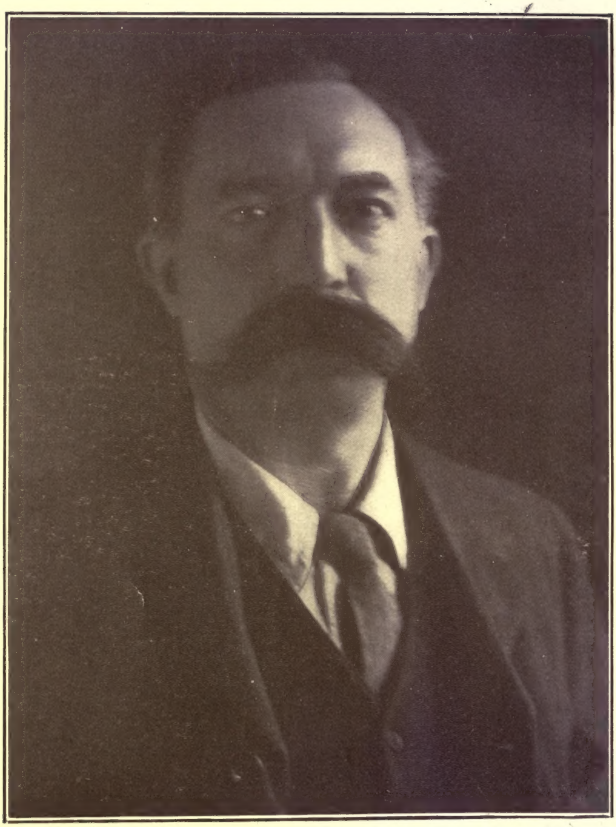
ROBERT BLATCHFORD



Cruwys Richards

Robert Blatchford

The Sketch of a Personality: An Estimate of Some Achievements.

By A. Neil Lyons.

London: The Clarion Press,
44, Worship Street, E.C. 1910

Contents.

List of Illustrations.

Robert Blatchford:

The Sketch of a Personality

Authoritative Preamble.

MEMBERS of the "Clarion" Staff always think and speak of him as "R.B." The readers of the paper and persons who capture him at railway stations usually call him "Bob." I suppose that some psychological significance attaches to this fact; but I shall content myself with placing the fact on record, leaving to my readers themselves the task of supplying philosophic comment. I owe it, however, to my colleagues to anticipate and repudiate the obvious suggestion that we are awed by the Presence. It is not like that. We know "R.B." himself—the man behind the man who writes the books—and I suppose that, like our readers, we are snobs, and feel that a familiarity practised by the multitude is too gross for us.

This is a genial sort of beginning—I don't

think. But the fact is that the writer of these lines is feeling rather sick. He has to do a very difficult thing: to write honestly about an intimate friend.

You will have guessed instinctively that I undertake this task with many misgivings. Of course. I should not, in any case, have omitted to place on record such a gentlemanly sentiment. But I have reasons enough for misgiving—even for abject funk. It is not merely that I am almost the youngest of Mr. Blatchford's colleagues and the newest of his friends, but that I am also faced by this discomforting thought—more than half the people who will read this production have known Mr. Blatchford and worshipped him, either in a vicarious or a personal sense, for nearly as many years as I have lived. These people will naturally view, if not with hostile feelings, at least with very critical ones, this effort, as it were, of a newly joined midshipman to explain his captain to old messmates. But a monograph concerning Mr. Blatchford had obviously to be written, pending the full-dress biography which some hand will some day certainly write. We had much argument about it, and we ultimately decided that the only "Clarion"

writer possessing the impudence essential to the performance of this feat was—myself. That is my simple explanation.

It is clear, of course, that the man best qualified to write about "R. B." was "R. B.'s" oldest colleague and convive—Mr. A. M. Thompson. But Mr. Thompson asserted that his great friendship for Mr. Blatchford was in itself a bar to the undertaking. "I could as easily," he said, "write an honest book about my wife." It suits me very well to seize upon this argument. The converse of Mr. Thompson's plea shall be my plea: I know Mr. Blatchford so comparatively little that I may, perhaps, succeed in writing honestly about him.

But it is an ill business all the same. My mind is surging with confused ideas about the apologies which I ought to offer, the explanations which I ought to make.

There is, for instance, the question of my own attitude towards Mr. Blatchford. I feel bound to make a plain statement in this connection, so that those readers who, on the one hand, are looking for gush, and those, on the other hand, who expect impertinences, may be induced to refrain from reading these pages, supposing such an

action to be possible. It was stated, in a hastily-written announcement respecting this sketch, that I "view the opinions and temperament of Mr. Blatchford very critically." This is at once an over-statement and an under-statement of my position. To say that I view certain of Mr. Blatchford's opinions very critically is grossly to understate the passionate scorn with which I view his complacent belief in human goodness and his devotion to certain puritan ideals. To state that I view "very critically" his opinion of my favourite authors is to be guilty of childish satire at the expense of the blind fury which possesses me in respect of what I *call "'R. B.'s' intolerance." But how could one "view critically" Mr. Blatchford's temperament? It is a benign, understanding, steadfast temperament. A dancing temperament. A wise, a hopeful, heartening temperament. It is a temperament which draws out music from itself like a harp which is touched by breath. It is a temperament which loves lame dogs. It is a temperament which gave me help and encouragement when I sorely needed them. It is the temperament of my friend. It is my friend.*

You will see that so far as Mr. Blatchford's personality is concerned I approach him in a spirit

of strong and reverent partisanship. And I am glad to say that the work which lies before me will be chiefly concerned with his personality. When I have finished with the story of "R. B.'s" life, I shall have something—not much—to say about his work, and, consequently, about his opinions; and I shall say some things which I have often said to him before, and shall often say again, on many a jolly ramble and in many a pleasant inn. But all that will be mere trimming. I feel convinced that that which you chiefly want to hear is the story of Mr. Blatchford's life: the fairy story of an ill-taught, ill-fed child, a colour-printer's devil, who grew up to be a man— a Great Man.

I say that Robert Blatchford is *a great man. It is a great thing to have taken in hand a forlorn, discredited cause like the Socialism which was, and to make of it, in fifteen years, a living, vital, pregnant thing like the Socialism which is. No honest man will deny that Blatchford's pen alone has produced—has invented if you like—"the rank and file" of Socialism. I say that it is a big thing to have done this. It is also a big thing —and here I speak with the heartfelt veneration of a craftsman—to write the cleanest, straightest English which has been written in our time.*

In writing this sketch, therefore, I shall be governed by the following preconceptions:

(1) That Mr. Blatchford is a very close and intimate friend.

(2) That I regard him as a great man—a genius.

(3) That I disagree with quite half of his opinions.

Within the limitations imposed upon me by these premises, I hope to produce an honest book.

Chap. I. Childhood

THERE used to live in Halifax a little old lady who was great friends with the milkman's horse. One day, when this old lady was examining a shop-window in a crowded thoroughfare, the milkman's horse (a tall, white animal) recognised her back, and ascending the pavement, accompanied by his cart and milk-cans, placed a familiar nose upon her shoulder. The little old lady, turning round, remarked, merely, "Hullo, here's Pete," and at once entered into a long and affectionate conversation with the milkman's horse, much to the interest of passers-by.

This story is told by the old lady's own son's wife, who witnessed the incident. That son is the subject of this sketch; and so, perhaps, the story will not be considered irrelevant.

And, indeed, this story and all stories concerning Louisa Blatchford have a special relevance in this place, for it is impossible to consider the complex character of Robert Blatchford without reference to the temperament and influence of his mother.

Louisa Blatchford was, for all psychological

purposes, Robert's only parent. Mr. Blatchford himself knows little of his father. He was a strolling actor and an ardent Tory, who christened his second and last-born son Robert Peel Glanville, doubtless believing that names like these would form an attractive substitute for a patrimony. There is a story current in the Blatchford family concerning little Robert's christening (John Blatchford was a great Churchman). When the baptismal party had arrived at the font and the officiating clergyman had learnt that the infant in his arms was to be christened Robert Peel, he said, to the father: "After the great statesman?" and on receiving an affirmative reply, he expressed the hope that little Robert would grow up to be as clever a man. "Ah," said John Blatchford, "I hope he will be *half* as clever." It is to be hoped that the shade of John Blatchford, supposing that the long-spent spirit concerns itself with earthly or democratic matters, is satisfied with the answer which has been vouchsafed to his pious wish.

John Blatchford was not able to witness the fulfilment of his hope; for he died in 1853, when Robert was two years old. Thenceforward, Louisa Blatchford became the sole guardian of her two sons (Montagu, the elder, was born in 1848, three years before Robert), and how, a frightened, friendless, lonely woman, faced with the most terrible poverty,

"R. B."
Aged Six.

she bravely discharged this guardianship will presently be seen.

Mr. Blatchford says that his mother was a "queer customer," and difficult to describe. But, yielding to the importunities of the present writer, he has written a little sketch of his mother, as she appeared to him. This charming document will appear in due place.

It is quite evident that Mr. Blatchford has to thank his mother, not merely for his preliminary appearance upon the stage of life, her care and love, but for his own originality of thought and feeling. If he derives from his father any characteristics at all, it is probably that streak of simplicity, of *naïveté*, in faith and outlook (such, for instance, as his simple, intense, straightforward patriotism) which is at once a puzzle and a charm to those who know him. If it is the paternal fount from which "R. B." derives his unaffected belief in simple human goodness, it may certainly be said that the paternal legacy was, after all, no mean one.

Most clever men—nearly all clever men—are by nature cynical. "R. B.'s" utter absence of cynicism, of the cynic's doubt and bitterness, while apt to be a trying quality in argument, is obviously in itself a thing to be envied. "R. B." has a hopeful, benignant attitude towards life, an attitude of calm affection which is different in itself, as it is different in

its source, from the contemptuous calm of the cynic. The cynic may marvel at this attitude, but he cannot help but envy it. If he happen to subject the matter to speculation and if he had swopped tobacco and secrets with "R. B.," he will probably conclude that John Blatchford is at the bottom of the matter.

It will presently be necessary to put forward the proposition that "R. B." is, in essential matters of the spirit, an ardent and irrevocable Tory—that which is called "a Tory of the old school." But this proposition, together with the considerations upon which it is based, will be presented in subsequent and more critical chapters. It is mentioned here in order that the reader may be asked not to confuse this intellectual, emotional, perfectly sane Toryism of Robert with the flat-footed, latter-day, obvious Toryism of his father. In so far as the father's blood has given any political colour to that of the son, it is in matters of mere family prejudice and sentiment. "R. B.'s" mother's father had served as a middy under Nelson, and had been wounded at the Battle of the Nile. When, during the Boer War, his grandson scandalised Small Heath—or was it Bootle?—by instructing his daughter to play "God Save the Queen" once a day to the glory of British arms, he was doubtless actuated by the direct and obvious influence of heredity.

And then, again, his Christian name was Peel. And then, again, he had served for seven years as an English soldier. And then, again, he had the fortune to be born in England, and Englishmen were being killed—for an idea or for money. He believed the idea to be mistaken and the money to be dearly earned, but not being cynical like his critics, he overlooked the absurdity of Tommy Atkins' performance and fastened his mind upon the fact that Tommy Atkins was being made all dead and bloody by bullets. So he commanded his daughter to play "God Save the Queen," and a congress of six north-country intellectuals sternly turned his picture to the wall. His recovery was slow but sure.

Let us now pursue our narrative.

Before Robert Blatchford was ten years old, he had travelled in Scotland; in the North of England; in the Eastern Counties, and in the Isle of Wight. Portsmouth, Leicester, and London were among the cities which he had visited.

Mr. Blatchford tells some perfectly horrible tales about that time. His mother was an actress, and at the age of 32 she was left with two little boys and no money. She had never acted in any but the poorest theatres or earned but the poorest wage; and it was not to be supposed that the widow, alone and friendless, could make a better trade of it than husband and wife together had done. For years she

struggled on, working sometimes with small touring companies, more often travelling alone with the two children (often on foot) seeking an engagement in one small town after another, and not always finding it. The little family tasted of poverty in all its forms; mother and children alike were always cold, and often hungry, but sometimes they were literally starving. "R. B." says that his strongest and most poignant recollection of that period is of the agonies of cold which they endured. Nothing, he says, is so precious to poor people or so hardly to be won as warmth. As a little boy he learned to hate and dread the winter months; and cold weather makes him depressed and broody even now. When he was a very young child he used to get up early and grub in other people's dustbins for old bottles, which he would barter for coals.

It was an awful time, and does not call for emphasis.

In 1862, when Robert was eleven years old, the family went to Halifax. They tramped there from Bradford. Louisa Blatchford possessed relations, of a distant kind, in the former town, and they had promised to help her in finding work of a less ebullient and spasmodic nature than that afforded by the stage. The joint efforts were successful, and Mrs. Blatchford, with needles, and thread, and a dressmaker's measure, took up life anew,

discharging the stage for ever with a thankful heart. Mr. Blatchford says that his mother hated the stage. As a matter of fact, this hatred had its basis in a very practical dread. The stage life had won her nothing but hardship; and the people with whom it brought her into contact were probably small-minded, and unhappy, and selfish, and unkind. Her whole life, in its relation to her sons, expresses the fear which she felt lest either of the boys should ever be thrown back again into that dreadful life of penury and vagabondage.

After they all had settled down in Halifax, both the boys went out to work. Robert, child as he was, took employment as an errand boy (*i.e.*, beer fetcher) in a colour printing works. He worked in this capacity for twelve hours every day, and received a weekly wage of eighteen-pence.

Chap. II. Boyhood

"R.B." WAS a very delicate child. The doctors—many and various doctors, met with in divers places during the pilgrimage of want—said that he would never live to be seven; then that he would die before he was ten, then before twelve, then before fourteen. They meant well, but, as "R. B." says, the luck was against them. The doctors, all the same, were justified of their wisdom to the extent that Robert remained a very sickly boy. He was still a sickly boy—sicklier than ever—when he joined the Army, but there, he says, they made a man of him in six months.

Well, at the useful age of eleven this frail child, as has already been recorded, was toiling and sweating and bleeding at a colour printer's. In what may perhaps be termed his leisure hours he was given all which the weary, eager, persistent mother had to give him in the way of knowledge. He had actually learned to read when he was eight years old. When the juvenile tasks which he was put to do each day at the colour printer's had been quite completed; when he had reached home and had run upon the ordinary errands for his mother;

when he had had his lessons in Scripture and arithmetic, and his lecture upon filial deportment, and had washed up the tea-things and helped with the supper (presuming that it ran to supper), he was at leisure to follow literary pursuits. These at this time consisted in reading "The Pilgrim's Progress"—reading it and re-reading it, and then reading it over again. He also read, when he could get hold of them, stories about battles and about Nelson and Wellington. But all his juvenile reading put together did not amount to much—not, at least, in respect of variety.

This is not to be wondered at when you consider how his life was crowded with what we will describe as "other interests." It is difficult to be a good son and a hard-working lad and a schoolboy *and* a voracious reader all at once, at eleven years of age and on eighteenpence a week. Young Robert differed from any other grimy little toiler of his age and status not in respect of the number and class of books which he read, but in the fact that he was minded to read at all. His opportunities, whatever they were, did not carry him far in these days: for he has placed it on record that at sixteen he was just able to read and write.

I do not want you to get hold of the idea that the boy was neglected or "put upon" at home. It was not the poor mother's fault that her son went out to work before he had reached

"R. B.'s" MOTHER.

even the age at which other boys begin to learn to play: it was not her fault that he had few books to read and few spare minutes in which to read them, or that she could tell him so little concerning the things and ideas which are written about in books. His mother was a plucky, irritable, intelligent, penniless, half-Italian woman faced with an awful problem. She worked hard all day long, and during the nights as well, but all the money which her ten sore fingers could secure would not keep a woman and two boys in food and lodging.

Louisa Blatchford's actual weekly wage was eight shillings. To this sum Montagu, who worked as an errand boy, contributed two shillings, and Robert, as we have seen, added another eighteenpence. Thus the family possessed a combined weekly income of eleven shillings and sixpence, out of which stipend five shillings had to be deducted by way of rent for two furnished rooms. A sum of six shillings and sixpence thus remained in hand, with which to cover the week's expenditure in respect of food, light, warmth, clothing, recreation, and culture for three people. Are we to blame the little dressmaker for sending her children out to work?

Robert was not her favourite child. He was looked upon as being rather "slow"; as being unworthy of the family reputation for mental alertness. But he was her very son, and

she fought and struggled for him and argued with him and corrected him and watched him and tried to instil things into him—religion, politics, and a fierce loathing for plays and players—above all that. Surely my readers can understand and like this woman? A woman with fifty little talents, fifty little graces, fifty little "corners," fifty little prejudices, and with stupendous courage, resource, and vitality. But one need not labour to explain her, for here is "R. B.'s" own picture of his mother:

"She was a little woman, with square shoulders: slim, and light on her feet. You may see the picture of her, face and figure, at any Italian fruit stall, as you may see mine behind many an Italian organ. She had abundant black hair, hazel eyes, black eyebrows, like smears; large, white, even teeth, a heavy mouth and jaw. She had a good mezzo voice, and as a young woman sang well. In temperament she was very, very mixed and elusive—in fact, Italian. She had high spirits (when not in the dumps); was witty and bright, and had a ringing, voluminous laugh that hung on the hair trigger. She was not a good-tempered woman. Her temper was most uncertain. She would be angelic for weeks, and then the nether fires would burn up, and she was impossible for a day or so. She was 'odd,' too—had an odd, abrupt, and

whimsical way distinctly suggestive of Betsy Trotwood. Her religion and politics seem to me at this day to have been weird. But I think she got them from my father, who was a Churchman and an admirer of Sir Robert Peel.

"Well, my mother was not quite an educated woman. But she was the daughter of a composer, and she had been brought up in Bohemian circles and on the stage; and she talked well, and her English was correct; and she read a good deal (mostly fiction).

"She was not a Bohemian at all, but very respectable and strict, and she did not like the stage. Her aversion to the idea of her sons being actors was very strong, and she made great sacrifices and worked very hard to keep us out of the Bohemian environment.

"She taught us her religion and her ideas of politics, and used to read and sing to us, and tell us stories. She hated humbug and snobbery, and she was rather satirical and not at all romantic. She was compassionate and generous, and loved children and animals. She was almost like a witch with animals. Her cats followed her to church: her chickens slept on the hearthrug, and the milkman's horse would stop her in the street and ask for cakes.

"She was brave and obstinate and persevering and practical, and she wore the oddest bonnets.

"Now can you see her? She could be delightful; but she was hard to live with, and she had a most ruthless and wounding tongue.

"I think she was a clever woman, but was wasted—never had a chance. She had an original gift for drawing, and had a fertile mind and a fluent flow of language. Just an impulsive, unreasonable, clever, wilful, bad-tempered, affectionate, pleasing, exasperating, funny little Italian woman. But it would take a book and a Thackeray to paint her portrait."

This is not merely splendid writing: it is splendid biography. It presents the whole drama of "R. B.'s" childhood; it explains what one means by saying that, psychologically, "R. B." was born an orphan.

At fourteen years of age our now mature young labourer was taken from the colour-printing works and apprenticed to brush-making. Louisa Blatchford had a very sound belief in the value to her sons of "a trade." She could not give them any money or much education, but she would give them a "trade." This, she argued, was the surest obtainable charm against hardships, and against that which she held to be the basis of all want and unhappiness—the damnable spell of the foot-lights.

"R. B." worked at brush-making for twelve hours every day: from six in the morning until six at night. He says that it was hard, dirty

work in a dusty, smoky shop, conducted by ordinarily objectionable bosses. "But," he also says, "many of the men and boys and girls were very good and intelligent."

That is a queer statement. A man is bound to wonder what those men and boys and girls did with their intelligence while they went out making brushes from six to six.

"What did 'R. B.' do with his?" you ask. Dear brethren, "R. B." took it with him to the brush works and—"R. B." "did a guy."

But we have not yet arrived at that point. You must first of all be told that about this time "R. B." began to visit chapel. This was a very natural proceeding; for "R. B." was obviously and necessarily a lad with stuff in him, and the chapel would offer the society of other young men having stuff in them: young men with minds in embryo, with vague internal cravings for fare other than pork: young men with a vague perception of the Problem. "R. B." kept up his chapel-going until he was twenty, at which age Fate intervened; and he says that the chapel did him lots of good, and taught him to think—to criticise. The chapel planted a seed, and the seed has grown into a tree—a tree which is rather by way of being a nuisance to the chapel. "R. B." does not think that at any time of his life he possessed what is called the religious instinct; he was attracted to the chapel because it was a resort

of quiet and thoughtful people. It offered a change, too, from the environment of the old strolling life, which experience and his mother's constant voice had taught him to hate. It was a change to be "respectable."

There may have been another inducement to regular attendance at chapel. Amongst the workpeople at the brush factory there was a "little proud, pretty thing with flaxen hair and sharp, dark eyes." *She* was a chapel-goer. "R. B." fell in love with her—or became fond of her—when he was sixteen years old. When he was twenty-nine he married her.

It seems a silly thing solemnly to announce the existence of Mrs. Blatchford and the Blatchford children to an audience largely composed of *Clarion* readers; but a biography is a biography, and one must state facts. I have, therefore, the honour to announce that Mrs. Blatchford is living (and likely to remain so, so long as there is a bargain to be had at Liberty's or a stair-rod to criticise in her house), and that Mr. and Mrs. Blatchford have three children—Winnie and Dolly and Corri. Corri is a boy, and bears the maiden name of his grandmother.

"R. B." led a hard but not unhappy life, of the vegetable kind, in Halifax until he was twenty. He worked steadily at the brush factory for six years and a few odd months and weeks and days. Then, of a sudden, on

the oddest day of all, the steadiness suddenly went out of him.

This brings us to the story of the Great Adventure.

Chap. III. The Great Adventure

ONE morning—a bright spring morning—"R. B.," aged twenty, walked to the brush factory. When he got there the gates were shut. He had been guilty of a chronological inexactitude, and had arrived five minutes after six o'clock. By the rules of the factory he was shut out for a "quarter"—that is to say, he could not enter and take up his work until after the breakfast interval at nine.

Being a philosophical young gentleman, Mr. Blatchford resolved to devote the period of his forced abstention from labour to the enjoyment of natural beauties. These, he assured me, existed in the neighbourhood of Halifax thirty years ago. Perhaps he speaks comparatively. At any rate, he walked and walked until he found some water and a bridge, where he rested and ate his breakfast. After which he leaned upon the parapet of the bridge and gazed upon the chimneys and the smoke of Halifax, which lay below him. Then, shifting his view-point, he gazed upon a different scene—a scene of

rustic beauty. And being a philosopher, he philosophised.

"Why," he mused, "when there are trees and fields and birds and a blue sky like yon, should one be compelled to spend one's life in a stinking factory in a stinking town beneath a dirty pall like yon?" And, being a philosopher, he again said, "Why?" And, being a philosopher, he found the proper answer, which was: "Why?"

Having been thus prosperously delivered of an entirely sound idea, Mr. Robert Blatchford promptly acted on it. He threw away the paper which had contained his morning's stodge, waved a long farewell to Halifax, and —walked to Hull.

Thus began the great adventure.

I do not know how far Hull may be from Halifax, or what the road is like, or whether "R. B." found it pebbly, or at what time he got to Hull. I only know that he got there. And found a friend—a brushmaker like himself, who worked at a brush factory in Hull.

And now there falls to be related a fact which will give great pain to the True and Faithful: a fact which will greatly surprise the student of "R. B.'s" psychology. At Hull, "R. B." did a thing which is obviously at variance with his true character. He did an unconstitutional, unpremeditated, irregular, eccentric thing. In defiance of all the rules and

"R. B."
Aged Twenty-two.

customs and regulations affecting the rights of man, he went to a brush factory and secured work as a skilled hand—he being still an apprentice. (A voice: "There ye are Bill! There's yer jolly Socialist!")

It is true that he was penniless and had a young man's appetite; but he knows that that is no excuse, and so do I; and we are both sorry. He earned enough at the factory to keep himself and to save a few shillings. And he wrote home to Halifax, and was duly reproached and forgiven.

When he had worked in the factory for two or three weeks a gentle instinct urged him to depart. He was doing a risky thing. The consequences arising from its discovery would be rather grave. He had not been found out, but the danger of being found out would be lessened by his departure, and, as he had saved a little money, he packed up a little bundle and boarded a little ship and sailed to Yarmouth. From Yarmouth onwards his adventures ceased to support an air of comedy.

He had but little money, and he wanted to go to London. So he walked to London. The distance from London to Yarmouth is 124 miles: he walked it in about a week, sleeping in mean inns or hiring his bed at a cottage. And at last he got to London: to the city of Desire.

That which followed is an exceedingly

antiquated story: a story of disillusionment, disappointment, and despair.

I could describe "R. B.'s" adventures in London at this time in my own fashion, but I am relieved from that gloomy task by the fact that they are all set forth by "R. B." himself in *A Son of the Forge*—that spirited story of Army life which Mr. Blatchford began as a sketch in the *Clarion*, and which, to his own surprise and wonder, insisted upon growing—and growing—and growing—until it finished as a full-blown novel. I am not going to discuss the book at this stage, but I am going to quote from it—from Chapter VI., which is almost pure biography.

"R. B." tells in this chapter how, sitting one night in a dismal coffee-house, he was touched by the misery of a little starveling boy who was in despair for want of a halfpenny to make up the price of his "doss." "R. B." befriended the boy—whom, in the book, he calls Harry Fielding—and it was this lad who first put into his head the notion of enlisting. This is how "R. B." tells the story:

". . . . The idea that he might have given the boy the halfpenny did not seem to have occurred to the waiter at all. I asked him to call the boy back and send him to me.

"Then I counted my money. I had two shillings and a penny. Unless I found work to-morrow, I should be soon destitute. But

this was a cheap house, and the beds only sixpence, so that I was still rich enough to entertain a guest.

"The boy came back in a minute with the waiter. His name was Harry Fielding, and he appeared to be about fourteen years of age. He was very thin and pale, and his clothes were covered with white dust. I asked him to sit down, ordered him some tea, and waited for him to tell his story.

"He had no parents. His mother had been dead five years. His father, a soldier, discharged as unfit for service, had died in Dover workhouse a month ago. The boy, after trying to enlist for a drummer, and being rejected owing to a defect in his left hand, had lived upon the charity of the soldiers in the Shorncliffe Camp until the provost had expelled him, when he set off and tramped to London.

"He had walked twenty-five miles that day along the dusty roads without food, and had sold his waistcoat and neckerchief for fivepence to a Jew clothes-dealer. He told me, with the ghost of a smile, how he had spent an hour in fruitless efforts to persuade the Jew to give him another penny, and how the waiter in the coffee-room had sent him out to beg for the same amount. 'But,' said he, with a sigh, 'I could only get a halfpenny, and he wouldn't let me in until I had sixpence.'

"He was a quiet little fellow, and I was glad

of his company. We shared our coppers while they lasted, and when they were spent we foraged for food by day and slept in the streets by night. Sometimes we got a box to carry, or a horse to hold, and earned a few pence by that. But bread was dear and times were hard, and we could barely keep body and soul together.

"I could get no work. Trade was slack, many men were out of employment, and my ignorance of the city, as well as my provincial dialect, were against me. I sold my spare shirt, then my waistcoat; then I sold my new boots and bought some old ones, netting a shilling on the exchange, but at the end of a week we were at the end of our tether, and starvation stared us in the face.

"It was Friday night, wet and dismal, and after many fruitless efforts to earn the price of a crust, we stole into a court off Drury Lane, and went to sleep in a doorway, which afforded some shelter from the rain.

"When I awoke in the morning I found myself alone. Harry had gone, and had pinned to my coat his note of farewell, written on a bit of the margin of a newspaper. The note said simply:

"Good-bye; I'm off. Thank you for being so good to me. Look to yourself. I will try the road. Keep up your spirits.—Yours, HARRY.

"*P.S.*—If you can't hold out, try the soldiers.

"It was useless to look for him. He might be miles away by this. I walked down to the dock gates and tried for a job; but there was a crowd, and the men shouldered me out of their way, each one trying to get first, and I was too miserable to fight. Why should I? What did it matter? I left the docks and wandered about the streets till nightfall, when I made my way to the police office to ask for a ticket for the casual ward at Clerkenwell Workhouse; for it was raining, and the wind was cold, and I was wearied out."

"R. B." goes on to relate a strange adventure which befel him outside the gates of the police-station where he waited, in company with a host of other vagrants, for the gates to open. He sat down on the pavement, close beside a miserable woman:

". . . . She was a swarthy woman, her skin tanned by long exposure to the weather. She wore no bonnet, and was smoking a short black pipe. I watched her for some time, and thought what a bold, hard, wicked face she had, and at length, more from curiosity to hear her speak than from any desire for information, I ventured to ask her a question about the tickets.

"She turned upon me with a scowl which gradually melted away as she looked at me, and at last said, not unkindly, 'What do you

want to know for, boy? You're not going to Clerkenwell, are you?'

"I said I was. She sat smoking for a few minutes, then took her pipe from her lips, and, stroking her chin with her great brown hand, said, very much to my surprise, 'You mustn't; no, you mustn't. You're only a boy, and not used to no kind o' wickedness, I can see. Don't you go, boy; don't you go.'

"'I have no other place to sleep,' I said.

"She shook her head. 'Sleep in the streets; boy, sleep on the bridges; anywhere but there. It's the worst workhouse in all London. No, you mustn't go.'

"'But you are going,' I hinted.

"The woman laughed. 'Oh, me,' she said. 'It's good enough for me. But you are different. Ah, don't be stubborn. Take an old woman's advice. It's a cruel place. Don't go, don't go.'

"'I'm not a child,' I said.

"She laughed again, not pleasantly, and answered, 'You know nothin', nothin'. I know all. Been through it all.'

"Then, very earnestly, she continued, leaning closer to me: 'Be advised, now. Be told. I know these places; and I've had sons of me own. Don't go, don't go. D'ye hear?'

"I rose up wearily from the pavement. 'I will take your advice,' I said.

"She nodded, and put the pipe back in her

mouth. 'Good,' she said, 'good boy. Now you're talkin',' and turned her attention another way."

But of all the queer doings of that queer time, the queerest was the final doing: that which "did" "R. B." into the Army for seven years. He relates in this chapter how he fell in with a poor girl who asked him for some bread, and who, on hearing that he was as breadless as herself, said: "Well, blood's warm, chummy; come and sit aside o' me." "R. B." sat down beside her and watched her through the night. Then:

"Very early in the morning the market carts began to rumble over the bridge. The child-woman awoke, and looked at me with a smile.

"'We must go,' she said. 'Early risin' an' late breakfasts is the rule in this hotel.' She got up shivering, and tried to straighten her hair with her fingers.

"'Where are you going?' I asked.

"'With you, if you like,' she said. 'Neither of us has nothin', and we might as well share.'

"I shook my head. 'No,' said I, 'not that. Let me see if I can get a few coppers for you.'

"'You're not going to give me the slip?' she said.

"'No.'

"'I'm nothing to nobody, I ain't,' she said, her eyes filling with tears; 'but you won't leave a poor girl all alone, will you, chummy?'

"I said I would come back if I was alive."

"R. B." lived and did come back. He came back with a shilling, the "Queen's Shilling," which he gave to her. He had enlisted at Tower Gates as a soldier.

We show a picture of him as he appeared in uniform when he had barely passed the recruit stage of his service. At the time when this portrait was taken he had just celebrated his twenty-first birthday.

"R. B." has often told me about that poor girl who slept beneath the same bridge with him, and about young Fielding. I remember that we talked about them once while sheltering from the rain under a hideous arch near Blackfriars Station. "R. B." described the boy to me, and, of a sudden, it struck him with all the force of a wholly new idea that if that youth should stand before him then it would not be as a boy, but as a decidedly middle-aged man. "R. B." had often thought and wondered about the boy—he does still—but in all his speculation it had never occurred to him that the boy would grow up and smoke tobacco and drink beer. We amused ourselves for half an hour by trying to imagine the present aspect and fortune of the boy. . . . We settled, at last, on neck-protector whiskers and wide trousers, and we put him into possession of a comfortable marine store in Shadwell. . . .

We have brought "R. B." at last to the point of enlistment. It is now that the story of his psychological development begins. The Army made a physical man of him: it sowed also the seeds of his moral and mental manhood.

Chap. IV. The Army

UPON enlistment (1871), "R. B." was drafted to the 103rd Regiment, which has since been reconstituted as a battalion of the Dublin Fusiliers.

The 103rd had been a John Company's Regiment. All the old soldiers within its ranks had spent years of their lives in India. Mr. Blatchford's military novels (*Tommy Atkins* and *A Son of the Forge*), and his collection of short soldier stories called *Tales for the Marines*, present a delightful gallery of military portraits. It takes all sorts of men to make up regiments and worlds: it took a particularly varied and startling lot of gentlemen to make up "the Ramchunders"—by which name "R. B." distinguishes his regiment in print. The most startling thing in connection with the Ramchunders is the change which they wrought in "R. B." He joined them as a solemn, sullen, sickly, awkward lad. He left them a high-spirited, quick-witted, cultured, observant man.

It is worth while, I think, to interrupt here the strictly biographical course of this undertaking, while we consider that phenomenon.

In discussing the influence upon "R. B." of

his life in the Army, we must divide him into his two proper parts:

(1) Writer, poet;
(2) Reformer and politician.

Viewing him in either capacity, one perceives that we are reaping now what the men of the Ramchunders sowed.

You have only to talk with "R. B." for half an hour in order to discover that the whole man hinges upon those six years of rough-and-tumble in the Army. He lived those years with the naked souls of a thousand other men, and that experience afforded him a better education in the science of Souls and Things and Causes than he could have gained from six Universities or ten Grand Tours.

At a University boys are associated with boys in a certain community of interests and enthusiasms. They meet, broadly speaking, on common ground in respect of worldly experience, worldly knowledge, spiritual ideals, social ideals, wit, common sense, insolence, the things which they do not know, the things which they want to know, and the things which they will never know; and in respect of manners, prejudices, and affectations. This community of interest can be limited or extended at the will of the individual. He has (assuming him not to possess an intellect or any other ungentlemanly attribute) a recognised

"R. B." AS A "ROOKY."

right of privacy and the material means for securing it.

But a boy who goes for a soldier goes directly into action. He "sweats with a tumult." He will find some other boys in the same place; but there is no guarantee as to a community of anything except poverty, youth, and an interest in evading "Red Caps." If there are a hundred of these boys, then there will be nearly a hundred distinctions of personality—genuine differences produced by genuine diversity of training, experience, and example. Recruits in a barrack-room will not, from their childhood upwards, have been folded in the same way and creased in the same place like the highly-standardised young gentlemen who emerge from Oxford to throw the weight of their shining individualities against the levelling-down proposals of Socialism.

But the boy who goes for a soldier will not only have to take the measure of other and really different boys; he will have also to keep his foothold amongst men, all sorts of men: old men, young men, laughing men, careful men, clean men, greasy men, clever men, and nice men; men who have met things, men who have seen things, men who walked there, men who got there, men who were carried there, men who like women, men who have killed women, men who, one and all,

have lived and are alive; silent men also and seers and fools and rogues and pimps and bullies and common grocers. These are the men whom a boy will meet with in a barrack-room, and these are the men whom "R. B." met. And he did not meet them just when and how he chose. He lived with them always, day and night. He mixed with them upon terms of continuous, unlimited, and illimitable familiarity—for six years. Do you think it possible, bearing in mind the fact that he has experienced this ordeal, bearing in mind the fierceness of the ordeal—do you think it possible that "R. B." can have any use at all for the ordinary theories which are held by men concerning men? Do you think that he can hear without smiling your talk about good chaps, and bad chaps, and moral chaps, and silly chaps?

"R. B." has "learned" men. He learned them in the Army.

He learned his Socialism in the Army, too.

One knows, of course, that "R. B." did not actually think about Socialism until years after he had left the Army. But I am nevertheless sure that his Army experiences did much, if merely in retrospect, to provoke and stimulate and fashion the faith which is in him.

See how perfect, how concise a reproduction of the Problem was before him. It was a working model of the whole thing. Upon the

one hand he had a shining example of the virtues of combination, of discipline, of the common working for a common end and of what wonders the application of this principle may produce. Upon the other hand, he was continually witnessing and acting in a highly-compressed but very lively version of the drama called "Every man for himself and devil take the hindmost." That is not the motto of the Army; but it is the motto of the soldier. "Concentrated Effort" is the strong suit of the Army. "Individual Merit" (meaning Individual Shove) is the principle on which soldiers work and are worked.

"R. B." soon learnt how to shove. But he shoved fair—so fairly as might be.

"So fairly as might be." Let me explain this qualification. One knows, apart altogether from the testimony of his old comrades, one knows, because one knows "R. B.," that he was kind to all his military inferiors and a friend to all his friends. But men who sought to take advantage of him; men who grudged him his promotion; men who envied him; men who merely hated him (and "R. B.," not being a character in fiction, encountered all these men), found out that he could push. "R. B." was not a Prophet then. He was a heavy-jawed young man of twenty, faced with the alternatives of shoving or being shoved. As I say, he shoved—so fairly as might be.

What a perfect little miniature of the whole wild scheme was this barrack life! "R. B." has often told me how the soldiers hate a thief —a mean thief, a sneak thief. If a soldier sneaked another soldier's button stick, the whole society of the barrack-room at once combined to make things lively for the thief—just as our society contrives to apply correctives to the pickpocket. But when it came to high-class, intellectual thieving—the faking of accounts, the intelligent manipulation of canteen finance, the science of short reckoning, and so forth—then the soldiers shrugged their shoulders. This was merely "business," merely "life"—the economic basis of their little world.

"R. B." himself has pocketed the people's money. (Sensation!) This was when, by Individual Merit, he had climbed the social ladder to such a height that criticism became impertinence; when he was a Sergeant. I need not describe the process by which he conducted this operation. The matter was connected with beer and his spell of duty as caterer to the mess —a duty which every sergeant performed and abused in turn. Here the principle of *noblesse oblige* came in. Your turn to be "It" came round. You were told how to do *it* by one sergeant; you were helped to do *it* by another sergeant; you were watched doing *it* by all the other sergeants; you were obligingly relieved

of a small commission on *it* by the sergeant-major. And if you did not; if you would not? Ah! that was where the principle of "shove" came in.

They say that "R. B." is not a practical man. God's truth, he knows it all as well as Mr. Rockefeller. That solemn, impossible monomaniac, the good God's warning to those who court dyspepsia, stands now, at seventy-something, where Blatchford stood at 24. "R. B.," the unpractical, has climbed up a ladder of common sense and logic and honesty to a point which Mr. Rockefeller could not even see through a telescope. "R. B." has repaid his debt to the people a thousand times over. Rockefeller teaches in a Sunday school and has allowed the Devil, God be praised, to take his stomach. This fellow is really no more practical than the righteous are.

This sort of thing which was perpetrated by the "upper and middle classes" in "R. B.'s" regiment is done to-day in every regiment, so sure as there is an England. What else can you expect? The people, and things, and ideas which have made our England what she is have invented and inspired her Army.

Because I cannot be sure that this book will not be read by pudding-heads, I have to point out the obvious fact that in doing (at 24) what all his peers and equals did—what all his fellow-sergeants taught him to do and

expected him to do—"R. B." was merely being a gentleman; was merely "playing the game," just as our bishops, and dukes, and brewers, and stockbrokers play the game.

He played the game quite fairly, according to its rules. But when he had grown older and had read books and had seen facts and had found his mind, he perceived that the rules of the game were lopsided and impossible and altogether wrong. And he has devoted his life to proclaiming this wrong. But do not, therefore, hug to your souls the belief that he is "unpractical."

When excited jute merchants tell you that "R. B." is a dreamer, a visionary, tell them this story of his youth; how he "played the game" and made a profit on other people's beer. The jute merchant will then respect "R. B."

And so we see that the "Ramchunders" had to teach Mr. Blatchford in the matter of Men and Life. But the regiment performed for him other services. It drilled him out of sickness into health; it "shoved" him into strength of purpose; it chaffed him into geniality; it offered him friends and the leisure to read books.

Chap. V. More Army

I SAID in the last chapter that when Mr. Blatchford entered the Army he was a solemn, sullen, awkward lad. This description may not be literally exact; it is always difficult to describe exactly a landscape which one has not seen.

But "R. B." tells me, and his wife tells me also, that he was a solemn, serious, silent lad. The sullenness I have ventured to add, because it seems to me that any young gentleman having lived through the bitter experiences which led up to "R. B.'s" enlistment and who had found no better way out of them than that afforded by a bottle-nosed recruiting sergeant would not, as he practised the technicalities of the goose-step, be feeling altogether sunny.

But regular food and the nonsense of the other chaps soon began to improve the temper and constitution of our friend. Also, he liked soldiering: he liked the drills, he liked his fine tunic; above all, he liked the shooting. He was a puritan young gentleman; he was a little dour; a little moody and mysterious; but he could "shoot." He "could shoot like an angel," as his cot-mates said, and that fact,

combined with a recognition of the circumstance that he always "played fair," moved his comrades to forgive him for his virtues. "R. B." has often told me how the grim old buff-sticks, the "long-service" soldiers, deeply learned in iniquity, would collect around his cot and pay him mock-worship—mock-worship which possessed more than a touch of sincerity.

"Look at 'im!" they would say. "'E don't drink, 'e don't fight, 'e don't swear, 'e don't collect no sweet'earts, and yit—'e can shoot like a angel!"

Quite early in his service he found a friend —one Joe Norris, a lively young gentleman, the tale of whose impertinences would fill a book. Mr. Joseph Norris, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting, is now a successful man of business and the father of a family. There is, however, a Ramchunder gleam in the white of his eye which makes me believe the incredible stories that "R. B." tells: those wonderful stories which bubble out of "R. B." all day long, and which always begin and end with what Joe Norris said.

Most of these tales, but not quite all of them, you will find in "R. B.'s" story-books. Many of you know these tales by heart; the others must get and read them. These books will naturally be reviewed by me in due place, but I wish that considerations of form and unity and expense did not prevent me from

printing half-a-dozen of them here. With the exception of that which is the best tale of them all (I refer to the unforgettable romance of "The Scrumptious Girl"), the most important of these stories are biography, pure and simple. The one I should most like to set out here is the story of "The Black M.P.'s." It describes how "R. B.," when in charge of a picket, arrested and ran in four military policemen. It is a touching, simple story, and anybody who has read it once will re-read it twenty times. I have heard Mr. Blatchford *tell it.*

Mr. Blatchford has written most of his soldier stories in the form of "cuffers," which is Tommy Atkins' name for a story. The stories are set out in dialogue form, and the word "Boots!" followed by the word "Spurs!" recurs often throughout the tale. This is a piece of realism. The soldiers' time for telling cuffers is after lights out, when the barrack-room is in darkness and the men are in bed. "The form of procedure," says Mr. Blatchford, in a foreword to *Tales for the Marines*, "is much the same in all regiments. Private Noaks requests Private Stokes to 'spin us a cuffer.' Stokes calls 'Attention!' and then says 'Boots!' to which the men reply in chorus 'Spurs!' The 'cuffer' then begins, the 'spinner' testing the interest and wakefulness of his audience by interjecting the word

'Boots!' at such intervals as may seem advisable."

"Boots!" with its countersign "Spurs!" has been adopted by *Clarion* readers as a special form of greeting by which they make their presence known one to the other in public places.

When he performed the devil's prank which is recorded in "The Black M.P.'s," "R. B." had long grown out of his "solemn" stage. I do not know how long his solemnity lasted, but I suspect its disappearance to have been coincidental with the advent of Joe Norris.

Mr. A. M. Thompson once told me a story about Joe Norris. Thompson—then a boy—was invited by a gentleman to play at cards. He did so, and the gentleman cheated him. Shortly afterwards, A. M. T. related this circumstance to Mr. Norris. "Lead me to your friend," said Mr. Norris; "*I* will play cards with him," adding, explanatorily, "I've served seven years in the Army." Mr. Thompson produced his friend, and Mr. Norris administered a life-long cure.

This anecdote points the moral that soldiering is soldiering; and even at the risk of being mistaken for a parrot, I will ask you once again to remember that "R. B." has "soldiered." Get out of your minds at once, you who do not know him, the notion that "R. B." in any way resembles a Nonconformist minister. He

is a thoroughly human being, who, as the vulgar expression goes, "has been through the mill." He is as much now as he ever was—a cheerful, impudent, careless, jolly, you-be-damned sort of a soldier. At the same time he possesses knowledge, culture, sympathy, logic, and abundant tenderness and humour. Mix all these qualities together and employ your imaginations, and you will know "R. B." But do not think of him as a "goody" man.

During the whole of his military service "R. B." was a teetotaler. He tells me that while in the Army he "did not read much." Cricket, shooting, and performing the Unexpected were his chief amusements then. But he did read Chaucer, Leigh Hunt, Cowper, Mark Twain, George Eliot, Brontë, and Fielding. Dickens he already knew, and Bunyan and Defoe, and De Quincey and Thackeray and Ruskin. This list of books may not represent "much" to "R. B." now, but many persons would consider that an infantry sergeant who carried such things in his head had not ill-treated himself in the matter of culture.

The military authorities evidently thought well of his attainments, for when he was promoted to be a sergeant in 1874, they granted him a Second-class Certificate of Education. The front page of this document we reproduce with a view to creating mirth.

Upon the inner sheet of this document it is stated that No. 4,231 possesses the capacity to read and write; also that he possesses "the requisite proficiency in numeration and *no more*." The italics are mine.

That which helped him most in the development of his literary instinct was, in "R. B.'s" opinion, the fact that, while soldiering, he wrote a great number of letters. I have tried in vain to trace some of these letters. The following fragment has, however, been handed to me by "R. B." himself, who says that it is copied, word for word, from a letter which he wrote at this time:

". . . . A very old house, and a very big one, with a score or two of rooms dotted about in a labyrinth of crooked passages, and tacked together with crazy flights of stairs. A great, solemn, solid stone house that had seen better days. A house with a wilderness of garden overgrown with weeds behind, and a row of gaunt, uncanny-looking poplars ranged along in front like a gigantic guard that had turned out to present arms, and had forgotten to turn in again. A house infested with rats and bats and crickets and mice and cockroaches. A house of the draughtiest, creakiest, dustiest kind, all full of corners and recesses hid in gloomy shadow. A house that had been a mansion and a ladies' school and a smugglers' haunt, and was come down to be a barracks. Often have

W. O. Form 1164.

V. R.

SECOND CLASS

CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION.

AWARDED TO

No. 4231 R. Blatchford

103rd Regiment R.I.F.

2nd June 1874

On the recommendation of the Inspector of Army Schools

by

W. F. Gartside Lt Colonel

Commanding 103rd Regiment R.I.F.

I sat alone in the topmost room, with one rushlight making darkness visible, and listened to the creaking of the stairs and racing of the rats and sighing of the wind till I could have found in my heart to see ghosts by the double company.

"But I never saw any. There had, we were told, been a violent death in every room in the house save one, and in that room one of our men shot himself. But I never saw a ghost. Only one night I was on guard, and the dead man was lying in the guard-room, and I fell asleep. And when I woke the candle had burned down into the socket, the fire was out, and the moon shone through the window. The first thing that met my eyes was the stark figure under its white sheet. I sat up; I looked round; there was no one in the room but myself and—*it*.

"I didn't see a ghost. I didn't wait. I just jammed my busby on, and left the guard-room in three hops and a skip; and I never went back that night. It was warm weather, and sitting in the garden smoking a pipe and talking to the sentry was good enough for me. But I saw no ghost."

This document makes it clear, of course, that "R. B." knew all the elements of the trade while he was still a soldier. This is writer's writing. It also tells us plainly what writer most influenced "R. B." at this time. The

fragment is pure Dickens from top to bottom. But then, "R. B." himself says that even now, looking back over all the many literary enthusiasms to which he has thrilled, he would still place Dickens first on the list of writers who have influenced him.

"R. B.'s" literary gifts were known and admired in the regiment. An old comrade of his described to me recently a burlesque which "R. B." wrote to amuse the detachment then stationed at Popton Fort. "R. B." not only wrote the words of this stage-play (not one fragment of which remains to make him blush), but he designed and painted the scenery for its production. The gentleman to whom I have referred told me that the officers came in to see the performance, and that one of them remarked to him that it was very clever. "Yes," said my informant, "Sergeant Blatchford is a very clever man." "I suppose he is," said the officer, yawning.

One cannot help wondering what would have happened to "R. B." if he had remained in the Army. "Spotting" cleverness is obviously not a strong point with our officers. One cannot imagine a civilian employer of brains allowing "R. B." to walk out of his employment as "R. B." was allowed to walk out of the Army. Those who know him will, I think, agree with me in saying that he has all the qualities necessary to successful military command. He has

great presence of mind, great resourcefulness, great personal courage; he has quickness of perception, unlimited self-control, a fine bump of strategy, and a magnetic personality. He has the finest moustache in England. For all that, he would have made, perhaps, but an indifferent butcher. It is remarkable, however, that nobody thought of trying him.

And anyhow, why not the Stores department? "Superior" men in the lower ranks of our Army are nearly always rewarded with an honorary lieutenancy and a quartermastership, and sometimes the governorship of a gaol to follow. If things had followed their proper and accustomed course, "R. B." might now be worrying Suffragettes in Holloway.

But they let him go.

Once, when he had completed about five years' service, they nearly promoted him to the important post of regimental sergeant-instructor in musketry. But one of his innocent little pranks (this time unconnected with Joe Norris) had stuck in somebody's memory. The coveted post was awarded to another.

And, anyhow, "R. B." wanted to get married. And he knew enough about soldiering not to be desirous of introducing his young wife into barracks. Fortunately for us and for the Socialist movement, the Short Service Act had been put into force a few months before the date of "R. B.'s" enlistment. So that at the

end of six years and some odd months of service he was free to go. And he went.

Soon after leaving the Army he happened on the works of Mr. Thomas Carlyle.

Chap. VI. Waiting

MR. BLATCHFORD left the Army in 1877, but he returned to it for a brief period in 1878, when there was talk of war with Russia, and "R. B.," in common with other soldiers of the reserve, was recalled to the colours. This second spell of service was brief in duration and unproductive of adventure, and it is sufficient for our present purposes merely to mention it.

I may refer to one incident which "R. B." has related in connection with his brief experience as a Reservist. Amongst the soldiers who had been "called up" were a number of Militiamen—members of the Militia reserve. These irregular soldiers were very irregular indeed, and one evening about thirty of them gave trouble by persistently lighting candles in their barrack-room after "lights out" had been sounded. The orderly-sergeant happened to be "R. B.," and when that young gentleman went upstairs to talk wise words unto the mutineers, he was received with contumely and epithets, the latter conceived in a spirit of imagery peculiar to the New Cut, from which village the Militiamen had been recruited. Whereupon "R. B.," knocking up

some regular soldiers from another room, marched them in on the Militiamen and placed the whole roomful under arrest. Three-and-thirty crestfallen irregulars found themselves suddenly transported to the "clink," where they had leisure to rehearse their parts of speech. "R. B." is essentially a quick thinker and possesses a useful gift of repartee, as this anecdote suggests.

After leaving the Army, "R. B.," having first indulged himself in a pleasure-tramp through Wales, obtained work as a time-keeper with the Weaver Navigation Company at Northwich. Here he remained for some years. Nothing happened in particular until 1880, when Mr. Blatchford got married.

For the first two years of his married life he worked hard at grammar and shorthand; varying these amusements with cricket and rifle shooting. He had joined the Volunteers and won all sorts of prizes at the butts. It may be mentioned here that "R. B." has been in his time a very fine marksman—quite up to what is now called "Bisley form." And even in these days—at 57 years of age—he can do things with a gun which are calculated to open the eyes of self-confident and vain-glorious Youth.

Thus, for five years, "R. B." lived at Northwich a smooth, industrious, rather vegetable life; "vegetable" as to its outward seeming, that is to say. The inward parts of him were

SERGEANT
ROBERT BLATCHFORD.

living rapidly all the time. He was reading much and learning and thinking. But it is hardly reasonable to expect that the aspect and growth of his spiritual being attracted much public notice—in Northwich. He was, I suppose, to all outward appearance as "honest," "stalwart," "industrious," "civil," "obliging," "thrifty," and generally foolish as his fellows. Just a respectable working man, teetotal, it is true, and silent, and having a rather remarkable habit of laughing "inside" at all sorts of ordinary things, but at the same time quite "decent," even to the extent of wearing black clothes on Sunday and drinking cocoa.

When this chapter appeared in serial form, I ventured to wonder how "R. B." "got on" with his fellow workmen at this period. How did he behave to them? What did he think of them? What did he say to them? And what was their opinion of him.

This paragraph called forth a most interesting letter from one of "R. B.'s" old "mates"—Mr. Thomas Palin, who now lives near Manchester.

Mr. Palin wrote me at great length and I am going to reprint nearly all of his letter; for I am sure that those people who read this sketch with understanding will agree with me that that simple document is quite the most valuable piece of testimony which it contains.

Mr. Palin, I think, may be regarded as the spokesman of all his mates, and his letter makes it clear that the name of Robert Blatchford is now venerated amongst them, not merely in respect of his work as a writer and politician, but in remembrance of countless little acts of generosity and simple kindliness, such as those which Mr. Palin here describes.

This is what Mr. Palin says:

"I may say that I was a youth serving my apprenticeship as a boiler maker under the Trustees of the Weaver Navigation, at which Robert Blatchford was my timekeeper. He was also storekeeper.

"I may say that we all looked up to Robert as one that was gifted; for if you went into his office he could do your photograph with his blacklead in a jiffy. He could also make verses, too. I remember something about the voyage of the ship, Soap Bubble (or some such title), and the consequent wreck on Frodsham Marsh.

"I well remember we formed a cricket club, of which Robert was our captain; and we working men got a boat-load of green sods brought up the river, and we all went at nights and laid a large patch at a brick field with the sods, Robert Blatchford working as hard as any of us.

"I also remember our having a match, *Married v. Single*, for a knife-and-fork tea—

the winners to pay 1s. 3d., losers 1s. 9d., when we vanquished the said Robert and his host. My word, we did swipe them! And they had to pay the piper.

"I remember also that he had no *swank*, to use a modern phrase. He was a nice, sociable man; not one of those upstarts that think a man working with his hands is inferior to him. Oh, no; a man's a man for a' that.

"I remember, also, my father was a captain of a vessel—a lifting vessel; and one time the vessel was doing nothing; so father was told to stack some coal up in a field. Some men were emptying a coal boat lying in the river and they did it piece work, and when father's wages came down the river, he was this time short about 10s. The cashier said he must see these coal men for his money, but they disclaimed any responsibility for it, as they had to empty the boat and not stack the coal. So it went on for about three months, I think, father seeing first one and then another. . . . . My father was only getting £1 a week, and there were five youths and one girl at our house, and we could shift something. So in despair father went to Robert Blatchford. He was not his timekeeper, but he had dealings with him sometimes and he knew his man. So father went to him, and I fancy I can hear him saying it now: 'Well, John?' So father told his story and Robert said, when he had done:

"'The old devil! I'll get it for you, John; leave it to me.' And it goes without saying that he got it.

"We all knew if we were short of our time, if it was possible, Robert would put it right. Robert was a strong Liberal in those days, and he didn't half crow over a strong Tory, a fitter named Elliott. . . .

"When he went to London to be a reporter on *Bell's Life*, I think it was at £5 a week, we got up a presentation and had a tea at an hotel in the town, and presented Robert with a large album full of views of the river and district.

"Robert was a good shot . . . and he had won the Volunteer's silver medal twice in succession, and if he had won it that year it would have been his own."

At this stage of his letter, Mr. Palin, who is a strong "believer," takes Mr. Blatchford to task for his agnostic sentiments. No useful purpose would be served by reproducing that portion of the letter here; but the fact that Mr. Palin so strongly differs from "R. B." in this respect may be noted, as giving emphasis to that which follows:

"I remember one Whitsuntide, the men in the boiler shop got up a bit of a collection to reward me for being a good lad (I suppose). And I well remember that Robert Blatchford gave me 3d. . . . .

". . . Since writing the above I have seen my father and he said that Mr. Blatchford gave him the 10s. out of his own pocket, and he said: 'I will have it back before the cashier leaves the yard in the morning,' and he said: 'Here you are, John; go home and don't say anything to anybody.' He was full of righteous indignation at my father being treated so.

"Another time Robert sent father with a bag to their house and he said: 'Tell Mrs. Blatchford to give you 6d.' Father said, 'No, thank you,' but he had to have it whether or not. Mrs. Blatchford made him have it.

"Father said if Robert saw one man trying to best another he would put his foot on it at once. In short, he was a working man's friend then as now, and a gentleman to boot; one of Nature's gentlemen. Long may he wave!

"He is doing far more good in my opinion that three parts of the parsons, notwithstanding his opinion regarding religion."

I think that Mr. Palin's concluding sentiment will find an echo in the hearts of all Mr. Blatchford's readers, whether they be Christian men or infidels.

And if any cross-grained person should tell me that some of the facts for which I am indebted to Mr. Palin are trivial in character, I would point out to him that it is just such

trivial facts by which we may judge of bigger things.

I have often asked "R. B." to talk about his "mates" at Northwich, and he has talked about them by the hour. He has told me about the amazing carpenter who had an amazing story about Admiral Sir Cloudsley Shovel, and would narrate wild stories concerning the prowess and genius of that gallant person. He has told me about all sorts of queer and interesting men whom he got to know in Northwich. But he has never told me that which I wanted him to tell me. He has never told me what Mr. Palin tells me.

When "R. B." had been living in a respectable manner for five years he suddenly broke out and—wrote a story. This was accepted and published by a paper called the *Yorkshireman*, and "R. B.'s" life-long friend, Mr. Joseph Norris, has recorded the circumstance that "R. B." "walked on his heels." This story was called "The Militiaman," and it has been republished in a summer number of the *Clarion*. It has all the qualities and all the faults which are common to first efforts of clever writers.

Thus encouraged, "R. B." wrote a few more stories, which were published here and there. He tried his hand at other things as well, and in 1884 was writing a weekly column of

notes for a semi-comic paper called the *Leeds Toby*.

In this year, also, he met with Mr. A. M. Thompson, a young gentleman who was destined to mingle his fortune rather intimately with that of "R. B." Mr. Thompson was one of the original founders of the *Clarion;* he has written for it regularly since its first number was published. He is "Dangle," and is known, and liked, and respected (in a peculiarly actual sense which only people who have been fortunate enough to work for the *Clarion* can understand) by a literally world-wide host of readers. Mr. Thompson is "R. B.'s" most intimate friend, and of all that gentleman's admirers the most single-hearted and sincere.

Mr. Thompson and "R. B." became acquainted through that same Joe Norris who has hereinbefore been mentioned. Mr. Norris stayed on in the Army after "R. B." had left it, but finding that the "Ramchunders" had lost much of their flavour since being deprived of the membership of his "pal," he bought his discharge and came to Northwich and found work there and saw much of his friend. But work of a more attractive kind being offered to Mr. Norris in Manchester, he deserted Northwich. In Manchester he became acquainted with young Thompson, who had just stepped into journalism, and was full of

opulence and pride. It was Mr. Norris's happy custom to keep down young Thompson's temperature by a constant application of Blatchford. "You think you *know*," was (in effect) the daily refrain of Mr. Norris—"but wait till you meet Bob Blatchford."

At last young Thompson did meet this much-vaunted person. "R. B." has described the meeting in a paper contributed to the *Clarion*. He tells there how that when first he saw the solemn Dangle, the solemn Dangle was in bed; six foot of lanky youth established firmly in "the pleasant land of counterpane," and—reading the Koran.

Mr. Thompson, so far, has refused to publish his own impressions of that meeting. But having been worried by the present writer, he has broken the silence of a lifetime. He has produced a charming little record, very vivid, very suggestive, of his first meeting with "R. B."

Chap. VII. Journalism and Journalists

IN an old summer number of the *Clarion* "R. B." published the following reflections on his first meeting with A. M. Thompson:

"The first time I saw Dangle he was in his chamber reading the Koran. He reminded me of the song, 'My Sweetheart When a Boy,' so young, so innocent did he appear. And on his bed-quilt was embroidered the motto: 'Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.' Pathetic indication of an early moral training. And this man, so young, was already a dramatic critic."

This constitutes the sum of "R. B.'s" utterances concerning that historic meeting. Dangle is less reticent. Having been prevailed upon to break a silence which has lasted more than twenty years, he has broken it to some purpose and sends me the following vivacious and really helpful account of a meeting which was destined to exercise a very powerful influence upon the fortunes of both the men concerned.

With characteristic bashfulness Mr. Thompson begins his letter by assuring me that he really has nothing to say. With a playfulness and

simplicity, equally characteristic, he goes on to say a lot:

"We met in 1882, nearly twenty-seven years ago, at my mother's house in Boston Street, Manchester. A mutual friend, Norris, who had been a sergeant in the same regiment as Blatchford, had previously made us aware of each other, had incited us to some exchange of letters, had finally brought him over from Northwich, where Blatchford had, on leaving the Army, found a place as store-keeper.

"To make you understand the humour of that interview as I see it now, I must begin with a personal preface. 'R. B.' was then thirty. I was an unfledged puppy of twenty. This figure is mixed, but it has to be double-barrelled to cover the ground. In extenuation of my U.P.'ishness, I may plead that I was very young, that I had been egregiously flattered by a large and congenial acquaintance of fools, and that I was earning more money as a writer of 'smart' paragraphs than I have yet attained to on the *Clarion*.

"Conceive me, then, in these pre-Blatchfordian times, an Unfledged Puppy spreading his peacock's tail to the gaze and secret mortification of all the other bantams on the walk. Conceive the wily Norris diligently nipping the U.P.'s blossoming cheek by dropping the insidious poison of his friend Blatchford's superior attainments into the

"R. B."
During his Early Days as a Journalist.

swelling ear of the U.P.'s insufferable conceit. For example: If I quoted Mark Twain or Artemus Ward, Norris casually mentioned that his friend mostly read Emerson to breakfast, Plato to dinner, and Carlyle for supper. If I told of my afternoon's practice with Briggs and Watson at cricket, Norris would inspissate the night with fabulous tales of his friend's (Wilhelm) Telling marksmanship at Wimbledon. Even if I fell asleep he would try to rouse me with accounts of his friend's amazing wakefulness. It is a wonder I did not loathe his admirable friend. At any rate, I was fully fed up with him. And yet my disgust was tempered with a wholesome touch of awe.

"Behold us now assembled, Norris glib and easy as ever, his friend very morose, the Unfledged Puppy chastened by nervousness. 'R. B.' has recorded in another place that he found me reading the Koran. If so, I must have done it to give myself an air. One had to resort to desperate measures to encounter a man who read Emerson for breakfast. Be that as it may, I perceive dimly that I was disappointed—and relieved. Norris's friend did not look formidable at all. He was not so tall as a Colossus, nor so bright as the wits at the Mermaid. Between ourselves, he looked countrified, chapelified, Northwichy. There was no military swagger about him. His

clothes rather suggested the Nonconformist conscience than the soldier.

"I have no more memory than a straw mattress, and I find it difficult to detach that day's impression clearly from later growths. But I picture him as a sort of brown man, a man of brown study, brown clothes, and brown eyes. They were more gentle and dreamy then—the eyes, I mean, not the clothes—they had not the fierce, quick, steely glint of later years. The face, too, was softer, lacking the aquiline fighting edge of these Berserker times. Something distinctly womanly about it, despite the swarthy, thick moustache. A gentle, firm-looking beggar, not at all truculent.

"He was very quiet. Of course, I talked Carlyle—had crammed a chapter or two for the occasion. He retorted with allusions to the last pantomime! Then I breathed again.

"As my bashfulness wore off, I probably became patronising: condescendingly encouraged him to write, assured him kindly that my practised eye discerned merit in him, thought I could promise, with pains, to make a little man of him. It must have been funny. He was my senior, remember, by ten years. But I had lived in foreign parts, spoke tongues, had achieved a sort of twopenny celebrity, was already very middle-class-conscious—and very young.

"He was grateful for my kind patronage, but not effusively so. And then, by degrees, imperceptibly, though he did not say much, he began to 'pervade.' He did not explicitly express scorn of the prospects I had unfolded to his ambition, but it was subtly borne in upon me that my glowing glories did not appeal to him. He did not overtly disparage my Economic Basis, but tacitly conveyed that a Philosophic Basis, as a foundation of conduct, might be more useful.

"I had never thought of that before, and yet in my fine sufficiency I seemed to have thought of most things. A reasoned code of principles, he suggested, should be the first essential to any writer. None of the writers I had met had appeared to feel their want of it. But the idea struck me, as the Americans say, 'where I lived.' I mentally filed it for future reference. And there, or thereabouts, ended the first lesson.

"Of course, I had no conception then of the number of lessons that were to follow, but I clearly remember that even then I regarded the meeting as an Event. I clearly remember that even in this first fumbling at acquaintance I was conscious that here was a character different from any I had met. He was cleaner than any man, except one, that I had met. There was more meaning in him, more strength, more determination, and, above all, more

gentleness than in any man I had met. Even then I realised that here was a man utterly incapable of littleness in any sort. Even then I realised that here was a man whose friendship was a thing worth winning. In short, I knew, even at that first meeting, that I had met a Man."

I think that this tells us all there is to tell about the "R. B." of that period: chapelified, Northwichy, cultured, self-confident, calm, disdainful, proud, right-minded, quick-witted, and possessed already of an entirely individual standpoint of faith.

The "kind patronage" of which Mr. Thompson makes so light did actually provide "R. B." with the means of escape from his penal servitude at Northwich.

The proprietors of the *Sporting Chronicle* at Manchester, which journal was the scene of Mr. Thompson's early triumphs, became interested in *Bell's Life*, of London. This "new interest" decided, after the manner of "new interests," to do all sorts of novel and surprising things with the old paper, not the least important of their decisions being to transform it from a weekly into a daily journal. "New blood," as the saying goes, became necessary to the proper conduct of this undertaking, and Mr. Thompson made bold to speak up for the rich, untapped corpuscles of his friend "R. B."

By this time "R. B." was the father of two children—a girl and a boy—and he has placed it on record that the weekly stipend accruing from his "billet" at Northwich amounted to twenty-seven shillings. "Domestic life on twenty-seven shillings a week," he said, "resembles the ready-made suit at one-and-a-half guineas; it is apt to prove a tight fit." His association with the *Leeds Toby* (before referred to) had eased the pinch a little, but this process was effected at a cost of some discomfort to the man inside the suit. The "copy" for this Leeds paper had, perforce, to be written all on one day—and that day the Sabbath. The copy ran to five thousand words —say twenty pages of this book—and for this very solid contribution "R. B." received the staggering reward of—a guinea. In these days he could readily command fifty guineas for the same quantity of work contributed to the capitalist Press.

When the offer of a job on *Bell's Life* was submitted to "R. B.," you may well suppose that he quickly decided to doff his ready-made suit and face the unknown perils of professional journalism.

On March 24, 1885, he went to London. On the day following he became a journalist, and, to quote his own words, he "has never got an honest living since."

He tells us that the reception which he met

with on *Bell's Life* was not a very hearty one. "The editor and resident proprietor were frosty, but not kindly. The former confided to the latter that I was a 'rank outsider'; the latter confided to the former that I had 'no more style than a cochin-china hen.' Six months later they quarrelled, and each told me what the other had said."

But they found him plenty of work to do.

He was engaged to write the "Echoes" and make himself generally useful. He thinks he did it.

"I was often at work from ten o'clock one morning until one o'clock the morning following. I was sent to all kinds of places to do special articles on all kinds of subjects. I attended cricket matches, football matches, boat races, horse races, boxing contests, swimming contests, theatres, coach meets, sailing matches, military tournaments, picture exhibitions, brewers' exhibitions, sporting exhibitions, Imperial exhibitions, Lord Mayors' shows, pigeon shooting contests, dairy shows, cattle shows, and committee meetings of all kinds, including one committee meeting of sporting noblemen—real live dukes, earls, and baronets."

When "R. B." first joined the staff of *Bell's Life* that paper was conducted in a frigid and respectable manner. But, subsequently, the editor was deposed and a new editor appointed. Then—ah! then—*Bell's Life* Office became

a strange and wonderful and delightful place.

Under the benign reign of Pontifex II., as he was called in the office, *Bell's Life* was given over to mirth, good-fellowship, old port, and—the scrap-heap.

He seems to have been a live person, this Pontifex II.: a man and a brother; a gentleman; an Admirable Crichton among editors. "R. B." wrote his portrait some years ago, and I cannot resist the temptation to quote some portion of that vivid sketch.

Pontifex II., coming into the office within half-an-hour of the time appointed for "closing down," learns that the paper is three or four columns short; that the printers are standing for copy; that several of the editorial gentlemen have failed to produce that which they have been instructed to produce.

Says the master printer:

"Miss our trains, as sure as eggs. For heaven's sake, sir——"

"Ha! ha! ha! For heaven's sake, eh? Didn't know they read *Bell's Life* up there! Ha! ha! ha! Eh? Wish to Ged they'd buy it down here. Ha! ha! ha! Well, gentlemen, to work, eh? Phew!"

And this, according to "R. B.," is how Pontifex would get to work:

"Phew! Mr. Bounder, your pen of the ready writer, eh? Phew! I'll dictate—ah—

Bleys—eh? Mr. Tucker, be so good as to—ah—get me *Truth*, *World*, *Echo*, *Pink 'Un*, and—ah—Phew!—scissors and paste. And—ah—Mr. Nunquam will, I'm sure—ah—facile pen—ah—special descriptive, crews at practice—ah—from tow-path—ah—facts from *Evening Standard*. Phew!

"*Now*, Mr. Bounder, although the Kingsclere colt shows rather more daylight under him than a strict connoisseur might wish—damn this paste—all lumps—where's the *Echo?* (*snip*, *snap;* dab, dab, dab)—ah—still, being sweet about the hocks and filled with the—*Pink 'Un*, please—blood of mighty sires—here, Mr. Hall, are the first three pars general sport—(snip, snap; dab, dab, dab)—he may be expected to show a clean pair of heels to more than one crack—if, indeed, does not prove himself—(snip, snip, snap)—finest horse Victorian Era—Phew! (dab, dab). Ask Mr. Hall how much general sport."

"Thus," says "R. B." ". . . Would this truly great man steer, work, and captain his ship off the rocks, night after night, in less than thirty minutes. Pontifex II. . . . was a man."

You see what a queer, new world "R. B." was bundled into when he was bundled into his post on *Bell's Life*. The jolly, careless, "Irish" atmosphere of this place, the breezy methods of King Pontifex, must have taught much to

"R. B.," who had been schooled and nurtured in the stuffy air of chapel and amid the cast-iron laws of the barrack-room and the soul-mangling devices of mill and workshop.

But on *Bell's Life* also he met with another influence, more powerful than all the rest combined. He met with E. F. Fay—"The Bounder."

This incident in "R. B.'s" life is so important that I must deal with it in a separate chapter.

Chap. VIII. "The Bounder"

EVERYBODY who reads this sketch is not necessarily old enough in years or Socialism to remember "The Bounder" or to remember the *Clarion* when Fay wrote for it.

For these reasons it is necessary that I should state facts which to many may seem rather commonplace.

E. F. Fay, whose pen name was "The Bounder," wrote for the *Clarion* from the time of its foundation until his death in 1896. I have read much of his work and heard much about himself and his doings.

"The Bounder" was a curious man, and he wrote curiously. Those who can appreciate the things which really matter in literature—an individual standpoint, an individual faith, an individual touch, and an individual man behind all these—will know how to appreciate "The Bounder's" work. It was curious, I say —curious in its strength and sanity, and in its fine broad humour and perfect tolerance. It resembled in certain aspects the work of Sterne (a writer, I believe, who was much esteemed by

Fay), but "The Bounder's" work was free from those dabs of false sentiment and niggling artifice which disfigure the writings of Sterne. By the same token, therefore, Fay lacked something of the refinement and "polish" which distinguished Sterne. Some of us may think that he was as well without it.

Fay himself, Fay the man, has been described to me in a hundred different languages by a hundred different people. I need not attempt the almost impossible feat of re-describing these descriptions, for I propose in a little while to quote the words of "R. B."

This man Fay was "R. B.'s" best and closest friend: the friend who has exercised most influence upon "R. B.'s" character, temper, and opinions. The Fay influence is even to be traced, at certain moments, in Mr. Blatchford's speech and looks.

"R. B." has expressed in unmistakable terms his sense of the debt which he owes to the genial, stimulating comradeship of this big-hearted Irishman. "'The Bounder,'" says "R. B.," "was a revelation. . . . . The *Chronicle* boys told Fay that I did not know how to laugh. Laugh? I was growing mouldy for something to laugh at, and I got it. 'The Bounder' was funnier than his writing He was funny in character, in manner, in appearance. He was a new type. We went all over London together. We went to exhibitions and

E. F. FAY ("THE BOUNDER.")

theatres together. We discussed all manner of experiences and life problems together. We swapped ideas about men and women and books. And I laughed all the time. It was a great time, and I laughed more in the first six months than in all the previous five-and-thirty years of my life."

In an old *Clarion* Mr. Blatchford described the manner of Fay's first entry into the *Bell's Life* arena:

"The advent of 'The Bounder' on his appointment to the Staff was striking. It was a foggy, miserable evening, and the streets were like open sewers. The Cackler (a colleague), breathless, splashed to the hair, rushed through the outer office crying, 'Here he is!' The Staff were all agog. The Cackler blocked the doorway with his angular figure. 'The Bounder' appeared, clothed in an acre of streaming ulster, looming like a mighty cloud. The Cackler wriggled, giggled, and looked more Japanese than ever; and then came a calm voice from the cloud: 'Ah! Mr. Tucker, will you have the goodness to remove this bally old umbrella-stand from the doorway?'"

This is what "The Bounder" looked like when he and "R. B." first met:

"A huge fellow, six feet two, and eighteen stone, with a florid, rather stolid face, sleepy eyes, and a habit of pursing his lips and draw-

ing down his nose sarcastically. He was shabbily dressed, untidy.". . . . "I can see him now as he strode across to the Cheshire Cheese, with his shoulders squared, his hat on the back of his head, and a big, heavy-headed bamboo stick under his arm.

"'The Bounder' of 1885 was difficult to follow in conversation. His utterance was rapid, and quite half he said was in the manner of soliloquy, indistinct, half audible; added to which his strange jumbling of slang with quotations from authors ancient and modern, and his use of words and phrases of his own coinage, kept one guessing at his meaning."

Mr. Blatchford gives this as sample speech in the Fay language:

"Haw! You behold in me one out of suits with fortune. Pestilential person with the scythe hovers o'er domestic oasis with lethal O.P. optic fixed on the firstborn. Ha! Fate hath dealt the knock like Sullivan at twelve-stone-six. Poor blooming gentleman has copped the auctioneer. Very snide the poor sportsman is. Haw! like old Billy Barley 'on the broad of his back, bless your eyes.' The poor blooming gentleman. Is there no hand on high to shield the brave? And I that sucked the honey of his musie fizz must feel the deep damnation of his taking off. Grassed, my friend, the poor old sportsman's grassed! And shall Trelawney die? Haw! You see how it

is. I am indifferent honest. One must back his friends. Who else shall fill the cruse and sponge his features frail? I will never desert Mr. Micawber. The poor gentleman, the poor old sportsman, haw! Kismet, scrape thyself! I say 'he shall march, by God.'"

"Which," says Mr. Blatchford, "being rightly heard and shrewdly translated, meant 'My brother is nearly dead of typhus fever, and I must go home and attend to him.'"

I never saw Fay; but I know him well. He was the friend of all my friends, and lives in their fireside talk and jokes and metaphors. But nobody knew him as "R. B." knew him, and nobody talks of him as "R. B." does.

Here is Fay's own description of his first encounter with "R. B." in *Bell's Life* Office:

"The non-managing partner led me into a dark, disagreeable room, in the corner of which was a little, dark, disagreeable-looking person, writing at a little, dark, disagreeable desk. I couldn't see his face, as he was bent over the desk; but his back was visible, and it occurred to me that in the whole course of my mundane experience—which had been pretty peculiar and fairly extensive—I had never sampled such a distinctly 'humpsome' dorsal development.

"'You have there,' said the non-managing partner, loftily waving his hand, in the direction of the files, 'all the numbers of *Bell's Life* since the first issue in 1826. If you look

through them you will find that you have had not unworthy predecessors. You will find,' he said, still more loudly and loftily, 'that Dickens, Thackeray, Jerrold, and other eminent men of letters have written for *Bell's Life in London.* This, I hope, will be an example and incentive to you.'

"With this, like a nineteenth century Brutus, he departed, leaving me alone with the back.

"Something seemed to have gone wrong with that back. It seemed to be trying to tie itself into a knot, and anon curling itself into a hoop, and seemed to be troubled with a curious, gulpy gurgling. A most offensive back. And when, eventually, it got up and walked out on its heels, I was much relieved."

A few days later, Fay saw what he called "R. B.'s" "front elevation," and his mental note thereon was: "Morose and truculent to a degree. William of Orange with a dash of Black Ruthven."

But this, as "R. B." has said, was not "meeting": it was only "seeing."

The two men met a little later. "R. B." was a sort of general handyman on *Bell's Life.* Fay was dramatic critic. A whisper went forth that "R. B." would be required to deal with certain theatres, so as to save "Fay's fee" when possible. Instinct told "R. B." that Fay's fee meant a good deal to Fay. There-

fore "R. B." sent Fay a little invitation, and the two men met and . . . became friends.

"R. B.," the morose, the sullen, the Northwichy, woke up. He had found a fellow-man.

The two friends entered into a partnership of ideas and pleasures. They went all over London together. "He kept me laughing most of the time." says "R. B.," "for he had a wonderfully keen eye for the ridiculous, and saw humours, as I saw pain, in the most unexpected places. His wit was very nimble, and he had a queer, whimsical fancy. Add to these qualifications the picturesqueness of his own character, his habit of mixing slang and poetry, profanity and ethics, racing talk and shrewd criticisms of Shelley, Dickens, Milton, and Bret Harte, and it may be well seen that 'The Bounder' was a fascinating and interesting study." . . . The two men, superficially so different, had much in common spiritually: they were qualified to help and enlighten and stimulate each other; they were "born to be friends," as the saying goes. Let me quote "R. B." again:

". . . . I was rather strait-laced and, perhaps, in a way, inclined to a certain unforgiving and self-righteous puritanism. 'The Bounder,' again, bore some resemblance to the unflattering portrait painted for me by the Manchester men. He certainly swore and drank too much. He was not free from in-

tellectual pride, had even imbibed a little Cambridge caste prejudice, and, through many years of wild bachelor life and a close intimacy with the racecourse, had not grown in grace. He was almost a cynic; I was almost an idealist. He was a patriotic Irishman, with bitter anti-Saxon feelings. I was a patriotic Englishman, with the Saxon's stupid ignorance of Irish affairs and prejudice against Irish people. He was superficially anti-democratic. I was a democrat by nature and reflection. . . . . And, really, I believe we did each other good. 'The Bounder' made me a Home Ruler, and taught me patience, good-humour, and a wider human charity. I converted him to Socialism, put him in the way of becoming an ardent and uncompromising democrat, revived his fainting faith in men, and gradually drew him into a cause and a work that brought out the best of his native goodness."

Two big-souled men thus "struck the bargain."

Personally, I never feel that Fay is quite dead. He talks to me and laughs at me with the mouth of my friend.

Chap. IX. Success & Socialism

TOWARDS the end of 1886 the *Sunday Chronicle* in Manchester was started. Some of the proprietors of *Bell's Life* were interested in this new venture, and "R. B." was put to write its "leaders."

He remained in the South of England for a while. In 1887, bad times arrived for him and Mrs. Blatchford. They lost two children, and nearly lost Winnie. They moved to the Isle of Wight for a few months in search of rest, and change, and healing; but after a brief stay, and in response to urgent calls, they packed up once again and trekked to Manchester.

Here "R. B." was able to resume intimate relations with his old friend A. M. Thompson, while at the same time he was not wholly cut off from Fay; for that rare gentleman was appointed London correspondent to the *Chronicle* and often came to Manchester.

"R. B.'s" work in Manchester met with much success and appreciation. He says that he does not know why. But we know why, of

course. It was honest, first-hand work, observed from life and not from grammar-books. It was humorous, vivid, human. These things were obvious to all; but the lettered reader was able to observe a finer, more elusive merit in "R. B.'s" work; he perceived that "R. B." was master of a singularly simple style or manner in writing. He knew that the straight, clean, logical Saxon in which this new-comer expressed his ideas or impressions was rare and wonderful.

It was a series of sketches called "The Chronicles of the Drum" which first brought "R. B." into prominence. These were followed by other tales and devices, many of which are to be found in *Fantasias*—"R. B.'s" first published book; a book of fine poetry. A little later "R. B." added to his fame by "doing" the Manchester slums. Those who know and appreciate his later writings and who are conscious of his fine and genuine passion for justice and his love for dirty and cold and hungry people can imagine with what white heat he threw himself into the task of exposing the Manchester tribe of rack-renters. One can imagine also, as the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford would remark, that he made things hum. He was merely a "Radical" by expressed conviction even in those eye-opening days; and in 1889 he went to Ireland and wrote articles on the conventional Home Rule ticket. But a

little later—in 1889—the inevitable occurred: he became a Socialist.

In a brief memoir contributed to *Justice* some few years ago, "R. B." explained just how he became a Socialist. It is a simple explanation.

". . . . Socialists are born as well as made," he says. "I was born with a nature which was certain to get me into some kind of mischief sooner or later. I have had, from my earliest recollection, a keen sympathy for all kinds of 'bottom dogs,' and a rather pugnacious resentment against all kinds of bullies. I learnt the meaning of poverty in a lean and sharp school, and the blessings and indignities of labour were made manifest to me at an early age.

"Then, again, my natural bent was intensified by the literature I so freely indulged in—the books of Dickens, Ruskin, Thackeray, Carlyle, Emerson, Whitman, Thoreau, and other such plain-spoken authors were not calculated to check my progress towards democracy.

"Indeed, I was a thorough democrat and an out-and-out Radical before I was out of my teens, and when I joined the *Sunday Chronicle* I was something more than a Radical, for having perceived that competition was a failure, and being convinced that the doctrines of the Manchester school were hopeless, I had, with considerable labour, devised an economic

scheme of my own, somewhat resembling the single-tax by virtue of which the unequal and unjust distribution of wealth could be periodically rectified. The details of the scheme have long since passed out of my mind.

"Some time in 1888 or 1889 I was writing upon some social question in the *Chronicle* when a Manchester workman wrote to say that the only remedy was Socialism. I replied by condemning Socialism. Then a Liverpool workman wrote to say that I evidently did not know what Socialism was, and that I was an ass for writing about things I did not understand.

"This caused me to think about the position, and I readily perceived that I really did know nothing about Socialism, that I had written about it, and that I was an ass.

"Therefore I wrote to my Liverpool friend and asked for some books on Socialism, at the same time saying that I would study the question, and that if Socialism seemed to be just and wise I would not be ashamed nor afraid to say so.

"The man—I forget his name—sent me a pamphlet by Hyndman and Morris. I read it. I saw directly that this collectivist idea was the very thing I had been looking for, that it was juster, simpler, and more perfect than my own scheme, and that it was very different from what I had believed Socialism to be.

"Therefore I was a Socialist, and said so.

"I do not know," is "R. B.'s" final reflection, "that I have anything to add . . . . except that I am a Socialist still and always shall be, and that I cannot understand why other people are not Socialists also when Socialism is so wise, so just, and—so easy to understand. But all progress is slow.

"The British are a level-headed and practical people, but they cannot help it, and we have got to make the best of them, consoling ourselves with the reflection that as our beloved fellow-countrymen are too stupid to turn round very quickly, it is probable that if they ever do become Socialists they will 'stay put' for a long while."

"R. B.'s" connection with the *Sunday Chronicle* lasted until 1891, in which year three important happenings befell him: (1) He "stood" for Parliament; (2) he wrote and financed a comic opera; (3) he started—or helped to start—the *Clarion*.

Dealing with these events in the order mentioned, it may be said of the Parliamentary candidature (he stood for East Bradford, as a Socialist) that it did not succeed and did not matter. All that it did for "R. B." was to diminish his banking account and to instil in him a distaste for practical politics and practical politicians which has endured

to this hour. If you mention the matter to him, he merely snorts and talks about George Hirst. To one like myself who knows "R. B." and has visited the House of Commons, there is much humour in the thought of my friend having competed for legislative "dignity."

The comic opera completed the financial process inaugurated by the comic candidature. It was a good opera; everybody says so who ever saw it. "R. B." wrote the libretto, which was dainty and whimsical, and "R. B.'s" cousin, Mr. Clarence Corri, supplied the music. The playgoer, however, refused to appreciate this work. It "petered out." So did "R. B.'s" savings.

Then it was that pressure was applied to "R. B." in reference to the political colour of his writings. It is not necessary to record here the details of the dispute which ensued between Mr. Blatchford and the proprietor of the *Sunday Chronicle*. I will content myself with stating that "R. B.'s" Socialism formed the chief subject of contention.

"R. B.," having squandered his savings in pursuit of Parliamentary and dramatic fame, was placed in a weak position from which to conduct disputes with his employer.

He possessed on the one hand a wife and family and a distinguished and lucrative post, the revenue from which amounted to £1,000 per

annum. On the other hand there was—his Socialism.

He stuck to the Socialism and threw over his "post."

Chap. X. The "Clarion"

ENGLAND was born again, as it were, on December 12, 1891, upon which day the first number of the *Clarion* was published.

The founders, inventors, and proprietors of the new paper were the following four gentlemen, all of whom had worked for the *Sunday Chronicle*:

"R. B."

A. M. THOMPSON.

E. F. FAY.

MONT BLONG (Montagu Blatchford).

These four revolutionaries did not all "come out" together. They left their old haunts one by one, as occasion offered and in the above order.

When it became known in Manchester that "R. B." had resigned his post on the *Sunday Chronicle*, the well-wishers came round in their hundreds, proffering praise, and comfort, and advice. "R. B." was greatly cheered thereby. It was, indeed, the flattering whispers of the well-wishers which first put into his head the idea of starting a new and independent journal. The idea was received with general acclama-

tion, and promises of support reached "R. B." and his conspirators from all quarters.

But when the project began to take a practical shape; when the moment came for signing cheques, then the professed admirers displayed that caution which is so generally practised by such people at such moments.

"R. B." and his fellow-adventurers perceived that this was going to be an exclusively self-aided enterprise.

None of the bold quartette had any money to speak of. But somebody had some shares in something and somebody else a life insurance policy, and somebody else an uncle in oil and tallow. So that by dint of thrift and prayer and fasting a capital of £400 was collected, and on this sum of money the paper was organised, advertised, and inaugurated. The inauguration did not take place under exactly cheerful conditions. In the first instance difficulties were encountered in respect of the paper supply. Capitalists looked askance at this queer new venture, and the usual trade credit was difficult to obtain. But at last a paper-maker was found at—Blankney, having within his breast the tiny seed of love and charity. He offered to supply the Clarion Board with paper. Everybody was surprised, particularly "The Bounder," who promptly dubbed the paper-maker a "Breezy Fellow." He was ever afterwards spoken

of in the *Clarion* office as "the B. F. of Blankney."

The justification for this epithet, however, became subsequently less obvious. While the first number of the *Clarion* was being printed, its four parents were hurriedly and excitedly summoned to the place of printing, where it was found that the printing machine had gone wrong by reason of certain abnormalities (china clay was one of them) having been introduced into the texture of the paper supplied by the gentleman at Blankney.

As a consequence of this fact, the first number of the *Clarion* was almost wholly illegible. When lumps of china clay did not come off and stick to the cylinders, lumps of cylinder came off and stuck to the china clay. Hence the now common expression: "A patchy paper."

This was not the only disastrous incident which marked the birth of the *Clarion*. While the china clay and the printing press were worrying out their differences, a terrific rainstorm burst over Manchester and peeled every hoarding in the city. At daybreak there was not a single *Clarion* poster to be seen.

The appearance of the new paper was therefore kept a profound secret from the public. And those members of the public who could not be fooled, who *guessed* that the new paper had been published and rushed to buy it, were

—foiled again! For when they got it they could not read it. In these circumstances it must be regarded as a surprising fact that the first number of the *Clarion* was bought by nearly 40,000 people.

The subsequent sales of the paper averaged about 34,000 copies weekly, at which figure they stuck for three or four years. Those were hard years for the plucky little band of *Clarion* writers. Years of tough work and tender pay. When the fortunes of the paper and of its devoted foster-parents were at their lowest ebb, a syndicate offered "R. B." £1,500 a year if he would leave the *Clarion*. "R. B." declined. This spirit of pluck, and endurance, and sacrifice ran right through the regiment. Every man on the muster-roll lived on half rations for years. These hard times had passed away before I got to know the *Clarion* and the *Clarion* men. I am one of those who batten, as it were, upon the blood of the pioneers.

In 1894 Mr. Blatchford engaged in his first real encounter with the influenza fiend. It nearly killed him. He did not fully recover for nearly two years afterwards, and he is now peculiarly subject to the same disease and suffers badly under it. "R. B." under influenza suggests always to my mind the simile of a viking with the mumps.

In 1895 the *Clarion* people made a bold and, as it proved, a useful move; they transferred

the head offices of the paper from Manchester to London. This brought them into touch with advanced opinion in the South of England whilst sacrificing no portion of their following in the North.

And shortly afterwards "R. B." wrote *Merrie England*, and published it as a book. *Then* the tide swung round.

The publication of *Merrie England* added 10,000 to the weekly circulation of the *Clarion*. *God and My Neighbour*, published about ten years later, moved the circulation up another 15,000, and during the last three years 20,000 more copies have been added to the weekly sales of the paper, so that the *Clarion* can now boast of a *bona-fide* circulation of 83,000 copies. Mr. Blatchford and Mr. Thompson must view with some pride the present sturdy growth of the tree which they planted so haphazard in such inclement weather.

It scarcely behoves a *Clarion* writer to brag about the influence and prosperity and power of the journal with which he is associated. But I would like to point to the record of the Clarion Cinderella Clubs—one of the many recreative and social enterprises which are carried on by *Clarion* readers all over the world. The object of the Cinderella Clubs (of which there are many, all affiliated to the central organisation) is to feed and amuse poor children and to provide them with toys and

boots and clothing. One club, that of Hull, fed and entertained in its first year 300,000 children. It is the entertainment feature of these clubs which chiefly distinguishes them from ordinary charities of the capitalist kind. The children are not merely provided with boots and food: they are *entertained*—petted and played with and made much of. It was the experience gained by Clarion Cinderella Club officials in Bradford which enabled the school authorities of that city to take the lead in the public feeding of school children. The said authorities have called upon the Clarion men to show them how. The affiliated clubs, since their institution, have given happiness and comfort to millions upon millions of poor children.

It was "R. B." who thought out the Cinderella Club idea, and who (while still associated with the *Sunday Chronicle*) instituted the first Cinderella Club—that of Manchester—which has very properly continued its allegiance to the *Chronicle*. The income of the *Chronicle* Cinderella Club last year amounted to £2,500.

It is certain that that which is called in the Office "the *Merrie England* boom" established the fortunes of the paper. Mr. Blatchford had written for the *Clarion* a series of letters addressed to an imaginary working man, the purpose of which was to present the case for

Socialism in plain language. After this series of articles had run its course, it occurred to somebody inside the *Clarion* Office to make a book of them. Nobody had any serious criticism to offer respecting this proposition, though, at the same time, nobody expected or prophesied that any startling results would follow on the publication of the book. But while the Thinking Branch of the Office was discussing within itself whether to print 50,000 or 100,000 copies of the book, orders came in for 200,000 copies, which set the Thinkers thinking overtime, with the result that a decision to "let her out" was arrived at. The little book was issued in various forms, at prices ranging from five shillings down to a penny. Seven hundred and fifty thousand (750,000) copies of the penny edition were sold at the first rush. Its sale in this country and America has since exceeded two million copies. If one states that this book alone has made more converts to English Socialism than all other Socialist publications combined, one is putting the case conservatively. *Merrie England* has been translated into the Welsh, Dutch, German, Swedish, French, Spanish, Hebrew, Danish, and Norwegian languages. And through this book, of course, "R. B." achieved an international reputation.

It is worth while to consider now what sort of book this *Merrie England* is; why it is the

best-known and best-remembered of all "R. B.'s" writings; and why it has proved so valuable as a work of propaganda.

The book, as I have said, is written in the form of letters addressed to a Mr. John Smith, practical working man, of Oldham. It was the first book by "R. B." which I ever read, and I do not think that any other book of his (and I have read them all) has so impressed me with its sense of logic, lucidity, and vitality—though logic, lucidity, and vitality are the outstanding features of all Mr. Blatchford's work.

Take the opening paragraphs of *Merrie England:*

"Dear Mr. Smith,—I am sorry to hear that you look upon Socialism as a base or foolish thing, and upon Socialists as foolish or base men.

"Nevertheless, since in you lies the hope of the world, I shall try to change your opinion.

". . . . Now, Mr. Smith, if you are really a man of hard, shrewd sense, we ought to get on very well. I am myself a plain, practical man. I build my beliefs upon that which I see and know, and I respect a 'fact' more than a Lord Mayor.

"In these letters I shall stick to hard facts and cold reason; and I shall appeal to that robust common sense and English love of fair

play for which, I understand, you are more famous than for your ability to see beyond the end of your free and independent nose at election times."

What could be more irresistible than this "approach"? Nothing could be more plainly stated from the standpoint of Mr. Smith, or more quietly, honestly, and sensibly expressed from the standpoint of Mr. Smythe. Here we do, in sooth, possess a book which (putting its politics on one side) is calculated to appeal to those who do not know about the art of writing equally with those who do.

What other man in England could have covered all the preliminaries in those few lines as Mr. Blatchford does?

Mr. G. R. S. Taylor has recently published, through the *New Age* Press, a book of very brilliant character-studies dealing with the leaders of Socialism. In the last of these papers Mr. Taylor considers the work of "R. B.," and I am going to take the liberty of quoting the major portion of his very striking essay. It seems to me that in considering the question of Mr. Blatchford's claim to public esteem, Mr. Taylor has arrived at very exact conclusions. If I attempted to write an essay on *Merrie England* I should say so much which Mr. Taylor has already said that my performance would read like a very stupid plagiarism. Furthermore, I do not possess Mr.

Taylor's talent for saying these things so brightly and gracefully.

"We have tried," says Mr. Taylor, "to weigh the merits and the faults of the twelve men who have, perhaps, the best right to be called the leaders of Socialism. But you cannot have an army of leaders. There must be someone to follow behind.

"It occurred to one clear-headed man, who thought in short paragraphs, that it was time somebody set to work to create an army to go after the great men who were on in front. That man was Robert Blatchford, who can manufacture Socialists more quickly than anyone else. Tipton, Limited, sells more packets of tea than any other firm; Bever sells more soap; one factory makes most boots; another most chairs. Mr. Blatchford and the *Clarion* make more Socialists than any rival establishment. When you come to think it over carefully, this business of making Socialists is the only real work to be done. Whilst those brilliant leaders are waving their swords and doing the heroic generally, Mr. Blatchford attends to business and makes converts. When everyone is a Socialist—that is, when everyone is intelligent—there will be no need for leaders. It is only sheep who need shepherds and dogs to herd them properly. Intelligent people will do what is right out of sheer intelligence. (There is really much saving of trouble by being intelligent.)

"Mr. Blatchford's great qualification for the post of missionary-in-chief is the fact that he can say in one sentence what the gentlemen who write for the *Times* and other classical works take half a column to put down. If the best literary style is the style that is clearest, beyond all possibility of misunderstanding its meaning (which is not a bad test for people who set out to say something), then Mr. Blatchford writes better English than any other master except Shakespeare and the author of the *Bab Ballads*. Whether you agree with him or not, you certainly cannot misunderstand him. He is the only man who would make a suitable editor for the Book of Life, wherein, we are given to understand, everything will be put down with perfect precision and with intolerable clearness. One meditates on the editor of the *Clarion* sitting within the Golden Gates, writing up the biography of Jay Gould or the Duke of Slumdom, or Messrs. X., sweaters; probably the brief paragraphs on ordinary professional men and manufacturers and tradesmen will not read more soothingly; or on the wage-earner who voted against the Labour candidate. Their doings will be put down so that there cannot be the slightest mistake. There will be nothing unkind: it will only be clear truth. Mr. Blatchford is never unkind to an opponent. Why should he be unkind? When he can merely tell the truth about him.

If I were a Liberal or a Tory politician I would pray that Robert Blatchford might lose his matchless skill of telling the plain truth (so that it stands out like gold in the sun), and that he would take to writing fierce invective and flowing periods.

" Mr. Blatchford wrote two books, one named *Merrie England* and the other *Britain for the British.* When he had finished them it was no longer possible to plead that you could not understand what Socialism is; for these books tell you so precisely and clearly that there is no possibility of misunderstanding. Further, they are so convincing that everyone who reads them becomes a Socialist—except the mentally deficient. There are about a million people in England who would vote for a Socialist candidate at the next election. There are perhaps five million more who have read Mr. Blatchford's writings and are not convinced. This fact confirms the statistical summary of Thomas Carlyle, who estimated the population of the British Isles as 'thirty millions, mostly fools.' This is how Mr. Blatchford states his aim: 'If I can make my meaning plain to members of Parliament, bishops, editors, and other half-educated persons, and to labouring men and women who have had but little schooling, and have never been used to think or care about Socialism, or economics, or politics, or " any such dry rot "—as they would call them

—if I can catch the ear of the heedless and the untaught, the rest of you cannot fail to follow.' These two books are a kind of test of sanity; if you cannot understand them, if you are not convinced by them, then you are ripe for a lunatic asylum."

Chap. XI. Practice and Fellowship

We discussed in the last chapter certain aspects of Mr. Blatchford's work for practical Socialism. I quoted the entirely impartial evidence of Mr. G. R. S. Taylor in support of my statement that *Merrie England* alone has attracted more followers to the standard of English Socialism than all or any of the other books contained in the library of the London School of Economics. This result has been achieved by the simplicity, and logic, and the obvious sincerity of the work in question.

But there is a side to Socialism, thank goodness, which does not entirely consist of economics. Practical Socialism, the reality and importance of which cannot be too strongly insisted upon at election times, is, after all, but one aspect of Socialism. Socialism possesses also an idealistic or—let us be frank and say it plainly—a religious element. Indeed, one may with greater truth reverse the proposition and say that Socialism is a profound and noble religion possessing a definitely practical and economic aspect. Socialism is neither proud

nor terrible, and yet it is the proudest, most terrible, most humble of all religions. It is proud in its standard of an absolute communal integrity; terrible in its avenging hate of tyranny and grocerdom; humble in its familiarity with babies and in its care for dirty people. No other religion—not even Christianity itself—has dared to stoop so low as Socialism; has dared, like Socialism, to preach sermons upon pinafores and boots. And no other religion has dared, like Socialism, to argue with police-inspectors and to laugh at kings.

This capacity for laughter is, when you come to think about it, the greatest and most wonderful thing about true Socialism; the thing which distinguishes it from all other faiths and from all mere shibboleths. The priests say: "Order yourself humbly and reverently towards your betters; be contented; be sober; be industrious; never hit back." Socialism says: "Work, laugh, love, and *don't* forget the sparrows."

But all this is not contained in the message of practical Socialism, which concerns itself exclusively with immediate, earthy, and obvious things. I say this without disparagement to practical Socialism, or to the hundreds of staunch spirits who are fighting the battle of practical Socialism. But, at the same time, it is well that the wider and loftier doctrines of

Socialism should be preached and practised. Who has preached them more sweetly or more fruitfully than "R. B."? Who have practised them more freely than his followers?

This is the remarkable fact about "R. B.'s" achievement. He has succeeded in capturing not merely the political support of his adherents, but their spiritual sympathy also. He has won men over not merely to practical Socialism, but to *Socialism* also. He has charmed the ears of paper merchants by the logic and sound business acumen of his proposals; he has charmed the souls of poets by—by his poetry. In order to secure this dual victory, Mr. Blatchford has had to perform an unprecedented feat of spiritual vivisection; he has had to divide himself into two parts—into: (a) Robert Blatchford, the practical politician, simple arithmetician, and plain economist; (b) Nunquam, the poet, visionary and jolly good fellow.

Other revolutionary writers have been content to cut a figure in one or other of these capacities. "R. B." is not even content with playing the dual *rôle;* he has a third and even more popular personality—that of pater-familias and domestic sage. And he paints pictures—sea-scapes, by which he sets no store, but which have at least the merit, rare in these impressionist days, of not being painted brown.

There have been practical Socialists before

"R. B." There was Karl Marx, the father of practical Socialism, and the author of works more often quoted and less often read than any other works on practical Socialism which have ever been produced. Marx, I am sure, was a far sounder economist than "R. B.," and theoretically, I daresay, more awfully destructive. But Mr. Blatchford has succeeded in making himself more generally understood. The feeling of the two million working men who have read *Merrie England* is that Marx is good to venerate and Blatchford good to quote.

There have been visionary Socialists, revolutionary poets, before "R. B." There was William Morris. He was a greater poet than Mr. Blatchford—who, technically speaking, has never set up for a poet at all—and he dreamed dreams which "R. B.," or any other man, can never surpass in splendour. But Morris was a literary exquisite. His appeal, in any true sense, was only to the few—the comparative few. "R. B." has put poetry and desire into the souls of thousands upon thousands of working people.

It would be easy to cut a long story short by saying: "Mr. Blatchford has interpreted Marx and Morris to the million." But this would be to speak that which is untrue. Blatchford has interpreted Blatchford to the million. His view of Socialism, it is true—of Socialism in the broad—is largely Morris's view of

Socialism. But all people who are sane and love flowers take that view. As for the Marx tradition—well: I may be telling State secrets —I may even be telling fibs—but I believe it to be a fact that "R. B." has not read *Das Kapital*, either in German or in any of the unknown tongues into which it has been translated.

"R. B." has read what he pleased about Socialism and thought what he pleased. He has written books of practical logic and he has written books of poetry and love and laughter. He has persuaded working men to think, and he has taught them to feel. He has manufactured thousands of hard-headed, clear-cut, class-conscious electors, and he has manufactured—the Clarion Fellowship.

What is the Clarion Fellowship? It is an unorganised body, or disembodied organisation of persons and people who read the *Clarion*, and live or die at its bidding. (Strangers please note: This is metaphor.) I experience a difficulty in trying to explain the Clarion Fellowship by reason of the fact that it is a thing essentially, and of its nature, inexplicable. We know the rules and processes which entitle one to membership of the Fellowship (which has no membership), but we do not know and cannot explain how the conditions, such as they are, antecedent to these rules, ever come to be fulfilled. The conditions, rules,

and processes are as follows: You read the *Clarion*. That is all. That seems simple. But why do you read the *Clarion?* It is an absurd paper, absurdly edited. Nobody writes for it except at the last minute, and nobody ever writes what he meant to write a minute before he sat down to write. And nobody agrees with anybody else, and seldom with himself. And nobody has read Karl Marx. But more than eighty thousand practical Socialists buy this paper every week and read it every word and like each other just for reading it, and help each other just for reading it, and—marry each other just for reading it. And buy their boots, and bicycles, and soap, and 'cyclopædias exclusively from those makers who are of the Fellowship, having joined it (by advertising in the *Clarion*) from purely altruistic motives.

Such is the Fellowship. I hope I have explained it. I am the first person who has ever properly explained it.

The Clarion Fellowship is absurd and inexplicable, and—wholly charming. It is Socialism—real Socialism—this bond of genuine sympathy and kindness which exists between the readers of the paper which Mr. Blatchford edits. A stranger entering almost any town in England has but to proclaim himself a *Clarion* reader ("Clarionette" is the popular phrase) to be assured of welcome and

hospitality in the houses of friends whom he has never seen before. This is not practical; but it *is* Socialism.

There is obviously but one sane and certain method of promoting Socialism, and that is to promote the circulation of the *Clarion*. If Mr. Blatchford will only accede to our importunities and consent to live for another hundred years, there will not be any need for a "movement." We shall all have moved.

How has "R. B." managed to instil this spirit of brotherhood into the practical converts to his practical Socialism? Primarily, because he is a brother himself and cannot help showing it, and that sort of thing is catching; secondly, because he has balanced his "practical" books and articles by a number of very unpractical, human, jolly books and articles.

Chap. XII. As Novelist

"R.B." HAS to his credit a list of twenty books, nearly all of which have been republished from the *Clarion*. These books may be classified as follows:

PRACTICAL SOCIALISM.

(1) *Merrie England.*
(2) *Britain for the British.*

ETHICS AND IDEALISM.

(3) *God and My Neighbour.*
(4) *Not Guilty.*
(5) *Dismal England.*

STORIES AND TALES.

(6) *The Sorcery Shop.*
(7) *Tommy Atkins.*
(8) *A Son of the Forge.*
(9) *Tales for the Marines.*
(10) *A Bohemian Girl.*
(11) *Pink Diamonds.*
(12) *Julie.*

BELLES LETTRES.

(13) *The Bounder.*
(14) *My Favourite Books.*
(15) *A Book About Books.*
(16) *The Nunquam Papers.*

(17) *Fantasias.*
(18) *Impressions.*
(19) *The Dolly Ballads.*

DRAMA.

(20) *The Mingled Yarn.*

I propose in the next and succeeding chapters to consider some of these books, both from the standpoint of intrinsic merit and in respect to their influence upon that true spirit of Socialism which flourishes so bravely amongst *Clarion* readers.

Those of Mr. Blatchford's stories which relate to soldiers and army life are, I think, incontestably the best which he has written. His other works of fiction are full of good things, of fine literary feeling, and genuine sense of character, but he writes of soldiers with a firmer, more convincing touch. *A Bohemian Girl* is, I think, out and away the best of Mr. Blatchford's general novels—if novel it can be called, being rather a loosely-strung series of sketches and incidents surrounding the personality of a jolly girl. A volume full of prettiness and nonsense, and containing, incidentally, a very taking lyric relating to the subject of grey eyes. But (there is a "but" in my mind where all the non-military novels of "R. B." are concerned) I am pained about Miss Calliope Calliper. I think that we are expected to laugh at her, and

I cannot laugh at her. She strikes me as being so perfectly sane and just.

The least successful of all Mr. Blatchford's novels is, I think, *The Sorcery Shop*. No man has yet succeeded in inventing a satisfactory Utopia, and Mr. Blatchford, perhaps, has come as near to doing so as anybody else. But—John's Utopia never fits Jim. Mr. Blatchford, in this picture of the Ideal State, has seen fit to deprive us of our wine and tobacco. Mr. Blatchford expects too much from his fellow-man—especially from his fellow-craftsman—when he asks him to consider seriously ideals which eliminate wine and tobacco.

Pink Diamonds is a most attractive book; but I think that only persons with a specialist interest in literature can appreciate it at its true worth. Mr. Blatchford tells me that it was written for the *Clarion* "as a joke." It transformed itself somehow into a literary *tour de force;* a perfect imitation of Dumas, half respectful, half mocking in tone, and wholly charming.

The list of Mr. Blatchford's general novels—as distinct, that is to say, from his military romances and tales—is completed by *Julie—The Story of a Girl.* This is in many ways a convincing and effective book; it contains one character—Chigwin, the labour agitator—the presentation of which is a fine piece of cynical realism. It contains bits and passages; whole

pages, indeed, of tenderness, and prettiness, and humour. But in so far as it is a study of a slum child and of slum people, it loses a certain degree of vitality by approaching its subject from a rather sentimental standpoint.

Mr. Blatchford is, of course, an open and unashamed sentimentalist. It is this characteristic which constitutes his greatest charm in the eyes of all classes of his admirers. Admitting this fact it may, therefore, seem a little strange that one should blame a sentimentalist—a professed, deliberate sentimentalist—for writing sentiment. Well, I am not blaming Mr. Blatchford for anything—he has taught me to recognise the futility of blame; but I say that in *Julie* Mr. Blatchford has given one reader, at least, rather too much sentiment. It is not a serious charge, even if proven. Dickens occasionally gave us too much sentiment, whilst Thackeray, even more often, gave us more than we wanted of the opposite thing. In this respect, however, Mr. Blatchford's work affords a curious contrast. The strain of sentimentality which, as I think, appears too conspicuously in *Julie* and in some of his shorter stories of a like character, is altogether absent from his military novels.

Now, I can't help thinking that the reason why the soldier stories strike me as being more true and natural and as being upon an alto-

gether higher plane of art than those of "R. B.'s" inventions which are more general in theme is that Mr. Blatchford, from the very nature of his own experience, has taken his soldiers at first hand. Whereas Julie, and Mr. Jorkle, and Daisy Spanker wear somewhat the air of having been copied from traditional models. Mr. Jorkle, the financier, who is "quite out of his element," and steals away, when other gentlemen (not financiers) talk about the fragrance of a woman's skin, is a weird and impossible monstrosity who could only have been conjured up by a high-minded philosopher who—does not know financiers. Now, I could tell some stories about financiers which. . . But, then, "R. B." would blush.

We are indebted (I think) to Sir A. W. Pinero for the definition of a financier as "A pawnbroker *with imagination*."

Accuracy of observation is a trait of art which does not often exhibit itself in English fiction. Nine English novelists out of ten (including those whose books are most successful in the commercial sense) build up their characters upon accepted lines. English novels are full of "shrewd lawyers," "sour spinsters," "stern and bluff old warriors" (watch them crawling up Pall Mall), titled, high-minded hospital nurses (who never served a gross novitiate as ward maids), "jolly sailors," and "honest farmers." If "R. B.,"

whose boundless literary activity has touched almost every branch of his calling, has been content to take it easy sometimes and to work occasionally from lay figures, he has an excuse which his purely professional rivals cannot offer—the excuse of the extreme urgency and multiplicity in his affairs.

Also, "R. B." has written soldier stories.

The "Black M.P.'s," and Sergeant Bonass, and the Scrumptious Girl—*they* are real and true, beyond all shadow of doubt or criticism.

Those who would read a very just and finely-tempered eulogy of "R. B.'s" work in his capacity as a soldier-novelist will be privileged to do so in the next chapter, wherein I reproduce some quotations from two essays by Mr. A. M. Thompson.

In the meantime, I will ask you to examine this account, as offered by Private Stumpit, of a curious game which was played for a wager between an Indian rajah and the officers of an English regiment.

Private Stumpit. Wherefor they played 'igh an' they played low, an' they played 'ell generally; but the rajah 'e always seemed bored, an' the 'igher the stakes the boreder 'e got, until at last 'e ups an' says as European games were too slow, an' 'e'd be glad if the officers would pass their words for to take 'im on at a country game, for a stake worth 'avin. . . .

So, to make a long story short, the

game was to set an English soldier on sentry in the coort-yard o' the rajah's pallis, the rajah an' the colonel seein' fair through keyholes, an' then to send in a pretty girl to coax the soldier's musket off him. The gel to use no weepons, nor drugs; nothin' but female bedevilments, fair an' square. An' if the gel got the arms off him within the hour, the man was forfeit; but if not, the colonel took the gel. Of course, the sentry was to know nothin' of the game, much less as 'is commandin' officer's eye was on 'im: so that 'e'd nothin' to stand on but 'is soldierin'. *Boots!*

CHORUS: *Spurs!*

Stumpit. Well, when old Strapper an' the officers tumbled to the game, they looked seven ways at once, for they knew the Old Scuts pretty well, an' devil a man of 'em was fit to stand his corner. But at last they picked out a raw-boned, hard-faced, canny Scotchman, named Angus M'Allister; an' they put up a prayer, an' sent 'im into action. *Boots!*

CHORUS: *Spurs!*

Stumpit. Angus was posted at twelve midnight, an' there was the colonel an' the rajah, with their eyes glued to a brace o' keyholes; an' there was Angus p'radin' up an' down, an' never a move out of the enemy till the *ghurry* struck the half-hour. *Boots!*

CHORUS: *Spurs!*

Stumpit. Soon as the *ghurry* struck the

half-hour, the curtains opens, an' out comes that *Scrumshus Gel!* . . .

She 'ad an 'ed of 'air like a mermaid; long an' black an' curly. She 'ad flesh like strawberries an' cream, eyes like flashlights, a figure like a hangel, and a mouth like a cut cherry. . . .

She stood still long enough to let the sigh melt away—as a sportsman does the smoke of 'is rifle—an' then she come forard, movin' as if she'd been steppin' to a slow waltz; an' 'er splendiferous eyes on Scotty's face, an' 'er whole self seemin' to shine an' ripple all over, as a graylin' does swimmin' slow up stream; an' at last she halts, right opposite to him where 'e'd stood like a moonstruck Lascar, an' there she stops with 'er arms 'anging down, an' 'er long eyelashes a-lyin' on 'er cheeks like black silk fringe on a peach; an' 'er breast heaves, same as two little smooth waves a-risin' outer deep water when the sea's calm, an' she gives another sigh. Angus said one o' them sighs an' a slice o' brown bread would feed a soldier for a day. . .

Now, observe what Angus says: "One o' them sighs an' a slice o' brown bread would feed a soldier for a day."

The poetic realism of that playful passage lives in the memory. Mr. Blatchford's soldier stories are crowded with such touches. For what happens to Angus and to Angus's

numerous successors I must refer the reader to the original story (which is that of "The Scrumptious Girl"). There he will read how the honour of the regiment is ultimately saved by Kate O'Flaherty, who is prevailed upon to "ambush 'er charms in the uniform of the Scuts," and to perform sentry-go. I do not think that a more delightful piece of comedy has been written in our time than the account of the interview between the Scrumptious Girl and "Private" Kate O'Flaherty. But I do not propose to reproduce that passage here. I have already quoted enough, I hope, to suggest the rare, vintage flavour of the story. It appears with many others in a volume called *Tales for the Marines.*

"'Tis a good lie, Peter," says Corporal Ryan, "an' wan that improves wid the tellin'."

The same volume contains a fine story called "The Mousetrap." It is a grim story written in a vein of terrible reality which Mr. Blatchford does not often adopt.

Tommy Atkins is a continuous novel of Army life, and it introduces many of the scenes and characters which appear in these short stories. It is a good book, but suffers by comparison with *A Son of the Forge.* Let us proceed to discuss that interesting and, in some respects, curious, work.

Chap. XIII. "A Son of the Forge."

THE book whose title heads this chapter is perhaps the most interesting of all Mr. Blatchford's novels.

Its interest consists not merely in its own intrinsic excellence, but in the fact, which has been readily perceived by Mr. Blatchford's public, that it is, in several important respects, an autobiography. It is "R. B.'s" *David Copperfield*.

It is also a rather queer book—a mixture of genuine art and obvious journalism; of passionate rapture and slap-dash impressionism; of careful and conscientious craftsmanship and careless scribbling.

"It is a very fine book," says Mr. Thompson, but ". . . . Had he bestowed upon it even a small fraction of the characterisation so extravagantly lavished upon his military sketches in *Tommy Atkins* and *Tales for the Marines*, it might have been a popular, and possibly a famous, book."

Mr. Thompson, referring to "R. B.'s" statement that *A Son of the Forge* was not designed

as a novel, but only became one by accident, has described the process by which it happened: With a view to variety of contents in the *Clarion*, the author had set himself to expand into two columns an early tale, entitled, "No. 66," the story of a dramatic incident in battle, where a soldier, having wrested a rifle from a dead comrade's grasp in the fury of the fray, finds, on examining the weapon after the fight, that it is marked No. 66—the rifle number of his nearest and best friend! As originally written, the story did not contain above 1,500 words; but finding the story unfinished at the end of his two columns, and being pressed by a friend to continue it as a serial, he went on with it week by week, "just splashing the colour about," he told Mr. Thompson, "as a kind of artistic showing off among friends, and by way of a vanity which never took itself seriously."

A reviewer on one of the dailies told us, when the novel appeared, that "the conceptions of character resemble those of Walter Scott and Dickens." But Mr. Thompson points out as the most curious fact about the whole thing that, despite its undoubted success (artistically) as a story and as a sermon, the novel presents, strictly speaking, no "character" at all.

"There is," says Mr. Thompson, "one central figure—the Son of the Forge—who tells his own story, and tells it in fastidiously-chosen,

felicitous, and fluent literary terms which nowise fit his self-description as an uncultivated, uncouth, and naturally sullen churl. He calls himself 'a savage,' 'coarse and ignorant,' and 'a victim of brutish slavery'; but when he goes on tramp he observes that 'the cottages along the highway were clean and bright, with flowers trained over their lattices, and pigeons fluttering above their thatched roofs; and in the trim gardens before them the broad-faced sunflowers and flaunting hollyhocks made a brave show. Better to die here of hunger,' he thinks, this dainty boor, 'with the scented elder flowers above, and the daisied grass below, than to live for a century of brutish slavery in the smoke and sulphur of the chain sheds.'

"A passing lady gives him a lily, and the look which accompanies the gift makes him feel 'ashamed to be seen.' But a few days later the 'coarse and ignorant' Orson perfectly understands the meaning of that look, and of its effect upon him. 'It was the light of love that had shone in on my dark soul from those great, sweet eyes. *The light of the love that is of no sex, no nation, and no creed, of the love that is Christ-like in its humanity and divinity, the love that hopes all, believes all, pardons all, and glorifies all,*' cries the lumpish and truculent boor, in very unchurlish ecstasy, and '*so I blessed the lady of the lily, and fared on.*' The reviewer who found Blatchford's charac-

terisation like that of Dickens evidently remembered the elder novelist's habit of making his 'creations' talk like their author.

"The hero's accidentalness has not only been very damaging to his character: it has almost robbed him of his good name. Two admirers of the book, whom I asked what the hero was called, scratched their heads, smiled shamefacedly, and confessed they could not tell. When I put the question to the illustrious author himself, he puckered his eyebrows for a moment, then chuckled as though he had found a new joke, and said: 'Blest if I know! Hasn't he got a name?' The fact is that neglect of pre-natal preparation has left William Homer almost as marrowless and pale as David Copperfield himself; but the latter has a notable advantage in that his name appears on the cover of the book and in the library catalogues.

"The persons who more or less fortuitously tumble into the hero's life are equally vague and casual. Philip Joyce, 'his friend,' as the old dramatists would have described him, is a miscellaneous sort of lovesick swain, who suddenly breaks out from the author's brain like the beamish Distinguished Person on the Cinematograph, and lo, behold! in a brace of filmy twitters, whiz! he is off the screen, leaving no trace behind except a fidgetting impression of wobbliness.

"Conversationally, Mr. Joyce, like Mr. Homer, is constituted so as in many respects to resemble the conceptions of character of Dickens. When his friend asks him what there is to live for, he answers: 'Why, plenty of things. Doing your drill, and cleaning your traps, and reading books, and looking at the fields and flowers, and laughing at people, and being sorry for them, and helping them, and falling out with them, and going to bed and getting up again, and eating your meals, and cursing the commissariat, and falling in love, and getting married, and having children, and growing old, and being a man, in short. That's how I look at it.' It is my secret belief that it was Mr. Philip Joyce who wrote Robert Blatchford's famous 'Not Out, 50.'"

So much for the "curious" side of the book. Now let us begin to test its actual quality.

Philip Joyce does not make his appearance until the 111th page of the book, and the love interest only begins at 230, while the book ends at page 248.

"Yet," says Mr. Thompson, "if I were asked what were the dominant note of the book, I should answer, Love.

"It is a tale of War and Battle," says Mr. Thompson, in explanation of this seeming paradox, ". . . . but the permeating influence is that of Woman, and the dominant effect is one of feminine tenderness!

"That is the phenomenon which makes *A Son of the Forge* a wonderful book: the visible, stage-monopolising Hamlet is here the shadow, and the transcient Ghost behind the scenes, the Spirit of the Eternal Feminine, is the reality which gives the play all its character, colour, and glow.

"Except as a reflex of feminine influences, the hero is nothing. In the first and finest chapters of the book he is a mere lay figure used for the display of Alice Homer's beautiful sisterly love and solicitude. Though she speaks only one word in the whole book, and that word is 'yes'—though there is no other description of her aspect than that she had a homely face, big, misshapen hands, and an ugly frock, the rough Rembrandtesque outline of Alice Homer has more flesh and blood 'to' it than Balzac's Nanon derives from fifty well-fed pages of Leonardesque detail.

"She worked as a chainmaker, and was thrashed by a drunken father. When her brother was waled with the buckle-end of the father's strap, she crept upstairs to take him in her arms and cry over him; 'and if she could find a crust of bread or a cold potato, she would bring it to me, pressing me to eat it, while she whispered such words of hope as her simple heart could prompt.'

"On one occasion she took off her only petticoat, and sold it to buy bread for her brother's

supper. To procure him warmth she walked a mile in the winter night to sell a basket of empty whisky bottles for a piece of coal. When he was down with low fever, she forced her way into the reeking taproom where her father sat among other brutes, and, despite his ruffianism, she brought home grapes and white bread for her fevered and starving brother. 'And the great God, who made the west wind and the briar rose, never made anything more worthy or more sweet than she.' The portrait is the perfect condensed essence of reality—idealism achieved by a few simple strokes of realism."

But here again the critic finds himself confronted by a paradox.

"There never was a story with so strong a 'feminine interest,' and yet there never was a story with so little space devoted to the frocks, the chatter, and the personal beauty of individual women."

The truth is that, as Mr. Thompson puts it, the characters who speak and act the story "are mere shadows: they are only illumined and warmed into life when they come under the glowing, but uncertain, rays of Woman's tenderness."

The critic quotes a passage from what he describes as "the sunniest of all the woman chapters," in illustration of this quality. This is it—a delicious morsel:

Carrie came and sat on a stool at my feet. I began to talk business.

"Carrie," I said, "how old are you?"

She smiled, and rubbed her chin with her thimble, thoughtfully. "About eighteen," she said, "I think."

"Would you——?" said I, very diffidently. "Don't you want me to go away?"

"God forbid," she exclaimed, looking up with pained anxiety.

"Have you no friends?"

"Not a soul in the world but *you*, chummie."

"Would you—like to live with me?"

She looked at me with quiet, serious directness, and nodded.

"Always?"

"Ever and ever, amen!" She showed her white teeth in a smile. She smiled as frankly and sweetly as a child.

"Would you like to go to America?"

"With you?"

"Certainly."

"Yes."

"I'm very poor, Carrie."

"Well?"

"We might have hard times."

"Of course."

"You expect that, then. But yet you'd come?"

Carrie glanced at the bed.

"Nan would go with us," I said.

Carrie held out her hand. "It's agreed," she said.

"Well, Carrie," I continued, "you are alone, and I am alone. And you want a friend, and I cannot spare *you*. So we will take our chance together. If I can get the money, we will emigrate. If not, we will fight it out in England."

Carrie nodded and smiled. "Anywhere," she said. "What does it matter to chums?"

"Then" said I, making a dash for it, "when shall we get married?"

"Married?"

"Yes, dear. You will marry me?"

"Marry? Do you mean to *marry* me? Really?"

"Carrie, Carrie," I said, perfectly startled. "What did you think I meant? What do you think I am?"

But Carrie did not answer my question. She knelt upon the floor, hid her face against my knee, and, gripping my hand in hers, began to cry.

"Carrie!" I said, for I was alarmed by this strange conduct. "What is it? What do you mean?"

The girl clung to me, sobbing and laughing wildly. "Marry me? Marry *me?* Oh, Willie! Oh! chummie! Shall I be your *wife?*"

I began to understand her now. I drew her into my arms, and kissed her. "My dear," I said, "you are too good for me. But I love you, and I will take care of you. Will you promise?"

But at that moment Nan awoke, and, starting up in bed, called out, "Carrie, what's the matter? He isn't going to leave us? Carrie, don't! You frighten me."

Poor Carrie ran to her sister, laughing and crying, took her in her arms, hugged her, kissed her, and repeated a dozen times, "Nan, Nan, Nannie! We are going to get married. We are going to live with Willie. You shall be his sister, and me his wife."

But although the love interest, apparently adventitious, dominates the whole story, there is more than that in the book. "R. B." never writes anything without betraying his hatred for cruelty and oppression, and Mr. Thompson declares that:

"*A Son of the Forge* takes its place, too, amongst the instruments of his fierce indictment of Society.

"With the entrance of the soldiers, the tune changes to a swinging martial march and a roar; but even in the loudest blare of the trumpets, the indictment of Society is not forgotten.

"After the miseries of the workers comes the exposure of the agonies of war. There is no special pleading, no declamation, no 'fireworks,' no embroidery. Precision, not preciosity, is the author's aim. He tells his tale in a strict and succinct, but always vividly picturesque, style; and though the narrative seems more like a report than a story, the underlying indignation attains contagiousness which is often missing from the violent declamations of the avowed humanitarian preacher.

"There is no sign in the book that the author has consciously set himself any theory to prove or any doctrine to preach. He is too artistic to be didactic. He impresses his readers with the absolute reality of certain characters and certain incidents, and, without seeming to point a moral, he makes his very reticence stamp it upon the mind with the force of a sledge-hammer.

"The impact of the lesson is all the greater because in his wide catholicity of human sympathy, the author actually betrays us into momentary admiration of the wild-beast attributes whose survival in the civilised human animal continues to make war possible.

"In one of the most marvellous pieces of word-painting ever accomplished—his stirring description of the march of the Highland and Devonshire regiments through Portsmouth—he makes every nerve and muscle throb respon-

sive to that magnetism of numbers, of sound, and of colour which is the mainstay of militarism. No Jingo ever made this amazing thrill of elementary passions more real or more infectious.

"The waiting soldiers' lust of blood, their delirious reception of 'the tidings of great joy' (that they are to go out to slash and slay, and be slashed and slain), the madness of their disappointment when they learn that the opportunity of killing is postponed—all these incredible brutalities and ferocities of the trained fighting animal Blatchford makes for the moment comprehensible, and almost sympathetic, to all. The reason is that he knows the feeling which he so convincingly describes. He has told us, in his articles on "Heredity" in the *Clarion:*

> "When I went soldiering, and got out into the skirmishing line at a field day, and when the smell of the powder was acrid in the air, and the rattle of musketry drummed on the brain, and the men got excited and ran and cheered, I was startled to find a grim change in my nature. I felt like a prowling savage. A strong instinct took hold of me: the instinct to hide, to crouch, to steal forward stealthily, and to shoot straight, and with deadly intent. I did not like this feeling, and could not account for it. But I suppose

I got it where I got my back hair: from India. Or maybe it was the genius of the Dutch Boer.

"That is the reason which makes the war fever and the blood lust so real a thing in *A Son of the Forge*. Blatchford has felt them himself. He has the memory of, and sympathy for, them. Under the influence of that exaltation, he himself becomes, despite his almost feminine tenderness, a fighter eager for the cut and thrust and drunkenness of battle.

"But, like his hero, he soon becomes 'ashamed of it,' and then proceeds with his right business of exposing the emptiness, the fraud, and the horror of war. After tricking us into understanding Philip drunk, he opens our eyes wide to the awful sadness of Philip's return to sobriety. No writer who had not sympathised with the first feeling could have so stirred us with the horror of the reality. The mere preacher, the doctrinaire, the deliberate denouncer, could never have got the effect. We should have 'seen him coming.' But Blatchford makes us partakers of the intoxication that we may 'feel' for ourselves the humiliation and sickness and pain of the recovery.

"He does not give us much breathing-time between the debauch and the beginning of the cure. Nor does he spare any ignoble details. First, the agony of the women and children.

The physical 'seediness' of his pot-valiant brawlers the morning after the truculent orgie. Still more grimly sardonic—though he writes it with his usual compassion—the chapter of seasickness, where the heroes are represented lying 'in heaps upon the bare boards, grovelling and helpless, the sailors striding over them, stepping on them, kicking them, and cursing them for lubbery swabs and land crabs, and the vessel all the while rolling and pitching horribly.' What an awakening! what a disillusion! what a satire! This contrasting of nauseous impotence with bellicose vainglory was a masterstroke.

"It is more effective than the picture of the heap of amputated legs and arms in Erckmann-Chatrian, or Zola's gruesome picture of the wounded at Sedan lying face downwards in pools of their own blood."

Chap. XIV. Chapter and Verse

LET us now direct our attention to that section of Mr. Blatchford's writings upon which (as I think) rests most securely his claim to be regarded as a great craftsman. I refer to the series of books which I have grouped under the heading of *Belles Lettres.*

During his *Sunday Chronicle* days, Mr. Blatchford was seized with an ambition to "improve his shorthand." The method which he adopted may not be original, but it was carried out with a thoroughness probably unparalleled.

For two solid years he devoted all his spare time to reading and re-reading the following books: Job, Isaiah, The Psalms, The Song of Solomon, *Pilgrim's Progress*, and White's *Selborne.* Line upon line, page after page, he searched these books for rare, or archaic, or beautiful words. These he wrote down upon slips of paper, and against each word he wrote its synonym or synonyms. Also the shorthand forms of both word and synonym. These shorthand "outlines" he subsequently

compared with the shorthand dictionary. The primary object of all this was, as I have said, to improve his shorthand. Mr. Blatchford has no doubt that the exercises did improve his shorthand, which has been of little or no use to him since. But the exercises did more than this: they helped Mr. Blatchford to form and develop that remarkable gift for writing plain English, which is not only the most remarkable of all *his* gifts, but is a gift so remarkable in itself as to mark out its possessor from among all other modern writers. I can justify this statement by quotation and example. Be so kind, please, as to examine the following specimen of prose:

"This fitful fever, this yoke-bearing drudgery under goad which all of us endure —we call it real life. We think of it as actuality! As fact! As the practical and true. Sweating under our burdens, writhing under our affliction, we struggle on; but we don't like it. The demons of pride, hate, greed, ambition, shame, want, and terror pinch and wound and revile us in our Valley of the Shadow, and we stumble forward amongst the gins and pitfalls. But we don't enjoy it. Always the soul struggles in its bonds, and turns its eyes for ever upwards. From prince to pauper, from infancy to senility, we hunger and thirst for something better, brighter, purer—we know not what. It would seem as

though we are fallen spirits cast out from some higher sphere, and can never wholly accept or reconcile ourselves to the degradation of this world. It would seem as if the old Platonic notions were right—that we get our souls from a perfect state, and with them an inarticulate memory of what is true or false, of what is base or noble. The greatest sinner hates and despises sin. The biggest rascal knows honour to be better than villainy. The soul of man revolts from moral iniquity; his nature shudders at what is base as his body does in the presence of impurity. Men work in grime and dirt. But every man loves to have his body clean. They live in dull and sordid ways, but they never lose the yearning for that which is beautiful and pure. Captives by the waters of Babylon, we thrill with rage and pleasure at the sound of the songs of Zion. Fallen, degraded, blunted, and given over to the service of Baal we may be; but if amid the din and clatter of the devil's workshop one true note is sounded, our besotted memory stirs itself—our dull wits wake to listen."

Fantasias the book is called from which I take this cutting. I am not asking you to appraise the philosophy which it preaches. I allow people not to argue about philosophy. I am asking you to view the extract merely as a specimen of prose writing. Is it not splendid

writing? Does it not thrill you? Does it not sing to you? And yet observe how simple are the words and thoughts which compose it.

This book, *Fantasias*, is out of print, by the way. The writer of these lines only succeeded in getting hold of a copy a few hours before the lines were written. He has read it through with delight and amazement, for it contains a varied assortment of the very best of Mr. Blatchford's imaginative writings. The book must certainly be reprinted.

Amongst the pieces contained in *Fantasias* there is a character sketch of a wild-beast soldier, who belonged to "R. B.'s" regiment. It is a terrible little story, related with terrible effect. I desire to direct the particular notice of the reader to this story, because it again offers testimony to Mr. Blatchford's remarkable versatility—a versatility which on this occasion he displays not so much in his subject as in his treatment of that subject. Mr. Blatchford is not, by habit, a "realistic" writer—that is to say, his literary tendency is to make the best of things, whether good or bad: to represent both goodness and badness with just that touch of exaggeration which moves the reader to emotion. What is called the "nervous restraint" of the modern school (a trick or manner of literary expression borrowed from France) is not much in "R. B.'s" line. And yet—when he chooses—as the particular sketch

to which I refer makes evident, our war-worn veteran can perform grim realistics with any of the youngest and most nervous of his contemporaries. Let me quote an illustrative passage:

"That night Buffalo got out of bed after tattoo, climbed the down-spout of the officers' messhouse, walked along the eave spout to the barrack wall, dropped twenty feet into the field, went to the nearest tavern and bought a bottle of rum, forced a window of the artillery stables, wrenched off the lock of the hatch door, dodged the artillery sentry, and got back to bed. Here he drank up all the rum, and then disturbed the room by yelling his favourite ditty:

> Drunk and sober again,
> Sober and drunk again;
> Oh, if I do live to get drunk,
> I shall live to get sober again.

"Pat Daley then rose up in bed and threw a canteen at Buffalo in the darkness. It caught him on the nose, but made no mark. Buffalo hurled the rum-bottle at random. The sergeant got up and ordered Buffalo to the guardroom.

"This was too much. Buffalo went to prison for forty-two days.

"He returned but little changed, except that having his hair and moustache close cropped

made him look, if possible, more base and villainous than ever. He was still sullen, still silent, and drank with the steady perseverance of a man to whom stomach and conscience are words without meaning.

"'You were the worse for liquor at drill this afternoon,' said the drill-corporal. 'Don't turn out like that again. You've had rough times, but I'll have to run you in if you don't keep sober.'

"Buffalo said 'All right,' and went to the canteen and drank till he could hardly see.

"'Where's the colonel gone to?' asked Buffalo of his cot-mate.

"'Gone on leave,' said Jack Smith; 'back next Monday,' and he went on reading. None of the men would waste words on Buffalo.

"Buffalo said no more. He went to his cot and sat down. He had in his valise a new Belgian revolver and fifty cartridges. He had bought them since he returned to the regiment. He kept his own counsel, though he drank harder than ever. The colonel would be back on Monday. Then something was going to happen.

"But something happened on Sunday night. A new recruit had joined while Buffalo was at Millbank. His name was Evan Evans, and he came from the Rhondda Valley. On the Sunday night he strolled into F Company, and saw Buffalo Adams sitting on his cot,

smoking a filthy black pipe. As he came in, Adams laid down the pipe, and rose up, his small grey eyes almost starting out of his head. Evans stopped half-way down the room. He put his arms akimbo, and looked at Adams in astonishment. The other men noticed this, and gave their attention to the two Welshmen. Adams spoke first. He said:

"'You black beast. What are you doin' here?'"

Any writer who has ever tried to tell a story will appreciate the art of that passage, with its grim and deadly geniality, its deliberate and calculated reticence.

This same remarkable little volume of Fantasias contains a poem—a sort of nursery rhyme—called "The Three Baby Buntings."

This again enables me to offer evidence of Mr. Blatchford's really astounding versatility. Here are three verses:

There were three baby buntings,
  And a rambling they did go;
They toddled and they waddled,
  And they tumbled down also,
    Look ye there!
They toddled and they waddled,
  And the first thing caught their een
Was a bonny yellow butterfly
  That fluttered o'er the green.
Bert said it was a butterfly,
  But Jennie she said "Nay,

It's just a pansy flower that's spread
Its wings and flown away,"
Look ye there!

They rattled and they prattled
Till they heard a merry sound
Like the chirping of a grasshopper
From out the dăisied ground,
Look ye there!
Dick said it was a grasshopper,
But Jennie laughed so blithe,
And said a fairy mower was
A-whetting of his scythe,
Look ye there!

They toddled and they waddled,
And the next thing they did find
Was a bed of dainty jonquils,
And that they left behind,
Look ye there!
Dick said they were sweet Nancies,
But Jennie said she thought
They were little baby sisters which
The doctor hadn't brought,
Look ye there!

There are more verses of similar grace and prettiness which I have not room to quote; but here is the ninth and last verse :

She took them in and washed them
Cleaner than a silver pin,
And then she told their dada
Of the mischief they'd been in,
Look ye there!
She called them naughty children, but
Their dada answered, "Nay,
Pinafores were made to wash, my lass,
And lambs were made to play."
Look ye there!

Superior intellects will probably tell you that these verses are homely. But do not allow that epithet to spoil your dinner. This is a lyric poem, you see, and all lyrics worth talking about are homely in sentiment.

Revolutionary ideas have been expressed in lyric form before to-day; but that is a method of adopting means to an end which is not recommended by the best authorities. Messrs. Thrush and Blackbird are the two models which all good lyrists set before them; and judged by the standards of these eminent performers, this little song about the Baby Buntings really seems almost to touch perfection. Read it over again, and then see if bits and snatches of it do not keep reciting themselves to you all day long. This is the test of a good lyric. I offer that information without charge.

While we are talking about Mr. Blatchford's verse we may as well talk about the *Dolly Ballads*—the only book consisting entirely of verse which "R. B." has published.

I have a great affection for the *Dolly Ballads*. A lady, to whose children Mr. Blatchford sent a copy of the book when it was first published, two years ago, wrote him, in that spirit of kindly candour which highly-educated people sometimes exhibit, to say that she had taken the book away from her children because the verses were written in ungrammatical language. They are written in child

language: the language of Mr. Blatchford's child. This is the sort of thing to which the lady objected:

I wish it didn't blow, Ma,
  Acos I's cold as lead;
An I wish if you would rock me
  Before I go to bed.

If I was on your knee, Ma,
  I fink I'd be all right,
As then I's tell a story
  What Mary telled last night.

Onct there was upon a time, Ma—
  Let me kneel up on your knees.
How can a robin sleep, Ma,
  When the wind shakes all his trees?

Onct there was upon a time, Ma,
  A naughty Turkiss Jew;
An' he lived into a comtry,
  An' his whiskums all came blue.

My Dada's face is blue, Ma,
  Acos he s'aves, you know.
Would my Dada have blue whiskums
  If he let his whiskums grow?

Thus Dolly goes on to tell in her own language and in her own way the story of Blue Beard. One trusts that the children of that austere lady whom I have mentioned will grow up to talk extremely careful English and to part their hair exactly.

You cannot quote effectively from the *Dolly Ballads*. The verses hang so closely together that any individual poem would be bound to

come badly through the ordeal of detached representation. One might just as sensibly cut one square inch out of a picture and present it for judgment to the discerning critic.

This book is not exactly written for children: though children, I am sure, are bound to like it. There is no living child who will not listen open-mouthed, with a delicious mingling of horror and happiness, to the highly-sensational romance of the "Grumblin' Grisly Bear," or to the stirring adventures of the "Bishump and the Crocumdile." But for all that, I think that I am right in saying that the verses were not written for children; for behind the mere mechanism of the stories which they tell there is a flavour—a thrill—which only the grown-ups will notice, which only the grown-ups can enjoy. What is the quality of this flavour? It is anything of many qualities, chief among them being a sort of a something which I will permit myself to describe as child-hunger.

Mr. Blatchford himself thus describes the origin of the *Dolly Ballads*: "I wrote those ballads for the pleasure of writing them. They are, as nearly as possible, a true report of certain stories told by Dolly ("R. B.'s" daughter) at the age of four. I have cast them into verses, but have kept as closely as I could to the actual words of the child. The sayings are Dolly's sayings; the language is Dolly's

language; the interpolated questions and irrelevances are Dolly's own. I wrote the ballads about twelve years ago, and I cannot write any more unless some good friend will lend me a baby. Dolly has disregarded the advice given to her in a letter by Mark Twain, and has grown up."

My own reasons for liking the *Dolly Ballads* are these: I like them because they are fresh and tender and whimsical, full of insight into the hearts of children; full of love for children, full of honest fun. Also (and of what other similar verses published within the last ten years can this be said?) they are wholly underivative—really and truly new.

There are other stray verses scattered through Mr. Blatchford's books of which I should like to speak. I will say my "permitted say" in the next chapter.

Chap. XV. More Quotes

A CHAPTER of quotations may as well begin with quotations. To begin with, therefore, I shall quote some verses from *Dismal England*. They appear in a paper called *Linen and Lives*, and form, as it were, a new "Song of the Shirt." I quote at random:

A woman weak with years,
  Cowed down by sickly dread,
In the shadow of my fears
  I slave for bitter bread.

* * * * *

Spin, spin, thou cruel wheel!
  So my sick brain doth spin;
Stab, stab, thou leaping steel!
  So hunger stabs within.

* * * * *

"Whir, whirr," the hoarse wheel sings,
  Like man it hath no ruth;
Sharp, sharp, the needle stings,
  Like some damned serpent's tooth.

* * * * *

A woman grey with years,
  I bow my stricken head;
In the shadow of my fears
  I slave for bitter bread.

God knoweth what I feel,
  Though man doth nothing heed;
Oh! broken on the wheel,
  Internal tears I bleed.

Who would these fardels bear?
  God knoweth what I feel,
But I've no time for prayer—
  Round goes the giddy wheel.

* * * * *

Swift, swift the needle flies:
  God seeth my sad heart;
He bends His awful eyes
  Upon the "Labour Mart."

Some bring fair flesh for sale,
  And others bring fair fame;
Some cheeks with want are pale,
  And others red with shame.

* * * * *

I have no time to weep,
  God knoweth what I feel;
I have no time to sleep—
  Round goes the giddy wheel.

Round goes the giddy wheel,
  I lift my palsied hand;
God knoweth what I feel—
  I curse my native land.

My wrath is as a flame;
  I curse this devil's mart:
I curse this land of shame—
  I curse it in my heart.

Where legislators try
  The false and true to fit,
And lie, and lie, and lie,
  And are well paid for it.

Where cultured rantipoles
Of "ladies'" virtues tell,
What time their sisters' souls
Creep shuddering to hell.

* * * * *

I curse this swinish rout—
God knoweth what I feel:
Their sins shall find them out—
Round goes the giddy wheel.

I have quoted less than half of this fine poem, and some of its best verses I have, perforce, omitted. But the scope and purpose of it may be judged from these extracts.

Now, I think that this is a very remarkable poem. Nothing more successful in the simple ballad form has been written in our language. The suggestion of bitterness and tragedy is conveyed with terrible power. You can find lapses, of course. "Internal tears" I do not like, nor such trite colloquialisms as "labour mart." But, taking the poem as a whole, and excluding Hood's "Song of the Shirt" (which must in part have suggested it), I will confidently challenge anybody to produce a plain ballad more absolutely effective in the suggestion of horror and want and injustice. Even Hood's great poem, I think, is no more than its equal. "Round goes the giddy wheel!" That recurrent phrase is introduced with fine restraint and effectiveness.

Dismal England, the book in which this

ballad occurs, is a collection of sketches and impressions in which the note of cheerfulness is rather obviously subdued. It contains *one* comic sketch, however—about a lion-tamer. "R. B." talked with the lion-tamer, who divulged the secrets of his craft and explained how extraordinarily simple it all was! "There was really no danger," he said, stroking a lion's nose.

"I am more sorry than I can say," states "R. B.," in conclusion, "to have to add a sad *postscript* to this article.

"Our gentle lion-tamer was killed less than a year after our interview with him. He slipped in the cage, and, falling, was seized upon by the bears and hyenas, and so badly hurt that he died.

"And another lion-tamer, with whom I had a talk some time afterwards, told me it was mainly our poor friend's own fault that he was killed. 'He was careless,' said the second tamer, 'and went into the cage with wet clay on his boots. That caused him to fall, and a blind bear, prowling round, came upon him, and naturally seized him in a hug. Then the hyenas and the wolves attacked him, and the man was helpless. But *there is really no danger if you are careful'!*"

It is a good book, this *Dismal England*, but I will restrain my passion for quotation. My favourite pieces in it are the sketches called

"A Gay Life," "The Poor in Ireland," and this lion-taming yarn.

Now as to the books about books. There are two of them—*My Favourite Books*, published in 1901, and *A Book About Books*, published two years later.

"R. B." has publicly confessed that writing about books is his very favourite form of work. And the resulting essays read like it. They are the spontaneous, friendly discourses of a bookman. Take the article (from *My Favourite Books*) on "Bed Books:

"If the reading of good books is ever sinful, it is at meal-times. He who reads at meal-times treats his meal and his digestion with discourtesy, and puts upon his author the affront of a divided allegiance. But to read in bed! That is a good man's virtue, the innocent indulgence of the well-deserving. Therefore gossip about bed books will ever be acceptable to the just. And the wise man will show a nice discrimination in the choice of his literary nightcap. It is a case of means and ends. A man might write about bed books until he sent his readers to sleep, yet would get no 'forrader' unless he followed some logical plan.

"Do you want to go to sleep or to keep awake? That is the question. Are you a reader, or only one who reads? Do you love books, or would you e'en be snoring?

"A gentleman, look you, would fain go to sleep like a gentleman. That is leisurely, kindly, with a grateful smile to Goodman Day, his host that is, and a graceful greeting to Mistress Night, his hostess that is to be. None but a boor would turn his back upon the sun in churlish haste, and jump into the arms of Morpheus neck and crop, like a seal rolling off an ice-floe. Therefore, a gentleman reads before he goes to sleep.

"The ideal bed book should be small, printed in good type, not too boisterous, not too sad; an old friend. Then, with a mild, clear light, a pipe, and something in a tumbler, a man may court happiness and win her; and the malice of the gods and follies of the flesh shall fret his soul no more.

"The best bed book I know is Spenser's poems. That is a book you cannot fully appreciate in the workaday hours. Only in the silence of the night can one hear the murmur of its song, like the regular irregularity, the ordered wildness, and charming cadence of a brook." After which, "R. B." quotes some lines from the *Prothalamian* to uphold his claim for Spenser.

It is remarkable, when you consider the facts of Mr. Blatchford's life and training, how strongly the Greeks and Latins are represented in the counsels of his book-room.

I have said elsewhere that "R. B.'s" real

interest in books began when he left the Army and got hold of Carlyle. He followed up Carlyle with Emerson, Sterne, and Rabelais.

When he was about thirty he met with Sir Thomas Browne, *Morte d'Arthur*, Keats, Shelley, Montaigne, Plutarch, Whitman, *The Conscript*, Browning, Smiles's *Selp Help* (for which book he has always entertained a serious veneration), and Swinburne.

He had begun to read Shakespeare at twenty-six.

"I discovered Walter Scott at forty-five," "R. B." once told me. He began to read the Greeks and Latins at forty, and they have formed the staple of his literary diet ever since. He had never happened on the *Odyssey* until about two years ago, and he was a happy man for weeks when he *had* found it. Darwin, who is one of "R. B.'s" great literary heroes, came to him at forty.

As to the authors who have most influenced him, he gives this list:

Dickens, Plato, Carlyle, Darwin, Ruskin, Sterne, Emerson, Smiles.

Authors who have influenced him in a lesser degree are—

Gilbert White, Defoe, Bunyan, Thackeray, Sir T. Browne, Milton, Shakespeare, Lamb, Leigh Hunt, "The Poets," *and*—"The Greeks."

All these friends, or nearly all of them, find

a niche in the books about books, together with a mixed company of moderns, varying in character from Stevenson to Mrs. Meynell. If you want to gather an idea of the remarkable variety of Mr. Blatchford's book-lore, read the paper in *A Book About Books* called "The Little People."

Here is a long quotation (yes, I must do it) from an essay in defence of books about books. It exhibits, I think, very clearly the peculiar charm, the grave good-humour, real learning, and fine discrimination which Mr. Blatchford brings to this sort of writing:

"What literary pope is responsible for the bull by whose authority 'books about books' are excommunicated?

"Is the damnatory edict older than Montaigne? It is, at any rate, as old, for in his essay, 'Of Experience,' Montaigne says:

"'There is more ado to interpret interpretations than to interpret things; and more books upon books than upon any other subject; we do nothing but comment upon one another. Every place swarms with commentaries; of authors there is great scarcity.'

"The evil that men write lives after them. This, which Montaigne said in his haste, many a callow ready-writer repeats glibly at his leisure, and a commodity of yea-forsooth cynics, fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils, now scrawl flagrantly above the portals of one

of the most tranquil and leafy by-ways of *belles lettres* the sour legend, 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here.'

"Nevertheless, fear not, gentle reader. Let our latter-day Zál and Rustum bluster as they will, but heed not thou.

> With us along the strip of herbage strown,
> That just divides the desert from the sown,
> Where name of pope and pressman is forgot,
> And peace to Montaigne on his purple throne.

"To return to the knight of Bordeaux. That is a quaint distinction which he implies. Of commentators there are swarms; of authors great scarcity! A commentator, then, is not an author. He who interprets placket holes, devil worship, the Scandinavian mythus, or the reasons why monks love to be in kitchens, is free of the literary guild; he who interprets books is outside benefit of clergy; even the hospitable Montaigne has slammed the door in his face, and the literary whippersnapper, who retails the wooden nutmegs of his imagination as the delectable spice of fiction, or ekes out a harmful unnecessary existence by scribbling impertinences about society big-wigs, has stabbed the poor outcast with the leathern dagger of his wit, or shot him flying with a paper bullet of the brain.

"You may rip your quill to a feather over small-beer chronicles, write sonnets to your mistress's eyebrow, babble of green fields,

extract metaphysical moonshine from green cucumbers, split the ears of the groundlings with windy passions, wash out human nature's dirty linen in the market-place, or clog Fleet Ditch with 'the spawn of the press on the follies of the hour,' and be the classic of a season; ay, and have your foibles chronicled in *M.A.P.*, and your seven ages of portraiture blazoned in the sixpenny magazines. But, though you speak in books about books with the tongues of men and angels, it shall avail you nothing. An angel you may be, but you shall be written down, as Shelley was by Matthew Arnold, as 'an ineffectual angel, beating in the void your luminous wings in vain.' Nay, is it not possible that Solomon in all his glory has been misreported, and that what he actually said was, 'Of making books about books there is no end'?

"But, what the good year! Are we men, or mice? Shall we, being free-born British book-makers, writers of books about books, allow a dead Frenchman to come betwixt the wind and our nobility? Shall the excellent Sieur de Montaigne, who wrote of books himself, and, to speak brotherly of him, sometimes wrote of them but dully, stand, like an awful constable on point duty, and with the raised arm of authority invidiously halt our chariot only, under plea of regulating public traffic? I say no. I will, like the eloquent counsel of

Mrs. Bardell, 'appeal to an enlightened, a high-minded, a right-feeling, a conscientious, a dispassionate, a sympathising, a contemplative jury of my fellow-countrymen.'

"There can be but one sound reason for avoiding a book about books, and that is because the book is not a good one—a reason that will serve equally well for avoiding what Oliver Wendell Holmes calls 'broken-winded novels, and spavined verses.' If Montaigne disliked the commentators of his time, we may be sure they deserved it, and it is no part of my case to defend every fusty pedant and prosy bore who may, in past times, have misused some honest author by thumping him like a 'drum ecclesiastic,' or have wearied an unwilling congregation with his tedious homilies. There are, I admit, amongst the higher ranks of English literature, several captains of renown whose solemn and authoritative utterances on books might be lost or burned without serious check to the gaiety of nations. That delightful old humbug, Fadladeen, who serves as comic interlude between the scenes in *Lalla Rookh*, is the very type of the literary bore in a full-bottomed wig who trampled with elephantine feet all over some poet's garden, measuring dimensions with his land-surveyor's chain, pompously declaring that Shakespeare was longer, Spenser broader, this more oval, that more square, and neither conformable to

the classic pattern of Horace or of Virgil. No reader, no writer, will trouble about the mensuration of these robustious, periwig-pated, queer old fogies. It is not the dimensions of the garden, but the colour and perfume of the flowers that we prize. And why may not you, or I, or he, or she, loiter awhile in some shady walk, or rest a little in some musky arbour, or, plucking a rose for our own pleasure, call to a friend to mark its beauty?"

Is it not worth while to have called for an "encore" to that pretty piece of writing? There will not be anything much better to read in to-day's paper, *I* know.

Chapter XVI. The "Thunder Books"

NOW let us consider, so briefly as may be, the thunder-books—*God and My Neighbour* and *Not Guilty*.

Mr. Blatchford's reputation with the *outside* public—with the "Socialists? I'd like to shoot 'em!" type of person—is based almost entirely upon these contributions to rationalist and determinist literature. I knew Mr. Blatchford when he was writing the two books I have named—I watched him writing them, you may say; and therefore I know with what deep earnestness and with how high a purpose he set himself to the task. But I also know that he did not enjoy the task—not one little bit. He did enjoy writing the books about books and *Tales for the Marines*, and *Fantasias*, and the *Dolly Ballads*. These the "outside public" has never read. Which is a great pity, because you cannot properly estimate the worth of a man's arguments without some grasp of his premises.

But it is no use arguing about it. Our people have no use for dulcimers, and they love the big drum, and that is all about it.

In *God and My Neighbour*, "R. B." rolled them a roll which kept them quick marching—atheists, priests, scientists, divines, and common scoffers—for more than two years. *God and My Neighbour* woke them up.

When Mr. Blatchford's first article in condemnation of certain Christian dogmas appeared in the *Clarion*, many readers of the paper became highly agitated. When the second article was printed, this agitation turned to horror. Then came the final and most crushing blow. Mr. Blatchford caused it to be known that his little "baggage action" was not really a baggage action at all, being, in fact, a full-blown, double-breasted campaign, "to be continued" in the paper week by week for an indefinite period.

The feeling which now agitated the bosoms of the afflicted was one of blank dismay. Socialists all over England went into mourning, and told each other that Socialism would die—was dead; Nunquam had killed it.

And how had Nunquam killed Socialism? Had he recanted aught of his opinions? Had he eaten, so to speak, of swine flesh? Had he joined the Liberty and Property Defence League, or accepted a knighthood? Not *then*, at all events. Perhaps he had been seen to enter a first-class railway compartment, wearing a tall hat? Perhaps there was truth in the rumour that he truckled to class prejudice by

H. Starkie, Hyde, Cheshire.

"R. B." AT THE PRESENT TIME.

adorning his extremities with spats? No; these charges were not under consideration. They might be true, and, if so, every earnest democrat would doubtless give them the serious attention which they merited. But they were not present in our minds when we asserted that Nunquam had killed Socialism. What *had* Nunquam done, then, to warrant our despair? Friends, he had . . . . told the *truth!*

Sensible people, therefore, did not allow themselves to be worried with fears for Socialism. How can the truth—any sort of truth—kill Socialism? You cannot quench fire with fire nor mop up water with water. You cannot kill truth with truth.

But there was another and more personal danger in the situation which I, at any rate, viewed with some apprehension. This was the danger that Mr. Blatchford's latest frontal attack on the Citadel of Lies should damage his reputation, in the worldly sense, and inflict a monetary loss upon the *Clarion.* All advertisers are not Socialists, and all persons who profess Socialism are not necessarily wise and just. And so, while one did not fear for Socialism, one did fear that the fortunes of the *Clarion*, regarded as a journalistic venture, might be seriously affected by the courage and candour of its Editor. And, like many other people, I discussed the matter with him. It is

only honest to mention that my interest in the *Clarion's* finances was not purely platonic. The paper then owed me three guineas.

But we need not have worried. Before half-a-dozen of the articles had appeared people came joyfully to realise that their fears had been baseless. Whilst admiring Mr. Blatchford's qualities as a thinker and a writer, one is sometimes apt to forget that he is also a journalist. He is also the possessor of a rare form of sensitiveness—that which is sensitive to the sensitiveness of others. And so it happened that the articles were characterised by a wonderful restraint in the writing of them—born of a keen sense of the journalistic fitness of things, and a most graceful and goodly restraint in the spirit, and form, and "feel" of them. The journalistic instinct was not responsible for *that*.

God and My Neighbour is, as it were, the rarified extract, the chemical resultant, of these brilliant *Clarion* articles. It is, I think, the sanest, gentlest, most honest and convincing book on its subject which I have ever read. Its opposition to conventional Christianity is so logically founded and so logically expressed.

The literary qualities of the book—its craftsmanship—must be admired even by Christians. These same qualities, I think, will also appeal strongly to those readers whose

acquaintance with the literature of Agnosticism is most wide. My own reading in that line has been lamentably restricted; but the mere fact that *God and My Neighbour* at once imbued me with an unquenchable thirst for further knowledge on the same subject is, I think, a sufficient proof of its propagandist value.

You see, I did not approach *God and My Neighbour* with any preconception of awe and reverence. I did not say to myself: "This is the Gospel according to Blatchford; let us, therefore, believe on it." I took the book for what it set out to be—an exposition of the arguments and facts which have led Mr. Blatchford, together with a vast number of other intelligent men, to form the opinion that "Christianity is not true." I delivered the volume into the hands of all the scholarly and earnest Christians of my acquaintance, and requested them to pick holes in it. You may be sure that they did not fail to attempt this feat, but with an assurance none too marked. The book impressed them with a sense of its power. They saw that this was no case of the eager apostate blaspheming in his wrath. Here was something lucid, and definite, and complete, and strong. The calm, deliberate masterfulness of the whole performance gave them pause. This book did not content itself with appealing to their reason.

It appealed to their reason in terms which their reason could comprehend—in a manner, moreover, so simple and direct that it offered no man a loophole for believing that he did *not* comprehend. This book was powerful. This book was interesting. This book was new.

When you say that a book is powerful, and interesting, and new, you say that it is literature. To interest and refresh and command the mind is the mission of literature. Mr. Blatchford's book does these things most excellently well, and that is why I say that it is the literary qualities of the work which fascinate me most. I am not referring particularly to Mr. Blatchford's style—I shall have a word or two to say about that later. I look at this book as a book, and I am filled with admiration at the wonderful craftsmanship which has gone to its making.

I say quite frankly that many of the arguments in this book, much of the science and philosophy, have been borrowed from other writers. But I will tell you what has *not* been borrowed, and that is the art which has set these old truths forth in such wise that a child might read them with understanding, and a grown man with pleasure and profit. I will tell you of another thing which has not been borrowed, and that is the art which has pieced, and separated, and joined, and re-joined these truths in such wise

as to form a whole which is almost perfect in logic and completeness, and that arrestive faculty which we call "power." There are yet other qualities which have not been borrowed. These are humanity, great simplicity, abiding honesty; and there remains, finally, the most intangible, and yet the most important, feature of all—the personality, the mysterious "ego," of the thing. Only Mr. Blatchford might explain that mystery. I am quite certain that he will not, however, and I am not sure that he could.

Have I made clear my meaning—that this book fascinates one, not by reason of the originality of its purpose and material, but by virtue of its wonderful construction and perfect design and its simple strength?

My favourite chapter in this book is called "The Parting of the Ways." There are two paragraphs in it which, I think, convey the whole spirit and purpose of the book. Incidentally, I think, also, they show us something of the author:

(1) ". . . . If there is a Father in Heaven, He is likely to be better pleased by our loving and serving our fellow creatures (His children) than by our singing and praying to Him, while our brothers and sisters (His children) are ignorant, or brutalised, or hungry, or in trouble.

(2) "I speak as a father myself when I say

that I should not like to think that one of my children would be so foolish and so unfeeling as to erect a marble tomb to my memory while the others needed a friend or a meal. And I speak in the same spirit when I add that to build a cathedral, and to spend our tears and pity upon a Saviour who was crucified nearly two thousand years ago, while women and men and little children are being crucified in our midst, without pity and without help, is cant, and sentimentality, and a mockery of God."

You will observe that the second of the paragraphs which I quote contains more than one hundred words. You will also observe that this number includes but eight words of Latin origin, and four of those ("crucified," "cathedral," etc.) are essential to the text. This leaves us four words to divide among a hundred—one Latinism to twenty-five words. I have not specially selected that paragraph. You will find the same amazing store of good Saxon in any other sentence or paragraph in the book. This feature of his writing alone is sufficient to single out Mr. Blatchford as a stylist of rare worth. But Mr. Blatchford's method of writing has many other virtues—crispness, lucidity, "bite," "grip," and the much-worshipped and much-wooed "short sentence." Mr. Blatchford's style is *all* style.

All that I have written about *God and My Neighbour* applies in a general sense to *Not*

Guilty—which is, in a sense, a continuation of the first book. In *Not Guilty* the arguments upon which Mr. Blatchford builds up the case for his neighbour are carried to their logical conclusion. *Not Guilty* is Determinism reduced to Anglo-Saxon. Mr. Blatchford calls his book "The Case for the Bottom Dog." He tells us things which have been familiar commonplaces to philosophers throughout the ages, but which most of us are ignorant about because we cannot read the language which philosophers *will* talk. In an "apology" which prefaces *Not Guilty*, "R. B." states the whole Determinist position in two or three hundred words. The rest of his book is devoted to establishing and defending that position.

"Knowing," he says, "as I do, how the hard-working and hard-playing public shun laborious thinking and serious writing, and how they hate to have their ease disturbed or their prejudices handled rudely, I still make bold to undertake this task, because of the vital nature of the problems I shall probe.

"Much golden eloquence has been squandered in praise of the successful and the good; much stern condemnation has been vented upon the wicked. I venture now to plead for those of our poor brothers and sisters who are accursed of Christ and rejected of men.

"Hitherto all the love, all the honours, all the applause of this world, and all the rewards of heaven, have been lavished on the fortunate and the strong; and the portion of the unfriended Bottom Dog, in his adversity and weakness, has been curses, blows, chains, the gallows, and everlasting damnation.

"I shall plead, then, for those who are loathed and tortured and branded as the sinful and unclean; for those who have hated us and wronged us, and have been wronged and hated by us. I shall defend them for right's sake, for pity's sake, and for the benefit of society and the race. For these also are of our flesh, these also have erred and gone astray, these also are victims of an inscrutable and relentless Fate.

"If it concerns us that the religions of the world are childish dreams, or nightmares; if it concerns us that our penal laws and moral codes are survivals of barbarism and fear; if it concerns us that our most cherished and venerable ideas of our relations to God and to each other are illogical and savage, then the case for the Bottom Dog concerns us nearly.

. . . . . .

"Rightly or wrongly, happily or unhappily, but with all the sincerity of my soul, I shall here deny the justice and reason of every kind

of blame and praise, of punishment and reward—human or divine.

"Divine law—the law made by priests and attributed to God—consists of a code of rewards and punishments for acts called good or bad. Human law—the law made by Kings and Parliaments—consists of a code of punishments for acts called criminal, or unlawful.

"I claim that men should not be classified as good and bad, but as fortunate and unfortunate; that they should be pitied, and not blamed; helped instead of being punished.

"I claim that since we do not hold a man worthy of praise for being born beautiful, nor of blame for being born ugly, neither should we hold him worthy of praise for being born virtuous, nor of blame for being born vicious.

"I base this claim upon the self-evident and undeniable fact that man has no part in the creation of his own nature.

"I shall be told this means that no man is answerable for his own acts.

"That is exactly what it does mean.

"But, it will be urged, every man has a free will to act as he chooses; and to deny that is to imperil all law and order, all morality and discipline.

"I deny both these inferences, and I ask the reader to hear my case patiently, and to judge it on its merits.

"Let us first test the justice of our laws,

divine and human: the question of their usefulness we will deal with later."

As for that which follows, I think that it is a complete and absolutely unanswerable presentation of the Determinist case. All sorts of people, ranging in degrees of knowledge and attainment from Nonconformist ministers to Mr. G. K. Chesterton, took up the challenge and upheld the theory of free will according to their several abilities. But Mr. Blatchford's case, I think, remains unshaken.

Don't you think it curious that Mr. Blatchford should have written *Not Guilty?* It seems so absurd and improbable a performance to come from a man who has written *Tales for the Marines* and the *Dolly Ballads* and articles about Dreadnoughts. Well, my friends, the truth of the matter is that "R. B." is an improbable sort of man.

Some of "R. B.'s" actions, however, are not nearly so improbable as it suits his kind critics to pretend. Just as this book proceeds to press a sudden noise arises, emanating from some articles which "R. B." has written "in the Capitalist Press." These articles relate to the very important question of Anglo-German relations and to the danger which all intelligent persons know to be actual, and which many people believe to be imminent, of a conflict between this country and Germany.

Most of the noise is being produced by

"critics" who share Mr. Blatchford's own economic views. These gentlemen, with many thumps on the tablecloth, are denouncing "R. B." as a traitor and impostor, and are charging him (as is their critical way) with having sold the movement and himself to "the Capitalists."

Now, all this affretation of surprise and indignation is surely somewhat uncalled for. My friend has for years made no secret of his Imperialist sympathies: he has for years proclaimed quite openly his deep conviction that aggressive designs against this country are cherished in Berlin. He has written on these matters in the *Clarion* for so long, at any rate, as I have known him. But now that he has chosen to say the same things to another and a wider audience, he is charged with inconsistency, with treachery, with malice—nay, more: with being actuated by the basest of motives.

The people who do this to Mr. Blatchford are dishonest. He has never hesitated in the past to make use of "the Capitalist Press" for such propagandist purposes as seemed useful to him. When those purposes have been agreeable to the prejudices of Mr. Blatchford's "friends" it has been very well; but when, as now, they happen to conflict with the placid beliefs of these gentlemen, my friend is accused of inconsistency, of—worse. Why? If he

may write about the obvious significance of German military preparations in the *Clarion*, he may write on the same subject in the *Daily Mail*. If (as he has done) he may write about Socialism in the *Daily Mail*, why is he not to write about militarism, or any other "ism," in the *Daily Mail?*

The bitter opposition which these articles have provoked from Mr. Blatchford's erstwhile friends is compensated for by the appreciation which they have wrung from his erstwhile enemies. This fact again gives rise to curious reflections.

When "R. B." published *God and My Neighbour* and *Not Guilty*, those books were ignored or pooh-poohed by the "respectable" papers. It was carefully explained to the readers of such journals that Mr. Blatchford was a "demagogue": a shallow, catch-penny sensationalist, whose writings were addressed to the vulgar and credulous mob. "Cultured" people were not to be troubled by them.

But directly Mr. Blatchford concerns himself with matters which do not affect the selfish interests of "cultured people," we learn that he is a deep thinker and a trenchant writer. His "German" articles have elicited letters of praise and congratulation from half the social and intellectual "swells" in England. From judges, lawyers, generals, admirals and savants. Yea, even from the clergy.

It is the revolutionaries, the "unrespectables," who now find Mr. Blatchford a demagogue and a sensationalist.

Well, it is clear that a man who is capable of commanding applause or censure at will from the extremes of Society is a remarkable man.

In my next and concluding chapter I shall try to tell you just what sort of man he is.

Chapter XVII. Personalities

WHEN I first set eyes on Mr. Blatchford only the top of him was visible. He stood behind a mahogany counter and looked me up and down with eyes which were very big and very black and very calm. He wore (and wears) a heavy black moustache, of the type which was once in fashion amongst Oriental despots. This ornament entirely screens his mouth, and on meeting him for the first time and arguing from the particular to the general, you naturally imagine that he has a despotic mouth to match: which is not the case. He has a chin, mind you, and a jaw—not at all the sort of jaw which it is useful to fall over—but his mouth, as may be seen in the youthful photographs we have printed, is not terrible.

I stood, as it were, on the safe side of the counter, and returned the gaze. I tried to tell myself that I did not falter; that boldly and deliberately, according to the arrangement which I had come to with myself, I scrutinised this man and took his measure in guineas. You

must understand that at this time I knew but this much of "R. B.": that he was "one of these Socialist beggars," and had written me a letter respecting a book which I had published, and offering to print some of my stories in the *Clarion*. Therefore did it behove me to view him with a bold and mathematical eye; but when he actually appeared and faced me, like that, with those eyes, his shoulders square, and his fist on the counter, I do not believe that I thought about guineas at all.

Suddenly the man's jaw dropped, after a manner peculiarly its own, and the noble moustachio cocked itself sideways and—behold! the man behind the counter was smiling. He also spoke.

"So you wrote so-and-so," he said. "Ha!"

I also said "Ha!" It seemed to be the jolly and appropriate thing to say. Then "R. B." said: "Let's go out and have a drink."

We went out, and stopped out, and talked about Karl Marx and Love and Rudyard Kipling, and the pianola, and marriage, and tobacco, and Sir Thomas Browne, and Mr. Chamberlain. We walked about Fleet Street and beheld the aristocracy of intellect, and wondered what it felt like to wear that sort of tie. When Mr. Blatchford had missed a respectable number of trains, we separated. I saw him off by the train which he did not miss,

and as it drew out of the station he put his head through the window-opening and called out:

"By the way—forgot to mention it—send us in some stories; don't forget."

That, I think, is a full and verbatim report of the business portion of our conversation that afternoon.

You may suppose that I thought a good deal about "R. B." that evening, and so far as I am now able to remember, the personal feature which most impressed me was his remarkable gift of phraseology. (I had been touched, of course, by the kindness and sympathy which he had shown to me that day. But that is the sort of reminiscence which one does not put into books.) I had been invigorated by his rich and spontaneous humour, and I had not failed to observe how honest, determined, and altogether definite a person he was. But the characteristic which, as I say, most impressed itself upon my youthful fancy was "R. B.'s" remarkable way of talking.

Men who write well do not always talk well. Good writing is normally the result of infinite care and labour, and, therefore, produces itself slowly. But in conversation it is not possible, or at any rate desirable, to make long pauses between words while you look about for exactitudes of expression. The writer has been trained to work in this leisurely

fashion, and his verbal utterances, therefore, are often either halting or imperfect. But "R. B."—alone among all the authors I have ever known—talks exactly as he writes—plain, Saxon words, which exactly convey his meaning, and which he forms without effort into perfectly-modelled sentences. I have never heard him tell a story or utter an opinion which was not expressed naturally and without effort in what is called literary form. To speak of "R. B." as a "born writer," then, is to utter more than an empty phrase; for "R. B.'s" literary gifts are to a remarkable degree instinctive.

Mr. Blatchford is obviously a desirable companion. He is a man of very wide and genuine culture, and he is "very noticing," as they say of the children. His sincerity and earnestness, his hatred of sham, his strong logical faculty, his irrepressible humour, combine to make him an irresistible "talker" even from the academic standpoint. But he shines forth even more brilliantly as a gossip and playfellow. No subject is too simple or ordinary—too beastly human—for "R. B.'s" consideration; no pastime too useless for his amusement. I have sat for hours by his side on the sea-shore shying stones at a bottle (and hitting it once to his twenties, be it said); I have lain on my chest throughout a summer's day and shot at postcards and clay pipes with

an air-gun in strenuous competition with the author of *Not Guilty*. I have helped to dress and burnt-cork that gentleman for the delectation of his trembling family into a terrible representation of the Terrible Turk. I have taught him how to play word-diamonds. On the other hand, I have discussed with him not merely Free Trade, Free Love, the Nebular theory, and Progressive Revelation, but also sea-sickness, Bath buns, the Tam-o'-Shanter Girl, and Surrey *versus* Yorkshire.

It is a curious fact—and one which gives rise to all sorts of considerations respecting the *nuances* of friendship—that "R. B." entertains one more, if anything, during his occasional fits of depression and boredom than when he is well and wicked. This is not because it amuses one to see "R. B." unhappy, but because he takes his unhappiness so happily. His humour is never so keen, so whimsical, and, withal, so wistful as upon those occasions when he is out of conceit with the universe. When Mr. Blatchford "humps himself," as he calls it, his hair turns two degrees more grey—a temporary phenomenon—his countenance assumes a vivid blueness; he sits very close to the fire, with rounded shoulders, and he—maketh sport. I remember finding him in the fender, as it were, on one of his moody days two years ago. He looked up as I entered the room, nodded grimly,

pulled at his pipe, and resumed his close inspection of the hob. After some moments of silent meditation he spoke. "How long is it to April?" he inquired, with extreme gravity.

"Nine weeks," I answered, after rapid calculation.

"Oh!" said "R. B." "I shall go out for a short walk in April."

I do not want anybody to suppose that Mr. Blatchford is in any way a "nervous subject." He is a very healthy and vital person of middle age. But he has fallen into an unfortunate habit of catching the influenza. You know what that means. We have suggested to him that he should ask permission from the democracy to spend his winters in Italy or Egypt; but he scorns our suggestions. He has never condescended to support this attitude by argument, but it is generally supposed amongst his convives that the snow-capped hills and tinkling bells of Norwood have captured his heart. My God, how they tinkle, those bells! There is a half-minute tram service in constant operation exactly opposite the editorial front door, and the bells thereof form a subject of constant editorial profanity. But the Old Man will not leave them. Thus are we the creatures of our environment.

Although he cannot be persuaded to seek

relief from bells and bacteria upon the shores of the Mediterranean, that ocean is, nevertheless, the constant subject of Mr. Blatchford's dreams. Water-colour painting is a favourite pastime of his solitudes, and when the hump is at its worst and the bells most loud and frequent and the beauties of Norwood most evident, he sends to the office for vast supplies of cobalt blue, and you may imagine him, as I have seen him, seated at his desk with tubes of colour and stacks of brushes upon his either flank, and Mediterraneans in various stages of preparation opposing him. These paintings, by the way, are characteristic of the man. I have observed that all writers play at making pictures just (I suppose) as artists play at making poems. I have observed, also, that a writer's pictures, even though they be crude or merely grotesque, reflect in some queer, indefinable way the literary qualities of him who has produced them. Now, "R. B.'s" paintings are not crude. I am more than usually ignorant where pictures are concerned, and therefore speak with diffidence; but, having expressed that reservation, I make bold to say that "R. B.'s" seascapes are pretty and graceful and accomplished, and that they exhibit a rich sense of colour. But whatever their technical merits may be, there can, I think, be no doubt that they possess qualities exactly similar to those which distinguish his best

literary work—extreme simplicity and rigid economy. All his pictures contain simply sea and sky, and sometimes—very rarely—a sail. You can take it or leave it at that. If you are lucky, you take it.

I suppose, now, that it is up to one to write about "R. B.'s" political temperament.

I have said somewhere that, in my view, he is essentially—that is to say, spiritually—a Tory. I stand by that declaration even at the risk of having to convince Mr. Blatchford himself, by banging a table, of the truth of it.

It has always seemed to me that Toryism is not so much a political condition of mind as it is an emotional state. There is always this difference between the Tory and the so-called Liberal: the Tory is a spiritualist, seeking, sometimes consciously, sometimes as the result of sheer instinct, to defend and preserve those things which are familiar to him and which he reveres by virtue of association, tradition, and sentiment. Your "Liberal," upon the other hand, trades in flour, and cannot for the life of him understand why sentiment should be mixed up with questions of business—*i.e.*, government. That those beliefs and customs which the emotional Tory bleeds for at the ballot-box are often barbarous and disgusting is outside the scope of this inquiry, as is also the fact that flour-dealers are often in the right about water rates. The important thing is

that one deals in sentiment and the other in flour.

It is pure sentiment—class sentiment—which inspires the squire of my parish (a retiring, gentlemanly, ignorant man) to stand up in schoolrooms and get very red and awkward in defence of Christianity, the rights of property, beer, etc. And I contend that it is an exactly similar sentiment which is voiced by Mr. Blatchford. The two men think along identical lines to opposite ends—with the difference, of course, that Mr. Blatchford thinks briskly and definitely, whilst the squire's little brain can scarcely hobble. Both men are passionately in earnest; both men are sentimentalists, devotedly attached to the traditions of their class. Both men, as it were, are fighting about poems. One man's poem is Tennyson's *Princess;* the other man stands for *The Cottar's Saturday Night.* There is persistent divergence about the poems, but none at all concerning poetry. Neither man cares tuppence for the flour trade.

Between these men there stand two other men—the flour-dealer, already introduced to your notice, and—the Revolutionary, the rebel: he who has revolted with sword and Blue Book; he whose quarrel is not with a class or with a system, but with all classes and all systems; he whose mission is not so much to despoil the squire and exalt that gentleman's

shepherd as to gently eliminate all squires and all shepherds, and set gods in their places.

It is not for me (thank you) to judge between these men and the impulses which they represent. I desire merely to present them as I see them, and incidentally to present my reasons for calling "R. B." a "Tory."

But it is for me to point out that sentiment is a far stronger thing than reason. When Mr. Blatchford and the squire have arrived at the respective ends of their single line, there will be nothing for either gentleman to do but walk back till he bumps the other—unless you conceive the line as being centrally pivoted, in which case the voyager who first gets home—and I am putting my money on "R. B."—will only have to hold on tight till the other comes after him by force, as it were, of natural attrition. Whatever happens, there will be either a sudden collision or gradual fusion of all impulses collected on the line of sentiment.

The revolutionary and the flour-dealer will have to do gymnastics on their own line. But it is a short line, and carries a light weight as compared to the other. It seems to me that "R. B." and the squire, when they do join up and have agreed to sing in a common metre, will have it all their own way.

I leave my friend with confidence at his end of the line. I wish him continued power, determination, and endurance.

I can wish him nothing else; for he has already all things which are worth the wishing of mortals. He has a woman and children of his own; he has his sticks of cobalt blue; he has the respect of all thinking men and the affection of all gentlemen; he has the love of all his friends; he has his piano and his tram bells and his John Sebastien Bach. He has the confidence and fellowship of a hundred thousand disciples, and the songs of the thrushes which he feeds each morning in his garden.

THE END.

BOOKS BY THE CLARION PRESS,

44, WORSHIP STREET, LONDON, E.C.

By ROBERT BLATCHFORD.

MERRIE ENGLAND. By ROBERT BLATCHFORD. A New Edition. Paper cover, 3d.; by post 4½d. Cloth, 1/-; by post 1/2.

"Merrie England" first appeared as a series of articles in the CLARION in 1892-3. These articles, with some revisions and additions, were afterwards produced in volume form at a shilling. The book met with immediate success, some 25,000 copies being sold.

In October, 1894, the CLARION published the same book, uniform in size and type with the shilling edition, at the low price of ONE PENNY. As the book contained 206 pages, and was printed by trade-union labour, and on British-made paper, it could only be produced at a loss. This loss was borne by the proprietors of the CLARION.

The sale of the penny edition outran all expectations. No one supposed that more than 100,000 would be called for, but in a few months over 700,000 had been sold, without a penny being spent in advertisement, and in face of the tremendous opposition excited by Socialistic publications in those days.

Later on an edition was published at 3d., and the total sale reached nearly a million copies.

BRITAIN FOR THE BRITISH. A further exposition of Socialism. Price 2/6 net; by post, 2/9. Paper cover, 3d.; by post, 4½d.

This book was written to take the place of "Merrie England," and has had a sale of 300,000 copies. It deals with the problem of Socialism from a practical, present day standpoint.

THE SORCERY SHOP: AN IMPOSSIBLE ROMANCE. Cloth, 1/6 net.; by post, 1/9. Paper cover, 6d. net; by post, 8d.

A BOOK ABOUT BOOKS. Cloth and gold, 2/6 net; by post, 2/9.

MY FAVOURITE BOOKS. Cloth and gold, 2/6 net; by post, 2/9.

DISMAL ENGLAND. Price, cloth and gold, 2/6 net; by post, 2/9.

Vivid sketches of the life of the people at work and at play. Contains articles on The Chemical Workers, The Chain Makers, The Song of the Shirt, Life on the Canals, The Police Court, The Signalman, The Lion Tamer, etc., etc.

TOMMY ATKINS. A Military Novel. Price, cloth, 1/6 net; post free, 1/9. Paper, 1/- net; by post, 1/3.

Robert Blatchford served seven years in the Army, and rose to the rank of Sergeant. This experience furnished him with the material for a budget of soldier stories, which are, by good judges, reckoned to be the best pictures of soldier life yet drawn. "Sir Evelyn Wood sat up all night to read 'Tommy Atkins,' and praised it highly."

TALES FOR THE MARINES. A New Book of Soldier Stories. Price, cloth, 2/6 net; by post, 2/9. Paper, 1/- net; by post, 1/2.

JULIE—A Study of a Girl by a Man. A Story of Slum Life. Price, cloth, 2/6 net; by post, 2/9.

A SON OF THE FORGE. Price, cloth, 1/6 net; by post, 1/8. Paper, 1/- net; by post, 1/2.

Robert Blatchford's Crimean War Story. Some of the earlier incidents are based on the author's own experiences.

GOD AND MY NEIGHBOUR. Price 2/6 cloth, net; by post, 2/9. Paper, 3d.; by post, 4½d.

This is an examination of the claims of Christianity to be the one true religion. It has created more controversy in the religious world than any book published the last ten years. The author considers it still unanswered.

NOT GUILTY. A Defence of the Bottom Dog. Price, cloth, 2/6 net; by post, 2/9. Paper covers, 6d.; by post, 7½d.

A BOHEMIAN GIRL. An Up-to-Date Love Story. Cloth and gold, 2/6 net; by post, 2/9.

DOLLY BALLADS. With 280 Illustrations by the late Frank Chesworth. Price, cloth, 3/6; by post, 3/10.

By R. B. SUTHERS.

COMMON OBJECTIONS TO SOCIALISM ANSWERED. Price, cloth, 1/- net; by post, 1/2. Paper, 3d.; by post, 4½d.

This deals with the common arguments met with in the press and on the platform, *e.g.*, That Socialism is based on the fallacy that Labour is the only source of Wealth, That Socialism means Confiscation, That Socialism would destroy Home Life, etc., etc. Full of facts, figures, and arguments. An invaluable handbook for students and speakers.

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS. The Case for Municipal Management. Price, cloth, 1/- net; by post, 1/2. Paper covers, 6d.; by post, 7½d.

Answers the arguments against municipal trading, explains why municipal debt is not a burden, and proves the advantages of municipalisation. The municipal reformer's text-book.

MY RIGHT TO WORK. Price, cloth, 1/-; by post, 1/2. Paper cover, 6d.; by post, 7½d.

Explains the causes of unemployment, and shows why good trade can never solve the problem, and demolishes the arguments in favour of the Free Trade and Tariff Reform remedies.

A MAN, A WOMAN, AND A DOG. Paper cover, 6d. net.; by post, 7½d.

Domestic adventures of a newly-married couple. Described as one of the funniest books ever written.

JACK'S WIFE. Price, cloth, 2/6 net; by post, 2/9.

The further domestic adventures of Jack and Minnie.

THE CLARION BIRTHDAY BOOK. Compiled by R. B. SUTHERS AND H. BESWICK from the writings of the CLARION Staff. Wit and Wisdom for Every Day in the Year. Price, cloth and gold, 2/6 net; by post, 2/9.

By SMITH ADAMS.

POLITICAL ECONOMY FOR PLAIN PEOPLE. Cloth, 1/- net; by post, 1/3; paper, 6d; by post, 8d.

By EDWARD FRANCIS FAY.

UNSENTIMENTAL JOURNEYS. With Illustrations by FRANK CHESWORTH. Price, cloth, 5/-; by post, 5/4.

The strange adventures of "The Bounder" on his tours in the Eastern Counties and other parts of England and France. Wherever Mr. Fay went he met tramps and other queer human fish, and in this book he relates his experiences with that rare gusto and whimsicality so admired by his readers in the CLARION.

By J. H. GORING.

THE BALLAD OF LAKE LALOO, AND OTHER RHYMES. With 122 Illustrations by E. BENT WALKER. Price, 3/6 net; by post, 3/10.

THE CLARION SONG BOOK. Ten Parts in One Volume, price 2/-, post free. Separate Parts in Old Notation or Tonic Sol-fa, price 2d. each, by post, 2½d. Book of Words only, 2d.; by post, 2½d. Price to Societies, 12/- per 100, carriage paid.

THE UTOPIA PRESS, *Printers*, 44, Worship Street, E.C.