"Talking o' mares," said Bill Pike, "did you hear about that gel in Peverel? You didn't? Well, I'll tell you. She 'ad a kid—a bastard." He turned to the man beside him and tapped him on the knee. "An' it turned 'er 'ead. What was 'er name, now? Ann—Ann Collis, that was it."

At the mention of the name the two preachers stiffened. They looked quickly at each other, and even the driver ceased to mutter and half-turned his head so that he could hear; whilst the girl gripped her warm little bundle more tightly and shrank into her corner.

"I never knowed 'er," went on Bill Pike, "but you know how these 'ere things git around. They say it was a man name of Matthew Bray. We was a-talking about it in the 'Live an' Let Live' not long back, and strong was the argivement we 'ad, too. She 'ad it in a hovel one

evening, where some old witch belonging to the village, roaming about the fields, found her labouring an' 'elped 'er. It turned the young gel's 'ead, they say, an' got 'er religious-minded, if you knows what I mean ; thought she'd committed a very turrible sin, an' was doomed to everlasting hell-fire if she wasn't forgiven an' 'er babby blessed in the Lord's name. Bad case, that, genelmen, bad case." He nodded, pursing his lips.

"When the girl got better, she began to wander about the village o' nights wi' the babby in 'er arms. She used to hang about the chapel, waitin' for when the gates would be unlocked. An' then, one night, she saw lights there. They was holding a prayer-meeting, an' the Rev. Samuel was leading 'em in prayer, when all of a sudden she blundered in, right down the aisle, 'er 'air down an' 'er eyes all staring wild. Everybody looked astonished, an' when the Rev. opened his eyes an' saw 'er standing there, he couldn't speak for a moment. Then he started holding forth, pointing to 'er, saying that she was a woman sunk from grace an' that 'er soul was damned. He pushed 'er outer the chapel, calling 'er a wanton, who'd brought misery an' shame on 'er family. We o' the 'Live an' Let Live' was all o' the opinion that he oughter be ducked in the river."

The man with the gold chain turned to him haughtily.

"Mr. Gilchrist is a righteous man. He acted as he thought was right. The young woman was a member of his own congregation and one in whom he was particularly interested. That she should be having intimate relations with a man—whilst on the Sabbath worshipping the Lord and knowing all the time that for her to do so was blasphemy—was something he could not forgive. Her very presence there was desecration of the House of God."

For some time Bill Pike was silent ; and when he spoke again it was slowly and thoughtfully.

"Blas-pheemy, disecration—they are things I know nowt about, save when a man swears against God or laughs loud an' drops 'is spittle in church—or something like that. But if I'd bin parson, I'd 'ave not bin hard-spoken, but soft an' gentle-like, an' pitied 'er."

“We must not condone her weakness,” answered the other in a harsh voice. “She would not even divulge the name of the man who was the child’s father. She was not truly repentant, and she must suffer before she finds redemption and remission of her sins.”

Again the road widened between thatched cottages, encircled a large mound on which stood a tall elm, the branches of which stretched widely out beyond the mound, almost touching the steep roofs of the cottages. They passed a low, brick-built public-house, with a newly painted sign, and approached a square box-like building. The man with the gold chain rose from his seat, and the girl covered her face with her scarf and shrank back still farther, gathering herself up as though to avoid all contact with him. The trap stopped. He brushed by them and stepped down.

“God be with you,” said Bill Pike, solemnly. But there came no reply and the trap went on its way, its wheels grinding harshly the grit of the road.

There was left beside him only the thin nervous man, who either had not wished or had not the courage to say anything at all. With the departure of his two friends had gone also the feeling of moral strength their presence had given him. With Bill Pike’s eyes intently on him, his nervousness increased, and he looked anxiously and often ahead, where other lights were twinkling; and as they approached them, Bill Pike suddenly leaned sideways and shouted in his ear:

“Find what? Redemption? She’ll be finding the river, that’s what! An’ as fer the father o’ the child, I tell ’e they say it was the son of Ezra Bray, whoever ’e be, that was part cause on it. An’ who says it was sich a turrible sin, after all? She was only a woman wi’ a ’ealthy woman’s instinck.”

The thin man sprang to his feet.

“Pull up! Pull up!” he cried.

They had reached a lane and at the far end were the twinkling lights. Almost before the trap stopped he clambered out of it, but to his dismay Bill Pike followed him, keeping pace beside him. Their figures were soon lost in

the darkness of the lane, but Bill Pike's voice could still be heard raised in protest.

"'Ere's a poor gel going fast outer 'er mind. One kindly word would 'ave saved 'er. She'll be jumping in the river an' drownin' 'erself, that's what she will."

But the trap did not resume its journey. The girl was standing with the child in her arms, looking after them with bitter anger, until Bill Pike's indignant tones and the sound of his striding feet keeping pace with the thin man's hastening ones, grew fainter. Then hot tears of self-pity ran down her cheeks.

"Ann Collis."

She turned and stared at the driver of the trap. He, too, was standing, his shoulders a little more bowed, his head thrust forward. Beneath his black hat his eyes peered at her.

"They say 'twas my son, Matthew, Ann Collis. Wherever I go, they say 'twas 'im as done it. They say nowt to me, it is true, but they look at me an' their eyes say it. I know it, an' I ain't 'ad no peace o' mind for weeks. Matthew denies it; but how am I to be sure 'e speaks the truth? him 'avin' bin so familiar with 'e in the past, an' when he refuses to name the father."

He waited. She said nothing; only stared at him with wide eyes, and held the child more closely to her.

"Ye 'ave brought dishonour on yourself, an' reproach on me an' mine," he went on. "But I pity ye—I do, indeed, Ann Collis, an' whether 'twas my own son or not, I will not condemn ye." He took off his black hat. "Come, bring the child." He stretched out his arms. "Come, bring the child, an' I will bless it in the name o' the Lord."

As she made no movement to do so, he leaned forward and placed his hand on the child's head, but the girl sprang from him with a low cry, clambered wildly from the trap, and, her scarf blowing from her face and her burden swinging awkwardly in her arms, she ran back along the road and was lost in the night.

Long after she had gone, he stood looking after her, wondering. Then he began to speak, at first with a

low muttering that gradually rose into loud, passionate speech.

“For what, breathrin, was her sin? She gave birth to a child. ’Twas in the night—in a hovel, mark ye, shelterin’ from the wind. No stable that, wi’ sweet-smellin’ hay, but a cold stone an’ mud hovel, wi’ only the earth, soft an’ moist, beneath ’er. No frankincense an’ myrrh—just the dung-laden air an’ the stench o’ cattle. No evenin’ star above it, but black storm-clouds a-driftin’ across the sky, an’ the wind whining an’ the trees creakin’ an’ the bushes an’ hedges a-shudderin’. But ’ers was the everlastin’ miracle—an’ she offered ’er gift in the service o’ the Lord. Is the givin’ o’ life thus a greater sin than that o’ takin’ it away?”

“Was her unworthiness greater than that o’ those who condemned ’er? Were they without sin that they should cast at ’er the badge o’ infamy? Were their souls so free from all taint that they should write the word ‘defiled’ across ’er forehead? The owl looks grave an’ solemn, but ’e fastens cruel talons on his victim, an’ after ’e ’as swallowed it whole, he spews out the skin an’ bones in little round pellets. Breathrin, fer shame that ye should fasten your talons on ’er, taunt ’er with ’er wickedness, an’ then spurn ’er away from ye as though she were somethin’ vile from outer your mouth! Be ye merciful to the sinner, breathrin, an’ judge not, condemn not.”

The church bells long ago had ceased their call to service. In churches with spires and churches with towers, people were mumbling responses to intoning, surpliced clergymen. In small, square chapels congregations were singing heartily of wretched sinners plunged in the depths of dark despair, or were listening to men in black preaching of hell-fire and of the eternal damnation that lay in store for the wicked. But in the chapel at Upper Wreyford the worshippers still waited, whispering among themselves.

For on that lonely country road the pony stood patiently between the shafts. The tall trees were motionless, and soundless save for an occasional creaking; the stars shone through the overhanging branches; the hedges were still and silent,

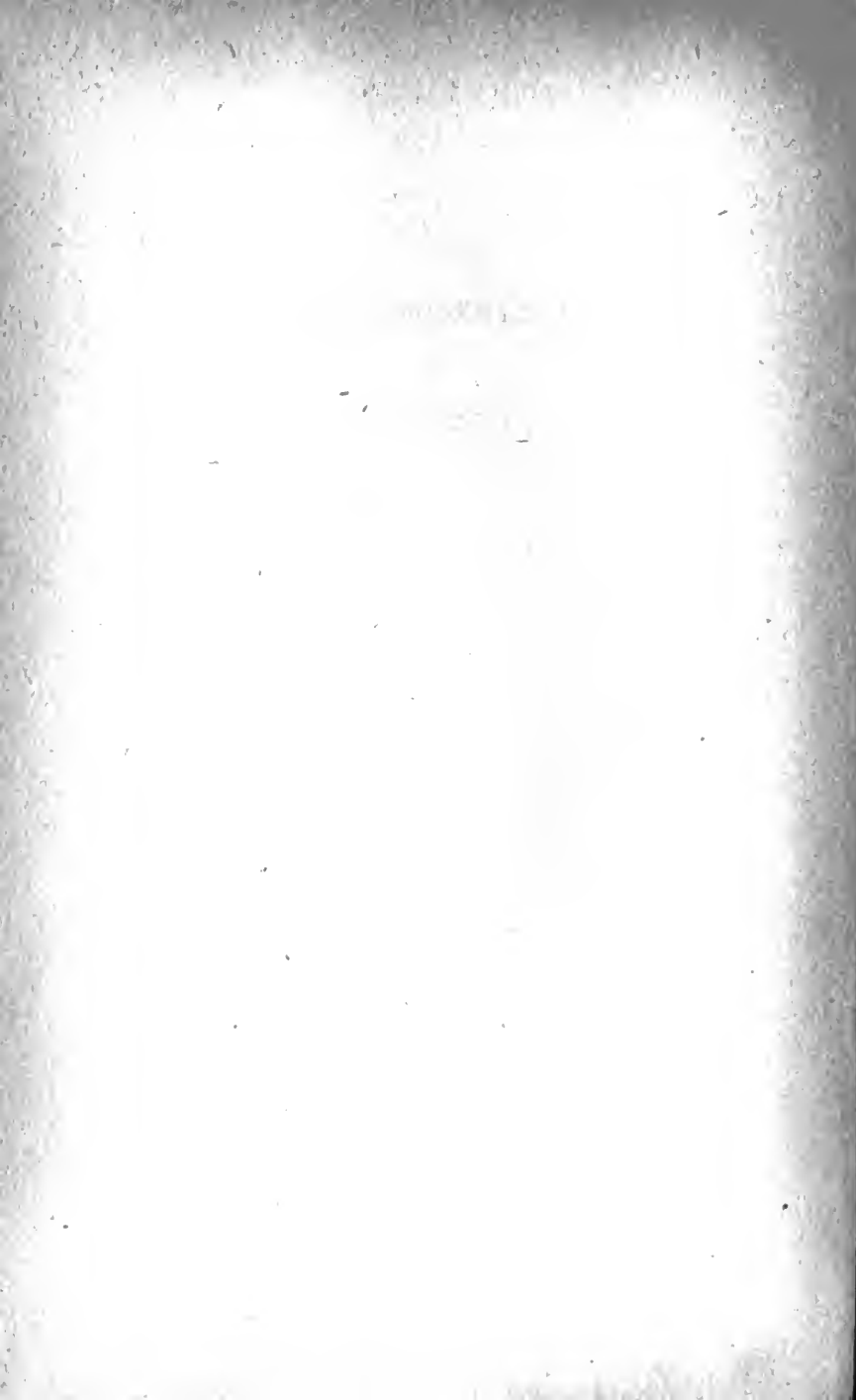
too, save for the quiet fluttering of sparrows nestling in the dark hedge-bottom.

And on the floor of the trap, as though it were a pulpit, stood Ezra Bray, the night air cool and sweet on his brow, his eyes alight with inspiration, unaccustomed words pouring in rough, uncultured tones from his lips ; with no one to hear him but the black, tall shapes that were about him, and the wild creatures that moved unseen and unheard in the fields beyond.

WALTER BRIERLEY

★

Transition



BORN at Waingroves, Derbyshire. Middle son of five, all miners. Father a winding engineman at the same colliery for forty-five years. Elementary school education to thirteen, then the pit. Worked underground at Waingroves Colliery until it closed as a result of the 1921 strike. Went to Denby Hall Colliery as a surface-man. There till December 1931, then told to 'stand off.' Did not get work again until 1 January 1935. McEvoy, the racing motorist and son of the artist, took me on at his engineering works in Derby as Timekeeper. There for eighteen months, then was appointed Children's Welfare Officer under the Derby Education Committee, a job that I was made for. Still there.

In 1926 gained a Miner's Welfare Scholarship tenable two days each week at University College, Nottingham. It was renewed until 1930-1. Got London Matric., failed in Inter. and was discarded. Out of work, then, I had no money to take it on my own.

In 1928 and 1932 won the 'Arthur Markham' memorial prize for an original narrative in prose. Wrote *Means Test Man* while unemployed, and during that time and since have contributed articles to the *Listener*, *Spectator*, *London Mercury*, and stories in a few magazines. *Sandwichman* was written last year, of course. In it is embodied a good many of my own experiences—but I had an excellent father, and was never a sandwichman.

I was married, too, without a hitch, in 1924, and have a son ten years of age. My wife was a school teacher.

WALTER BRIERLEY.

TRANSITION

IN the school playgrounds—the girls and infants one side of the wall, the boys the other—there was swift movement and quick, shrill voices. Girls stepped to the turn of skipping ropes and tossed balls with fine judgment, infant pulled at infant ; boys swerved and darted, bending bodies from the brushing, clutching fingers of the one who was 'on,' or who was 'it.' A youngster of ten, in desperate effort to evade capture, slipped round a group of senior boys and clutched at the last to help him turn more sharply. The senior, Jack Parker, clouted him as he dashed away, then spoke again to his two companions.

"Yes. I s'll be comin' down there this time on Monday."

"Wish I was leavin' to-day, as well," Sam Lester said with faint envy. "I'm goin' to the pit an' all, when I leave. My mam wants me to try for t'Co-op——"

"Co-op," Jack broke in. "My mam wanted me to try an' all. I'm bein' no counter-jumper."

"I don't want to go to t'pit," the third lad said. "I s'll try for t'Co-op."

"Ber," sneered Jack. "Look at 'em comin' 'ome from t'pit." He pointed over the school wall, across two fine meadows where the chimney, headgear, and screens of the mine stood perched on a small hill, dead-black in the glowing afternoon sunshine. Tiny figures moved down the steep pit bank on to Pit Lane, which led into the village. "Comin' 'ome, an' not three o'clock yet. An' you'll be stuck in t'Co-op till seven."

"An' they never 'ave many 'ol'days, either," Sam Lester was beginning.

"They don't," Jack took up the cue. "An' when they

'ave 'ol'days at t'pit they get dole for 'em. An' do Coppers ever see Derby County play at footba'?"

"They don't," Sam helped. "They at work all Sat'day afternoon. I'm not goin' to any shop. I'm goin' to t'pit when I leave at Christmas. Like Jack."

A whistle blew and Sam and the other boy turned at once and walked towards the lines forming at the school door. Jack stayed for a moment and watched the steam shoot from the exhaust and foam in the still air over the winding engine-house, watched the wheels in the headgear twinkle and slow to rest. Then he hurried to lines.

"Don't think because this is your last day at school, Parker, that you can slink into lines five minutes after the others. Stay at my desk when you get in."

He left the desk and went to his place with tingling hands; he sat and glared until the teacher looked at him, then he dropped his gaze.

"I'll make the devil look out when I've left," he muttered to his neighbour. "I'll come down when 'e's takin' drill an' shout——"

The master's eyes stayed on him and Jack was silent. He got out his library book and opened it—the last half of Friday afternoon was always silent reading—but he read nothing, sitting with empty eyes, thinking and sometimes thrilling.

When he reached home his tea was ready and he sat down at once, eager to get it over. His mother sat at the table while he ate; she would clear away the tea things and carry the pots into the kitchen immediately he had done, then straighten round and go shopping to Pirley. Every Friday she did this, for it was every Friday that her husband and their two sons brought home wages from the pit. They were home now; the father was in the garden watching his pigeons peck up the corn he had scattered, Tom dozing and starting in the chair under the narrow side window, Harry snoring on the sofa. They were still in their pit clothes. Mrs. Parker looked from Tom to Harry with faint disgust.

"Tom! Harry!" Tom murmured in reply. "Come

on. Get washed. Lyin' about in your pit-muck till bed-time. House's never tidy."

"You won't forget to bring my pit trousers, will you, mum?" Jack said across the table. "White moleskin. Don't bring me them cord'roy things. 'Ad I better go with you?"

"I shouldn't go to t'pit, Jack, if I was you." She had glanced at the other two, one drooping and jerking in the chair, the other sprawled in ugliness across the sofa. "Stop at 'ome a bit an' find a job in a shop or somewhere."

"I'm not. I'm not. My dad got me on at t'pit an' I'm goin'. Don't start that again, mum. I want to go to t'pit." She did not answer but began clearing the table. "I s'll want a strap, as well."

"You've got two or three cricket belts."

"Oo. Them won't do. I want a leather strap. I'll go with you to Pirley."

They walked to Pirley and he would have her buy the moleskin trousers, the blue linsey shirt, the nailed boots, and leather strap, before she pursued her regular line of shopping. He carried the parcels and waited outside grocery and provision shops, he followed his mother from stall to stall on the market, impatient of the jostling and noise. When he complained that he was tired and wanted to go home, his mother was angry.

"I told you to wait till I'd finished shoppin', didn't I? You must wait, now."

He brightened when they were walking back over the fields.

"Mum. Could I 'ave long trousers for Sunday, wi' my next suit?"

"I'll see."

"I don't think I s'll go to t'chapel on Sunday mornin' again, mum," he said after a while, and his tone asked that she would agree.

"Oh. An' why not?"

"Well. Not many go who goes to t'pit."

"Well, you'll go. So get that into your 'ead." There was some disgust in her voice. "I should think you want

to lie in bed till dinner time every Sunday, then rake about t'fields for the rest o' the day. Well, you're not."

"Our Tom an' 'Arry does."

She was silent in face of that. Her teeth pressed together and she did not speak when he offered another remark. She changed the full basket from one hand to the other that the physical effort might steady her wild thoughts. He'd be the same as the others. If only his dad would make him have something different. Still the dad hadn't much go in him, just a collier ; never known anything but the pit and the village. Well, Jack hadn't, so how could he be expected to want something he knew nothing about. She brightened and moved again to the boy.

"You must keep goin' to the chapel, Jack. Mester Poole's 'ead deputy at t'pit, an' if you go to Sunday School—well, 'e's sure to look after you down t'pit. You go. I should." He did not offer anything and she began again : "An' I should go to night classes, if I was you. They don't get to be deputies an' under-managers wi'out studyin'. I should."

"I think I shall go to night school. They don't boss you about same as at day school. I should soon chuck it if they did."

"Now, don't be too big a man. You'll wish someday, perhaps, that you'd learnt more at school."

As soon as they reached home, Jack tore open the parcels and was soon clattering about the kitchen floor in the nailed boots, looking down at the white moleskin trousers imprisoning his legs. Until now he had been free in shorts and light boots ; the thick cloth rubbing about his knees and the noise he made at every step brought a sheepish look to his face as he met the eyes of his parents ; he felt strange and less certain of himself.

The pit was idle next day, Saturday, and Jack hurried out as soon as he had had his breakfast to find Joe Lynam. Joe had worked at the pit for a year and had said he would take Jack the first morning. But Mrs. Lynam said her son had gone to an aunt in Pirley and would not be back before dinner. Jack turned away in anger and disappointment,

nor did he feel any more at ease when Sam Lester called and invited him to play in his back-garden. He didn't want to play in schoolboy fashion, now; they ought to know that. Did Sam ever shout to Joe Lynam and ask him 'to play'? Still there was nothing else to do until dinner.

"I've got some pit things ready for Monday," he told Sam at once. "Moleskins, and boots wi' clinkers in. An' a thick leather strap. I wish it was Monday."

Neither boys got pleasure out of the morning's play; when Mrs. Lester called Sam in for dinner he went at once, usually she had to come out three or four times and get from him: 'I'm comin',' or 'Just another minute.' But he was utterly sick of Jack's talking of the pit and left him eagerly. Jack was not unwilling to break away, either, for although he had enjoyed talking about Monday and the pit, there had been no response from Sam, who had tried all the time to slide the conversation to the games they agreed to play.

Immediately after dinner he went to his mother in the kitchen where she was washing up.

"Gi'e me threepence, mum," he pleaded in a whisper.

"Threepence! What do you want threepence for?" she cried.

"Shut up," he said quickly. "Dad'll 'ear you." His tone slowed again. "I'm goin' to t'cricket match wi' Joe."

"It's only a penny to go in, isn't it, for you?"

"Well—but—Joe'll 'ave some to spend."

She wiped her hands and gave him three pennies from her purse, and he went at once along the street to Joe's house and waited there until the Lynam family had finished dinner.

"You're goin' to t'pit, are you, my duck?" Mrs. Lynam asked, and Jack nodded in smiling agreement. "I thought your mam wanted to make sommat else of you. She said she'd enough wi' two lads at t'pit."

"She doesn't want me to go, but I'm goin'. My dad's got me a job, so I s'll 'ave to go, now."

"Pit's as good as any other job," Mrs. Lynam sniffed. "Them women who thinks their lads are better 'cos they work in a shop——"

She broke off when she found no one listening, her husband had left the table and gone into the garden, the elder son was deep in the sport page of the newspaper, and Joe and Jack were talking quickly. She left her chair and put the kettle on the gas ring to make herself a cup of tea. The two boys went out.

"Not time for t'match, yet," Joe said as they walked down the street and came to the small shop in the middle of the village. "Say, Jack. 'Ave you ever smoked?"

"No. I 'aven't. No. Why?"

"I 'ave." He was silent a moment watching the other. "I say. Fetch a packet from 'ere. They'll think it's for your dad." Jack looked startled, then laughed nervously. "Go on," Joe urged.

Jack took the two pennies and waited until the shop was empty, then fetched the five cigarettes and furtively transferred the packet to Joe. Jack seemed immensely relieved to be rid of them.

"We'll go down Stoney Lane to t'park, eh?" Joe said. "We've plenty of time."

They walked over Pit Lane, then turned down the narrow Stoney Lane hemmed in by tall, thick hedges. Joe pulled out the cigarettes and offered one to the other boy.

"No. I'd better——No."

"Come on. Get 'old o' one an' light it. Everybody smokes who goes to t'pit. Come on."

Jack was glad when the park entrance came in sight and he could throw away the cigarette; each time he had taken the thing from his mouth to expel the smoke he had drawn in, he had looked at it between his fingers and swallowed hard, shuddering inwardly at times. Joe seemed to throw his away with as much relief, though he attempted a gesture for Jack's sake, which was by no means a success.

Inside the park gates, Jack put down a penny on the table at which two cricket club officials sat, and passed on. Joe did the same, but one of the men caught his arm.

“Come on, young Lynam, twopence more. You go to work.”

Joe forked out two more pennies and came up to Jack mumbling in his throat, his mouth pushed out.

“I’ve never paid above a penny before. It’s that sod Kelly. I’ll bet their Bill’s come on for nowt. Ber!”

They walked on towards the playing pitch and sat down with a group of youths who sprawled about the grass on the top side of the wicket. One greeted Joe, who at once joined in the quick, vivid conversation. Most of the youths were gangers like Joe, and the talk rarely moved from that particular section of pit work. Jack listened but could get little sense from the chatter about ’osses, stints, lockers, doggers, couplers, drags—he wouldn’t ask Joe, though, it would all be plain to him when he had been at the pit a week. The youths were smoking and Joe looked stealthily around, then fetched out his cigarettes. Jack looked about, too, when he saw Joe get on to his stomach and elbows and light up, and moved away to sit among some schoolboys. His father was coming from the gate, he mustn’t let him see him with that swearing, smoking pit gang to-day. It wouldn’t matter next week.

He watched the play for a while, saw his brother Harry get fifteen runs and catch out one of the other side, then he went with two boys climbing the oak trees standing about the wide park. An ice-cream man came on to the field and they bought a cornet, then went into the long wood at the bottom of the park to play cowboys.

Sunday was an excruciatingly painful day. He went to Sunday School in the morning and afternoon much against his will; Joe Lynam had asked him to go a walk after dinner but Jack’s mother had been at the gate when the invitation was put out and she had told Joe firmly that Jack wasn’t going to rake about the fields on Sunday afternoons, he was going to Sunday School. Joe had gone off at once and Jack had walked into the house scowling and muttering in an ugly tone. But his mother went to chapel in the evening and the two boys did get an hour together in the fields, coming again into the village with pale faces and somewhat

guilty looks. Jack went to the tap at once and had a long drink.

“Don’t forget to call in t’ mornin’,” Jack said seriously to Joe when they parted. A sudden dread seized him. What if he was too late the first morning, and them at the pit got a job all ready for him. They wouldn’t have him if he put them in a mess like that. “Be sure, Joe,” he cried as the other merely nodded.

“Oh, I s’ll call. ’Alf-past six.”

Jack sat on the sofa from nine till half-past watching his mother put up the food for to-morrow’s shift—two slices of bread with bacon between, two of jam and an apple pasty went into each snap-bag. Then she brought in the pit-clothes from the kitchen where they had been drying and put them in heaps on the rug about the hearth. She left Jack’s on the chair by the dresser, they were clean and new-smelling; after to-morrow they would be another heap on the hearth. When he had seen his mother wash out his water drum and put it with the others on the sink near the tap, he went to bed. He was a long time dropping off to sleep, and twice during the night he wakened suddenly and lay listening with eyes held wide open. His mother’s voice brought him from a deep sleep and out of bed in quick bewilderment, and fear swept to his eyes when he ran downstairs and saw that his father was about to leave for work and his brothers had finished breakfast.

“Am I late?”

“No,” his mother said firmly. “Get your clothes on, it’s only quarter-past.”

“Now, be’ave thisen,” his father said as he slid the tape of his snap-bag over his arm and turned to the door. “Don’t let gaffer ’ave to come to me wi’ any tale about thee actin’ monny, an’ playin’ t’fool. Look after t’job tha’rt sent to, an’ tha’ll be all right. Mornin’, mother.”

He went and the two other sons followed him. Jack drank the tea his mother had poured out and began the boiled egg but turned from it before he had half eaten it.

“Can’t eat any more, mum,”

"Come on. Get it eaten. Tha'll be no good at work wi' nowt in thee belly. Come on."

"Gimme another cup o' tea, then."

"Ner, Jack!" Joe was at the door. Jack jumped from his chair and pulled on his coat, took up his water drum and snap-bag.

"Be a good lad, Jack. Be careful, an' do as tha'rt told."

"A' right. Mornin'." He was at the door, away from her completely. She moved to the small side window and watched the two pass out of sight down the street; Joe was bending to look at the strap Jack had pulled up his coat to show, then Jack bent to see how Joe's fastened.

They clattered down the street in the still morning, turned over Pit Lane and climbed the steep bank to the pit head. Bells jangled, the cage crashed up and rested on the props, men filed on and it crashed down again. The ropes whirred and whipped about the shaft, steam roared through the exhaust over the engine-house. Jack appeared less certain of himself now, the noise and throng of men bewildered him slightly and he kept very close to Joe.

"'Ave you to see t'gaffer before you go down, or what?" Joe asked when they were passing the under-manager's office.

"No. I signed on when I was 'ere last week." He motioned towards the office window. "'Ee said I 'ad to see Mester Poole when I got down."

"Oh. That's a' right, then. Come on." They walked to the lamp-shed. "Four, six, one," Joe called and a lamp was poked through a small window. "Eh!" A face peered through. "'Ee wants a lamp. First mornin'."

They crossed to the timekeeper's office and Jack said his name and received a motty with a number on. Jack had hung the lamp on his strap as he had seen Joe do, but as they walked along to the pit-head it banged against his knees and he had to take it off again and carry it in his hand. With nine others he filed on to the cage, the bell rang and he clutched the hand-rail suddenly as he felt himself jerk up, stop, then begin to fall. Steadily down from sunlight to a grey daylight, faster now into lamp-

light. Jack's stomach seemed to rise sickeningly, he clenched his teeth. The empty cage sighed towards him, rattled in passing, sighed away. He looked up suddenly, startled, grasped Joe who stood by him.

"'S all right, Jack. We're not goin' up again," Joe whispered. "Seems like it, though, doesn't it?"

Mr. Poole was with the other deputies in a room cut out of the rock and he came to the door when Jack asked for him.

"Oh. It's young Parker, is it? Tha can go an' learn to 'ang on at bottom o' double-road jig. Young Cooper'll show thee. Go in t'stables, 'e'll be theer." Jack was turning away with "Right, Mester Poole." "Eh." The boy turned again. "I 'ope tha won't be too big to come to Sunday School, now."

"No," Jack said, and went into the pit bottom again where Joe was waiting. "'E says I've got to go wi' Cooper an' learn to 'ang on at bottom of—oo, where did 'e say? I've forgot."

"Cooper's at bottom at t'double-road jig——"

"That's it. Double-road jig. Mester Poole said Cooper'd be in t'stables."

They crossed to an opening in the wall and passed between rows of 'standings' where gangers were putting bridles on their horses. Jack kept his mouth closed and put his handkerchief to his nose, but he could not keep from his mouth, throat, stomach, the hot, thick stench of manure. They came to a group of youths at the top of the stables. Joe was peering about all the way up.

"W'eer's Cooper." A small youth pushed forward. "Oh, Fred. Jack Parker 'ere's got to learn thy job. Poole says."

"Ooray!" cried Cooper. "I s'll go gangin' to-morrer. Come on, Parker, let's go. Tha can learn t'job in a day."

Jack followed him from the stables and they walked down the mile-long rope-road to a wide junction where three roads diverged. They went to the right, along a double-road stint.

"That long 'ill we came down," Cooper said, "was

t'incline. Where them roads met was main turn-out. This's double-road stint ; ganger goes back'ards an' forrards ovver 'ere bringin' empties an' takin' loaden'ns from us to that big turn-out." They came soon to where the road and the two sets of rails rose steeply at an angle of about forty-five degrees. "We're 'ere. Take thee jacket off an' put it in this seat-hole."

Jack looked about him. Nine full trams were on the right track, the left was empty ; six-foot props, each with a bar resting on it, lined the walls. To one of the props a wire was fastened and it reached into the darkness of the jig, running through staples sticking from each prop. Cooper had sat down, his chin rested on his hands and he was yawning. Jack leaned against a loaded tram, listening and looking down the stint where a faint rumbling sounded. A steady point of light grew brighter as the rumble increased and broke gradually into the plodding of hooves and the clicking of wheels over rail-joints. The ganger began singing, sang all the while he turned his horse from the front of the three empty trams he had brought and hung it on the first of the loaded ones. He clicked his horse to start when he had coupled three together, then leapt on the front of the first and rode away singing.

"This's w'eer we start, now," Fred Cooper said. "Come on." Jack followed him to the three empties. "Bring one, I'll take two." They pushed them to the foot of the incline. "Couple three on, like this." He picked up two couplers from the floor and fastened the three trams together. "Then 'ang this rope on, like this." The end of a rope lay in the track where the first empty stood and Fred cattered it to the tug-hole. "Put t'drag on." He hung a long piece of iron to the back of the last empty. "That's to throw 'em off road if they run back—if rope breaks or a coupler." He went to the front of the trams again. "Ner. Just ring t'bell." He took hold of the wire running through staples and swung on it, swung almost to the floor. A bell chinked away in the darkness. There was a dry sound of the rope tightening, then the empties moved, were pulled upwards, were lost in the darkness. A mighty roaring sounded, the

darkness was thick with noise ; Fred had turned away without interest, Jack stood clenching his hands, afraid, swallowing hard. But soon there was a definite line of sound, the heavy running of wheels over metals, now the clicking over joints, then into the little world of light his lamp made, three loaded trams ran, the long smooth pieces of coal gleaming brilliantly black. Fred came to them at once. "Take rope off these an' throw it ovver on to t'empty road ready to 'ang on to next empties ganger brings." He threw over the rope as he spoke. "Then uncouple these loaded 'ns an' push 'em down out o' t'road of next three landin'. See. Come on, push these down." They banged the three into the other six and the line of nine ran down to where the ganger turned his horse.

"Another ganger's comin'," Jack said.

"Well, thee 'ave a try, this time." The ganger came and left three empties. "Come on. Ner, push 'em up. One at a time if tha can't manage any more. Couple 'em together. Put drag on. Ner the rope. Be sure that's on right. Let me 'ave a look. Good. Ner ring t'bell. Go on, swing on it, it'll not break. That's it."

The bell chinked faintly, there were sounds at the top of the jig, then the empties began to move. The darkness roared, then came the smooth running sound, the clicking over joints, the slow gliding of the black brilliance into the room of light.

"Take rope off an' throw it ovver. Uncouple 'em an' push 'em into t'others. Bang 'em. That's it. Why, tha can do t'job a'ready."

Jack was eager, now, and flushed with sense of achievement, he waited impatiently for the gangers, he hurried about, strained at the empties and the loaded trams. Fred Cooper sat all the time in the seat-hole, encouraging, praising, making certain Jack had coupled the empties, put the drag on, made secure the rope.

"Say, kid," a ganger said to him, " doesn't young Cooper 'elp thee? Come on out o' that seat'ole," he shouted, " an' let 'im 'ave a minute."

Cooper came out and the ganger went.

“Don’t ’ave owt to do wi’ ’im,” Fred said, with a leer. “’E’ll sneak to t’gaffer. Oh. I must tell thee. When tha sees a light comin’ up stint or down t’jig an’ tha’rt not jiggin’, clean this place up. If there’s nowt to clean up, tha can scrape thy shovel about floor. Don’t let gaffer or t’deputy catch thee doin’ nowt. ’Ere’s ganger again. Come on.”

They worked on, at eleven sat in the seat-hole and ate the food they had brought, then began again. Jack slowed down, his efforts at pushing the trams were noisy and big, he visited his water drum more often, asked the time frequently.

“Last gang, ’e says,” Fred told him as a ganger left. “Come on, let’s jig these, an’ go.” He marked the boy’s effort. “Tired?” he asked, and Jack nodded as he pushed. “Let’s get these off, then, an’ we’ll look sharp into t’turn-out an’ get a pull up big incline.”

The three loaded trams slowed to rest and immediately Fred pulled five times at the bell-wire.

“That’ll tell ’em it’s last jig. Come on.” They hurried along the stint into the wide turn-out where four gangers were ungearing their horses. “Get ’old o’ one o’ ’osses’ tails,” Fred said as the horses began moving towards the incline. He himself grasped one and motioned Jack to another. The ganger of the horse moved his hand a little as Jack reached out to hang on with his hand. The horse pulled willingly, towards the stables, towards food and rest. Jack hung back wearily, merely picking up his feet and putting one forward as the horse pulled. In the pit bottom when he let go as the horse turned into the stables, he almost fell down, so weak his legs seemed. But he strengthened when he saw Joe Lynam waiting for him on the pit-top, and walked briskly to the lamp-shed and the time-office.

“’Ow ’as tha gone on?” Joe asked. “Like it?”

“I do. S’ll do it mysen to-morrer. I’ve done it most of to-day. That Cooper sat in t’seat-’ole nearly all time.”

“Tha shouldn’t ’ave let ’im.”

They walked over Pit Lane and up Main Street; children shouted and played, happy that they had a whole month’s holiday before them. Some of the older boys called to Jack and he moved his head to one side in recognition; to girls

who laughingly pointed out to others his black face and long trousers he showed an ugly, threatening countenance and they ran from him a little distance and called louder than ever.

"'E's a man now 'e works at t'pit. Where's your knees?"

"I'll sock that Nellie Bates when I catch 'er." They walked slowly up the street, their nailed boots slurring on the smooth pavement. "W'at time are tha comin' out?"

"Oh," Joe said brightly, "I s'll be out by four. 'Ave I to ca' for thee?"

"Yes. I'll be ready."

Joe crossed to his home, Jack continued more slowly now. His mother stood at the gate and went in with him.

"Well, 'ow 'as tha gone on? Ready for some dinner?"

"Mm," he affirmed with closed lips. He pulled off his coat and dropped it on the kitchen floor, then went into the middle room where the table was laid. "Not very 'ungry, though." He sat heavily in a chair and leaned an elbow on the table.

"Now get thee washed an' changed," she bade him immediately he had done eating. "Come on, tha'll feel a lot better washed."

"I'll sit on t'sofa a minute an' look at t'paper."

His brothers came in and chaffed him a bit, then they turned to the food. The mother watched Jack nodding over the paper.

"Ner Jack. Get washed. Is Joe comin' for thee?"

"In a minute," he said irritably.

The father came in, saw the boy fast asleep.

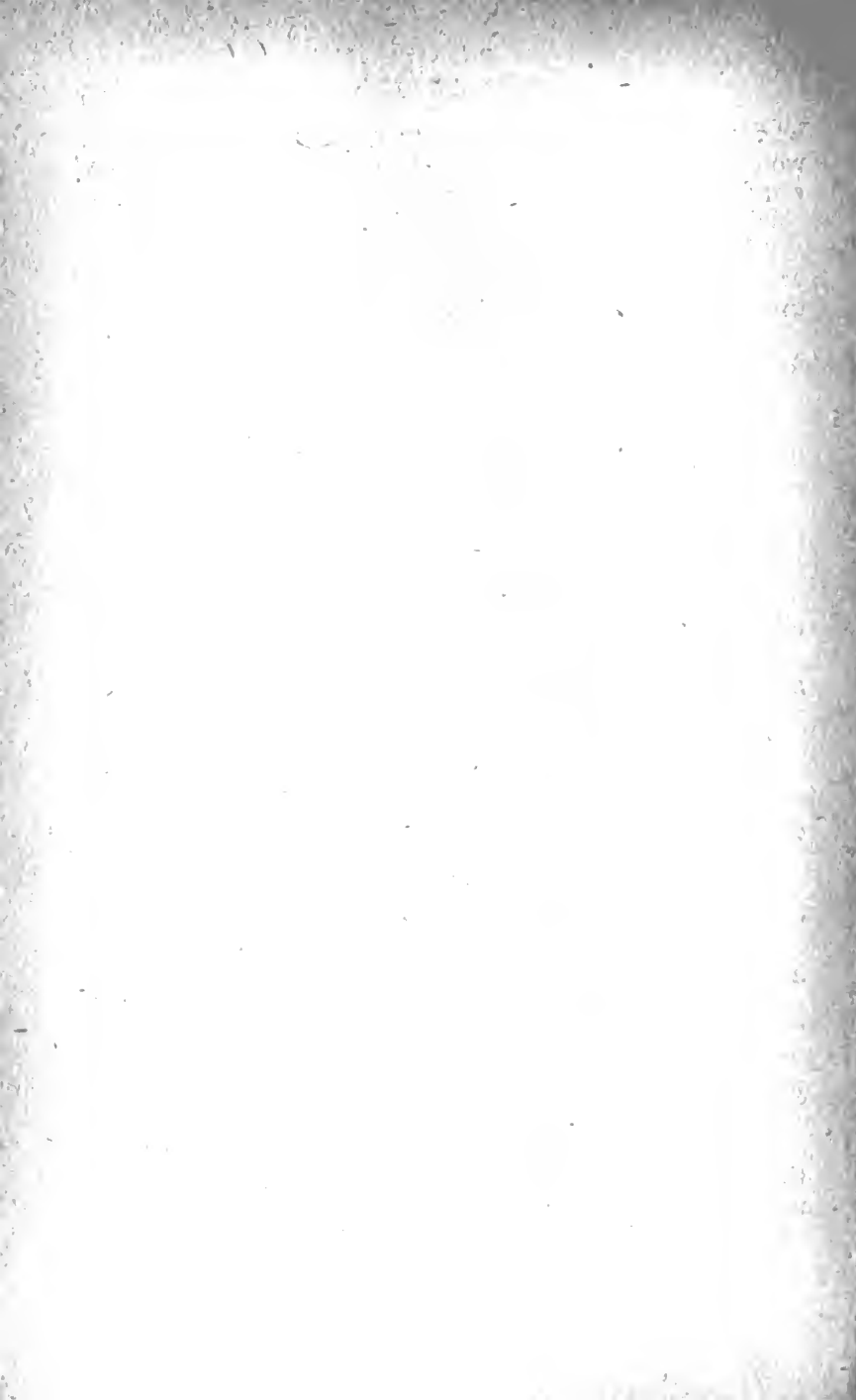
"'E's bottled, is 'e?" He laughed, but the mother made an impatient sound.

At four o'clock Joe Lynam came on to the yard and called, "Is Jack ready?" and Mrs. Parker went to the door.

"'E's asleep, Joe. Not washed or changed. I'll tell 'im you've been."

She came back into the room with tense lips.

"'E'll be t'same as t'rest. Lozzin' about in 'is pit-muck till bedtime." She glanced at the boy, saw the pain of weariness in his features, and her mouth softened. "I wish wi' all my 'eart 'e'd been a gel."



ARTHUR CALDER-MARSHALL

★

Pickle My Bones



I LEFT Oxford eight years ago, after twenty-one years of preparation for life. About fifteen hundred pounds had been spent on my education. But the only use to which I could put my knowledge was teaching. Classics, philosophy, and ancient history equip the student for nothing else. My only asset was that I had got a second-class degree instead of a first. A third would have been even better, as I found. The only time my B.A., second class, meant anything to me was when I was turned down from a job for being too highly qualified.

I hoped to live by writing. I had edited a paper in Oxford. But there were no openings in journalism, daily, weekly, or monthly. I wrote a novel in three months and tore it up. Five months after leaving Oxford, I took a job as schoolmaster and taught for two years.

I began to drop the cocksure omniscience that Oxford fosters through contact with adolescent students and emotionally retarded dons. I knew a lot, I realized, but not everything.

Writing my second novel, which I ought to have torn up but didn't, I discovered that I knew nothing about fiction, and I learnt the way to write sentences.

Teaching boys of all ages, I discovered that I knew almost nothing about other people or myself. What little I knew about myself showed me that I was as bad a teacher as the other teachers I met.

Some find school life a sanctuary from the outside world : but it was a prison to me. Edward Charles wrote to me at this time : 'There you are, wasting your own youth, teaching others to use theirs.' I didn't even have the satisfaction of believing that.

I chucked teaching as soon as my second novel was

accepted. I was prepared to risk the danger of a swelling overdraft, and I expected my second book to be a success. It was a *succès d'estime*, selling twice as much as the first, but still under a thousand copies. I cadged reviewing, hawked short stories, ghosted autobiographies.

Almost immediately on reaching London, I got psycho-analysed. I knew that my failure as teacher and my unhappiness were due to infantile problems. During analysis, I wrote *At Sea, succès d'estime 2*, which was more a cuspidor than a novel.

In July 1934 I married Ara Sales and we went to Spain and Morocco, during which time I made my last two offerings to the past, *Dead Centre* and *Challenge to Schools*, an analysis of what schools are like and why. In Fez, I collaborated with Ara on a play, emotionally excellent, technically lousy.

To be full, a man's life must have a threefold relationship ; firstly, to his wife and children, secondly, to his work whatever it may be, thirdly, to society as a whole. This third relation was the latest to grow in me as in many other *bourgeois* writers, only springing to full activity under the threat of Fascism in the last three years.

Dead Centre was *succès d'estime 3*. But its successor, *Pie in the Sky*, translated me from being what is almost technically known as a 'coming' writer to a 'successful' writer. Now instead of my begging for work, editors begged me. I had the luxury of turning down jobs. And finally came the Hollywood contract, which all friends who had no Hollywood contracts, assured me would mean 'æsthetic suicide.'

Meanwhile in England appeared *The Changing Scene*, a full-length non-fiction book which Mr. Evelyn Waugh deplored as another good writer gone Marxist, until he had to review *A Date with a Duchess*, a collection of my short stories, a few weeks later. Then he revised his opinion. He didn't like Marxists. He liked the short stories. So I am an anarchist.

Eight years is a short time to unlearn the training of

twenty-one. But bit by bit the structure collapses. This snobbery, that prejudice splits and falls. Maybe before I die, the litter will be cleared up, and I shall be able to write the book I want. If not, somebody else will.

A. CALDER-MARSHALL.

PICKLE MY BONES

“ I KNOW,” Charley said, taking Bimbo’s arm in a firm hand. “ If they don’t want us, I know where we’ll go.” Split from the others, they turned downhill. “ You met Ted Slaughter, didn’t you, that night, Bimbo ? ”

“ I know Slaughter,” the young man answered, Bimbo the hawk, sweating beneath the eyes. “ And his brothers, Plague and Pestilence. Not one of that family I haven’t met. Huh ! ” His voice barked a laugh-cough. “ Huh ! huh ! that’s funny, a joke, see ? ”

Street lamps revolved and stopped, reversed and stopped, swung back again. Night nibbles at faces. Take gin and shake it off. “ That’s no joke, but symbology you’re talking,” said Charley, fat, white-skinned, with a voice that, coming from the coarse body, sounded rare and gentle. “ But what I say is fact most wonderful, most curious fact, stranger than all fiction. Slaughter’s the undertaker, a man setting his name to rights.”

The sky was pricked out with stars, the roadback netted with frost. “ I knew a man in Lagos,” Bimbo said. What song the sirens sang. “ Yes, Lagos it was.” Bathing in memory. “ Name Christmas, a missionary by profession. Was that chance ? ” Hark, vault of heaven, was it chance ? Discuss celestial bodies. Mars, are you warlike ? Venus, true planet of love ?

“ What’s in a name ? ” the older man propondered. “ Why’s Bun the baker, why the Doctor Dose ? Bim, boy, I tell you this. Mark it before I die. Should you want to plumb the profundity of profundity, interrogate the games of childhood. Explore Tom Tiddler’s Ground and cogitate the symbolosophy of Catch-as-Catch-can. What’s Hunt the Slipper but what we all do, calling the slipper happiness, calling it truth ? ”

"Call it booze, Charley, and you're right. This Slaughter, has he got a cellar?"

The white face turned towards hawk's eyes. "That's our reason. The purpose of our envoy. An's a fine chap, Slaughter, stands drinks with the best."

Swaying silence. Footsteps hammer tones in eternity. Silence stirred by street lamps. Sprang from a hoarding. ANDREWS THE LIVER SALT. Must have left it behind. Laugh, folks, at the fat man's bottom and he scratching his head, see. If he scratched his arse, he'd find it. Behind the hoarding was a broken house, cellars and rooms laid open like hollow teeth. The wind whipped at the sodden paper peeling from the walls. Where the December draught blows, men once warmed cold hands before a fire and women sewed in comfort.

"When you're dead, son," Charley said, "be balmed by Slaughter. His granny was Egyptian."

Bimbo stopped and separated himself from Charley as he swayed. His eyes stared down the light-pooled street, but they saw nothing. "The Egyptians drew the brain down through the nostrils." He hunched his shoulders, gestured with his hands. "Think, Charley, think of the hooked metal probing your dead cold nose to yoick the grey stuff down. Think of death, Charley. A man might blow his nose and see his cerebellum lying in his noserag. Ugh!" He shivered.

"Come along," said Charley. "I know you're going on the stage. You told me all that once this evening. It's not I don't believe you, but I just don't want to hear it over again."

A car, two cars, roared into, shot down the—"Cheerio, boys!"—street. Headlights piled up against a—"See those lights, Bim, that's Slaughter's"—shop-front. Then the cars wheeled, one behind the other, brakes grinding, turned right-angled down another street, humming away, away. The sound a dying lamp glimmering, leaping up, down, up but always farther down.

"You mustn't say that, Charley." Bim's voice trembled. "You mustn't make fun of that."

"I didn't meant it." Charley pressed his hand.

"You mustn't say it. You're my friend. There's some things sacred. . . . I'll be a great actor. But if you don't believe it, then who . . ."

"You'll be fine, Bimbo. You've got it in you. I know that."

The young man pushed him away. "You're just trying to comfort me." My God, how sad my voice, how sad the world is under a shivering sky. Harshening, his voice rose. "You don't believe in me. What you're saying now is just to comfort me."

"Slaughter's!" Charley distracted, pointing to the shop front. "What monumental masonry! What venereal piles!" In the moonlight a blind angel stared at them winding a soundless horn. Before her feet were tussocks of immortelles. MY GOD HOW WONDERFUL THOU ART IN LOVING MEMORY OF . . . Inverted grave vases of porcelain. THE LORD HATH GIVEN. . . . I wish he'd take away.

Staring up at higher stories, Adam's apple ripe in his throat, "No lights!" Charley gargled. "No one in."

Bim gazed at the vision in the dark shop, the rich coffins stacked behind glass along the walls until: "Try the side, Bim," Charley jerked his arm to follow. His knees were weak but his mouth was parched, tingling for liquor.

Through an arch slant-shadowed from a wall-bracket, they now one mass, now two linked by an arm, lurched to where the backyard was trellised about. Here, concourse of angels and marble cherubs balanced on the balls of their feet like a frozen ballet class, stretched to but never touched God perhaps knew what paradise. Yearning maybe merely to see a name sculpted after IN LOVING MEMORY OF, ambitious only to stake first claim in the cemetery.

"No lights here, either," Charley said.

But Bim, "What matter? Come on," scrambled over the trellis sooner than wrestle with the gate latch.

Charley hesitated, cupped hands, "Hoy there. Anyone awake?" But no one answered.

"Found a door," called Bimbo. "But's locked." He pushed against it.

“No lights.” Charley crossed the shadows of the angels.
“No good. No lights.”

Bim took a loose brick and—“You can’t, Bim!”—smashed, the glass fell and clattered, the brick fell. “Can’t do it, Bim.” He got his hand through—“It’s illegal.” Bimbo turned the key in the lock and bending drew the bolt. “Oh, can’t I just?” He swung the door back on a passage. Pale in shadow, his face turned. “Come on, Charley.” Blood welling clotted his hand and stuck his fingers together. “I’ve done this. Think I’m going back without a drink now?” He bound his handkerchief round the hand. “Enter the Slaughterhouse.”

The older man followed, and they felt their way along in darkness. The sole noise was their footsteps on the brick floor. Then Charley’s soft voice, “Here’s a door.” When he turned the handle, a grey rectangle dawned on the passage. He pushed down the switch and from the white shade light shot in a cone on to the floor. “Office,” he said.

They looked round, dazzled and silly. A desk, a chair, a flask of water and a glass. A safe, three filing cabinets, a hardwood bookcase with account books and, on a shelf, “Bottles,” said Charley. Bim said, “Booze.”

Bim got on a chair and handed down a couple of bottles. Embalming fluid. Superior quality.

“What’s good,” Charley said. “I’m not dead yet.”

“You will be soon. Jest pickle my bones in al-co-hol. It’s alk. Got a corkscrew?”

“Use paper-knife.” Charley leant against the side of the desk. Bimbo looked round. Charley flicked the knife with a finger. It swung on its shoulder. “Cut self?” he said. “You look white. Maybe’s deep.”

“’S not deep,” Bim said, shivering. “’S cold. Not enough alk. Carn get cork out.”

“Get in then. Push home.”

The young man tried, but his handkerchief got in his way.

“Here, give it to me.” Charley took the bottle, shoved the cork in, and smelt the bottle. “It’s alk,” he said, “and smells good.” He raised the bottle and swigged.

Bim felt faint. Took glass off flask and said: "Fill." Charley poured glass full and Bim drank it down. "Jest pickle my guts in al-co-hol."

"Doan make that row," said Charles. "You'll wake the Slaughter—household."

"Pretty funny idea getting pickled in pickling fluid."

"Member Nelson? England expects every man to do's duty. British Navy did theirs by un. Pickled him in rum and when they got to port, there wasn't a drop left. They'd tapped un."

"Was Colet, Dean St. Paul's. Know that story?" Bim said. "My God, room's cold. Give some more. 'S got kick."

He raised new brimmed glass and gulped half down. "Wha was I sayin'?"

Charley stared at his right foot. It moved up and down. Cracks in the toe were a toothless old man's face and the movement made him talk. St. Peter's bell chimed and struck once. "Last words, 'Room's cold,'" Charley answered.

Bim brushed hair back with hand. Flask on desk tilted, stood straight and tilted. He rubbed eyes. "Yes and Colet, Dean St. Paul's. Now I remember, 'member. Fire of London. Think of Great Fire, Charley. Think St. Paul's each stone of which was boun' wi' lead and gutterpipes were lead. Know that? Know it melted in Great Fire and flowed down Ludgate Hill in molten stream?"

"Bottle's dead," Charley yawned. "Open other."

"You open. I talking. You listen an' open." Cigarette fell from fingers on to floor. Groped feeling for it. Hand tangled with leg. "Cig? Thanks, Charl." But didn't light, it stayed between fingers. "After Fire, two chaps came to Cathedral. Colet's coffin split, part melted in heat maybe. Poked body with sticks. Bubbles came out."

"What's got to do . . .?" Charley held up bottle.

"Wait for point," Bim said. "Doan be impatient. No man ever got anywhere by impatience. Ole man pickled in liquor. They drank it. That proves it, doesn't it?"

"What's prove?"

Cigarette dropped Bim's fingers. Head sang what song sirens sang, sunk. "'S liquor's good, course."

"Drink't, prove't." Charley thrust bottle forward. But's head was sunken, drunken. "Drink." Charley pushed bottle at Bim's lips, "Drink."

Bim raised hand, held it in lax hand, dropped it from lax hand. It spilled across his legs.

"Wet here," Charley sprawled forward. "Where come liquor on trous?"

"Ge' 'way," Bim said. "Gray actor. Doan' b'lieve." What song the Sirens singling, circling sangled. Here we go roun' and down an' . . . Raised eyes glazing, jutting lower lip forth. Slaver dried.

Charl clutched Bim roun' neck. "Ole man, sorry, ole man. Kiss me, Bim. Kiss. Kiss."

Both fell, heavy coats, on wood floor. Fell and lay. Charl tried rise, sank, on Bim's belly, pillowed his head. "Great actor, Bim. You'll act like . . . like some grey actor . . . name forgotten."

When Charley opened his eyes it was so dark that he could see nothing. His feet felt as if they were frozen and his fingers were numb. He shut his eyes again and tried to sleep. His head ached. Everything turned in his brain. He put his hand down and touched something wet. As he fell into half-sleep, he began to think, 'Why is there water in my bed?' He thought, 'It doesn't matter. There's water in my bed. It doesn't matter.'

His brain swung round and he wanted to sleep, to stop feeling the pressure in his head. He thought, 'Why in my bed?' When he opened his eyes, all was dark. He felt the mattress and it was wood. It was a floor. He felt his pillows. It was a warm coat. It was Bimbo.

"God, I've a head, Bimbo," he said. But Bimbo didn't answer. "Doesn't matter," he muttered. "'S still dark." He went to sleep.

When he woke it was still dark. He struck his last match, but it gave no light. He threw it away.

He felt a bottle on the floor. It was so dark he couldn't see it. "Hold it up against the window." But there was no window. He lifted the bottle towards his eyes and hit himself on the nose. "Damn," he said, and put the bottle down.

His head was still splitting. There was a queer smell. He wanted to get back to his bed and sleep the blind off. "Bimbo," he said, "we'd better be going."

There was no answer. He pushed the body and said: "Wake up. Don't lie ther dead drunk."

Bimbo did not move.

Charley groped in the darkness with his hand. He felt the shoulder and then the face. He drew his hand back. The skin was frigid.

He groped out again and touched Bimbo's lips with his fingers in the darkness. They were chilled stiff.

"Bimbo," he called, "wake up." He caught the boy's shoulders in his hands. "Wake up, for Christ's sake," he shouted. But the body was heavy and when he released his grip, it fell with a thud against the floor. He stood up staring into the darkness. "You're not dead, boy," he whispered. "Say you're not dead." But no sound came, no movement, no noise even of breathing.

Terror struck him, his pillow the cold body at his feet. He cupped his hands and bawled with his full lungs: "Ted! Ted! Ted! Come down here. Come, for God's sake. Ted! Ted!"

He heard a noise, a chair drawn back, a shout. "Who's there?"

"It's me. It's Charley. Come, for God's sake."

Footsteps hurried downstairs. "Where are you, Charley?"

"This way," he shouted. "In the cellar."

"Coming," the voice said. He heard a door open and Ted call: "You there, Charley?" But the voice was farther distant.

"Here," he shouted, "in this cellar place."

The sound of footsteps. A door open close to him. "My God," said Ted, "what are you doing here?"

Charley's voice trembled. "Turn on the light, Ted. I've got something awful to show you."

Ted did not speak, but Charley heard his breathing.

"Turn on the light, Ted. It's something. You can't think how terrible."

"I can't turn it on," said Ted softly. "It is on. And the sun's shining through the window."



H. A. CARTER

★

Another Day

1875

1876

H. A. CARTER was born, in September 1914, in a Derbyshire mining village. After attending elementary school, and by scholarship, secondary school, he entered the local government service eight years ago. 'Morning,' his first published story, appeared in the *London Mercury* in 1934, and 'Another Day' was published by *New Stories* in 1935. After a long period of barrenness, and, he admits, untorgivable idleness, he is again becoming active. He has recently written several short stories dealing with the leisure hours of the miners among whom he lives, and he is also working on a novel dealing with the working-classes in a manner in which he believes they have not hitherto been presented. He finds difficulty in getting anything but the vaguest impression of a story 'in his head,' and finds it utterly impossible to write in longhand. He works fairly quickly straight on to the typewriter, finding two drafts to be usually sufficient preparation for the final product. He has no political affiliations, and believes that the writer, whilst not living in an ivory tower, should remain as free as possible from entanglements, political, social—or personal, taking the whole world as his oyster. He dislikes writers who deal with the working-classes sentimentally, romantically, or as political figures, or as 'comic element' in the manner of the country yokel or village bobby. He disagrees with the view put forward in Huxley's *Eyeless in Gaza* (by a character, Anthony Beavis, although he thinks Huxley might himself subscribe to the view) that proletarian literature will, indeed must, deal with exceptional proletarians. He is of opinion that just as a painter can take an orange, a banana, and an empty bottle and produce a work of art, so a writer can take plain common-or-garden Mr. Smith, Mrs. Jones, and Miss Robinson, and by his treatment produce a work of literary worth.

H. A. CARTER,

ANOTHER DAY

“**B**E still !” she hissed, snapping. “Bistill ! Yer Dad and me’s commin’ ter bed now and we want ter goo ter sleep. Yer know what yer Dad’ll do if yer dunna shut yer row. Now remember. Good night.”

The boy, aged seven, and his sister, aged five, closed their eyes and lay innocently enough, their black heads shadowed largely on the torn dirty wall-paper by the flickering candle-flame on the chair-bottom.

“ Good nigh’, Mam.”

She took the candle and carried it carefully erect, shielding it from draught with her fingers. Darkness came across the little bedroom with the low angle-roof like the slow drawing of a dark curtain.

As she sat on the edge of her own bed removing her worn stockings, she heard her husband downstairs locking the kitchen door, closing the pantry door. He stumbled noisily against the table : he had turned out the gas. She had left the candle on the top landing of the stairs to light him up ; it cast a dying gleam into the room, expiring before it reached and could expose the crumbling wall and damp plaster under the window.

His stockinged feet padded up the bare stairs. The light gave a leap and approached further into the room. He placed the candle on a chair near his side of the bed. In the uncurtained, unshaded window-panes the room was darkly reflected. The small mirror on the red-wood dressing-table cast a light rectangle on to the cracked ceiling.

He shivered as he removed his socks. She silently clambered into bed, her face looking even paler above the pale night-dress. The light from the candle threw fantastic shadows on her face, elongating the shadow of her nose

and making her right eye a black hole. She stared unseeingly at the window through half-closed eyelids.

He kept his shirt on and arranged it after he had clambered into bed, but even so he knew his legs from his knees, and his feet, would be cold before morning. He laid his cold right foot on his wife's feet, which were close together. She started but said nothing, and he moved back again.

They lay a few minutes, lying motionless. The grey blanket under them was rough, and uneven here and there with patches. The thick 'navy blanket' was warm, but tickled. On top of that was laid an old plush table-cloth, and finally two overcoats stretched across the bed, their empty arms reaching and clasping the shape of each body.

He coughed, moved warily, so as not to drag the bed-clothes across the bed, and leaned over. The candle flickered, fought for life, and then went out. He settled himself again in bed, wriggled further down so as to wrap the edges of the clothes about his neck and chin.

They lay silently, until the dense darkness following the loss of the candle light diminished and they could make out the outline of the window panes against the starless sky.

They heard the clock downstairs strike nine. They came to bed early so as not to burn more gas than was necessary. Gas was expensive. And they came to bed because there was nothing else to do. No papers, no magazines, no cigarettes, no sweets, no wireless, no piano. Nothing.

He shifted on to his side and stretched out his arms to fumble for her shoulder. He felt the thinness of her flesh, the exaggeration of her collar-bone. His fingers moving downwards felt the strengthless frailty of her arms.

Lightly, teasingly, he caressed her.

"Ain't yer gooin' ter say nowt?" She remained silent.

He wormed his finger-tips under her armpit and tickled her. Unable to stand this she moved irritably and thrust his hand away.

"Don't act like a fool."

Mocking, he pleaded: "Oh, Mama!"

She said tensely, between her teeth: "God, I wish you could get a job! I'm neerly beat."

Still cajoling : " Well, I've tried, ain't I? Ain't I? "

" You should try more. You should get out on yer bike. Surely somebody could give you a job. But you don't want one. You're comfortable enough. You don't 'ave ter rack yer brains out thinkin' what ter get in fer food."

" Oh, Christ! 'Ave we got ter 'ave all that agen? Any'ow can't we 'ave the same food every week. That needs no brain-racking once you've figgered it out, does it? Don't make out yer job's so 'ard."

" I suppose we 'ave shoes and clo'es for the kids every week an' all, don't we? 'Ow der yer think we can buy them wi'out missin' something else? You don't know and yer don't care. As long as yer've got a coat and trousers and boots ter goo and sign on and then ter get ter the centre yer don't worry. D'yer think I sit on the sofy all day wonderin' what ter do wi' miself? Y're 'ardly in the 'ouse except fer a bit o' summat ter eat and then off yer go agen. . . ."

" Well, I mend the boots and shoes at t'centre, don't I? And I goo and gather coal from Throttle Outcrop."

" Yes, and yer 'angs about at t'centre pleeing cards an' dominoes and readin' t'papers. The lot on yer's comfy enough up theer wi' a fire. Yer can ferget about the 'ouse then. The centre does none on yer any good, on'y ter mek yer idle and satisfied. It's the wives what feels all the pinch stickin' in t'ouse all dee."

" 'Arf a mo! I were 'ardly out o' t'ouse one night last wik."

" I know all about that. But what did yer stop in for? To plee about wi' that owd trumpet thing. I thowt as tha were goin' ter ride all over t'county this week pleein' it in the streets. But yer don't intend nowt o' sort. Yer were all raight last wik amusin' thissen wi' it an' rousing all the neighbours wi' thi rows. But tha'll take care as tha doesna march a yard or two on t'street wi' it, tryin' ter get a bit o' munny."

He burst out angrily and loudly. " Dammit. Look 'ere. What's the bloody good o' makin' a fool o' missen wi' the thing? Tha knows I canna plee it properly. If people

didna laugh at me they'd run me out o' district fer making a noise. Tha seems ter think as I ought ter be able to plee it like a perfessional a'ready. Tha wants ter shut thi gab a bit. Tha does nowt but complain. Anybody 'ud think as I were livin' i' luxury an' leavin' thee and t'kids ter starve. Tha mun be a bit fair. There's very little fun fer me nowadees, I can tell thee. There's no pints o' beer and on'y fags as I can borrow. And as fer stoppin' at t'centre when I should be at whome, well tha knows I should on'y be in t'road 'ere. . . ."

"I don't care. Tha should try ter get a job. Tha'rt gerrin' idle. Tha doesna want work. Tha'rt like all t'rest. As long as tha'rt not raight starvin' yer dunna worry. An' I'm about fed up. . . ."

"Oh, go ter bloody 'ell," he shouted. There was a silence.

"Mam! Mam!" came from the back room.

She whispered fiercely at him. "Theer. Tha's frightened 'em."

"Shut yer bloody row," he called angrily. The cries ceased.

Noisily and angrily she turned on her side with her back towards him. He lay quietly. Gradually he cooled down and his sense of humour returned. He thought smilingly of the pointed turning of her back on him. He remembered a remark made by one of the miners some time ago: "Yer 'ave ter take yer wife ter pictures or summat now and then. Yer've got ter 'umour 'em or else they'll on'y turn their arse on yer when yer get ter bed." He smiled.

He felt himself getting drowsy. From a queer sense of duty he fought the desire to sleep. He knew that his wife lay at his side almost every night sleepless until the early hours. Sometimes he was wakened by her restless moving. But he could not keep awake. It was no good. It brought no more money into the house. It was a matter of waiting. The social centre didn't do much, but it had been able to get them permission to pick coal free from Throttle Outcrop, and they could buy leather cheaply to mend footwear. And gifts of clothes were taken to the centre and distributed.

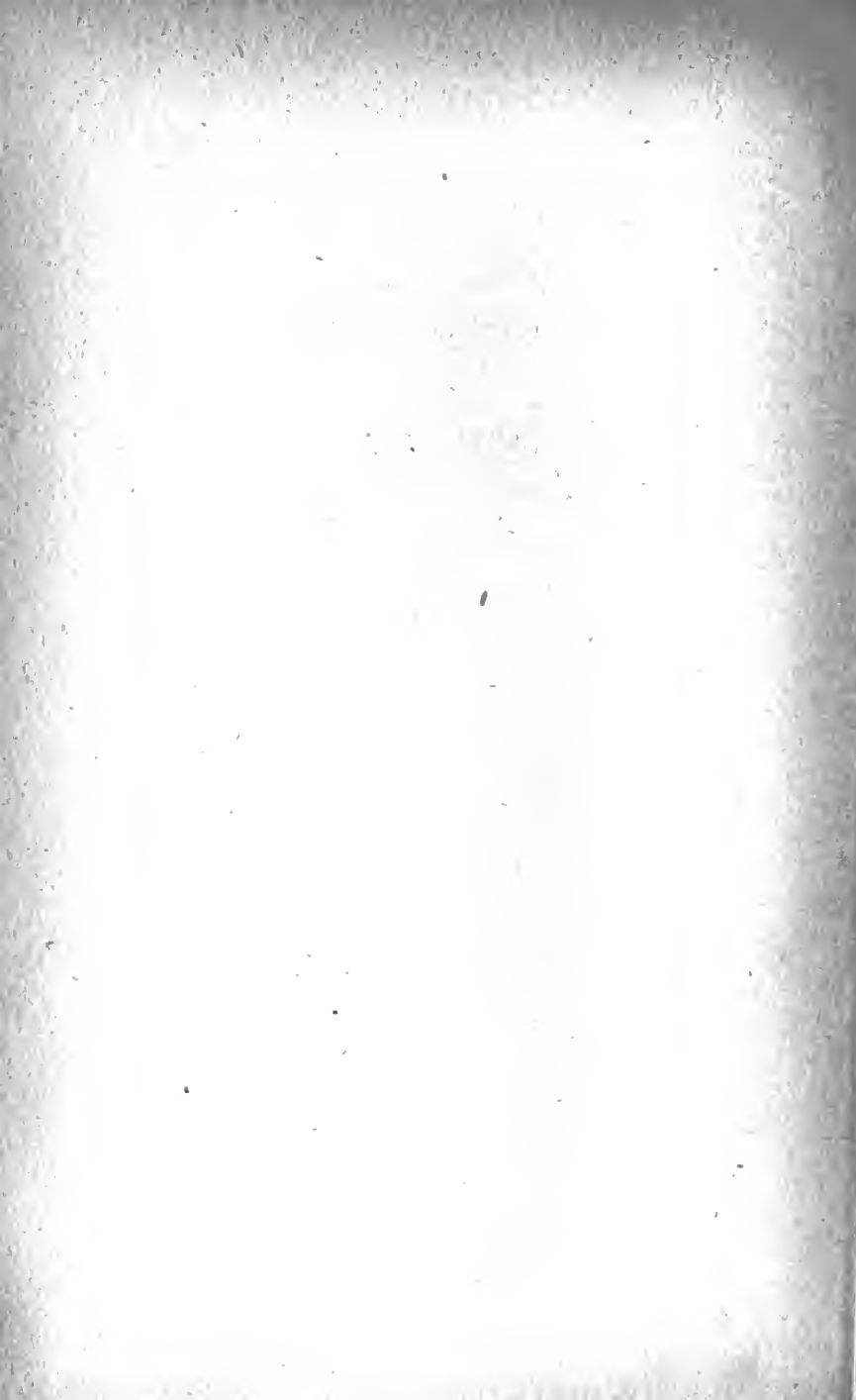
Nobody could do anything. There was no work. The mines were being closed one by one. His children were poorly fed and clothed. They were not happy. They were pale. And his wife was getting thin. Himself too. And he felt dead inside. He didn't really care about anything. He had passed the first stage of resentment. Resignation, that was it now. Wait and see. Trust in God, if there was one. He heard several cars and a bus pass the house, and the confused gabbling and short laughter of people in the street. The deadness he felt inside him all day began to spread all over his body. It reached his brain and he forgot what he was thinking about. His body relaxed. His mouth opened a little and soon he started a rhythmical snore, rather quiet and apologetic.

As his wife heard it, she sighed and moved her body restlessly.

PETER CHAMBERLAIN

★

Shrimps



PETER CHAMBERLAIN was born in Edgbaston in 1903 and educated at Clifton. He comes from a well-known Birmingham family. His maternal grandfather, Sir James Smith, was the first Lord Mayor of that city, while his paternal grandfather, John H. Chamberlain, was curator of the Art Gallery and a great figure in Birmingham life. He was architect, painter, educationist, and poet, and perhaps it is from him that his grandson has inherited his literary qualities.

Peter Chamberlain is author of a collection of short stories, *What the Sweet Hell!*, published by Chatto and Windus in this country, and Henry Holt in America. I. A. Richards, of Magdalene, Cambridge, described one of the stories from this book as the finest thing in English he had read for six years. Chamberlain's first novel, *Sing Holiday*, appeared in July last from Arthur Barker, and deals with motor-racing in the Isle of Man. V. S. Pritchett, writing on *Sing Holiday*, said that the author had 'revived the traditional humour of the English novel.'

Peter Chamberlain was at one time the most famous motor-cycling journalist in the country; he is Vice-Chairman of the Auto Cycle Union which controls all branches of motor-cycle sport in this country, and Chairman of the British Selection Committee of the A.C.U. Chamberlain has contributed short stories to most of the leading literary periodicals, and is a member of 'The Midland Group,' a name given to some half a dozen young writers who lived in and around Birmingham.

PETER CHAMBERLAIN,

SHRIMPS

TRUE to his methods, Old Joe, long a traditional figure in the streets of the midland city, did not at first look up from his perch of sacks on the pavement, when, one bitter morning with the wind driving dirty smudges of sleet-filled clouds across the dark February sky, he subconsciously noticed that a pair of legs had remained stationary before him for some moments. Accustomed to judge the world from the knees downwards—for even when pennies rattled into his dirty cap, he seldom raised his head, believing clients found pleading eyes an embarrassment—he knew that these neat black shoes represented a gentleman who had passed his pitch twice a day for years, with never a glance at him or his pictures; but, as the blue trousers stayed motionless in front of him, eventually Old Joe peered up, raising a finger in salute. Yes, it was the old familiar gent right enough, and he seemed in a bad temper.

“Here, you,” he almost shouted. “Here, you, I’ve never given you anything all this while and it’s getting on my nerves. Take this!” He thrust a crumpled piece of paper towards Joe and hurried off.

So taken aback was the old man that he nearly put it in his cap; then, realizing that something altogether out of time had happened, he hastily shoved it in his pocket. After a little, taking care that no one should see what he was doing, he secretly examined the gift. A quid! God Almighty, he thought, a quid!

Unable to grasp the true significance of what had occurred, Old Joe continued crouched on the ‘foot-walk,’ as he called it, automatically raising a grimy finger to his forelock when coppers fell into his cap, turning the matter over and over in his mind. Beside him were the six

bedraggled pictures of patriotic subjects, which, with his evening occupation of 'car-minding,' earned him his living—two battleships, a soldier in khaki, another in hospital blue smoking a pipe, and portraits of Their Majesties the King and Queen, doomed to remain woebegone smears for, as with the two medals he wore, they had been acquired from a one-legged sailor who had died in his doss house. As an unbroken succession of feet blurred past him, he sat on with his problem; he digested it whilst morning feet, already slightly mud-stained but purposeful, changed to more casual, shopping feet, and back again to rushing legs with never an instant to spare, in a whirl to reach the nearby suburbs and be back within the hour.

A gent had given him a quid! Several secret glances had proved that beyond all doubt, and at last he began fully to appreciate his luck. Slowly in the vacuum of his mind was born the germ of an idea. Painfully he cogitated, until all at once he remembered a pet theory he had held for years. One moment his fortune meant nothing to him, and the next this scheme was rocketing through his head.

In the pubs which he frequented when in funds, often there appeared a very spruce and spry young man, who, for reasons best known to himself, always wore shiny black leggings, carrying a wicker basket on his arm, from which he sold oysters. Under a white cloth was a pile of 'blue points' and 'natives,' and there was also a large bottle of vinegar, which his customers sprinkled liberally over the shellfish.

With great skill the young man opened them, one after another, in the twinkling of an eye. He was very gay and did a brisk trade, and people would buy him drinks. The pub-keepers liked to see him, for those who sampled his oysters almost invariably wanted some stout to go with them. There was a couple of music-halls close by, and flashy youths in tight-waisted, many-buttoned coats and cloth caps or conical bowlers, accompanied by their young ladies, having a drink on coming out of the first performance, or going into the second, liked to lap up half a dozen oysters, as a prelude to, or a fitting conclusion of the evening.

“A fair treat,” the dashing young man said they were ; and a treat his customers seemed to think them. So everybody was happy—except Old Joe, who could not abide the taste of the things, even had they not been much beyond his means. He loathed the young man and his oysters.

But, he had often thought, if only someone started the same game with shrimps, a delicacy he particularly fancied, and one which many more people could afford, there might be some sense as well as profit in the business. It had long been hidden away in a far corner of his mind that, given a little capital, shrimps would be an excellent line.

Now, as he sat dumbly on the pavement, head sunk in a greasy old army greatcoat, looking mechanically at the feet of the passers-by, he began slowly to work out the details of his plan. He would invest this terrific sum of money, more than he had had at one time since he could remember, in the shrimp business. So engrossed in his dream did he become that he hardly noticed the penny which was placed in his cap ; the ugly, worn boots told him it came from an elderly woman, one of his most regular patrons, and in his sleep, his hand rose.

As the leisurely tea-time feet twinkled past, he sat with no thoughts but of shrimps. Vistas of little pink fish floated round and round in his mind, shoals of shrimps swimming in placid oceans of beer. Majestically they navigated glass bowls filled to the brim with mild beer. He pinched their heads off and spat out their tails ; they tasted of the sea and of malt. He squeezed the meat out with a finger and thumb, and bubbles of beer oozed out as well. Shrimps seemed to frolic in the wash about the bows of the painted cruiser by his side, so boldly ploughing its way across the fierce winter seas.

At five o'clock he came to a decision. Before what were often the two most profitable hours, when the crowds, thankful that another dreary work-day was over, were most likely to drop him coins ; before the release from offices and warehouses, he packed up the pictures in their sacking and shambled off.

Half an hour later he was in the market. His first purchase

was a basket ; not, perhaps, quite as large and grand as that carried by the oyster man, but a very splendid and satisfying basket for all that. He was immensely pleased with it. Hooking it importantly over his arm, he glanced at it proudly from time to time as he proceeded to the fish market.

Buying the shrimps, themselves, was not quite such an easy matter. The dealers were inclined to crack jokes, in voices hoarse from shouting their goods, at the expense of this dirty, shuffling old codger, who seemed to think that he was going to obtain a monstrous quantity of shrimps for a dollar. But Joe handed them back as good as they gave and the job was done at last. Chuckling to himself with delight, he set off, his precious basket containing ten shillings' worth of shrimps and a bundle of old newspapers thrown in by the fishmonger.

It was a bleak evening with the promise of a sharp frost. A harsh city wind scurried dirty straw and litter from the gutters into his face as he hesitated where to go to prepare his shrimps for sale. Sitting on some steps in a quiet corner, he started to parcel up the fish into twisted newsprint packages, taking a soiled handful as the measure, which, if sold for a tanner, should, he reckoned, insure a handsome profit. Soon he had a good number of little bags in the basket and felt he could allow himself a few ; for the first time he remembered that in the excitement of the fortune his usual midday hunk of bread and cheese had been missed.

The shrimps popped as the old man tweaked off their heads and tails ; their delicate pink flesh was just what he had been imagining. Once started, he sat in perfect content, eating, only moving on when he found a policeman regarding him with a look of pained disapproval.

The unfamiliar and pleasant chink of money in his pocket reminded him that he still had a substantial amount of ready. Although it was too early to begin visiting the pubs, which were just opening, professionally, where was the harm in having a good drink, quiet like, before he commenced work.

It was a part of the city he seldom visited, and he was unrecognized in the bar which he entered. After his glass of beer he could not resist the temptation to eat a few more shrimps, and as he wandered off he quickly scooped a couple of handfuls.

Gradually he made his way to the district in which he was at home and where he hoped to sell his fish. 'H-I-P-P-O-D-R-O-M-E'; the electric lights spelt out the words slowly and carefully like a little boy at his lessons. Crowds were waiting in queues outside the picture houses; the doors of the brightly illuminated pubs swung continuously. Youths, cigarettes hanging from their lips, lounged about in front of the steaming windows of a fried fish saloon, exchanging brutish cross-talk with the sharp, undersized factory girls, who paraded up and down the pavements, arm-in-arm, giggling in high-pitched, hysterical tones. They knew well enough what the boys wanted, and they knew equally certainly that they were likely to get it only for the price of a night's entertainment.

Suddenly becoming self-conscious, Old Joe paused at the door of one of his favourite ports of call. The music-hall patrons would soon be arriving, but, for the first time, he had a momentary doubt whether they would fancy his shrimps. Hesitating at the entrance to the Smoke Room, he finally went into the Public Bar and ordered a half of mild and bitter.

"What you got in the portmanteau, Joe?" asked Harry, the barman.

"Shrimps," he replied. "'Ave some? Tanner a go."

"Sez which!" the barman laughed. "What you got?"

"Shrimps, I say, and shrimps they are and bloody all."

"What's the game then?"

"Sellin' 'em, on course."

"Straight?"

"Ain't I a-tellin' you?"

"But what's the game then?"

"S'truth, like the young bleeder what takes the oysters, on course."

"Good Gawd Almighty!" the barman put back his head and laughed again. "Well, I'll go to our 'ouse! You

don't say? Shrimps! Well, I'll go to the foot of our stairs. Shrimps, eh? You'll be death of me, you will straight, Joe! 'Ere, let's 'ave a dekho."

Putting the basket on the counter Old Joe experienced another second of doubt, for the newspaper balls did look a bit scruffy and uneven. But on lifting some to show the heap of unpacked fish beneath, gleaming a tasty pink, all his pride and confidence returned.

"There you are, me lad. Tanner a go."

"Well I be god-damned!" exclaimed the barman, departing in peals of laughter to serve another customer.

Fascinated by their pearly freshness, Joe was eating once more when Harry came back.

"And 'ow do you eat 'em, Joe?" he asked.

"With your bloody mouth!" growled the old man, suddenly cross again. "'Ow does they eat oysters?"

The barman ceased laughing. "'Ere, you're not reely serious?" he asked.

Old Joe exploded. "Chri——" he started.

"All right, all right, all right," soothed Harry. "That's all right, so long as we know. No need to create. But shrimps ain't the same as what oysters are, Pa. The young bloke loans 'em a fork, don't 'e? Opens 'em up all fresh like, and makes a posh class affair of it, don't 'e?"

"Well, these 'ere shrimps are fresh."

"Ar, maybe. But they don't look so tasty like, and you can't go round and set 'em out neat and new, so who's to know? Then the tarts like the oysters. You know what they say? Who's a-going to make theirselves all of a muck and stinkpot with these 'ere shrimps? 'Tain't the same as oysters. I give you my early bird it ain't. 'Tain't in reason."

"'Ere," he added, seeing the old man looking strange. "'Ere, give us a tanner's worth, old timer. I can't only die but once."

Heartened by his first sale, Joe went into the Mixed 'Smoke' with his basket on his arm. But Harry had been right; they laughed a good deal and he only sold one packet, to a prostitute who, like the barman, took pity on the old man's blank look of amazement at his failure.

The 'Gaffer,' the boss of the pub, thought it a first-class joke and told all his cronies as they came in. "Heard the latest? Old Joe a-hawking shrimps round the town! Did you ever? Shrimps! It's sure to be right! A fair knock-out. Can you beat it?"

Joe could not understand what there was to laugh at. "They're all fresh-o!" he proclaimed to the room at large, as he remembered the oyster man did. They seemed to find this extravagantly funny; everyone roared, even the woman who had bought the packet, and no one else showed any signs of sampling them.

But they did buy him drinks, the 'Gaffer,' himself setting the ball rolling by giving him another half-pint. Several others asked him what he would have and, emboldened by this unusual amount of beer, he had the audacity to ask for whisky. It was difficult to call to mind when he had last had a drop of spirits. Things weren't so bad, even if the shrimps were selling slow, he thought.

After a while he went along and entered the next house. Almost exactly the same scene was enacted; first they laughed incredulously; then they laughed again and as often as not gave him a drink. Once or twice a sympathiser purchased a packet, but, if the sales were negligible, there was an astonishing quantity of free booze about.

From being quite cheerful, a period of acute depression overtook him. The problem of the shrimps beat through his head, and suddenly confident pride in his theory burst out once more in a last expiring flame. He'd show 'em!

Striding boldly into another pub, he shouted his fish loudly and courageously, until the more than usually brutal remarks of a Jew-boy tailor, bent on impressing his girl that he was a man of the world, finally brought home to him the fact that these people, for some reason he could not comprehend, simply did not fancy his shrimps.

All at once he gave in. All right, God rot 'em, if they didn't want 'em, they bloody well needn't 'ave 'em! He was fast growing fuddled and lumbered off, away from the lights and noise, with only a vague idea where he was going. As he lurched along he munched contentedly, crunching off

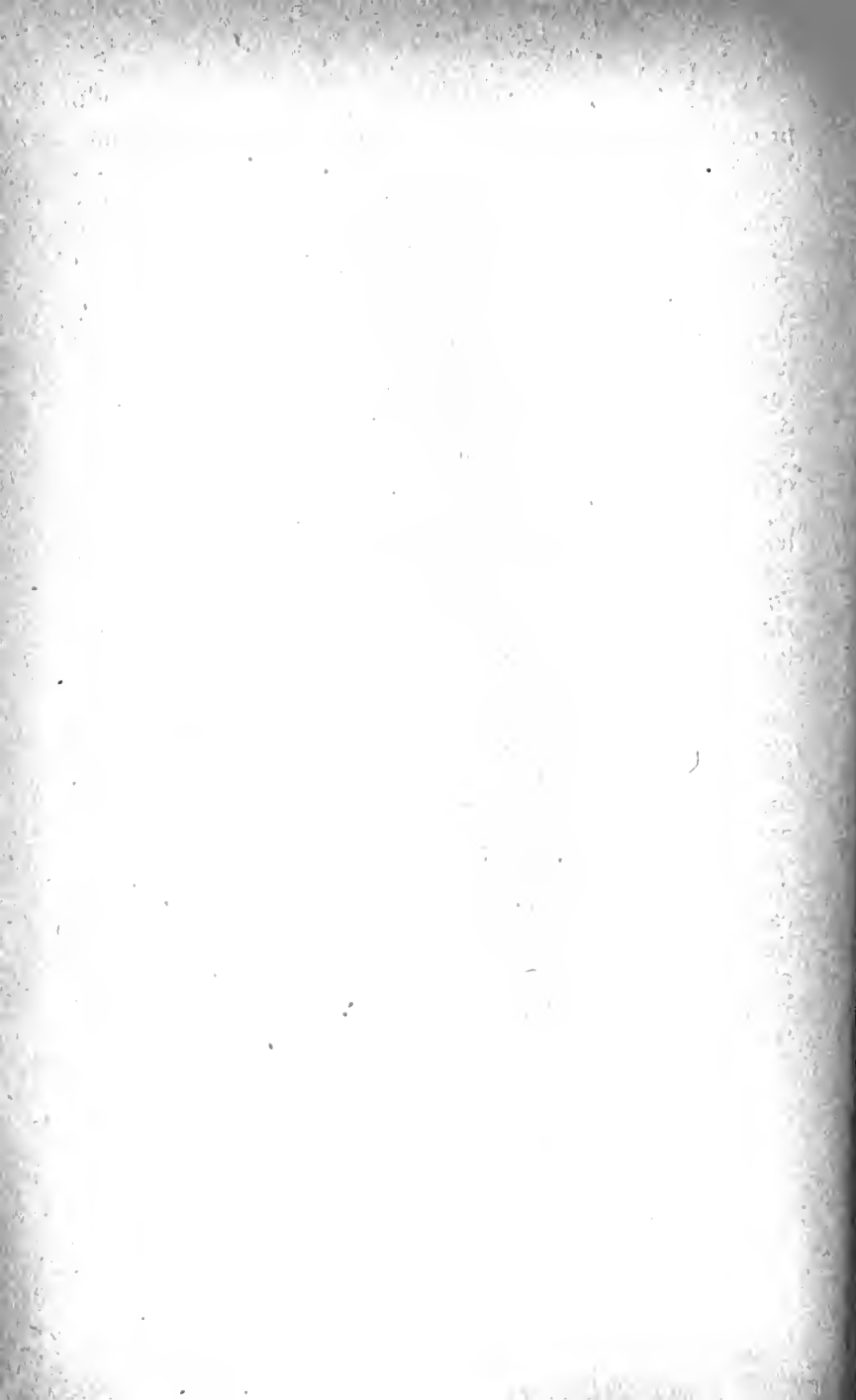
heads and tails, and pressing the firm meat into his mouth between his fingers.

Closing time found him sitting in a small out-of-the-way pub, buying drinks all round, giving packets of shrimps away, and attempting to fight those whom he accused of saying they were not fresh. Now he was drunk, and when he was bundled outside he had no idea in which direction his doss house lay. Paying no attention to the wind, which had risen to half a gale and carried a sprinkling of frozen snowflakes, on uncertain feet which plodded automatically one in front of the other, his basket still on his arm, he staggered off, blindly, intent only on finding a refuge where he could finish the shrimps in peace.

Mumbling to himself he went, until he came to some steps leading to the canal bank. Slithering down, he sank to the ground, back against a factory wall, and stared at the dead water, on which ice was beginning to form, lying greasy in the light of the street lamps on the bridge above, associating it in some shadowy manner with his pictures.

Then he began to eat the remaining shrimps, grumbling and complaining, and boasting of their excellence in a confused jumble of words. When he had finished the loose fish he set to work on the others, ripping the newspaper, and stuffing whole handfuls into his mouth, not stopping until the basket was empty, when he felt he had reached the successful conclusion of an important business affair.

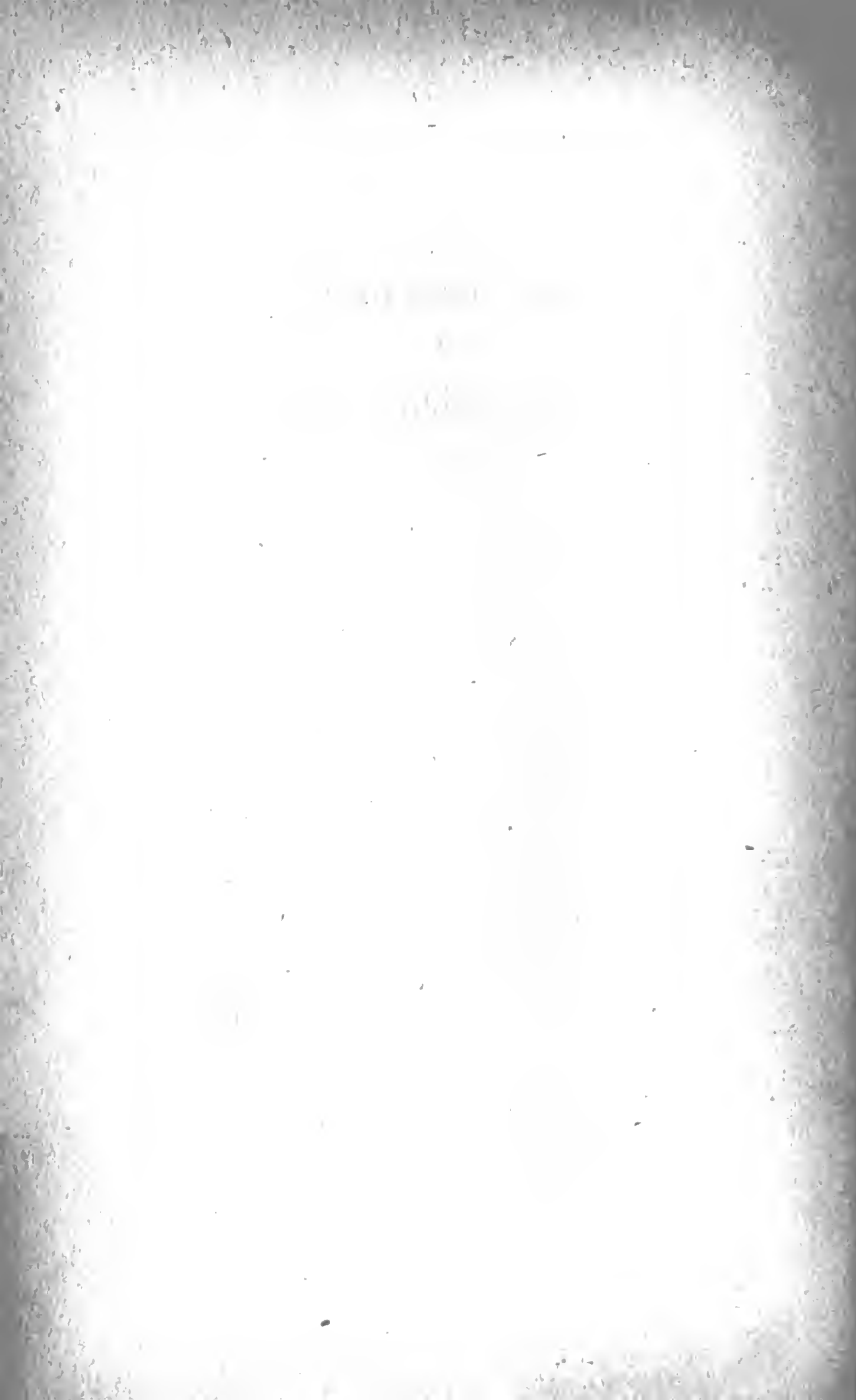
For a while he appeared asleep ; then clearly and loudly came the words 'all fresho,' as someone else in the same line of trade used to say. His task seemed well done and his characterless features relaxed into a happy smile, which, by some trick of the frost, was still on his face when they found the body in the morning.



RUPERT CROFT-COOKE

★

Rough Island Story



BORN 1904, at Edenbridge, Kent.

Educated Tonbridge School.

Paris, as private tutor, 1922.

Buenos Aires, 1923-5.

Germany, 1929.

Lecturer in English at Montana Institut, Switzerland,
1931.

Barcelona, 1932.

Buenos Aires, 1936-7.

Central Europe, 1938.

* * *

Has been schoolmaster, stable-hand, journalist, first-
edition bookseller.

* * *

Novels : *Troubadour, Give Him the Earth, Night Out
Cosmopolis, Release the Lions, Picaro, Shoulder the Sky, Blind
Gunner, Crusade, Kingdom Come, Rule Britannia.*

Commentary : *God in Ruins, How to Get More Out of Life,
The Man in Europe Street.*

Short Stories : *Pharaoh with his Waggon.*

Plays : *Same Way Home, Banquo's Chair.*

Autobiography : *The World Is Young.*

Poetry : *Twenty Poems from the Spanish of Becquer ; Some
Poems.*

RUPERT CROFT-COOKE.

ROUGH ISLAND STORY

EXCEPT for purely literary purposes, people are not often cast away on desert islands. Yet that is exactly what happened to Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins. They were on their way to some port in British Guiana. Or was it farther south? Somewhere quite remote and tropical, where Mr. Jenkins was to take over a branch of the bank by which he had been employed in England. And for motives of economy they had booked their passage on a small cargo steamer. Unfortunately, Mr. Jenkins had not taken the precaution of inquiring whether the company which owned her was solvent or not. He did not know that the ship was fully insured and no longer very useful. So that he was quite surprised when the Captain, whom he had always considered a most pleasant man, though by no means English, called him aside one evening and pointed to a rather small island nearby.

“See that?” said the Captain.

“What?” said Mr. Jenkins.

“That island,” said the Captain.

“Why, yes. Charming, isn’t it?” smiled Mr. Jenkins, who had been enjoying the trip and thought the tropics were very nice.

“I’m glad you think so,” grunted the Captain rather rudely, “because that’s where you’re going.”

“Oh, no,” smiled Mr. Jenkins quite good-natured and patient with the Captain, although the latter was being rather obtuse. “I’m going to R——,” and he mentioned the port where his new post was.

“You’re going yonder,” said the Captain, nodding across the water, “and think yourself lucky I don’t send you down with the ship. Can you row?”

"I can paddle," said Mr. Jenkins, "and I can punt. I've never tried rowing. It looks quite easy, though. Why? Is there much of that sort of thing at ——?" and once more he mentioned the port for which he was bound.

The Captain walked away, but at nightfall Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins were placed in a small boat and told to row for the shore.

Mr. Jenkins, who was a member of a tennis club in Leamington, where he had lived, prided himself on not being namby-pamby, and soon learnt to move the small boat in little jerks towards the island. He was a grey-haired man, with a pointed moustache and glasses with thick lenses. He dressed neatly, as a rule, and now unbuttoned his jacket for the effort of rowing.

"Rucks it up under the armpits," he explained with a smile to his wife, who sat opposite him.

"You do it very nicely, dear," she said amiably. She was a stout, complacent woman, very devoted to Mr. Jenkins, and fond of cooking. "But why are we in this small and inconvenient boat?"

Mr. Jenkins smiled encouragingly. "Oh, it is the sort of thing that frequently happens in these extremely foreign places," he replied. "Those sailors intend to scuttle the ship, and will receive their share of the insurance money. They did not want us to be witnesses, of course."

Mrs. Jenkins took her knitting from her bag. "I see," she said, "and will it delay us much, do you think?"

"That remains to be seen," said Mr. Jenkins. "If this island is inhabited we shall soon be able to communicate with the mainland. If uninhabited, the usual thing is to light a fire in a high place and attract the attention of a passing steamer."

Mrs. Jenkins nodded. "Quite exciting, isn't it?" she said, quickly manipulating two plain and one purl.

"Well," replied Mr. Jenkins, who had read a great deal, "Mr. Conrad has related far more stirring events. But it will provide some variation from banking. I'm quite enjoying this exercise, after being cooped up on board."

They drew the boat up on a sandy beach, and Mrs.

Jenkins, who had a louder voice than her husband, called "Oo-oo!" to attract the inhabitants. But there was no response.

"We will explore in the morning," said Mr. Jenkins. "In the meantime, my dear, let us see what supplies have been given to us."

They were disappointed to find that the only food in their boat was a large quantity of ship's biscuits. "Well, well," said Mr. Jenkins, showing, for the first time, a little irritability, "these will have to serve until to-morrow." And they ate heartily of them.

Mrs. Jenkins had brought a travelling-rug, so they laid this on the soft dry sand and prepared to sleep.

"It reminds me," Mrs. Jenkins said, "of that time, just after the war, when we went to Hastings and COULDN'T find accommodation. Do you remember, Edgar?"

"Yes, dear," said Mr. Jenkins rather curtly.

"Only then we had a breakwater to shelter us. I wonder if we could find one farther along the beach? We never thought of looking, did we?"

But Mr. Jenkins, exhausted by the effort of rowing, was already asleep.

In the morning, after they had eaten some more biscuits, they set out to explore the island. Mrs. Jenkins had thoughtfully brought her parasol and Mr. Jenkins wore a sun-helmet. They found that the island consisted of two hills, and not very much more. They walked along the beach for about two and a half hours, but found neither breakwater nor pier, as Mrs. Jenkins seemed to expect.

"It's a very quiet little place," she said with some disappointment, for in England she had always chosen the more populous resorts. "Not a soul in sight."

The island, in fact, was uninhabited, even, it seemed, by birds. But they found a stream of fresh water running lackadaisically seawards and were glad to stoop and refresh themselves.

Another half-hour's walk brought them within sight of a boat, lying high and dry on the beach. They were very pleased at this until they approached it and found that it

was their own. They had made a complete circuit of the island and returned to their landing-place.

"Really," said Mr. Jenkins quite peevishly, "it's very vexing. There seems to be no one on this island at all." He drew out his watch. "Lunch-time," he added sharply. So they ate some more biscuits.

In the afternoon they explored what Mr. Jenkins jocularly called the 'hinterland.' Mrs. Jenkins went first, with her parasol, and Mr. Jenkins followed. There was the semblance of a valley crossing the island, but even between the hills the ground rose to a considerable height, and they found walking rather slow and painful.

"I like the country," Mrs. Jenkins said, "but I always say you can have too much of it. Oh, look at that yellow and black creature, Edgar! It reminds one of the reptile house at the Zoo!"

"Best not to prod it, dear," said Mr. Jenkins, "it might have a sting. You never know. Let's sit on this rock for a little while and enjoy the view."

"It's really very lucky," said Mrs. Jenkins, complying heavily, "that there are no savages or wild beasts here. We at least have no danger from anything of that sort."

"No. On the other hand there is the question of food. It is going to be very awkward when the biscuits are finished."

"I hadn't thought of that," said Mrs. Jenkins.

"Well, I don't think you need, dear. We will light a fire on this eminence to-night and no doubt some passing ship will send out a boat to take us on board."

Suddenly Mrs. Jenkins looked disturbed. "But, Edgar!" she exclaimed almost fearfully. "Suppose the ship were going THE OTHER WAY? It might be weeks before we got to R——"

"So it might. But don't let us anticipate trouble. And now, dear, if you're rested, we had better be getting back. It must be tea-time."

They started their descent. "In a case like that," said Mrs. Jenkins presently over her shoulder, "who would bear the cost of the second passage, Edgar?"

“ I really scarcely know, dear,” said Mr. Jenkins. “ But cannot see that I should be liable, having paid it once.”

“ I should think not ! ” said Mrs. Jenkins as they sat down to more biscuits.

* * *

A week passed and brought great changes, for Mrs. Jenkins ran out of the brown wool with which she was knitting a pull-over and Mr. Jenkins got more tired of biscuits. But they found no means of replenishing their supplies. Mrs. Jenkins said with resignation that she supposed she would not be able to get any more wool until they reached R—. She explained that this was of a special colour which had cost her some trouble to find in Leamington, and she hoped there would be no difficulty about matching it when they arrived. And although Mr. Jenkins made one or two attempts to catch fish with a bent hairpin they were not successful.

Every evening he climbed towards the summit of the hill and lit a large fire to attract the notice of a passing ship, and one of Mrs. Jenkins's garments was hung on a pole as a signal in the daytime. She was at first a little unwilling about this. She reminded Mr. Jenkins that she had never allowed the servants to hang the more intimate portions of their laundry on the clothes-line at home, and wondered what the sailors of their relief ship would say about it. But Mr. Jenkins explained that it really could be considered an emergency, and the sailors would understand this. So she gave way at last and helped him to hoist their distress signal.

But still there was no sign of relief, and the monotony of their diet began to tell on Mr. Jenkins's nerves. “ Really ! ” he said, “ it's too bad ! ” And on the eighth day, “ I don't feel that I can eat these much longer.” On the morning of the ninth day he said savagely that if he didn't have something else to eat soon he didn't know what he would do, and on the tenth he told Mrs. Jenkins that he was getting desperate.

* * *

It was the morning of their eleventh day ashore that Mrs. Jenkins noticed something very strange in her husband's demeanour. "Didn't you sleep well, Edgar?" she asked.

"I slept quite well, thank you, dear," he returned sharply.

He was eyeing her fixedly. His eyes travelled over her ample contours with a new interest.

"Whatever's the matter, Edgar?" asked Mrs. Jenkins. "Really, you make me feel quite jumpy!"

"It's these biscuits," said Mr. Jenkins.

"I know it's trying," said Mrs. Jenkins placidly.

For a moment he was silent. Then he said: "My dear, I'm very sorry, but there is only one thing for it. This island provides no other food. I'm afraid, I'm very much afraid, that I shall have to have a change of diet. And you will have to provide it."

"Well, Edgar, I should be only too glad to cook anything you please. But I don't see what there is. I can't catch fish."

"I wasn't referring to fish," said Mr. Jenkins, "but meat."

"Meat, Edgar?" asked his wife, for the first time growing nervous. "What meat?"

"There is only one kind of meat on this island," said Mr. Jenkins drily.

"Edgar, you . . . cannot be proposing to turn cannibal?"

Mr. Jenkins shifted uneasily. "Of course, it is all very unfortunate," he observed, "and the Captain was greatly to blame for his inadequate supplies. But there you are."

Mrs. Jenkins began to cry softly while her husband continued. "I think it rather selfish of you," he said, "to make things more difficult than they are by those tears. The situation is trying enough as it is. And I shall envy you for being out of it."

"It's . . . not that," sobbed Mrs. Jenkins.

"Then what is it?"

"I think . . . you might have waited until the biscuits ran out, Edgar!"

It was on the thirteenth day that Mr. Jenkins's patience was finally exhausted.

"It's no good, my dear," he said resolutely, laying down his breakfast biscuit. "I can eat no more of these."

Mrs. Jenkins nibbled on. "I don't know how you'll manage alone, Edgar," she said rather sentimentally.

"Nor I. But I see no help for it. There is one suggestion, however, which I might make. Since we are likely to be relieved shortly, it would be a pity to be unnecessarily premature. I mean, we might start with a leg, perhaps, and in that case you yourself would benefit also in some measure. . . ."

Mrs. Jenkins shuddered slightly. "No, dear," she said, "I should prefer to leave the whole matter to you."

"Just as you wish," returned Mr. Jenkins with a conciliatory smile. "Then, if you are quite ready?"

Mrs. Jenkins rose to her feet. "It's quite an important step to take, isn't it?" she said hesitatingly.

It would be kinder perhaps to Mrs. Jenkins and also more delicate to leave unexplained the method chosen by Mr. Jenkins to achieve his unwilling object. Suffice it to say that the method was both simple and humane. On this point he gave his wife the most earnest assurances before he began tactfully and cheerfully to distract her attention by more general conversation as they crossed the island.

But when they reached the appointed place, and the prearranged moment, he hesitated. A sudden doubt had occurred to him, and in order to remove it he was forced to return to the subject which he had been avoiding.

"My dear," he said after clearing his throat uncomfortably. "Er . . . how long does one give it to cook?"

The housewife rose bravely in Mrs. Jenkins's bosom. "Twenty minutes to the pound, dear," she said.

And those were her last words.

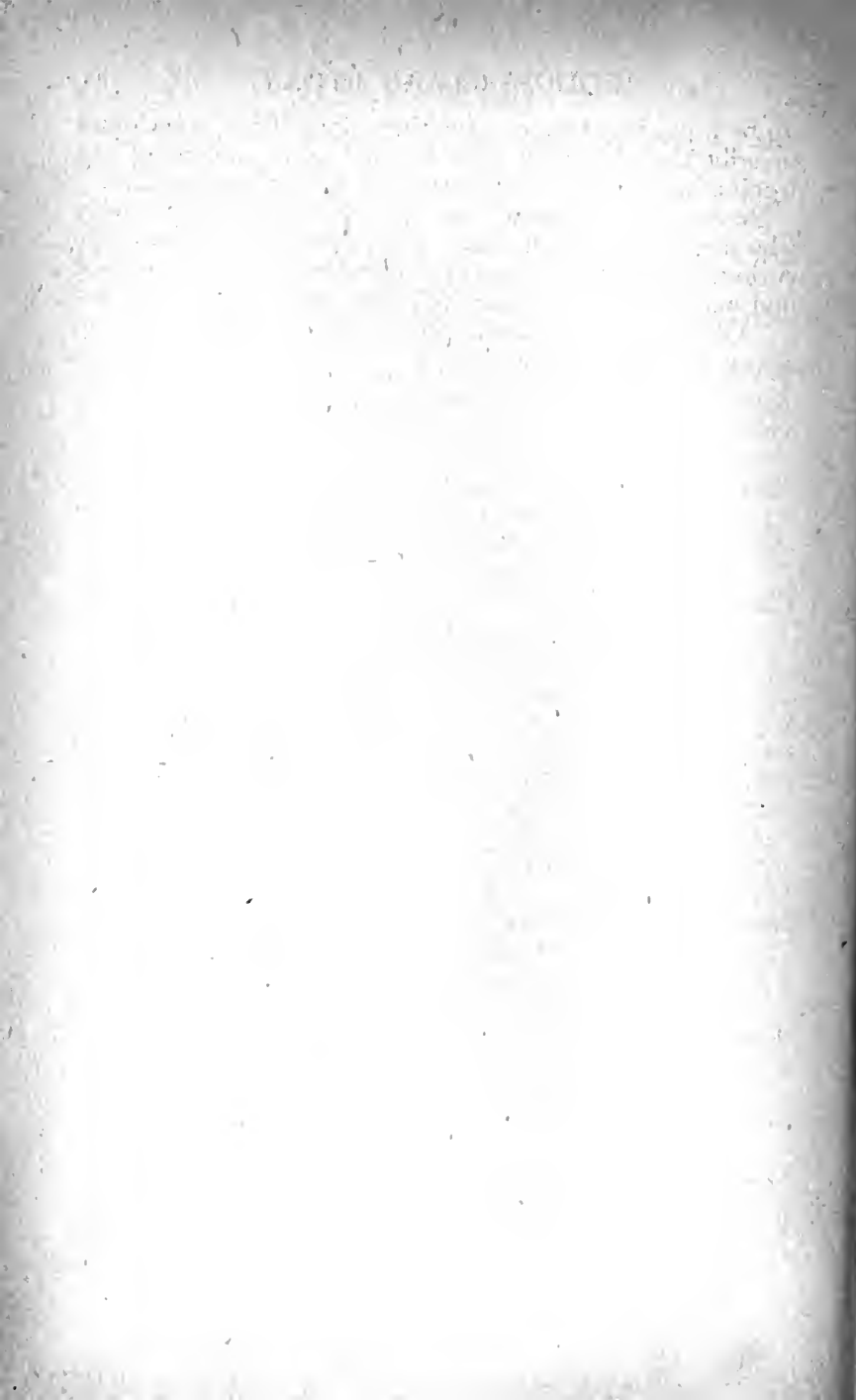
* * *

Mr. Jenkins lives a few doors down the road from me and is a pleasant neighbour. We often walk to the station together in the morning. It appears that he was picked

up by a passing steamer some three days after the incidents described, and feeling that he had seen enough of the tropics, he returned to the service of his bank in England.

He has married again, and is very happy with his wife, who rarely speaks of the past. Only once has she shown any curiosity about the cause of the first Mrs. Jenkins's decease, and her husband was quick to satisfy her.

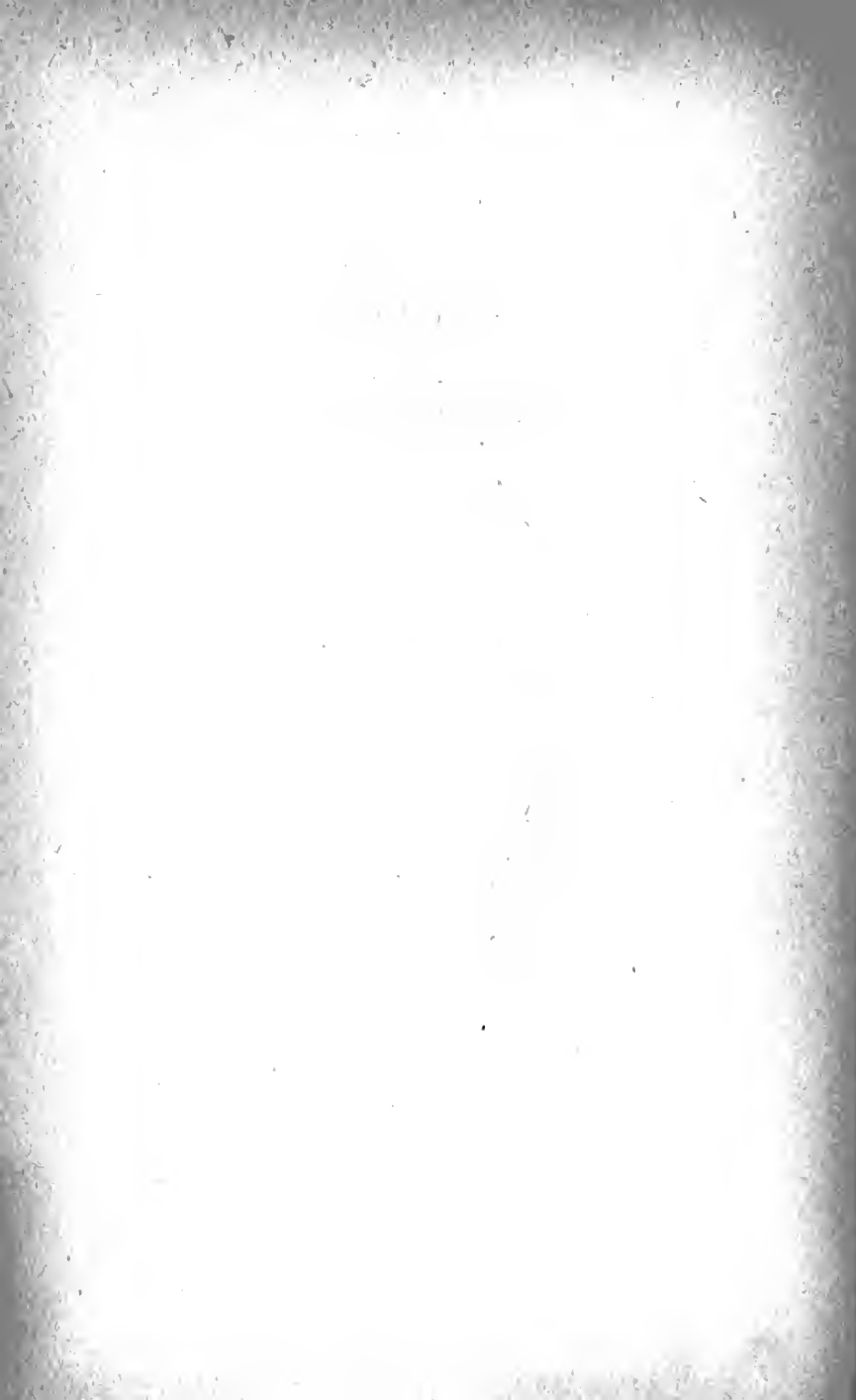
"Oh, she died of consumption," he said briskly, and, in a way, of course, it was true.



A. W. DODD

★

The Opposition



My father, who is a blind music-teacher in Birmingham, encouraged my earliest effort at writing. I seem to remember a long play carefully typed on a very old Blick machine which my father sometimes used. It was so full of symbolism, *à la* Maeterlinck, that it is doubtful whether any real plot or meaning emerged from it when the curtain rang down on the third act. However, I sent it by registered post to the famous Belgian playwright, and was, I believe, at some pains to decipher his kind and well-meaning letter. But it did start me on the right path. I began to write in my spare time, though I never sent the stuff anywhere, fortunately perhaps! I had my living to get. Our family numbered six, and as far back as I can remember, were always in poor circumstances. My mother battled valiantly for us by taking in sewing and by working in a munition factory during the War. When I was fourteen I went in a factory too, though from the very beginning I felt that there was something numbing and degrading in the job. I had many jobs after that, choosing clerical work of some kind, and never being able to earn what I should call a living wage. I sought release from the monotony and boredom of these jobs by endeavouring to create a world which was certainly pleasant, but unpractical. I read to my father a great deal, and then, during a very long stretch of unemployment I took up again the idea of writing plays. I read innumerable books and studied subjects which, without lack of training, I could never hope to master. But it pleased me to think that, with only an elementary school education at the back of me, I possessed the power to absorb them in an intelligent manner. I began contributing musical articles to a Birmingham evening paper, and felt that future success was assured. At this time I sent one of my efforts to Walter de la Mare, whose books and self-created world I felt very much in

sympathy with. From him, too, I received words of encouragement that helped me to persevere. He has since praised stories of mine and has also given me the personal interest and friendship which I had been so sorely in need of.

My hobbies are the pianoforte and drawing—which latter subject elevated me above my fellows during my last (and not very brilliant) years at school. But now that I am writing, and am also a married man with a daughter twelve months old, it is obvious that I have little time to spare for these.

A. W. DODD.

THE OPPOSITION

VICAR LAWSON was amazed at the unexpected streak of generosity in the man before him. Tentatively he had dug the ground, but in his wildest dreams he had never hoped to unearth pure gold—and one hundred pounds *was* pure gold. What was more, such a gift helped considerably towards the solution of a difficulty that had worried the Vicar for many months. Holding the cheque in his hand, he smiled with downright pleasure, scarcely knowing how to thank the grocer.

Mark Onzell smiled too, enjoying a situation that placed him in the position of a benefactor to the church of St. Michael's. He was able to experience, too, perhaps for the first time, the pleasure of giving something which offered neither interest nor return. He spread out the palms of his hands—hands which the Vicar had always thought carried with them the distant aroma of roasted coffee—in a deprecatory fashion. This gesture was accompanied by the raising of both lip and little moustache, and betrayed his Jewish origin.

But it also suggested to Lawson that the hundred pounds only tapped an inexhaustible source. However, time would tell. What perplexed him after he had recovered from his astonishment, was Onzell's request that the gift should remain anonymous. Said the grocer, in a voice that removed all doubt of his sincerity: "You see, my dear Vicar, a gift made public is not a gift; it is an advertisement, and my wife would never have agreed to it being *that*. Of course you remember my wife?" The Vicar nodded thoughtfully. Only too well did he remember her! She had always seemed to him the meanest and most ungracious of women.

“Jane had peculiar ideas, I’ll admit,” continued the grocer. “She had her ups and downs too, moody, if you understand my meaning ; but one had to *know* her, Lawson, and that’s what our neighbours in Briscott-Abett did *not* do : not a soul among them. I guess she never set much store by money, except as a definite means to an end—and that end you now know of. This money she left in my keeping for St. Michael’s, should the old church ever be in need of it. Now that the need has arisen, I am only too glad to place the money in your hands, as long as you keep my name out of the business.”

“If you will pardon my saying so, it is a matter of surprise to me that Mrs. Onzell should have shown such sympathy towards our church. To the best of my knowledge she never entered it or evinced any desire to do so. I am quite at a loss to understand her, Mr. Onzell.”

“Don’t try, my dear sir ; I never did, and now that she’s dead and gone these six years, no amount of worrying will do any good. I can tell you, for what it is worth, that she loved the building—the stones, the old spire—more than she did the folks who went into it. That may not be natural from your point of view, but there is a grain of sense in the idea, if you agree that buildings can’t help becoming rotten.”

Lawson coughed gently. He was determined not to feel annoyed with the little grocer, or pass any judgment on the strange, unsociable views of the late Mrs. Onzell.

“About your desire to remain anonymous,” he said, not without an anxious note in his voice, “there will be difficulties in the way. As you may know, I have gone the rounds of the village in my search for donations, and these amounts, however small, are to be posted on the notice-board outside the church. I am afraid that the absence of your name may cause a reactionary feeling in my parishioners which may be detrimental to your shop. Is there no other way out ?”

“Don’t let that worry you,” replied Onzell, plunging his hands into his trousers pocket, “whatever their *feelings*

may be, they won't get better value anywhere else in the village."

Lawson walked leisurely home, tapping every now and again the pocket which contained the cheque. He was thinking of Onzell, perhaps rather guiltily. He remembered the time when he had approached the grocer and his wife concerning their faith, and had received the somewhat disconcerting reply that they had never been churchgoers and never would be. "Did they follow the Jewish faith?" "No, they were Christians." Jane Onzell didn't look Jewish, but her husband did, especially when he became excited. That visit had been followed by others equally unproductive, until the Vicar ceased to pursue them. Now he realized that his psychology was at fault, and that he had approached them in the wrong way; it should have been through the door of understanding, not of condemnation. Neither himself nor the rest of the villagers had seen the Onzells in the right perspective. It was a most uneasy thought, and he decided, as he crossed the road towards the church, that he would visit his benefactor's grave, kneel down in the deep grass, and express his contrition. He was overawed too, because it seemed that after all he knew so little of human nature, and that he had failed, in his capacity of Vicar in the sight of God, to bring understanding to his flock. Reaching St. Michael's, the Vicar paused for a moment beneath the shadow of its ancient porch, sighing heavily as he gazed critically at the dilapidated guttering and crumbling gargoyles. It had always saddened him that such a fine church should be so little appreciated by present-day Briscott-Abett. At the same time he felt cheered by his new knowledge of one woman who had worshipped its declining glory in silence.

'Onzell's Stores' commanded the largest shop in High Street, boasted a young man assistant, and a girl at the cash-desk. For a village shop it was kept meticulously clean and well stocked. The cleaning was usually done by the girl who also acted as cook-general for Onzell now that

he was alone in the world. Onzell had a great fondness for Ruth, who, he would often say, had been sent to him by providence. The villagers, it must be added, were rather sceptical of providence, since Ruth resembled her employer in a marked manner. Many cups of tea had been sipped during discussions of Ruth and her possible paternity, gossip which could not fail to reach Onzell, or even the girl. But if they heard, they ignored, and no word of it ever passed into the back-parlour of the shop.

Some few weeks after Lawson's visit, Onzell noticed a gradual slackening off in his trade. Never very popular with his customers, who, he well knew, patronized him solely for economic reasons, the old man was now being openly ignored. A small, inferior shop in Market Street, owned by a man named Mostyn, gathered in by degrees some of his best customers. Evidently Mostyn had sent in his donation in the approved manner, not forgetting, of course, his name. Onzell did not know. He had never even glanced at the church notice-board. It was all very annoying because, whatever his faults, Onzell was a grocer born and bred. He knew the trade backwards, having been apprenticed as a boy to one of the largest wholesalers in Birmingham. Even the Vicar's wife had to admit that no man blended his tea quite so successfully, or roasted coffee to such a nicety.

Ruth, ever considerate, sought for a reason for bad trade, which she suggested to her employer on numerous occasions—there had been much illness in the village because of the indifferent water and drainage system, the crops had been poor because of a persistent drought, Mostyn had begun the practice of giving dividend for all purchases. Onzell merely smiled, and patted her gently on the shoulder.

“Don't you worry your head about it, Ruth,” he said. “It isn't the drought, or the illness that's keeping them away: it's sheer priggishness and obstinacy. They don't know when their bread's buttered. You leave it to old Mark. He knows just what to do.”

But within three months the young man had been dispensed with, and Ruth herself served in the shop. Notwithstanding the added burden placed upon her—for

Ruth would not allow the old man to do more than she thought necessary—the shop still remained as clean and orderly as before, and although its stocks were noticeably less, their quality never deteriorated. Onzell, for the first time in years, stood often at the entrance to the shop, clad in speckless white apron, seeming to be always deep in thought, gazing moodily at the antique dealer's opposite, speaking to few people, and seldom smiling.

Gossip again flourished over a cup of tea, but this time it was purposeful, and intended that the grocer should know exactly how feeling ran in the village ; but again it was ignored. What business was it of anybody's whether or not he should make a donation to the St. Michael's church restoration fund ?

Sometimes Onzell took the 2.30 from Briscott-Abett, his destination unknown even to Ruth. Neither was the most prying and persistent villager able to discover a single thing that would enable him to build up a case, on moral or mental grounds, against the grocer.

Perhaps Onzell had got wind of the arrival of Waldings ? Perhaps he had tried to stop them buying the antique dealer's shop opposite ? Whatever his efforts, they were doomed to failure, for within a short time Briscott-Abett was able to boast of a grocery store much superior to Onzell's. It was the last word in modernity, with its marble slabs, its bacon-cutting machine, and huge patent coffee roaster. And what was perhaps deeply significant, its prices were cut below Onzell's.

For the villagers the shop was Heaven-sent. Almost immediately they transferred their custom from Mostyn, looked triumphantly dignified as they crossed the road from Onzell's, and generally behaved as though Waldings knew of their personal grudge against the Jewish-looking man.

Ruth, when she had finished the housework and dusted the shop with her usual care, was determined to get to the bottom of the mystery. She had long thought that lack of trade was due to the malign gossip of certain of the villagers ; she was also certain that her employer knew the cause. She chose a time when the shutters were up, and Mark was

lingering over his newspaper. "There must be a reason, Mr. Onzell : there *must*," she persisted.

"Of course there's a reason, my dear. The villagers don't approve of me. They imagine that all subscriptions to the fund should be placarded outside the church. To them a man who just gives is either a fool or a rogue. For this very reason I refuse to publish the amount I willingly gave to the fund. And as for Waldings, you will see that they will soon raise their prices when they know that all my custom is gone."

"We could at least do something about it," said Ruth. "Couldn't we sue Waldings for taking our customers away from us?"

"Nothing can be done, I'm afraid, except close the shop. I can always go into respectable retirement, you know!"

Ruth's anxiety was relieved, her love and respect for Onzell increased by the knowledge of his good deed. She felt that, more than ever, she must stand by the old man whatever happened. The word that might have altered his destiny she never spoke. She believed that Onzell was perfectly right, that he should risk his shop before breaking his word to Jane.

As Onzell had predicted, Waldings *did* raise their prices as soon as the opposition failed.

The Vicar regarded the closing of Onzell's as a major catastrophe. It weighed heavily upon his conscience, and prayers on behalf of the grocer became a daily necessity. Added to this, he made vague references to the shop in his Sunday evening sermon, speaking with some severity on the lack of brotherly love and understanding in the village. Then he decided to pay Onzell a further visit in order to get his consent to a public announcement. Surely the old man would not force him to remain silent any longer, even though the damage had already been done?

He was led into the parlour where Onzell sat in a high-backed wooden chair, smoking his pipe. A look of pleasure passed between the two men as they shook hands. Ruth sat on the couch knitting.

As Lawson had feared, the grocer refused to have anything to do with the announcement idea. For the first time in many weeks he smiled, went to a drawer in the sideboard, and handed an envelope to the Vicar.

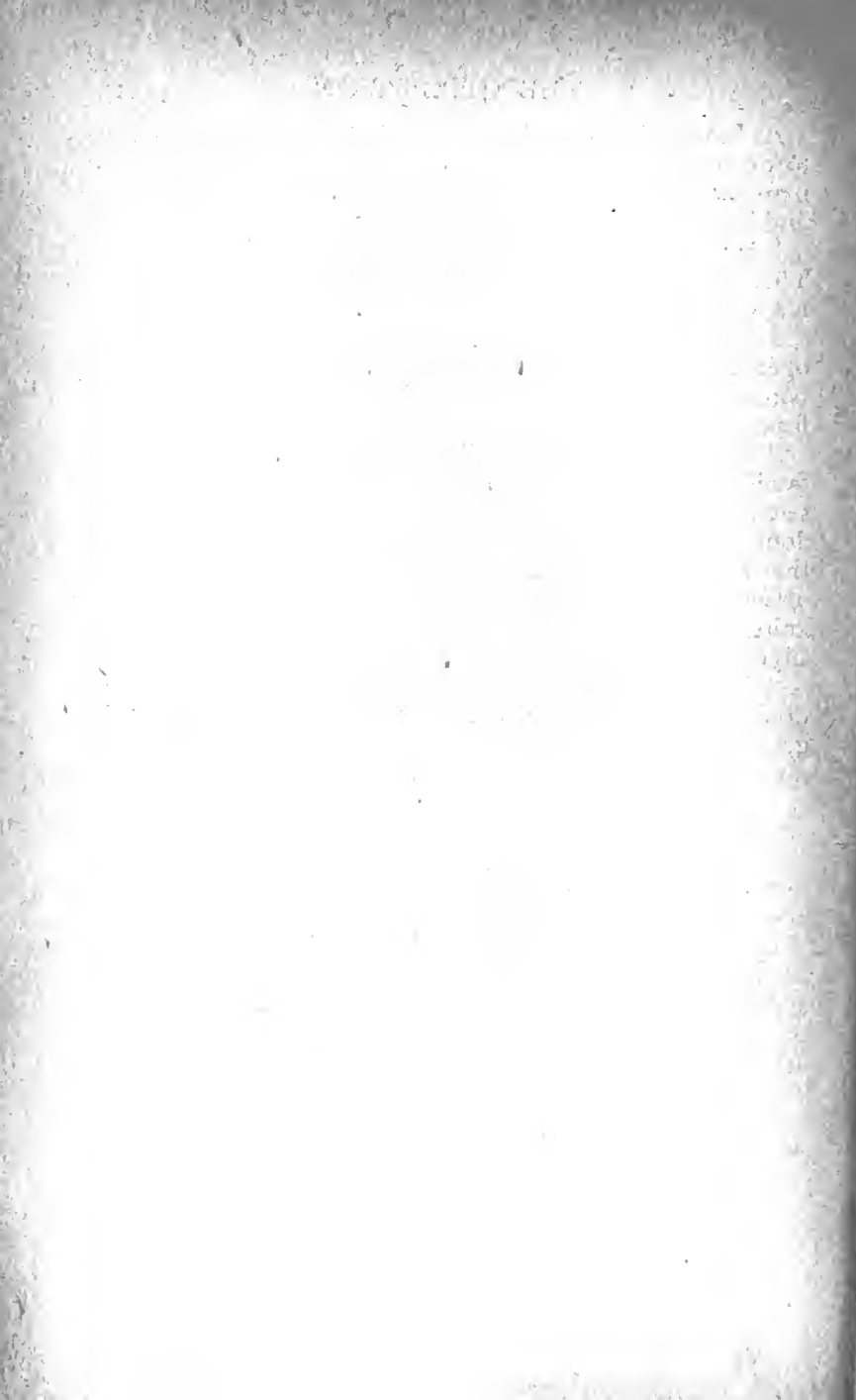
"Here, take this, and think no more about it," he said. Then to Ruth: "Do you think we might have a cup of tea, my dear?"

Lawson was silent; overwhelmed. He saw, when he opened the envelope, a further cheque for one hundred pounds, made out for the St. Michael's church restoration fund.

"You are a man of God," said Onzell, patting the Vicar familiarly on the shoulder, "and I'll let you into a little secret. You see, when I knew that Onzell's stores was done for, I determined to open Waldings. The success of that shop has far exceeded my expectations."

Onzell glanced fondly at Ruth, who had laid aside her knitting. Then a whimsical smile played at the corners of his full mouth.

"Somehow, I think Ruth could handle that shop very well, don't you? We all get old, my dear Lawson . . . we all get old."



RONALD MACDONALD DOUGLAS

★

The Corporal



BORN Edinburgh ; educated nowhere ; Gaelic enthusiast, and when not writing English signs name *Raonul Domhnullach Dubhghlas* ; owns property in the north and in the south of Scotland, and is a company director, but despite that looks on literature professionally, and is a Socialist. Is an ardent Scots Nationalist and hopes that out of the chaos of the next war an independent Scottish Socialist Republic will arise . . . and so on !

RONALD MACDONALD DOUGLAS.

THE CORPORAL

“LEFT, left ; left, right, left. Pick ’em up ! You, on the left of the rear file, you’re saggin’ at the knees. Left, left. . . .”

Corporal Alan Macpherson, the smartest N.C.O. on the square, kept his men on the move, up and down, and across the parade ground, entirely oblivious of the fact that the men had scarcely rested all the morning, and that the hot morning sunshine of the southern English summer was wearing them out.

“Left, left ; left, right, left. About—tu’n !” The rolling Scottish R was almost unheard in his last command. The movement stirred a red cloud from the heated gravel beneath the feet of the men.

“About tu’n !” again. Then : “Left, left. . . .”

Backwards and forwards the corporal moved the squad of recruits, but more as a man plays draughts than as a man plays chess—almost without thought, for the corporal’s thoughts were not on his squad.

He looked at his wrist-watch : ten minutes to twelve ; ten minutes yet to go. He cocked his Glengarry forward.

“Left, left. . . .”

That blasted English quarter-bloke, in his riding-breeches and spurs, had crossed along the top road not three minutes ago.

The squad was almost on to the grass verge.

“About tu’n !”

Breeches and spurs ! Why the hell did a corporal of a Scots regiment have to wear slacks on a drill parade ? He had joined the Army to wear a kilt always.

“Left in—cline ! Left, left. . . .”

In any case English slacks looked daft with a Glengary and a cut-away tunic.

Breeches and spurs ! He'd give him breeches and spurs, quarter-bloke or no quarter-bloke.

“ At the halt, on the right, form squad ! ”

The wearied recruits thought a rest was coming : but, no.

“ By the left, quick march ! ”

Would she be looking out of the window of their quarters to see the swine pass in his breeches and spurs ? Oh, God, but he was tired and weary of it all. Tired ? And so must these fellows be tired, too.

“ At the halt, on the left, form squad ! ”

The recruits thought they knew this trick.

“ Order a'ms ! ” A sigh of relief seemed to come from every man in the squad.

“ Stand at—ease ! Stand easy.”

The corporal looked at his watch again, as the men mopped their faces, and flexed their limbs : five minutes still to go. There was a staff-major on the square, talking to the captain. If the captain had been on his own he might have made an excuse to get away. After all, he was the best drill instructor in the depot ; but one or two of the officers had looked at him queerly in the last week or two. Maybe, though, he was just imagining.

Oh, why had he ever joined the Army ? And yet . . . No. Why, had they ever sent him south ? Why couldn't they have kept him at Inverness—or in Edinburgh ? Why send Scots troops to Aldershot, or anywhere in England ? Keep them at home in Scotland, or else send them abroad. That's what they should do. If only they'd kept him in Scotland this wouldn't be happening at all. He would never have met her. He would never have married her. Five years now, and 'on the strength,' too. She didn't know when she was lucky. Married quarters, and spliced to the smartest N.C.O. on the square ; singled out for promotion ; if all went well, he'd be sergeant in six months from now. If all went well ! And he was only thirty. He'd be sergeant-major, maybe—a warrant-officer—before he was forty—if all went well. And he was a good-looking

chap, too. There wasn't a man in the depot—in the whole mob for that matter, officers included—who could carry the kilt so well.

But she didn't know when she was well off. If only he could have married a Scots lass ; but she was English, and as soft as muck. An English doll, who couldn't let another man go past her without simpering at him. Particularly a cavalryman. Breeches and spurs ! But, Lord Almighty, this thing wasn't even a cavalryman. He was only a blasted Cockney A.S.C. quarter-bloke. Oh, hell !

Better get these fellows on the move again for the last lap. The staff-major was looking at him. The captain was nodding towards him. They were talking about him.

He cocked his Glengarry, and flicked his leg with his stick. The men knew the signal.

“Squad—properly at ease everywhere. Squad—shun ! As you were !—and put some jip into it ! Squad—shun ! Slope a'ms ! By the left, quick march ! Left, left ; left, right, left. Come on ! Pick 'em up ! Left, left . . .”

He glanced at the officers. What the devil were they saying about him ? He knew how to drill recruits. Better than they did—by a long chalk !

If she thought that. . . . If that blasted quarter-bloke with his breeches and spurs. . . .

“Come on ! What are you playing at ? Left, left. . . . Right incline ! Left in—cline ! About tu'n !”

He'd gut the swine. Gralloch him like a deer. And her, too.

“Squad, mark—time ! About tu'n ! Quick march ! Left, left. . . . You, in the middle there, that's a rifle, not a stick o' sugarolly. . . .”

The staff-major was grinning. That was all right. He'd show them !

“Come on ! Snappy now ! Your mothers'll be proud o' ye yet ; if only you'll forget the hills, and get the heather oot o' yer ears. . . .”

The hills—and the heather ! And here he was stewing, far from the north, on this hot Aldershot square. And she . . . She was his wife. Married. ‘On the strength.’

“ Left, left. . . .”

A bugler appeared at the edge of the square nearest the guard-room. Twelve o'clock. The bugle rang out.

“ Squad—halt! Mind yer dressing, there. Come on, heads up! Squad—dis—miss!”

The men turned to the right, brought their hands across to their rifles in salute, and broke ranks.

Corporal Macpherson, the smartest N.C.O. on the square, took a pace forward in the direction of the two officers, snapped his stick beneath his left arm, clicked his heels and jerked his hand up in regimental salute.

Now, he thought, now he'd see what she was up to, but she was cunning enough to know that it was time for him to be leaving the parade ground.

He swung round on his heels, preparatory to marching off the square, conscious of the fact that the two officers were watching him.

“ Corporal Macpherson!” It was the captain's voice.

“ Damn!” The corporal halted, and turned about.

The officer beckoned him.

He went across the square at the double, halted two paces from the officers, and saluted, standing a rigid six feet of magnificent Scottish manhood.

“ Sir?”

The captain glanced at the staff-major before he spoke.

“ Oh, corporal, report to the orderly-room at two-forty-five, will you?”

Orderly-room? What was wrong? But the officers were smiling—both of them—so it was all right.

“ Two-forty-five? Right, sir.”

It was the staff-officer, a little more human than the majority of his type, who answered the corporal's unconsciously querying eyes.

“ Good news for you, corporal,” he said.

“ Er—? Thank you, sir. That all, sir?”

“ That's all, corporal—for the present,” the major dismissed him.

“ Right, sir.” The corporal saluted again, turned smartly, and marched from the square.

News—good news? What could it be? Something out of the ordinary to treat it like that. A staff-wallah, too. What was it?—a special course?—special promotion? Two-forty-five.

He reached the roadway, bordering the parade-ground, and broke into the double as he made for the married quarters.

He ran past his own place about a hundred yards, and then doubled back, stopping to peer between the barrack blocks.

The master-tailor, standing at the door of his workshop, grinned at him.

“What’s come ower ye, Mac?” he asked. “Touch o’ the sun?”

“No.” The corporal, unsmiling, answered him quite seriously. He took a couple of paces forward as though to interrogate the tailor; but suddenly changed his mind.

There was no sign of the breeches and spurs.

The tailor chewed his heavy moustache, and shook his head. Queer devil, Macpherson.

The corporal went in.

She was sitting by the window, pretending to read a magazine. He wondered if she had seen him go past, and if she had seen his other movements.

She was dressed in her best, and with her blonde hair frizzed elaborately about the pink and whiteness of her made-up face.

He looked at her, but did not speak. Cheap, that’s what she was. Why hadn’t he seen it years ago? A cheap doll.

He flung down his Glengarry, and sent a piercing glance into each corner of the little room. Then he went hurriedly from it, searching each of the other two rooms of their quarters. He came back.

She looked up from her magazine with a sneer.

“Wot you looking foah?” she asked, in her flat Hampshire accent, with an affectation that she thought were the tones of a lady.

“Nothing.”

“Ho, reely. Couldn’t look for much less, could yer?” She thought that was funny.

Suddenly he snapped out : " Has that A.S.C. quarter-bloke been here ? "

" That—— ? "

" Quartermaster-sergeant Higgins of the Royal Army Service Corps." There was a bite in every word.

" Ho, yes——"

" Oh ? "

" I mide a complaint about some of the rations, and, of course——"

" That's only an excuse."

" Reelly ? " she sneered.

" Yes, really."

" Oh, for Gawd's sike shut up ! " She threw down her magazine. " You mike me taihd, you do."

" Tired ? " he repeated wearily. " Yes, I am tired."

He turned round and went out, picking up his Glengarry as he passed the chair on which he had thrown it.

Not too loudly, but loud enough for him to hear it, she flung ' Lousy Scotch pig ! ' after him, as he passed the open window.

He stopped. For a moment he thought of going back to smash the words down her throat. But that wouldn't do. He had to report to the orderly-room at two-forty-five. He had to keep calm.

The master-tailor, still at his door, had heard her words. ' Bloody cow ! ' he muttered, and watched the corporal as he crossed the road and disappeared between the barrack-blocks.

The corporal went into what had once been the dry-canteen, now known to the troops as ' The Naffy.'

He asked for coffee and a pie.

The girl behind the counter grinned, and, as the boiling liquid bubbled from the tap of the urn, she asked : " No dinner at 'ome to-day, corp. ? "

He did not answer. He merely glared at the girl, confirming her suspicions that the ' Scotch ' were all balmy.

He took his coffee and pie to a corner of the empty canteen, and sat down.

He tried not to think of his wife. He wanted to forget her.

He had to keep calm. Orderly-room, two-forty-five. Good news. What was it? Did it mean a shift? Abroad, maybe, to the battalion. He could leave her in England. She could go home, where she belonged, on allowance. She could do what she liked. She could go to the devil! He wasn't going to spoil his career for her. That's what she wanted, of course: a hell of a row in quarters. Get him up for the high-jump. Queer everything. Abroad? He could forget abroad, and get on—more or less free of her. Abroad? But it couldn't be that—or, at least, not just that alone. That wouldn't need a staff-major on the square, smiling, and almost friendly. What was it? Special promotion of some kind? P.T. instructor? No. What then? The authorities had him taped, he knew that. They knew he'd been at the Glasgow University before he enlisted at twenty-one, because there was nothing else to do. And he'd got on all right. And there were big chances. He'd queered some of them, of course, by marrying. Damned fool! Orderly-room. A staff-major. A cadetship? By God! Was that it? Sandhurst—a commission? Oh, but that needed a preliminary exam., and he hadn't bothered. Should have done that five years ago—or more. No. Besides, he was married—too true, he was married. And nearly thirty. Too late for a commission now. And yet—you never knew! The Army could play steam with its own regulations if it wanted to. The Army could muck you about to your good, as well as to your bad. And, after all, wasn't he the smartest young N.C.O. in the whole — : AND with special qualifications? God! A commission.

Then he laughed, bitterly; he laughed at the folly of it, and he laughed at the thought of HER as an officer's wife. But what was the good of worrying? He'd soon know. Two-forty-five at the orderly-room.

He bought a picture post card at the counter, and addressed it to his mother, telling her he would have good news. He smiled at that. Why not wait until he knew what the news might be? His mother wouldn't get it any sooner. Och, well, she'd be pleased to get the picture, anyway; and he would write a letter afterwards.

He went across to the post office in the lines, and sent off the card.

It was only one o'clock : an hour and three-quarters to wait. The lines were deserted. It was too hot for the troops to be wandering about after dinner. In any case, most likely, they wouldn't have finished. But he wanted someone to talk to. No, he didn't. He wanted a drink. No, that wouldn't do. He was sleepy enough as it was. Sleepy and tired and sticky.

He strolled down by the garrison church. It was open, and he went in. He knelt down. . . .

At half-past one he came out, crossed the road, and went into one of the barrack-rooms. He borrowed a towel, and went to what is euphemistically designated the ablution-bench. He filled a tub, and washed, then held his head under the tap and turned the water full on. He felt better after that. As he returned the towel to the lance-jack from whom he had borrowed it, the man wanted to know if his quarters had been blown up. He told the fellow to go to hell, and then begged the loan of a comb and a brush.

At five minutes to two, as he was going on parade, he saw the breeches and spurs : he looked right into the little pig-eyes of the quartermaster-sergeant. He thought the man smirked as he passed. He wanted to run after him, and to smash into him, and to beat him to a pulp—to hear him screaming for mercy. He wanted to—but, no ; there was too much at stake. Orderly-room at two-forty-five ; and the man wasn't worth it, and, after all, neither was she.

The parade was drawn to attention. As he reported, the captain spoke to him :

“ You'd better hop it, corporal,” the officer advised. “ I'll have Sergeant Fraser take your squad.”

“ Yes, sir. Very good, sir.”

“ —Er—I mean—you'd better be properly dressed this afternoon, corporal.”

Properly dressed ? That meant the kilt. What was on the go ?

“ Yes, sir.”

“ All right, corporal.”

The corporal saluted, and left the square. It was five-past two. Properly dressed? That meant returning to his quarters. She wouldn't know he was coming in. She'd think he was on the square. He wouldn't take any notice of her. He would just go straight through, and change. He had to keep calm.

The door was locked. She would be out. And he hadn't a key. That was like her—what the hell did she care if he did want to get in? He would have to go in by the window.

As he pulled himself up to the open casement, with his body poised half inside the room, he heard her voice in a loud whisper, followed by the lower rumble of a man's tones.

The corporal dropped quietly into the room.

He listened.

They were in the bedroom. The bedroom! Here? Here in quarters! Rations! Rations!

God!

Something seemed to snap in Macpherson's brain.

He wanted to scream, and he wanted to laugh: to scream at the foul outrage, and to laugh at their colossal impudence. But he stood still.

Then his limbs trembled—and stopped. His teeth snapped, and the noise of their coming together seemed to create some strange division: he was the soldier still—trained and disciplined; but he was, too, another man—a man moving in a hideous dream. He was a man apart, watching, yet playing in the dream, and knowing in advance what the outcome of it all would be; but the man watching was powerless to stop the man acting.

He removed his boots. He removed his tunic. He looked round the room. He took his bayonet from its scabbard—cold steel. He found his rifle—be prepared for anything! He found a clip, and quietly slipped it into the rifle-magazine. He snapped on the bayonet.

Noiselessly he crept along the short passage to the bedroom. He listened at the door. It was open an inch or two, and he could hear—everything!

He touched the door, and it moved quietly—six inches—

a foot—a foot and a half—two feet. He slipped, unheard, into the room.

For a moment he stood—watching—unable to realize fully the truth of the horror before him.

Suddenly, the man on the bed turned—and saw. But his yell died before it had begun ; his movement was stopped before thought became action.

The corporal leapt, and the bayonet crashed to the work it had been fashioned to do : through flesh and bones and blood it went—through the living body of a man—right through and beyond—driven by a demoniacal power—right through, and through the woman, too—pinning their bodies in sudden death to the bed they had been desecrating.

The rifle stood straight up, held by the flesh-embedded bayonet, rearing from the dead man's back like a fantastic pylon. A river of blood ran round the man's waist, pouring down on to the whiter flesh beneath him.

The corporal stood back—and then he laughed. For a full minute he laughed.

LEFT, LEFT ; LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT. . . .

A voice, half-muffled by the heat, came from the barrack-square.

The corporal stopped.

AT THE HALT, ON THE LEFT . . .

Then he remembered.

Orderly-room. Two-forty-five. Properly dressed.

He found his kilt, his sporran, his spats, and his shoes.

LEFT, LEFT ; LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT. . . .

Without as much as one glance at the bed—the bodies might not have been there—he changed.

He went through to the other room. He buckled his belt with the empty bayonet scabbard about him. He put on his Glengarry.

He went out.

LEFT, LEFT ; LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT . . .

At two-forty-three he was marching stiffly, up and down, outside the orderly-room door.

Twelve paces up.

ABOUT TURN !

Twelve paces down.

LEFT, LEFT ; LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT. . . .

The orderly-room sergeant came out.

HALT !

The corporal went in.

The captain was there, and the staff-major sat at the table. Inwardly, the corporal laughed. They didn't know. They didn't know that he had just come straight from battle. They didn't even know that war had been declared. Victory ! And easy—he alone. One movement only. No LONG POINT, SHORT POINT, IN, OUT ! No ! One—JAB !

The officers smiled at him. The major spoke :

“ Well, corporal——”

“ I have come, sir, to report——”

The major looked at him keenly. There was something strange and queer about the man.

And from outside, from the square, the voice went on :
LEFT, LEFT ; LEFT, RIGHT, LEFT. . . .

“ I have come, sir, to report,” the corporal repeated, “ that at two-fifteen, or thereabouts, single-handed and with the bayonet, I defeated and despatched two of the enemy.”

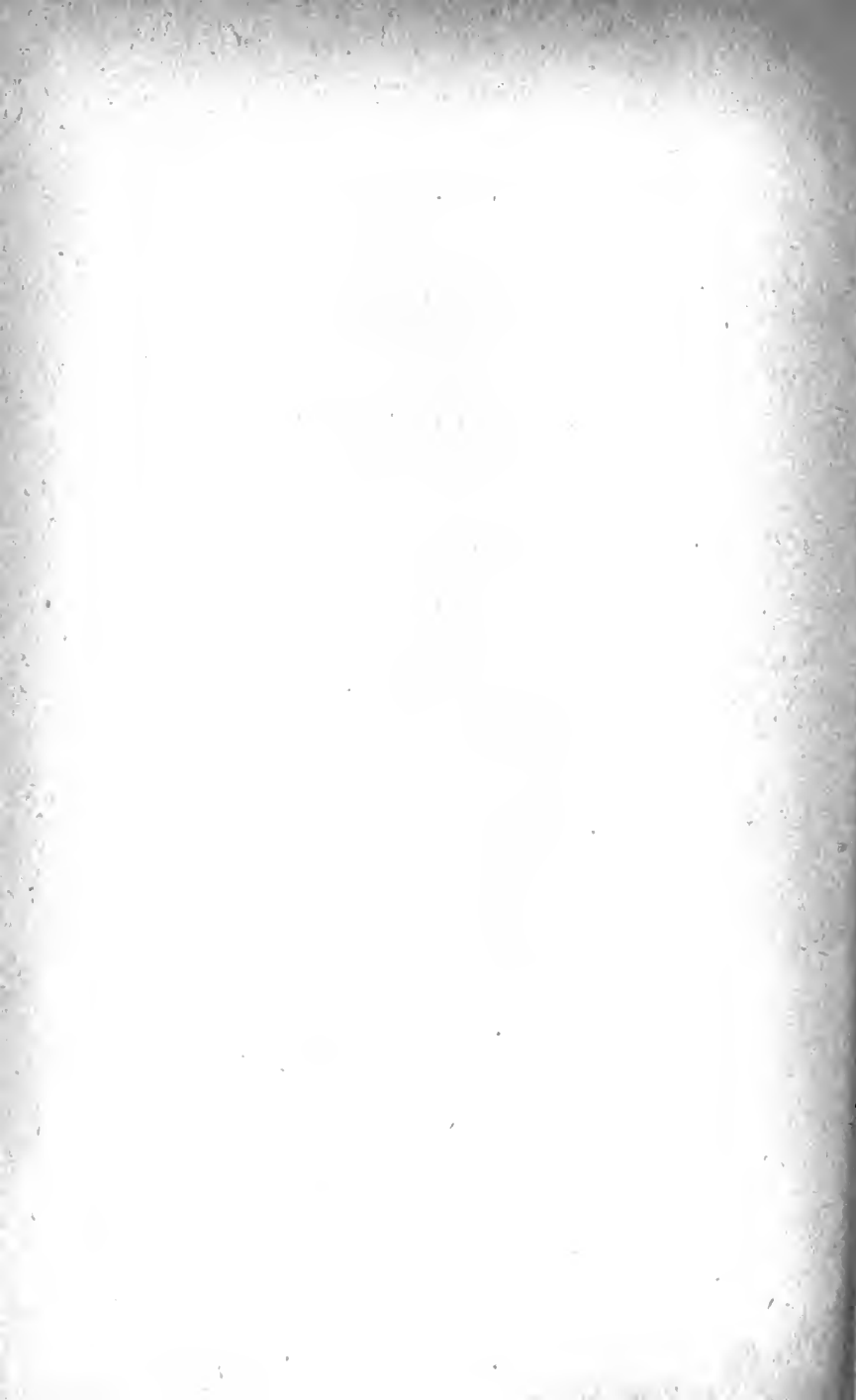
Then the six feet of him swayed, and crashed. . . .

AT THE HALT. . . . !

DAVID GASCOYNE

★

Death of an Explorer



I WAS born at Harrow, near London, in 1916, and spent my childhood first near Edinburgh, then in Bournemouth, then in Fordingbridge, on the edge of the New Forest. When I was nine years old, I became a choirboy of Salisbury Cathedral, and remained at the Choir School until my voice broke, when I was fourteen. My family having moved to a London suburb, I was then sent to the Regent Street Polytechnic, where I stayed for two years, supposedly studying for an exam. ; but the headmaster having made it clear that I should never be able to pass any exam., no matter how long I stayed there, I was removed, to my great relief, when I was just over sixteen. I had already published a few poems, and had finished an adolescent semi-auto-biographical novel, the MS. of which, owing to the kind help of Mrs. Alida Monro, was accepted by a London publisher a few months after I had left school. My parents became resigned to the idea that I was only good to be a writer.

With the money I received for advance royalties on *Opening Day* I was able to satisfy a long desire to visit Paris. I continued to write poetry, with moderate success, and prose, with less success ; and became very interested in the Surrealist movement, which by that time was no longer young, but which seemed to me to correspond to certain instincts of non-conformism and revolt which I had always recognized in myself. In 1935, my publishers were persuaded to commission me to write *A Short Survey of Surrealism*, one of the first books in English on a subject which, the following year, became a leading topic of conversation and newspaper gossip. I was a member of the organizing committee of the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1936. At about the same time, I became very preoccupied with politics, and in the autumn went for a while to Barcelona,

where I worked in the Propaganda Bureau of the Catalonian Government. On returning to England I continued to do a good deal of Left-wing political work ; and also became connected with the formation of the movement now famous under the name of ' Mass-Observation.' For eighteen months I was unable to write a line of poetry ; and did little other work except the collecting of material for a book on Arthur Rimbaud (to be published in 1938 under the title *Diabolic Angel*).

Now, at the age of twenty-one, having passed through surrealism, communism, mass-observation, etc., I no longer have any desire to be connected with any particular group, ideology, or programme, but wish to be entirely free to develop my own individual preoccupations, which centre round the inner problem of modern man : the necessity for *greater consciousness of himself* : as a social being, as a psychological being and as a spiritual being—a problem too great to be perceived from a single, fixed point of view.

My present work includes *Diabolic Angel*, *Hölderlin's Madness* (also to be published in 1938), a new collection of poems, three *nouvelles*, collectively called *Quiet Minds*, and a series of short stories to be called *The Midnight Sun* (of which ' Death of an Explorer ' is one of the first written, and the first short story I have ever had published).

DAVID GASCOYNE.

DEATH OF AN EXPLORER

' L'enfant Septentrion dansa sept jours. . . '

MR. PARKER was a middle-aged, undistinguished-looking man, who worked for a firm of insecticide manufacturers. His job kept him at the office most of the time, but occasionally his employers would call upon him to go and demonstrate their products in towns in some quite distant part of the country, or even abroad, so that after a while he became quite used to making journeys and seeing strange places, although the previous positions he had occupied had never given him the opportunity to travel. He did not like to be referred to as a traveller, though; his salesmanship was in a higher class than that.

He woke up one Sunday morning in a strange bed, and remembered that he had arrived the previous night in a town he had never visited before and where he had an appointment for the following day with a large firm of wholesale gardeners. He had been giving demonstrations the day before in another town in the same county.

He lay in bed enjoying a vague feeling of pleasure at the thought of having nothing to do all day except take his meals, read the newspaper, and perhaps explore his strange temporary surroundings a little in the afternoon. He always liked to wander about and see the local sights, even in the most insignificant of the places that he visited. When the landlady came in with his breakfast, he did in fact ask her whether there was anything of interest in the neighbourhood which, in her opinion, a traveller ought not to miss. He asked this in a half-jocular way, although his curiosity was quite genuine. The landlady looked at him with a puzzled expression, fingered the back of her head, and answered that she couldn't exactly think of anything.

“Well, yes,” she said, after a short pause, “there’re the Municipal Gardens, of course. And then there’s the Corn Exchange, that’s an old-fashioned sort of building, a gentleman once painted a picture of it, I believe. And, oh!” she added, “I was quite forgetting, there’s the house where A—— used to live, they say you can still see the blood-stains on the staircase.” She named a murderer whose sordid crime had filled much space in the newspapers a few years before.

Mr. Parker thanked her for her information, and thought no more about it until after lunch. He had read all the Sunday papers, it looked as though it were going to be a beautiful afternoon, he was feeling in a very good mood; and as he was not particularly interested in the architecture of Corn Exchanges, and was even less interested in crime (he used to say he thought the papers should be prohibited from publishing reports of murder cases), he decided to go for a walk in the Municipal Gardens. He did not omit to take an umbrella with him as, in his experience, it always came on to rain just when one least expected it to.

“It’s not far to go,” said the landlady, as he was leaving the house. “You go straight down the High Street, and over the bridge, then turn to the left and go down past the new cinema until you reach the cross-roads. You’d better ask a policeman when you get as far as that, I can’t quite explain, but it’s not much farther.”

Mr. Parker set off down the High Street with a jaunty air, twirling his umbrella, which marked him out as a stranger among the people who, dressed in their best Sunday clothes, were slouching aimlessly along the pavements and gazing at the windows of the shuttered shops. He crossed a bridge over a rather dirty little canal, turned down past the new cinema, a hideous erection, and soon found himself at the cross-roads, where he asked the constable on point duty whether he could direct him to the Gardens.

The constable looked him suspiciously up and down before he answered; then he said, speaking very slowly: “The Gardens? Ah, yes! the Gardens. You’ll have to go along this road you see in front of you until you come to the

end of the shops, then go through the alley beside the Library, and you'll find yourself nearly opposite the gates."

Mr. Parker thanked him pleasantly enough, and went on his way ; but he had an unpleasant feeling that the policeman's eyes would be fixed upon his back, instead of on the traffic, until he was quite out of sight. Nevertheless, he continued to twirl his umbrella nonchalantly. So much for all officials !

Having noticed that the Library clock said ten to three, Mr. Parker turned into the alleyway to which he had been directed. It was narrow and dark and smelt of dustbins, and he was glad to emerge at last into a spacious road lined with tall Victorian houses set back behind railings and strips of weed-infested gravel. The light seemed stronger here, and the sky higher. On the other side of the road, making a break in the line of houses, stood a high brick wall topped with broken glass and with a high ironwork gateway in the middle of it. He made his way over to the gate and tried to push it open. It was padlocked ; the grounds inside did not look much like a public garden ; there was no one in sight. And then his eye caught the notice that was fixed to the wall on the right-hand side of the gate : STRICTLY PRIVATE—MENTAL HOME.

He turned indignantly on his heel, and looked up and down the road to see whether his discomfiture had been observed. So the policeman had tried to make a fool of him, had he ? What impertinence ! He would have the man reported ! But perhaps, after all, it was a mistake ; perhaps if he went on a little farther up the road, he would come to the Gardens still ? The whole prospect was extraordinarily deserted ; it seemed as though all the inhabitants of this part of the town were submerged in sleep. He walked slowly on, no longer swinging his umbrella, and wished there were someone of whom he could ask once more the way. There was only a miserable white dog sitting beside a gate, who growled at him as he went by.

He walked for what seemed a long time, past interminable houses, but saw not the least sign of any garden. He eventually found himself in the neighbourhood of the station ;

the road went under a railway bridge ; and it was here that he met a passer-by at last.

“ Excuse me, but can you tell me whether I am going in the right direction for the Public Gardens ? ” he inquired.

The man, who was carrying a small case, looked at him vacantly and shook his head. “ I’m sorry, sir, but I’m afraid I’m a stranger in these parts,” was his reply. He touched his hat to Mr. Parker and went on.

‘ Well, at any rate,’ said Mr. Parker to himself, ‘ I am getting a bit of a walk, and that’s the main thing.’ He was glad he had brought his umbrella with him ; the sun had retired by this time behind a heavy film of cloud, and there was a certain sultriness in the air.

Beyond the railway bridge there were stretches of allotments behind the hedges on either side of the road. On the edge of these allotments rose the railway-line embankment. Mr. Parker kept his eyes open for anything that might be of interest. When he got home again after one of his business trips, he always liked to describe everything he had seen and done in minute detail to his wife. It somehow increased his sense of his own importance to do this, and his wife was always impressed, even by the most trivial things, since she herself had never travelled in her life. But this time, he reflected, there would be singularly little to tell her about. He began to regret not having gone to see the Corn Exchange. He remembered, also, how much interest his wife had displayed in the A—— murder case at the time of the trial. . . .

The allotments gave place to fields, in which stood enormous hoardings advertising cars and pills. After the fields, he came to a large nursery garden full of green-houses, and was delighted to discover that the name on the placard beside the gate was that of the firm to whom he had to demonstrate his insecticide on the following day. This made his walk seem thoroughly worth while after all, for now he would not have to waste time in looking for the place the next morning.

He stood still in the road to take a long look at the nurseries. They were hardly any different from the many

others he had visited in the course of his expeditions. In one corner of the grounds there stood a lofty water-tower ; and it was whilst he was glancing at this tower that he noticed a couple of men who were standing at its foot, nodding to one another and pointing in his direction as though they suspected him of something. Then a third figure appeared from behind the tower and the others spoke to him hurriedly and again pointed towards the road. Mr. Parker immediately resumed his walk. Did they imagine that he was loitering there with some ulterior motive, he wondered ? Two ragged children were wandering towards him down the road ; it might just as well have been at them that the men were pointing ; there had perhaps been cases recently of fruit or flowers being stolen by urchins, and that was the explanation.

Although he had a feeling that the men by the water-tower were still watching him with interest, Mr. Parker stopped the little boy and girl, and asked them, just to set his mind finally at rest, whether he would be likely to find any Public Gardens round this way. The children looked at one another, and then laughed.

" Yes, mister," said the boy, " there's some sort of gardens way down yonder. Yes, mister."

" It ain't far," explained the little girl, whose face and hands were extremely dirty. " You just keeps straight on."

Mr. Parker, even though he thought it not impossible that they were pulling his leg, gave them each a penny, and left them gazing after him, with their fingers in their mouths. It did not occur to him till afterwards that his behaviour must have seemed rather peculiar to the watchers in the nurseries. He would have to try to remember to speak to someone about it in the morning ; they would be very amused when he explained.

When he had walked considerably farther, he came to an abrupt turning in the road, a cluster of houses and a pub. Three motors passed him, leaving a cloud of dust behind. After the dust had cleared, he saw that on the opposite side of the road there was an imposing stone gateway surmounted by carved lions holding shields, and a wall enclosing

numerous trees through which, in the distance, part of some large building was to be discerned. At that moment, a casual group of people emerged from the entrance. They looked like tourists. Mr. Parker crossed the road. 'This must be the place,' he thought, as he glanced in between the gate-posts. He walked inside. There was certainly no one to stop him.

The place was more like a park than a garden; paths stretched away in all directions among the trees; in the grass here and there stood clumps of blossoming shrubs and one or two weather-stained statues. It was obviously open to the public, because there were little receptacles and drinking-fountains placed at the corners of the paths, and fixed to the tree trunks were various notices, such as: 'Bird's-nesting is Strictly Forbidden'—'To the Kiosk'—'This Way to the Ruins.' Mr. Parker also saw a notice saying: 'This Way to the Palace,' but when he looked in the direction in which it was pointing, he could no longer see anything of the building he had observed through the trees from outside the wall. Very varied-looking groups of people were strolling carelessly about.

But, Mr. Parker asked himself, what was this mysterious Palace? Were these the Municipal Gardens that his landlady had mentioned? If so, why had the policeman attempted to lead him so deliberately astray? Perhaps there had been some misunderstanding—perhaps he was quite a new policeman who did not know the district any too well? It had taken him a long enough time to reach the place, and it was certainly some distance from the town. But it was not so far away that the landlady would not have mentioned it as being among the attractions of the neighbourhood, supposing it were not the Municipal Gardens he had come to. On the other hand, she had said nothing about a Palace. And whoever heard of a Municipal Palace? It was most confusing.

It occurred to him to speak to one of the many other visitors who were wandering about the paths, and to ask for some enlightenment. But every time he was about to stop someone, either the person was too engrossed in his friend's

conversation or his own thoughts to notice him, or he was unable to think how to phrase his question. Among the people he passed without being able to attract their attention were a couple of Cinghalese ladies wearing *saris* (he could not imagine how they had got there), an elderly clergyman with a long white beard, and a number of foreign-looking young men who might have been students of some kind. He began to swing his umbrella round again, more out of a feeling of disquiet, this time, than of good humour. He looked up at the flat grey sky : Was it going to rain ?

At this moment, he was confronted by a door set in a wall. Passing through to the other side, he found himself in a more open space, rather like a field, in the midst of which there was a wide oblong stretch of ornamental water, bordered by avenues of elms. Here, again, there were many people walking on the foot-paths ; a number of men sat fishing along the edge of the water ; and in the distance, which was indistinct, Mr. Parker thought he could see animals of some kind moving about, most probably cows.

To one side of the foot-path which Mr. Parker decided to follow, there was a wire enclosure, inside which a number of schoolboys were playing cricket on a ridiculously short pitch. They were all dressed in immaculately clean white flannels and were wearing white caps ornamented with gold braid. He paused to watch them for a few moments.

“ I say, that’s rather a short pitch that you’re using there ! ” he called out cheerfully.

One or two of the boys turned round and looked at him with deepest scorn, as though he had offended some sacred convention ; while the rest disregarded him completely and went on playing their game with an air of intense concentration.

Mr. Parker shrugged his shoulders and moved on, feeling rather hurt. He sat down presently on a bench near the edge of the lake, beneath the elms, and watched the fishermen who were sitting not far away from him. They appeared to be absolutely motionless. Turning his head, he suddenly saw the front of the Palace, which faced the lake, for the first time.

It was a fine building in the best Georgian style, much larger than he had expected it to be, rather like a monstrously over-developed country mansion. With this grey and melancholy sheet of water stretching away in front of it into the distance, it had something of the appearance both of Versailles and of Hampton Court. As Mr. Parker was not acquainted with either of these places, he could not make the comparison. He just sat and gazed in wonderment, quite unable to make out how it came to be there, on the outskirts of such a completely unimportant little town.

He sat gazing at the building and trying to make out the tiny human figures that were moving about on the steps leading up the main entrance. Was the Palace open to the public too, then? He thought he could see lights being carried across the rooms behind the great uncurtained windows of the upper floors. At one moment he even had the fantastic idea that there was someone moving about among the forest of chimney-stacks on the roof.

On either side of the façade there stretched a wall; the summit of a fountain could be seen glittering just above the top of the wall on the left-hand side. Everything was smothered in a silence broken only by the click of bat and ball. Mr. Parker was beginning to find this silence oppressive, when he heard the voice of a man on the other side of one of the trees behind him, saying: "You'd better be careful, it's the mating-season!"

He was wondering what in the world this might mean, when he heard a noise of violent clattering and snorting going on in the avenue a short way away; and turning round, saw a couple of stags, their antlers interlocked, engaged in furious combat, stumbling every now and again against a great dead fallen branch of an elm. He rose hurriedly to his feet, and just as hurriedly moved away towards the Palace.

The nearer he approached to the vast building, the more curious he became as to its interior. Beyond the entrance hall, through which people were continually moving in and out, one could catch a glimpse of a shadowy courtyard, with farther wells of light and shadow stretching inwards

beyond that. At the top of the front steps, beside a little orange tree in a pot, stood a tall, ferocious officer of some kind, wearing a sky-blue uniform which made him look exactly like the commissionaire of an hotel. Mr. Parker made his way up to this figure, and somewhat diffidently inquired what the name of the palace might be, and to whom it belonged. The man told him the name, but it conveyed absolutely nothing to Mr. Parker, he had never even heard of it before.

The officer managed to convey by his glance that he considered Mr. Parker to be an idiot. "All further information at the Kiosk," he snapped. "Straight along to the left, turn to the left again."

Mr. Parker walked along the frontage of the Palace, noticing with disappointment that all the ground-floor windows were heavily shuttered. He passed through the door in the wall from which he had emerged before, and found himself among the trees and gravel paths again. He caught sight of the Kiosk in the distance and hurried towards it. He was too late! Just as he had got to within a few yards of it, someone inside pulled down the shutter behind the inquiry-desk with a loud crash. He loitered about for some time, swinging his umbrella round impatiently, in the hope that the attendant would shortly emerge; but he or she had either already made an exit unobserved, or had decided to stay the night inside. Mr. Parker moved slowly away.

Just then, a clock in the vicinity struck six o'clock: the deep-toned chimes wavered oddly in his head. How the time had flown! He would have to be getting back, he thought, but he wanted to see just a little of the inside of the Palace first. He went through a door in a wall, and discovered at once that it was the wrong one: he had come out somewhere at the back of the Palace, or at the side perhaps, and was in a long-deserted-looking mews. There were apparently people living here, for there were curtains and bright flower-boxes in the first-floor windows. He perceived a shadowy archway in the distance, and began to stroll towards it. His feet made a surprisingly loud

clatter on the flag-stones ; a number of dogs began to bark savagely somewhere quite near to him. But at that moment he heard voices just above his head and, looking up, caught sight of a young woman in a dark dress with a broad white satin collar and with beautifully waved dark hair leaning out of one of the windows. His heart gave a sudden jump, not because she was so beautiful, but because he immediately seemed to recognize her : it was surely young Mrs. Fitzgerald, who had once lived next door to him at home ! He could remember her very clearly ; his wife had been quite friendly with her ; she was known to be very clever at telling fortunes with tea-cups and cards.

“ Oh, Mrs. Fitzgerald ! ” he called up to her, but she had already disappeared.

In his excitement he noticed that there was a small green-painted door beneath the window, with three bell-pushes and brass name-plates beside it. Fitzgerald was not, unfortunately, among the names engraved on the plates ; but that did not matter ; she was probably just staying there with a friend ; or she was perhaps related to one of the officials connected with the Palace, and that would make the visit all the more interesting. He pushed the lowest bell and waited. Nothing happened. After several minutes he rang again, and began to feel uncomfortable. Supposing it hadn't been Mrs. Fitzgerald at all—how foolish he would look ! Shortly after his third ring he heard footsteps, the door opened slowly, and a pale, half-witted-looking servant-woman peered suspiciously out at him.

“ Does Mrs. Fitzgerald live here, please ? ”

The woman shook her head without replying.

“ Do you happen to know the name at all by any chance ? ”

Again the woman shook her head. Was she dumb, he wondered ?

“ You are *quite* sure ? ”

The woman nodded. She was obviously incapable of speech. She closed the door abruptly in his face, leaving him standing there like a dummy.

He retreated a few steps, and again stared up at the window where the young woman had appeared. It was no

use, someone had drawn the curtains now. Anyway, he had most probably made a mistake. The invisible dogs had begun to bark again, more loudly than before. He walked hurriedly away towards the arch that he had seen.

The archway led into a dark, tunnel-like, damp-walled passage. A distant glimmer of light indicated the farther end. Other passages branched off on either side here and there, but not knowing into what forbidden precincts they might lead, Mr. Parker decided to keep straight ahead. 'I shall certainly have plenty of things to describe to the wife after all,' he thought to himself as he paced towards the light.

He came out into the daylight once again on the opposite side of the Palace, among the lawns and flower-beds of the garden where he had seen a fountain rising. There were not so many people about here. It was very quiet. He wondered which path to take, there were so many; he wanted to return to the main entrance so as to be able to take a look at some of the rooms inside before he went away.

A group of three people passed beside him; and as he guessed from their determined gait that they were probably going home, it occurred to him to follow them, as they would surely have to go round in front of the Palace on their way out? They were an old woman in black, a younger woman, and a tall young man with untidy hair, a torn, dirty jacket, and shapeless dark grey flannel trousers that were too small for him. They did not speak to one another. Mr. Parker fixed his eye upon their backs so as not to lose sight of them. Strangely enough, he found himself worrying as to what the young man's face must look like, his shoulders had so disconsolate a droop.

After a time he realized that he had been mistaken in following these people: they were going quite the wrong way round. They passed through a low gateway and crossed a gloomy, brick-paved courtyard, Mr. Parker trailing after them. He suddenly felt tired; but he was determined to see the inside of the Palace before he went back to the town. With the next turning taken by his untrustworthy guides, he found himself once more in the long-deserted mews.

Was he ever going to find his way out again, he wondered ? It was surely getting late, the place would be closing soon. Once more the dogs set up their furious clamour. Mr. Parker tried to remember which was the window where he had seen the image of Mrs. Fitzgerald, but every window looked exactly like the rest. By the time he had directed his gaze in front of him again, the trio he had been following had completely disappeared.

Once more he made his way beneath the arch into the passage, and decided that he would turn off down one of the side corridors this time. What ages seemed to have passed since lunch-time ! He had missed his tea and was now beginning to feel ravenously hungry.

Half-way down the passage he turned to the left. A dim light led him on, emanating, he discovered a few moments later, from a lofty-ceilinged hall into which the daylight entered through a single stained-glass window. There were a number of doors, and a broad oak staircase, which he began to climb. The light was so bad that he did not notice the official seated on a chair on the landing half-way up until the man rose to his feet as he was passing, and said : "You'll have to hurry, we're closing in another ten minutes or so." At least, Mr. Parker thought that was what he said, but he could not be sure ; the man spoke very indistinctly. He could hardly see his face.

At the top of the staircase, he entered yet another corridor, where the light was even worse than before. This led him eventually to a narrow balcony running round beneath the roof of an enormous banqueting-hall lit by a skylight. From what he could see of it, the floor-space below was taken up by a single massive table enclosed by a rail of crimson cord, as in a museum. The hall was quite empty, except for an official seated on guard beside the farther entrance.

He went on through a series of half a dozen or so empty rooms, the windows of which appeared to look out into an inner courtyard, and at last reached a wide open landing at the top of another broad flight of stairs, which were railed off to prevent anyone making use of them. ' This

Staircase is Unsafe,' said a hand-written notice propped up against the banisters. On the wall facing Mr. Parker was another notice, which said: 'This Way to the Torture-Chamber.'

'I'll just go and see that,' he thought, 'and then I really shall have to be getting home.'

The finger on the notice-board pointed down a lengthy gallery hung with tapestry. On his way, Mr. Parker paused for a few moments to examine the design. He found it rather disturbing. It appeared to represent a scene in Hell, and though the colours were rather faded, the effect was sufficiently vivid to cause the most light-hearted spectator to shudder slightly. 'What morbid imaginations they used to have in the old days,' thought Mr. Parker. The most striking thing about the tapestry, and undoubtedly that which gave it its particular local interest, was the fact that the background of the scene was obviously based upon the Palace and its grounds, only horribly transformed: the ornamental water was a lake of brimstone, in which the naked souls of the damned were eternally writhing, while the Palace was being consumed by flames that burnt away for ever and yet never destroyed the fabric of its walls. Mr. Parker shook his head, said, "Tch, tch, tch," and moved away.

The room at the end of the gallery was apparently the torture-chamber, for there was a notice beside the door to the effect that children were not admitted. But there was nothing in the room which could have alarmed even a child. Its whitewashed walls contained only an old broken-down wooden bedstead. On the stone-paved floor lay a few pieces of rusty chain and a sort of metal horse-collar. That was all.

Mr. Parker stared about him, then went over to the window. Outside lay the grounds, exactly as he had left them, except that it was perhaps a little darker now. The schoolboys were still engrossed in their game of cricket, the fishermen still sat motionless by the lake, the stags were still fighting beneath the elms. He even thought he could distinguish the bench on which he had sat down, and

wondered whether anyone would notice this small, insignificant window from that distance.

When he turned back to the room, his eyes fell upon a door which he had not seen before. It was half-open, he wandered through, and found himself in a dark inner chamber illumined only by the smallest grille. After a moment, he caught sight of a large circular hole in the centre of the floor. He moved a little nearer, so as to be able to see it more clearly. It appeared to be a sort of well, though there was no bucket or chain to be seen. Somehow wells always had a mysterious fascination for him. He peered into its depths. Supposing it were bottomless?

He was standing perilously on the very edge. At that moment, he thought he saw an indistinct figure moving in a corner of the room, and simultaneously, an official came suddenly running through the door behind him, shouting: "Hey! Get out! You're not supposed to come in here, it's absolutely forbidden!"

The combined shock was sufficient to cause Mr. Parker to lose his balance. He toppled, threw up his arms and, with a faint cry, still clutching his umbrella, fell sidelong into the gaping pit. He was never heard of again, and neither his landlady, his employers, nor his wife ever knew what had become of him.

R. G. GOODYEAR

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Valse des Fleurs



As with most people, the really significant events in my life are the concealed ones. These will be found presented obliquely in my work.

For the rest, it can be said that I was born in Luton, Bedfordshire, on 26 November 1905, to exceedingly well-chosen parents. Two or three years of my extreme infancy I spent having operations. Then I went to a Dame School, where for the fee of a shilling a week, paid every Monday morning in advance, I learned to write my name and play *Sally Go Round the Moon*. After that, a co-educational elementary school (where my 'compositions' were frequently shown to distinguished visitors).

My education commenced when I went out to work at fourteen, and attended night-schools. First, I was a clerk in a gasworks, and then worked on the staff of a group of local newspapers, finishing up as sub-editor on an evening newspaper. I married, and went to live in London, where I wrote my first novel, called *I Lie Alone*. This was published, after one rejection, by Boriswood, in May 1935. It was followed, a year later, by *The Mirtle Tree*. There is more to come.

ROBERT GEOFFREY GOODYEAR.

VALSE DES FLEURS

THE drawing-room was empty and silent. There was not even the sound of a clock in it, for Clothilde had stopped all the clocks in the house except that in the kitchen. If they knew, said Clothilde, what it was that clocks *said*, as they ticked in the house all day long, they, too, would wish them silent. So they had acquiesced. Their day was measured now by dawn and sunset, by the gong for meals and the appearance of candles.

By a coincidence, the thin dead hands of the cupid-wreathed clock, glass-domed on the marble mantelpiece, stood at half-past three, which was almost the exact time. Through the two tall windows poured slanting beams of gold October sunlight.

It was like a room seen in a mirror, fixed, remote, unreal. And then suddenly, with drama, the high white doors opened, and Ernestine stood there. With her hands on the cut-glass door-knobs, arms outstretched, she surveyed the room with hauteur, her head held high. Smiling slightly to left and right, as though the room was full of people, she entered. Her movement was attended by a rich sweeping sound, for she wore a white satin ball-dress with a long train.

The dress had a low-cut bodice which her shrivelled breasts did not fill. A ripple of light played on the diamonds in her necklace. From the narrow waist the dress swelled out and fell in copious white cadences over the bustle into the pool of the train. The satin of the skirt was caught up in the front into heavy horizontal folds. From her left shoulder, diagonally across the dress ran a trail of ivy leaves made of green velvet. A spray of real ivy bound her faded blonde hair. The yellow flesh of her arms showed between the top

of her long kid gloves and her puffed sleeves. Her feet were not visible, but she was wearing white satin slippers worn into holes.

She was playing a game. She was acting a play in which she was the heroine. She stood before the cheval glass and took up her pose—one hand raised to touch the diamonds at her throat, and the other holding her dress. Between narrowed lids she looked at herself, turning her head, raising her chin, lifting an eyebrow, curving her mouth in a composed, disdainful smile. Then elegantly she moved to the grand piano, opened it, touched a yellowed key with a gloved finger.

The note sprang with surprising sharpness into the room's stillness, vibrated with a thin ringing, and was gone. She unbuttoned her gloves and thrust out her hands, rolling back the white kid over her wrists. And kicking back her train, and arranging her dress in graceful folds, she sat on the velvet-covered piano stool. Sat with her hands poised over the keys, glanced up once coquettishly as though someone was leaning on the piano and looking down at her admiringly.

Down the wide oak staircase came Lucian into the soundless, shadowed well of the hall. He had his hands thrust into the corded pockets of his wine-coloured velvet jacket. He wore lavender grey trousers. An air of excitement and purpose surrounded him.

At the stair-foot he paused as a high thin note of music came wavering across the hall from the closed doors of the drawing-room. That was Ernestine. He had seen her go down, wearing an old white dress. She was in there at the piano playing one of her endless games of make-believe. What did she imagine herself to be this afternoon?

Lucian walked with quick noiseless steps across the faded Persian rugs in the hall to the morning room, and through there to the conservatory.

The humid air met him, closed round his mouth and nose, clung damply like cobweb to his skin as he entered and shut the door. Greedily he looked round at the flowers.

The glass of the roof and half-way down the walls was

whitewashed to shade the brightness of the sun. So that the circular place was filled like a tank with a radiance white as the light from snow. From a mound in the middle sprang tall palms, brushing the roof with their great dark plumes.

All the flowers were white. White waxen roses, huge glistening chrysanthemums, madonna lilies, white cyclamen-like butterflies among the dark metallic green of their leaves, heavy plumes of white lilac green-tinted.

Slowly he walked round the conservatory examining all the flowers. He stretched out his hand over a chrysanthemum, lowered it until the cool tight ball of petals caressed his palm. He restrained his fingers which longed to close round the flower, plunge deep into the white petals and tear them asunder. With a voluptuous circular motion of his hand, he repeated the caress. He bent and brushed the flower lightly with his lips, turned his cheek to its exquisite texture and breathed its subtle perfume.

As he moved on, a toad plopped heavily across his path and disappeared under the ferns. Now he paused by a bush of white roses climbing the wall. Raptly he stood before it, and suddenly put out his hand, thrusting his finger deep into a half-opened rose. He closed his thumb, and thrilling to the satin skinlike feel of the petals, slowly tore the rose to pieces. With a faint lustful smile on his lips, he looked down at the torn, bruised petals, white on the dark mould.

And now Clothilde appeared at the top of the stairs, looming there with the bleak north light of the landing window behind her. Her grey hair was plaited and wound in two coils round the crown of her head. She had a heavy fat face and large grey eyes under thick dark eyebrows, like Madame Blavatsky. On her hand, resting on the banisters, a large moonstone shone palely.

Motionless, she listened, staring down into the hall with a brooding expression, to the sound of the Waldteufel waltz which Ernestine was playing in the drawing-room.

Ernestine's foot in the white satin slipper tapped on the carpet; her shoulders swayed to the swing of the music.

She pouted, smiled, glanced sideways. Gaily, the tune quickened to its end.

Clothilde stepped back quickly as a door opened down in the hall, and Lucian came out of the morning-room.

He has been with the flowers, she thought, and returned to her room, her gross body in its dingy grey draperies moving with surprising softness and speed. A trail of cedar-wood perfume followed her.

On the table by the window, the Tarot cards were spread. Near them on its ebony stand stood the crystal—a bubble of white light. One card in the row of the Tarot trumps was misplaced, standing out from the others. Number Sixteen, the Stricken Tower.

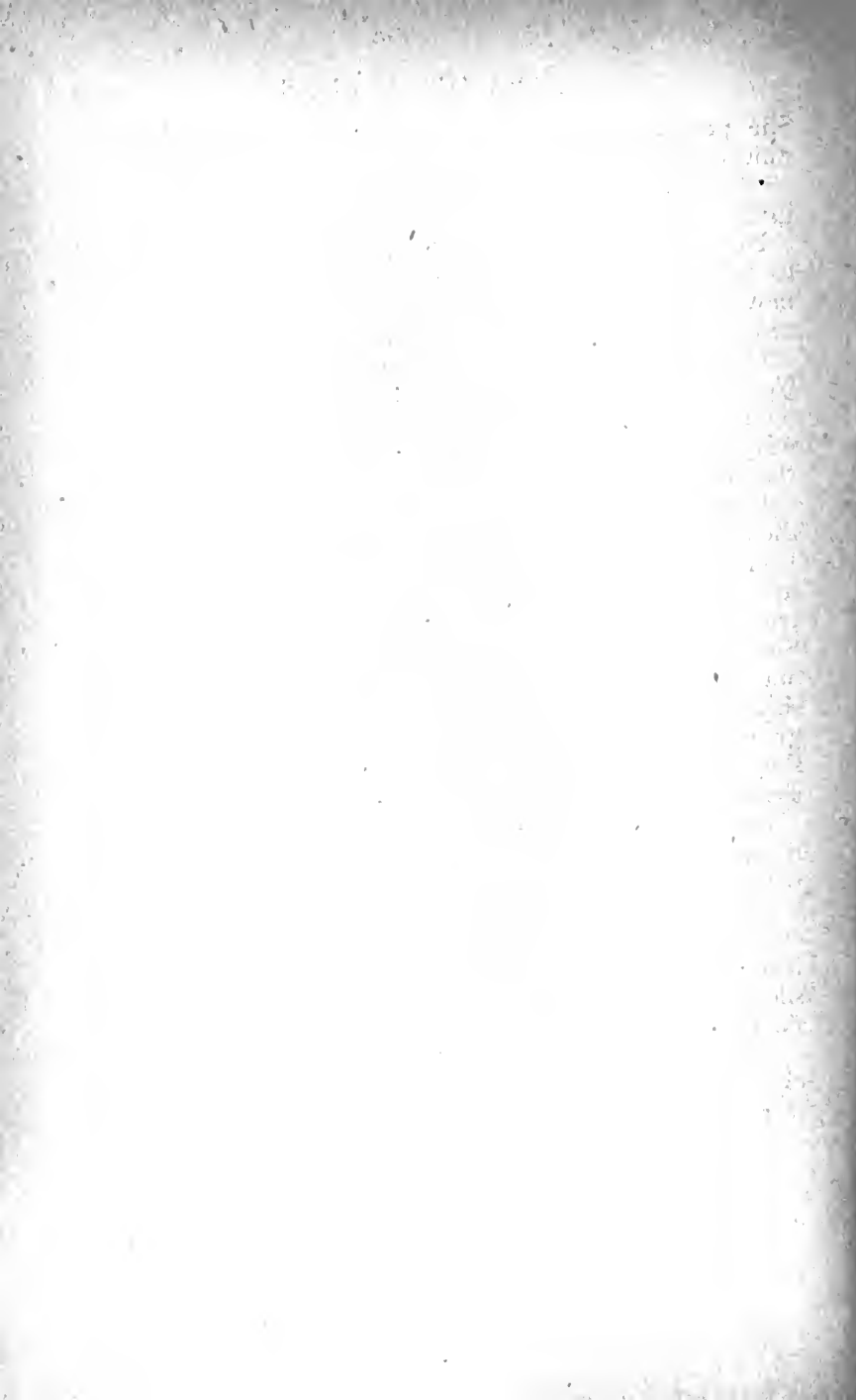
Death, disaster, destruction, thought Clothilde, and swept the cards into a heap, shuffled them and dealt again.

Pressing the final chord in triumph, Ernestine looked up and saw herself again in the long mirror. Silently the triple rhythm of the waltz pulsed on through the room. She could see beyond her image in the glass, the window, and through that the lawn bordered by the dark trees and shrubs which hid the house from the road. The sun had gone : shadows invaded the garden, and across the empty sky a bird went flying so swiftly that she could not be sure she had seen it at all.

She rose in consternation, and stooping to gather up her train, went quickly out of the drawing-room, closing the white doors behind her.

Long after midnight the mechanism of the grandfather's clock on the stairs suddenly started. Untouched, the heavy pendulum began to swing, sounding through the silent house where white pools of moonlight lay on the floors.

Clothilde heard it, sitting at the table where the Tarot cards were spread, and pressed her hands to her ears in terror.



LESLIE HALWARD

★

The Doll



BORN Birmingham, 1905. Educated, five years council school, five years grammar school. At fifteen became an apprentice to a die-sinker and toolmaker, and remained one for seven years. Got a job in a factory. At the end of the second week was informed that I knew next to nothing about the trade and given the option of clearing out or working as an improver for thirty-five shillings a week. Worked for thirty-five shillings a week. At the end of eighteen months was sick of factory life, so got a job in the building trade. Started to learn plastering and was paid sixpence an hour. After six months had a rise of a penny an hour. Remained in the building trade for two and a half years, then fell out of work. On the dole. Had been trying to write for about four years without success. In 1932 had a story accepted by *John o' London's Weekly* and decided that I was a writer. Acceptance of story coincided with my receiving a bit of money, left by my mother who died a year before, and also notice from the Ministry of Labour that I was to be subjected to the Means Test. Informed the authorities that I was now working on my own account and have been writing ever since. Have contributed stories to thirty-five different anthologies, magazines, periodicals, and newspapers, including *The Best Short Stories*, 1934, 1935, 1936, and 1937, *The Faber Book of Modern Stories*, *New Writing*, *New Stories*, *London Mercury*, *Life and Letters To-day*, *Listener*, *New English Weekly*, *Left Review*, *Fact*, *Manchester Guardian*. My collection of short stories, *To Tea On Sunday*, was published by Methuen in April 1936. In the spring of 1938 my autobiography, *Let Me Tell You*, was published by Michael Joseph, and my second collection of short stories will follow from the same publisher.

LESLIE HALWARD.

THE DOLL

A CHILD of seven or eight years sat on a little three-legged stool before an almost burnt-out fire. She sat quite still, with her elbows on her knees and her small, oval white face firmly held between her cupped hands. So tiny did her huddled body appear that one would have judged her years to be no more than five.

Yet the child had a woman's face. Her eyes were a woman's eyes : large and dark and heavy as if with sleep. Her mouth was a woman's mouth, firmly set, the lips thin and pale. Shadows lay in the bowls of her hollow cheeks. She had the face of a woman who has suffered and all her life has looked on suffering.

She was dressed in a cheap blue cotton frock, much too small for even her frail body ; thick worsted stockings, a hole in each knee, held to her thighs by lengths of soiled white tape that cut deeply into the flesh ; and a pair of hard-looking black boots with iron tips to their heels. For comfort the boots had been unlaced and the tongues pulled out, so that they lolled, like the tongues of thirsty dogs, over the sides of the boots, their tips touching the bare red-brick floor.

The child was alone in the room. On the table, which was covered with cracked and peeling black American leather, stood a tarnished brass oil lamp that threw on to the low whitewashed ceiling a circle of pale yellow light. A torn and patched yellow blind hung crookedly over the window. Now and then the blind bulged inwards with a swishing sound, for at some time or other a pane of glass had been knocked out of the window and never replaced. Save for a chair or two and an old sofa, one of whose springs had forced its way through the seat like a crocus seeking the

sunlight, the room was bare of furniture. The wall-paper was faded and dirty and here and there hung from the wall in layers, like the curling leaves of a book, exposing the grey plaster.

After a while the child stirred. She languidly raised her head and looked at the metal alarm-clock set on one corner of the mantelshelf. It was a few minutes to ten. The child sighed, then got to her feet and went into the pantry. In a moment or two she came out with half a loaf and some butter in a chipped basin. She cut off a piece of bread and spread some butter on it. Then she sat down on the stool again and began slowly to eat.

When she had finished she wiped her fingers three or four times up and down the legs of her stockings, and then she resumed her former position. From time to time she glanced at the clock. Once she shivered and rubbed the tops of her arms. Only grey ashes now remained in the grate.

All at once she dropped her hands to her knees and sat upright. She looked towards the door and cocked her head to one side, listening. She had heard footsteps in the yard outside, and the sound of a woman giggling and then the hoarse laughter of a man. She knew that the man was her father, but the woman's laughter she did not recognize. She did not get up from her stool, but still sat motionless, looking towards the door. No sign of pleasure or even curiosity was visible on her face. Her expression of weariness had not altered.

After a few seconds the door opened and a man came into the room. He looked slightly drunk, but apparently was in good spirits. A cloth cap hung precariously on the back of his shining bald head. He held himself slightly backwards from the hips, and his chin was tucked in, so that he looked rather like a cockerel pecking his breast. His small, washy-blue eyes twinkled merrily, and a foolish grin creased and puckered his red face. His nose had once been broken and was twisted comically to one side, and from under it, like a small inverted fan, hung a tobacco-stained ginger moustache. He was still chuckling to himself and lurched unsteadily as he crossed the room. He carried a bottle of beer under one

arm and from each of his jacket pockets stuck out the neck of another.

"Come on in!" he called good-humouredly to the woman, who came in behind him.

He set the bottles of beer on the table, blew out a great sigh, and sat heavily down on a chair.

The woman, with a glance at the child, shut the door, and then took off her hat and coat and dropped them both on to another chair. The child, who had ignored her father, had not taken her eyes from this stranger. She was about thirty-five or thirty-six years of age and was tall and extremely thin. Her coarse blonde hair was artificially curled and frizzed in an attempt to give an air of youthful abandon. The skin of her face, heavily powdered, was drawn tightly over the bones, except under the eyes, where it hung in loose bags. Her arched eyebrows had been plucked until they were mere pencil lines, her eyelids stained blue, and her mouth painted a vivid scarlet and modelled into a cupid's bow. She wore a loose-fitting red silk jumper and a blue skirt so short that it reached barely to her knees.

"Is this the kid?" she asked, looking at the man and jerking her head at the child.

The man beamed, hung one arm over the back of the chair, threw back his head and gazed fixedly at the woman from under lowered eyelids. Then he nodded rapidly three or four times.

The woman took up a chair, set it alongside the stool, and sat sideways on it, facing the child. For several seconds the two regarded each other in silence and without movement.

"Well," said the woman at last, "ain't you going to say how-do?"

The child did not speak. She continued to look into the woman's eyes. Then her eyes moved slowly downwards over the entire face, pausing a moment to stare a little incredulously at the livid mouth. The woman moved uneasily, wriggled her shoulders, and pushed up her hair at the back. She emitted a short laugh.

"Quiet, ain't she?" she inquired, turning again to the man.

In the meanwhile he had gone to the cupboard and got out a couple of tumblers. One of these stood, full of beer, on the table. The other he was in the act of filling from a bottle. He did not bother to reply to the woman's question, but, having filled the glass, pushed it across the table to her and said : " Here. Drink this."

The woman took the glass from the table, raised it to her lips, and began drinking the beer, at first in short sips, lifting her head after each sip, like a bird. Then she took a longer drink and set the glass again on the table. The man emptied his at a single draught and at once refilled it.

The woman leaned again towards the child, quickly, in friendly fashion, and drew breath to speak. But again the look in the child's eyes held her back. There was something altogether too frank about that look. It was as if the child had divined the woman's business, knew the type she was, and was contemptuous of her kind. The woman sat slowly upright and clasped her hands about one knee. She attempted to smile, but failed even to part her lips. She swung her leg self-consciously and pointed her toe. Then she looked suddenly away from the child.

The man, who was leaning back in his chair, his mouth open, one hand clutching the empty bottle that stood on the table, caught her eye. He winked at her, and, releasing the bottle, crooked his finger at her, and with his other hand patted his knee.

" Come here," he said softly.

She made a face, shrugged her shoulders, and jerked her head again at the child. He pursed his lips and nodded wisely.

" You'd better get to bed, Nellie," he said.

He smiled and winked at the woman.

The child at once got up and pushed her stool under the table. Then, in silence, she walked to the foot of the stairs. With a sudden thought the woman jumped to her feet and cried : " Wait a minute, Nellie ! "

She strode past the child, picked up her coat from the chair, and felt each of the pockets from the outside. There was a crackling of paper.

"I've got something for you," she said.

She took a small brown-paper parcel out of one of the pockets. She held it out to the child, smiling and nodding and waving her hand.

"Go on. It's for you," she said.

The child glanced at her father, who had fallen into a doze, and then looked again at the woman. She still regarded her with faint mistrust.

"Go on," said the woman again, pushing the parcel into her hands. "Take it. It's for you. I bought it for you."

The child laid the parcel on the near corner of the table and began to pluck eagerly at the string. When she saw what was in the paper her eyes widened and her lips grew round, though no sound came from them. She clasped her hands and stared down at it, as if it were something of great value and extreme fragility and must not be touched.

"Go on," said the woman. "Pick it up. It's yours. I bought it for you."

Then the child lifted out of the paper a small wooden doll, of the sort that can be bought at any bazaar for a penny or twopence. It had a round head and it lacked ears. For hair its scalp was daubed with black paint, its eyes were two dots of blue, and its mouth a red smudge. Its limbs were awry, and its joints creaked when moved. It was stark naked: not a stitch was there to hide its rough, ill-shapen body or its crippled arms and legs.

"Like it?" asked the woman, dropping on to one knee beside her.

The child gazed intently at the hideous face of the doll. She pressed it to her breast and, closing her eyes, rocked her body gently from side to side.

"Like it?" repeated the woman.

The child opened her eyes and nodded once.

"That's good," said the woman, getting up again to her feet. "I'm glad you like it. Now you get off to bed."

The child again turned to go. At the foot of the stairs she paused and looked back at the woman, who stood watching her. Then she came to her. She stood before her and lifted up her face, pouting her lips a little. With a curious

laugh the woman bent down and kissed her. The child did not move away. For a moment they looked at each other in silence. Then suddenly the woman caught the child to her breast and imprinted kiss after kiss on her mouth. As suddenly she let her go.

Up in the bedroom the child lay with the doll on the pillow beside her. For a long time she talked to it and stroked it with her finger-tips.

In the room below the woman giggled, and then came the hoarse laughter of the man.

But the child did not hear them. She had fallen blissfully asleep.

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JOHN HAMPSON

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The Harlot's Progress

1871

1872

I WAS born in Birmingham. My parents had a family of three sons and four daughters. I was the youngest boy. My grandfather was the manager of the Theatre Royal. One of my earliest memories is of the drive from Perry Bar into town, for my first pantomime. Being delicate, I was taught reading and writing at home. By this time my grandfather was dead, and we were living in Leicester. My father had found himself a humble job, and life opened rapidly for me, now that nannie and governess had vanished. After a brief spell at school we moved into the country, my parents hoping there to find a cheaper rate of living. After a time of running wild, I was sent to the village school. My health improved slowly, and by the time we returned to live in town again I was much stronger. I left a fourth and final school gladly during the War years. My father found me a post with a solid, old-fashioned firm that had been in existence for nearly a hundred years. Finding it dull and dreary, I left it after twelve months, without consulting anyone. It took me ten years to find a job of the kind I was really looking for, but find it I did. During the search, I tried my luck in a wild and wide variety of jobs, including work in shops, hotels, warehouses, clubs, dance-halls, and munition factories.

I like walking and swimming. I am interested in the theatre and films.

Contributions to *New Country*, *Charles's Wain*, *Best Short Stories*, *New Writing*, *New Letters in America*, *Story*, *Life and Letters*, *This Quarter*, *New Stories*, etc.

Books : *Saturday Night at the Greyhound*, *O Providence*, *Strip Jack Naked*, *Family Curse*, *Care of Grand Hotel*, etc.

JOHN HAMPSON.

THE HARLOT'S PROGRESS

IN a top-story bed-sitting-room of a Paddington lodging-house, Clare Tapina sat considering the newly acquired points of her finger-nails. They were very smart, quite vampy, she thought, moving her fingers to and fro. She felt excited and gay. She was preparing for her first visit to a night-club. It was strange how things happened. It had been her name that did the trick. She smiled complacently in the mirror.

"Of course," she had told her last night's friend, "I don't often go off with anybody who tries to pick me up. I'm a dancer, really, but I've not been in a show for nine weeks now. And I've got to get a bit of fun somewhere, haven't I?" He had already given her thirty shillings in soiled paper money. So there was no risk in talking airily. It had been the right thing, too, for his waning interest revived. They talked stage affairs glibly.

In spite of all ambition, Clare had never appeared behind the footlights. Her sole achievement was a stage name. Still, her knowledge of stage people gained from gossip columns always convinced her clients that she was connected with the stage. Her new friend was no exception. After a while he said admiringly: "You ought to join Lou's club. Crowds of pros go there. You might meet someone who could help you to get an engagement."

Soon everything was arranged. He would propose her as a member. He would speak to Lou about her. Lou was an old darling. All that Clare had to do was to turn up at the club, give her own name, and mention his, then she would be a member, too. Clare thanked him, and hoped gracefully that they would meet again. Possibly at Lou's. And that was that.

Clare had thought about the night-club all day. It would be a good thing for her. She could take men there. They would be impressed. Old Lou sounded rather dangerous. Clare laughed. After all, she knew how to take care of herself. She would have to be careful about her imaginary stage experience. If anyone asked point-blank, she would tell them it had been on the Continent. Paris and Brussels, and a few of the larger provincial towns. They would swallow that. She was cute enough to convince anyone. After all she could dance, and dance well. It would be nice to get in a show. She did not hope for that, really. It was too much to expect. If she could pick up clients of the right sort she would be quite satisfied. The stage could wait.

Dressed in her only evening frock, Clare set out for the club. She was pleased with her appearance, and excitement brought an effective wave of colour to her cheeks. She dare not imagine what the club would be like, but she hoped sensibly that it would not be too smart. She was not ready for a smart place yet, but a few nights' experience would teach her all the tricks needed. The smart clubs would come later. It would be a lucky sign if she picked up a nice friend during the first night at Lou's. Say a five-pound touch.

She found the place with ease. Over a blinded shop window in a Soho street was painted in white letters the name Lou. It might have been a *modiste's* or a *corsetière's*, or anything. She walked into the entrance hall and looked round. Lou was not the only tenant. Many other names were painted on neat wooden boards like large visiting-cards. On the door to her left was written again Lou. Underneath the name was a bell-push. Clare looked at her face in a small mirror. She tidied her hair swiftly, then rang the bell.

The door opened. A fat woman in a jersey suit smiled at her inquiringly. Clare gave her name. The fat woman's smile became benevolent. "Come right in, dear. We're all friends here. I'm Aileen." Clare walked into a smallish room and looked round. The furniture was plentiful, and enamelled bright green. Clare knew it was cheap. The room and the furniture had been decorated by unskilled

if eager hands. "I'm an Irishmerican," Aileen said. "Will you sign the register, dear?" Clare did so, biting her underlip. "That will be five shillings, dear. Five shillings a quarter, dear, which is not much to pay for the advantage of getting a drink at any hour of the day or night, is it, dear?" Clare said nothing, but smiled. "First door on your right, dear, is the bar," Aileen said, leaving her.

Clare sat down on a wicker-work couch. She felt quite at ease. The club was not smart. It would have pleased her to find it smarter than it was. She became aware of an unceasing chatter from the bar. Two fat women came out from it towards her. She stared at them boldly, thinking: 'Cows.' That's what they were, and she did not need anyone to tell her so. Both women smiled hardly. "I'm Lou," said the tallest one. "Glad to make you welcome at my funny little club." Clare smiled back. "This is Tina," Lou said, pulling her companion forward. "She plays my piano and sings hot songs better than most." Clare smiled again. Tina nodded, then walked to the piano. She sat down, commencing to strum. Her hair was cut very short and the back of her thick, masculine neck was shaved. Lou smiled too, then walked back to the bar.

It was early yet. Clare sat awkwardly, smoking a cigarette, an illustrated paper open on her lap. She turned the pages slowly, pretending to read. Her mind spun quickly from thought to thought. She felt shy and uncomfortable now. It was not much of a place, anyway. What was the correct thing to do? Should she sit still or go into the bar? She would finish her cigarette first, and then decide.

"What does that bitch think this place is?" Lou demanded, whispering to the barmaid. "Go and ask her if she wants a drink, and bring the register back with you." Aileen nodded and went in past Tina. "Want a drink, dear?" she called. Clare looked up swiftly. "I'll finish my cig. and come over for one," she said quickly.

The two women looked at the register. "Looks foreign to me," Aileen muttered. Lou smiled. "Don't be green, kid. She has knocked the *a* off her first name to fasten it

behind her second, that's how." Aileen sighed with admiration. The electric bell rang sharply. Carrying the book with her, Aileen went to the door.

Clare got up and walked into the bar. It was small and furnished with a counter and high stools. There were four men there, and an elderly consumptive-looking blonde who was whispering secrets to Lou. Everyone gave Clare a faint smile. She responded, choosing a stool.

Aileen came in. "What's your poison, dear?" Clare looked along the shelves, considering. "Whisky, plain," she ordered. "Whisky," echoed the barmaid. "Whisky's heating. You take my tip. Have a beer." Clare refused haughtily. Fancy suggesting beer. They must be a common lot. Served with a drink she sat forward, added a little water, and took a delicate sip. The whisky was tepid. She gave a disgusted shudder.

The door-bell rang again. In less than ten minutes the tiny room was full of people. Clare disliked the look of them all. They were a cheap crowd. She carried the remains of her drink back to the first room. Tina still sat at the piano. Other people came into the room and commenced to dance. Soon the floor held several swaying couples, and one man who danced alone. His buttocks jerked as he shook his shoulders. Clare watched with disgust. She knew what he was. Fancy allowing anyone like him in. Tina played furiously, singing the choruses of her songs in a husky voice. She introduced guttural explosive noises. She was horrible, like an excited ape. "Um, da da! Um da da!" The crowd grew more noisy. They formed a ring round the solitary dancer, clapping sharp hands and beating the floor with stiffened feet. Tina's voice roared:

*"Happy feet, he's got those happy feet,
Do do do dodo do do do dodo."*

The man danced with frenzy. He shook and shivered. Clare gazed with disgusted fascination.

A young man came and sat by her. "Isn't Martie clever?" he asked. "Of course his mother was a coloured woman." Clare nodded with a faint smile. When Martie's

performance finished, they danced together. He asked :
“What are you doing when you leave here ?”

“Nothing.”

“May I come with you and help ?”

“It wouldn't be nothing we'd do, would it ?” Clare inquired archly ; her brain worked furiously. “Well, I hope not. You are a darling,” the man's voice thickened.

“May I come then ?” The girl smiled. She was uncertain of how to proceed. “May I come then ?” he repeated tenderly. Clare had no intention of giving her favours. Men were all the same. She would not give any one of them anything for nothing. She made her voice light. “How much will you give me, eh ?” The man's manner stiffened. He looked at her through narrowed eyes, then said : “I've never given a woman money yet, and I'm not going to begin now.” Clare laughed shrilly. It was funny. Already his body had ceased to embrace hers, and his hold had become delicate. They circled the room twice more, then the piano stopped. Clare went back to her couch alone. She took a tiny sip of whisky, then searched with hostile eyes for her late partner. Soon she saw him, talking eagerly to Lou and the puff-ball. She could guess what he was saying.

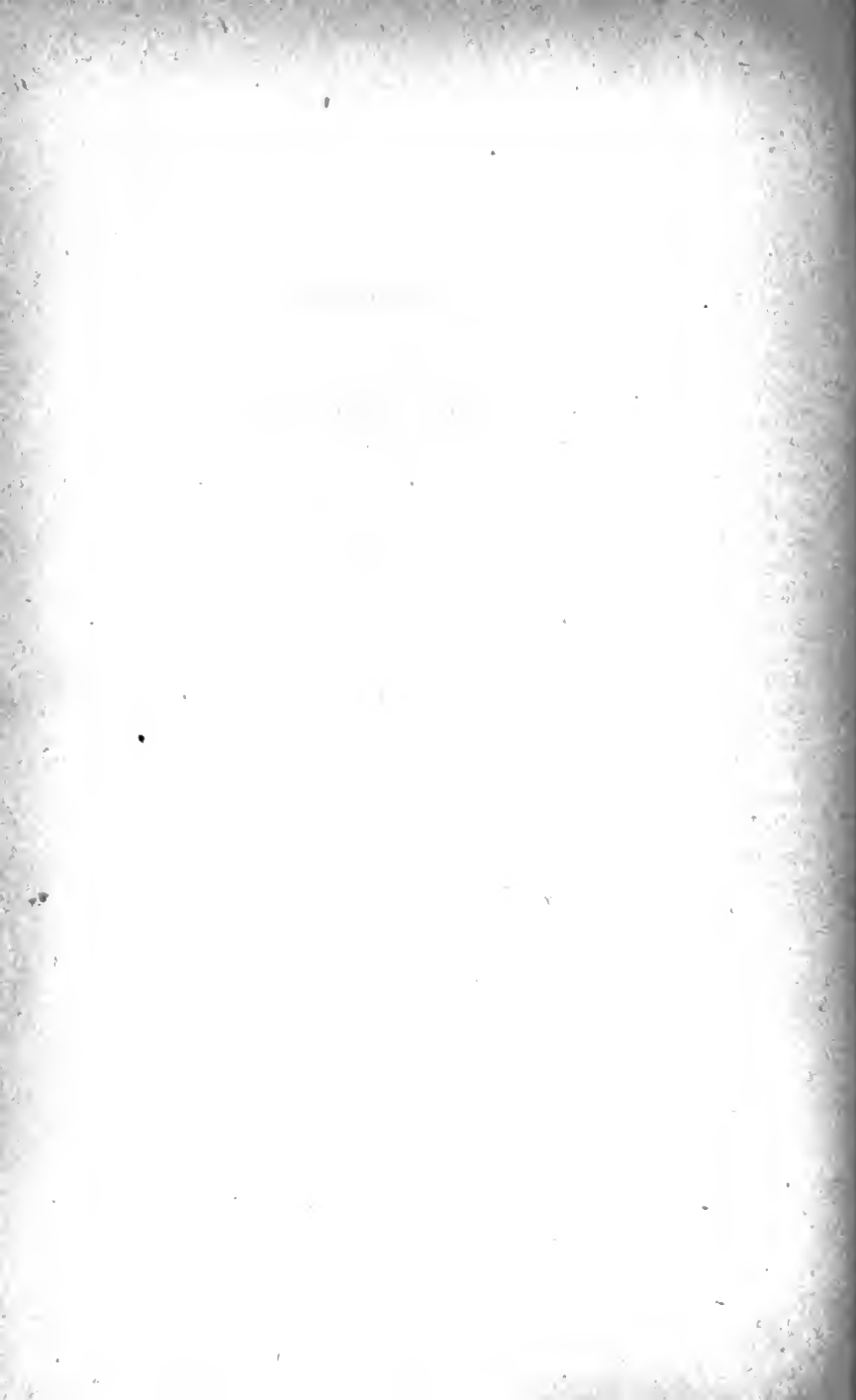
Tina started to thump the piano again. The floor was crowded at once. Clare stared at the dancers scornfully. She finished her whisky. It was no use waiting any longer. A whole night wasted. “Oh, hell,” she whispered half aloud. “To think I paid five bob to get in here.”

She edged quickly towards the door, and, passing out, slammed it loudly behind her.

MICHAEL HARRISON

★

For Ever and For Ever



LIKE Mr. John Betjeman, I cannot write about myself, however much, in moments of elation or depression, I can utilize myself as a subject for talk.

My history ordinary enough : the usual progression from complete acceptance to as complete a repudiation of all that I was taught as a child. Heredity ordinary enough, God knows !

Of mixed English and Irish descent ; the latter having given me as ancestor, James Flood, member of parliament for Kilkenny (where the cats come from) and Vice-Treasurer of Ireland. His honesty in the conduct of this important position may be verified by examining my pass-book. He bequeathed me, for all that, the ability to express myself, both in speech and in writing. Now I am searching for something to express.

Career : worse than ordinary. No pig-gelding, but damned nearly everything else. Now in a publisher's office ; the first job in which I have not had to fight hard against an almost overwhelming sense of degradation.

No politics. An anarchist : the only description applicable to one who still cares for the dignity of the human spirit.

(And if that sounds too pretentious, bear in mind, please, that it's sincere. . . .)

MICHAEL HARRISON.

FOR EVER AND FOR EVER

IT was as much a surprise to me as to Mrs. Quill when she fainted : for although it was the first time I had ever spoken to her, yet I knew her well enough by reputation ; and in small towns like Wessenden it is rare indeed that one does not know all that there is to be known about one's neighbours, especially when they are as rich as Mrs. Quill.

And, besides, when a young veterinary surgeon comes into a small community ; intending, with the help of God, a good degree, and a pleasant smile, to build up a practice that will keep him in some sort of comfort ; it is to the Mrs. Quills that he first directs his attention.

The bank manager had been very kind ; showing me where the moneyed people lived ; so that I might leave my card ; and introducing me where possible. Little by little my practice grew.

But my list of clients did not include Mrs. Quill. She kept horses ; but a London vet. came down to see them when necessary ; and her head groom usually managed to see to it that it wasn't necessary.

Apart from the horses, there were no other animals, as far as I knew. I used often to see her walking in the High Street on Saturday mornings (which was our market day at Wessenden) and I never saw her with a dog. She may have owned one at some time or other, but I never knew anything about it.

Mrs. Quill had been a widow for nearly ten years when I first arrived in Wessenden : a tall, handsome, well-built woman, who seemed born to defend the privileges of her class against all encroachment : the very embodiment of what a Communist would call 'reaction,' and what I always thought of as 'Rule Britannia !'

Naturally enough, until Mrs. Quill came one day into my small surgery (that had once been the conservatory) I had never met her on social terms. Mrs. Quill used to visit Wessenden Abbey, and Ormsby Hall, and the other big houses of the district ; but a struggling young veterinary surgeon, of no particular pedigree, was hardly likely to provoke her interest. And it didn't.

So that, when Mrs. Quill came into my surgery : that was before the days when I had a maid ; and I always left the door ajar : she spoke to me for the first time.

Now, I don't know whether the satisfaction I felt must have shown in my face, as I asked her what I could do for her. I rather feel that it must have done : for she suddenly smiled, as she put a small wicker basket on the table.

"Mr. Benson, it's my cat. He's too old ; and . . . well, I want you to destroy him."

I said : "Very well, Mrs. Quill," and she did not seem surprised that I knew her name. I wondered why the London vet. had not been sent for ; but I concluded, that for a small matter like this, it was considered hardly worth while to send for him. I reflected sadly that destroying cats would probably be all that she would ever call on me to do.

But when one is young, one is always optimistic. Who knows, I thought, what she won't do, if I'm nice to her ? After all, I'm on the spot. . . .

So I said, as pleasantly as possible, picking up the wicker basket, from which a series of squeaks and growls were now coming : "Very well, Mrs. Quill. I assure you that there'll be no pain."

"Oh, nonsense !" she snapped. "There's always pain. Death's always painful. It's *unnecessary* pain I object to."

"Of course," I murmured ; rather annoyed at her brusque tones ; but deciding that an argument with this assertive and self-possessed woman could do no good. "It will be soon over."

I had already observed her use of the word 'destroy,' instead of the more feminine, euphemistic 'put to sleep' ; but that was just the sort of woman Mrs. Quill was. Forthright, unimaginative, careful of falling into indiscriminate

affections ; rich enough, and long enough rich, to be able to call tactlessness, 'honesty,' and get away with it. I could imagine her telling her friends :

"Of *course* I like cats. Like all animals. (They're all God's creatures ; and everything was put in this world for a purpose.) But don't like all this fussing over animals : slobbering over them as though they were one's own flesh and blood. Some women make me sick ; the way they maul over animals ; kissing them, hugging them. . . . Pah ! Now my old Tim's always had a good home ; and he'd always rather have a basin of milk than a lot of sloppy baby-talk. He's had a good innings, and now he is going to retire ; before life becomes a burden to him. No good letting him get too old. . . ."

I was startled out of my reveries by Mrs. Quill saying : "Well, Mr. Benson . . . I'm waiting. . . ."

"For what, Mrs. Quill ?" I asked.

She shook her head, in an insolent amazement that I should be so dull. She said : "I want to see Tim destroyed."

"*Here ?*"

"Yes . . . why not ? I like to know a thing's properly done." She smiled, a little wintrily, as she observed my hesitation. "Oh, come, Mr. Benson ! I'm not a silly girl. I've seen worse things than a cat chloroformed."

"Very well," I said ; something nettled at her tone ; "just as you like. Only . . . have you ever *seen* a cat destroyed ?"

She said no, and (a little unfairly, I'm afraid) I looked concerned. I had the satisfaction of seeing a shade of doubt creep into those hard grey eyes. But all I said was : "They have enormous vitality—that's all . . . the old fable of the nine lives, you know. . . ."

* * *

I went out in the back yard, and returned to the surgery carrying my little galvanized-iron lethal chamber. Mrs. Quill, at my suggestion, had taken the cat out of its basket, and was stroking it. Happy to be released from its captivity, its purring could be heard across the room.

"Quieten it down," I said conversationally. "It'll be

easier to deal with. Animals are uneasy in an atmosphere of death ; and cats are the worst of all. . . .”

“ Why is that ? ” she asked, idly.

“ Lord knows ! But the fact remains that they can smell death. Look,” I said, opening the box, and laying some sheets of newspaper on the bottom, “ if you will hold the lid open, I’ll take care of the cat : these old toms are inclined to get a bit wild. I’ll put him in, and if you don’t mind closing the lid, it’ll be a great help. I really should have an assistant for these jobs.”

She said amiably : “ Oh, you’ll get on, by and by. . . .”

“ Now,” I said, loosening the stopper on my bottle of chloroform, and placing a pad of cotton wool inside the lethal chamber : “ Now, I’m ready.”

Mrs. Quill held the lid by its handle ; and with both hands I grasped the cat around its middle. As I expected, its good-humoured lethargy dropped from it in a second ; and in my hands was a twisting, screaming, spitting mass of fur and sinew, whose claws raked at my wrists, and whose angry fury made its mistress start back in bewilderment.

“ Tim ! ” she said. “ Tim ! be quiet ! ”

“ It’s all right,” I said, breathlessly, “ I’ve got him.”

I lowered the struggling body into the box, and Mrs. Quill closed the door on my hands.

“ Now close it,” I said, letting go.

A claw shot out of the narrow gap ; but quite viciously, I pressed the lid down, and Tim was secure. We could see the whites of his eyes as he pressed his muzzle against the glass observation window in the top of the box. Then the box shook as the cat launched itself in a fury against the sides.

I said : “ It’s not very old, is it ? ”

“ Nine years. Quite old enough.”

I didn’t argue. After all, what would have been the good ? And though I was making but half a crown by killing Tim, this introduction to Mrs. Quill’s notice might have invaluable results.

So that, without another word, I unscrewed the small opening in the lid, and poured some chloroform on to the cotton wool that lay directly underneath.

"It is quieter now," said Mrs. Quill, peering through the observation window.

"For a bit," I said. "Won't you sit down?"

I pulled a chair up, and she sat, looking down at the box.

"Do you really want to see it?"

"Yes," she said, "*I do*. Then I'll *know* it's properly done. . . ."

The cat, by this time, had begun to realize its danger. It was turning round in the box; rushing from corner to corner in the hope of escaping the suffocating fumes that were rising from the soaked pad. It would stop for a second or two; then hurl itself against the sides; then relax, and stand on its hind legs; with its nose against the vent of the box.

Mrs. Quill said, a little uncertainly: "It's quieter now. Is it dying?"

"Yes," I said; glad, in spite of myself, to have observed that faint tremor in her voice. It made her more human, I thought.

"But it's quiet, because its instinct tells it that the quieter it stays, the longer it will take to be asphyxiated."

Then together, Mrs. Quill and I watched Tim die: observed the lengthening intervals between the ever more feeble paroxysms of terror. Then the legs gave way: there was one agonized moan; and breathing heavily, the cat collapsed. . . .

I said, with an assumed lightness of tone: "Well, that's over. . . ." and turned to Mrs. Quill.

As I say, considering everything, you will understand that I was as surprised as she was, that she had fainted.

* * *

We all react differently to the same situation. Most people, no doubt, would have endeavoured, with smelling salts or glasses of water, to persuade themselves that they had revived Mrs. Quill.

But fainting is not Nature's weakness; it is Nature's strength. Fainting is Nature's anæsthetic; and women who can faint at will are less affected than wise.

No, instead, I removed the cause of her distress. I

picked up the lethal chamber ; carried it out into the hall ; and opened it. Tim's stiff body I gathered up in the newspaper on which it was lying, and put it outside the back door. When I re-entered the surgery, Mrs. Quill had recovered.

She fumbled in her big black leather bag, and handed me my fee. She murmured : " I don't know what can have possessed me to faint like that. The heat, I suppose. . . . "

I said : " It is not a very pleasant thing to see for the first time. . . . "

" Oh, rubbish," she said, with a return of her old manner, " it's rather stuffy in here ; that's what it is. "

Mrs. Quill was a woman who had long prided herself on the lack of any ' nonsense ' in her spiritual make-up.

I did not press the point.

* * *

Now one must bear Mrs. Quill's self-confident nature very clearly in mind, in considering the curious events that followed my chloroforming her cat.

When she left my surgery, there were other clients to be seen ; and I suppose it was about an hour and a half later that I answered the telephone ; to hear an excited voice that I hardly recognized as Mrs. Quill's.

" Mr. Benson, what has happened to Tim ? "

" To Tim . . . ? "

" Yes," came the quick nervous tones. " What did you do with the body ? "

" I . . . I put it outside : in the back yard. "

" Mr. Benson . . . will you go and see what has happened to it ? "

It was the most curious request that had ever been made ; but I went.

I came back to the telephone in a thoughtful mood ; yet not unduly agitated.

" Well, Mr. Benson ? "

" It is no longer here, Mrs. Quill. "

" No," she said, " I realize that. And do you know where the cat is now ? "

" I should say," I hazarded, " that it was at home. "

She seemed to consider my remark ; for several seconds elapsed before she asked breathlessly : “ How do you know ? ”

I said : “ Well, what more natural than that it should go to its home ? ”

Another long pause ; then something happened for which I was utterly unprepared. She screamed down the telephone, so that the diaphragm danced and rattled in my ear :

“ *Natural*, Mr. Benson ? *Natural*, that a dead animal should come back to its home ! ”

“ But, Mrs. Quill ! ” I expostulated, “ the cat cannot have been killed. I took it out of the lethal chamber ; and the fresh air obviously revived it. It was only heavily anæsthetized : that’s all. . . . ”

She said, slowly : “ Mr. Benson, how many cats have you known to revive like that . . . ? ”

I considered the matter, having (I regret to say) more honesty than tact.

“ Well . . . ”

“ Yes . . . ? ”

“ Well, curiously enough : *none*. But . . . ”

“ *None !* ” she cut in, triumphantly. Then she added, with a curious *intentness* : “ Of course not. Mr. Benson : I realize that something *very strange* has happened. I don’t pretend to explain it : but when you took Tim’s body outside, he was dead. *And you know it.* ”

* * *

It was three days after that that I received a letter asking me to call at Mrs. Quill’s house : three days in which the whole matter had been threshed out in her mind : enabling her to arrive at some surprising conclusions. The main difficulty, of course, was that her pride had needed assuaging. She had always believed that there was something rather, well, *odd*, about her having fainted like that, when she had never fainted in her life before. And then, when she had returned home to find the cat she had seen die, sitting in its accustomed place before the fire ; for all the world as though

it had never been called upon to endure the horrors of the lethal chamber : well, then, she began to perceive a curious connection between her fainting and the chloroforming of the cat.

Turning the matter over quite calmly in her mind (Mrs. Quill told me) she had realized that Tim, in some subtle and hitherto unrealized way, must have entered into the very fabric of her life. She had never understood, before this sudden frightening proof, that the threads of their existences were so commingled and entwined ; and in such a manner, that it was too late now to dream of separating them.

“ You mean . . . ”

“ I mean, Mr. Benson, that as I watched Tim’s struggles weakening ; as I watched him grow fainter and fainter ; so I felt my own spirit die within me. When that last awful moan came (you remember it) I felt something snap within me. I remember no more, until I awoke in your chair.”

“ You fainted, Mrs. Quill.”

She shook her head, looking at me with a curious *furtiveness*. (Ah, how shall I explain that look !) Her old assertiveness, self-security, was gone. In front of me was a tired, bewildered, and . . . frightened, old woman.

We talked for a long time in that pleasant drawing-room, whose tall bay windows overlooked the rolling uplands of the Weald ; and when at last I left, I knew many things about Mrs. Quill that had before been unsuspected by me.

She told me, for one thing, that she had for many years been a Theosophist ; having joined the faith while living with her husband in India.

And I began to perceive that, hard-headed though she undoubtedly was, the wayward beliefs of this mystical philosophy had exercised, all unknown to her, a subtly corroding influence on her common sense.

The bookcases flanking the big Adam fire-place were filled with the multitudinous journals and pamphlets of her religion, and, though I am no alienist, I could not but realize that her life in the last ten years ; idle, companionless, remote ; would make her only too easily the prey of fixed and fantastic beliefs.

So that I asked her quietly, directly : “ You think then, Mrs. Quill, that . . . that you died ? ” I asked it seriously, and she did not search my face for mocking.

She nodded.

“ Yes . . . it must have been.”

“ But,” I said, “ *why* must you think that ? Why *should* you ? Ladies have fainted before this, in witnessing unpleasant things . . . ? ”

“ I never do,” she said stubbornly ; so that of a sudden I wanted to shake her.

I controlled my annoyance.

“ Mrs. Quill,” I said, as patiently as I could, “ what possible connection could Tim’s death—or Tim’s life, rather—have with yours ? ”

She shook her head.

“ I don’t know . . . but, Mr. Benson, ‘ there are more things in heaven and earth ’ . . . ”

“ Yes, yes,” I said impatiently, “ but not *that* . . . ! ”

She stared blankly into the empty fire-place, before she murmured, in mild reproach :

“ Mr. Benson . . . how *obstinate* you are ! ”

* * *

Now before I proceed farther with this tale, I want it clearly to be understood that Mrs. Quill was labouring under an *idée fixe*. As I said, the nexus had been formed between two events ; and her brain, day by day, was strengthening the connecting link between two unrelated happenings, as she came more and more to regard them as cause and effect.

Tim, as I persuaded her, was not dead : never had been dead. He had simply been heavily anæsthetized, and the cool fresh air had revived him. And I was surprised, that after a few half-hearted protests, Mrs. Quill accepted my word. She had never, as I now perceived, *really* believed that her cat had come back from the dead.

I was relieved when I heard her agree that there was nothing unusual in Tim’s recovery ; but, had I known it, I was preparing the ground for a belief still more foolish and tyrannical.

For, one day, Mrs. Quill said to me : " I was only thinking, yesterday, about Tim and that *awful* day. What little things stand between us and disaster ! "

" Such as . . . ? "

She shrugged her shoulders.

" Only that . . . if you hadn't taken Tim out of that box . . . I shouldn't be here now. . . . "

I stared at her in bewilderment, as I grasped her meaning.

So that was it ! The link was forged : effect was joined to cause as prettily as you like ! and now, Mrs. Quill's life and the life of her cat were not two lives ; but a dual existence, where neither part might exist without the other.

She explained it so well. Her husband was gone : children she had never borne : and Tim's love, in some mystical fashion, had been more important than she had realized. It was a sort of symbiotic union, where each was vitally necessary to the other : Tim depending on Mrs. Quill for food and protection ; and she on him for love.

It was folly, of course ; but folly unassailable of argument ; folly safely esconced beyond the attacks of reason or ridicule. One could only shrug one's shoulders and accept it.

Yet this simple rôle of spectator was not for me. I was forced (after all, I was building up a practice) to take an active part in all this farce : unless, indeed, I preferred to lose what promised to be a most profitable account ; in washing my hands of the whole childish business.

For the logical conclusion (once the premises are admitted) was this : if there existed a connection between the lives of cat and woman ; so much so that *the near death of one procured a similar condition in the other* (by a sort of sympathy, not infrequently observed in identical twins, for an example) ; then the life of each was obviously dependent on the continued existence of the other. And, logically, one would not die without the other.

Now, Mrs. Quill was (as I learnt later) about sixty when I first met her : healthy, robust ; looking a good ten years younger. She had no wish to die, and I perceived the conclusion to which she was arriving, even before she did.

But when she *had* arrived at that conclusion, she sent for me, and asked me to examine Tim for any signs of disease.

"None, as far as I can see," I said, running my hands over him, and giving him a cursory inspection.

"That's not enough," she said. "I want him properly examined: his blood, and so on, tested. I want to be sure. But that can wait; there are other things I want to talk about now. Sit down, Mr. Benson. You may smoke if you wish. . . ."

So I heard of the other things, and for the first time since we had met, Mrs. Quill learnt that I had passed my examinations, not very well, but brilliantly. She seemed pleased to hear it.

"Then you will help me?"

"I'll do," I said diplomatically, "anything you wish me to do."

"Very well. First of all, I want you to prepare me the dietary you talked about; and I'll have the windows and doors wire-netted."

It was at my suggestion that the order was given for an exerciser. As I explained to Mrs. Quill: if the cat were to be kept indoors, permanently, then something would have to be done to exercise him; otherwise all sorts of organic upsets would come to trouble him.

Finally we hit on the idea of a large box, whose floor (of rubber) revolved over mechanically driven rollers; providing a movable platform, which demanded exercise with the undeniable authority of a treadmill.

As I left her, she said: "We must take *no* chances, Mr. Benson."

* * *

So for nine years we kept Tim alive. It became with me, I must admit it, a hobby of overwhelming interest, to see how I might enlist every modern discovery in keeping old age at bay. With balanced diet, and surroundings as clean as modern antiseptics would keep them, it was only that inevitable time when the life spark grows dim that we had to fear.

But to my practised eye, that time was not far off. Already the cat slept through the day : its washing it had long neglected ; and both its glazing eyes, and its bad temper, told of an end not long distant.

And at last I told Mrs. Quill so. I did not like doing it, but, somehow, I felt that she should know.

She received the news quite calmly.

She said : " Of course. I've been expecting it. How long do you think ? "

I shrugged my shoulders.

" One can never tell, really. But not more than two years at the outside. More likely, a few months. . . . "

She nodded.

" I see. Tell me, Mr. Benson, can *nothing* be done ? "

" Very little, I'm afraid. After all, it's, let me see, eighteen years old. A very great age for a cat. "

She considered the matter before she said : " I was reading something in the paper the other day . . . rejuvenation : glands : I forget now . . . but, " she fixed me with an eager look, " is there anything in it ? "

" Something, " I admitted.

" Only something ? " she answered. " Why ? Tell me. . . . "

I explained.

" Wonderful things have been done in gland transplantation : but what we *don't* know, is more important than all we do know. ' Rejuvenation ' is the right word : we *can* restore youth. But to add a year to life : that we may, or may not be able to do. At present, no one can say. "

" But *why* ? "

" Chance . . . " I shrugged. " Perhaps, in the newly restored vigour, more risks are taken ; or it's a case of new wine in old bottles. . . . Lord knows ! But these rejuvenated animals don't seem to stand the pace. . . . "

" Yes, " she whispered, gazing down at the sleeping Tim, " he's old. He'll die anyhow, *soon*. " She turned to me, her hand clutching at the lapel of my coat ; and her mouth working in a frantic eagerness to have her way.

“ You’ll do it? Mr. Benson, will you? Oh, I *know* you will. . . .”

* * *

That night, as I worked alone in my surgery laying out my instruments and testing my cylinders, I wondered to what ultimate folly all this business of Mrs. Quill was leading me.

Certainly, in the last nine years, her recommendations, quite apart from her own personal account, had been invaluable to me, and from a struggling young vet. I had come to be one of the most esteemed members of my profession ; at least, as far as Kent was concerned.

Yet I viewed what I was about to do with a distaste that no amount of professional interest could overcome. Not, indeed, that I had any sentimental qualms about operating on an animal when it was not entirely necessary. After all, the operation was going to be done under conditions of complete anæsthesia, and Tim would feel no pain.

But there was something deeper than petty considerations of pain or sentimentality : there was, I felt, an impropriety about the business that was making me a little ashamed of myself.

Had this operation been in the ordinary course of my work, I should have done it, taken my fee, and never given it another thought.

But—and here was the distressing point—this was not (or should not be, rather) in the ordinary course of my work. I was serving, I told myself, no useful purpose in patching up this old cat : not even a scientific one ; for the operation I was about to perform had been invented by a very famous surgeon, and by him carried to a successful conclusion.

I knew that what I should have done was this : I should have said to Mrs. Quill : “ Why don’t you pull yourself together, and stop all this nonsense ! Let Tim die a natural death, and live your life decently until your own time comes.”

Of course I should have said that. But . . . well . . . I sighed as I took Tim out of his basket, and strapped him

into the frame we use when operating on animals. I opened his mouth with one hand while I drew out his tongue with the forceps, fixing it to the permanent forceps attached to the operating frame.

Still sighing at my folly, I placed the props between his teeth, and placed the face-piece over his muzzle. Then I turned the tap on the cylinder, and the gas hissed into the mixing chamber.

* * *

The details do not matter. The operation, which was a complete success, was the famous operation performed by Sand, of Copenhagen, whose only fear was mine : that the animal was patently so senile, that in ordinary circumstances one would have advised his destruction. He was now in that condition when he moved unwillingly and with difficulty ; and not infrequently, he would fall down.

He exhibited, in short, all the symptoms attributable to the weakness of old age.

* * *

I set to work.

The anæsthetic had taken well, as might have been expected. He was too old to have given much trouble.

I listened to the heart : it was quite steady. I picked out a scalpel, and made the first incision.

Now, the rejuvenation operation devised by Sand is quite simple. I followed his technique exactly.

First I removed three to four centimetres of the right epididymis (Tim was a very big cat), and I then ligatured the two ends, closing them with a Paquelin Cautery.

From the left side I removed four centimetres of the vas deferens, and the operation was over.

Tim stayed with me for a month, for a few days later, a certain amount of inflammation developed, with some suppuration. For a time, at least, he seemed to have been made worse, instead of better, by the operation, which was Sand's experience.

But within two months a miraculous change had begun

to manifest itself. The legs straightened, the hair grew thick and glossy, the eyes clear and bright. Tim began to take an interest in the world around him.

When I took him back to Mrs. Quill, he seemed like a cat of four or five years, but I prefer not to think of her face as she gloated over him. . . .

* * *

A year later I left Wessenden to take up a practice in Holland Park, and I did not see Mrs. Quill again until sixteen years after that. In the year that had elapsed between the operation and my going to London, Tim had shown no signs of any falling-off, and my most careful examination failed to reveal any sign by which Tim's true age might have been detected. To all intents and purposes he might have been a cat in the prime of his life, with years of existence before him.

I did not smile when Mrs. Quill told me how she had detected an improvement in her spirits; and how her depression had been coterminous with Tim's former life, as she called it. It was to be expected, and I told her so. I did not add, of course, that there was nothing miraculous in her spiritual regeneration; and when she insisted on making me a present large enough to make possible my purchase of a London practice, I decided that my tact had been justified.

I had to tell her, naturally, that the operation could never be performed again; but she only smiled, and murmured that perhaps it wouldn't again be necessary. . . . Mrs. Quill and I had grown to be great friends.

As I say, I had not seen her for sixteen years, when I was, quite by chance, passing through Wessenden in my car. At first, after coming to London, we had corresponded with an admirable regularity; but, little by little, the letters grew scarce, until, in the end, they quite ceased, and other things came to occupy my mind.

So that it was with a little shock that I found myself passing Mrs. Quill's big house.

I thought to myself: shall I go in? And then I found

myself wondering if she could be still alive ; whether, indeed, her imagination had been strong enough to kill her when Tim had died ; for, of course, as I told myself, Tim must have died long ago. . . . And then I wondered why she had never written to tell me. . . .

But was she dead ? I began to be very curious about Mrs. Quill.

I could see from the road that the house was occupied ; and the grass was clipped ; and the gravel of the drive smooth and weedless.

I turned my car in through the open gate and drove up to the house, ringing the bell with a curiosity that had in it (as I admitted to myself) not a little of trepidation.

Still, Mrs. Quill was not dead. It was a new butler who took my hat and led me into the drawing-room, but otherwise nothing seemed to be altered.

"Mrs. Quill will see you in the morning room, sir. Will you come this way ?"

On the way to the morning-room, I asked the man : "Mrs. Quill : is she well ? I'm an old friend, but I've not seen her for many years."

"Oh, yes, sir," says he, "quite well, to be sure."

But, as I came into the darkened room, it seemed to me that Mrs. Quill had grown unbelievably old. Perhaps she was well, . . . perhaps. . . . Anyhow, I said I hoped she was as I gave her my hand.

A sidelong glance around the room told me that Tim was not there.

I said : "How are you, Mrs. Quill ?"

"Well," she said, her slowly moving eyes the only sign that she was alive.

I said : "I was passing, and I thought I'd come in and . . ."

"And see if I wasn't dead ?" she completed, with a sour, contemptuous smile.

I shrugged.

"None of us grow any younger, Mrs. Quill. . . ."

The sunken eyes seemed to close, as she considered that.

"No . . . that's true."

I said, gently: "You never told me that Tim had died. . . ."

She looked at me for so many moments that I thought that she could not have heard me.

But at last she said: "He . . . is . . . not dead. . . ."

"Alive?" I said, incredulously. Her face betrayed no emotion as I babbled on. "But how amazing! . . . lasting all that time. Why, it must be . . . let me see . . . it's . . ."

"It's thirteen years."

"Thirteen years! And he's still alive?"

"He's certainly not dead."

"Well," I said, a little damped by her manner, and chilled by something, I knew not what, in the atmosphere of that room, "I'd like to see him. May I? Is he quite well?"

"Perfectly. He's behind you."

I think I must have started at that; for there was nothing behind me but a big white enamelled cabinet that looked like a refrigerator, with its polished handles and electric leads. There was not a sign of Tim.

"I don't see him," I said apologetically.

"In there. Open the door."

I opened it.

So, for the last time in my life, I saw Tim. As Mrs. Quill had said, he was quite well. I did not see him at first (for the room, as I have said, was not well lit), but, as my eyes became accustomed to the gloom, I saw a dark shape behind a plate-glass window; a dark shape, from which hundreds of wires and shining tubes ran to the ceiling of the tank. And as I observed this horror, I saw that the purplish fluid in which the body of Tim the cat was suspended, was pulsing, as though waves of energy were constantly radiating from the uppermost portion of the cabinet, while, loud to my ears now, and full of a dreadful significance, came an even, monotonous *ticking*.

I stood awhile, gazing at what I knew I should never see in this world again; while the dull, cold voice behind me

said : " Two Russian surgeons did it . . . five years ago. . . . It took a year to do. . . . "

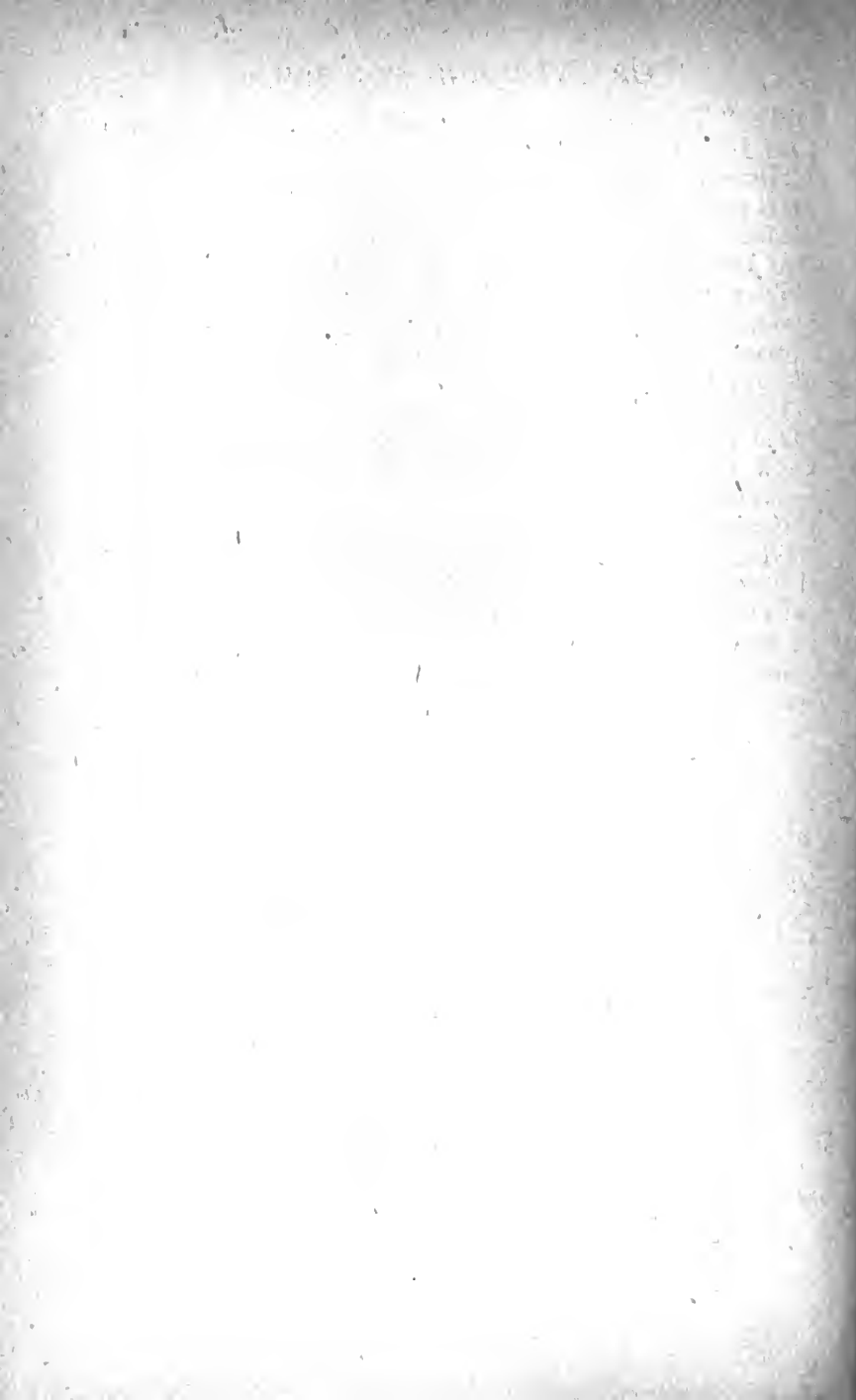
Silence. Then, a whining : " It was the only way . . . don't you understand ? "

More quietly now ; with a sort of gloating satisfaction that I shuddered to hear : " It's so *clever*. No attention. Only a quart of blood from the butcher's every day, and some sodium chloride for the filters. . . . Oh, and, of course . . . a little oil occasionally, for the motor. . . . *Clever*, isn't it ? "

I looked at Tim for the last time. Then I turned, and gazed down at the shrunken shape in the arm-chair. I know that my face was white, and that my hands were trembling.

I said (my voice must have sounded quite hysterical) : " Why, Mrs. Quill . . . provided you remember to pay the electric-light bill, you are *immortal* . . . ! "

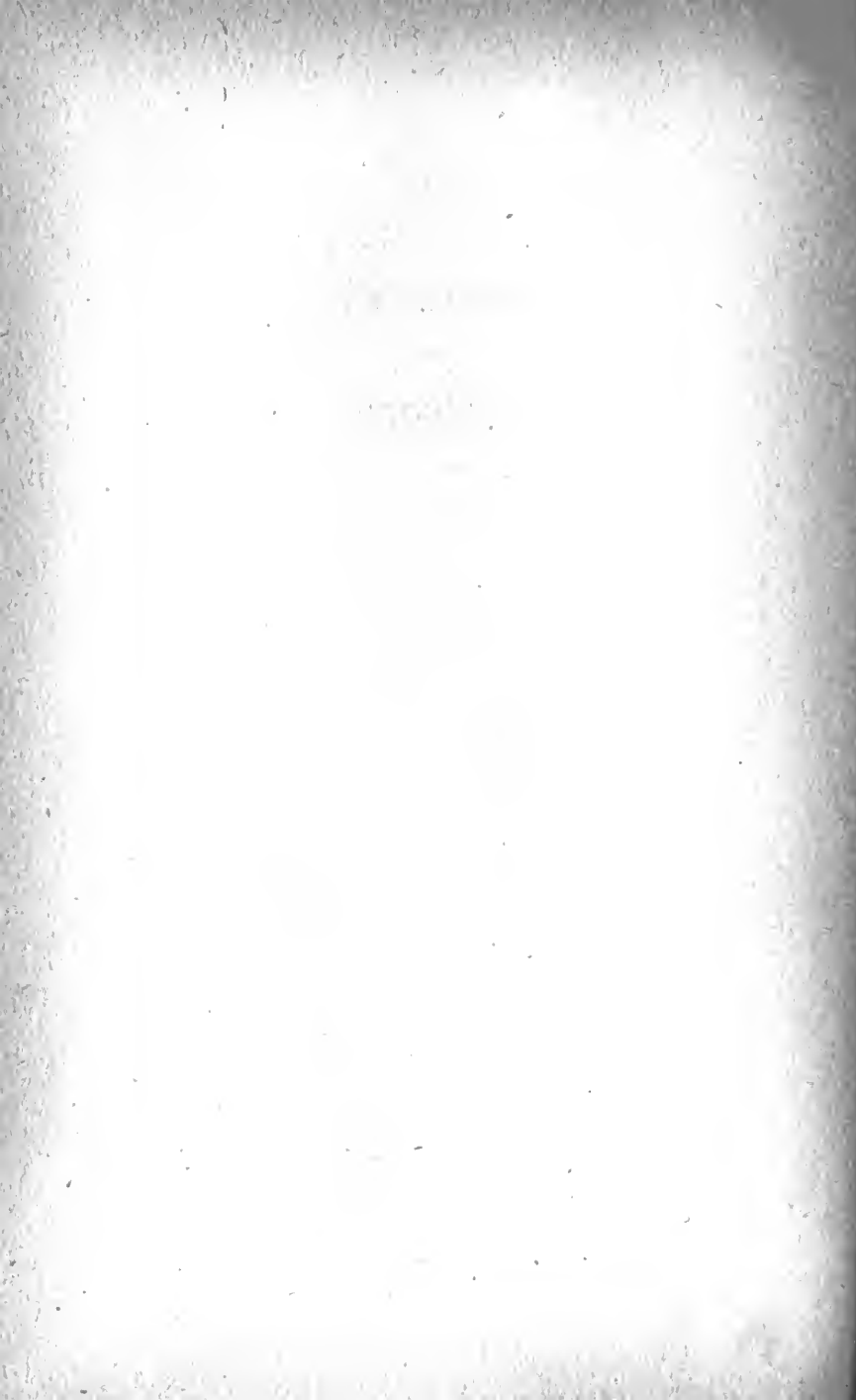
I can still hear the crash with which I slammed the door on her. . . .



TANGYE LEAN

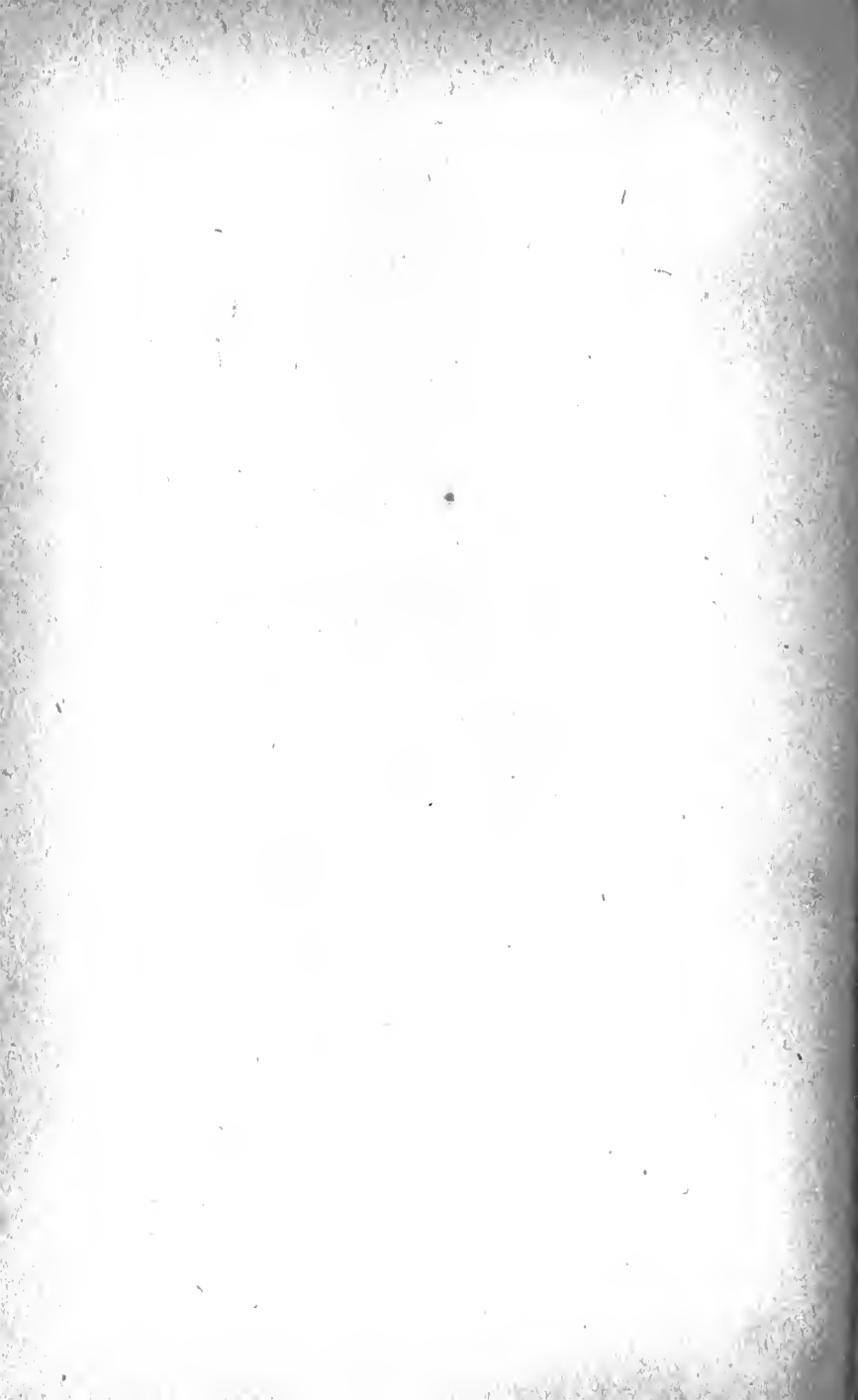
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Ballerina



MR. TANGYE LEAN is a journalist
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Chronicle*.

M. H.



BALLERINA

THE distant crescendo of the orchestra told her as soon as she came out of her dressing-room that there was no need to hurry, but she did hurry, fluttering down the passages as if she had already missed the entry and flicking at the creases of her skirt as though little Sonya had not gone over them twice with her long competent fingers to allay her fears. But that was what she distrusted about Sonya, her calmness, the competence she managed to suggest with every movement ; it was all directed to reassuring her as a doctor might reassure a panic-stricken invalid, whereas the only reassurance she wanted, she kept insisting, was the knowledge that her costume and make-up were perfect. Sonya was sometimes very dense. Cornered and picked on for some specific point, the cross tapes of her shoes, a strain on her tights, instead of seeing to it at once she surrounded her more generously than ever with unwanted words of comfort. It was maddening, and as she hurried round to the right, past the SMOKING FORBIDDEN notice, each flick she gave to her dress was a denunciation of Sonya's impertinence.

The bass strings were still tumbling and lifting below the tumult of the brass as she reached the wings. The repetition of this moment over thirty years had told her exactly how long she had to wait before her rapid flight of steps should invade the silence of the stage. She liked to hold back till the last moment possible, the diver heightening the beauty of his plunge, vaguely conscious that out there in the black sea of faces people were whispering : "It's Natásha—I think."

And now the subject of her irritation changed from Sonya to something urgent and physical trembling in the air around her. It was as if the fierce white glare of the

lights sunk in the stage fifty feet in front of her joined with the slowly swinging beams of the spotlights and the shafts which pointed down from the front wings, and all of them had become the eyes of the audience fixed mercilessly on her body. In her youth, knowing its perfection, that had tightened her limbs into a single coherent instrument, brought her already conscious of her power into the first steps of the adagio. But now it was more complex. Even in the soft yellow light of her dressing-room she could see the parallel lines coursing deeply below the powder on her forehead, and there was a queer limp look about the skin, as if the blood had been withdrawn leaving it fixed and unchanged for eternity. And she would close her eyes for a moment, to open them again suddenly, trying to look at it impartially as a stranger might who had no fixed ideas already on what he would discover. Then, for a moment, she was relieved and seemed to see the same features that had smiled out from the pages of European magazines for twenty years. But even while she looked and spoke soothing words to herself she noticed that her eyes had caught a fresh detail on the reflected face ; she tried to avert them as from a horror, but something forced them back, bringing, now, her whole mind with them, so that she bent almost hungrily forward to see more closely. Then, slightly turning her head into a three-quarters profile, she noticed, perhaps, that a tiny group of downward-pointing marks like arrows had appeared where the skin of her cheek dropped downwards from the ear.

So the glare of these lights that once had been a joy was now more dangerous. On bad nights when she was depressed she had almost to shout against them as if engaged in some nightmare argument with herself. Her arguments were true, part of herself knew that, but something else inside her stayed obstinately unconvinced. No doubt, she said to herself, the lights here were a hundred times stronger than in her dressing-room, but the audience was a hundred times farther away, even the front row of the stalls beyond the orchestra, beyond the fore-stage and the footlights, was two hundred feet from where she danced, and on her good

nights it seemed as if the controlled uproar of the orchestra was in itself a tangible curtain of gauze which protected her. And her body, she thought to-night, it was there where the spotlights met the sidelights and the footlights, and her face was not isolated but merged into it like a limb.

But more potent than these arguments was the ritual she was already performing with her legs. Raising first one, then the other, feeling the knee lifted high, turned outwards, then two deliberate beats with the foot which touched lightly the supporting leg like a reassuring caress. Her torso bent forward and back, and she seemed to stand aside and watch with a new calm as if she had satisfied some urgent demand. The orchestra's theme was now careering to its end and in a moment everything would be quiet. She pressed the little finger of her left hand against the gold crucifix which lay hidden between her breasts, and with the other slowly crossed herself as she always did, her eyes lowered, her mind all but free now from the weight oppressing it.

Her time was now. The auditorium was tense and silent. On the stage she could hear the shuffling of the *corps de ballet* as they changed position. One moment longer she held back, then fled into the lights.

The middle-aged music critic who leant slightly forward in his box at that moment had come in late. He came in late so regularly that the Press agent who watched over the fortunes of the ballet had found it necessary many years ago to safeguard the temper of the audience surrounding his seat by giving him a box. But A. A., as he signed his reviews, would have felt wronged if anyone had accused him of chronic unpunctuality, for he was aware of no general tendency in his behaviour, only of isolated situations which made a delay advisable that particular time. To-night, as an instance, he had been dining with his son. Twenty-two-year-old Miles, he suspected, had inherited none of his own somewhat uncreative but certainly artistic gifts. He worked solidly at the final examination which was to qualify him as a Chartered Accountant, and remained in many ways a mystery. A. A. found it more difficult than he cared to admit to understand him, partly because he had high

standards of understanding, and demanded of a person that he should be able to feel his way into them as he did into a symphony, exploring with a welcome feeling of uncertainty the development of a theme, recognizing the full and logical implications of a final movement. And in this he was much less successful with Miles than with a composer he scarcely knew, for some irrelevant gesture, a sharp movement of his hand, a redness about his face, would fix his attention and block the path. A peculiar state of relaxation was what he needed, a state which could not be commanded, but which sometimes, amid favouring circumstances, opened out in front of him like the dawn of a perfectly fine day in March. It had come this evening as they sat together over their brandy in the 'Coq Doré.'

"We'll go behind afterwards and see Natásha," he had said, and felt a little sheepish because he was implying that they were free to go or not, as they wished, whereas he knew she required it of him.

But Miles for some reason was sympathetic. "That'll be nice," he said. "I should like to meet her again."

And A. A. was suddenly more relieved than he could say. For on the rare occasions that they agreed, it was as if some tension were relaxed at the inside of his throat. Normally he could hear Beethoven assaulted or Conservatism or Corot, and the arguments in their defence would stay paralysed at the root of his tongue; he would refuse to talk about them, jolting the conversation off on to other lines, only retaining in himself the conviction, like a load of guilt, that their justification existed. But Natásha had a quite peculiarly unstable place in his loyalties. Coming out of the theatre to a bar in the interval, he would perhaps overhear some balletomane expounding her greatness, her historical position, to a new-comer. Then he swallowed the words eagerly, even pretending to be pushed against the speaker by the crowd, for he knew that his notice would be restrainedly enthusiastic, and what he heard seemed to cancel out the bias of his friendship. (Natásha kept Press cuttings, and twice had shown him the ecstatic enthusiasms that her influence had inspired in Latin critics.) But those words

did far more than justify his reviews ; they restored her youth and prestige, annihilated the twenty years that had passed since a war-strangled Europe had raised her almost to the pedestal of a Madonna. It was true that she herself did everything she could to foster this vision—by the indifference she showed to the number of bouquets in her dressing-room, the casual reference to an invitation from a peer—but coming from her own lips and seeming to him evidently calculated, it had the opposite effect and could only remind him of the days when she frankly loved the profusion of a florist's shop which was her dressing-room.

Yet the damage she might do her own cause by pleading it, was nothing to that wretched time when he had brought Miles (perhaps his motive had been that Natásha was not dancing that night so he risked no assault) and they had met her in the foyer at the first interval, standing like some *passée* hostess where the stream of theatre-goers debouched from the revolving door. Miles had not recognized her, and saw only in that expression of almost savage delight with which she greeted his father the irritating relief of a lonely and unattractive woman on seeing an acquaintance. Even when he was introduced, her name, prefixed by madame and devoid of christian name, seemed unknown to him, and merely reinforced his impression that the acquaintanceship was slight. He had been barely civil, kept glancing away from her face at an auburn-haired girl behind her, and finally as they were going back to their box, said to his father as if to reproach him for his charity : “ It's extraordinary how exhausting it is responding to the inanities of an unattractive woman ; I don't know how you manage.” That had been such a shattering blow to Natásha's prestige that A. A. had not gone behind afterwards for a fortnight. For suddenly and overwhelmingly he accepted it, and doing so would have felt impossibly dishonest to talk to her on the basis of fervent admiration which was the only one she would tolerate. Beethoven, Corot, Conservatism—he might not be able to defend them against Miles, but doggedly at the back of his mind they retained his faith. Natásha, on the other hand, had appeared to him in those few agoniz-

ing moments as the vain and stupid—not even graceful—woman that she seemed to Miles. In time she recovered, but only to renew this erratic alternation in his mind.

“In any case,” he said now, “we won’t stay long. There’s a last night party afterwards at Mitenka’s, and she’ll be coming on.” A moment’s uneasiness stirred his calm, for he noticed that he had picked on the most probable difficulty in front of them and declared its non-existence. Miles would be wanting to meet red-headed Irina, and not only her, but all that profusion of young women that the ballet offered him. Already he was smiling his thanks. And that was what A. A. had wanted, only the price, it occurred to him, might be dangerously high if Natásha perceived it. Her hatred of parties grew with her age. But he refused to pay attention to mere possibilities now. They sat on smiling over their brandy till long after the curtain had risen.

As soon as she came on he could see that she was dancing unusually well. It was a thing that had always astonished him that the motive behind a great performance could be entirely trivial: a feud, perhaps, in which she might be more sinning than sinned against, would be settled to her own satisfaction by perfect dancing as a knight in the age of chivalry would have vindicated his honour by armed combat. Or a last night like this; it must seem to her, he thought, that all the automatic gestures and faked steps of the season could be abolished by one brilliant performance. And it puzzled him, because one expected a vaster and more mysterious background as a prelude to genius; it implied that Shakespeare might have written *Hamlet* because one morning he stubbed his toe.

But Natásha was no longer aware of external motives like these. Her struggle had ended with those fevered minutes in the wings; the ritual with her legs and arms had all but dispelled it, and now she was free, floating strongly in the drift of the music as a gull hangs in the sky, its wings foreseeing the changing currents as they approach, touching and interpreting them with the certainty of a deep and impersonal intuition. There were nights when her contact with it was

intermittent, when the boards below her feet seemed to take on a separate existence, and hostility threatened from the great black aperture where the audience watched. But now the music and the floor of the stage were as much in her power as the slow unfolding of her legs ; almost, she felt, they were part of herself, the boards rising obediently to receive the gift of her points, the music flung out around her like a dress ; and this certainty quivering through her body overflowed in her smile and held the audience poised spiritually with herself.

But to-night, as she felt herself still gaining in control, she was aware dimly that something was different in the scene around her. Only in isolated flashes could she think of it, and at first could not discover what it was. Sergei, her partner, had come on in his usual costume, Landau, vaguely lit by the orchestra lights, was conducting normally, in the left-hand wings Sonya stood watching. Then in a spare second at the end of an *enchaînement* she isolated it. In the wings opposite Sonya a man crouching slightly forward had his hands up to his face and pivoted round as she danced, pointing steadily at her with a metal cylinder which glinted in the light. She went into the *pas de deux* with the knowledge that twenty, fifteen, ten feet away she was being photographed.

She tried at first to ignore it, shutting her mind against it like a door, but as she moved on about the stage the little tube shifted after her, now catching the light, now shadowed by the scenery. And although she still refused to acknowledge its existence, other things equally precise in the threat they bore pushed their way up : that Sergei, raising her from the arabesque, was only twenty-four—was it twenty-four?—she wondered urgently as his face flew past and vanished, flew past and vanished, while she pirouetted beneath his upraised arm. For the question seemed to assume a gigantic importance, and for all she knew he might be only twenty-two, young enough, for certain, to be her son. She seemed to be back in her dressing-room peering hungrily into the glass, the downward-pointing arrows by her cars struck her, then the knowledge that her argument

in the wings about the distance of the audience was false. She remembered her sittings in photographic studios. For ten years past they had been getting longer, more carefully prepared, and the results were steadily more cloudy. "It is the fashion, Madame," they said, shrugging, and she accepted it, but only with part of her mind, for she knew that, too, was false. And now she felt hypnotized by that man with his features twisted up behind the camera, some tension seemed to exist between them that the cylinder pointed at her so steadily; it was almost as though her movements were directed from outside.

Suddenly her foot slipped, and for a moment she was off her points. It gave her mind a wrench, and she realized that she must hold fast to her surroundings or something else would happen. She began spending her strength on the effort to regain control, her eyes searching the patterns of the stage for danger, her mind looking ahead at the music to make certain of the final beat. But she did it in desperation, in the fear that she could not watch everything and aware that she was faking steps. Opposite Sonya once she began to blurt out a demand for the man's removal, but only the first words escaped her because she nearly tripped. And now she was like a tight-rope walker who has lost his balance, the only thought in her head the necessity to struggle through to the end, the gestures she made limp and uncertain under the cold eye of the camera.

A. A., watching her, could see no reason for the gradual deterioration. He glanced at Miles, but Miles came so rarely that he seemed to see nothing. And obedient to the habit of his trade, A. A. began groping for intellectual terms to control his emotion. It's the same thing, he thought with immense weariness, if you go into a restaurant. Put masks on all the women present, and you'll still be able to tell their ages from the way they eat. Their gestures give them away, express age identically with the lines you can't see, because they're equal, if less hackneyed, symptoms of the same decay. But the effort of forcing these bits of theory together was too much. Underneath, more powerful feelings grew. He remembered that first morning after

they had slept together in Berlin after the Armistice, her staggering coolness after giving herself for the first time, distant, self-contained, as if in some essential sense she still guarded her virginity. And she always did guard it. "I'm not going to marry nobody," she said in her ridiculous English when, a widower, he asked her to marry him. "Nobody!" she shouted, "you might always have known it!" Yes, he thought, I might, but I didn't, because I didn't quite realize quite how much passion her dancing absorbed, how stealthily, crazily, she looked around for people who were out to steal it. And that, he reflected, had been fundamentally unnecessary because she gave herself so completely to the audiences that there was little enough left over for individuals; often you didn't feel like one when she was there, you were a pair of hands to clap, eyes to open wide with admiration. In the years after the War she had got her reward. The opera houses of Europe saw her dance with an emotion so concentrated that the smallest gestures acquired a mystery of their own; she seemed in front of them to dissolve into something greater than herself, something transcendental, beyond duration in time. And, reaching that point, A. A. was suddenly aware that he was looking at the wreck of her dancing through a veil of anger. For wasn't it all proved to be a lie? What happened now to that background of eternity she had promised, which one saw sometimes unwaveringly, for minutes on end? On the stage in front of him was a ferocious parody. If she had died or married or stopped dancing, at least the illusion would have been left; to go on like this. . . . He felt sick, cheated. He turned suddenly to Miles—there were about thirty bars to the curtain. "I think," he said, carefully tentative, "I think perhaps it was a bad idea going behind afterwards. Shall we go back to the 'Cock'?"

Miles, to gain time, pretended not to hear. Sometimes, in places like this, there rose up through the layer of dull hard work which was his present life, memories, soaked with obscure significance, of his childhood. Three words had risen from the darkness while he watched. 'Gently she floats'—they curled around the box, rising tensely from some central

spark, the fine blue smoke of a cigarette, but less pure than that, a cigar? he wondered. Was it a cigar his father used to smoke after dinner on Sunday? Then it came. He saw the stub-end still spinning out its slender column from the ash-tray close to where he squatted on the drawing-room floor, and his mother—her last year of life, and he was less than five—was singing the 'Sunday song' while his father played the piano. 'Gently she floats'—that voice, its throbbing passion contradicting the harmless message of its words, revealed to him something he had only suspected in her, something naked that appalled him. He could not look at her face, the straining open mouth, but kept his eyes fixed on the trail of smoke still rising from the ash-tray. When he had to kiss her good night, he closed his eyes and pecked at her, cramped with vicarious shame. After her death he wondered twice in bed at night whether her singing was not a disease which killed her. He had tried to get into the bedroom where she lay, wanted to look closely at the dead face as if that would solve an overwhelming mystery. But then he could remember nothing more. Had someone stopped him? He didn't know, but watching now the indecent prancings of a dried-up ballerina he seemed at last to be confronting the same situation. For there was nothing indecent, surely, to those movements themselves, they were muslin words, the same face-value as the song, only they were performed by someone who for an obscure but imperative reason should not be dancing in public at all. And curiosity spread through him, fear, and at the same time relief that he would be seeing her face to face. When his father's question reached him again, he said: "But I'd like to see her—I really would."

"We could go straight to Mitenka's," said A. A. The lights were up and he was fumbling an unnecessarily long time to get his coat down from the hook.

"I expect you've forgotten," said Miles. "I hadn't the foggiest who she was that time you introduced us. I'd like to see her now I know about her."

His coat was in his hand now, and A. A. realized that he had to choose—between revealing emotions to his son that

he never revealed, and capitulating. "All right," he said. "Come along." He blundered out of the box.

It seemed to Miles that they passed from one world into another. Here were red carpets and ornate settees past which they were drawn by the slow momentum of innumerable and richly dressed women, their hands resting lightly on the shoulders and through the arms of identically clothed men. They went down some steps and through a narrow doorway. A draught swept the surface of the floor, transforming his socks into cold films of air. Buff-coloured distemper peeled off the walls of the corridor. A. A. went in front muffled up in his overcoat. He said nothing. Once he pointed back at a step. Like a mole, thought Miles, burrowing blindly into earth he already knows. They crossed the stage and suddenly a giant section of shadow rose from its resting-place on the boards and disappeared into the darkness above with a faint hydraulic hiss. They went into more passages past a gauntly lettered notice: SMOKING FORBIDDEN.

Her dressing-room was ajar. A. A. beat a rapid little tattoo on it, his head bent closely over his knuckles in a habitual gesture of listening.

"Qui est-ce?"

"A." He pronounced it as French, dreading, as he did so, the joke that must inevitably follow.

"Oh, la la!" it came. "Je vous permets d'entrer, monsieur, and there ees no need to speak French."

She pushed her chair sideways and back from the mirror, waiting for him to come in. Only five minutes had passed since she had taken the final curtain, but in that time the fight against acknowledging the existence of the camera had at last been won. And it was won without that steady outpouring of her strength it had claimed while her dance lasted. For overtaking the final chords of the movement, dropping sharply with the two released halves of the curtain, came the applause. Scattered at first, merging unsteadily with the confident strides of the music, then gaining coherence, it crashed around her like long successive waves against a sea-wall. She felt frail at those moments, tiny beneath the giant

falls of the curtain, and impersonal within the movements of the orthodox bow. The dance and even the feel of it was gone from her, and she stood with her head bent forward helplessly, at the mercy of the audience.

But at first she saw the applauders less clearly than the rise and fall of her own breasts (her breathing was getting convulsive, she noticed), and she made a quick movement with her hand to rearrange her skirt. She was conscious for the first time of hot wet patches at her arm-pits. But that massive approval which rose from the fluttering thousands of hands gradually penetrated her. It spread through her body like the warmth of a fire in front of which one stands after coming in from cold streets, and as she surrendered herself to it, the anxiety which had stiffened her muscles seemed to relax. A bouquet was thrust into her hands, and another. On the boards around her feet lay more in a mounting heap. She broke off the head of a carnation and handed it to Sergei with a smile. The applause continued in great broad waves which seemed, if anything, to grow. She bowed easily, with a confidence which implied this was her just desert, and the audience, sensing it, gave her more. When she came back from the fore-stage for the last time isolated bunches of enthusiasts still tried to recall her.

Sonya was waiting for her, curious as to the interrupted command. "What did you want, Madame?" she asked in Russian. "I couldn't understand you."

A momentary anger seemed to threaten Natásha's good humour. "If you couldn't understand," she said sharply, "you'd better not try now. Pick up the flowers."

"But you only said two words, how could . . ."

"Bring the *flowers*," said Natásha, tapping with her foot. "Put them in my room, and you can go home. Tomorrow will do for the packing." She stayed with her foot extended towards the heap of bouquets, as if to pin the girl's attention to them; and Sonya, who was slowly learning that she must accept a world of unexplained and inexplicable facts, resigned the solution of this, too. Daring the faintest semblance of a sigh, she bent over the flowers.

Natásha had come back to her room. Leaving the stage,

she thought someone was still standing in the wings, and turned her head abruptly, but it was only the first of the 'regulars' coming behind. And as she went on down the passage the din of the clapping was still so loud in her ears that she could look back at her performance and consider it. She felt to begin with like a skater traversing ice whose strength was uncertain, but her early dancing that night stood out like a firmly planted post, and seizing its protection, she felt, looking gingerly around, that perhaps the whole adagio had been more impressive than she had thought. That applause . . .

"Magnifique," said a director of the theatre, thrusting his head in at her door and grinning broadly.

"J'ai su que vous seriez là," she said, giving from habit, but with unusual gratitude, the reply which could be repeated an indefinite number of times in the same evening. But the director had gone.

Then it was A. A. She could tell by the knock, but a moment's delay was valuable. She had learnt to trust his opinion more than anyone else's, feeling that in him there was no need to suspect flattery; on the contrary, in recent years he seemed even to withhold fair praise as if he owed her a grudge. So that she felt at this moment, between his knock and appearance in the flesh, as she did in those seconds in the wings before she submitted to the judgment of the lights. And pushing her chair away from the mirror, the little pat she gave to her hair and the stretch of her eyelids which disentangled the lashes at the corners, produced in her a feeling of something appeased and settled which would bias the trial in her favour.

A. A. had motioned to Miles to stay outside for a moment, as if Natásha might be dressing, but really to give himself time to overcome the embarrassment he still felt on penetrating her room. He found her leaning back in her chair with a smile on her face. It was the stage smile, the one which seemed infused at bottom by a feeling of uncertainty. But it was her eyes that made him hesitate before speaking, for they, too, showed fear, but at the same time a despairing plea that he should cure it, a suggestion that he could do

that with a word. Coming along the passage he had sworn he would be honest, but here were the hunger and thirst of someone who threatened suicide if she went unsatisfied.

"Natásha," he began, as he had for twenty years, "I liked the start of that adagio, I . . . I thought . . ." But the sound of his voice giving form and shape to the lie seemed to paralyse his tongue. Was it possible for her after a performance as tragic even as that to go demanding her toll of flattery?

"Well, my dear, tell me—what deed you theenk? You look *confus* and stupid to-night." She watched him.

He shuffled one of his feet uncertainly, then: "But what did *you* think?" he almost barked.

"I?" She fell back in her chair and looked at him in mock astonishment. "Why, *I'm* not the creeteek?" She heaved up her shoulders in a single big shrug. "I bigeen to theenk you may not have enjoyed yourself. . . ."

With his lips closed together as if holding something in, he watched her turn back to the mirror and give three distinct and unnecessary touches to her face. Her eyes seemed peculiarly intent, but he knew that at the fringes of her vision it was himself she still watched.

"Natásha," he began again, only this time faster and more loudly. "I've been wanting to say for some time, only I've hesitated and only say it now because no one else will—I've been wanting to talk frankly about your dancing. . . ."

She had made a weary little gesture with her hand as if to brush the first words out of existence, but against her better judgment she started to listen, for a moment with her eyes fixed on his in the mirror, then, as he hesitated, throwing herself round in the chair and leaning avidly towards him.

"Well," she said, tapping one hand fiercely against her thigh. "Please tell me what *ees* thess thing that you theenk and want so much to say."

"It's difficult to say without hurting you."

"What *ees* eet?"

There was a sudden knock at the door.

Each of them, like lovers discovered in a guilty embrace,

fell back into themselves. Natásha turned to the mirror and wrenched off one of the strips of sticking plaster which held her ears flat against her head. A. A. went to the door and half opened it on an apologetic Miles.

"I almost forgot," he said, coming back into the room. "Natásha, young Miles wanted to meet you again."

She looked up and smiled at him. Through her anger it seemed a sort of joke that A. A., as he had been twenty years ago, should be standing before her now. "Eet was nice of you," she said in a quiet voice. "Have you seen me dance to-night?"

He stood a little awkwardly in front of an ageing woman with fierce lines on her face. He nodded, but out of time with the question as though he would have assented, thinking of something else, to anything she said.

"Did you like it?"

To A. A., as he anxiously watched them, this seemed another of those proofs that he would never understand his son. He realized that there was something hypnotic about Natásha's look which claimed flattery as unequivocally as a burglar's revolver demanded money. But Miles in his embarrassment, he thought, might fail to give it. Instead of that, his voice, when it came, seemed to flow with the far-away and detached cynicism of a practised courtier. Detached, because it seemed to have no relation to his eyes, which wandered over her face and clothes with ruthless fascination, exploring her like a corpse or museum exhibit.

"Madame," he was saying, "it should not interest you whether I liked it or not, because I'm ignorant about dancing. All I know is that you put your breath and your blood into it and moved me more than anything since I was a kid."

As if the flattery were a pane of glass, A. A. was thinking in horror and amazement—an aquarium through which he could study the behaviour of newts. . . .

But Natásha saw nothing odd. She flushed slightly and stayed quite silent, listening while the echoes of the sentence still lingered. They seemed to merge with the waves of

applause that came from the audience, to settle any doubts for good. "Eet is partecularly nice of you," she said, "and I am charmed, because your father who once felt like yourself, now believes that I am too ancient to dance. I do not know preciselec why he thinks that. Perhaps eet ees I who am getting old. Or perhaps eet ees heem who ees getting tired." She spoke ostensibly to Miles, but had turned her full face on A. A. and the wide eyes jumped and sparkled. Then she took a step towards Miles and held his hand. "I theenk, my friend, eet ces now you who ees my admirer. . . ."

But A. A. could see that that protective sense of distance was vanishing between them. The touch of her hot hand seemed to melt it like an icicle in the sun, sending a dense flush of colour from his neck to the full extent of his forehead. His face dropped forward, trying to hide itself, the lids half closed over eyes which refused to meet hers.

"But look at me," she laughed, suddenly snatching at his other hand as if something were being lost.

Ladenly, his features tried to smile at the floor. "You funny boy," she said, and squeezed his hands. People were often shy when they met her, but she realized in alarm that he was twisting his hands to escape her clasp. She deserted the fact, and insisted, trying to draw him to the chair: "Seet down while I take off my face. You can talk to me because I find you deelightful."

He broke his hands away by force. She was strangely motionless, because the thing she had been afraid of losing was gone.

A. A. cleared his throat in embarrassment. "As a matter of fact we only came in for a moment. I've got to get back to the paper, and Miles is coming." He didn't look at her.

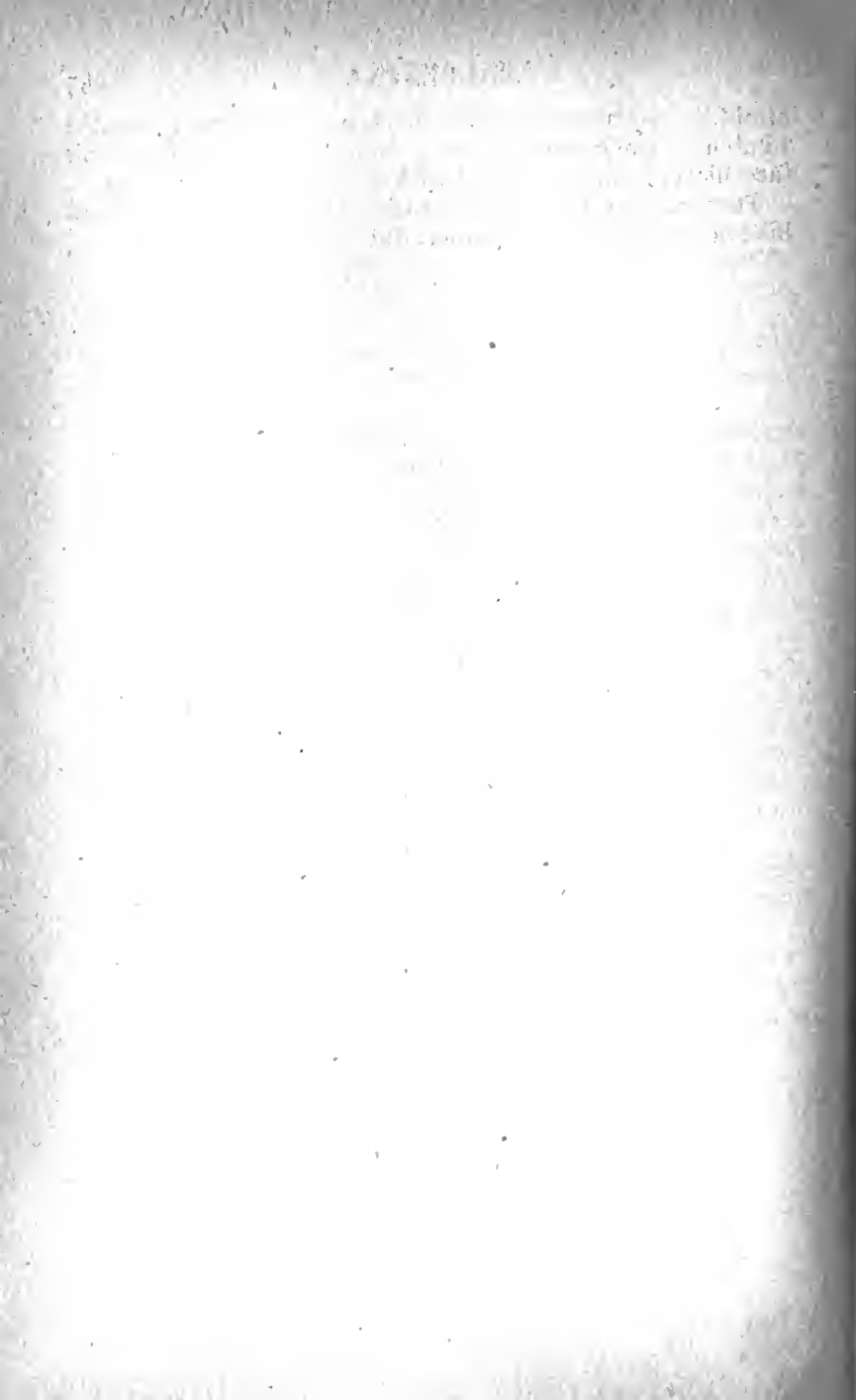
"But he can stay!" she blazed.

"Would you like to stay?" said A. A., fumbling anxiously for his handkerchief as if the question were without importance. "You could go on together to Mitenka's."

But Miles had his hand blindly clutching the door-knob. His words were barely audible. "I've got to work, I'm

afraid." He refused to look at them, and when he forced himself to smile good night to Natásha the features of his face flickered and twitched with the effort.

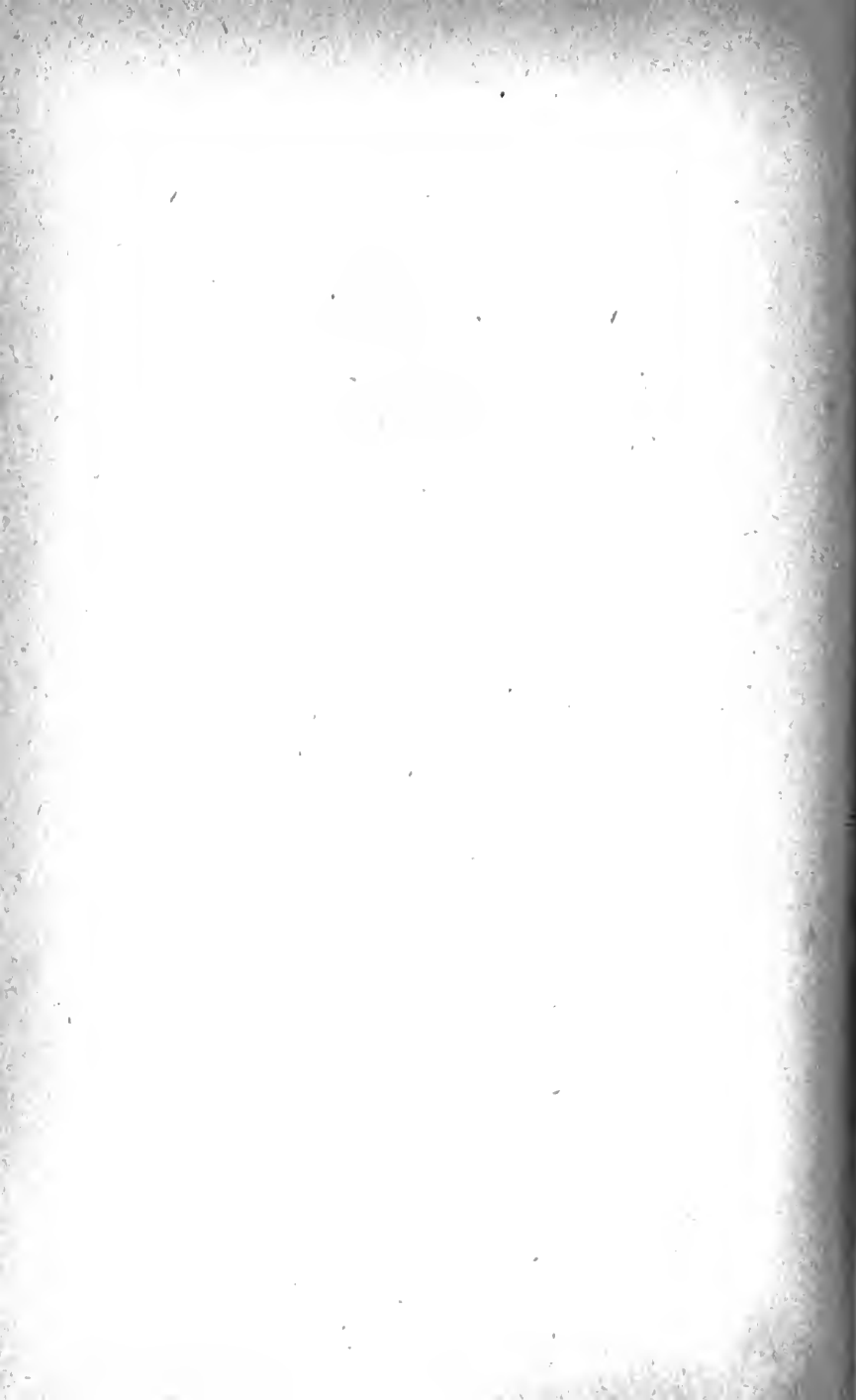
That was the last night Natásha danced, and A. A. and his son, driving home together, did not speak.



JOHN LINDSEY

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A Muffled Peal



JOHN LINDSEY was born at Hadleigh, Suffolk, on 7 April 1909. At the age of twelve, while still at a preparatory school at Frinton-on-Sea, he wrote the life of a race-horse in ten thousand words, which was published to the mingled horror and admiration of his relations. At his public school he tried for four years to persuade the Master who edited the school magazine to print some of his efforts, but never succeeded ; the Master's advice being that as he would never write anything worth reading, he had better go to sea before the mast.

While still at school, however, he wrote an eighty-thousand-word novel that was accepted by the first publisher to whom it was sent, and had the distinction of being banned in the Irish Free State and Australia.

At this time, despite the banned book, he intended to become a parson, and, to this end, went to a University and later a theological college where the ordinands appeared to him so incredibly wicked that he left and became a schoolmaster.

After some years as an Assistant Master he opened a school in partnership, but left this to devote himself entirely to writing. At the age of twenty-eight he has published ten novels and two books of original historical research, over two hundred short stories, is a reader to two firms of publishers and reviews in four newspapers.

He was married at the age of twenty-three, and his hobbies are horse-riding and growing tulips.

Special interests are Prison Reform and talking.

JOHN LINDSEY.

A MUFFLED PEAL

SOMERS had always loved the bells. As a child, lying awake on New Year's Eve, he had listened to their muffled farewell to the old year. He had, as the last stroke of twelve died away, heard, with a rush of gladness, their glorious cascade of greeting to the New Year. He had heard them on Sundays. He had listened to and rejoiced in the record peals that were rung on them by visiting campanologists. And, as the years had passed and he had grown from boyhood to manhood, it had been the bells, more than anything else, that had prevented him from accepting offers of employment elsewhere and persuaded him to carry on his father's old practice in the town.

It was a dull enough practice. The townspeople did not frequently resort to litigation. Most of Somers's time was spent in drawing up wills, conveyancing property and attending to the investments of the few wealthy clients he had.

But he did not mind that, because the place itself, the ancient customs of the place, the church and the church affairs kept him pretty busy.

He encouraged the youth of the place. He persuaded the men to form a bell-ringers' club and, with himself as leader, they rang mighty peals of Bob Major and Bob Minor, so that the townspeople smiled and shook their heads: "It's a wonder the old steeple stands up to the racket Somers and his lads make."

They laughed at Somers sometimes. But he did not know that; and, knowing it, he would not have cared, so dearly did he love his bells.

He neglected his business for them. Climbing up the steep steps of the tower in the dark—for only he had the key—he

would sit for hours, watching the bells ; Great Tom and Gratia Plena, the Angelus Bell, Will Nollens, and Sweet Mary, finding great pleasure in their solidity and in the remembered music they had made.

He would climb along the dust-covered rafter that lay between the two rows of bells, balancing himself with perfect ease where another would have been nervous, because he knew every inch of the way and the bells were his friends.

He knew that.

Alone, for he had cultivated no human friends in the town, he was never lonely, spending night after night, with pencil and paper, working out new variations that had never been rung on these bells, so that his men might practise them and wake Easter or Christmas morning with a new galaxy of sound.

Confidently, standing on his rafter, Somers would stretch out his foot, tapping Will Nollens gently, while his whole being thrilled to the deep note that echoed around him, hurling itself against the walls of the bell chamber, powerless to escape while Somers, moving along the beam, would tap Sweet Mary to have her music joined to the other.

Below him, beneath each bell, there were eight pits, one to each bell, into which the bells swung, just clearing the ground before, madly, they rushed up again only once more to fall back, an endless turning over and over, while their music passed through the town and to the fields beyond.

Quite early Somers had been aware of the pits. Quite early he had realized that to make one false move would mean his precipitation into their depth, his frail body to be shattered and smashed by the falling tons of music until it was unrecognizable and there was nothing left of it save the spattered marks of blood on Will Nollens and Sweet Mary.

But he was not afraid. The pits were not for him. He knew the place too well ever to make a false step. The pits were for those who did not love the bells, who needed correction.

One day, he thought, he might need those pits. And then he would laugh at himself, for there was no one to whom he intended harm, no one who had hurt him.

But, as the years passed and as Somers's neglect of his business grew more frequent, he began to think of the pits more regularly.

His income had dwindled ; but his expenditure remained the same, still living in the old red-brick house, retaining the same servants, giving lavishly to anything connected with campanology.

"He's mad," people said. "He's got bells on the brain." And they took their business away from him to a young solicitor who had set up his plate in the town.

Outwardly Somers did not notice their desertion. He maintained the same staff in the office. He spent a great part of his time visiting famous peals in different parts of the country, so that his fame grew among bell-ringers and they were honoured when he suggested that he should take a hand with a peal.

But the pits loomed more important. Now that Somers saw his clients leave him, all save a few, whose affairs his father and grandfather had handled ; now that he knew he could never forsake his bells for the sake of legal fees, he saw ever more clearly that the pits in which the bells dropped were the only way out.

He could not economize. He dared not economize. All his resources, all the money on which he could lay his hands, were going to the compilation of his great work, the *History of Campanology*, that would be his justification.

But, even in the middle of a complicated mathematical pattern of music, he knew that there must be an end.

Larkin, whose affairs he handled, must grow suspicious. One could not hide what he had been doing for ever.

Not that he had tried to hide it. He had not the time for that. He had not the leisure to make his way safe when every moment must be given to the great work.

But he knew what he would do. He had it all mapped out. He had no grudge against Larkin. He had no fear for himself that, when Larkin made his discovery, he would be exposed. His only fear was that discovery might come too early, before his great work was finished.

After that, they could do what they liked.

His managing clerk told him one day that Larkin had been on the 'phone. . . . Wanted to see him. Said it was urgent. His managing clerk looked at him curiously ; but Somers did not notice that, his mind filled with a glory of sound that had been rung that afternoon.

He said : " Get him on the 'phone," and, when he heard Larkin's voice, agitated, angry : " Look here, Somers, . . ." he took the receiver from his ear till the voice stopped, because the music in his head must not be shattered by a fool wondering what had happened to his money.

He said : " Yes, things are bad. Won't you come in to-night. We can talk better then. Come about seven. I want to show you a crack in Will Nollens before we have dinner."

And then he forgot Larkin, absolutely forgot him, because he was unimportant and futile ; and Somers went home and wrote several thousands of words on the bells that had hung in Old St. Paul's. The book was taking shape. Another nine months would see it through. If Larkin had waited, he thought, how much better for him. . . . He need not have seen the crack in Will Nollens. He need not have climbed the tower to-night. He could have lived and his brains and blood not be spattered all over the bell chamber. But he had not waited. And the book must be finished.

At a little to seven Somers went across to the Church. He left a message for Larkin to follow him. He was quite unemotional, quite undisturbed ; because, deep in himself, he knew he was doing the right thing. He had his work to give to the world. . . . And, high up in the bell-chamber, he stood on the beam between the raised bells, looking down into the pits.

He stood by Sweet Mary, the bell he loved best. He stretched out his hand and touched her, cold and massive and ageless ; and read, for the thousandth time, the inscription carved on her, ' Sweet Mary, toll for the rest of sinners.'

She would toll for him, he thought ; and was suddenly glad, because he asked for no better farewell from life than

this . . . that the bell he had loved should sound his passing.

' Sweet Mary, toll for the rest of sinners.'

He heard Larkin ascending the stairs, climbing heavily, his breath coming in gasps.

" You up there, Somers ? "

He called : " I am here," and seeing Larkin's head as it came through the door : " Come over here."

He pointed to a place on the beam beside him. Larkin stared. " On that thing? Not likely. You may like to risk your neck. . . ."

" It's safe enough," Somers said, " if you keep your balance."

He watched Larkin as he came slowly towards him. He saw the man's reddened face, heard his laboured breathing and, touching Sweet Mary, Somers knew that this man must never stop him finishing the work.

Then Larkin stood beside him, bristling and angry. By heaven, he'd take his business away from this fellow. No wonder he'd lost money. The chap was quite mad. Still, better humour him. . . . You never knew with a fellow like this.

" Well, what is it ? " he asked. " You mentioned a crack, though why on earth you spend so much time in this hole beats me. Bats and dust. Poof! Let's see the crack and get down."

Somers nodded. Now he hated Larkin. He hated him because he spoke like this of the bells, as though he did not know that the bells could hear him, that they understood and had seen life for hundreds of years. Again he touched Sweet Mary as though he would gain strength from her.

He said, pointing with his finger : " Look, it's down there."

Larkin leaned forward, his stout body bent, the back of his neck bulging with fat.

" I can't see anything," he said at last.

And he tried to straighten himself and turn.

But he was too late. As he moved, he heard Somers's voice, lucid and cool as though he were in the office he

neglected : " Look again, Larkin. Look again while you have time."

There was the roar of a shot and all the bells leapt into anguished echo, Great Tom and Gratia, Will Nollens, and Mary weeping together as this new sound burst on them, a sacrilege in this place where none but lovely sounds were made . . . and Larkin's fat hands shot up, trying to save himself, and, failing, falling into the pit beneath Will Nollens who, as Somers watched him, seemed to quiver and shudder.

He dropped the pistol now. He had no further use for it. It had served its purpose. The meddlesome fool had been silenced in time and he had been saved to go on with his work. He peered over into the pit where the body of Larkin lay sprawled, fat and ugly.

And, suddenly, he became as one inspired.

He *was* inspired. He knew that. He knew that he had done the right thing, the only thing ; and that now, with no fear of interruption, he could mould the rest of his life round the bells.

They were his. He had bought them. Bought them with blood, the blood of that meddlesome fool who had worried about his money.

He stared down at Larkin.

Below him there were sounds, but Somers did not hear them. He was leaning over the pit, trying to extract something from Larkin's pocket. . . . A paper. Something that might hold evidence of guilt. And there must be nothing of that, he knew. Will Nollens would destroy Larkin, would batter him and smash him to pieces but Will Nollens could not destroy paper.

He leaned farther forward. He was chuckling. He would finish his book and dedicate it to the memory of Larkin. . . .

He chuckled again. To the memory of spattered blood and crushed bones and brains flung round the bell chamber.

He had his fingers on the paper. But, even as he touched it, above him, he saw the bell begin to move. He heard the voices of the ringers beneath, whom he had forgotten. In

a moment, he knew, they would begin ringing the bells and the whole bell-chamber become a chamber of death.

And Somers started back and stood, swaying dizzily, on his beam.

He must get out of here. He must hurry down. He must leave Larkin. He must leave the paper.

He put his foot forward, but, as he did so, he heard Great Tom sigh and saw the bell move, slowly at first, and then crash forward and over, to be followed by Gratia and Peter and Mary.

He stood, trembling, cowering, trying to move.

And, as he stood there powerless, he saw Nollens move, heard it, amid the tumult by the other bells, creak and groan, saw it turn over. . . .

For a moment Somers looked down on Larkin's face.

Then the bell crashed over and something warm and wet hit Somers, splashing his cheek, so that he jumped back and lost his balance.

He hung, for a moment, his arms outstretched, clutching for something to support him.

Then something else struck him. He sprang back again and lost his balance while Sweet Mary crashed forward to catch him.

* * *

His housekeeper kept dinner waiting some time.

She went out to the door to see if Larkin and Somers were coming.

There was no sign of them. Above her the air was filled with the glory of the music that Somers had loved.

For a little the housekeeper listened. There was something missing in the music . . . something for which she could not find a name.

She looked up the street again. "It sounds almost like a muffled peal," she said.

LAURENCE MILLER

★

Life is Like That



LAURENCE MILLER was born in Manchester in 1909. At the age of seven he was stricken with infantile paralysis in its most virulent form, and nearly died. This illness left him so severely disabled that an ordinary school and university career was impossible. He was, therefore, educated at home by the masters of Bedford School, in which town his father is a doctor. The external-degree system of London University enabled him, while working at home, to sit for the B.Sc. degree in Economics of that University. At twenty he got his degree with first-class honours.

Two years later, Laurence Miller decided he was interested in play-writing. He took a correspondence course run by the British Drama League, and in spite of the fact that he had not been inside a theatre more than half a dozen times in his life, became, at twenty-three, the youngest playwright ever produced in the West End by Sir Barry Jackson. His play, *Head-on Crash*, at Queen's Theatre, had a cast headed by Cedric Hardwicke, Flora Robson, and Ernest Thesiger. James Agate wrote: 'This piece is a failure on an extraordinarily high level, and worthier of respect than fifty abject successes.' The author, however, would willingly have swapped it for even *five* abject successes! In the *Daily Telegraph*, W. A. Darlington 'felt like some watcher of the skies when a new planet swims into his ken.' The more general view, however, was expressed by *The Star*—'Young Dramatist's Odd Piece of Work'!

In 1935 his first novel was published. A. G. Macdonell wrote in *The Bystander*—'Again, I do not say that *Gloomy Romeo* is a great book. But I say very definitely that it may be the precursor of some pretty important stuff.' The public, however, showed a marked aversion to buying it.

Since then, Laurence Miller has written three more plays. If none of them is produced, he is likely to come to the

conclusion that novel-writing, which he hates, is far richer in possibilities for his highly individual talent than play-writing, which he loves.

Watching Rugby football, detective-stories, films, and low comedy are among the things he likes.

LAURENCE MILLER.

LIFE IS LIKE THAT

THE room at the bottom of the stairs in the boarding-house was where Paul slept and received his friends and worked. Just now, he was bending forward in his shirt-sleeves, brushing his hair, trying to find his parting in the Woolworth mirror tacked to the wall. His large, healthy, plump face was scowling a little, because he was aware all the time of Eva behind him, sitting on the bed. It was just like Eva, he thought, to come early and catch him in his shirt-sleeves. But it gave him an odd pleasure to think that she was sitting on his bed, watching him brush his hair. And that annoyed him. You see, he was fighting against Eva. The more intimate they became, the more it annoyed him.

So he whistled between his teeth and brushed his hair and scowled. His good-looking face seemed rather babyish until you noticed his eyes. Thoughtful, blue eyes that were focused coolly on the future. Paul worked in a wireless factory, and in ten years' time he expected to be manager. He was crazy about research and television and circuits—things like that. It didn't seem at all improbable to him that in ten years' time he would run the place. Sometimes it didn't to the manager himself.

"Come on, Paul," sighed Eva. "Are you going to keep me waiting here all night?" Seeing that Paul had his lips pressed together in the funny way that meant he didn't choose to answer anything she said, she arranged her skirt and giggled. "I don't know what my Mum would say if I did stay out all night!"

"She'd probably say it wasn't the first time. I should be be surprised," said Paul, savagely buttoning up his coat.

Eva shrank back on the bed a little, then jumped up and

walked too calmly across to the mirror. "You'd better be careful what you're saying," she murmured, but she was thinking only of the mirror and her bright curls. Or so it seemed.

She's got much blonder since I first met her, thought Paul. And she isn't a bad girl. She just isn't good for me. But who is? His eyes took in the worn carpet and the mud-coloured paint and Eva's calf, swelling in gentle lines up under her skirt. Who is?

"I should have thought that anyone as smart as you say you are——"

"I don't say I am," said Paul mechanically.

"You think you are! Look at all those books and—things!" she cried scornfully. "Anyone as smart as that ought to remember the time we went to the pictures and I walked out."

"Why did you walk out?" asked Paul innocently, his blue eyes round.

"You know why," she said softly, coming up to him, and smiling into his eyes. "Because Somebody couldn't keep his hands to himself! And yet you think I'm the sort of girl that stays out all night!"

Paul smiled and caught her by the elbow. It thrilled him to feel the thinness of it, to run his finger up to the rounded shoulder. It would be much easier for him if she was a bad girl. But she jerked away, looking mildly amused, surer of herself. And surer of him.

For a moment, anger darkened Paul's face. Then, quietly, he said: "It's ten-past. We'll miss the big picture if we don't go now."

"What big picture?" asked Eva, coming very close to him now that she felt it was quite safe. It was always safe when he looked thoughtful like that. "What silly big picture is Paulie talking about?"

"The one at the Regal."

"But it looks awfully dull!" cried Eva, "and I don't like any of the people in it!"

"Frank Capra directed it," said Paul, "and I want to see it."

“Who on earth cares who directed the silly thing!”

“But it makes all the difference!” he said, looking alive for the first time, looking as he looked at the factory. “The personality of the director makes all the difference.”

“I want to go dancing,” murmured Eva.

Paul was thinking about the film, and hardly heard her. She tap-danced lightly on the floor, humming a tune. “What?” he cried. “But we went last night!”

“I want to go to-night, too. I love dancing! Lots of fellows love dancing! Why don’t you?”

“I do like dancing,” said Paul slowly, trying to be fair. “But not every night.”

“We’re going to-night, honey,” she murmured, nestling against him. “And we’re going on Thursday.”

“Can’t,” said Paul curtly. “Got to work.”

Eva’s voice rose a little harshly, meanly, as it would rise, thought Paul, when I’ve married her and she’s putting the baby to bed, and I want to work. “Why do you always have to stew in here working, when all the other boys I know finish at five? Sitting here, cooped up with a lot of lousy drawings and—things,” her hand nervously sketched in the old white-wood table that was his workshop. “You must be soft or something, working when you don’t have to! Do they pay you for it?”

“Of course they don’t,” said Paul quietly, “but it’ll pay me in the end.”

“In the end,” she mimicked him savagely. “You’re a fool! In the end, we’ll all be dead. I want to have some fun! Are you coming dancing to-night or aren’t you?”

“I suppose so,” said Paul quietly. “And I suppose I must be a fool,” he went on to himself, looking for his hat, denting it, “to go about with anyone as cheap and stupid as you.”

Eva turned her back on him, and walked towards the bed and stood looking at the eider-down as if she’d lost something there and couldn’t find it. Then she sat down, and fell back, crying with soft, low sobs that touched his heart. Under the electric light he saw her with merciless clearness. The silly little hat that had come half off,

when she lay on his bed like that. The cheap, thin dress stretched tightly over her thighs, moulding them as her legs sprawled apart. The little pink hands touching her face. The light hair and the dark pained eyes. He had hurt her, saying that. He knelt down and kissed her, drawing her to him. One of his hands supported her head. The other wandered over her face and neck and breasts, lightly, tenderly, then more commandingly. She pushed it away. He groped for the light-switch over the bed, and plunged the room into darkness.

And as he kissed her and caressed her, the darkness in the room was lighter than the darkness in his mind. She's no good for me, he thought bitterly, but I need her. He shivered. God, how I need her! She's cheap and stupid and she'll never understand me. I'm going to marry her and I'm going to spoil my life. But I need her.

He could see faintly the black iron-bedstead bars, and they seemed like a cage, imprisoning them as they lay, warm and furtively passionate.

She's no good for me. But who is? Who else is there? He thought of all the other girls he knew, but got no farther than their names. Eva's arms were round his neck, this was what he wanted, this was what he was going to get all his life, and as he kissed her parted lips, at the back of his mind he hated her.

The room at the top of the stairs in the boarding-house belonged to Rose. She had just come in, she was still a little breathless and excited. She had been, alone, to the Frank Capra film that Paul was so anxious to see. She had gone to see it because the film-paper she read had said it was interesting and she liked interesting films, although she didn't always understand them. Rose was twenty-four, tall and graceful, and she worked in a draper's for thirty-five shillings a week.

She was going out to supper with Mr. Bennet and his mother. 'Mr. Bennet'—she blushed. How silly that sounded! Of course he was 'Fred' now. At least, outside working-hours he was 'Fred'! But she always thought of

him as Mr. Bennet. Perhaps it was because he was sixteen years older than she was.

She'd better change her dress, there wasn't too much time. She had gone straight from work to see the film. She had hoped that Mr. Bennet would take her, but he didn't like the pictures. He liked a good old-fashioned variety show at the local theatre, with low comedians and lower jokes. He liked the noise and the lights and showing her off, parading about with her on his arm. He always tried to make her have a glass of stout during the interval. But she wouldn't. She always wished when she was out with Fred that she was back in her little room, back with the dingy carpet and the mud-coloured paint and the pathetic little pictures on the wall she'd cut out of film-papers and Christmas numbers. No, Fred didn't like films. So she went alone.

She stood in front of the mirror and took off her dress. Her forehead was good, and she looked sensitive and intelligent. She was too kind, too modest, too patient, really; she had a pure, fine face that contrasted oddly with the wanton way her hands undressed her, showing her off to herself in front of the mirror, until she stood naked, graceful, white, and a little shy.

Her mind was still full of the ideas of the film, dimly remembered. She still felt full of the evening walk home through streets left shiny by a recent shower, golden with lights and thrilling with half-glimpsed faces. Dusk. She was young! She was almost beautiful. She was lonely. And she was going to supper with Mr. Bennet and his mother.

One of her proudest possessions was a little slip of paper. She had written a letter to the film-paper about Walt Disney and his imitators, and the editor had printed it. She had shown that letter to Fred. She remembered in a hurt way how he had laughed at it. He would have crumpled it up and thrown it away if she hadn't stopped him. "You'll have other things to think about when we're married, my girl!" She remembered how she hated his touching her.

As she dressed, something as near rebellion as anyone so patient could experience bubbled up inside her. Why should her parents live so far away, in South Wales, father unemployed, unable to help her? Why should she have got a job at that very draper's, 'under' Mr. Bennet? She remembered the first day he noticed her. Going to tea and being approved of by his red-faced, managing mother. And later on, 'Of course, you and Fred'll live with me when you're married.' The worst of it was that Fred was a real 'catch.' Everyone said so. He was 'comfortably off.' He was kind. He would probably be a far better husband than she deserved. If she threw him over, he wouldn't make a scene. She would probably lose her job, casually, as if by accident, a month or so later. Of course she would. But Fred was really a very nice man. She wished passionately that she could hate him. But she couldn't. She just prayed that she wouldn't marry him. She didn't dare to think of going to bed with him. But she knew she would marry him. She would be very foolish not to. Everyone said so. Lots of girls had tried to get him and failed.

She looked at the clock and sighed. All this bitter argument in her mind was nothing new. What was new—and it may have been the film that caused it, or the evening or the recent sight of her ripe, young body—what was new was that she should voice her despair, aloud. As she fixed her hat and looked into her eyes, she spoke to herself, and it sounded eerie in that dim little room. A nice, wistful, heart-broken voice. "I suppose I've tried too hard to understand things. Boys don't like girls to be interested in things seriously. Not the boys I meet, anyway. And the boys that have taken me out haven't been my type. Noisy, silly, cheap. But I would give everything to anyone I could help. Are there any boys like that? Boys who think and like to be quiet sometimes, boys who plan and talk sensibly. Who don't laugh at you for taking ideas seriously. You've been too serious, Rose. And yet, with the right boy, I could laugh a lot. But it's too late. It's never happened, it won't happen now." She bit her lip a

little. One day old Mrs. Bennet would die. And she and Fred would have the house to themselves. Fred, sixteen years older than she was, would be settled in his habits, then. Sleeping in the parlour on Sunday afternoons. Having his loud friends in. She would be lonely because none of them would understand Fred's quiet wife. She would only be happy reading, endlessly reading. Yes, they would all think her queer. Probably there wouldn't be any babies. Fred didn't like them. They were too much of a nuisance.

Rose put out the light, and left her room at the top of the stairs in the boarding-house. She was on her way to supper with Mr. Bennet and his mother.

And at that very moment, Paul came out of his room and stood at the foot of the stairs, waiting. He was waiting for Eva to tidy herself, to 'do' her face. In a minute she would come out and confidently take his arm. He had a minute in which to escape.

He gazed up the dark stairs, seeing nothing, yet seeing everything. He saw the last few minutes over again. He felt again the soft bed and heard his thick broken words, smelt Eva's scent and her hair, felt her warm, smooth flesh. But all that was nothing. In the darkness he had sensed most vividly her mind, calculating, cool, resisting him. He wanted her more than ever. And she had resisted him. Both of them knew what that meant.

He saw the first six months of their marriage, intoxicating and exciting. And then the long years would set in, and he would walk out to meet them eagerly. But Eva and he would, by then, have shared all that they had to share. She wouldn't want to change, to learn. She'd resent his success because she wouldn't understand it. She wouldn't be happy, either. At the back of his mind he knew the whole thing was a mistake, a fatal mistake. She wasn't a bad girl, but she was no good for him. But then who was? And all the time a voice inside him told him not to be silly, not to think too much, to marry Eva—wasn't that what he wanted? And he knew this false voice would win.

Looking absurdly young and hopeless, Paul stood waiting.

Only a few seconds were left in which he could still escape. He suddenly realized that he could never set himself free. Only another girl could do that. And she must come now. Within the next three seconds. A girl he could really love and cherish. He smiled wryly as he heard Eva moving about in his bedroom.

Unseeingly, he gazed up the dark stairs.

And slowly Rose came down the stairs. She always walked slowly when she was going to Fred's. Her mind was full of queer, sad thoughts, like people in black, whispering.

'It's awful only having one life. You make a decision, and if it's wrong, your chance of happiness is gone, at once, for ever.

'I hope it's raining a little. Anything seems possible when your face is wet, and it's dark.

'I didn't know I looked so nice undressed.

'My whole life is being settled, now. If something's going to happen, it's got to be now. Now!'

She reached the bottom stair but one. Paul stood at the bottom of the stairs.

'Why haven't I met someone I could really love? I'd do anything for him, learn anything. He might even love me. Why haven't I?

'Nothing will happen. You know it won't. I mustn't cry now. I can cry after supper—on Fred's shoulder. He'll think it's because I'm so in love with him.

'I'm never going to be happy. Only lucky people are. Oh, God, why shouldn't I have been lucky? What did I do wrong?'

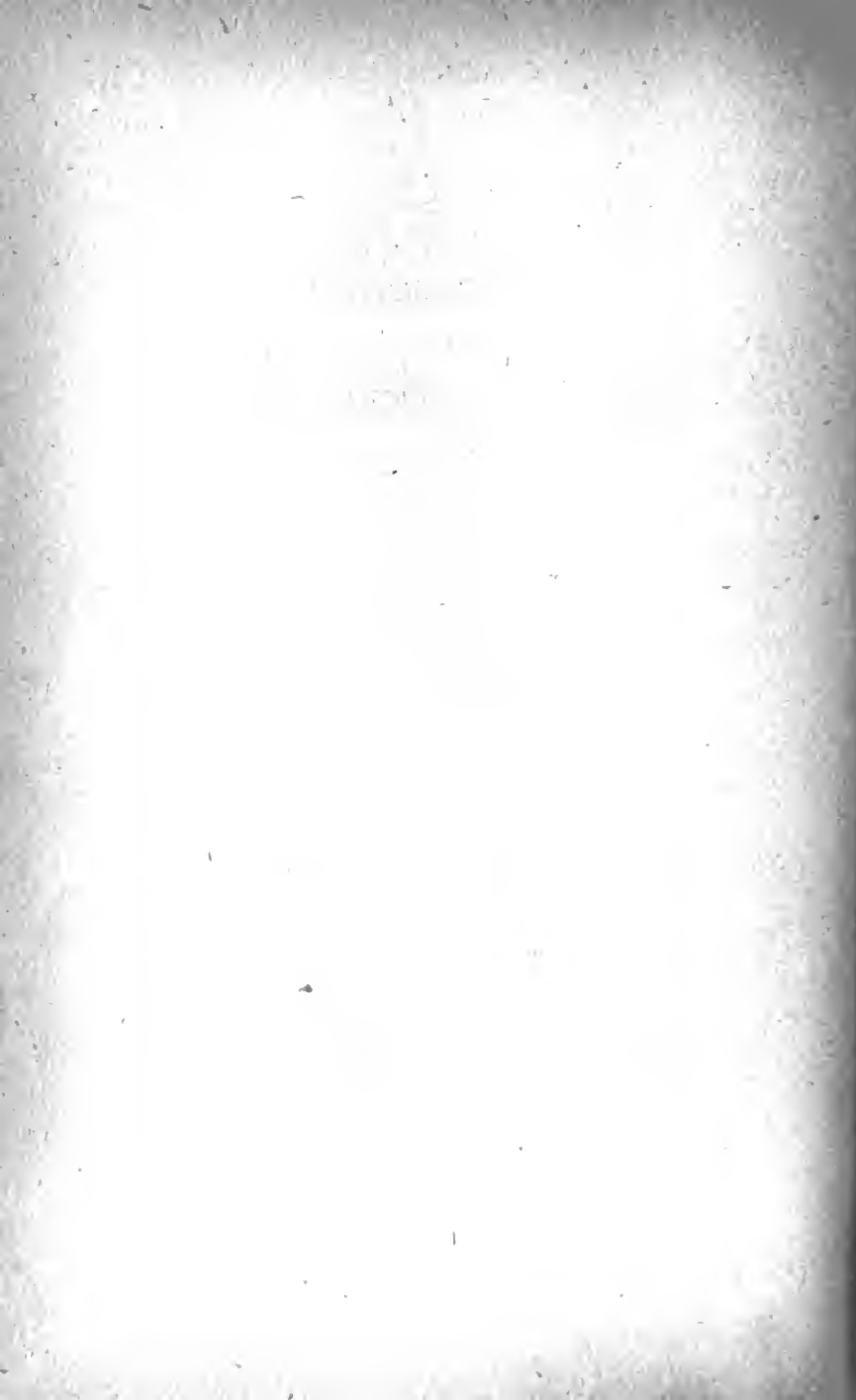
She didn't see Paul. He didn't see her. You see, they weren't the same stairs. It wasn't the same boarding-house. Rose and Paul lived two hundred yards apart.

They would never meet.

DONALD MOFFAT

★

‘ Doucement ! Doucement ! ’



MR. MOFFAT has the shyness that is shared equally by Mr. Ernest Bramah and the Abominable Snowmen ; we know that these people exist, but how, it is not given us to understand. Mr. Moffat's literary agent informs me that his age qualifies him for inclusion in the present collection, and that was all that he could (or would) tell me.

NOTE BY MICHAEL HARRISON.

‘DOUCEMENT ! DOUCEMENT !’

BY the time May was well upon them and spring had melted softly into early summer, the Mott family, no voice dissenting, packed their baggage and moved into Paris to bathe their vexed souls a while in the contentment of their familiar and beloved Hôtel de l'Université, in the Faubourg St.-Germain. They hungered, after their winter's vegetation, for a taste of the fleshpots ; and, too, they wanted to be near their friends the Poulters, who had just arrived from home with their children.

Among Mr. Mott's first acts, after helping to get his family settled, was to arrange to take possession of the small car which a departing American friend had left in France, and which Mr. Mott had bought from him by mail, sight unseen. He therefore wrote to M. Roux, proprietor of the garage in Nice where the car was stored, saying that he'd be down with his friend Mr. Poulter on the following Saturday to drive it back, and hoped to find it ready for them. He got no answer till Thursday, on which day M. Roux replied that the Renault was in good shape and waiting for him, but that before Mr. Mott could take possession he would have to get written authority from the actual owner of the garage, M. Meyer, who conducted a transport agency at a certain address in Paris. Mr. Mott was slightly annoyed, because time was short ; but he reflected that a day and a half ought to be ample to conclude a mere formality like this.

Nevertheless it was with certain forebodings that he set out next morning in search of M. Meyer. There was no real likelihood of trouble, of course ; yet Mr. Mott knew from experience that it was just as well to take nothing for granted. The average Frenchman is disinclined to sign a

paper till he has read all the fine print on the back. He knows that the fine print is put there not for a whim but for a purpose. He likes to conduct every transaction one step at a time, each step a logical successor to the one before ; and his advance is unhappy unless every footfall gives evidence of firm ground beneath him. He takes no sudden leaps, no intuitive short cuts. Logic guides him, his sense of reality sustains him, his self-interest beckons him on : and he gets there. And if the nervous systems of foreigners suffer in the process, sighed Mr. Mott—well, whose country is it, after all ?

Mr. Mott spent the customary hour locating the business premises of M. Meyer, marvelling, as he crept in and out, at the taste for small Parisian business men for hiding their offices behind dark courtyards and misleading stairways. M. Meyer was at home, greeted him with smiling politeness, led him to a dim inner office, and faced him across the flat-topped desk—a gracious, round, and ruddy little man with a head completely bald. M. Meyer leaned forward in his chair, smiled sympathetically, and waited.

Mr. Mott said : “ My name is Mott, monsieur. I am the American who bought the little Renault of M. Wrightstoneham, which is now in your garage at Nice. I have come to ask you for a letter authorizing the *garagiste* to let me have the car. I go to Nice to-morrow.”

“ Ah,” said M. Meyer, “ of course. A charming fellow, M. Vrigstonhon. He is well, I hope ? And madame his wife ? So you have bought his little car, monsieur ? ”

“ That is so, monsieur. Permit me to offer my passport, for identification.”

M. Meyer examined every page of the passport with interest and care. Then he turned to the photograph, held it out at arm's length, and compared it with the original, feature by feature. “ Well,” he said at length, pleasure and surprise in his voice, “ a good likeness. I compliment you, monsieur. And now ? ”

“ A letter to M. Roux, if you will be so kind.” Mr. Mott was congratulating himself on M. Meyer's amiability, and the simplicity of the little transaction, when M. Meyer

hesitated and fell to drumming on the desk, plunged in profound thought. After a minute of this, "Monsieur," he said apologetically, "pardon me, but in an affair of this kind it is not well to move too quickly. For both our sakes, care must be exercised. I shall therefore be so ungracious as to beg of you some further identification—identification that is to say, of yourself as the actual purchaser of the little car. That you are indeed M. Mott is established beyond a doubt. But that M. Mott has bought the *voiture* of M. Vrigstonhon . . . ?" He paused, and smiled agreeably.

"Certainly, M. Meyer," replied Mr. Mott. He took out the wallet sent him by Wrightstoneham and spread on the desk the keys of the car and the three licences, besides his own *certificat de domicile* and *carte d'identité* for good measure. M. Meyer passed them earnestly in review, while Mr. Mott wondered if he meant to put them under a microscope, then conceded, with a polite bow, that the defence had scored one point at least.

"*Parfait*," he said. "All is in order ; *mais*" (oh ! that French 'but,' thought Mr. Mott) "you will forgive me, monsieur ? Papers like these, as you know, may easily be lost, and as easily be picked up by another, not the true owner. You will also agree that such documents are not difficult to steal, and although I do not, of course, suggest for an instant that such is now the case—a thousand pardons—you will appreciate that it is my unhappy duty not to neglect such a possibility. Also, monsieur——"

"I understand perfectly, monsieur," Mr. Mott interrupted, digging once more into his pocket-book. "As a man of business you could prudently follow no other course. But here is a copy of the letter M. Wrightstoneham wrote to the *garagiste* at Nice telling of the sale. If you will send for the original, which is doubtless in your files, you may compare them and so satisfy your praiseworthy scruples."

M. Meyer rang for a clerk and sent him for the letter. And to Mr. Mott's surprise he was back with it before M. Meyer had finished Chapter I of his recitation on the subject of 'Paris Weather, Past, Present, and Future.'

M. Meyer compared the copy with the original word for word, then fitted them together, held them up to the light over his head, and gazed through them for signs of forgery.

Finally he lowered his arms. "The letters," he pronounced "are identical. I congratulate you, monsieur. . . . Yet," he added, after a thoughtful pause, "how easy it would be for a clever man to make up such a letter, and, having dispatched it, to keep a copy to produce at the required moment. Of course," he went on, with a jolly laugh, "I know quite well that *you* have not been guilty of such villainy ; but you see my difficulty : I am compelled to act on that very supposition. You pretend to be M. Mott ; your passport confirms the assertion. You pretend to have bought an automobile from M. Vrigstonhon, and in support of this contention you show me these papers. But"—here M. Meyer spread his arms wide, as if beseeching Mr. Mott's co-operation and charity—"nothing to show that you have *paid* for the car except"—shaking his head mournfully, and letting his arms fall—"this letter, which, as I have logically demonstrated, is technically open to suspicion."

Mr. Mott watched the performance with fascination. Then suddenly, cursing himself for his stupidity, he remembered the receipted bill of sale, his trump card. Once more he reached into his pocket, bulging with the accumulation of papers that always seemed to breed mysteriously in his clothes after a few days in Paris. He found the bill of sale, unfolded it. "Here, monsieur," he said, handing it to M. Meyer, "is M. Wrightstoneham's own receipt for the money, signed by his own hand. Examine it carefully, I beg."

M. Meyer took him at his word ; then sadly shook his head. "It is obviously correct," he said, "but—alas!—worthless. Tenez : I believe you to be M. Mott ; I believe that you actually bought the car from M. Vrigstonhon" (does no Frenchman *ever* make an attempt to pronounce—or spell—a foreign word correctly, thought Mr. Mott) "and paid for it. I am anxious to help you. It is my greatest desire to serve you. But this!" Again he shook

his head. "As the world knows, monsieur, a receipted bill is valueless in the eyes of the law unless payment of the sales tax is attested by the affixation of the Government stamps, and countersigned by the vendor. On this paper, as you see, are no stamps whatever. Therefore, alas, the sale is not complete. It is unfortunate. . . . I regret, monsieur, infinitely."

"But, monsieur," Mr. Mott protested eagerly, "the sale occurred in the United States, where, by some strange oversight of the Government, the custom of taxing receipted bills has not yet been introduced. How could there be stamps?"

M. Meyer laughed in grudging admiration. "You argue well, monsieur, but! We are not now in the United States. That, you will agree, is evident." On this point M. Meyer was polite, but firm. "We are in France. The little Auto, the subject of this affair, is also in France. Thus, you see, monsieur, there must be stamps. I am sure that you understand the entire friendliness of my attitude, and that I take these precautions, not from any doubt of yourself, but because such matters must be concluded in an orderly fashion. Indeed the fact that the principals in the transactions are both foreigners, Americans, makes my position all the more delicate. Consider the international complications that might arise if I did not take my responsibilities as intermediary *au pied de la lettre*," he paused.

Mr. Mott said slowly: "Yes, I see, monsieur. . . . But these stamps? Where may they be procured?"

"I do not know. It is not, strictly speaking, my affair. But if I may offer the suggestion, it is possible that your American Consul may be able to help you."

Mr. Mott got up and held out his hand. "Thank you, monsieur, I shall go there directly." He congratulated himself, as M. Meyer escorted him to the door, on having kept firm hold of his own sense of reality as well as his temper.

At the consulate, when Mr. Mott looked into the waiting-room, he found so many troubled-looking compatriots that he left at once, and went to a café to brood. His brooding

brought him an idea—the idea that comes eventually to most Americans who get up against it in Paris. He went to the office of an American lawyer he knew, and asked for his chief of staff, whose name was Emily.

“Emily,” he said, “I’m up against it; what shall I do?” and he explained the situation.

Emily told him. “What you need,” she said, “is seals. Give me that paper.”

She took the receipted bill and left the room, and presently came back with a gorgeous seal, fixed to the paper with masses of wax and red ribbon.

“What’s that?” Mr. Mott asked.

“That’s a seal,” said Emily. “Take it to the Consul, tell him I sent you, and have him put on stamps.”

“What kind?” asked Mr. Mott.

“Don’t be so fussy,” Emily replied. “Good-bye.”

The Consul was young, bored, and, as soon as Mr. Mott mentioned Emily’s name, obliging. He stuck on stamps—what stamps Mr. Mott did not inquire—cancelled them with a flourishing signature, and also gave Mr. Mott a letter to the Consul at Nice, in case . . . It was then too late to return to M. Meyer.

The next morning he packed his bag and left it at the Gare de Lyon, to be sure of having plenty of time to meet Mr. Poulter and catch the afternoon train in case M. Meyer had any further ideas. But he had none. His eyes lit up with pleasure when he saw the glorified document. He barely glanced at it.

“Perfect,” he said. “I am truly delighted. A moment, monsieur, and I will compose the letter to M. Roux.” He wrote. “There, monsieur, and forgive my precautions; they have been troublesome for you, I know, but necessary. My responsibility in the matter is now removed. I wish you many happy days of touring under our sunny, smiling skies.”

They parted on the best of terms, with many gallant expressions of mutual admiration and esteem; but as Mr. Mott turned on the stairs to bow a last farewell, he caught M. Meyer gazing inscrutably after him, in his eye

still glowing the living embers of doubt—not, Mr. Mott knew, of his personal honesty, but of the completeness and authenticity of his chain of evidence.

At Nice, Mr. Mott and Mr. Poulter took a taxi and drove straight to the garage where M. Roux, huge, greasy, and jolly, greeted them with warmth, and thus dispelled Mr. Mott's secret fear that M. Meyer, in the last throes of suspicion, had cancelled the letter by wire.

M. Roux led them to the Renault. "Voilà, messieurs, all ready to drive away: essence, oil, water, battery charged. A fine little car."

Mr. Mott thanked him, and offered M. Meyer's letter, explaining its contents.

"Oh, that," M. Roux laughed. "Keep it. I don't need it. Any friend of M. Vrigstonhon is a friend of mine."

"But you wrote me," Mr. Mott persisted, "that you couldn't let me have the car without it. Would you have, after all?"

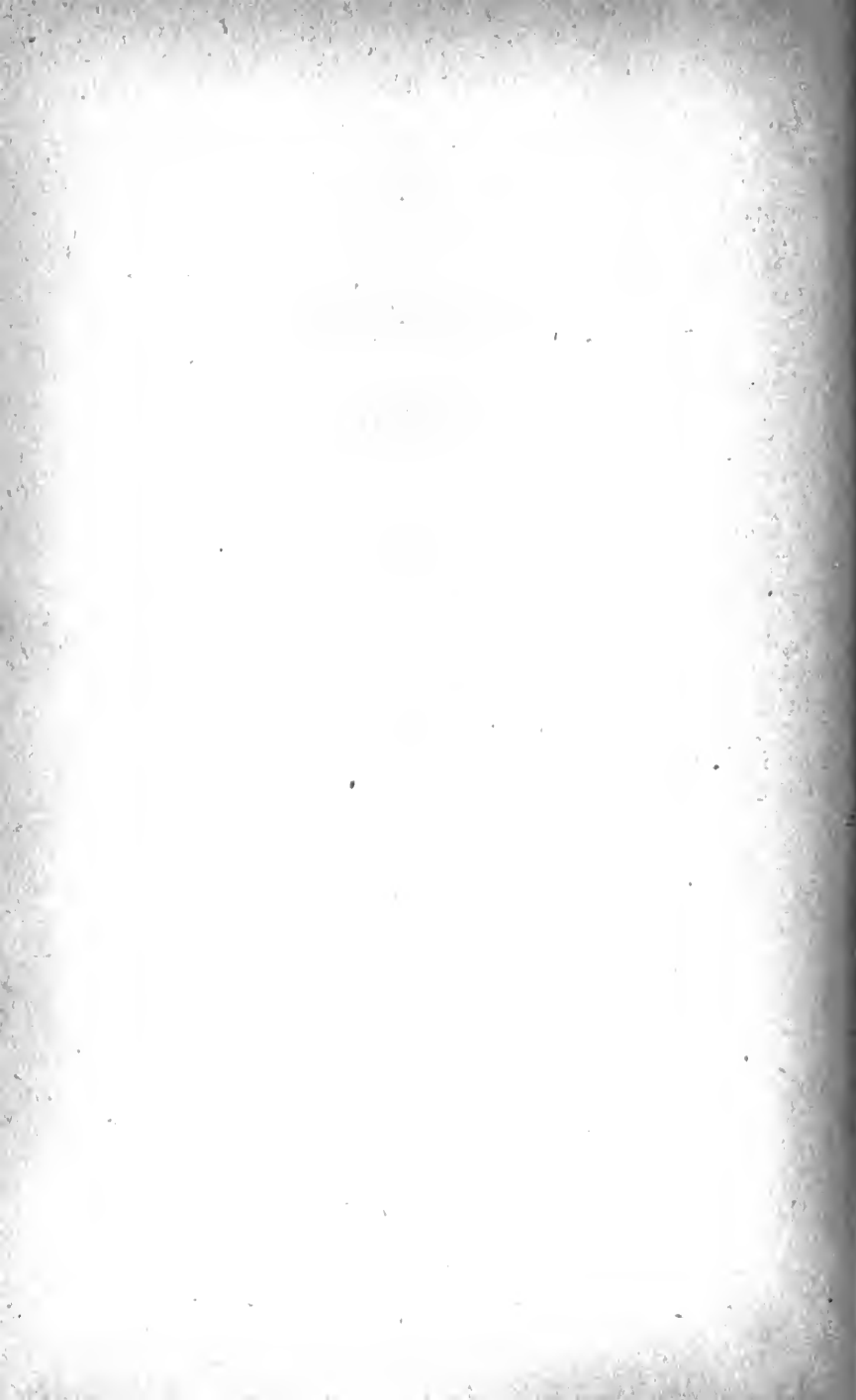
"Of course. Those were the orders of the *patron*. I had to write to you. He is careful, that one. However"—he shrugged—"one must remember that he is not only a man of affairs, but a Northerner as well. What would you?"

M. Roux took the letter, and, without reading it, folded it small (the world-wide sign of the peasant), put it in his pocket, and proceeded to think of other things.

RICHARD PARKER

★

Soup Kitchen



UNTIL I was ten I used to play in a long garden with my sister. We had a tricycle, some planks and boxes, and a love of making bonfires. When these palled, we painted the garage doors with large brushes and water, and the sun dried them, leaving long muddy streaks. Then we painted them again. Outside the garden there were clever boys who played on the road—we saw them sometimes—and even cleverer ones who knew how to play cricket. Then my father lost all the money he had made during the War and I was saved from going to a good school. I began to learn a lot of interesting four-letter words at the council school.

During the General Strike in 1926 I had to walk to school because the buses had stopped running. I hadn't imagined that those things—buses, trams, trains—*could* just stop. I discovered that, sometimes, really things happened for which I was not responsible. I forgot about this for a long time, and during the next five years took jobs as an office boy, reporter, fruit-picker, postman, farm-hand, library assistant, wood-cutter, commercial traveller, factory-hand, pig-castrator, and dole-collector. But it took me ten years from the General Strike to discover the link between the personal self I have been developing and what, in 1926, had seemed to lie outside it.

I am now twenty-two and a Communist.

RICHARD PARKER.

SOUP KITCHEN

JIMMY came back with the empty bucket in his hand. "Everybody laughed at me," he said. "Everybody laughed because I didn't have no basin. And then they sent me away, and I didn't get no soup."

We all went to bed then, and I was cold in the night. I slept in the middle as I was the smallest, but Janie kept crying, and saying she was hungry, so we changed places. A lot of cold air came in under the edge of the overcoat and I couldn't sleep any more.

When it was light we got up, and mother said Janie must go down to the soup kitchen in Pad's Hole and explain to the man about the bucket. She told Janie to say that we hadn't got a basin or a jug, so would the man let us have the soup in the bucket, because we hadn't got anything else. Jimmy wouldn't go again because of them laughing at him before, so Janie took the bucket ; but she was crying all the time because she was hungry. Mother said perhaps the man didn't like cry-babies when she came back without any soup. The man was cross with her. He said that taking a bucket was being greedy, and did we want everybody else's share. He said we ought to think of other people sometimes and not just try to get as much as we could. He said if everybody thought that way there would be no more soup kitchens.

It kept raining hard all the morning, but it wasn't quite so bad in the afternoon, and mother went out to see if they could lend us a bowl or something next door. But they were using theirs, and so was Mrs. Barnes. Then she went to Mrs. Sneath on the corner, and she was very nice even though she couldn't lend us a basin. She sent a pair of socks for Janie, that used to be her Alice's who was dead a few weeks before.

When mother got back her feet were hurting. When she had taken her shoes off she sat down by the fire and began to cry. Janie cried a bit too, but not very much because she had the new socks on.

I asked mother if I could go down to the soup kitchen when it opened in the evening, but she said it was no good taking the bucket, not if we tried for a hundred years. And we didn't have anything smaller. But I went into the other room to see if we'd perhaps forgotten something that might do. The chamber-pot was like a basin. Mother thought if she cleaned it properly it would be all right. She boiled some water, and scoured it out with earth and sand. When it was wrapped up in newspaper you couldn't really tell what it was, so perhaps if I took that and didn't unwrap it the man wouldn't see.

When it was nearly dark I put the chamber-pot under my coat and went down to Pad's Hole by myself. I thought it was something like the stories where the oldest brother tries to do a thing, like chopping wood, and then the next oldest—only Janie wasn't a brother—but they both fail, and the youngest one, who nobody doesn't think very much about, goes off and does it quite easily.

There was a long line of people waiting for soup, but they pushed me up to the front because I was so small, and my feet were all blue with no socks on. But they weren't really cold ; only it was like I hadn't any feet at all.

Then, when it was nearly my turn, I tried to take the chamber-pot from under my coat without the paper slipping off. The handle was showing, and a little bit of the pink flowery pattern on one side where the paper wasn't big enough. Nobody saw it because I held it close to me.

The man behind the shutter kept grunting at the people, and asking how many there were in the family. He measured the soup out with a big spoon into the basins—only most people had jugs, and Mrs. Boorman had a beer bottle. The man didn't say anything, but looked sort of thin and worried, like the coloured pictures of Jesus. Like he was doing something he didn't really want to do, but had to go on doing it because it was good.

When it was my turn the man told me to take the paper off, but I said it was so as not to burn my hands—like mother told me to. He tried to take it away from me, but I held on tight, and then he snatched it away. I began to cry because I thought the people might laugh at me, but they didn't. Then when I looked up again he'd taken the paper off. His face was all red, and he was holding the chamber-pot with the ends of his fingers. He turned round and said something to the lady in a fur coat just behind him, and she looked too, and her eyes opened wide and she went red as well, but not so red as the man.

"You dirty little boy," she said, "hasn't your mother any sense of decency at all?"

Mrs. Boorman, who hadn't gone away, shouted out: "Give the kid his soup, you bloody hypocrites." The rest of the people began shouting too, so perhaps the man didn't hear me telling him that it had been washed out and that we didn't have nothing else.

The man wrapped up the chamber-pot as quickly as he could. He said that we were behaving like pigs, and that kind people were only wasting their time and their money trying to help us. We were biting the hand that fed us, he said, and that we didn't deserve helping. Then he leant through the hole and handed it back to me. But I suppose my fingers were cold, or he wanted to get rid of it quickly, because I didn't catch hold properly and it dropped on the stones and broke. I tried to pick up the pieces, but there were too many of them, so I just had the handle and a little piece with pink flowers on it, and I ran back to tell mother.

JOHN PUDNEY

★

The Albions' Secret



BORN 19 January 1909.

Short period of highbrow education at Gresham's School, Holt.

Began work in London at sixteen and a half years.

About half a dozen odd jobs, including real estate and journalism.

Now feature-programme producer, B.B.C.

The Albions' Secret was adapted as radio play and produced to England and overseas, 1937, for B.B.C. National Broadcasting Corporation of New York produced it last month and are doing it again. It has also been done on the amateur stage.

Married. One daughter.

Games : Rugby and squash.

JOHN PUDNEY.

THE ALBIONS' SECRET

“OH, Mother, Mother! Look at the elephant coming down the garden,” cried Lily.

Her mother was thinking just then, however, and disregarded Lily's remarks. Her mother was thinking about possessions.

So Lily ran and opened the front door, ready to let the elephant in. She was thrilled at the unusual visitor; though, judging by her mother's reticence, she should not have shown excitement. She had rarely seen elephants. Though she was receiving a normal education, regular nourishment, and a proper home environment, her opportunities of seeing them were almost negligible.

Something had happened at last: she had always known that it would. She opened the door wide and smiled. She heard the gentle, rather ponderous breathing, and the muffled but eager tread. She was impressed by the physical dimensions. She noticed that the eyes were twinkling like raindrops. “I'm your Uncle Arthur,” said the elephant.

“Oh, Mother, Mother! The elephant that has come says that he is Uncle Arthur!”

There was no reply. Her mother must be thinking. How rude. Lily smiled at the visitor, who was standing patiently on the threshold, completely filling it. Then she popped her head round the sitting-room door and interrupted her mother's thoughts.

“He says he's Uncle Arthur,” she said.

“Who does?” said Mrs. Albion.

“Sh!” Lily made a polite gesture. “The elephant.”

“What elephant, Lily?” Her mother looked cross.

“The elephant I told you about, who has just called.”

“Lily! Come right in.” Mother was wasting time, but

she was very cross. "Now tell me: who is at the door?"

"Uncle Arthur."

Mrs. Albion winced. The child was imaginative, of course, that was the danger—a misfortune, in fact. UNCLE ARTHUR. "I'll go to the door myself," she said.

They found the elephant wedged. Mrs. Albion screamed. Lily felt sorry for him, and frightened. He was stuck fast, more in than out.

"Help!" cried Mrs. Albion. "A zoo's escaped. Help! We shall be trampled underfoot!"

"Oh, Mother! He's terribly stuck. What can we do for him?"

"Come away, Lily. Quick! Run round to the Bridies and telephone. Call the police—and its keeper. I'll come with you. What a horrid great ugly brute!" For a moment she hesitated to convince herself that he was wedged. She snatched an umbrella from the hall-stand. She was outraged—she would defend her home. She had half-turned towards the back door when the kindly voice of the elephant again declared: "I'm your Uncle Arthur."

Mrs. Albion stopped. It was all very well for Lily, who was an imaginative child, to see elephants and hear them talk, but she was proud of the fact that she herself was practical. She had never heard elephants talk. She disbelieved them. There was no doubt, however, that an elephant was wedged in her front door.

"I'm your Uncle Arthur," he repeated.

A grey fear then enveloped her. When the Albions feared, it was grey and bleak in the house, just like a November fog outside in the streets. The sitting-room sweated an emulsion of mistrust from its scrolled, crenellated and patterned contents. The hall-stand wilted in abject submission; the stairs looked weak and rickety at the first fearful thought. Then Mrs. Albion, in a grey voice, addressed the elephant.

"Will you repeat that, please?" she said through clenched teeth. She was desperate. One thought had taken the place of all others. It was a legend in the family that Uncle Arthur—whose uncle he was had never been clear—

had been sent to prison for a long term, convicted of an unmentionable crime. That thought alone induced Mrs. Albion to address the elephant.

"He's said it twice, Mother," cried Lily; "and he must be terribly uncomfortable. . . ."

"Quiet, Lily! I wish him to repeat that remark."

The elephant eased his position. He regretted his haste in accepting Lily's invitation to come in. "I'm your Uncle Arthur," he repeated with some lack of enthusiasm. But Lily clapped her hands and danced round in front of him.

"I'm Lily!" she cried. "Little Lily!" Her voice rang out bravely against the grey pallor of the lincrusta in the hall. The bead curtains danced with her.

"But this is absurd. What will the neighbours think? Stop dancing, Lily! Go and play quietly out at the back." Mrs. Albion slammed the umbrella into the wickerwork stand. Her worst fears were realized, though she was satisfied now that she was in no danger of physical attack. "And, Lily! Not a word of this, mind. If the Bridie kids are nosey, you had better ignore them. Now, out you go, and let me think in peace."

"Good-bye, Uncle Arthur!" She ran out into the cold afternoon sunshine. How rude Mother had been. Uncle Arthur was standing there so meekly. Probably he was most uncomfortable too. The least one could have done would have been to offer him a bun. Lily was a kind, sweet-tempered child in spite of Mrs. Albion's vigilance. It took more than a church-going mother and her rigid interpretations of truth to discover, much less disturb, the child's convictions. Lily had always believed that an amazing event would happen one wet afternoon. Hundreds of times she had imagined visitors such as Uncle Arthur appearing at the front door. Now it happened, quite suddenly. A new truth had been added to life. While Mother was trying to fit the visitor into the anxious interior of 'The Croft,' she would run out of the 'Tradesmen Only' and buy him a bun—or two, for there was twopence in her savings-box. She was not afraid of Uncle Arthur being sent away, because there had been undeniable anxiety in her mother's voice.

It meant that the front door must be shut at once, before the Starks, from opposite, saw in. Besides, Uncle Arthur was wedged more in than out. It would be a job to get him out again. So Lily skipped off through the 'Tradesmen Only' and ran into the baker's shop, ignoring the Bridie children who called after her at the corner.

Mrs. Albion stood alone with the elephant in the frightened house. She was trying to calculate.

It was more difficult than calculating the hire-purchase terms of a mahogany radiogram (like the Bridies, only better); more difficult than finding the money for the motor-car insurance (the Starks had only a three-wheeler); more difficult than what to wear at the Garden Fête; and more difficult, even, than entertaining George's important client to tea on a Sunday. Mrs. Albion was trying to calculate the exact dimensions of the rumour she remembered hearing in family circles concerning Uncle Arthur and his unmentionable crime. It had not been mentioned for ten years. George had always declared, looking down his nose, that there were ugly things in many families which need never come to light if they were never mentioned in any circumstances. One must never take a risk with a thing like that, he had said. It led to loss of prestige, goodwill, and—inevitably—clientèle. And then, of course, there were the neighbours. Look at Mrs. Carver, when her sister was divorced. She was hardly able to go out of the house: and everyone sent her anonymous letters. Mrs. Albion turned over in her grey-curtained mind the words: 'I'm your Uncle Arthur.' There was something sinister, something irrevocably destructive, about them. From an elephant, too.

She was now satisfied that the patient beast who had stood in front of her had said these words, and might say them again. She had heard, too, of elephants trumpeting, particularly when cornered. There was no time to be lost. The Bridies, the Starks, or (Heaven forbid!) one of the snooty Miss Carvers, might at any moment pass, and, looking through the laurels, see the elephant. Worse still, they might hear him repeat his declaration.

"Come in," she said, "if you must. I'll put you into the conservatory till George comes home from work."

Wherever he had come from, Uncle Arthur could never have encountered a less gracious invitation. The front door was pressed right back on its hinges as he strained to squeeze his hindquarters through. Mrs. Albion, her hands clumsy with fear and disgust, fretted with the bead curtains, and opened invitingly wide the double doors leading to the conservatory. It was fortunate that for privacy George had whitewashed the conservatory glass. The neighbours had seemed to live at one time upon the door-step of the sitting-room which could be seen through the glass. George had determined that there were limits to neighbourliness: there was a point when you must keep yourself to yourself. That determination, Mrs. Albion reflected, had arisen at the time he had become junior churchwarden. Now the whitened panes were to succour them in a situation which might imperil the very foundations of life at 'The Croft.' It showed, in a way, how guidance, and a little common sense, sometimes followed services unstintingly given, services which, at the time of their being offered to George, were considered to be of questionable value, as the Carvers were the only people in the road who went to church, and they alone were to witness the dignity of his duties.

Mrs. Albion sighed. There were no plants in the conservatory; nothing but a few gardening tools and Lily's pram. She quickly moved these to one side. The elephant was still straining at the front door. Every moment jeopardized her position. The latter end of that elephant writhing in her front door, were any of the neighbours or the tradesmen to catch sight of it, would give rise to endless rumour and speculation. Sooner or later Uncle Arthur's name would be mentioned. No. Emergency action was necessary. Her own hat hung upon the kitchen door. In another moment she had withdrawn one of its pins and was out through the 'Tradesmen Only.' There she met Lily carrying her little bag of buns.

"Oh, Mother, what are you going to do?" cried Lily, waving her bag. "Oh, Mother, I am excited!"

‘Sh-sh! Remember what I told you about keeping to yourself. You’d better stay quietly in the kitchen till I call you.’

“But you’re not going to hurt Uncle Arthur with that pin?”

“Be quiet and mind your own business!” Mrs. Albion’s voice swept through the shrubberies like the grey wind.

“Shan’t!” cried Lily defiantly. The shrubberies were lit with tinsel, like Christmas-trees. The ‘Tradesmen Only’ swung musically upon its hinges, twinkling with iridescent red like a huge garnet brooch. Uncle Arthur was just round the corner!

“What, Lily!” Mrs. Albion, half stifled by the heavy air of the frightened shrubberies, was suddenly at a loss for words. She turned quickly and ran to the front door, from which the straining bulk of the elephant’s haunches still protruded. All was lost if anyone should see her now, or overhear the cries of Lily. She staked her all on the efficacy of the hat-pin which she jabbed into a soft part of the great mammal which was inflicting such terror upon her home.

Immediately there was a roar, and the next moment the elephant was inside the house. With the voice of a church organ he emitted peal upon peal of sound.

“I’m your Uncle Arthur—Ouh!” he trumpeted. “I’m your Uncle Arthur—Ouh!” Mrs. Albion slammed the door after him. He went through the hall into the conservatory. But he continued to cry out. The neighbours could hardly fail to hear those cries from the conservatory. The elephant sat down on the place where she had jabbed him.

“Can’t you be quiet now?” shouted Mrs. Albion.

The trumpeting continued.

What have we done, thought Mrs. Albion, that we should have been visited in this way. She thought of a dozen mean things she had done during the last few weeks. Not one of them seemed to justify the visitation of an elephant.

The trumpeting filled the house. The glass of the conservatory rattled. Lily came running in from the kitchen.

Mrs. Albion made as if to slap her daughter for disobedience, for spending her pocket-money, and because she was afraid to slap the elephant. But Lily was too quick for her.

"Poor Uncle Arthur," she cried, going into the conservatory. "But look what I've brought you. Buns!"

The trumpeting ceased.

With a benign expression, Uncle Arthur reached out his trunk and took the buns. He was satisfied: he liked buns. "Run round to the baker's and get half a dozen more, Lily. No, get seven—for sixpence." Mrs. Albion could not conceal her relief. Seven buns, though extravagant, was not an impossible price to pay for security, till George came home from work. "And if you meet anybody, and they ask you what the noise was, say it was the wireless."

"Don't go and hurt him again while I'm gone, Mother. It's going to be such fun having him." The colours and shapes of a tropical jungle danced in profusion around her as she passed up the few yards of drive to the front gate. The late afternoon light which laved the tidy avenue in pungent ordinariness, swirled about her in magical effulgence. Something had happened. The avenue, the drive, the front door, the wicker hat-stand, and, most of all, the white-washed conservatory would never be the same again. An elephant had come.

"Lily, dear!" Mrs. Bridie leant over her gate. "Are you all right at home? We thought we heard such a funny sound just now. I was just going to send to see. . . ."

"Mother says it's our wireless." Nobody could tell an untruth and be aware of the glory of the afternoon.

"Oh, a NEW wireless?" Mrs. Bridie felt that she had not been kept abreast of local affairs. Lily skipped on towards the baker's. Uncle Arthur will have had nine buns, she thought: how satisfied he will feel!

But all was not well at 'The Croft.'

George Albion, on his return from business, had not expected to find his wife conversing with an elephant.

"You had no business to come here," she was saying. "I don't care whether you starve or what happens. I am not going to be made the talk and, of course, the laughing-

stock, of the whole avenue. . . ." George stood still. It was not an elephant : it couldn't be.

"What ARE you talking about?" he asked, ignoring the elephant altogether.

"Can't you see, George?" snapped Mrs. Albion.

"Yes," he said, relieved that she saw it too. "An elephant."

"I should think it is an elephant."

"But what made you get it?" George Albion was losing his self-control. All things considered, his business reputation, his authority, his office in the church. . . .

"It came. It walked in." Hysterically she turned again to address the elephant. "I don't care whether you say you're Uncle Arthur or not. . . ."

"I am your Uncle Arthur," said the elephant.

Mrs. Albion faced her husband as she would have faced death. There was no pride or arrogance or even cunning left in her demeanour. She looked sallow, ruttled with anxiety : and all the Albions' fears emerged from their hiding-places behind the bead curtains.

"Does anyone know?" said Albion at last.

"Only Lily."

"Where is she?"

"Buying buns."

Mr. Albion glared. Buns on Sundays, yes—but on weekdays it was just the kind of extravagance he was determined to put down. His small anger vented his huge quaking fear. "Why buns?" he roared.

"For the elephant."

Mrs. Albion's words laid him like ashes. Nobody spoke till Lily returned. Nobody answered when she asked if she should give Uncle Arthur the buns. They watched her feed sixpennyworth of buns to the elephant. Then George announced that he would speak to the elephant alone. The legend about Uncle Arthur's crime had been unmentionable.

When they had gone, he lit the gas and questioned the elephant for an hour. He asked every question that a careful business man could ask an elephant. There was no

reply at all. Then, looking closely at his visitor, he noticed that the small eyes were closed. The elephant was asleep.

That night, the Albions came to the most critical decision of their lives : they decided to keep Uncle Arthur concealed in the conservatory. It was the only safe course. With constant attention and vigilance they would be able to protect themselves from a danger which both agreed would destroy those virtues more precious than life itself, the respect of their neighbours, financial stability, and the support of the church. In the course of time the elephant might be induced to explain himself.

“ Shall I buy some more buns for Uncle Arthur ? ” said Lily at breakfast.

“ Yes, dear. Run and get seven more.”

With the sixpence warm in her hand, Lily ran out into the bright new morning.

“ What, more buns ? ” said the baker’s wife. “ You are a hungry girl, Lily.”

“ We shall need plenty of buns just now,” replied Lily, with joy in her voice which the baker’s wife failed to understand.

Plenty of buns were needed at ‘ The Croft.’

During the next fortnight they tried every form of food, from dog-biscuits to rice-pudding. Uncle Arthur disliked them all. With anything but buns he grew restless, muttering to himself, and threatening to trumpet as he had done when Mrs. Albion jabbed him. He needed plenty of buns. It varied from three to four dozen. It was no good running and buying them by the bag. They were sent round by special delivery.

“ And the more buns they has,” said the baker’s wife to Mrs. Bridie, “ the thinner they gets. Like a pair of shadows, though Lily don’t seem to suffer. . . .”

Mrs. Bridie nodded. “ I shouldn’t wonder,” she said, “ if there’s not something going on. Just what it is, I can’t get at. . . .”

Everybody suspected something, but nobody suspected that the Albions were keeping an elephant.

Uncle Arthur said very little for three weeks, but he

seemed to think his own thoughts, not snatchily as Lily had seen her mother think about possessions, but rhythmically, like rain on wet afternoons. He was a pleasure to watch.

George Albion took to sitting by the conservatory door in the evenings, at first in order to carry on interrogation, but later because he, too, found pleasure in watching Uncle Arthur think. Sometimes he caught himself thinking himself: and one evening he read a book to Lily and the elephant.

Mrs. Albion did not join them until a week or so later, when the intensity of local gossip drove her out of the sitting-room. They gave up lighting the gas there because friends were always calling on some pretext or other and mentioning casually the subject of buns.

Three to four dozen buns a day for three people.

Every other evening one of the Miss Carvers would call to see if her cat had strayed. Young Stark would pop in to borrow insulating tape. The Bridies—any pretext was enough for them.

Mrs. Albion became much kindlier when she met them all in the street, however: and everyone agreed that Lily was radiant. Lily had lost her spots, and that couldn't be buns.

Mrs. Albion found that sitting with Uncle Arthur calmed her. Sometimes she held Lily's hand, and sometimes when they were all sitting round together she sang rather sentimental songs. The bead curtains clicked merrily and Uncle Arthur's eyes twinkled. Except for the expense of buying buns, fears and anxieties vanished from the Albions' home. They had sold the car and sold the wireless set, and were wondering what to give Uncle Arthur for Christmas, when they realized that they had very little money left.

"Though we shall always be quite happy on what I earn," beamed George Albion.

"I think it's time Uncle Arthur worked for his living, too," said Lily. "I'll tell him there's no more buns, and see what he does."

"He's a lazy old thing, bless him," sighed Mrs. Albion. "It's a pity he costs us so much in buns; but then, I must say I don't grudge it."

That night Lily told the elephant that there were no more buns, when she went to kiss him good night. They all laughed when she said it. They wondered if it would make him think of something new to say. But he thought ponderously that evening and went to sleep early.

In the morning he had gone.

“How he went through that door beats me!” muttered Albion.

“We shall have to tell the baker not to send the buns,” sighed Mrs. Albion.

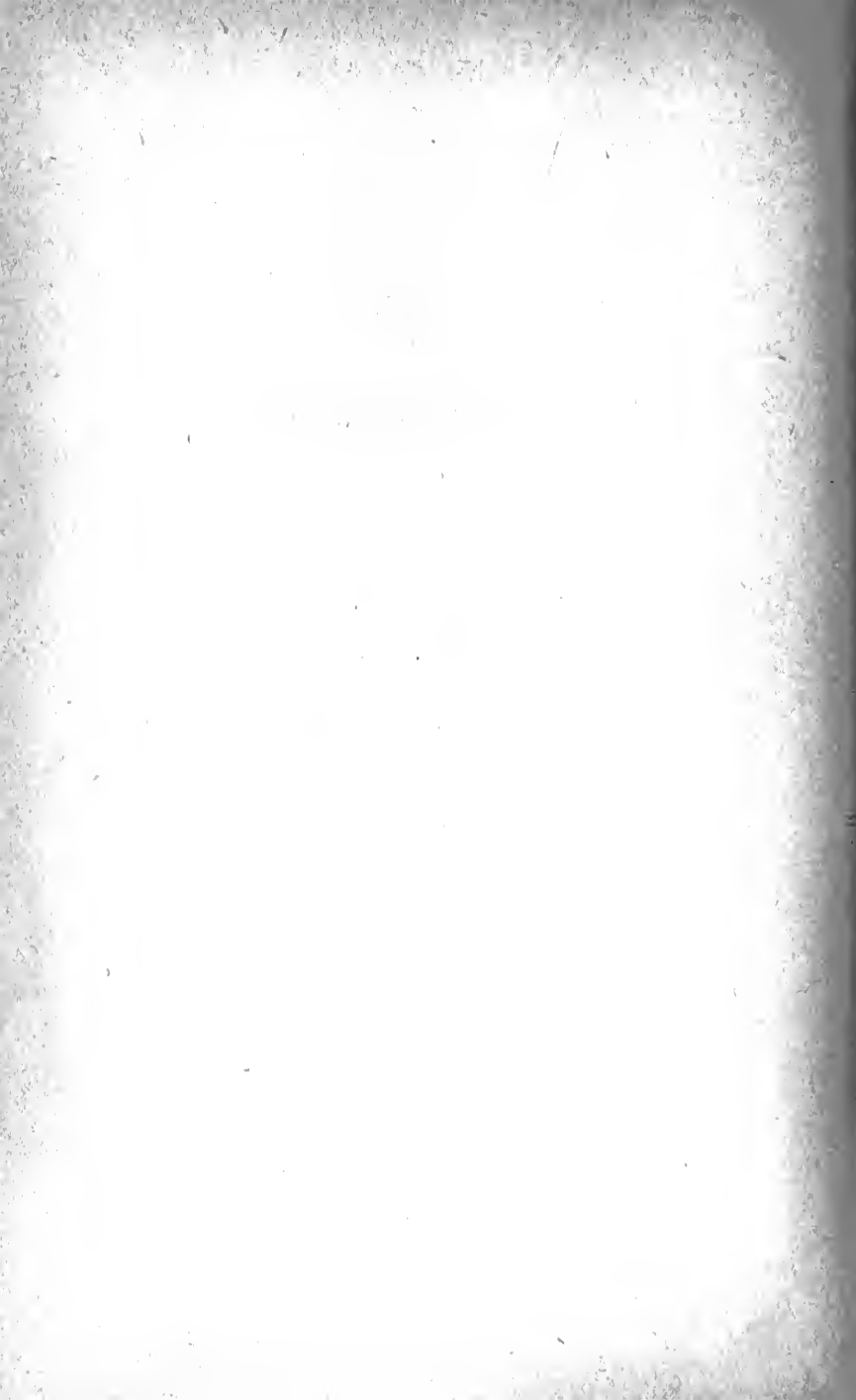
Lily cried a little at first. But the world had not changed : it was still full of surprise. Something had happened. They bought her a small grey toy elephant for Christmas. But her father and mother laughed more often now, and they all agreed that it was not a good substitute for Uncle Arthur, so they burnt it.

In the avenue and round the corner, the inhabitants discussed the Albions' order for buns, whenever more than one of them was gathered together. Its sudden cessation did nothing to diminish speculation. It gave the story a finality which added to its relish. They discuss it still : and if the Albions overhear them, they just laugh.

IVAN ROE

★

My Husband is Ill



I WAS born in London, and got into the habit of reading the *Daily Express* when aged four. I took a newspaper with me to the first private school I went to, but was so unpopular that I gave up newspapers for a long time afterwards.

I had a conventional education in roughly twenty schools in different parts of England. I won a scholarship to a secondary school in Smethwick by accident, arriving late for the entrance examination. I completed my formal education at the age of fifteen by going to a girl's school.

I wrote a string quartet and wanted to become a professional musician. I was teaching myself counterpoint when I was told to find work. When invited to present myself for an interview at the office of a firm of bedstead makers I burned their letter and said I had not received it.

I received five shillings a week for learning to be a newspaper reporter. No sooner had I become fairly competent than circumstances (notably walking home in the rain at midnight six times a week) combined to undermine my health. I needed a holiday. I 'married' two people in a newspaper a fortnight before their time and was 'suspended,' thereby earning a month's leisure in which I wrote a 150,000 word novel.

I reported no more after that, but became a feature-writer. I wrote under about fourteen pen-names and sometimes produced a million words a year. I live in Edgbaston (which is a bad imitation of Kensington or Hampstead). I play the gramophone, collect material for several books, invent an instrument called the Glute, and like to drink beer when talking. I also like to sleep when it is possible.

IVAN ROE.

MY HUSBAND IS ILL

HE began to sweat as he was walking one day along the hot pavement of the road in which he lived. Great beads of moisture formed on every part of his body, though it was late evening ; he was returning from his mistress. In a very few moments his clothes were sodden. Several times he raised a wet handkerchief to his head to wipe the blinding moisture from his eyes. He secretly cursed his flesh and toyed with the idea of becoming a skeleton, of feeling the air flowing through between the bones. . . . He looked blinded, pathetic, worried.

He turned carefully and with relief into his garden and traversed the stone path which led to the door. There, as he fumbled in damp pockets for a key, a great quantity of sweat broke out over his eyes and rolled, warmly, down his trembling cheeks. He brought out with his key a handkerchief rolled into a ball and angrily mopped his face. Embarrassed by the heat which made a cauldron of his head and by the shining of the sun in his eyes (it lay low in the west and shone along several hundred yards of white concrete, for the road was monotonously straight), he stuffed the handkerchief into the breast-pocket on his left-hand side.

In the darkness of the house he had hoped to find coolness. But he encountered nothing but a sultry and oppressive warmth. He hung up his hat and passed through the house to the dining-room. His wife was sitting there : a woman of fifty, she was cool and quite still, seated at a window and yet seeming to be hidden in shadow. On the table lay a large bowl of green salad, untouched. He sat down without a word, reached for the bowl, and began to eat with his fingers at a desperate pace. As he did so a thousand thoughts passed across his mind. What had

caused the remarkable heat of the sun at this hour? Why did his wife remain silent? Why as if made of wax in the window, quite cold? Why was not she hot too? And why his hunger, in spite of the heat? In vain he attempted to get cool. And now he perceived that the moisture upon his face came not only from the pores of his skin but from his eyes. Salt tears of vexation and discomfort seemed to issue from every part of his body as he wept.

Finally he gave up his attempt to eat and pushed aside the dish. He rose, snivelling, drawing his hands over his eyes with a curious motion, as though he were blind. In truth he could hardly make out the outline of his wife; and the rest of the room was dissolved in the moisture which flowed from him. An exact knowledge of the house guided him. Every step seemed to be known a thousand times over. Without mishap he walked from the dining-room to the top of the stairs. There, for a moment, he looked about him. A woman's leg disappeared inside a bedroom door. He turned with a start. How could his wife have reached the top before him? For a moment he toyed with the dangerous and thrilling thought that it was not his wife, but his mistress. . . . But surely it was a maid. Why, however, was not his wife there to help him in his distress? Surely it was not his mistress who had come to his aid; no, it was not his wife who had deserted him? He entered the bathroom and turned on the cold tap over the water basin. Meanwhile the sweat flowed even more profusely. He made no attempt to undress, no attempt even to take off his coat. He thought, merely, of escaping the moisture. With shaking fingers he took the handkerchief from his breast-pocket and, as two great globules oozed from beneath each eye, clasped it to his face and plunged his head into the water in the filling basin. . . .

There in the water, beneath his fingers, writhing in the floating handkerchief, he saw two worms six inches long, yellow, translucent, active. In the folds of the handkerchief stirred a third.

Quite quickly the fear and horror which at first assailed him changed to cunning. He fingered his cheeks, now dry,

to find the pockmarks which indicated where the worms had made their escape. Quite quickly also, he realized that when he stood on the door-step, wiping the moisture from his eyes, he had been aware of the third worm, but had negligently, as it were absent-mindedly, placed the handkerchief in his pocket. Surely he had been aware of the worms beneath his face for some time? Surely he had known that between skull and face the worms were at work? But what if, multiplying or growing bold, more worms worked their way out from his skull? What if his features became a Gorgon's head, what if concealment ceased to be possible? Supposing one day he were in a roomful of people, when the worms emerged: they would turn from him with fear and loathing, afraid of the beastly change, and confine him, perhaps, in some hospital for diseases of the skin.

The worm which had come from him while he stood on the door-step was crushed. He wrapped the three, still moving, in the handkerchief. He wiped his face carefully on a towel, making sure that no worms were transferred to that too. He went to the garden and buried the worms.

His main concern during the days which followed was to conceal his loathsome disease from his wife. He could have borne anyone but her to see his suffering. He inspected himself in secret, relieved to find no open pores on his face. To make things doubly sure he applied an astringent. He did not walk in the heat, and on very hot days shut himself up. As time passed by he became accustomed to the feeling that worms lay in the dregs of his cups and glasses, in the residue of his soup, underneath the cream on his strawberries. But the fear of discovery, especially discovery by his wife, was far more crushing than this disgust. Sometimes he had to meet acquaintances and consort with them in warm drawing-rooms. On these occasions he trembled and smiled and sat quietly out of the way, striving silently to remain cool. He knew that the worms were at work, knew, too, that one day they were bound to emerge, leaving his skull naked to the air. His shame was not that this should happen, but that his associates, and in particular his wife, should see the parasites drip from his burning face.

The worms did not break through the mask of his flesh again. Long before his death (which was caused by excessive blood-pressure which led to a fit) he knew that they would. For years one could see him in drawing-rooms in a boiled shirt ; his face was quite smooth, his skin glowed, though soft, his eyes burned with a peculiar brightness, and his hands passed innumerable folded, newly laundered handkerchiefs across his face with a practised and cunning motion.

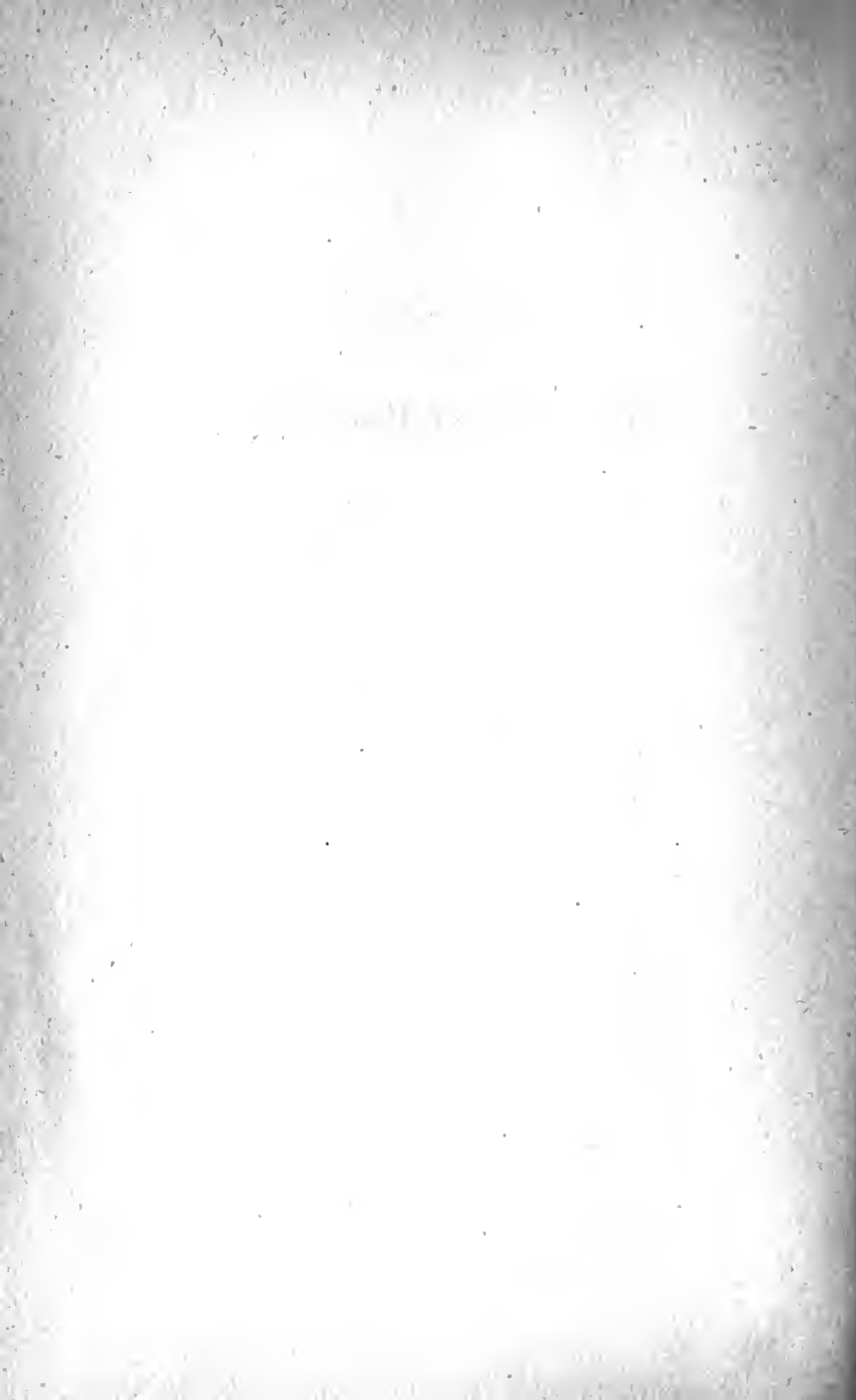
1870

Jan	1	100	100
Feb	1	100	100
Mar	1	100	100
Apr	1	100	100
May	1	100	100
Jun	1	100	100
Jul	1	100	100
Aug	1	100	100
Sep	1	100	100
Oct	1	100	100
Nov	1	100	100
Dec	1	100	100

PHILIP SCOTT

★

Mr. Mellows's Romance



DESPITE the precedent of three generations in the Medical Profession, on leaving Marlborough College at the age of eighteen, Philip Scott went North for the first time in his life, where, having never previously seen so much as the outside of an engineering works, he became an apprentice to Vickers-Armstrongs. Here he gained unusually valuable information about the manufacture of naval guns by filing the rough edges off bolts at the rate of six per minute for forty-seven hours each week for nearly eight months. He thereupon complained vigorously about the distressingly *vis-à-vis* sanitary accommodation, turned Pacifist, and fell in love.

The romance eventually ended in a desire to paint, coupled with mild exhibitionism and all the other usual symptoms of youthful desire frustrated, such as a loud taste in clothes and insipid Socialism.

At the termination of his five years' apprenticeship, knowing a lot of dirty stories and a little engineering, and filled with visions of selling stainless-steel Blackpool Towers to rajahs, the now fledged engineer was sent to the London office for an estimated three months prior to his becoming Our Indian Representative.

Every three months for over two years he was told that he would certainly sail within the next three months. Finally he did sail; but by that time he had been so demoralized by waiting about with little or nothing to do that he had taken to literature.

India turned out to be fifteen hundred miles of railway line per week, bad tempers, heat, food-poisoning, and malaria. Two years saw him on his way home again.

He returned to England via China, Japan, Honolulu, San Francisco, and New York, to take a cottage in a

Dorset wood, grow a beard, and write a life of Buddha. . . .

Philip Scott is now an engineer again, with a naked chin, electric light, a wife, and adequate sanitary arrangements.

PHILIP BODLEY SCOTT.

MR. MELLOWS'S ROMANCE

MR. SIMON MELLOWS hurried down the office steps. He was late. As he arrived in the street he pulled out his big silver watch and consulted it again. Ten minutes past six! Late, but perhaps not too late! He slipped the watch back into its chamois-leather case and replaced it in his waistcoat pocket, and buttoning his dark blue jacket and his black overcoat as he went, pattered along St. Anne's Gate and across Birdcage Walk into St. James's Park. He wished, fervently, that his legs were not so short. It would be too undignified to run, and this rapid walking made him very hot.

"Most unseasonable weather!" he muttered as he crossed the foot-bridge towards St. James's Palace, reflecting that an overcoat was an uncomfortable burden on such an evening. But it was only April, and Mr. Mellows always wore his overcoat until the end of May.

Impatiently, he waited for the traffic to clear so that he could cross the Mall, wiping, as he stood upon the curb, the mist of perspiration from his pince-nez with a clean, cambric handkerchief which knew no other duty. Once more he was off. He unbuttoned his overcoat, then his jacket, and pulled out his watch again. "Oh, dear, oh, dear! I shall miss her. I know I shall." But he hurried on, breaking into a run for a few paces, then back to a rapid walk again, looking about as though fearful lest someone should have noticed his unseemly haste.

At the bottom of St. James's Street he stopped and peered up the hill ahead of him. "Not there!" He turned and looked along Pall Mall. "Ah!" He waited, his heart pounding wildly in his sunken chest, while a slim figure in a smart red hat and a well-cut grey coat with broad, military

lapers, sauntered along the pavement in his direction and turned up into St. James's Street. After all, he was in time. A sigh of relief escaped from between his thin, half-parted lips, and at a more leisurely pace he set off up the street, keeping at a respectful distance behind the girl.

They had not gone above a hundred yards, however, when the girl stopped, suddenly, and stamped with her foot as if angered by some passing thought. Mr. Mellows stopped too, turned, and with apparent absorption, gazed at the array of ancient and battered hats which decorated the shop window opposite which he happened to be standing. Out of the corner of his eye, dimly, for he dared not look round so that he could see through his glasses, he watched the girl turn and walk towards him. Nervously, he took out a handkerchief, a common, cotton one, and blew his nose. His thin knees shook.

But the girl did not seem to notice the insignificant little clerk. There was a frown upon her usually so smooth white brow, and the corners of her little, cherry-tinted mouth drooped petulantly. Mr. Mellows watched her reflection pass his in the plate-glass window of the shop, waited a few seconds, then turned and followed her down St. James's Street and along Pall Mall. Was she going back to that dull, grey building in Whitehall? He wondered. He guessed that she was, and smiled to himself and nodded his head, which was nearly bald beneath its well-brushed bowler hat, when he saw her turn down the steps at Waterloo Place. He followed her into the Mall, through the Admiralty Arch and round into Whitehall, crossing on to the other pavement when she drew near to the door-way which, for several months, he had known to be that of the office in which she worked.

He saw her go in, then walked a little way along the street, hoping that she would not be many minutes. Mrs. Drenning liked him to be punctual for his supper and she was a good landlady. His thoughts strayed back to the girl in the red hat—Miss Rosemary Fitzgerald, he called her. . . .

Suddenly he was aware that she had come out into the street again, and under her arm was a neat brown paper

parcel. 'It might be a pair of shoes,' Mr. Mellows reflected, 'Or it might be . . . But, no! . . .' Angrily he checked the too-intimate trend of his impassioned thoughts and set off in pursuit once more. Back into Pall Mall they went, up St. James's Street, and into the bustling stream of Piccadilly. She crossed over, utterly calm and unperturbed by the traffic, concerning which her pursuer was so anxious on her behalf. He stood on the pavement in an agony of suspense until she was safely over and had turned up into Dover Street. Mr. Mellows sighed. All was well now, but he crossed the road after her. One never knows. . . . In Dover Street, in Berkeley Square even, or in Mount Street itself. . . . Anything might happen.

Mr. Mellows followed the girl, watching her every movement until she was lost to sight behind the big, green front door in Mount Street.

"Good night, Rosemary," he whispered to the empty street before he set off for his lodgings in the Pimlico Road.

Mr. Mellows let himself in with the latch-key which he kept with his others in a small, leather wallet. The wallet contained four hooks, so there were four keys: the latch-key, the key of his desk at the office, and the key of his suitcase (which was only used for an annual holiday to Brighton): on the fourth hook was the key of his mother's sewing-machine. She had been dead for many years, but Mr. Mellows liked to have a keepsake always by him. He went up to his dingy sitting-room and found Mrs. Drenning laying the table for his supper.

"I'm sorry if I'm a trifle late," he told her, "but Miss Fitzgerald kept me. After we had met in St. James's Street, she suddenly remembered that she had left some very important papers at the office, so, of course, we had to return for them."

"Well, you certainly are gone on that young lady, Mr. Mellows. Every night you see her home. It takes me back to when my Alfred, as the War took, was courting me." A broad, motherly smile lit up her kindly face. "I shall be real sorry to lose you when you get married."

"Ah!" Mr. Mellows sighed and nodded his head from

side to side. "Do you know, Mrs. Drenning, I am beginning to wonder if she will ever answer yes."

"Well, she'll be a fool if not. That I do say. A woman couldn't ask for a nicer husband than you'd be. You have tidy habits and are a pleasant-spoken gentleman." Mrs. Drenning cleared her throat and rearranged the neat bow which decorated her ample bosom.

"But Miss Fitzgerald is a lady of high birth, Mrs. Drenning."

"She's a secretary. You told me so last week."

"Ah, yes! But, you see, she is employed by a very influential gentleman, a Cabinet Minister."

Mr. Mellows sighed again, sat down in an arm-chair beside which his slippers were laid ready for him and began to unlace his boots.

"Well, well! I mustn't stop here gossiping or your supper will be burnt to nothing." And Mrs. Drenning shook her head sadly at the bowed form of her love-lorn lodger, then bustled from the room.

Mr. Mellows pulled off his boots and thrust his feet into his old carpet slippers, fingering them fondly and admiring the skill with which Mrs. Drenning's needle had repaired the ravages of time.

Sometimes, when despair ran high, he could not help wondering whether Mrs. Drenning would not make a more useful wife than the girl he called Miss Rosemary Fitzgerald. Rosemary! It was a charming name, and he had given it to her only after many weeks of serious debate, long after he had lost all hope of discovering who she really was. He lived for her, and after he had gone to bed he would carry on little conversations with his pillow, pretending that it was she. He would laugh a little shyly as he pulled it to him. Then he would pour out his passionate, aching heart to the wretched thing, calling it a dozen different pet-names and telling it that it did not really love him. "Oh, Rosemary, Rosemary," he would cry, burying his thin face in the pillow, "what can I do to make you love me? Ah, if only I could tell you how I worship you!" And then he would sob himself to sleep, where, in vague, troubled dreams,

Rosemary would come to him and give him something of the love he craved.

Night after night, some such pathetic scene would be enacted in that little bedroom over the Pimlico Road, and each evening at six o'clock Mr. Mellows would hurry across the Park to see that his beloved got safely home.

He had seen her, quite by chance, when, instead of going straight home from the office as had been his custom, he had walked over towards Piccadilly to see if he could find some early daffodils as a surprise birthday present for Mrs. Drenning, for he knew that they were her favourite flowers and suspected that she would not consider his advances to be misplaced. In St. James's Street, however, he had chanced to pick up a girl's bag and return it to the owner : she had smiled and thanked him : the flowers were forgotten and his advances to Mrs. Drenning were left unspoken. The bag had belonged to the girl he now called Miss Rosemary Fitzgerald.

The sad days had become weeks, the weeks months, and the months numbered close upon a year, when, one Sunday morning, the weather being fine and pleasant, the disconsolate Mr. Mellows set out across Belgravia to take a constitutional in Hyde Park. His once so sprightly gait was slow and halting : his little bald head was bowed in melancholy thought. He hesitated for a moment to look at the horses in Rotten Row, but soon walked on, for they did not really interest him, and passing close by the foot of the Achilles Statue, he made his way along the path which leads thence to the Serpentine.

Beside the lake, the little man sat down on a seat and watched an Airedale swim out to fetch the stick which a youth had thrown for it, then his eyes closed : he was worn out by sleepless nights of misery.

"Peter, Peter, come back !" Something vaguely familiar in the voice awakened Mr. Mellows. He looked up and saw that a small, white Sealyham was following in the Airedale's wake. He looked round for its owner. Rosemary Fitzgerald was standing within a few yards of him, and it was her voice that he had heard.

His chance had come. Solemnly he took off his bowler hat, put it carefully on the seat and walked into the water to retrieve the truant sealyham. The dog was no swimmer, and he caught it without difficulty. Holding it at arm's length, its legs still paddling frantically, he waded back to land and laid the offender at its mistress' feet. She was convulsed with laughter.

"I'm terribly sorry," she exclaimed when she was somewhat recovered. "It was awfully rude of me to laugh like that, but you really did look so funny and serious." She opened her bag and fumbled in its mysterious depths. "Please accept this in token of my gratitude. I really am very, very grateful." And she pressed a ten-shilling note into Mr. Mellows's hand.

Mr. Mellows picked up his bowler hat and set off for the Pimlico Road, his sodden trousers clinging about his ankles. At Hyde Park Corner a man was selling flowers. He had no daffodils, but there were masses of red roses on the barrow. Mr. Mellows bought two large bunches of them and continued on his way.

ANTHONY HECKSTALL SMITH

★

A Saucer of Milk



SELF-EDUCATED by reading during school-hours at Malvern College and, later, while in Fleet Street.

Editorial staff of *The Field*, under the late Sir Theodore Cook. Edited *The Yachting World*.

A recognized authority on yachting and ski-ing. Writes fact and fiction for many papers and journals in Great Britain and the U.S.A.

ANTHONY HECKSTALL SMITH.

A SAUCER OF MILK

MRS. AGATHA CARTWRIGHT—'Aggy' to her friends—lunched every day at the Ritz, the Embassy Club, the Berkeley, Claridge's, or Prunier's, because she had to.

If she did not lunch with her friends, which was seldom, she rather reluctantly paid for herself. On such occasions she ate sparingly, and told everyone who passed her table that it was her day for banting. But, in company or alone, Agatha Cartwright never failed to appear at one or another of these restaurants, between the hours of one-forty-five and three. It was her business to do so, for in these places she met her friends and enemies, and received orders from them to decorate their houses, mews, and flats.

She had a shop in a Mayfair side street, and at the back of the shop was a cubby-hole (originally built for quite a different purpose) that served as her office. Sometimes, for months on end, Agatha never went inside this office, containing only a slightly battered escritoire—a discovered fake once sold as genuine Louis XV—a telephone, and a chromium plated chair of a design too grotesque to be stomached even by her greatest sycophants. In reality, her office was any one of the aforementioned eating-places, just as her shop-window was the house where she gave intimate little dinner and bridge parties, carefully mixing together the right and the wrong people, so long as the latter had money. It was said, rather maliciously, that after one of her more successful parties, Agatha sold the dining-room table complete with its appointments and the entire contents of her bridge-room to an American heiress who paid cash before leaving the house.

There were countless stories of this nature told about Agatha Cartwright, some more spiteful than others, but all

of them spiteful because, being a success, she had many enemies who were charming to her and a few friends who told her the truth.

Algy Cartwright had long since given up the struggle of trying to live with his wife. He had borne with her patiently for twenty years. Then, as is told in one of the countless stories, he came home one night from his club to find that his bedroom furniture had been sold, and the sight of his most secret possessions heaped upon the carpetless floor so distressed him that he left next morning for the south of France, where he took to painting in water-colours, and strange, unmentionable vices. Agatha never troubled to divorce him. She had grown so accustomed to parting with her personal belongings at a moment's notice that, some said, she never missed him at all. She even sold some of his exceedingly inferior and highly colourful paintings to her clients, generously sending him the money, less twenty per cent. commission on the sale.

This buying and selling of furniture, however lucrative, was only a sideline to Agatha's more serious business of interior decoration. By the destruction of other people's houses she made quite a substantial income. By convincing her clients that a fire-place constructed entirely of broken bottles was infinitely more charming than one designed by Adam, or replacing their fine oak panelling with railway company's discarded posters, she managed to live comfortably in her little house off Knightsbridge, patronize an expensive dressmaker and go for a month's holiday every year, staying in the houses she had decorated.

Originality was the keynote of her success. But she had, too, an inventive brain and an eye for free publicity.

She kept open house to all gossip writers. There was no atrocity she would not commit in the name of art. Year after year, with studied cunning, she launched some new frightfulness upon the world of interior decorating. It was she who had been responsible for introducing varnished newspapers as curtains. The craze spread like the Fire of London. But the simile is too near to reality. For when Lady Entwhistle's house was burnt to the ground entirely

because of these newspaper curtains, Agatha's business was in jeopardy.

Lady Entwhistle had gone to law with her insurance company, and had lost her case and her claim for several thousands, solely on account of those curtains. Agatha only saved her face and her fortune by springing multi-coloured asbestos furniture and metal wall-paper upon an astonished world the following autumn.

But that all happened many years ago. Now, at forty-nine, Agatha Cartwright was established. Her clients were drawn from an exclusive circle and, under her tuition, they found it impossible to live with the same furniture, colour-schemes, and house-fittings for more than a year at a stretch. They paid, and paid handsomely, for their eccentricity, seeing nothing strange in the fact that for three months in every year Agatha's workmen took possession of their homes. Nor did they complain when the result of the redecorating in no way resembled the original plan, and the bill exceeded the estimate by one hundred per cent.

"Dear Aggy," they said, "is *so* artistic. What can one expect?"

"Exactly, darling," their friends replied. "No one knows what to expect from Aggy, the lamb. That's why she's so thrilling."

It was all very profitable and simple for Aggy. So profitable and so simple that the sharp corkscrew nose of Lady Honoria Pidworth, raised high, scented both these qualities and, as it did so, the first cloud appeared upon the horizon of Agatha's contentment.

Honoria, who had been one of Agatha's closest enemies, submitting her house off Park Street to suffer the latter's craziest originalities, started her own interior decorating business and opened a shop not a stone's throw from Agatha's. Honoria, too, took to lunching daily at the same restaurants as her rival, to giving intimate little dinner and bridge parties, to selling her furniture (furniture, moreover, that she had bought from Agatha in the first place), and to hurling new frightfulness, even more alarming than Agatha's, at her friends.

Moving as they did in the same circle, the competition between the two women became terrific.

Sometime they met at the same luncheon table, when one or another of their friends considered it diverting to bring two such hated enemies together for the entertainment of the rest of the guests. On such occasions Agatha and Honoria always kissed at meeting, and their conversation was freely punctuated with extravagant endearments that caused their fellow-guests to make odd noises with their soup and to do the 'elephant trick' with their hock. The situation was delightfully embarrassing for everyone.

But the strain of this competition was beginning to tell upon Agatha. Her slightly prominent blue eyes, questing the room in search of custom, took on a haunted expression, while the sight of Honoria talking to a rich acquaintance immediately affected her digestion, with the result that she became the victim of distressingly noisy hiccups. More than once these had caused her to depart from a luncheon-party with the knowledge that she was leaving behind many hundreds of pounds' worth of business.

Working in underground ways, Agatha had done all in her power to frustrate Honoria's success. She had bribed away her best workmen, planted spies in her workrooms, and once, when she heard that Honoria was about to launch silver paper as a medium for mural decoration, nearly ruined herself in a frenzied attempt to corner the market in that commodity.

Honoria, for her part, was not above stooping to particularly low forms of reprisal. She it was who told the gossip writers at a cocktail party that the lamp-shades Agatha was making for Lord 'Stuffy' Paunchington were made of a material suited to that nobleman's distinctly lower-school wit. Agatha had brought a highly successful action against the only gossip-writing peer who had considered himself sufficiently well-born to publish this sultry piece of news, thus neatly turning the tables on her rival.

But this guerilla warfare could not continue indefinitely. The common friends and enemies of both parties waited hopefully for the day when one or the other would step into the open and declare her hatred.

The climax fell far short of expectations. It came about in this wise.

Agatha was lunching at the Ritz. It was one of her banting days. Chewing her green salad, she was thinking out a new atrocity when the waiter told her that she was wanted on the 'phone. Struggling to swallow the salad, she hastened to the box.

The secretary of the World's Most Glamorous Film Star wanted to know if Mrs. Cartwright could come right over to the Savoy Hotel to talk over the doing-overr of an apartment furr hur Mistress.

Leaning against the wall of the box, for her knees no longer seemed willing to support her, Agatha said that Mrs. Cartwright would be delighted, and left without paying for her salad.

All the way in the taxi she thought of her triumph over Honoria. This commission would finally spike the hag's guns. Her hand trembled as she lit a cigarette. Never for one moment did she doubt that the order was already hers. She had tremendous self-confidence.

At close quarters, the film star was a little disappointing to Agatha, who was, secretly, one of her fans. Her hair was a most peculiar shade of red that reminded Agatha of the red-lead her plumbers used when fitting bathrooms and other things. It matched her long, varnished nails, which were shamefully dirty. She was still in bed and the heavy curtains were drawn against the daylight. The airless, centrally heated room smelt strongly of stale brandy.

Agatha had to pinch herself and recall the stories she had read in the Hollywood magazines of the star's even more astral salary, of her collection of rubies and emeralds, and the crystal bath and lapis swimming-pool in the home in the Beverley Hills. Even then she was unable to recapture the illusion of the screen.

To make matters worse, the star was tiresomely business-like. She wanted this and she wanted that, and she wanted it all in a hurry. She had a gentleman friend arrivin' next Touesday-week on the *Narmanddie*, and she warnted the apartment done overr with somin quite noo by the time

he stepped arf the shirp at South-hampton. The carst didn't mateura gardam, but the goods did, yessir.

(Agatha found the spate of strange words a little difficult to follow, and the fumes of the brandy were combining with the central heating to give her a headache.)

After an exhausting hour she left with the contract in her bag, and, exhilarated by the bite of the east wind and her victory over Honoria, she walked the whole way back to her shop.

For two days Agatha worked like a beaver, appearing only for a few minutes at the Embassy to let it be known that she and she alone had been selected to decorate the World's Most Glamorous Film Star's apartment.

She was working against the clock, creating frightfulness as never before. Triumph gave her inspiration. She paused for neither food nor drink. For the first time in her life she realized the necessity of keeping her contract. She worked with a method and system that seemed incredible to her employees. She dashed in and out of overheated shops matching materials, and rushed through draughty warehouses giving fabulous orders. She lived in a sea of satin, silk, American cloth, and cellophane, until the 'flu, raging in London at the time, possessed her. She continued to work until she collapsed, then summoned her doctor.

It was useless, she bleated, to talk about going to bed. Her face was flushed, her blue eyes, more prominent than ever, sparkled dangerously. A little delirious, she raved about the World's Most Glamorous Film Star, and dollars, and baths made of black jet and walls hung with bicycle tyres. She must keep going until Tooesday-week. (She said 'Tooesday-week,' just like that, and heard nothing strange about it.)

The doctor said that with the aid of a special tonic and a sleeping-draught, he might be able to keep her on her feet. The tonic must be taken at night. Sleep was very essential. Very essential.

Agatha took the tonic at night, and the sleeping-draught four times a day. . . . Sleep was essential. She slept, off and on, quite peacefully until Tooesday-week.

Lady Honoria Pidworth did over the World's Most Glamorous Film Star's apartment.

Two weeks later an excited world awoke to read in its morning papers that 'Mrs. Agatha Cartwright, the famous Mayfair interior decorator, has sold her business to Messrs. Blank. When interviewed by our reporter in the remarkable wattle and mud lounge of her Knightsbridge house, Mrs. Cartwright said: "I have worked hard at beautifying the homes of others all my life, I now intend to make a home beautiful for my husband somewhere in the South, where the sun always shines." Pressed to give her views as to the future of interior decoration, Mrs. Cartwright was at first reluctant to express herself. At length she said, with a sigh: "You may say that in my opinion the public's sense of art and beauty is being suffocated by the mass of inferior material that is being foisted upon it by mountebanks who, without art or inspiration, have set themselves up as interior decorators. They have prostituted my calling."'

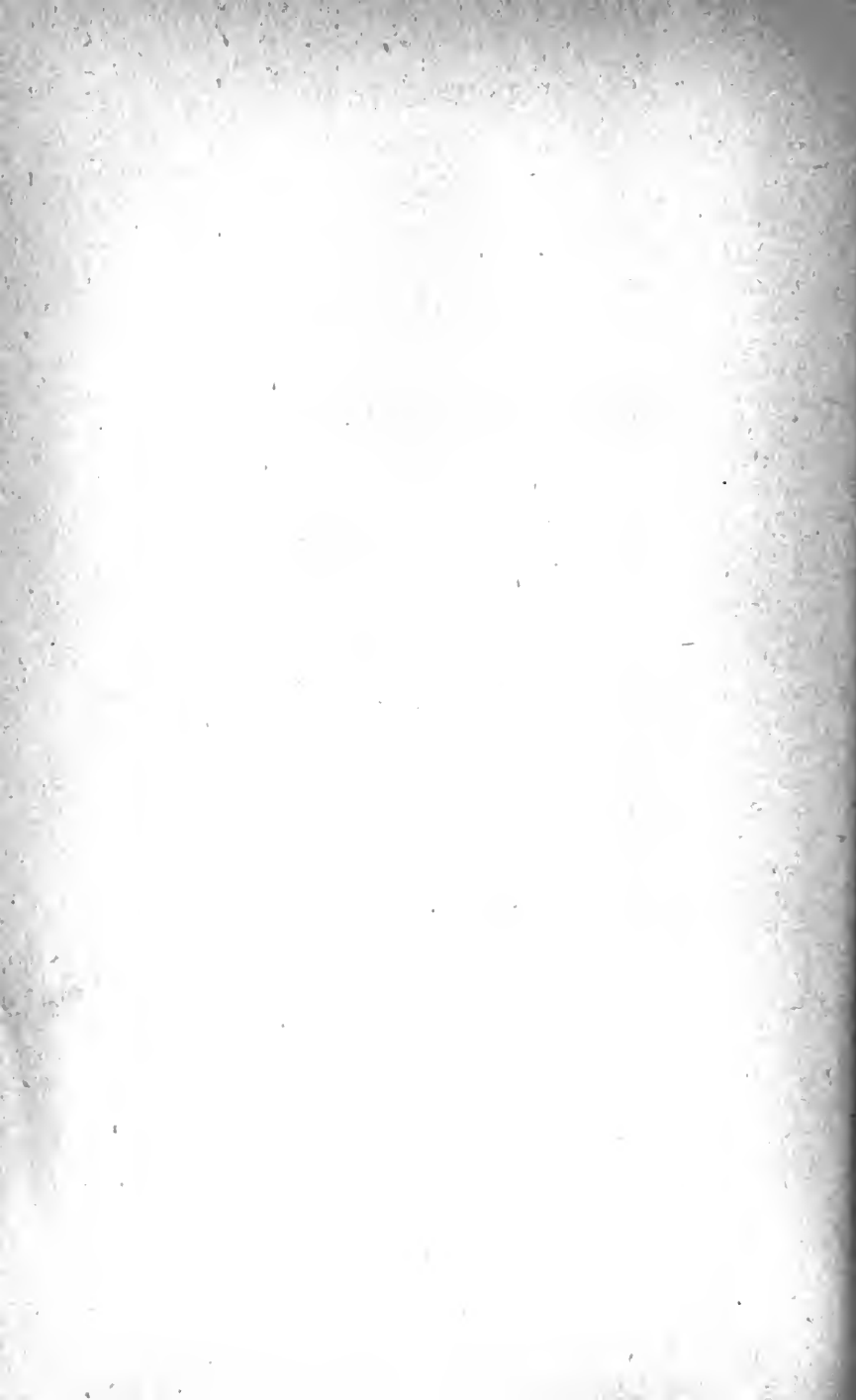
For at least a week Mayfair could talk of little else but the sudden retirement of Aggy Cartwright. It was felt that she had cheated her friends of the dénouement they had hoped to see. At the same time the last dig at Honoria was worthy of Aggy at her best. But why the flight to the South? Something very odd must have happened to send Aggy rushing to the unwelcoming arms of poor old Algy.

Honoria gave a simply colossal cocktail party to answer these questions. The World's Most Glamorous Film Star was the guest of honour, but she had a hang-over, and never turned up.

RANDALL SWINGLER

★

Mrs. Ponting's Victory



Primrose Hill Road,
N.W. 3.

DEAR MR. HARRISON,

I'm afraid this account of my life will be very dull. I am not a very unusual or exciting person, nor have I had a life of spectacular adventure, though it has been exciting and funny enough for me.

I was born in 1909, and brought up in a Midland town. During the War it exchanged the manufacture of lace for that of munitions and prospered accordingly. I don't think I should recognize it now. My childhood was mainly taken up with making and acting plays and playing various musical instruments. At one time I wanted to be a professional flautist. My so-called education continued along the same lines, acting, music, and producing scurrilous journals in the boot-hole. All efforts to make me into a scholar and a gentleman conspicuously failed, through no fault of the school. I was at Oxford for a short time, enjoying everything that had nothing to do with the University, and very little else. After that I was supposed to be 'teaching' at preparatory schools for three years. Nobody has ever been able to say anything true about English private schools for fear of the laws of libel. During that time I published with Methuen a book of poems called *Difficult Morning*. Somebody told me, apropos of this, 'to give up poetry and take to politics or prose.' The latter part of the advice I have since taken gladly, but not the former. I have since published quite a number of poems in various reviews, and in 1936 a novel, *No Escape*, with Chatto and Windus. Since then I have been writing hard. That's about all. What I hate most: intellectual snobbery, political hypocrisy, sadism, and exploitation. What I like most: people, simple jokes, music, etc. etc.

On the whole very dull and ordinary, but I believe most good writers are quite dull and ordinary people, to anyone who is out for sensational details.

Yours sincerely,

RANDALL SWINGLER.

MRS. PONTING'S VICTORY

MRS. PONTING lived in the house on the corner of Alma Crescent. It was curiously conspicuous with its clean painted front and the windows bulging out prosperously. Beyond it the rest of the crescent curved round like a cliff-face in its unbroken flatness and the scarred mouldering frontage of the houses. Mrs. Ponting's was the only house which was not a tenement, an outpost of respectability among the lower orders. Mr. Ponting had bought it when it was a bargain, the year before he retired, and after his death Mrs. Ponting lived on there in the tall rooms darkened with much furniture and heavy curtains, and the wall-paper with its enormous blotchy flowers.

Nobody ever came to the house on the corner. Only the Vicar of St. Andrew's sometimes had to call and take stately tea with Mrs. Ponting, for she was a regular subscriber to his church funds. But in her twenty-two years of married life Mrs. Ponting had borne no children, and her barrenness had gradually shut her away even from that small circle of society in which she might have moved and had some artificial contact. She lived alone with one maid, in a house from which, even if she had any inclination, she would hardly have dared to emerge, because of its vulgar environment.

Mrs. Ponting was haunted by the voices of the children who played in the alley beside her house. In the winter evenings, having nowhere else to go, they would cluster around the tiny front garden whose flourishing laurel bushes preserved the privacy of Mrs. Ponting's tall-windowed front room, and their cries would mix wildly in the brown foggy dusk. They would sit huddled below the railings on the little ledge of the low wall, like the flocks of sea-birds

clustering on the rocks around a desolate coast, chattering and clapping their wings, then suddenly flying off in vague circles with harsh weird cries, only to return again to the same rocks.

Their noise was torture to Mrs. Ponting. It began at four o'clock in the afternoon, when Alice brought in her silver tea-pot and the little squares of buttered toast in a silver muffin dish, and she laid aside her book, putting her gold-rimmed spyglass between the pages to keep her place. Just as she began, sitting very straight in her high-backed chair, to sip her tea from the pretty cup with the birds painted so delicately on it, there was a rush and a shout and a shrill laugh and the feet clanging oddly on the flagstones all up beside the house. And Mrs. Ponting would put down her tea-cup and clasp her hands tightly together in her lap. It had begun. For the rest of the evening she would sit there, clenching her teeth and rubbing her hands harshly together. She could not concentrate on anything. The fearful ebullience, the sudden rushes, and the wild cries and the laughter, so eerie in the out-of-doors, shocked her and unnerved her with a sharp apprehensive pang, as if it were an invasion of her very privacy. Sometimes she actually found herself shivering with a fear she could not rationalize.

At last she could not bear it. One evening at six o'clock she rang the bell for Alice.

"Alice," she said, "go and tell those children to get away from the garden wall—tell them to be quiet. I can hardly hear myself think for their noise."

Alice was a stolid and sullen woman, and she had a tongue of leather. The children looked up at her in large-eyed bewilderment. They sat there in unnatural silence like a row of stupefied young birds. Alice raised her thick arm and jerked it outwards.

"Nah then," she said, "get on with you—this isn't no place for your screamin' and shoutin'—this is a private 'ouse, this is——"

And the children still gazed up at her with that uncomprehending dazed look, and then suddenly, with one movement, with a ducking of their bodies, slipped from the ledge

and darted away. When they were well across the road, about twenty yards away, they all started yelling at once and the noise fell about the house like a shower of stones. But they kept their distance for that night at least.

Only Mrs. Ponting had now brought nemesis on her head. This house which had just been a headland under which they had been accustomed to perch and try to keep themselves warm on cold evenings, had suddenly sprung to life for the children. They turned their attention to it with a fresh curiosity. Whenever they passed it now, a sort of awe, a sense of adventure, came over them as they looked up to the arrogant bulge of the bay windows, with their portly curtains standing like flunkeys on either side. They became aware of its peculiarity in their neighbourhood. It was invested for them with a legendary wonder, a house where one woman had seven or eight rooms, and spacious rooms, at her sole disposal, while they were living five or six to one room. They stood outside more quietly in the evenings now, gazing at the dark glaze of the curtained windows and wondering what Mrs. Ponting did in all the rooms.

Always they were waiting in half fearful excitement for a new eruption from the mysterious house. But none came. Mrs. Ponting believed she had recovered something like peace once more. Until the children, growing bolder, decided to challenge the monster, as they might have poked a sleeping crab with a stick. The cries broke out anew in the evenings, but more piercing now, insolent, defiant, directed unmistakably at the house itself. Mrs. Ponting sensed that at once, with a quickening of the heart and a hardening of the spirit. She let them go on for a bit. The cries grew more jeering, little snatches of ribald song were lilted, and then there was a rush across the road. But still nobody came. At last, Ted Atkins, very bold, crept into the garden and crouched by the window, squinting through a crack in the curtains.

“There she is—I can see the ol’ geyser——” he whispered hoarsely to the others pressing against the railings, giggling with excitement. The whisper slipped like paper between the cracks of the window and to the ears of Mrs. Ponting,

sitting by the fire and pretending to read. Trembling all over, she got to her feet. There was a boy in the garden. They were really invading her property now. Stiff with anger, but trembling with an unknown fear, Mrs. Ponting went to the door.

At the first sign of her movement, Ted had darted out of the garden, and precipitated by his flight the others had clattered to a safe distance across the wide street. When Mrs. Ponting pulled open her front door and stood on the step, there was nothing to be seen but the dark bunch of the laurel bushes and the faint bronze glow of London in the sky. A man in a bowler hat walked briskly by and looked incuriously at the old-fashioned lady standing rather distraught on her door-step. There was nobody else to be seen in the street. The wind upset Mrs. Ponting's hair and rustled the laurel bushes. Suddenly in her helplessness, reacting to the excitement of her eruption, something like a sob climbed up in Mrs. Ponting's throat ; rather confusedly she closed the door and went back to her seat by the fire. For the rest of the evening she sat there looking into the flames that were hot on her eyeballs and twisting her tiny handkerchief in her hands. She knew now, war was declared.

And truly from that night, Mrs. Ponting had no peace. Now that the monster had been revealed in its all too vulnerable human form, the impudence and audacity of the children knew very little limit. They came into the garden and tapped on the windows, they tore at the shrubs, and hammered on the knocker. They made up little rhymes about Mrs. Ponting and sang them to her through the letter-box. Then one evening, something heavier dropped through that letter-box and the bell rang, quite politely. Alice went heavily along the hall. When she got there, it was a large and long-dead rat. The next morning Alice stolidly gave in her notice. She was sorry to do it, Mum, but she couldn't stand it no longer.

Mrs. Ponting became obsessed almost to madness by this persecution. She hovered for half an hour at a time by the front door, her thin hand shivering on the handle, ready to

pounce out. But always she was too late. She arrived on the door-step to hear the ecstatic clatter of feet on the tarmac of the street and a jeering cry of triumph tossed over to her from away under the saloon windows of the 'Duke of Marlborough.' Once, when she had stood behind the curtain for twenty minutes, she heard the crinkling steps on the gravel outside, and twitched back the curtain in time to see a little pale face floating in the blurred darkness, which was quickly lost among whoops of laughter and churning feet. But that was no victory. Only an added stimulus to the adventurers. At night she hardly slept at all. Her mind would not stop searching for a way to outwit them. There was nothing else she thought of now, by day or night.

As Guy Fawkes' day came near, the children grew wilder. They blacked their faces with coal-dust and put on paper hats and their father's old coats, or a bit of an old skirt of mother's, and they paraded the gutters begging for coppers from passers-by.

That distracted them for a little, and around Mrs. Ponting's house there was an ominous lull. When the day itself arrived, there were no expensive fireworks in spacious back gardens for them. Some had saved a penny or two and bought a packet of sparklers, but for the most part it was a question of hanging around until the market stallholders closed down and began to pack up their remnants and dismantle the weary stalls on their carts, and leave the street littered and derelict as a canal that has been drained. Then the children would dash in among the carts and the canvas and the packing-cases and seize upon any piece of old wood that had been overlooked and dragged it away round a corner. They would throw it down on a pile of old papers they had collected in a gutter, and one would produce some matches from a squashed packet and light the paper. And in a little the flames would leap up, flickering alluringly over the front of their bodies and making them laugh and their blood leap daringly with its warmth and sharp splendour ; they grew wildly excited and began to jump over the flames, fiercely thrilled to feel them snap at

their bare calves. Then one got hold of a crooked stick and picked up the flaming box by one corner and began to whirl it around. The flames trailed like a red mane and the hot light shifted angrily over the scarred dirty faces of the houses. Then as their excitement mounted up until it must burst itself in some impossible action, they began to drag the flaming box along the street with sticks, shouting and leaping over it and dancing like dervishes in a sacred ecstasy all round it. It was vigour, it was heat, it was freedom, it was in one vivid dagger of movement the emotion of all that their circumstances denied them. And when they came opposite Mrs. Ponting's house, with a common surge of effort and with a shout of derisive rebellious triumph, they slung it over the railings into her garden. The rectangle of fire rustled through the air and was caught like a great chrysanthemum in the wiry twigs of the laurel bush. It rested there lightly a moment, then all in an instant the fire had caught up the whole dry bare bush. The flame jumped chattering like finches from twig to twig, then jumped away and then returned, quick and nervous. And then, with extraordinary speed the whole garden was a leaping tower of flame, leaping and tearing at the face of the house.

The children stood in the road, their mouths gaping, the fire striking against the glaze of their eyes. They were paralysed a moment to see their game take on a giant and terrible life of its own. Then at last their terror escaped through their limbs, and in strange dumbness they ran as fast as they could, away, away from the responsibility of the deed.

Mrs. Ponting, brooding by the fire in her little sitting-room upstairs, heard without noticing the strange angry roar of the flames, and before she raised her head and saw the mad light tossing and shuddering on the walls of her room, and felt the ramming pressure of the heat, the fire had already leapt through the windows of the drawing-room below, was already eating up the room and licking at the ceiling. Mrs. Ponting rose slowly and went to the window. Below her there was a sensation of giving and a heavy thud. Behind her dense smoke began to fill in the background.

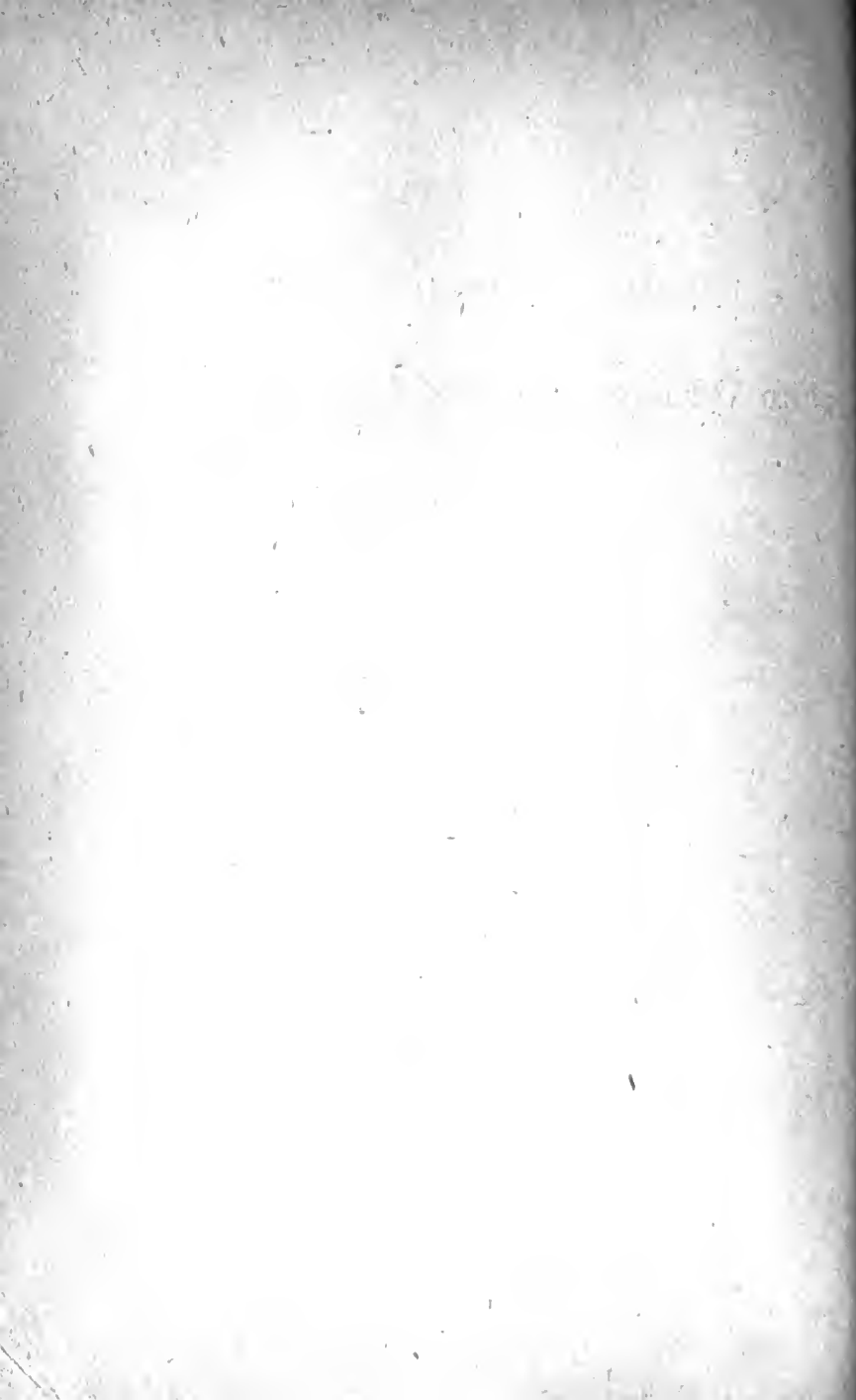
With steady staring eyes she looked out at the leaping wall of flame, shouting in her ear. Nothing could move her. Transfixed with an ecstatic triumph she was murmuring: "They've done it now. Now they've gone too far. They'll catch it for this."

1870
The first of the year
was a very dry one
and the crops were
very poor. The
winter was also
very cold and
the snow was
very deep.

UVEDALE BARRINGTON TRISTRAM

★

The Disillusionment of Mr. Summerton



AGED twenty-six, descended from bandit border lords on the Marches of Wales. Educated by well-meaning priests. Worked as an office boy at eighteen, has been publisher's reader, book salesman, editor of an aviation magazine, knowing nothing about aviation. He is now a partner in a literary and publicity agency. Has been described by his friends as poet, dreamer, literary racketeer, and several kinds of idiot. Wasted three years staving off another man's creditors, but says it gave him inspiration.

Pet aversions : Fascism, Communism, modern democracy, patronizing publishers and overdone steak.

Enthusiasms : The books of Mr. Charles Morgan, darts with beer, and the social doctrines of the Catholic Church.

Clubs : 'Waggon,' 'Coach and Horses,' 'Crooked Billet.'

Hobbies : Avoiding literary young men and sentimental columnists.

Sport : Riding, darts, and baiting critics.

Ambitions : I'm afraid you'll have to wait for these.

Publications : Dull industrial articles in all manner of journals. Political and literary articles in Catholic reviews.

U. B. TRISTRAM.

THE DISILLUSIONMENT OF MR. SUMMERTON

MR. MARTIN SUMMERTON sat down at the bar of the Chien Noir Club in Shepherd Market. The Chien Noir is one of those little establishments, a few of which still exist in dark upper rooms in the backwaters of Mayfair. Mr. Summerton's bloodshot eyes gazed with some annoyance at the wet bar-counter. He was well on the way to becoming very drunk. He was, in fact, drunk already. The bottles on the shelves behind the bar danced a sinister little jig before him, mocking the drunken gravity of his face. He was in serious danger of losing his temper. He was not used to such places. Why hadn't anyone told him what it was like?

He made a harsh suffering sound at the back of his throat. He hated being drunk. Moreover, he wished to be dignified. He wished to be very dignified. He had arranged to meet young Francis Edgar, and it was essential that he should be dignified at this meeting. It was imperative that Edgar, as an aspirant to literary honours, should be impressed with the stature of Mr. Summerton as a man and as a critic. It was most inconvenient that his dignity should be ruffled at such a time. He felt that providence was treating him unfairly. How could he continue to work in the interests of Truth and of Beauty, if his dignity, his self-respect, and his pride were upset?

He looked about him. He was feeling worse. Yes, he was feeling much worse. It was absurd, quite absurd. Why, there had been a time He sighed. His liver was not what it had been.

He heard footsteps on the stairs, straightened himself on his stool, and in a slightly harsh voice ordered a small

Guinness. The steps died away. Mr. Summerton slumped over the bar again, sipping disconsolately at his drink.

A sudden idea seemed to give him new vigour. From his black, official-looking brief-case he carefully removed the yellow-backed copy of *Advance Guard*. Proudly he read the inscription on the cover: SURREALIST TENDENCIES IN THE MODERN NOVEL BY MARTIN SUMMERTON. He preened himself. He might be drunk, but, by God! he was a critic. He placed the glaring journal tenderly on the counter. Mr. Edgar should see the kind of man he was.

Mr. Summerton smiled into the mirror opposite him. His drunkenness seemed to be falling away from him like mist from a willow tree. He stared harder at his reflection, and was not displeased by what he saw. He was an angular-faced man of about thirty-five, with thick wiry hair brushed away from a high forehead *en brosse*, and wide, rather staring blue eyes magnified to giant size by an enormous pair of horn-rimmed spectacles. His ears were very large, and the lobes seemed to have grown almost down to his thick red neck that rested in a self-satisfied roll upon his collar. 'Here,' he thought, 'is a man of substance, a man of no little weight.'

He glanced at the girl behind the bar, his angry blue eyes forbidding her to speak to him. She had a whining disgruntled voice and spoke in an accent that was a mixture of 'refinement' and Cockney. It was an accent with which Mr. Summerton's stomach could not cope that morning. He looked up at her again, and ordered some dry toast. He sighed. Young Edgar was late. He took up the *Advance Guard*. A little light of happiness came into his eyes as he turned up his own article.

He began to read :

At last there is some serious work being done in the novel. It is a relief to read the deep symbolism of Miss Sicklehammer's PROMISCUITY. It is full of wisdom and rich comedy, full of an idealism, the tragedy of which is set to the rattle of machine-guns and haunted by the spectre of injustice,

Mr. Summerton coughed. He read on appreciatively, only pausing for a moment or two when he was served with his toast. That was criticism. That was the stuff to give 'em. He became quite hearty in his exuberant appreciation of his own work. He was in the middle of the article when he realized that Francis Edgar had entered the club.

Mr. Summerton frowned. Mr. Edgar came forward, hand extended to greet him. "Are you Mr. Summerton?" "Yes, I'm Summerton. How do you do, Mr. Edgar?" Martin Summerton drew himself up to his full height. It pleased him to tower over this little man, with his tiny shrivelled hands, his queer screwed-up face, his curly ginger hair, and his uncanny resemblance to some little animal of the woods. Mr. Summerton clapped him on the shoulder, the waves of alcohol wafting away from him as he spoke:

"I've just received the latest number of *Advance Guard*, which contains my article on SURREALIST TENDENCIES IN THE MODERN NOVEL. I presume you are interested in the development of the novel," he said, and without giving the little writer time to answer, continued: "Listen to this. You must FEEL its truth, its sheer forceful GUTS:

" 'At long last, the novel is climbing out of the centuries of decadence, into the finer, freer air of the brotherhood of literary art, into the world guild of the craftsmen in words.' "

Mr. Summerton stopped reading. He was conscious that young Edgar was not listening. He was going to speak. Looking up, Mr. Summerton met the pale watery eyes fixed upon him in a funereal stare.

"I came to ask your advice," Mr. Edgar said in his husky voice that had a disquieting tremble in it. "I came to ask your advice about the finer points of Death."

The *Advance Guard* fell from Summerton's hand into the mess of beer and cigarette ash on the floor.

"Wh—what did you say?" he stammered.

Mr. Edgar laughed, a high-pitched eunuch's laugh. "I

see you're interested. We'll be able to have a nice little talk."

Mr. Summerton shuddered. 'My God,' he wondered, 'am I still drunk?'

"I feel," said Mr. Edgar, "that not enough has been made in literature, of the art of murder, of its matchless craftsmanship, of the mixture of love and hate, and the purest passion which must lie behind almost every murder, no matter what the motive."

"But," said Mr. Summerton, "but . . . but . . ."

Mr. Edgar waved his left hand before him, a brown wrinkled hand, with a forefinger that was bent almost double, and shrivelled to the bone.

"Can't you imagine," he said in a half-whisper, "the man who has tasted the devilish ecstasy of all the vice, of all the crime which this world has to offer—and then—why, then, he passes—he must pass to the final thrill—to MURDER ! It follows, doesn't it? He can take nothing else from the world. He must sacrifice human flesh."

Mr. Summerton brought his hand down with a crash on the bar counter, catching his glass with his hand, breaking it to smithereens.

Mr. Edgar frowned. He was not to be interrupted. "Leave it, leave it," he said impatiently. "The girl can pick it up later." Mr. Summerton bent to retrieve the fallen *Advance Guard*, which was becoming sodden with Guinness, but hurriedly straightened again as he heard Edgar's cluck of impatience. He was so embarrassed, so acutely uncomfortable, that he did not notice that he had cut his finger on his glass. He put the *Advance Guard* gently on the beery bar counter.

Mr. Edgar continued: "Yes, of course, it's madness. Murder is madness. But you can conceive the thrill of it, can't you?"

"Yes, oh, yes," murmured Mr. Summerton.

"I know you are a critic of remarkable insight," said Mr. Edgar. "A student of humanity. I feel you have great imagination. So I know you can realize the exultation of a murderer. He has smashed the poor fabric of humanity.

As yet he has not the secret of life, but he holds the keys of death."

Mr. Edgar came closer. In spite of himself, Summerton was fascinated. The pale hypnotic eyes were fixed upon him, enveloping him in an incalculable atmosphere of evil. He thought he could detect the faintest odour of incense. Must be some scent the creature was wearing.

"To hold the keys of death. Yes, that is the thrill," said Mr. Edgar. He leaned against the bar, plucking nervously at the buttons of Mr. Summerton's jacket with his shrivelled fingers.

"Yes, I could write a book about that. You see, I know all of it. I have felt it. I feel it now. It is an experience that is uniquely mine."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Summerton, staring, all his conceit driven out by an overmastering fear.

"Oh, nothing, nothing. It's just my artistic consciousness, you know, just my artistic consciousness. Funny, isn't it?"

Mr. Summerton stared desperately at the door, praying harder than he had ever prayed in his life before, that someone might come in to relieve their loneliness, that something might happen to end the nightmare dialogue, to rid him of the repulsive creature. At last relief came. Mr. Edgar smiled. He said. "Will you excuse me for a few moments. I really must wash my hands."

"Why, yes, of course." Mr. Summerton beamed Mr. Edgar out of the room, stretched his legs comfortably, tilted back his stool, shivered, stared fixedly at the wart on the barmaid's nose. It was strange and most unpleasant. To his drunken and fear-racked mind, that wart assumed gigantic proportions, and was somehow connected with all the talk about murder. He felt he would go mad if he stayed in that room another moment. He looked at his watch, scarcely knowing why he did. It was two o'clock. He seized his black Stetson hat, muttered something to the barmaid about making his excuses . . . very late for appointment . . . not feeling very well. The barmaid shouted at him that he had forgotten his magazine, but he was gone. She flung it contemptuously to the ground.

He ran down the narrow winding stairs, dashed through the market, and sighed with relief as he reached Curzon Street. London seemed a pool of deep quietness after the club. He felt much better, almost, he reflected to himself, as if he had emerged from purgatory to walk the streets of paradise. He was almost grateful to Mr. Edgar for having afforded him such a sensation.

Mr. Summerton went into Piccadilly for another drink—a whisky—to steady his nerves. He chatted to the barman for half an hour or so, and then strolled into the Park. The sun was shining. He would sit there for an hour or so. Seated comfortably on a bench, his mind wandered back to the terrible little author. He couldn't do anything for him. No, of course he couldn't. But it had been an interesting experience, not nearly so bad as he had imagined at first. It would be something to tell people about. He began to choose the phrases which he would use to tell the story, the little touches of dry humour, the apt epigrams—all those embellishments which he felt made him envied amongst his fellow-men, as a wit and as a raconteur.

How long he sat there in the warm June sun he could not afterwards recall. He was overwhelmed by an almost living sense of fear that no pretence of an amusing story to tell could drive out. He felt that he was being watched, felt that his every movement was being noted with a kind of satanic amusement. It was twilight. The grotesque shapes of the tree branches, like gnarled and monstrous old men, seemed to beckon to him. He rose from the bench, shook himself. Ugh, the afternoon had unnerved him. He looked at his watch. It was nearly eight o'clock, and getting very chilly. He would take a brisk walk down to his club in Garrick Street before going home.

At Hyde Park Corner, his eye was arrested by a poster.

MAYFAIR MURDER

BARMAID STABBED

Now, as a rule, he never bought an evening paper. He had always felt that they were a trifle beneath him. But on

this occasion, something—his curiosity, perhaps—prompted him to buy one. Casually he gave his penny to the man, and glanced :

MAYFAIR CLUB MURDER
Police Clue

In black print farther down the page, he read :

No known motive can be found for the murder of the barmaid in the Chien Noir Club, Shepherd Market, this morning. The police have, however, a clue as to the culprit.

The paper nearly fell from Mr. Summerton's hand. Good God ! So that was why Edgar had talked in that abominable way. He thought he had better report everything he knew to the police ; but then, he didn't want to be mixed up in anything. He felt dizzy and ill. He had better go home. He turned to go up Park Lane, and stopped under a lamp-post to read with fearful fascinated horror.

Suddenly his eye got to the stop-press news at the corner of the page :

BARMAID MURDER
Police Statement

The police state that they are looking for a man who is known to have been alone in the club for a considerable time this morning. He was wearing a large black Stetson hat, and had unusually large eyes protected by large spectacles. He was carrying a magazine of a vivid yellow colour. A blood-stained copy of this magazine, the *Advance Guard*, was found in the club.

The lights at the end of Park Lane turned red. Mr. Summerton leaned against the Royal Air Force Club for support. He was suddenly very sober. He was tired out. He would go home. He stepped off the pavement to hail a taxi ; the traffic moved faster, the buildings swung around in swift circles. Mr. Summerton swayed and fell. Two taxis stopped. " Wot's the matter wivvim, mate ? " one driver asked the other. A crowd collected. . . .

ERIC WALTER WHITE

★

Off the Road



I WAS born in 1905 at 6 College Green, Bristol, a house which is possibly the same as that immortalized by De Quincey in his *Essay on Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts*. I was educated at Clifton and Balliol ; but, as is generally the case, though I derived much essential instruction from public school and university, I owe my real education to my own inquisitiveness and obstinacy and to the untiring efforts of my friends. In 1928 and 1929 I taught English in Berlin and Potsdam ; and during the following four years I worked at the Secretariat of the League of Nations, Geneva, as minute-writer and translator. I spent most of my spare time in travelling, and at various periods I have visited and lived in France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, the Soviet Union, and Greece. During the last few years I have been employed in London by the National Council of Social Service.

I was always devoted to literature and music ; from my undergraduate days dates my interest in painting and the cinema. It was my good fortune when living in Berlin to meet Lotte Reiniger, the celebrated German silhouette film artist, whose best-known film is probably *The Adventures of Prince Achmet*. I was so fascinated by her special type of trick film that I wrote a short essay on her technique, *Walking Shadows* (The Hogarth Press, 1931), and followed this up by a record of one of her silhouette films, *The Little Chimney Sweep* (White and White, 1936). At various times I have been able to collaborate with her : for instance, I arranged and instrumented the score of *Harlekin* in 1932, and three years later a suite extracted from the score of a comic opera I had written at the age of fifteen was used to accompany her Greek silhouette fable of *Galathea*.

My interest in modern music led me to write the first full-length critical study of Stravinsky's music to appear

in England, *Stravinsky's Sacrifice to Apollo* (The Hogarth Press, 1930). For the last two years I have acted as music critic of *Life and Letters To-day*. Short stories of mine have appeared at various times in the *Best Short Stories* of 1935 and 1936, *Story, Life and Letters, New Stories*. 'Off the Road' won a prize offered by the *Oxford Outlook* in 1927, and was reprinted a few years later in the sixth volume of *The New Decameron*.

To conclude: Although no Communist, I have spent some of the most stimulating days of my life in Leningrad and Moscow. Although no mountaineer, I have climbed the Gnifetti, Zumstein, and Dufour peaks of the Monte Rosa. Although no expert skier, I have been an active member of that select Genevese body, Le Club Gastronomique et des Sports d'Hiver, for an account of whose activities I would refer the reader to Francis Beeding's *Pretty Sinister*.

ERIC WALTER WHITE.

OFF THE ROAD

THE road came from Paris and the North. Even in the days when dusty Roman legions had marched and countermarched through Gaul, the same straight white line had climbed the hills and divided the cornlands. After many centuries parts of the road fell into decay. Then the peasants' carts no longer lumbered over it; and the two cornlands grew together and were united into one great shimmering field of grain. Yet an acute observer might have noticed that the shimmer was crossed by a sinister band where the grain grew shorter, for there its roots were constricted by forgotten stones. And so the roadway lay secret, until Napoleon forced his glittering regiments south, to the Pyrenees and farther. It was he who revealed it once more, splitting the cornfields in half, so that the yellowing grain bent backwards from the heat that shifted and quivered above the flat white stones.

Bicycling through this corridor of burning air one afternoon in August came Monsieur Simoneau, the Protestant minister. It was not long since he had finished his midday meal and left his wife reading and his children playing in the garden. Yet here he was—without giving himself a moment's repose for digestion—pedalling steadily away from the town, but still bound to his house and family by the thin intertwined ribbons that his tyres unrolled behind him in the dust of the road. This road was to lead him to here a farm and there a farm, where families of his scattered parishioners lived. These people were isolated from their Catholic neighbours, and as they lived so far from the town, it was impossible for them to take any active part in the ceremonies of their religion. Each family existed in a grim Protestant loneliness; and it was Monsieur Simoneau's

Sabbath duty to visit these dark households and breathe encouragingly upon the small persistent flame of their faith.

And then there were the children to kindle so that they in their turn might hand on the precious fire. Little Toinette Décrouez (whom he would see first) was being prepared for Confirmation. He had given her an illustrated Children's Bible so that she might read of the life of Jesus and then they could discuss it together on his visits. He often wondered, though, if it wouldn't be better sometimes to discuss her instead. He saw her so rarely, and then she had always had her hands washed and her hair tied back with a ribbon. In fact, what did he really know of the lives of any of the good people he was to visit that afternoon?

He saw the road before him climb up to the skyline, where two trees marked the lane which led to the farm of the Décrouez family. On the other side of the hill the road continued its long straight line just the same and would lead him later in the afternoon to all the other farmsteads he was to visit. There, with each dark nucleus of people, he would establish contact for a moment, blow gently upon the glowing coal of their faith, and as soon as the flame began to flicker, depart into the light and heat again. In that short meeting, what could he get to know of them? How could he really help them? For a moment his work seemed futile, and the homes he was to visit, strung along both sides of this straight white road, more savage and unknown than the kraals of Africa.

He suddenly noticed his front tyre. It was swollen all in one place. Bump—bump—bump he went over the road. He turned to the left by the two trees. Bump—bump—bump he went down the lane. The tyre was many years old and he had often patched it before. If it burst now, he would unscrew the wheel in a jiffy, rip off the tyre and replace it with the spare one that he always carried slung behind on his saddle.

Presently he caught sight of Pierre working in the fields. Pierre was a man who lived and worked with the Décrouez. He wore a blue blouse and a wide straw hat, and at each sweep the corn fell over his sickle like a breaking wave.

“Hullo, Pierre,” called Monsieur Simoneau; “how’s life?”

Pierre laid down his sickle and gazed towards the lane. “Oh! it’s you, Monsieur Simoneau,” he cried. “Well, things aren’t so bad. We’ve had no hail this year; and the corn is strong and ripe.”

“And the others?”

“You’ll find them at the farm. Toinette brought us our food at noon. But I think she’s gone back now. They’ll all be pleased to see you,” he added, picking up his sickle and returning to his work.

Swish, swish; his blade cut through the grain, tumbling it down in curves. Near him a young woman clad in black worked at a parallel strip of corn. Monsieur Simoneau didn’t recognize her: she had probably come from another farm to help Pierre in the fields. After standing for a minute watching their two strong bodies stooping under the sun, he got on his bicycle and went away.

When he had gone, Pierre looked up and said gravely: “*Tiens*, so it’s Sunday!”

The woman near him pretended not to have heard.

“Still dumb?” asked Pierre.

“You’re insufferable to-day,” she snapped.

Pierre laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

In the distance Monsieur Simoneau was turning the corner near the sties. Another minute, and he had reached the farm. Wheeling his bicycle through the yard, he leant it against the house, taking care that the tyres should be shaded from the sun for the next hour or so. As he stepped to the door, three fat geese fled from him in panic through an untidy litter of cabbage stalks and other decaying vegetable gobbets. He knocked and went inside without doffing his straw hat.

* * *

Toinette had felt most uneasy when she woke up that morning. No sooner did she start doing one thing than she decided it was not worth finishing and went on to something else. It was Sunday too—the Sunday on which the minister

was coming to see if she had read the chapters he had set her and to talk to her about the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. What the minister told her wasn't very interesting : it was all about Jesus many hundreds of years ago. She wanted to know what Jesus was doing now and what He thought of actual things : of her dog, who was very old and dirty, and whom her father said would have to be killed ; of the beautiful coloured grasshoppers that filled the fields and felt so tickly when she caught them ; and of Pierre. That especially she couldn't understand ; and she was sure Jesus could explain it all to her. For, after all, Jesus was alive. Hadn't Monsieur Simoneau said so ? " Though nailed to a cross that Friday two thousand years ago, He had not died then ; for, the third day after, He rose from His tomb to eternal life." And that meant He went on and on, living for ever.

When Toinette was very young, she used to think that Jesus came to talk to the animals of the farms at night. So once she had got up while the household was asleep and crept outside. The geese stirred uneasily at her coming and then were quiet. There was just enough starlight to count them. One was missing. Perhaps, reflected Toinette, that one is with Jesus now. If only I could find him ! And she searched all over the stead, but found nothing and heard nothing except a tiny wind crooning to itself in the trec-tops. Chilled by the starshine, she had at length crept back to bed just before the vague white dawn, and the next morning her mother had scolded her in the kitchen because her sheet was dirty. " You must wash your feet more often and not go staling my linen." But Toinette didn't hear because she happened to be counting the geese at the moment. They were all there, and she never knew whether one had spent the night with Jesus or whether in the dark she had merely discounted.

But—Toinette reflected, lying in the hot smelly grass, trying to catch grasshoppers—the minister never talked to her about things like that, which were surely the most interesting and exciting in the world. He merely asked her questions about the Gospels which she didn't always

understand and tried to prepare her against a time when she should be dressed in white and go to the *temple* in the big town to be received into the church of her fathers.

Suddenly she heard the voice of her mother : " Toinette, Toinette, where are you ? "

What has mother found now ? Toinette wondered as she shouted back : " Here I am. "

" Pierre's meat and rice are ready. Take them to him and some bread and wine. Enough for that Suzanne too. "

" Oh ! All right. "

Toinette's heart sank. Pierre's lunch. Ugh ! She picked a long grass and stuck it in her mouth. She didn't know how to face Pierre after last night. It was he who was the cause of all her unrest. Because of him her very blood felt different and ran more hotly beneath her skin.

He had come to her after supper, when work was finished and she was lazing about the farmyard, and had suggested a walk. This was unusual : but Toinette felt reassured when he began talking about a very large owl that had its nest in one of the two beech trees that grew on the edge of the high road. She had heard the call of that owl sometimes at night before going to sleep ; and now Pierre said that there might be young ones. Then he laughed loudly and put his arm about her waist so that his fingers pressed her just beneath the right breast—which was curious, but also inconvenient for walking, because Pierre was much bigger and taller than she. However, she said nothing, and tried to keep interested in the owl. She supposed the little ones would be all small and fluffy like chicks ; but Pierre wasn't very helpful.

By now it was getting late. All the coloured light was being drained out of the west, and the first bright star of evening had appeared. Beneath it the two beech trees stood black and windless.

" Through here, " said Pierre, plunging into a piece of underwood.

Toinette followed without thinking and suddenly found herself caught in Pierre's arms. At first she thought it was a joke ; but Pierre was strong and held her for some purpose.

Then she was afraid and would have cried aloud at the strangeness of it all, had not Pierre stopped her lips with his. It was then that she first realized that unknown forces were at work in her. There was some strange new power in his lips and the touch of his tongue. Even the rub of his prickly chin, though repellent at first, fascinated her. Gradually she relaxed into a wise open passiveness and wondered at the joy Pierre found in her hair, her neck and her breasts, until she herself found joy in them and in her whole body too. And so they lay together in the dew-wet grass, and Toinette watched the pageant of the heavens wheel above her, at first with a distant wonder, but soon with a terrible new pain that burnt the image of the stars into her memory for ever.

"Toinette, Toinette," shrieked the voice of her mother. "Why haven't you gone? Take this food at once or I'll beat you, even though it is a Sunday with the minister coming."

Toinette tumbled out of the past at a bound and ran into the kitchen to collect the food. She took it quickly to the field where Pierre and Suzanne from the *métairie des trois noyers* were working. When the two reapers saw Toinette, they dropped their sickles and came into the shade. Suzanne seemed rather glum and ill-tempered, which was unusual, for generally she was in the highest spirits when with Pierre. As for Pierre, Toinette couldn't bear to look at him. She could only feel his presence, overwhelmingly near and hot.

"Thanks, Toinette," she heard him say as he took his food. And then he turned to Suzanne: "Aren't you going to say a word to Toinette? Look what a ripe, full-blooded girl she's grown. I'm going to save up to buy her some finery and take her to the fair."

"You're insufferable," muttered Suzanne sulkily.

"She won't prove sour and obstinate like you—will you, Toinette?" Pierre winked roguishly and flung his brown arm over her shoulder. Startled by this sudden movement and by the brave smell of sweat that came from his sopping blouse, Toinette broke away from his rough

embrace and fled. Behind her she heard a low bitter laugh from Suzanne.

Furious and bewildered, she returned to her form in the hot grass and there wept through sheer incomprehension of what had happened between herself and Pierre and of what had probably happened between Pierre and Suzanne. She now saw how the men lost nothing except the sweat of their skin by working in the fields, but gained a new kind of strength which they stored up within them to wreak upon the women. She suddenly felt sorry for her mother—poor woman, she must have suffered too!—and that only made her cry the more so that the tears ran down her face until she could lick them off the edge of her lip with her tongue. Oh, how unhappy she was—she never remembered being so unhappy before! And there seemed to be nobody to whom she could tell her tale or from whom she could get advice and sympathy. Somehow she shrank from telling her mother. Instead of answering kindly, her mother might become angry and tell her father, and then she would be beaten for being so wicked. No, that would never do. But perhaps she might tell the minister. They all said he was kind and good, for didn't he preach every Sunday morning in the whitewashed *temple* that was in the city? He surely could give her ease and comfort.

Refreshed by this resolution, Toinette went in quietly to clean her hands and tidy her hair. She also took out the Children's Bible from beneath her bolster and turned to the lesson he had set her. She was reading about the marriage feast at Cana when she heard a flutter among the geese and found he had arrived.

He was talking to her mother when she came in. For some time he didn't notice her. Then, catching sight of her pale anxious face, he smiled and said: "Hullo, Toinette! Shall we get to our lesson!" She said "Yes" and sat down opposite him; but she soon found she was still too dazed and stupid to answer his questions very well, so he perforce had to do most of the talking. And as he talked, her attention wandered. She could see her mother in the corner, mending clothes. Monsieur Simoneau had put his

straw hat down on the table. How yellow it was ! Sometimes he propped his Bible against it, and sometimes a black fly crawled round the brim. She wondered at what point she could deliver her confession. Perhaps her mother would go out of the room, and Monsieur Simoneau would stop talking, and then she would say . . . What would she say ?

Suddenly she realized Monsieur Simoneau had stopped talking to her and had turned to her mother. "Not a very bright lesson to-day," he said. "I think Toinette must be tired."

"I'm sorry about that, Monsieur," said Madame Décrouez. "She's not such a bad girl when she does what she's told, but she needs someone continually watching over her to keep her up to scratch. Before you go, you'll drink some wine, won't you ?" She bustled to one side of the room. Glasses, a bottle, some *pâté*, a plate, and bread. Toinette came and helped her. Madame Décrouez suddenly noticed how much her daughter had grown during the last year. Her dress was now too short in the skirt and her bodice too tight. Perhaps there was a natural explanation of her fatigue.

"There, Monsieur Simoneau."

The room was hot. Flies swarmed above the table, upon the table, and under the table, where Toinette's dog was lying panting in the heat, his fur too thick for him and his muscles too tired even to twitch away the flies. Monsieur Simoneau felt them crawling up his legs, and their tiny stings pricked through his socks. He looked at Madame Décrouez. They were thick like gems upon her wrinkled hands. It was no use trying to shake them away or to kill them. There were too many.

The heat was almost insufferable. It came through the open door from the yard like a tide. Toinette gazed across the room at the two beds covered with thick black quilts and cast-off clothing and wondered whether she should tell him now, even though her mother was there. The other part of the room was a kitchen. There was a sink near the window. Water in two buckets ; and a tin scoop with a handle that served also as a mouthpiece. Perhaps better

not. Jars, crockery, and scraps of food were ranged along a shelf. The flies were there too. Oddments had dropped on the ground—especially cabbage stalks. Madame Décrouez didn't feel the heat so much; her skin was tanned to it. Nor did the flies worry her. But Monsieur Simoneau paused while drinking to flick away two that were buzzing together on the open page of his Testament. There was a sickening pause while they disentangled themselves, and then he read: "*But Jesus stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground as though he heard them not.*" Yes, Toinette is now the age, Madame thought; I must keep an eye on the men from the *métairie des trois noyers*—they're always on the look out for something new. "*And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst.*" I wasn't very much older myself, she continued ruminating, when . . .

A hungry goose from the yard flapped in, snaffled up a particularly large piece of cabbage and waddled back comically on its flat feet. "Shoo," cried Madame, clapping her hands. "Shoo, shoo!" And she ran outside brandishing her apron.

Toinette's heart was beating fast. This was obviously the moment: while her mother was outside in the yard. There was not a second to lose. What was it she was going to say? She pulled herself together desperately, found a form of words and took a strangled little breath. Her untried voice felt husky; she was afraid to speak for fear of the sound she might make. Oh, why should it be so difficult?

"Monsieur Simoneau—Monsieur Simoneau."

But the minister didn't hear the low supplicating tones. At that moment, having finished his *pâté*, he got up somewhat noisily. "*And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.*" He closed the Testament and put it in his pocket. Toinette felt humiliated—defeated. She couldn't possibly tell him now. She couldn't—couldn't.

Two figures were at the door. Madame came in, followed by Pierre sweating from the sunlit fields. Reaping was finished for the day, he said, and Suzanne had returned to the *métairie des trois noyers*. Unconsciously Toinette's eyes followed him round the room; she saw him wipe the sweat

away with a towel and watched the slowly moving muscles of his throat while he drank. Monsieur Simoneau was going, but she didn't hear his parting words. Pierre was coming near her. She could smell the rich smell of his body and it excited her. As he reached over the table for some bread, his hand touched hers, accidentally, meaningly. She thrilled at that secret contact. Every trace of resentment had left her.

She felt she could not trust herself alone in the room any longer, so she left him munching bread and went outside, perplexed and troubled. Why had she not been able to tell Monsieur Simoneau? How was it that she now loved Pierre so much that she longed impatiently for the darkness of another night?

For the second time that day she flung herself down in the grass and wept.

* * *

Monsieur Simoneau felt pleasantly well at ease as he turned into the main road by the two beeches. The wine and the *pâté* consumed in the dark fly-filled room had been much to his liking; and now, outside, the afternoon heat enveloped him comfortably, as in a blanket. After all, he meditated, he could hardly call his work *futile*. . . .

At the next village his front tyre burst.

THE END









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