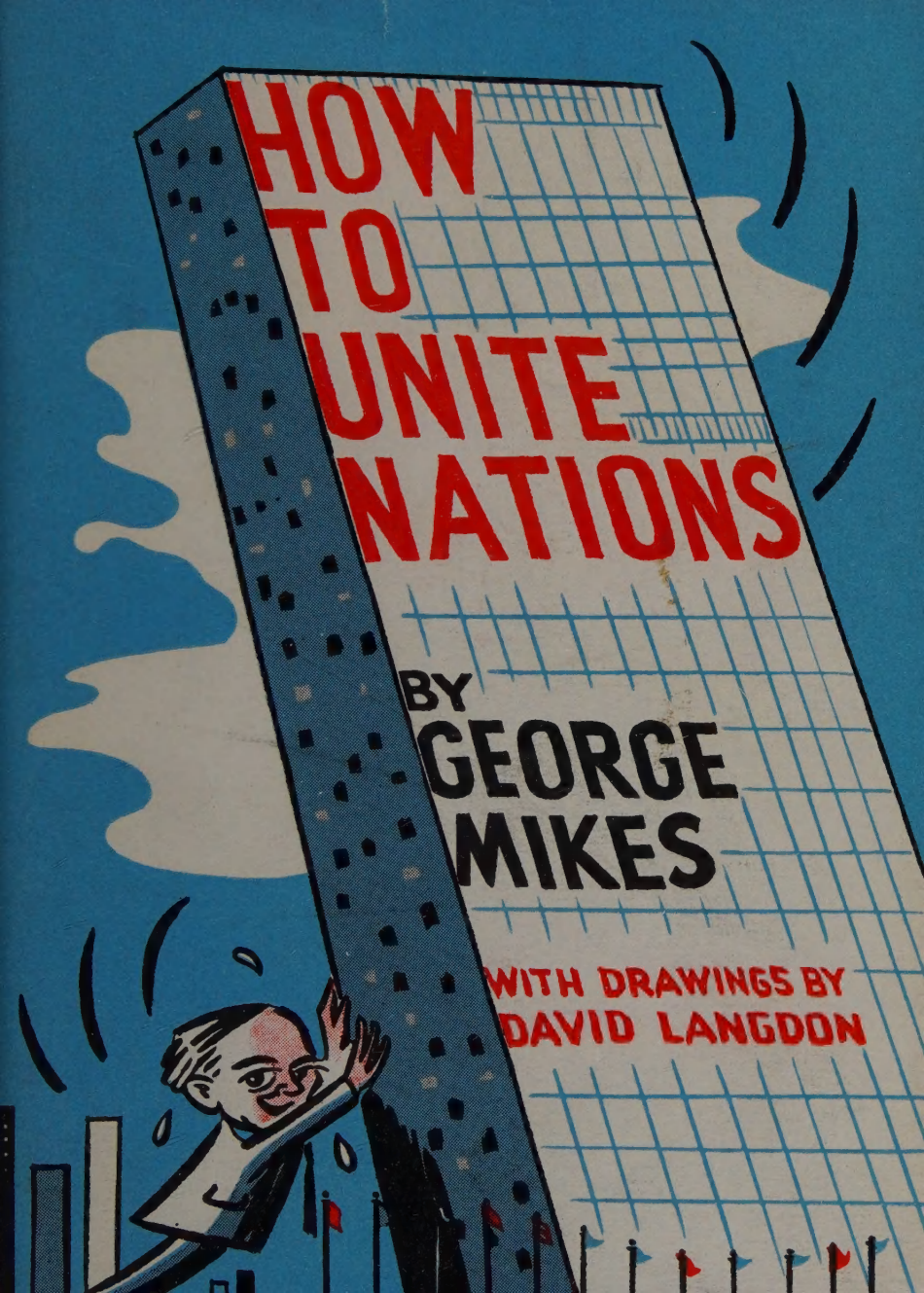
HOW TO UNITE NATIONS

BY GEORGE MIKES

WITH DRAWINGS BY DAVID LANGDON



This new book by George Mikes, that 'laureate of quick-witted wanderers' (*Sunday Times*), is named after its first part; but it also includes other work by George Mikes, notably his celebrated essay on 'How to be a European'.

The first part is the result of a visit to New York during which Mr Mikes, heavily disguised as Our Man at the United Nations, did some profitable lurking. He tells us about the U.N. Delegates' Lounge, so grave and like the hub of the world all week, but on Friday evenings astonishingly aflutter with pretty ladies; about the diplomatic cocktail parties, and what happens to naive delegates who think they are for fun; about the tourists with their compulsive urge to see the desk on which Mr Khrushchev thumped with his shoe. He has sized them all up and he makes hay with them. No doubt the nations first united for other purposes, but after reading this account of them one can't help thinking that they did it just so that George Mikes could write about them.

In the second part of the book he ranges far and wide, sometimes telling stories, sometimes describing, sometimes passing judgement, and always being very funny. He is accompanied throughout by David Langdon, and the partnership is a brilliant one.

Jacket design and illustrations by David Langdon

HOW TO UNITE NATIONS

By the same author

HOW TO BE AN ALIEN
HOW TO BE INIMITABLE
HOW TO SCRAPE SKIES
WISDOM FOR OTHERS
MILK AND HONEY
EAST IS EAST
DOWN WITH EVERYBODY!
SHAKESPEARE AND MYSELF
ÜBER ALLES
EIGHT HUMORISTS
LITTLE CABBAGES
ITALY FOR BEGINNERS
TANGO
SWITZERLAND FOR BEGINNERS

*

THE HUNGARIAN REVOLUTION
A STUDY IN INFAMY

*

MORTAL PASSION
a novel


HOW TO
UNITE NATIONS


DAVID
LANGDON

HOW TO UNITE NATIONS

by

GEORGE MIKES

Drawings by David Langdon

ANDRE DEUTSCH

FIRST PUBLISHED 1963 BY
ANDRE DEUTSCH LIMITED
105 GREAT RUSSELL STREET
LONDON WC1

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
TONBRIDGE PRINTERS LTD
TONBRIDGE KENT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Parts of this book have appeared in *Encounter, The Sunday Telegraph, The Guardian,* the *Evening Standard* and *The Teacher.* Thanks are due to the editors for their courtesy in permitting their appearance in this form.

CONTENTS

HOW TO UNITE NATIONS

A GOOD OR A BAD THING?

While being driven for the first time to that gigantic matchbox known as the United Nations Building, you find yourself trying to sum up your own feelings towards that august organisation. Of course, you can't help feeling cynical, mainly because you are a sophisticated, modern creature, a true child of your age, and you intend to feel cynical about *everything* – particularly things others respect.

But *do* others really respect it? – you ask yourself doubtfully. Still in the car, throwing a cursory glance at one of the pamphlets published by the U.N. Press Service, you read:

> 'Since the General Assembly first met within its walls, in the autumn of 1952, the buildings and surrounding gardens have become a major tourist attraction in New York City, along with such favourites as the Statue of Liberty, Times Square and Rockefeller Center. On an average day some 6,000 visitors enter the buildings, of whom about 3,000 take the guided tours which originate every few minutes from a point near the visitors' entrance.'

You get out of the car, pass through the visitors' entrance and there indeed are the solemn crowds listening to their guides with earnest and eager faces.

Once you have been duly accredited by the Press Office, you start moving about in the buildings on your own and you

keep on banging into these groups, the so-called 'men in the street': salesmen from Wyoming, merchants from Kansas, garage-proprietors from Louisiana and their wives and children, with an odd European thrown in from Athens, Greece, or Oslo, Norway. (You must always put it that way in America, lest these localities be mixed up with Athens, Georgia, or Oslo, Pennsylvania.) They pour through glass doors and you have to wait until all of them – a seemingly endless conglomeration of humanity – file through, before you can proceed in the opposite direction. You put a polite but bored and long-suffering face on it, to indicate that these mere sightseers, tourists, idlers are holding you up – *you* who *belong* and who are – or at least *may be,* as far as they know – a very important person indeed. Practice makes perfect and in the last few days of my sojourn, whenever I met these good people (after a day or two you cannot help thinking of them as 'these good people' and keep patting them, patronisingly, on their mental backs) – well, whenever I met them I looked courteous yet mysterious, important and extremely distinguished. I might have been – who could tell? – an Algerian delegate or even the Icelandic ambassador himself.

The good people are looking at various exhibits, gifts to the United Nations – a rug from Ecuador, a ceremonial mantle (used for the burial of Inca kings) from Peru or an ancient mosaic mural from Tunisia. You can see on their faces that they are duly impressed even if the Peruvian mantle is not remarkable as Peruvian mantles go. But after all this is no ordinary mantle: this is the mantle Peru bestowed upon the United Nations. Just think of it! They are even more impressed when led into the Trusteeship Council Chambers – even if most of them might be wondering what the hell the Trusteeship Council is in aid of. When you look from the Ecuadorian rug to their blank and puzzled yet, at the same time, thoughtful and eager faces, you feel

Mr K. struck here

ashamed of your original cynicism and start believing in humanity once again. Until . . .

Until you have a word with one of the guides.

'Why do all these people come here?' I asked a charming young lady, a citizen of a European country.

'What do you mean?' she asked indignantly.

'What exactly do they want to see? I observe, of course, their eager faces and the deep impression the U.N. makes on them. But *what* impresses them? The atmosphere? The chance of seeing some famous people – world statesmen? The knowledge – or shall we say belief? – that issues of peace and war are being decided within these walls? Or what?'

She was still aloof and a trifle condescending.

'Well, the United Nations is one of the great – perhaps *the* greatest – institution in the world . . .'

'Certainly . . . But let me try another way: what is the most frequent question people put to you?'

Suddenly her face fell. She hesitated.

'Well, when I come to think of it . . .'

She relapsed once again into silence.

'Yes?' I prodded her.

'Let's face it,' she sighed. 'The one question I am asked on every guided tour, and I mean *every* tour without exception, is where exactly Mr Khrushchev banged the table with his shoe.'

I meant only to nod but perhaps I grinned, too.

'But they are also interested in other matters,' she added hastily.

'Of course, of course,' I agreed readily. 'Peruvian rugs, Tunisian mosaics . . .'

She went on:

'But the U.N. *is* the greatest institution of our age.'

'Quite. And it keeps on saving the peace of the world. It is doing that all the time. But all these people really care

about is the spot where Mr Khrushchev banged his shoe?'

She nodded sadly:

'It is.'

But this clash isn't really between cynicism and faith: it is between lofty ideals and ordinary human silliness.

There is, on the whole, one thing and one only in which people are really inclined to believe: their own importance. If a man spends thirty-seven years in the service of the Bluehampton-Birkwood branch line, he will be convinced that the Bluehampton-Birkwood branch line is of vast importance. Not only because it is so important *to him* but also because no man is ready to accept the fact that he has wasted his life. How much easier then is it to believe that the United Nations – that supra-governamental organ, that acknowledged custodian of world peace, that world-government in embryo – is of tremendous, nay, vital importance.

'I know people like to be lighthearted and facetious about the U.N.,' a delegate – an American – told me, 'but when I think of all those wars the U.N. have succeeded in preventing . . .'

'But can you think of wars that have been prevented *as wars* any more than you can think of those who have been prevented from being born *as people?*'

But one can't really argue with them on this point. *Pompositis* is in the air and it is an extremely contagious illness. Each delegate tends to imagine that every word he utters enriches world history; that every debate conducted in this or that obscure Commission is of world-shaking importance; and every other journalist – a member of an otherwise practical and realistic profession – tends to regard himself as an ambassador, as one who not only describes events but helps in shaping them.

Parties – in exceptional cases even a couple of drinks at

the bar – acquire great significance. If Adlai Stevenson goes to the party given by Chad but fails to turn up at the party given by Upper Volta, his action may have serious diplomatic consequences even though his absence is due to nothing more than a slight but uncomfortable attack of indigestion. The press loves nothing better than speculation – a fascinating intellectual pastime, and one in which indigestion just has no part. A politician's indigestion can only be political. And sometimes the press are exasperatingly right. They noticed (in those unforgettable days of 1958) that Albania had not been invited by Khrushchev to a Communist reception and they jumped to the perfectly valid conclusion that all was not well in the Communist camp.

You cannot be careful enough in the bar either. You look round one day and observe the U.S. Secretary of State chatting with Gromyko and the Paraguayan Foreign Minister and – in another group – the Philippine ambassador with a Sudanese delegate and you try to recall who that third fellow in that second group might be. He is shabby and down-at-heel. Oh yes, suddenly you remember, he is that chap from X and you wonder how he has managed to sneak into the Delegates' Lounge once again. But overnight X becomes a new, independent African state and 'that chap from X' becomes the new X-ian ambassador to the United Nations, he buys new shoes, starts moving around in a huge chauffeur-driven Cadillac and – on ceremonial occasions – wears a heavy gold chain round his neck and a sash across his chest.

You go on debating with yourself: is the U.N. a Good Thing or a Bad Thing? You keep telling yourself that some U.N. organs – the World Health Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, UNESCO, the International Labour Office and the International Tele-communication Union, for example – do a great deal of good. Admittedly, you reply to yourself, but these organs could do just as well

outside the U.N. People could still discuss tele-communication problems even if they were totally unconnected with the Security Council – as indeed they are. Then, right in the middle of this debate with yourself you remember a small detail: the Charter declares that only peace-loving nations may join the United Nations. Quite right, too. But the original fifty-one members (who joined in 1945) were all at war. Unless a nation was then at war, it just could not qualify as peace-loving.

And in the light of this discovery you start to love, perhaps even to understand, the United Nations. It is a human institution, full of contradictions, pretensions and pomposity, silliness and goodwill.

A SHORT LESSON FOR IDEALISTS

Those who live in a parliamentary democracy cannot help thinking of the United Nations – at least during the first few days of one's visit here – in parliamentary terms. Is the organisation – or can it become – a world parliament? How sound is the parallel with a parliament at all?

To me it seems very sound. If you think of parliamentary democracy as a form of government evolved by knights in shining armour, all devoted to high ideals and lofty principles, all selfless, dedicated and incorruptible, then . . . well, then you are slightly mistaken. Democracy is politics; politics is about power; and power is a dirty thing. In exceptional moments, at times of intense excitement, elation or noble indignation, people are capable of real greatness. They may be willing, indeed eager to risk and lay down their lives or even – which is more – to offer their blood, toil and sweat for a great cause. (Alas, they are often misled and fooled; they are often persuaded to sacrifice their lives on the altars of triviality, stupidity and even wickedness, but that does not diminish the *subjective* nobility of their sacrifice.) The days of great moral test and devotion to principle are, however, few and far between. On ordinary weekdays, politics is a struggle for the power which you desire to wield over others for the sake of your clan, class, fellow-landowners, fellow-soldiers, fellow-bureaucrats or simply yourself. In this respect there is little difference between democratic and totalitarian politics. The essential, the vital difference is this: in a democracy you lay down certain rules of the game and keep to these rules. When voted down, you resign; in a totalitarian regime, bullets replace votes.

Yet, a basic question remains even in the purest democracy: *who makes the rules?* Because whoever makes them, he will do so in such a way that they tend to keep him in power. He who makes the rules has a good chance to go on ruling. This is not just a silly pun: it is no coincidence that the word *rule* (regulation) is the same as *rule* (control of government). They are both derived from the same Latin (and Old French) root. Magna Charta was not born because the English were high-minded and democratic but because the nobility had grown strong enough to challenge royal tyranny. Or – to mention a recent example – the rights of Labour and the Trade Unions were not acknowledged because employers were pleasant, decent chaps who wanted to play it fair. The basic rule in all constitution-making is that the man who rules is determined to go on ruling; all constitutional changes have to be fought for by force or squeezed out by threats from unwilling last-ditchers. Such exceptions as Britain's withdrawal from India and her relinquishing her Empire are rare exceptions of which the British may be proud, however difficult it is for them to feel proud of themselves for something they *do* – and not for something they *are*. Might is still right in many parts of the world but right is surrounded with a great deal of prestige and all tyrants always pretend that right is on their side. All this is well known and widely accepted, as long as we are discussing Magna Charta or even the growth of Trade Unions. But as soon as the United Nations is mentioned, the phraseology changes, the language becomes lofty and stilted, and we find ourselves talking about 'humanity's last chance', the 'voluntary sacrifice of sovereignty', 'noble experiment' and things like that. But when the U.N. was formed, the intention of all contracting parties was – quite naturally – to use it as their own instrument and pawn. There was a naked ideal: the supreme organisation which was to be obeyed by all. But the naked

ideal looked almost obscene, so a few fig-leaves were needed to cover up certain points.

(1) The first large fig-leaf was the Sherlock Holmes fig-leaf of the West. Sherlock Holmes – as we all know – reminded Inspector Gregory of 'the curious incident of the dog in the night-time'. Gregory was puzzled and replied: 'The dog did nothing in the night-time.'

'That was the curious incident,' nodded the great man.

The West needed no fig-leaf in those early days and that is precisely the curious story of the Western fig-leaf. The West, able as it was to command an easy and respectable majority, laid it down that the will of the majority must be the supreme law and this majority must decide all questions. Otherwise, the U.N. would not be a true democracy. True democracy meant, in other words, that *we* must rule while others obey.

In those early days the West paid lip-service to the United Nations. All our policies were supposed to be based on the United Nations (except in dire emergencies like Suez, when we chose to forget about the organisation); we always appealed to the U.N.: understandably, as we ourselves were sure to be called upon to decide those appeals. We consulted the U.N. on every question (we gave all the advice, too). Since the Afro-Asian invasion has made the U.N. less predictable, we have returned to the method of summit meetings, three- and four-power conferences, nuclear test treaties and similar devices.

(2) The Soviet Union, obviously, needed a fig-leaf of a very different cut. The Russians, too, were keen – or at least ready – to use the U.N. as an instrument of *their* policies, but they had less chance. They were easily out-voted in those early days so they had to swell their ranks. The Ukraine and White Russia became independent members of the U.N. – although they were both considerably less independent than

Alabama or Lancashire. Some satellites were also admitted to membership, although in those days of Stalinism they were even less independent than White Russia and the Ukraine. But these few states did not amount to much, so they had to insist on giving the real teeth to the Security Council and then blunting the ferocity of *its* bite with the veto. The veto is another democratic device (*à la Russe*, this time). And it may be construed as follows: I always blindly and unquestioningly submit to the majority decision, except when it does not suit me.

(3) The third major fig-leaf is paragraph 7 in Article 2, which prohibits U.N. intervention in '*matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state*'. But what is 'intervention'? What is 'domestic'? And, indeed, what is 'essentially'? the answer is: everything a state chooses to describe as any or all of these. Portuguese tyranny in Africa; the Indian invasion of Goa; aparthied in South Africa; racial persecution in the United States; France's long war in Algeria. This paragraph, however, establishes true equality in the U.N. The first two fig-leaves serve the Great Powers only. This third makes it possible for all the small members as well to defy the organisation and tell the U.N. to mind its own business. Which in this case simply means not to mind its own business.

So the founders and charter-makers were anxious (*a*) to make the U.N. an instrument of their own policy or (*b*) at least to render it harmless and toothless. They counted, however, without the baby itself. The U.N. has not grown up yet, but has reached adolescence; it has become stronger, more sensible and more experienced. Like all adolescents, it loves and admires itself and is keen to start living its own life. The character of the U.N. greatly depends on the character of the Secretary General and Dag Hammarskjoeld was a

strong character. He died in harness, on a U.N. journey. This accident is invariably described as 'giving his life to the United Nations' and 'dying a hero's death'. Well, he died in an air-crash. He was hated and bitterly attacked by Mr Khrushchev; consequently it was bad form to attack him in the West. But I never admired him much; he struck me as an ambitious and vain man of rather mediocre ability. (U Thant is much better. He is cool, logical and a man of wide vision. It is a current joke at the U.N. to say that the decisive difference between U Thant and Hammarskjoeld is that Hammarskjoeld had an Oriental mind.) Hammarskjoeld used to be referred to as 'Mr U.N.' and he accepted this nickname. He wanted to be identified with the U.N.; he, too, felt that he *was* the U.N. – the world's super-politician, set above ordinary statesmen and governments. It was he, first of all, who boosted the prestige of the U.N., who tried to turn it into a real international force and who asserted the organisation's own will against all the great powers – instead of remaining the tool of this group or that. The great powers, dismayed to see that the U.N. was starting to have a will of its own, tried to counteract this unexpected and unwelcome development in their own various ways – which ranged from seeming acceptance of the principle but obstructionism in all the details to the famous Troika-suggestion.

Idealists should remember this: the U.N. was created by the great powers as an instrument of their own policies; as a respectable cloak for their shady activities. It became a more or less independent organ mostly through the vanity and ambition of one man.

In addition, every institution of this nature – for example, all the parliaments in the world – also tend to become clubs. Some members quarrel in the chamber and are quite friendly in the bar: the Russians and the Americans, for example, rarely carry their animosities outside the Chamber, and vodkas

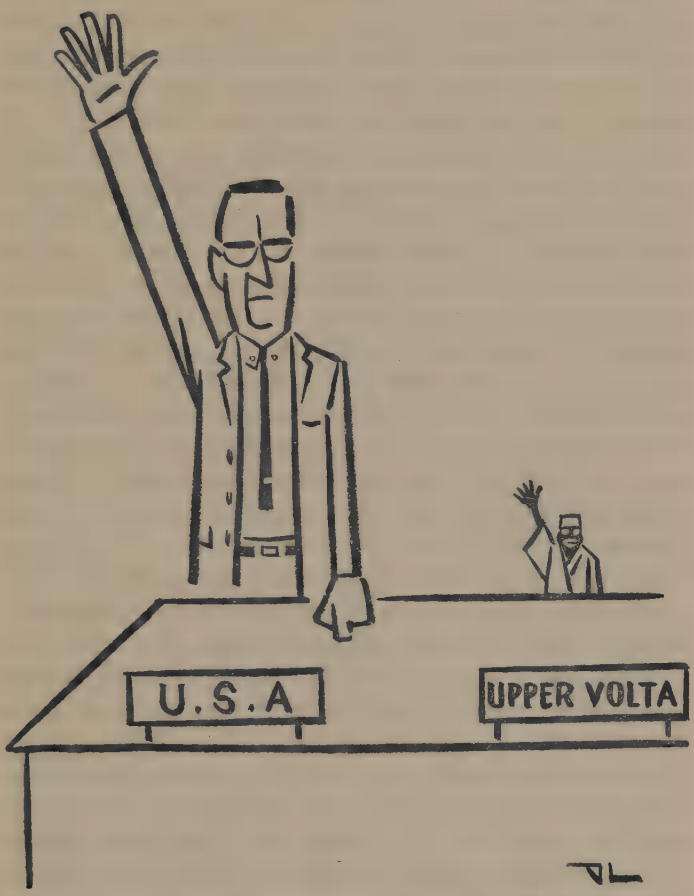
and dry martinis are often consumed by amicable gatherings in the bar even in times of international tension. Some delegates, however, preserve national hostilities in their private conduct; no Pakistani would drink (quite apart from religious considerations) with an Indian, and an Arab would never dream of chatting with an Israeli. Nevertheless, they all belong to the same club: the persons who are inside are members while the countless millions outside may be members of the united nations, but certainly not of the United Nations.

This, of course, is rather encouraging. Democracy is not less a boon to humanity because it was born of strife between kings and the nobility, between kings and parliament, between parliament and the executive, between the Prime Minister and the rest of his Cabinet, between factory-owners and workers. And the United Nations, too, may become one of the great institutions of mankind, though born of the power-greed and hypocrisy or, at best, of a flash of unselfishness (soon to be regretted) of governments, and the ambition, vanity and God-almighty-complexes of certain individuals. If the way to Hell is paved with good intentions, the way to Heaven is just as often paved with more than doubtful motives.

BIG AND SMALL

If we continue to compare the U.N. with a national parliament, we find ourselves struck by three main peculiarities.

(1) *The Constituencies.* To draw up the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies is an ancient, crafty device of the rule-makers. The party permitted to draw up those boundaries will enjoy untold advantages. (Remember, for example, the struggle for Parliamentary Reform in the early Victorian era.) The size of a constituency is as decisive as its boundaries. In the U.N. assembly the rule is as simple as it is in the U.S. senate: each state has a vote. The United States has one vote and Upper Volta has one vote; the United Kingdom has one vote and Chad has one vote. It is true that the Soviet Union has three votes (with the Ukraine and White Russia) and China has none, but these small irregularities do not invalidate the basic rule: one state, one vote. Most people object to this on the basis of sheer numbers. It is absurd, they say, that 180 million Americans should be equated with one and a half million Togolese. Numbers *ought* to count, we are told, otherwise the new nations will swamp the U.N. But if the number of inhabitants really counted, India and Pakistan would have more votes than the whole of Western Europe. The two U.N. members with the smallest population of all are European: Iceland and Luxembourg. The founder members of 1945 included all the little Central American republics, whose combined population barely equals that of, say, Tanganyika. China too will one day become a member. How many votes should *she* have?



One State, one vote

Togo may have one vote, just as the United States of America; nevertheless, to say that the two states are equal within the U.N. would be at astronomical distance from the truth. New York stamps its spirit on the U.N. in no uncertain manner: the state which pays more towards the upkeep of the U.N. has more weight and influence than another which pays less. The richer state *can* pay more; it does pay more; consequently the richer state is more important. We all know the American expression: Mr So and so is worth X million dollars. It is the same with various states inside the U.N. Some are 'worth' more, some less. A simple and clear-cut principle. A great deal also depends on the weight of the delegation in New York and occasionally on the leading politician of a country. The Irish and Sudanese delegations, for example, carry more weight than they would but for the excellent men in charge of them. Again, Yugoslavia and India carry greater weight than they would deprived of Tito or Nehru.

(2) *The U.N. differs from an ordinary, Western-type parliament in that it has no parties.* The satellites always vote with the Soviet Union – but even that is not a certainty: Albania may well vote against the Soviet line. The West is often divided against itself while the rest are completely unpredictable. A great deal has been said and written about the Afro-Asian block but in reality there is no such block. The Afro-Asians as such have no conferences, no regular meetings, no common policy. They are divided into a number of complicated groupings which may have some vague coherence. There is the Casablanca Group (Ghana, Guinea, the United Arab Republic, Algeria and Morocco); there is the Brazzaville Group – which consists of the former French colonies, and is, funnily enough, most compliant towards France; the Monrovia Group consists of the Brazzaville Group plus Ethiopia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone but *not* Liberia

and Ghana. And there is, of course, the Commonwealth Group. Some states belong to several groups; and as there is rivalry between the various groups, certain states thus become their own rivals. There is bitter rivalry within certain groups for the leadership – for example between the U.A.R. and Ghana in the Casablanca Group. There is often sharp division of views concerning some basic questions (African political unity, the possibility of an African Common Market, etc.) and occasionally even enmity, as between India and Pakistan, or Somalia and Ethiopia. So, talk of a united Afro-Asian political force within the U.N. is nonsense. The Afro-Asians with their own rivalries, jealousies, and individual bugbears are no better than the Labour Party was at its most discordant. The cross-current of Afro-Asian interests and rivalries makes every decision unpredictable and that is a healthy development. Western hegemony is gone; Soviet or even left-wing dominance has not replaced it; nor does there exist any Afro-Asian nation which could dictate to the rest.

There is, however, one idea – or rather the semblance of an idea – which unites the Afro-Asians: anti-colonialism. Whenever they smell colonialism – the moment someone successfully raises the cry or invokes the bogey – all Afro-Asian eyes begin to flash in anger. Colonialism is not dead yet. It is still kicking, even if its kicks are only the twitchings and convulsions of a death-struggle. But many things may be – and often are – dubbed colonialism. We may compare the way the word 'Jewish' was used in Nazi Germany and by her satellites. In those days we heard not only of the Jewish press or Jewish books but also of Jewish bootlaces and Jewish acid-drops. Christian bootlace good; Jewish bootlace no good. The same countries which defend the ancient, colonial frontiers as their sacred heritage, draw the sword as soon as the battle cry 'Colonialism!' is uttered. (Western colonialism, that is; Soviet colonialism does not matter in the least.) What

Israel is for the Arabs, colonialism is for the Afro-Asians: the only true bond between them, the sole source of unity and harmony. For this reason, the Arabs should love Israel and the Afro-Asians should dote on colonialism. But somehow they don't.

The Afro-Asian invasion has produced one minor, yet significant difficulty. This is a delicate subject, too explosive to discuss openly. It is hardly ever talked about and if it is, only in whispers. The fact is that the Secretariat of the United Nations used to be an outstandingly efficient organ, working miraculously well. With the influx of the Afro-Asians, however, many of these new countries claimed – and were granted – jobs on the Secretariat. Fair enough: the trouble is that some of the newly arrived African civil servants . . . how shall I put it? . . . well, lack the required administrative experience. Some, indeed, lack skill in writing memoranda and even in reading them. It is whispered that a few of them simply cannot read with adequate fluency the files on their desk and the reports they receive. They refuse to ask anybody and try to keep their difficulties secret. This new type of man, the under-educated bureaucrat, although few in number, does cause some minor hitches in the smooth running of the administration.

(3) *The local joke is the best of all jokes.* J. B. Boothroyd once remarked in a radio talk that at suburban or provincial meetings the greatest wit and the most brilliant and sparkling speaker of the land might deliver the most scintillating speech of his career, yet he could not compete with the local clown who only had to stand up and say: 'Fred'. Similarly, the local quarrel is always the most acrimonious. You can never detest anyone quite so much as you can detest your neighbour. You may hate your country's enemies and, being a decent citizen, you probably do; but this hatred pales compared with the loathing you cherish for your local political or

business opponent or personal enemy.

The nearer and dearer a person is to you, the more you can hate him or her. Matrimonial quarrels frequently end in murder; village quarrels (outside this cold-blooded island) break up in brawls; local political quarrels in shouting and mud-slinging. The more important the issue, the duller and more impersonal the debate. Municipal meetings are duller than family quarrels; and normal parliamentary debates are duller still. By these standards the debates of the United Nations ought to be the dullest in the world. And they are.

If dullness reflects importance, U.N. debates must be very important indeed. And certain artificial means are employed to make these debates even duller than they ought to be. First of all, no speaker ever goes to a rostrum or even stands up. They all talk sitting in their usual places and consequently it is hard to know who is speaking. It is even harder to find out what he is speaking about. In all parliaments of the world it is forbidden by the procedural rules to *read* a speech; at the U.N. the overwhelming majority of all speeches are read and there is nothing more difficult and tiring than following a dull speech read in a monotonous voice. In national parliaments the opposition keeps interrupting the speaker and interruptions and angry or witty exchanges are the spice of a good debate. At the U.N. hardly anyone ever interrupts anybody. All would-be speakers have their own prepared speeches in their pockets and they will read them when their turn comes. No one even pretends to listen to any speech. While a speech is being delivered, others work; they write; they are absorbed in crossword puzzles; they chat with one another; they walk about in the chamber, tell funny stories and laugh aloud. Meanwhile the poor orator, sitting in his place, is trying – with as much dignity as he can muster – to go on reading out his speech for the benefit of the shorthand writers, the national press of his own country, and posterity.

You can play about with the switches beside your chair and listen to those fascinating interpreters in English, French, Spanish and Russian. The speaker himself uses one of these languages and he is simultaneously interpreted into the three others. English is the most popular tongue of all and nowhere else in the world is English spoken so fluently yet so badly as here. Quite often, the only possible way to understand a speech being delivered in resounding English is to switch over to Point Three and listen to it in French translation.

SEX AND THE UNITED NATIONS

Sex unites nations more than anything else. Consequently the sex-life of the United Nations is of considerable sociological and political interest.

On Friday afternoons the place starts to lose a great deal of its solemnity and a certain note of frivolity steals in. The Delegates' Lounge begins to be filled up with pretty young ladies with interesting hair-dos, and various gay parties get under way with people ensconced in the comfortable armchairs that surround the long, low tables. Some of these visits are extremely respectable and purely social in character. But in many cases one cannot help feeling that the gallant delegates and the pretty young ladies . . . well, let's put it this way: the phrase 'international affairs' has more meaning than one. Yes, many of the delgates – and still more of the junior members of delegations – are young men who have to live far away from their families. At one time the charming young ladies of Fridays (and other days for that matter) became so numerous and conspicuous that there was (and is) a great deal of talk about a U.N. call-girl racket, with a slight undertone of spying.

U.N. delegates, generally speaking, enjoy a great deal of success with the ladies. Delegate status surrounds your head with a small but dazzling halo. U.N. delegates seem to be accepted as big shots and as shapers of our destinies. Most of them are also well-off – however poor their countries may be. One cannot help noticing that coloured delegates are devoted to the company of white ladies. The Africans are rumoured to have a sexual appetite which puts us white males in the shade. I had little previous knowledge of the

sexual capacity of Africans but my researches in this field have not been utterly fruitless. I find that we, poor white males, have every reason for being madly jealous of Africans. The ratio in their favour – if I may be permitted to be scientific – is something like 5 : 1. (Such a majority would be decisive in the Council Chambers; in fact, it is decisive *everywhere*.)

Sex-life is not social life; but as there is a vague connection between the two, I may perhaps be permitted to say something on certain aspects of social life, too. The arrival of the United Nations promoted New York to a higher status. It has been the first city of the United States for a long time; but as the government and the diplomatic corps are in Washington, it used to lack one kind of lustre and was rather self-conscious about it. Now New York has, at last, become the seat of *something* and has its own diplomatic corps. Washington has always had a few celebrated hostesses and famous *salons*, and the pinnacle of many an ambition has long been an invitation to these *salons*. For the outsider, they seem to be mysterious and intriguing places where charming diplomats – with replicas of medals pinned to their tailcoat lapels – play Talleyrand all the time and throw away one witty and immortal saying after the other. Insiders, knowing how snobbish and dull these miserable affairs often become, regard their party-going as hard and unpleasant work.

The *salon*, however, still keeps its spell and in New York the magic still works. Some hostesses work desperately hard in order to become the New York equivalents of their Washington counterparts and squander vast fortunes in the process. The usual game is played: delegates who try to avoid these *soirées* are relentlessly pursued by the hostesses, while their unsought-after fellows clamour for invitations. There is, however, one absolute must for these big New York receptions: they are regarded as flops unless some African diplomats

Delegate status

turn up. One night, a journalist friend of mine told me, some sudden U.N. crisis blew up and ruined a lady's party because very few delegates turned up at it. The lady, however, was worried about only one single aspect of this: she rang up my friend and begged him to produce an African ambassador for her.

'Whom do you have in mind?' my friend asked.

'Who cares?' snapped the lady. 'I am not in a position to choose, am I? Anyone will do.'

Then she added in more conciliatory tones:

'I'm desperate. I don't even mind if he is not terribly dark.'

VARIATIONS ON A THEME

The Man with the Red Tie

I asked the U.N. official I was having coffee with in the Delegates' Lounge whether he was acquainted with a gentleman whom we shall call here Milton Jones. I knew that Mr Jones was a senior member of the American delegation – but that was all I knew about him.

'But of course,' my friend reassured me. 'Milton is a colleague and a friend of mine. In fact, he is right here, in this lounge.'

He turned round and pointed out a man sitting by himself by a window at the other end of the lounge.

'That's him. The man with the red tie.'

The only peculiarity in all this was that Milton Jones was a Negro. But my friend did not seem to have noticed his colour. Or could it be that he refused to mention the fact that he *had* noticed his colour? Mr Milton Jones was at that moment the only Negro in pure white surroundings yet his most distinguishing characteristic was apparently his lively red tie. I often thought of this little scene later and I regard it as an example of U.N. mentality at its best. (I also find it an amusing and telling little sidelight that my friend still had to refer to a *colour-distinction.* Thus, Jones was not simply the man by the window; he was the man with the red tie.)

Milton Jones was, however, an American Negro and American Negroes are not very interesting at the U.N. There are, of course, a few of them who play important diplomatic roles. Mostly, however, they are conspicuous as lift-girls, dustmen and waitresses: in other words, in very secondary

roles. The Africans are the real stars there and their relationship with Americans, black as well as white, makes a fascinating study. It is a problem that keeps cropping up inside and outside the U.N. and I found it more absorbing and intriguing than almost any other facet of life I came across on the East River. There are three cogent viewpoints in this question: that of the white American; that of the American Negro; and that of the African himself. Let us take them one by one.

Fifth Avenue

The speaker was a rich banker's wife. We talked in their magnificent apartment – we'd call it a flat – on Fifth Avenue. She was charming, intelligent, progressively minded and compassionate. She was doing a great deal of voluntary work for an organisation closely connected with the United Nations and was, at one time, specially interested in the housing problem which Africans come up against in New York.

'It was widely predicted that the American Negroes and the African diplomats would form one great happy brotherhood. Our Negroes hoped that the influx of African diplomats would raise their own status here and that they would get on together like a house on fire. The prophets, as usual, proved completely wrong. The truth is that relationships are strained between our Negroes and the Africans. They are mutually jealous of one another. The African is jealous of the Negro's affluence; and the Negro is jealous of the African's independence and statehood.

'Jealousy breeds contempt and their contempt is just as mutual as their jealousy. The African looks down upon the Negro because he is a second-class citizen in America – a situation he, too, had to put up with for long enough in the

Mutual

past. But now the African is a citizen of an independent state with its own ministers, ambassadors and, of course (it seems to be equally important) its own airline. The Negro, in turn, looks down upon the African whom he regards as a near-savage. Mutual contempt overflows into cultural fields. The only cultural heritage the African has to boast about, says the Negro, is a primitive collection of repulsive customs, witchcraft and grotesque dances. At the same time the Negro regards our American culture as his own.

'The Negroes assert that the main reason why the Africans wear their outlandish, colourful and heavily gilded robes on any and every occasion, is simply to avoid being taken for American Negroes. The sad truth is that Africans are invited everywhere. All doors are open to them. In fact, as you know, they are in great demand. But no one would ever dream of inviting an American Negro.'

'Not even you?' I butted in.

'Well . . .' She pondered over the question very briefly. 'I did once invite a Negro. Once, one single Negro. He was a member of the government.'

'And Africans?'

'Oh, dozens of Africans. Scores of them. I like to think of myself as a person without prejudices. But people do not invite Negroes. The African does not seem to be a Negro. He is a diplomat. And diplomatic status, it seems, decolourizes a black man. As I heard it put in your country: diplomatic status washes whitest.

'Take housing. The Negro still has to live in Harlem while the Africans have the best addresses on the East Side. Many of them are paying as much as $1,000 (about £350) rent a month. At first it wasn't easy to get them accepted. Ten years ago the U.N. – and we voluntary helpers – had our work cut out to find proper accommodation for them. The Mayor of New York helped; the American U.N. dele-

gation helped; the State Department helped. Believe me, we needed all the help we could get. Pressure was put on owners of houses. As usual, the main resistance sprang from economic considerations. They were afraid that as soon as people with black skins moved in, the value of property would fall. They even thought the white people would move out as soon as the first Africans moved in. But nothing of the sort happened. The prophets were wrong once again. The fancy neighbourhoods of New York have their fair share of Africans, but they still remain the fancy neighbourhoods. People still refuse to have *too many* Africans in any one building but they are, on the whole, accepted.

'In a few cases, the U.N. had to take the proprietors to court and force them to swallow their first Africans. Colour discrimination is a violation of the constitution, as you know. As a rule, however, we managed without court rulings. A little tact, diplomacy and gentle persuasion was usually quite enough. And the same is happening today. Those charming ladies from the U.N. housing departments go along to the landlord, explain the position and play on people's snobbery. The distinction of having an ambassador about the house is emphasised. After some discussion, the landlord's fears are allayed and another African has a roof over his head. Pressure is occasionally still applied. The U.N. rents a large number of apartments from big property-firms and if they want to do business with the U.N. – as they all do – they have to accept some Africans. On the whole people do not mind the Africans; in some cases they even like them. I heard of one case when the tenants formed themselves into a reception committee and the black ambassador, when he moved in, was greeted with welcoming speeches and his lady with flowers.

'Not that people really welcome diplomats of any colour. They are distinguished and they have plenty of money – so

far so good. But they break things and do a lot of other damage and some are reluctant to make good. And they cannot be sued. Many people regard diplomatic privilege as a damn nuisance. Look what happens in the streets of New York. A guy spends thirty minutes hopelessly searching for a parking place – and then he sees a big Cadillac draw up on Fifth Avenue – Fifth Avenue, mind you! – and a lot of Africans get out and just leave it there with complete unconcern, well, this guy boils with rage. But it's not only the Africans who abuse their privileges like this. Diplomatic cars breaking the regulations are a pain in the neck and create more bad feeling than such a small offence really warrants. By the way, the British are among the worst offenders. It is strange that this should be so, but it *is* so.

'To return to the housing issue: the ambassadors who have lots of cash, are not difficult to place and they always acquire the most impressive addresses. Junior members of delegations – with less money – still have their problems. Whenever they try somewhere themselves, they are invariably turned away; when the U.N. rings up first and explains the situation, all is usually well. Of course, in the end they are all housed *somewhere*. All in good, white districts. Apart from one single family. They live in Harlem. They went there on their own accord – nothing would dissuade them.'

She stopped and had a dry Martini.

Then she said:

'One thing more. One of those U.N. ladies who look after housing told me: "Since we keep sending them Africans, at least no one has complained about our sending them Jews!" '

Harlem

The speaker was a well-to-do Negro doctor. Negroes do not

open up too easily on this subject. If they suspect you of being hostile, they freeze up; if they find you patronising, gushing and excitable, too ready to agree with them, they dislike you even more.

'We are greatly disappointed in the Africans. Perhaps we expected too much. We thought they might help to raise our status; take part in our social life. But they turn their backs on us. They take part in the social activities of the U.N.; they run after white women; they don't come near Harlem. They say they look down upon us because we aren't free. But we are fighting for our freedom just as they were not so long ago. After all, they were colonials the day before yesterday so what do they want? But all this "looking down upon us" business is sheer rationalisation, of course. It is simply nicer, more convenient, more gratifying and more snobbish to move in the so-called best social circles than it is to move in Negro circles and to live on the East Side than to live in Harlem. Once or twice the United States sent – or decided to send – Negro ambassadors to these new African states but the new states were hurt and rejected them. Not because of their black skins – they said – but because they maintained, *in America* the Negro is a second-class citizen and they did not want a second-class ambassador.

'Our disappointment is also economic. Our shopkeepers hoped the Africans would patronise their shops. They don't go near them. They patronise the most expensive and exclusive shops on Fifth Avenue. Our estate agents – a much more important issue – thought they would not only do roaring business with the Africans but also that these might help – through their extra-territorial privileges – to break down the barriers of the Harlem ghetto. Nothing of the sort happened. They go to live in the best districts of Manhattan and are not in the least interested in Negro estate agents and our housing problems.

'But the differences cut much deeper. We don't like their politics either. Many of them are leftish, crypto-communists or at least flirting with the East. American Negroes hate Communism because *all* Americans hate Communism. We don't trust the Africans' political judgement and don't think too much of some of their "great" statesmen.

'Many of us have tried to establish cultural and even emotional relationships with Africa and the Africans. Quite a few of us went on visits – almost pilgrimages – to the new Africa, just as many Jews went to Israel. An old culture, our own ancestral culture – we tried to persuade ourselves – had come to life again and achieved statehood. The disappointment was shocking. We have nothing in common with African culture. We find it primitive and savage and – what is most important – utterly alien. It is not *our* ancient culture. We regard American culture as ours. The U.N. delegates may drive about in their Cadillacs in New York (or be driven by white chauffeurs) but the African masses are revoltingly poor and backward.

'Nor did they treat us as their brothers. We aren't welcome visitors. They treat us as they treat white Americans but as a matter of fact they prefer white Americans. So we had to travel to Africa, not to find ancient ties we thought we had lost but to discover, often with a shock, how American we are; how American we feel. But are we? . . . Ask eighty white Americans in a hundred: are we?'

Africa

A junior member of one of the African delegations said:

'I've been here two years. I have no Negro friends and I don't like American Negroes. They keep asking us questions like "Did you learn to speak English at home?" They can't

believe it. And they watch us curiously at the table waiting to see what we'll do with our knives and forks. We resent this patronising attitude. All the same, it isn't true that we keep away from American Negroes; they keep away from us. They are jealous of us, of our superior status and of our opportunities. I have a girl-friend, a white American student. I am very fond of her and she is very fond of me. The Negro girls resent this. They believe our friendship is based on snobbery and not on affection. It would be *natural,* they say, for me to go around with a Negro girl. A short while ago when a new municipal institution was being opened – it was a grand occasion – I went there with my girl-friend, while American Negroes could not get in, with the exception of a very few. An American Negro girl pitched into me: she said I ought to have taken her, instead of the white student. It's her only chance of going to such places, she says. You see? That proves how wrong they are. The white girl comes with me because she likes me; the Negro girl wants to use me. She expects me to open doors for her which would otherwise remain closed. So all Negro girls want African boy-friends but all Africans want white girl-friends. I don't know why this should be so; but it *is* so. It annoys the Negro that we are accepted and they are rejected. Why, we even travel around in the South, under the protection of the State Department, and those famous Southerners cannot do more than gnash their decaying teeth at us.

'The American Negroes are polite when we meet them face to face but behind our backs they call us traitors and accuse us of letting down the cause. But it is they who lack racial consciousness, not us. They want to look *light.* They use all sorts of ointments and lotions to lighten their skins. We would never do a thing like that. A light skin only advertises your racial impurity. We Africans are proud of our black skins. The blacker the prouder.

'The American Negroes expect us to take their girls out and open doors for them. But we can't fight their battles. We have just won ours. We feel for them, of course; our sympathies are with them but they must fight their own wars. In the end, perhaps, the presence of Africans in New York will lead to some good; but I can't say it has done any good as yet. I've only got to appear with my white girl-friend, for all Negroes to glare at me bitterly. They are unjust to us. They accuse us of being self-seeking; of sucking up to the whites; of being snobbish; of thinking of ourselves only; of trying to forget our racial ties just because we happen to have our diplomatic privileges. Do you feel there is even a grain of justice in these charges against us? Well, tell me . . . Do you?'

So that's how it is. The United Nations instead of solving the great problems of humanity helps to create more. Is this the way to unite nations?

Yes, I think it is.

It is an erratic, roundabout, peculiar and even ludicrous way. In other words, the normal, human way. The way to disaster; the way to success.

STORIES

THE ASH-COLLECTORS

Should you be sitting in the canteen of the European Service of the British Broadcasting Corporation, you will notice that a lady, wearing a blue overall, will occasionally step up to your table and remove the dirty plates and cutlery; she may be followed – or preceded – by a gentleman wearing a brown coat whose duty is to empty the ashtrays periodically.

All this is the result of a friendly official agreement between two trades unions: the National Union of Ash-collectors and the National Union of Dishwashers and Cutlery-cleaners.

In earlier times there was a little tension – indeed, friction – between these two unions because the Ash-collectors insisted that their duty rightfully extended to *collection* of every sort from the table and, further, that the word 'ashes' clearly meant dirty dishes, too; the Dishwashers felt unable to accept this argument – however convincing it sounded – and insisted that clearing away dirty dishes was the first and essential step towards the actual dishwashing, in fact, an organic part of the process.

Discussions lasted eight months; they broke down four times and on three further occasions strike action threatened the whole canteen. But in the end commonsense and fraternal love prevailed, the unions managed to come to an agreement and work has gone on in perfect harmony ever since: the

browncoats empty the ashtrays, the ladies in the blue overalls take away the dirty plates.

Then one day Señora Miranda Martinez – a teacher in a Guatemalan ballet school – visited the B.B.C. to record a talk on Guatemalan folk-dancing and folk-customs for the Swedish Section. Why the Swedes should be interested in Guatemalan folk-dancing and folk-customs, does not concern us – which is lucky, as I should be hard put to explain it. The sombre truth is that not even the Guatemalans themselves are really interested in Guatemalan folk-dancing and folk-customs, because they happen to be busy with other problems.

Be that as it may, complications arose when Señora Martinez stubbed out her numerous cigarettes on her plate. Such an action was utterly unprecedented in the canteen, normally frequented as it is by well-mannered Britons and foreigners who have lived most of their lives in this country. Nevertheless, stubbing cigarettes out on one's plate was one Guatemalan folk-custom which Miss Martinez failed to mention in her script but was given to practising freely.

A browncoat and a lady in a blue overall stopped at Señora Martinez' table at one and the same time. Señora Martinez was chatting quite happily with the Swedish producer and his assistant, utterly unaware of the momentous significance of the situation. The two trade unionists stopped dead and eyed first the plate and then each other in horrified silence. This was clearly a demarcation dispute to end all demarcation disputes.

As the agreement between the Ash-collectors and the Dish-washers had been in force for some time, and disposal of the controversial plate meant no extra payment but simply extra work, each party insisted that it was the other's duty to do the job.

'You take it,' said the browncoat, 'it's a plate.' But the lady in the blue overall shook her head with icy determination:

Demarcation dispute

'No, thanks . . . *You* take it. It's ashes.'

The shop stewards in the canteen failed to agree; nor did the national executives of the two unions succeed in finding a formula. Both parties insisted that it was the other's duty to perform the job.

When the strike was three weeks old, the furniture-movers joined in, too.

There is a statute signed by Henry II in 1163, and confirmed *obiter dicta* in a judgment by Lord Chief Justice Plumborough in 1275 under Edward I, and thus part and parcel of the Common law of England and Wales (but *not* of Scotland) which holds that furniture-movers and dish-washers belong to the same union. For three whole weeks the furniture-movers had stood in angry silence, watching the brave fight of their brethren; but now they felt that the hour of action had struck.

It so happened that, the day before, the Russians and the British had signed an agreement establishing direct air-connection between Stockton-on-Tees and Minsk. The Mayor of Minsk was just visiting Britain, as the guest of Stockton-on-Tees, and he was to announce the opening of the new air-route in the Finnish service of the B.B.C. (Minsk, of course, isn't in Finland and has, in fact, nothing to do with Finland, but the Mayor of Minsk absolutely refused to speak on the Russian service.)

The Mayor of Minsk was to have recorded his message to the Finnish nation in Studio S4 but, unfortunately, it so happened that in that studio all three chairs had been pushed to the wall and the nearest of them was at a distance of four yards from the microphone. The furniture-movers on strike flatly refused to make exceptions of any kind and refused to touch the chairs – or even one chair.

That a non-furniture-mover – say, the Finnish producer or the Mayor of Minsk – should take a chair and move it up to

the table was unthinkable. The reply to such an action would have been an immediate, nation-wide, general strike: all buses, tubes, trains and factories would have stopped and the collection of refuse would have been suspended.

That the Mayor of Minsk should deliver his message to the Finns in a crouching position; or alternatively that he should howl it into the microphone from a distance of four yards was, of course, out of the question as incompatible with the civic dignity of the Mayor. Consequently the recording had to be cancelled.

Izvestia promptly launched a ferocious and vitriolic attack on the British government. Next day's *Pravda* informed its readers that Señora Miranda Martinez was the sister of the Guatemalan military attaché, which fact (the paper thundered) threw an entirely new light on this war-mongering conspiracy against the democratic and peace-loving Soviet Union. It was quite obvious (said *Pravda*) that Señora Miranda Martinez had deliberately put cigarette ash on her plate *in order to sow discord and to stir up a strike.* It was even clearer that the furniture-movers had not chosen the day of strike by chance: they were determined to humiliate the Mayor of Minsk in their own petty and selfish interest.

What exactly the petty and selfish interest of the B.B.C. furniture-movers was in humiliating the Mayor of Minsk or in preventing the Stockton-Minsk airline from starting, was not explained by *Pravda* in so many words; but its readers understood only too well and shuddered with fear.

Mr Khrushchev became so incensed that he ordered the seizure of a British airliner on Minsk airfield; in reprisal the Foreign Office declared that the Anglo-Russian air agreement – establishing the direct line between Stockton-on-Tees and Minsk – was 'regarded as suspended'.

As a counter-measure to *that* the Russians declared the Anglo-Russian Tourist agreement null and void. In reply

to *that* the United States of America, to show her solidarity with Her Majesty's Government, moved 40,000 marines from the Island of Bukinawa to the Island of Oligampa. Although this happened in the Pacific Ocean, Mr Khrushchev chose to regard it as an open threat to the Vladivostock-Minsk Railway and declared, most emphatically, that no leading great power could tolerate such a veiled threat. (He did not attempt to deny that the threat was pretty well veiled.) He added, even a shade more emphatically, that if he pleased he could reduce New York to ashes and blow Washington to smithereens.

The State Department retorted that America's Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles *if they went off at all* – and there was a reasonable chance that they would – would wipe out (1) Moscow, (2) Volgograd (formerly Stalingrad), (3) Minsk, (4) Stockton-on-Tees (if they missed their target,) (5) the moon and (6) Jupiter.

Mr Khrushchev's immediate rejoinder was to state that the moon belonged exclusively to the Soviet Union, and 'I can only say to the Western Imperialists: hands off the Soviet moon!'

After which both the United States and the Soviet Union ordered partial mobilisation.

The *Guardian* and the *New York Times* remarked that it seemed somewhat childish to start a world war for such petty reasons, but the rest of the press (with the exception of *The Times,* whose standpoint was not clear) retorted that this was a matter of principle. *Izvestia* declared in a five-page article that war would be started only and exclusively in the interests of peace; the leading ideologist of *Pravda* explained in a seven-page article that war was nothing more than the continuation of policy of peace *by other means.*

The Pope warned the opposing forces not to resort to violence and ordered a day of prayer. This order proved a

tremendous success all over Ecuador, where the government decreed that everyone who prayed was to receive his wages; all the churches were full from dawn to dusk.

Mr Nehru, too, issued a peace appeal; when international tension reached its peak, he attacked and occupied eight small Spanish islands in the Indian Ocean; when challenged at the United Nations as well as in his own parliament, he replied with another resounding speech condemning aggression.

Ghana, Guinea, President Nasser, Marshal Tito and Fidel Castro declared that Mr Khrushchev was absolutely right in refusing to hand over the British plane.

As soon as this declaration was published, Mr Khrushchev decided to let the British aeroplane fly home, upon which Ghana, Guinea, President Nasser, Marshal Tito and Fidel Castro declared that Mr Khrushchev was absolutely right to release the British plane.

The release of the British plane eased the international situation a little and it seemed possible to start new negotiations.

Preliminary discussions made it clear that everything could be smoothed out, provided a system of supervision could be organised at both Stockton and Minsk airfields to prevent similar occurrences. The Russians replied firmly that all supervision was spying and they were against spying, provided other people did it. The Americans, who had nothing to do with it really (but luckily no one remembered that by now) in the most emphatic declaration ever made by anyone about anything, announced that they insisted on supervision.

There seemed no hope of a solution to the crisis; nevertheless, one last conference was called in Geneva. This was partly from force of habit, but the high negotiating parties were also desirous to collect (1) their summer clothing; (2) their winter clothing; (3) their cars, skis and sporting equipment which they kept in Geneva permanently and (4) to eat one

last good peace-time meal.

At the Geneva conference the Soviet Union was represented by General Somorov, the Hero of Volgograd (formerly Hero of Stalingrad) who had lost his right eye on the battlefield. The British delegation was led by General Winterbottom who (a strange coincidence this) had lost his left eye at El Alamein.

The three missions (the third was, of course, the United States delegation) negotiated for four full days. Sessions were only interrupted by banquets every evening at which the delegates drank gallons of champagne to one another's health and toasted one another innumerable times. Agreement seemed out of the question: the West insisted on seeing everything: the Soviet Union was determined to show nothing.

It was at that moment that the proverbial and justly famous political sense of the British saved the peace of the world.

Lord Bing (pronounced Brownthorpe) suggested as a compromise that supervision should be carried out by Generals Somorov and Winterbottom.

'What's the compromise in that?' asked the Americans, whose political sense is not half so well developed as that of the British.

Lord Bing (pronounced Brownthorpe) explained that as these two gentlemen had only one eye each, they provided the sensible half-way solution between supervision and non-supervision, between seeing and not seeing things.

This suggestion (once understood) was received with overwhelming and unanimous enthusiasm – and it was only for the sake of form that they went on haggling for another eight days.

All three governments were wildly cheered and celebrated in their respective countries for having saved the peace of the world, threatened by the calculating meanness and reck-

less irresponsibility of their opponents.

Mr Macmillan won the next general election.

President Kennedy found the time opportune to give government jobs to two more of his brothers (hitherto underlaid), and he appointed his little girl chief of the Chicago Fire Service.

Mr Khrushchev's personal poll at the next election rose from 99.7 per cent to 99.8 per cent.

It is with the utmost regret, however, that I have to report that the original feud between the Ash-collectors and the Dishwashers still remains unresolved. The strike – which the Typewriter-Ribbon-Changers and the Electric-Bulb-Replacers have since joined – is still on, and there is not a glimmer of hope on the horizon.

TWICE LUCKY

'Look at him,' my friend Ivan remarked over the breakfast table. 'It is really difficult to decide whether he is an Englishman or only a funny drawing of an Englishman.' I turned to look at the gentleman in question and found myself in full agreement with Ivan's remark. The man was tall and thin; he had a long, expressionless face, resembling, or trying to resemble, the late lamented Sherlock Holmes; he wore flannels and a tweed jacket; he was reading *The Times* and smoking a pipe. He was too good to be true. Indeed, as we were soon to find out, he was not true at all.

It was our very first breakfast on English soil, in September, 1938. Ivan and I had arrived in London the night before. We had booked rooms in a boarding house in Bayswater.

'Isn't it disappointing,' I asked Ivan, still keeping an almost incredulous eye on the gentleman in question, 'that life can't be a shade more original? Cats *are* shrewd, Germans *are* thorough, Frenchmen *do* eat garlic and the English *are* caricatures of what every Continental imagines them to be.'

Five minutes later this over-typical incarnation of the thoroughbred Englishman stood up and walked over to our table.

'Excuse me, gentlemen,' he said in a stentorian voice and in impeccable Hungarian, 'but I could not help overhearing that you were talking Hungarian.'

'Oh . . .' said I.

'Ah . . .' said Ivan.

'Please permit me to introduce myself. My name is Baron Xavier de Ferenczy.' After a second's pause he added: 'Formerly of the 7th Hussars.'

We introduced ourselves.

'Delighted . . . Absolutely delighted . . .' he replied. 'It is indeed a great and unexpected pleasure to meet some of my compatriots in this establishment. By the way, gentlemen, I wonder whether you could lend me half a crown till 8.30 Thursday evening?'

Ivan looked at me in a way which indicated that we ought not to start this because there would be no end of it. But I did not care. Telling the Baron that I would be delighted to help him, I handed over the half-crown.

He bowed and left.

I met him at seven o'clock that evening. He asked me with extreme courtesy whether I would care to walk with him to the fishmonger's.

'As a matter of fact,' he explained, 'I am going to spend the money you kindly lent me this morning. Without your help I should have gone without supper.'

He bought a dozen oysters to take home. On the way I asked him what he was doing in London. His answer was not crystal clear and although we later became good friends and discussed his affairs at great length, it never became much clearer. As far as I could gather it had something to do with (1) the idea of breeding English greyhounds in Hungary and (2) importing Hungarian artificial silk into Britain. It was quite obvious, however, that greyhounds interested the Baron considerably more than textiles and he knew more about dog-racing than about artificial silk.

At eight o'clock on the following Thursday the Baron knocked at my door, returned my half-crown with courteous and ceremonious thanks and besought me to be so kind as to accept his invitation for supper that night – a small token of his appreciation of my extreme friendliness and generosity which, I gathered, had manifested itself in my lending him two shillings and sixpence. I said I'd be delighted and got

up, ready for another walk to the fishmonger's for more oysters.

But it turned out we were not going to the fishmonger's. A huge and elegant hired car was already waiting in front of the boarding house. A uniformed chauffeur bowed deeply when our party of six got in. The party consisted of the Baron, Ivan and myself, a charming girl called Phyllis who lived in the boarding house, her mother and her friend Anita. We were driven to one of London's best hotels where a private dining-room had been hired for us. The table was covered with flowers and glittered with silver. The supper started with turtle soup and consisted altogether of eight courses. We had about four different wines and followed it up with brandy.

'I had a little bit of luck with the horses,' the Baron explained during the evening. 'We understand each other. The horses and I, I mean. They are sometimes kind to me.'

After ten o'clock champagne was served. I was involved in an interesting but somewhat halting conversation with Mrs Parker – Phyllis's mother – when suddenly a loud noise of breaking glass shattered the air. It was only one of the Baron's little jokes: he had hurled his glass at the floor and smashed it.

'This is an ancient and, if I may say so, charming Hungarian custom,' he explained to Phyllis. 'Come on . . . fill up your glass again . . . Look into my eyes . . . Deeply right into my eyes . . . Now drink . . . Very good . . . And now, Phyllis dear, smash your glass, too. No one else shall ever drink from these glasses again . . .'

Phyllis proved herself an exceedingly apt pupil. Her glass went sailing into the large mirror. The Baron was so delighted that he used his, in turn, to bring down most of the chandelier.

We often went for long walks with the Baron. Almost every

day we crossed Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park on foot. Not long after our first encounter the Baron started wearing flowers in his buttonhole and soon one never saw him without a beautiful red carnation. Sometimes he had to borrow sixpence to buy it; on other occasions however, he repeated his magnificent parties which always came to the same rowdy end: glasses, mirrors, chandeliers, pictures and sometimes the plates and dishes, too, had to be destroyed to make what he called a real party. 'No one shall ever sit on these chairs again,' he shouted on one occasion, and broke two Chippendales into firewood.

'You know,' he told me once during a walk in Kensington Gardens, 'I made something of a mess of my life. Many people ask themselves: "Where did I make the mistake? What would I do differently if I had another chance?" Most people do not know the answer. I do.'

I listened in silence.

'At the age of nineteen I became a millionaire. I know that anyone who had more than a hundred thousand in those days was called a millionaire. But I inherited two hundred thousand and a man with two hundred thousand was a real millionaire.

'I was a law student before the War' (he meant, of course, World War I). 'I got my money at the end of June – just at the end of the term. I immediately travelled to Australia.'

'Why?' I asked. 'Was there anything specially fascinating in Australia?'

'I knew nothing about Australia,' he shook his head. 'But it was far away. And I reckoned that with all that money I ought to travel far because – I told myself – I might not have another chance of seeing Australia.'

That sounded convincing.

'To cut a long story short,' he continued, 'at the beginning of the autumn term I was back in Budapest, penniless once

again.'

'But how could you?' I exclaimed. 'How on earth could you spend all that money? And all in three months?'

'It wasn't easy,' he admitted.

Then, after some reflection, very wisely: 'It wasn't the right way to spend all that money. It was foolish, if you ask me.'

'Well, you enjoyed yourself . . .' I muttered.

'I did not. I was beaten up by sailors almost every night. But that's a different story. If I were ever to inherit money again I would know what to do. I would buy gilt-edged securities for my old age. But I missed my chance.'

'One never knows. You aristocrats have uncles and great-aunts everywhere.'

'Not a hope. My family is now broke.'

So we spent another few months, sometimes lending him half a crown and then again taking part in his unforgettable parties, whenever he was successful with the horses or dogs. Every now and then he borrowed ten shillings and went off to a shooting party with Lord X. or Sir Y. Z. Then one day he informed me with shining eyes that he had inherited about 60,000 pengoes from his mother's cousin's aunt. That was a much smaller sum than his first inheritance – only about £2,500 – but it was a tidy little sum and he, after all, had that rare thing, a second chance in life. Two or three days later he left for Hungary to take his inheritance and invest it.

War broke out and I did not hear from the Baron until 1948. In February of that year I visited Budapest for a fortnight. Many people came to see me, among them the Baron. He was very well dressed, still wearing a wonderful red carnation in his button-hole. He wanted to borrow ten forints, about eight shillings, which I gave him readily. As he offered no explanation for the evident change in his fortunes, I

Too good to be true

suggested politely that it must have been the War which ruined him.

'Oh, it had nothing to do with the War. It happened long before the War. In the inn.'

'The inn?' I repeated.

'The inn at Göd – near Budapest. Where I stayed with my friend, the Major. You know . . .'

But I did not know so he had to tell me the whole story. It was a simple if somewhat unusual tale. To celebrate his second inheritance he invited a friend of his, a Major of the 7th Hussars to an old country inn at Göd. They spent a pleasant and quiet evening there, chatting and later singing sad Magyar songs accompanied by gipsy music until the Baron threw a glass at the mirror, saying – as was his custom – that no one must drink from that glass again. The Major followed his example. Then the Baron broke the chairs, saying that no one must ever again sit on chairs which had participated in such happiness. Whereupon the Major broke up the table. Then the Baron took to smashing the instruments of the gipsy band, declaring that no one must listen again to instruments which had made them so happy. This gallant competition went on for some time, until the crowning idea occurred to the Baron: he set the house on fire, declaring that no one should amuse himself in that inn again where they had such a splendid evening. It was burnt to the ground. When he asked for the bill the consumption included – food, wine, glasses, mirrors, musical instruments, furniture and the inn itself. The bill took care of the inheritance.

'I have no regrets,' he said. 'We had a pleasant evening. Yet, if I had a third choice . . .'

He did not finish the sentence.

After a short silence he asked me whether I could make it another five forints.

I said I could.

A MINOR DETAIL

I was sitting in the Café Pannonia – one of Vienna's most popular yet most elegant coffee houses – surrounded by the most distinguished and the least interesting people I have ever met in my life. They were all university professors of the higher echelons. Perhaps I had better explain in mitigation that it was by no virtue of mine that I found myself in this illustrious company: I had been introduced at their table by an old friend of mine, the editor of a literary magazine.

The professors, who were rather excited, were chatting and gossiping like elderly maiden ladies because one of their colleagues had just published a book in which he had misquoted Nietzsche. The professors were shocked and amused; outraged and delighted. How could anyone commit such an unpardonable mistake? Of course, he *thought* he knew the lines and simply did not bother to look them up. Yes, yes, but how can you possibly make *such* a blunder even without looking it up? – and so on, and so on.

Mindenhuber, who has the Chair of medieval German literature, shook his head seriously:

'Famous last words: verify your quotations. And if I may add to this: never forget the smallest detail. Not the smallest detail.'

At this moment a peculiar character entered the café through the revolving door. He was a small, thin man, with a haggard – almost hungry – face and with the remnants of fair hair. For a moment I thought I recognised him, but I hastily dismissed this suggestion from my mind. How and why should I know anyone in a café in Vienna, a city where – apart from two very brief visits – I had not stayed for many

years. The man turned to Professor Mindenhuber and bowed solemnly and sadly. Then he looked at me and I thought he nodded to me, too. There was no trace of a smile in his greeting, yet it was not unfriendly.

'I wonder, Professor,' I said, 'did he greet you or me? Or both of us?'

'He certainly greeted me. I know him well. But he may have greeted you, too. He is a Hungarian.'

'Well, I don't know every Hungarian,' I began.

'You may well know this one,' he answered quietly. 'He is Marius de Barna.'

'You don't mean the opera-singer? The Wagnerian tenor?' I exclaimed in astonishment. 'That's impossible.'

'Why should it be impossible? I tell you: he *is* Marius de Barna.'

'And I tell you it's impossible. De Barna's a huge fat man, a big, jovial chap, not a skinny little spectre like that . . .'

'Yes indeed,' the Professor nodded without looking at me. 'He was a big, fat, jovial man just a short time ago . . .' He turned to me. 'You really don't know what happened to him?'

I shook my head.

'Well, let me tell you,' said the Professor thoughtfully. 'A minute ago we were talking about verifying your quotations,' he added with a faint smile. 'About the advisability of attending to detail. My story will illustrate that point.'

My heart sank. I had hoped to hear a human story about Marius de Barna, whom I had known quite well when I was a young journalist in Budapest. And now he was going to illustrate a dull academic point. But he did not start his story yet.

'I cannot decide, although I keep turning these matters over in my head,' he said, stubbing out his cigarette on the large ashtray, the free gift of a brewery, 'whether to laugh or cry at it.'

'Come on, old boy,' I said to myself in some impatience. 'You just tell your story. I shall decide myself.'

But now that I have heard the story, I still cannot decide whether to laugh or cry at it. This was the Professor's tale:

'In a way this is a very simple story,' he began. 'Marius de Barna, as you all know, is a great name. He sang Wagnerian and other parts at the Metropolitan, in Moscow, all over Europe. Here, in Vienna, too. Since the Revolution, however, we missed him. I have no idea how he behaved in those days, but I do know that he was not allowed to leave Hungary. He is a distant relation of my wife's – that's how I know the full story – but we never wrote to him. In these days it is better for people in Hungary not to receive too many letters from the West.

'About six months ago I learned from posters in the streets and advertisements in the newspapers that Marius de Barna was coming to sing *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal* in the Vienna Opera House. He did turn up this time; they trusted him enough to give him a visa, at last.'

The Professor lit another cigarette and continued:

'But the Hungarian authorities had miscalculated. He sang *Lohengrin* three times and *Parsifal* twice in ten days and at the end of his engagement he went to the Austrian police and asked for political asylum. He refused to return to Hungary.'

The Professor made another dramatic pause and looked at me. For my part, I was not impressed. I had heard scores if not hundreds of similar stories. But obviously there was more to come.

'In three days he was settled here. He should not have had a worry on earth. He had a contract for touring the greatest operas of Germany and a Paris booking. He had more money than ever before. He had a small but pleasant flat near the Ring – beautifully furnished and decorated – and he was driving his own car – rather a luxury by Hungarian standards,

although he had some old wreck of a car in Budapest, too. In fact, in Vienna he had everything he could dream of. Yet, he was unhappy.

'The reason for his unhappiness was that he missed his wife. Oh, I know, quite a few people are only too delighted to leave their wives behind. We have quite a few refugees here from domestic tyranny, even if not quite so many as from political tyranny. Marius, however, was different. He found himself utterly miserable. He was deeply in love with his wife and his love grew every day; it became, in fact, an obsession, and he started losing weight. Nothing alarming, mind you; he certainly did not look the way he does now. But he craved for his wife and his little son and we, his friends, decided that something had to be done.

'So someone – I won't mention names – visited Marius and told him: "Listen, Marius, we are going to get your wife and child out of Hungary. This is not an easy thing to do – in fact, lately it has become almost impossible. But it is not *quite* impossible and we are going to do it for your sake. Be patient. It takes time."

'A few weeks later a visitor called on the lady in Budapest and told her that she and her son were going to be taken to Vienna. One day there would be a telephone call for her. A man's voice would tell her: "Your dress is ready for the first fitting." At twelve o'clock noon precisely on the following day a man would call for them. She was to be ready – everything packed in two small suitcases. She should speak to no one about her plans; she should say good-bye to no one; she should not sell any of her belongings – she was to leave everything as it was.

'And, indeed, three weeks later the mysterious telephone message came. Next day at noon the woman and her son were ready. They were taken to the town of Győr, in Western Hungary, and there other hands took over their fate. Three

days later Marius was actually sitting in this café when he received a telephone message to say his wife and son had arrived and were waiting for him at his flat.

'He jumped up and ran, forgetting his hat and coat and leaving his bill unpaid. He zigzagged between angrily hooting cars and lorries. When he was dashing across the Ring he was nearly knocked down by a motor bicycle. In the house he had not the patience to wait for the lift, so for the first time in his life he ran up to the third floor. There, panting in front of his door, his hands were trembling so much that he could not fit the key into the lock. He tried it very slowly, once more, with great self-discipline, and looked carefully, but he could not see either: his eyes were full of tears. So he rang the bell. He could hear voices inside. His heart was pounding painfully. Those few seconds seemed hours.

'Till, at last, the door opened. Marius looked at the woman and he looked at the child. His face turned white. His lips trembled and then he collapsed in a dead faint. There he lay, on the stone floor of the corridor, like a corpse.'

The Professor paused again. I wanted to shout at him: 'Well, get on with it,' but no sound came out of my throat. At last he continued:

'The woman they had brought out of Hungary was his first wife, whom he had divorced so that he could marry his present wife. And the little boy was *her* son from a second marriage. Marius had never seen him before.'

There was deadly silence around the table. None of us knew what to say. None of us looked at Marius. The Professor got up and added rather light-heartedly:

'As I said before, you can never be too careful with minor details.'

And he left the coffee house.

(1958)

MY TEACHING CAREER

My teaching career was short and disastrous. Normally I am the kindest of men; I am patient, tolerant and amiable; I have a heart of gold and I am altogether a pleasure to meet.

But the moment I have to explain anything to anybody and he or she is slow in grasping my point – however badly put – I am suddenly transformed into a violent ruffian.

The first victim of my teaching methods was my younger brother many years ago. I was fairly good at school and especially interested in Latin – a subject I doted on to the dismay and disgust of most of my school-friends.

My father told me to teach Latin to my younger brother, Tibor. My pedagogical methods were simple: I explained for Tibor's sake the mysteries of, say, the *accusativus cum infinitivo* and asked him a few questions afterwards. If he answered properly, I merely shouted at him; if he answered wrongly I beat him up.

This was the core of my system. It worked reasonably well, until one unforgettable autumn day.

Tibor was five years my junior so, for a long time, I found no difficulty in whacking him. But he was the athletic type and he had slowly grown stronger than I realised. One day, when assaulted, he asked me to desist. When I refused, he sighed deeply and thrashed me thoroughly – if somewhat apologetically.

This unexpected turn of events induced me to change, once and for all, my educational principles. I never touched my brother again. But for me all the joy had gone out of teaching and soon I stopped our Latin lessons.

I have been against beating, caning and all sorts of corporal

punishment ever since. As long as I was meting it out, I appreciated its point; however, as soon as I found myself at the receiving end, I saw it in another light.

For me it was as simple as that. I often wonder whether for many others it is really any more complicated.

As a youngster in England I was brought up by my daughter. I was supposed to teach her many things, but as soon as she reached the age of three it was really she who completed my shaky education.

I came to this country before the war as a young journalist, and I tried to learn as much about the English language, English history, English life, manners and customs as I could absorb. Then one day, after years of relentless effort, my daughter Judy asked me:

'Daddy, who is Marjorie Daw?'

'Maybe one of the little girls upstairs. I've never heard of her.'

The point is, of course, that I had never heard an English nursery rhyme: I started in to learn them as a father.

Suddenly I became very self-conscious about this painful gap in my upbringing. What's the use of knowing the *Ode to a Grecian Urn* if you have never heard *Twinkle, twinkle little star?* Is it possible to enjoy the *Four Quartets* if you never enjoyed *Round and round the mulberry bush?*

So I took the lessons I was getting from my daughter very seriously. Gradually I learnt all the nursery rhymes. I became a regular listener to the 'Listen with Mother' programme (for children under five).

My daughter thought I was listening in to please her; but she was only an excuse. As a matter of fact, I preferred listening to it when she was out: there were no childish questions and I could concentrate more.

From nursery rhymes I graduated to simple stories. I cannot say that at the age of thirty-nine I liked Noddy, but I

loved Winnie the Pooh, Christopher Robin and Peter Pan.

Over forty, I began to pick up the school slang every sensible maiden of fifteen is keen to get rid of. Now I am back on Latin once again and I must say that that poor, classical tongue as pronounced in England has an element of refreshing novelty and constant surprise for me.

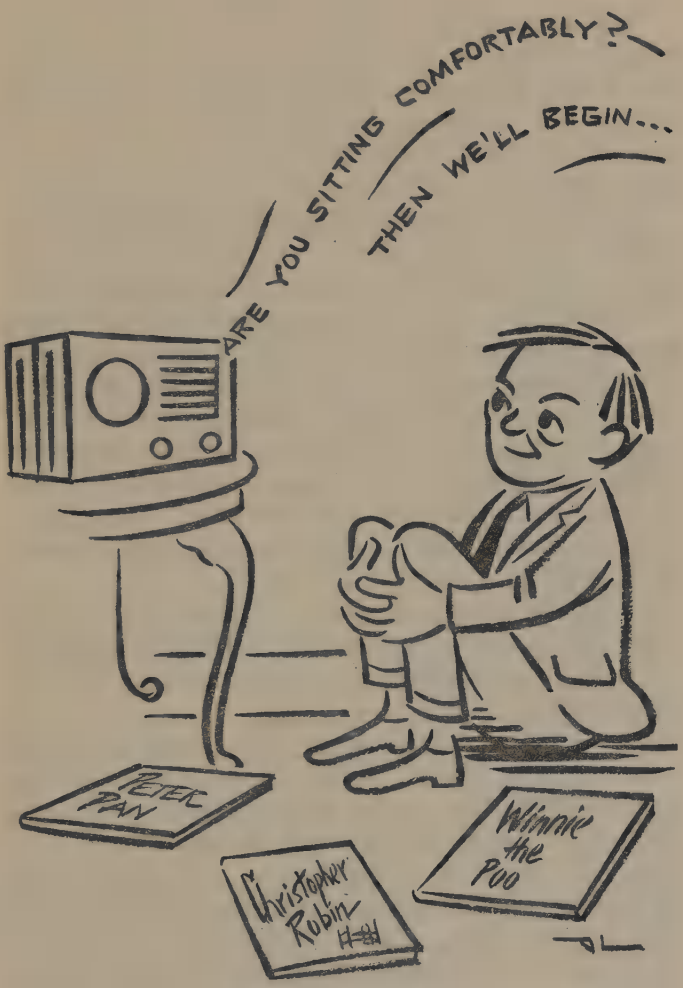
I am reading *Jane Eyre* now – for the first time, of course – but as my daughter is now absorbed in *Lolita,* I have hopes that my education will be completed some time in the not-too-distant future.

But one always hopes for too much too soon. My latest and presumably last connection with the education world is that some of my writings have started appearing in various school-books. First I appeared in a Swedish reader, called *Facts and Fiction.* Many similar readers followed.

It is initially a disconcerting experience because the list of authors in such books runs something like this: Dr Johnson, Samuel Butler, T. S. Eliot, Lord Tennyson, Mrs Gaskell, George Mikes, William Shakespeare. If the company were just a shade less distinguished, I could feel so much more relaxed.

Nevertheless, worse was to come. I keep getting German, French, Dutch, Spanish and even Japanese school-books. In these I can read, for example, a chapter from my book, *How to Scrape Skies,* on the American kitchen – a short piece written in pure innocence.

The chapter is followed by 'questions and exercises': Why does the tin-opener occupy such a prominent place in the kitchen? the poor Japanese pupil is called on to explain. (Yes, why?) Do you see any reason why bottles and containers should be discarded? Does the author speak seriously or in a jocular fashion when he says that the United States is the most maddening country in the world? (The author speaks seriously, not in a jocular fashion.)



Listen with mother

Then comes the vocabulary, with remarks like this: 'procedure – here (in a humorous sense) action, enterprise.' One of these Japanese school-books looks most formidable: the phrases explained for the benefit of the Japanese pupils include: 'laugh their heads off'; 'the old *cherchez-la-femme* story'; 'soap-opera'; 'Oh boy!'.

Alas, the explanations themselves are in Japanese, so most probably I shall never know how 'Oh boy!' and 'Soap-opera' are elucidated for the average Japanese teenager.

While in Japan a few years ago, I kept on having nightmares. Perhaps my fears were unfounded, but I often expected to see someone lurking in a dark alleyway, near the Ginza, waiting for me with a dagger or samurai sword in hand, ready for a final account. He would be a student, I imagined, who had failed in me (I mean, in me, as a subject) because he did not realise that the word 'procedure' was used in a humorous sense, or else did not quite catch the finer shades of 'Oh boy!'

And to conclude this description of my patchy and erratic, active and passive encounters with the world of education, I wonder if we couldn't take a leaf from these Japanese school-books.

It would be so helpful for the humorist if he could put footnotes in the *English* editions of his books, meant for so-called adults, and explain here and there: 'meant as a joke'; or 'do not go berserk and do not write letters to the editor'; or 'present expression used here in jocular fashion'; or 'humour is always serious and all things serious also have their humorous sides; you may or may not be amused, but for goodness' sake, before your eyes start flashing, try to see the point.'

Wouldn't it be nice if we could do just that? Oh boy!

ON SPEED READING

I have just read a news item in *The Daily Telegraph* which made me turn green with envy. 'Three United States Senators are among those attending a "dynamic reading" course which claims to increase reading speed to a fantastic rate and yet increase comprehension.'

As a man who has always been an exasperatingly slow reader, I gave a deep sigh before I read on to discover that Senator Symington read *A Tale of Two Cities* in thirteen minutes. We are not told what Senator Talmadge could do; but a girl of thirteen, sitting next to him, read *Exodus* in half an hour.

Senator Symington's achievement impressed me most. I got out my copy of *A Tale of Two Cities* and sat down to read it with stop-watch in hand. It took me a full minute of concentrated reading to finish a page, which would mean – speaking in round figures – six and a half hours to get through the 402 pages, as opposed to Senator Symington's thirteen minutes. In other words the Senator reads thirty-two and a half times as fast as I do.

Basing my calculations on his speed over the Dickens course, I found that he would read Dumas' *Three Musketeers* in sixteen minutes, amounting to five minutes, twenty seconds per musketeer. T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* would take him eighteen minutes, or two minutes thirty-four seconds per pillar.

As soon as the twelve weeks' course is over, the Senator will be able to peruse the complete works of Aristotle in one hour fifty-seven minutes; and Kant (including all the minor essays) in under three-quarters of an hour. On top of it all,

he will understand what he reads better than he does today.

I do not know whether he will feel mentally exhausted after such an exercise; but certainly he ought to be in a state of utter physical collapse, as even on their nation-wide television demonstration the Senators and their fellow-pupils could hardly turn the pages fast enough.

If Mrs Evelyn Wood, the principal of the reading school, has her way, and in a few years, all humanity has learnt to read at that speed, then we writers will have to re-examine our position in this world.

I cannot deny that it will hurt my old-fashioned pride to think of my books (painfully short in any case, though they represent some eight or nine months' work) being read in five or six seconds. On the other hand, of course, an era of unimaginable material prosperity will open up for all literary men and retired generals engaged on their memoirs.

Even if municipal libraries do put up stern notices: 'Not more than forty volumes may be exchanged in any one day,' most of us will have to produce at least a dozen works per annum. I look forward to the new Montgomery (eighteen volumes) and the new type of long American novel (3,200 pages) to provide us with two hours' reading.

Mrs Wood has certainly given a new shine and polish to the old truth that speed is the essence of modern life. I only hope she will not limit her beneficial activities in speeding up our processes thirty-two and a half times to nothing but reading.

First, I hope she will turn to the other arts. Why spend three-quarters of an hour on Beethoven's Seventh Symphony when with a little practice *à la* Wood, any decent orchestra could render it in just under a minute?

The traditional way of speaking is also annoyingly slow. If Mrs Wood gave some attention to this problem the performance of a play of normal length could be reduced from

Dynamic reading

two and a half hours to four minutes thirty-seven seconds. The next thing to tackle would be eating; a three-hour banquet could be dispatched in two minutes forty-one seconds.

It is likely that life lived at this healthy, modern pace would correspondingly speed up our biological processes, and there is no reason why babies should not be produced in five and a half days instead of the present old-fashioned nine months. In Mrs Wood's Brave New World, boy could meet girl, they could fall in love, marry, produce five children and divorce, all between Easter and Whitsun.

The only slight drawback is that life lived thirty-two and a half times faster than we live it today would turn us into brokendown dotards before we reached the ripe old age of three. A life-span of seventy-five years would be reduced to two years, three months and five days. But that, I feel sure, would be more than enough of *such* a life.

LITERARY

HOW TO QUOTE IN SELF-DEFENCE

Whenever my wife and I go out in the evening, my mother-in-law stays with our daughter. My wife is a kind woman and very concerned for her mother's welfare. Before leaving, she pauses at the open door and repeats her advice (which she has already given eight or nine times): 'Please don't work, don't do anything at all. If you feel like taking a little walk, just go out for a few minutes and take a walk. If you feel hungry, well, you know where the fridge is; and if you feel tired, please sit down and rest. But do rest, don't fidget.'

While I admire my wife's solicitude for her mother, I have asked her once or twice if it is really necessary to tell a grown-up woman – and tell her so many times – that if she feels like a walk, she should walk, if she feels tired, she should sit down, and if she is hungry, she should eat. 'It is extremely unlikely,' I pointed out, 'that a woman of your mother's intelligence would eat a couple of sandwiches when tired or go out for a walk in order to rest.'

You can imagine how surprised I was to read in a recent number of *Encounter* a reply by Mr Christmas Humphreys to an article by Arthur Koestler on Zen Buddhism, containing the following advice, quoted as a basic tenet of that creed: 'When walking, walk; when sitting, sit, but don't wobble; when hungry, eat; when tired, sleep.' Obviously, when I thought my wife was being fussy and tautologous, she was

repeating the wisdom of the Enlightened One. When I thought her silly, she was, in fact, an Oriental sage. She was simply repeating to my mother-in-law, even if a shade too often, the Buddha's message.

A few days afterwards, in a book describing and analysing a trial of the 19th century, I read this: 'Well, that's that, as Dr Johnson said.' Well, I thought, Dr Johnson was surely one of the wittiest men of all ages, but I, too, could say something equally memorable. When I started searching my memory, I grew almost certain that I had, in fact, said this very thing. Nevertheless, I have never read in any book, legal or otherwise: 'Well, that's that, as George Mikes said.' Or: 'Well, that's that, as Mr J. T. Thomas, a Leatherhead solicitor, declared in 1892.'

And then I suddenly saw through the whole thing; Dr Johnson, Buddha and my mother-in-law. Of course, if you have the slightest inkling about these matters, you must realise that the saying is utterly unimportant, the real question is, *who said it*. It's always the singer, never the song.

I went through three huge books of quotations and found them full of bits like this, 'Be easy.' Now if you say 'be easy' to anyone, the saying may not immortalise *your* name. But when you learn that Richard Steele said it in 1711, that adds quite a bit of lustre to it. If you tell your husband when he goes out for a quick one on Sunday morning: 'Joe, don't get drunk,' he may regard you as rude but it will hardly occur to him that you have said something pretty enduring. But you have, in fact, because I see in one of my books that Hugh Rhodes declared in 1530: 'Drink without drunkenness.'

If such aphorisms are set down in ancient orthography, they sound even better. I have had many unrecorded conversations about the weather, quite unaware that I was uttering one immortal wisdom after the other, just spitting them out. For example, the gentleman who cleans the corridors

Dr George Mikes Johnson said . . .

and steps in our block of flats often informs me in the morning when I am about to leave that it is raining. I may tell him: 'Well, let's hope it will soon stop.' This profound remark of mine is probably forgotten in two minutes even by the man to whom it was vouchsafed; but it remains on record that John Florio stated in 1578: 'After stormes come fayre weather.' Perhaps the trouble may be that on occasion I simply say: 'Oh damn it, it's raining again,' when I ought to say: 'Hark! Hark! List ye it raineth.'

This idea, of course, may be developed further; and after a little more research I found that it has, in fact, been developed much further. If one says something extremely stupid or platitudinous, people shrug their mental shoulders and you can read their thoughts: 'So he is just the fool I always thought him to be.' But if after a silly remark which has obviously not gone down at all well, you add: 'As Voltaire used to say,' that is quite a different matter. I have made it a rule that whenever I say something stupid, I immediately attribute it to Dr Johnson, Marcus Aurelius or Dorothy Parker. It is amazing how witty and profound my most idiotic remarks suddenly become.

It's quite easy, really.

'What I find in Homer is not in him but in me.' (I gave that one to Pascal.)

'There is one thing people hate more than being pestered; not being pestered.' (Oscar Wilde is indebted to me for this sally.)

'The law must be unjust; otherwise it would not be law.' (Bernard Shaw can have this one.)

This game, of course, was not invented by me: it has been played for centuries. All I can claim is that, unless I am mistaken, I have invented two minor embellishments:

(1) I say it in French. If a bird's feather falls into your beer at a picnic and you remark, 'Oh, a feather . . .' or 'Damn

these birds,' this is simply coarse and as there is no fourteenth century original there is really not much to it. But nowadays I would say: 'Oh, les plumes des oiseaux – as André Gide was fond of saying.' The effect is electrifying.

(2) Then I also trade in proverbs. I have learnt this from Mr Khrushchev who possesses a bottomless supply of non-existent Russian proverbs. Well, what Mr Khrushchev can do, I can do better. The only problem is that one has to pay great attention to *what* the origin of your proverb is supposed to be. Let me give you just a few examples from my collection:

Better a pancake on Tuesday than a kick on the behind on Wednesday. (Ancient Russian.)

Rich and poor sometimes lose their purse. (Chinese.)

Better a tomahawk in the hand than two in the bush. (Sioux Indian, near the Mississippi estuary.)

However loudly you may shout at it, the sun will always set in the west. (Burmese, 14th century.)

With a little skill and practice you may prove beyond a shadow of doubt that (*a*) you are a delightful, witty, and highly educated person, and that (*b*) no one has said so many stupid, idiotic and pointless things as the great wits of history and literature.

But that is their lookout – as Disraeli said. All I wish to add to it myself is a final word of advice: Ye make a foole of the Great before ye make a foole of thyselfe.

(The dead will survive it, as Ibsen never said.)

TRAVEL

DOWN WITH TRAVELLING!

'Travel' is the name of a modern disease which became rampant in the mid-fifties and is still spreading. The disease – its scientific name is *travelitis furiosus* – is carried by a germ called prosperity. Its symptoms are easily recognisable. The patient grows restless in the early spring and starts rushing about from one travel agent to another collecting useless information about places he does not intend to visit, studying prospectuses, etc.; then he, or usually she, will do a round of tailors, milliners, summer sales, and sports shops, spending three and a half times as much as he or she can afford; and finally, in August the patient will board a plane, train, coach or car and proceed to foreign parts along with thousands of fellow-sufferers, not because he is interested in or attracted by the place he is bound for, nor because he can afford to go, but simply because he cannot afford not to. The disease is highly infectious and nowadays you catch Foreign Travel rather as you caught influenza in the twenties only more so.

The result is that in the summer months (and in the last few years also during the winter season) everybody is on the move. In Positano you hear no Italian but only German; in some Swiss towns you cannot get along unless you speak American; and the official language of the Costa Brava is English. I should not be at all surprised to see a modest little

Mania

notice in Blanes or Tossa-de-Mar, stating '*A Qui Se Habla Español*' – Spanish spoken here.

What is the aim of all this travelling? Each nationality has its own different aim with it. The Americans want to take photographs of themselves (*a*) in Trafalgar Square, with the pigeons; (*b*) in the Piazza san Marco, Venice, with the pigeons; and (*c*) in front of the Arc de Triomphe, Paris, without pigeons. The idea is simply to collect documentary proofs that *they have been there*. The German travels to check up on his guide-books: when he sees that the Ponte de Rialto is really at its proper venue, that the Leaning Tower is in its appointed place in Pisa and is leaning at the angle promised, he ticks these things off in his guide-book and returns home with the gratifying feeling that he has not been swindled. But why do the English travel?

First, because their neighbour does and they have caught the bug from him. Secondly, they used to be taught that travel broadens the mind and although they have by now discovered the sad truth that whatever travel may do to the mind, Swiss or German food certainly broadens certain other parts of the body, the old notion still lingers on. But lastly – and perhaps mainly – they travel to avoid foreigners. Here, in our cosmopolitan England, one is always exposed to the danger of meeting all sorts of peculiar aliens. Not so on one's journeys in Europe – if one manages things intelligently. I know many English people who travel in groups, stay in hotels where even the staff is English, eat roast beef and Yorkshire pudding on Sundays and Welsh rarebit and steak and kidney pudding on weekdays, all over Europe. The main aim of the Englishman abroad is to meet people; I mean, of course, nice English people from next door or from the next street. Normally one avoids one's neighbours ('It is best to keep yourself to yourself,' – 'We leave others alone and want to be left alone,' etc, etc). If you meet your next door

neighbour in the High Street or at your front door you pretend not to see him or, at best, nod coolly; but if you meet him in Capri or Granada, you embrace him fondly and stand him a drink or two; and you may even discover that he is quite a nice chap after all and both of you might just as well have stayed at home in Chipping Norton.

All the above, however, refers only to travelling for the general public, the so-called lower middle-class. But I for one have never yet met anyone who described himself as belonging to the lower middle-class. Working-class – yes; upper middle-class – most certainly; lower middle-class – never. Lower middle-class is, indeed, *per definitionem* the class to which almost everybody belongs except you and those people you meet.

Well, if you want to avoid giving the unfortunate impression that you belong to the lower middle-class, you had better learn *the elementary snobbery of travelling*. The main rules are:

(1) Avoid all places frequented by others. You may declare: 'All the hotels are full, one cannot get in anywhere.' No one will ever think of the obvious retort that the hotels are *full of people who actually managed to get in* – so why not you, too?

(2) You must then carry this a stage further and try to avoid all places attractive to tourists or – as some prefer to put it – you must get off the beaten track. In practice this means that in Italy you avoid Venice and Florence but visit a few filthy and disgusting fishing villages no one has ever heard of; and if misfortune does take you to Florence, you avoid the Uffizi Galleries and refuse to look at Michelangelo's David, visiting, instead, a dirty little pub in the outskirts where Tuscan food is supposed to be divine and where you can listen to a drunken and deaf accordian player. The idea

behind all this is that since the tourist is the lowest form of human existence, by hook or by crook you must avoid giving the impression of being a tourist. A holiday-maker will just pass; a temporary resident – that's all right. But a tourist? Worse than death.

(3) This leaves you with quite a problem of where to go. It is not an easy question The *hoi polloi* – the lower middle-class – may go to Paris or Spain, or the Riviera or Interlaken but such an obvious choice will certainly not do for anyone with a little self-respect. There is a small international set that leads the fashion and you must watch them.

Some years ago this set discovered Capri but now Capri is teeming with rich German and English businessmen so you can't go near the place. Ischia became fashionable for a season or two but it too was invaded by the businessmen, so now Ischia is out. Majorca was next on the list, but Majorca has become quite ridiculous in the last few years: it is now an odd mixture of Munich and Oxford Street, and has nothing to offer – because, needless to say, beauty and sunshine do not count. The neighbouring island of Ibiza reigned till last year, but the businessmen have caught up with Ibiza too, so it will stink by next summer. At the moment I may recommend Tangier; Rhodes is fairly safe, too. And after that, who knows, Capri may be tried again.

Remember: travel is supposed to make you sophisticated. When buying your souvenirs and later when most casually – you really must practice how to be casual – you refer to foreign food, you should speak of these things in the vernacular. Even fried chicken sounds rather romantic when you speak of *Backhendl;* and you will score far more points by remarking casually – very casually, I repeat – that you went to a little *Madkurve kan medbrings* near Copenhagen, than by admitting that you went to a place where you ate your own sandwiches and only ordered beer.

It is quite possible, however, that the mania for travelling is on the decline. I wonder if a Roman friend of mine was simply an eccentric or the forerunner of a new era in snobbery.

'I no longer travel at all,' he told me. 'I stay here because I want to meet my friends from all over the world.'

'What exactly do you mean?' I asked.

'It is simple,' he explained. 'Whenever I go to London, my friend Smith is sure to be in Tokyo and Brown in Sicily. If I go to Paris, Dupont is sure to be in London and Lebrun in Madagascar or Lyons. And so on. But if I stay in Rome all my friends are absolutely sure to turn up at one time or another. The world means *people* for me. I stay here because I want to see the world.'

And he added after a short pause:

'Besides, staying at home broadens the mind.'

A DAY AT THE RACES

On boarding our coach for Ascot in the forecourt of St Pancras Station, I was relieved to see that we had nothing worse in our midst in the way of headgear than a couple of bowlers and three ladies wearing charming and preposterous confections. The conversation during the two hours' trip concentrated around three main topics: (1) Would there or would there not be a royal drive along the course? Some people maintained there would on this second day although there had not been one the day before; others, however, remarked thoughtfully that it would be very noble and self-sacrificing on the Queen's part to come at all and she could not really be expected to drive along the course one day before leaving for abroad. Division of opinion was, if not sharp, firm and unyielding. (2) A number of people questioned our guide anxiously to find out which was the best spot to see the Queen and members of the royal family. No one enquired after the best spot to see the race. (Such spots – I found out soon enough – were few and far between.) (3) An Australian lady (the majority of our party was made up of visitors from the Commonwealth) asked me whether I, too, hoped that the Queen's horse would win. Would it not be a simply marvellous inauguration of her tour if it did? I told the Australian lady that I failed to see any clear connection between the placing of the horse and the success of the royal tour. Besides, I added, while I was as loyal a subject of Her Majesty as the next man, I could not care less whether her horse came in first or last. After that I was ostracised by everybody except my companion and we spent the rest of the journey in splendid isolation.

As we came on to the race-course, a huge, red-faced policeman informed us that cameras of all sorts were forbidden on the course and directed us to deposit ours for safe keeping in a shed on the right. I asked why this prohibition was not made public. The policeman smiled and replied courteously that practically everyone knew about it. I explained that as I had never been at Ascot – or indeed at any other horse race – before, I did not know about it; furthermore, the fact that the shed was already full of cameras three hours before the first race was due to begin, rather disproved his contention. The policeman went on smiling extremely courteously. I asked the young man in charge of the temporarily confiscated cameras why they did not put a clear statement on tickets, programmes, etc, so as to spare people the bother of taking their bulky and useless equipment for a joy-ride. He admitted that I had something there. Later a steward, replying to the same question, praised me heartily and said that it was a very good suggestion. I asked whether such a procedure would be adopted in the future and he said it was unlikely. I asked another steward what the actual reason was for this ban on photographs. Was there any copyright problem involved? No – he informed me – but Ascot was the only place where the Queen moved around quite freely among her subjects. I could not follow his logic. It seemed to me that this could rather be an extra reason for permitting people to take pictures. No, he replied, because if photographing was allowed, people would keep on clicking cameras right into the Queen's face. I pointed out that most people have decent manners; besides I had never noticed that people were discouraged from staring at the Queen. Was staring with camera-eyes so much worse than staring with human eyes? Before he could reply, I gave him the point, admitting that human eyes, at least, did not click, but, I went on, was it quite fair to deprive many thousands of people of their

pleasure to save one lady from real or imaginary discomfort – preventable in any case, by other simple methods? As this question sounded dangerously like a suggestion that the Queen was a human being among others, the official turned away from me in disgust.

We walked around and were impressed by the beauty, the splendour, and the incredible discomfort of the place. The seats are hard, uncomfortable, and insufficient in number; shade is almost non-existent for ordinary mortals; and there are few places from where you can see properly. We climbed up to a clock where we had a fairly good view (though hardly any shade), but space was limited up there, too, and many people must jib at climbing the innumerable iron stairs. A few days later, when I was listening in to a radio commentary from Ascot, the commentator – who, presumably, had one of the finest spots available – informed us that he was extremely sorry, but all the horses were out of sight. We all hoped that they would would soon return.

Such is the Mecca of British racing to which people flock in their thousands and tens of thousands. But these people are quite right, of course, and I, in my ignorance, was wrong. Ascot is, no doubt, rather a poor place for watching races, but who on earth goes there because he is interested in races? Perhaps, roughly speaking, 0.001 per cent of the visitors. My heart is with those who are not interested in horse-racing because I agree (unlike the Queen who undoubtedly belongs to the small, genuinely interested minority) with an ancient Shah of Persia, who declared that he was perfectly aware that one horse could run faster than another and he cared precious little *which*. People breed horses to run faster and faster for no conceivable practical reason since the regrettable decline of cavalry. Experience shows that the faster a horse runs, the faster, ultimately, people lose money on it. I know little about Ascot and its surroundings as a breeding-ground

for horses; but as a breeding-ground of snobbery and social climbing it is second to none. I felt that I was watching a curious dead, extinct animal, carefully preserved in surgical spirit.

As you walk about and study your surroundings, you notice that everything and everybody has its, his, or her place, category, and pigeon-hole. The bookmakers and totalisators are divided into those working in respectable offices behind glass windows and those standing behind shaky little tables in the open. Then opposite us, on the other side of the course and behind a fence, were the public places for the *profanum vulgus*, also known as the common men – whose century this is supposed to be. Ascot Heath itself is free to all; admission to the betting enclosures is two shillings. On our side admission was £2 – so ours was a different world. But here again there were the simple roamers, like ourselves, with seats 'whenever available', and there were the truly distinguished people in private boxes – people, I believe, who hire houses in the neighbourhood, arrange those famous house-parties, and regret that King Edward VII can no longer be invited; yet others again are in the Royal Enclosure around the Royal Box – yet carefully divided from it. People are not simply invited into the Royal Enclosure: they have to try to get themselves invited. Every year, a few months before the Ascot meeting, an advertisement appears in *The Times* inviting applications for invitations, and then the scramble of Top People begins. Applications pour in from retired army officers; their equivalents from the civil service; manufacturers and traders who have managed to buy a knighthood or are just saving up for one; parents of girls who would be presented at court if such things still existed. The young men are those whose great ambition is to dance once in their lives with Princess Margaret; the majority of these people have had their photographs published, on one occasion or

another, in the *Tatler,* or have just narrowly missed that distinction. Applications for the Royal Enclosure are not too carefully sifted. Unless one turns out to be working-class, criminal, or divorced, they are granted. Once the 'invitation' is received, the guests, of course, have to pay the proper fees for admission.

On the great occasion, ladies attire themselves in new Ascot outfits for each day of the meeting. I found their dresses (on the whole) dull, but their hats magnificent. I yield to no one in my admiration of English women, but skirt and blouse, or a simple dress suits them incomparably better than these feeble efforts to imitate the French. The men don morning coat and top hat, adopt a supercilious or shy grimace, and affix a white tag to their lapels. The tag (ladies have to wear one, too) entitles them to enter the Royal Enclosure, but it is also a distinguishing mark which sets them apart from the common breed of humanity.

Whenever I see people in top hats, I expect either a coffin or else knights in armour with lance and shield to turn up. Top hats look like very sensible containers, suitable for holding almost everything with the exception of the human head. In the sticky heat, each topper contains its own torture, as it cannot be much more comfortable than a guardsman's bearskin. Today, however, English society cannot get away from the top hat. Not so long ago the motor car and foreign travel – preferably cruises on the Mediterranean or Caribbean – were the symbols of social position and affluence. Today even people at Ascot Heath arrive in their own motor cars, unless, of course, they do not arrive at all because they happen to be touring the Riviera or the Costa Brava. So what is a rich and childishly snobbish society to do? – a society in which there is money galore and the only breathtaking excitement is provided not by Foreign Ministers' or Summit Conferences or the Damocles Bomb suspended overhead, not even

by crime and sex, but by money, money, and money only – by take-over bids, shares rising and falling, diamond tiaras and old masterpieces sold at record figures (while new masterpieces are ignored or ridiculed). Today if you want to be somebody, you must possess a yacht and a few race-horses. These are minimum requirements. And you must keep your top hat, too. It is the symbol of an old social class which still has it as well as the upstart new class which has already acquired it. The ex-rich are coming down the slope with stiff upper lips; the new ones are going up perspiring and panting. As they pass each other, they do not raise their top hats to one another in friendly greeting.

On the race-course everyone is frantically busy all the time. For about a minute or two – as long as the actual race lasts – the stands are chock-full, but as soon as the race is over, people dash to collect their winnings, if any, go to the winners' enclosure, and – first and foremost – rush to the paddock and from there they rush on to place their new bets. Their purpose in visiting the paddock is to catch a last glimpse of the runners before risking their money. Real experts, of course, already know all about the horses, their ancestors, histories, trainers, form, idiosyncracies, etc, but they still want to see how they behave just when the race is about to start, and find out whether they are too nervous or shy. Others want to see if a horse does or does not wear a sheepskin nose-band, or blinkers; others again choose their horses according to sudden fancy or intuition, by the colour of the jockey's eyes, or simply by the horse's name. (The horse-naming industry, by the way, must be sorely tried: from simple names like Adam Bede, or René, they have advanced to the over-eloborate, like Godiva's Pink Flower; the facetious, like Adults Only, Snakes and Ladders, Pardonnez-moi; the surrealist, like Kaffirboom; and the plain silly, like Vacant Possession, Yorkshire Terrier, or Zip-goes-a-million.) Betting and gambling, of course, is

the object of the whole exercise. I bought myself five papers (*Sporting Life, Ascot Naps, The Racehorse, The Winner,* and *Sporting Chronicle*), learned which horses were the favourites, and was warned several times that favourites were not certain to win. I studied the various tips and all the data about prospective winners, looked at the excited queue in front of the tote windows, and decided not to bet at all. Queue up in the scorching sun to lose my money, or – God forbid! – to win and be compelled to queue up once again to collect my winnings . . . ?

Immense sums were staked. The huge electrically operated boards of the totalisators – changing every second – informed us that for the Royal Hunt Cup at 3.45 nearly £600,000 was staked in a very short time – £200,000 of this on the Queen's horse, *Pall Mall,* the favourite, which did not win after all. And all this money was staked in about half an hour at Ascot alone – not counting the bets on the daily doubles and trebles, nor the vast sums placed with bookmakers in London and all over the country – indeed, not counting bookmakers at Ascot. I watched people in the Royal Enclosure walking to the edge of their compound to place their bets with bookmakers and totalisators in attendance. As even their betting must be distinguishable from the ordinary vulgar betting of the rabble outside, they have to bet on credit: no money must pass. This system is more dignified; the greed is the same.

But they, too, leave their enclosure and go to bet in the ordinary way. They, too, take part in the wild rush from stands to tote, from tote to paddock, from paddock back to tote, from tote back to the stand, from the stand to the winners' enclosure, from the winners to the overcrowded, drab champagne bar with its hand-to-hand fighting and miserable service, and from there – and from everywhere, all the time – back to the tote. People, I thought, ran consider-

Same species

ably more in the course of an afternoon than the horses. But they, at least, know what they are after. The horses don't. Why do these beautiful and intelligent animals oblige by exerting themselves? During each race I half expected an elderly wise horse to stop at mid-course and shake his head, implying perhaps: 'This whole silly business is utterly pointless as far as I am concerned. I never bet. I am never invited into the Royal Enclosure. I can never wear a top hat. I am not even interested in horse-breeding – not in the same manner as you are, anyway . . . I get nothing out of it. Why should I run about in this blazing sun? No, sorry – I won't run. I'll stroll . . .'

But the horses disappointed me so I turned away from the whole thing and sought solitude. That was easy to find: I dashed up to the stands as soon as a race was over and hurried down to the paddock as soon as another race started. And I watched, whenever I could, the tic-tac men. Here was a clan near to my heart. They stand at the most conspicuous, strategic points in their red, orange, and yellow shirts, passing on information from Tattersalls to other tic-tac men and vice versa, with strange, mysterious signs and signals: touching their noses, turning their outstretched hands in and out, beating their chests, and placing their open palms on the top of their heads. A mistake by one of them may cost his employer thousands of pounds. Their activities hardly resembled normal business activities, their motions looked like a wild ritual dance of deaf-and-dumb tribesmen. The tic-tac men with their strange attire and peculiar behaviour were the spiritual brothers of the top-hatted tribesmen – but their fancy dresses and fancy behaviour had, at least, some practical meaning. Or was it possible, I wondered, that the tic-tac men were including all sorts of observations and maxims in their mysterious messages, such as: 'Gambling and fashion shows are all right, but couldn't it all be done

much more simply, getting rid of all this paraphernalia and leaving the poor innocent horses out of it?'

When it was all over, I still had time before my coach left. The public places were full of litter, knee-deep: newspapers, ice-cream wrappers, empty beer and coca-cola bottles. Litter at the £2 enclosures was ankle-deep only and consisted exclusively of torn-up betting tickets. Different classes, different litter. I walked out to the car parks and there discovered a pleasant and pretty general habit. People were sitting round their cars in the parking-lots and picnicking. Sitting there on rugs or on the grass, beside their Rolls Royces or small sports things – the ladies with their shoes and their ornate hats off, the men in striped trousers and shirt-sleeves, their waistcoats unbuttoned and their top hats on the grass: they all looked almost human again. I had a vague but inescapable impression that we all belonged to the same species after all.

HOW TO BE A EUROPEAN

I am one of those who was delighted when the Common Market discussions collapsed. And I herewith warn the Prime Minister and the Lord Privy Seal that, should General de Gaulle change his mind and should Britain enter the Common Market, I shall stage a sit-down strike in front of their respective doors, on alternate days. I have heard 239 more or less convincing arguments for or against entering – mostly by people who have never read the Treaty of Rome or even a brief summary of it – but no one has ever mentioned me. Am I not to be considered at all? What is individual liberty coming to in England – or in the Common Market, for that matter? I devoted twenty-three years of my life to becoming a genuine Briton – and now the whole country wants to go European. I once wrote a little treatise called *How to be an Alien;* I always expected it to be taken seriously but not quite so seriously as that. I never foresaw the possibility that the United Kingdom would study it, learn the rules and turn alien, lock, stock and barrel.

Britain is the only country in the world which has Bank Holidays. In the old days, the very expression 'Bank Holiday' used to puzzle and infuriate me. What could *banks* have to do with holidays in particular and with our religious life in general, I asked in my early innocence. Eventually I came to understand and accept the fact that banks have indeed a great deal to do with the inner, spiritual life of Englishmen. But even so this *Common Market* idea goes a bit too far. Turning our country into a Market – worse, part of a Market – is an exasperating notion. How could you owe allegiance to a Market? To be able to say: '*Civis Romanus sum*' was something; to declare that you were a subject of the British

Empire could fill you with pride; but one couldn't possibly beat one's chest and proclaim oneself a common marketeer. Could the sword be drawn for such a cause? How could one possibly cry: 'Long live Export!' and fall with a bullet through the heart? And could one honestly sing with moist eye and husky throat. 'There will always be a Market . . .' Or 'Rule E.E.C., – E.E.C. rule the waves?' . . .

Let me solemnly warn the nation that the act of joining the Common Market would have presaged a series of disasters of the utmost magnitude. We have recently learned that Mr Khrushchev has become – in his home policy – a mild, progressive, liberal engrossed in transforming the Soviet Union into a gigantic Welfare State on Attlee-Beveridge lines, where bus-rides will be free and political prisoners will get meat twice a week; but must our answer be a complete reversion to Marxism? Must our fate be decided by economic considerations only? There are more important things than welfare, prosperity, full employment, expansion and – what is that ungainly word? – productivity. We don't live by bread alone. Surely, the problem ought to be examined from the human angle – as it has not been yet – before we pay a crippling price for sheer material benefits. Just to point out a few dark threats:

DECIMAL COINAGE, which is already casting its ugly and menacing shadow over us, is not just a joke. Let's have a closer look at it. It has often been explained that while Continentals have the decimal system, we have the *duodecimal system* which is just as good; indeed, being British, it is better. Just in case your Latin is not quite what it ought to be: the decimal system is based on the number *ten* and the duodecimal on the number *twelve*. The duodecimal system is so-called because there are twenty shillings in the pound (£1), sixteen ounces in the pound (1 lb), fourteen pounds in the stone, eight gallons in a bushel and 1,760 yards in a mile.

Any Continental child of eight is able to calculate 10 per cent of 7.329,517 francs and 18 centimes in three seconds just by moving the decimal point; but if anyone wishes to calculate 10 per cent of £17 8s 4d, he has to buy a Ready Reckoner, employ an advanced mathematician and/or buy a computer. What is going to happen to Britain's ready-reckoner industry, her advanced mathematicians and her computer manufacturers if all these problems, which have given employment to thousands, are to be solved simply by moving decimal points? What will happen to our teachers if they cannot spend happy *years* teaching children operations any Continental child of five grasps in eight minutes and remembers for a lifetime?

Besides, pushing decimal points about is most undignified and un-English. We may have become a second-rate power; we may have lost an Empire; but are we to become a nation of decimal-point-pushers? Never!

WORK. I wonder if the Trade Unions are aware of a certain nasty habit Continental workers have? *They work.* Enter the Common Market and the infection will inevitably spread to these shores. The Germans have frequently been decried as the worst exponents of the theory and practice of hard work, but the days when the Germans earned this reputation are over: they have been bitten by the bug of prosperity and over-employment and, in fact, they are our only rivals as Enemies of Work and Slow Motion Champions. But all the others are hopeless, even the Italians; the Italians are perhaps the worst of the lot. They all work as though they were paid for it. Join the Six and in a few months a customer entering any shop could, almost at will, interrupt even the most animated and amusing conversation among the shop assistants; working time for plumbers, house-painters, carpenters, electricians and others working in your home or outside, on their own, in gangs, might actually *exceed* tea-breaks; and

chats about the weather between grocers, greengrocers, florists, postal clerks and their clients might be rationed to seven or eight minutes per client, if the queue is more than two miles long.

It is true that people might be able to earn more. The plan remains, however, self-defeating and nonsensical: what is the pleasure of making more money if you have, actually, to work for it?

Consider the FOOD DANGER. A very curious and welcome development has taken place in this respect in the last few years. To explain it, you must remember the one single intelligent habit of Europeans – their Anglomania. In some of them it is straight, somewhat primitive and undisguised; in others it takes more complicated forms, sometimes even the guise of resentment. Nevertheless, it is a solid rock on which one can build. While the British are busy turning themselves into aliens and Europeans, the Continent seems to cherish one true desire: to become anglicised. In England, we are assured by a recent book, even the English Gentleman is a dying species and definitely on the way out, to be replaced by the English Cad; but on the Continent people take evening classes to learn how to express themselves incoherently and train themselves in artificial stuttering, just to sound more English. Pursuing their desire passionately, they have, in fact, persuaded themselves that even English cooking is something admirable and worth imitating. While a long battle has slowly been won in this country – at least in London and in some other large cities – and English *cuisine*, if that be the word for the thing, has been replaced by French, Italian and Greek food, English dishes have found their way to the Continent. One's anglomania must be pretty well advanced before one can feel really enthusiastic about Yorkshire pudding along with cabbage boiled in salt water, but there you are. Today, if you want a good Lancashire hotpot, you have

to travel to Boulogne for it while on our side of the Channel you will be offered dishes like 'Lapin Gallois à la Lord Snowdon' which will probably turn out to be a strongly gallicised version of an old-fashioned honest Welsh Rarebit. Scampi and Italian pasta, are more popular in this country than steak-and-kidney pudding and more garlic is consumed in Southern England than Northern France.

The terrible, lurking danger must, I believe, by now be clear to all of us: if we import all things and habits Continental, *we might get our own cooking back.* This would be a blow of the first magnitude.

TRAFFIC PROBLEMS, too, may prove troublesome, even serious. Our ways are not as theirs. We have a minister who keeps talking of motor-ways; they have ministers who keep building them. I am not saying here which system is preferable: but there is certainly a difference in approach. Brussels, a city of 1,300,000 people, has an urban motor-way system the like of which has never even been discussed here; Germany will soon have 3,000 miles of motor-ways – we may have 300 one day.

For the Continental, motoring is simply a means of getting from one place to another. It would not be too much to say that a Continental looks at a motor-car as though it were a means of transportation. For the British, motoring is all bound up with rights and personal liberty. In most Common Market countries the police give you a ticket and fine you on the spot for parking, jumping the red light, not having your lights on at night, etc; in Britain, one of the most highly industrialised countries in the world, all these cases go to a justice-factory called the Magistrate's Courts and this is all closely connected with the liberty of the subject: because, while all those policemen are busy in court, giving evidence, the subjects, in the streets, can take liberties.

Motoring in Britain, while it has failed to develop good

Englishman on a zebra

roads, has been successful in developing a good many personal rights: the Right to Double Park, for example, was established under Henry VI; taxi-cabs gained the Right to Block the Road Absolutely Anywhere, where they deign to pick up or drop passengers under Richard III (it was a

sadistic joke on the King's part); the Right to Jay-Walk became the birthright of every true Briton under the Plantagenets and the Right to zebra-Cross is, of course, the most splendid of all. Zebra-crossings do exist in other countries but, observe, say, a German and an Englishman on the crossings and you will realise immediately that the Common Market is nonsense. I go as far as to say that even if nothing more than zebra-crossings divided us from the Six, the gap would still be unbridgeable. At traffic lights, a German pedestrian would not cross against the red, not if you paid him for it. At simple, unguarded zebras, he will cross with fear in his eyes, knowing perfectly well that not a single driver will even think of stopping for his sake; he regards the zebra-crossing as a death-trap: car drivers wait for him to step into the road and then they accelerate to get him. In England, on the other hand, drivers often enjoy stopping just as much as the pedestrians enjoy loitering. A man on the zebra is not just a person crossing a road: he is a Briton, exercising a fundamental right. He walks slowly, with dignity, as academic or civic processions do: indeed, every zebra-crosser is a one-man civic procession. His face radiates self-assurance and often, in order to stop a car, he lifts his hand and waves imperiously. I often feel he must be waving a copy of Magna Charta.

It must be obvious to all readers by now that joining the Common Market would be a major and irreparable disaster. Yet, the weightiest objection of all is this last one: through close association and constant collaboration with foreigners, the entire English character may slowly and subtly but profoundly change. The British, for example, may become *logical*. Had they been logical in 1940, they would have thrown up the sponge and lost the war. Or they may become *clever*. A clever Briton (even if you do not use the word in the pejorative sense) is a contradiction in terms, like a white

Negro, or a legless ballet dancer; or, to change the image, he would be like Samson with his locks shorn: lack of cleverness has been his great strength for centuries, he has banked on it, and boasted about it. The Bristish might also become *systematic*. If they had been systematic they would never have conceived, let alone founded, the Commonwealth because it would have been clear to any systematic brain that it could not possibly work. (It is no argument at all to point out that it does.) They might become . . . well, the list could be continued endlessly. The long and short of it is that according to some people Britain ought to join the Common Market because she is specially qualified to make special contributions, the first of which would be to lose these special qualities.

But perhaps, I mused, if we persist and finally succeed in this mistaken attempt, that will not be the way, after all. Knowing the British, I should not really be surprised if, five years hence, all the pubs in Frankfurt close at 11 p.m. and the French are playing cricket; if all the road-signs in Europe show distances in miles instead of kilometres; if the Belgian franc consists of 12 Belgian centimes; if one can go to watch the opening of the House of Lords in Luxemburg or Trooping the Colour in Milan.

No doubt of it, I realised on second thought: I ought to be warning the Common Market not to join Britain.

'Which road leads to the lake?' I asked a gentleman near Balloch.

'There is no lake here that I know of,' he replied coolly. 'But if you mean the loch – that way.'

I apologised for my foolish mistake but mine was an error easy to make: a loch looks very much like a lake. And a firth looks deceptively like an estuary.

And – I know I am bringing endless trouble on my head by saying this – a Scotsman looks very much like an Englishman. Except that nowadays it is mostly the visiting Englishman who wears a kilt up there, while the Scots use that new-fangled invention, called trousers.

My purpose in going to Scotland was to investigate Scottish nationalism. What brand does it bear? What is it made of? How does it work? What does it hope to achieve? I grew interested in it a few years ago, when I wrote a short piece on the Scots and promptly received more abusive letters than ever before or since. That gladdened my heart. I always appreciate some reaction to my writings and nothing is more frustrating than to speak your mind bravely, draw your sword to await the ensuing onslaught and, while cutting this heroic figure, to discover yourself being patted on the shoulder and told, 'Quite amusing.'

Scottish nationalism, I found, works on three levels. First, the Scotsman's greatest pride in life is that he is not English. A legitimate pride, I agree. But to my basically Continental eyes the differences, though noticeable, are infinitesimal. Perhaps they are warmer-hearted and more easily approachable, but their manners, generally speaking, are polite yet

Visiting Englishman

indifferent; if you enter a restaurant at five minutes to two, you will be told: 'Sorry, we're closed'; three Scotsmen together no longer form a clan but a queue; they are restrained, there is too much self-discipline about and the Highlanders look down upon the Lowlanders with the healthy contempt of the Northern Englishman for the Southern Englishman and vice versa. They hate being told that they are rather like the English but, in serious and sincere conversation, they admit: 'Yes, we *are* losing our distinguishing features.' And then they point out the rather elusive differences: 'We are closer to the French . . .' Yes, we all know of the Franco-Scottish alliance but it is no more living past than the Turkish occupation of Hungary or the Austrian alliance with Russia. 'Our *cuisine* is rather like the French . . .' a Scottish lady explained to me, but while Scottish beef is probably better than the best beef in France, porridge hardly resembles, say *Risotto Basquaise* and a mouthful of haggis does not suggest instinctive comparison with *Cotelette d'agneau de coutances grillée Cresson.* They will also tell you that they are more 'logical' than the English but will fail to produce evidence; and they will add nostalgically that their language is full of French words. Had I never heard of a '*dur* Scotsman'? Had I never heard the expression '*bien*', meaning 'well', but pronounced 'been'? I have never heard '*bien*' (pronounced 'been') but I did meet the '*dur* Scotsman' and remembered that ordinary English, too, contains many hundreds of French words. Besides, I have also heard something about the Franco-*British* alliance in the past. No, the only linguistic difference between Scottish and English English is – apart from accent and a few turns of phrase – that the Scotsman will not use the expressions 'wee' and 'bonny' quite so often as the visiting Londoner. But otherwise the differences are vanishing and in a few years' time the Scots will be exactly as the English are today; luckily, by then, the English will

be so much americanized that some degree of difference will still remain.

On the second level, we have partly legitimate and fully understandable national pride and partly its side-products. Bagpipes, tartan ties, rugs and kilts are sold in Edinburgh and Aberdeen to Americans, Swedes and Ghanaians, yet a true Scotsman will laugh at the ignorant lad who fastens a kilt pin on the lower *left* hand corner of the front flap or who wears a *leather* sporran with evening dress. They will laugh almost as heartily as some Englishmen do if you address wrongly the second daughter of an earl married to a commoner. The small secrets of groups, cliques and clans are really just traps to make ignorant outsiders utterly ridiculous.

But on the third and most serious level Scottish nationalism is angled against the English and is not an aggressive or a fighting brand of nationalism but melancholy and resigned. The English, of course, tricked them: instead of conquering them and imposing English kings on the Scots, the English accepted Scots kings. It was a mean but effective trick; as if the United States, instead of admitting Hawaii as the fiftieth state, had allowed Hawaii to absorb the other forty-nine.

But what can they do? They do not even hate the English – that would be some relief – but they keep talking of English perfidy and arrogance, even more than do former colonials. If the English praise them, that's even more maddening. If they say, as they do say: 'Oh the Scots are so clever, so much cleverer than we are,' that is 'damn patronising' and as I have already pointed out they are English enough to resent praise more than criticism and censure.

To remind them of the Scots who became prominent and ran this country and the Empire, to point at Mr Macmillan or Mr Macleod is no good either: these people have become southerners, their mentality is English or at best 'British'; they are émigrés; they are not exactly deserters

but they are absent without leave.

And all this gives such a melancholy undertone to Scottish nationalism. What can they do? Few of even the extreme nationalists desire separation: they are loyal subjects of the Queen (Queen Elizabeth I as far as they are concerned) and they are also sensible, practical people. Malta has a good chance of becoming independent; Scotland has not. Nairobi already has its parliament; Edinburgh may never have its.

And having come to this conclusion, I went to buy some tartan ties for myself and my son. I informed the shopkeeper that I was a Scotsman myself.

'Is that so?' he asked me with some surprise.

'Yes,' I replied. 'I spell my name differently but I pronounce it McAsh.'

He gave me a list of tartans and, to my delight, I discovered my own among them: CUNningham.

He still had his doubts.

'Is your whole family Cunningham?' he asked, frowning.

'No,' I admitted. 'My father is EUSton and my mother-in-law is MAIda Vale.'

HOW TO CRUISE

I have never been on a cruise round the Greek islands: at this thought, a short while ago, I woke up with a start in the middle of the night. Cold sweat poured down my forehead. To admit, nowadays, even to oneself, that one has never been on a Greek cruise is like admitting that one's children have no transistor radio set or that one does not care for Pinter; it is to confess that Becket bores you to tears or to recall the painful fact that you were not called as a witness at the *Lady Chatterley* trial. But luckily it is an omission that can be put right – so barely a fortnight later I found myself boarding the pleasure cruiser *Romantica* in Venice. This delightful craft – some 4,000 tons – used to be the private yacht of King Ibn Saud, the desert king who, it appears, could thus accommodate 190 guests – all of one sex if His Majesty so desired. The King is, however, getting older, I was informed, and he is only too pleased nowadays to have a smaller vessel.

The passengers were mostly English and French and all the stewards and the ship's officers were Greek. It was curious to notice that for the first few days at least, French passengers spoke English to the stewards while their English colleagues spoke French. Could it be, I wondered, that they felt the stewards understood bad French or bad English more easily than good French and good English? Or was their Odyssey into a strange tongue simply a modern sacrifice on the altars of the ancient Greek gods?

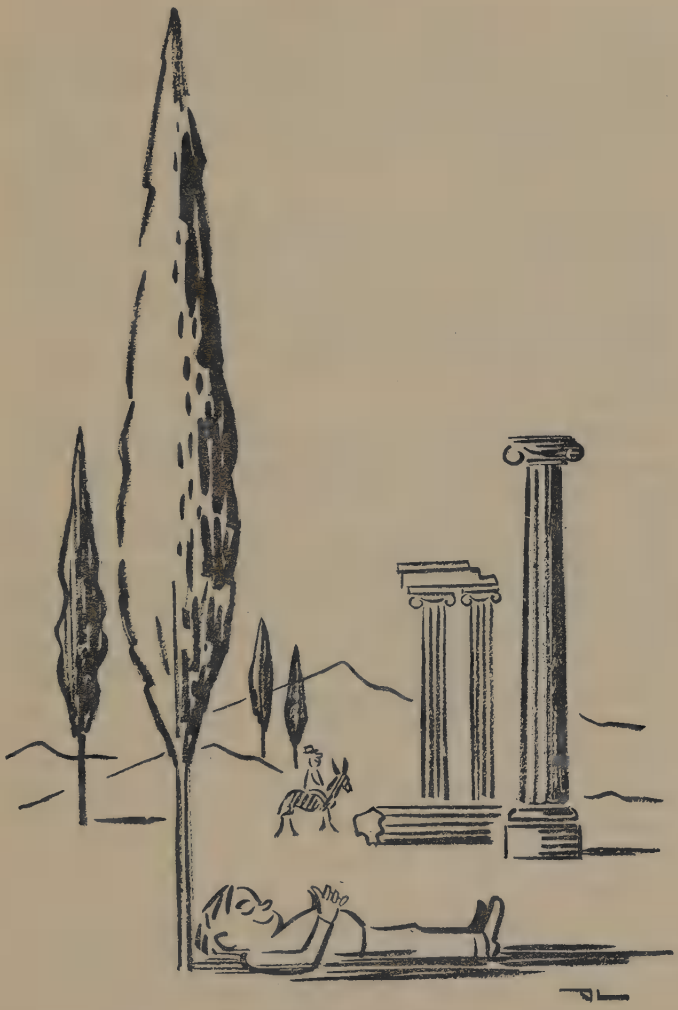
'Snobbery corrupts; absolute snobbery corrupts absolutely,' as Lord Acton ought to have said. A boat is a superb place for the snob. 'Who is to sit at the Captain's table?' This is a

question which inspires ambitious longings in many and fills those unhappy few who have any chance at all of being chosen with anxiety. The Captain's table, though certainly a distinguished place is, as a rule, a frightfully boring one. And if the Captain is into the bargain a Greek whose knowledge of English is limited to nautical words of command, the outlook becomes even grimmer. Then you must also bear a second tormenting question in mind: will you be invited to the Captain's cocktail party?

On both counts the Captain of the *Romantica* emerged with flying colours. He had all his meals (with one single exception) in the select company of his wife; and he invited *all* his passengers to his cocktail party. And that was that.

Yes, we were all called and chosen, we were all top people. And that of course, is the secret ingredient of any successful cruise. 'Cruise' – the very word is suggestive and luxuriously romantic. But you really do not cruise in any geographical waters; the Greek islands happen to be fashionable at the moment, but they play only a very minor role in the game. Like refugees who talk nostalgically of Prague and Budapest, Shanghai and Nizhni Novgorod, but who would of course never dream of returning to any of these places (what they long for is not a place but a vanished time, the twenties or the thirties when they were young) – so do you now cruise in a way of life which is not normally yours. You cruise in a millionaire, in a Hollywood way of life; you cruise in the realm of the most successful, the most acquisitive members of our affluent society.

And then you arrive at Corfu, your first stop. And here, on this luscious and faraway island in the blue Mediterranean you find people playing cricket. Watching the batsman you remember that Corfu was under British protection for fifty years and cricket, obviously, is a heritage of those days; then you look at the Greek wicket-keeper and slowly realise that,



Anaxagoras slept here

cruise or no cruise, there is no getting away from your own way of life. 'New ball!' – shouts the Umpire in Greek and you realise that, try as hard as you may, it is always the same old game with the same old ball.

International understanding between French and British passengers is difficult: more difficult, I believe, than between any other two nations. They just do not mix. We had a distinguished French writer on board and also a literary minded English housewife. On the island of Delos we were taken round by an extremely handsome young guide who looked like a Greek god: a young Apollo in blue jeans.

'I wish I had his teeth,' the English lady remarked to the French writer.

'I wish I had mine,' the distinguished author replied grumpily, and thus one of the few attempts at international understanding was nipped in the bud.

In Corfu we watched people dancing in folk costume; in Athens we watched people dancing in folk costume; diligent passengers could find many other places to watch people dancing in folk costume. Wherever we disembarked, there was a huge crowd waiting for us. They stood there and watched us, silent and, I felt, slightly bemused.

Suddenly I understood: we tourists, arriving in our yellow and purple shorts, funny straw hats, and tight shirts with wide red and blue stripes, the women with bare thighs, the men sporting Chinese coolie hats – we, too, must have seemed to be in folk costume. Only we did not dance; which was rather unfair.

We are all neo-Hellenists. It is the glory and culture of ancient Greece which we are supposed to be chasing and rediscovering. The tourist trade is booming and I had the horrid feeling that if tourism grows at its present pace, in five or six years there will not be enough ancient ruins in Greece to go round. Perhaps an enterprising British or, more likely,

American businessman will try to relieve this regrettable shortage of ancient ruins and will set about building some new ruins on Greek islands. I am sure that advertisements persuading people to 'VISIT OUR BRAND NEW ANCIENT RUINS IN GREECE' will prove irresistible for many.

But we are not doing at all badly as it is. We visit places where there is absolutely nothing to see but where, we are told, Socrates himself walked one day; we are informed in Olympia that Alexander the Great and Nero were, many centuries ago, among the competitors: although little is left of the Stadium, we can be sure that here they ran and jumped thousands of years ago.

I am as keen on ancient culture as the next man but I am more erratic than most. So I often went out for a picnic lunch with my wife and we always chose places where Euripides once had a picnic lunch; I slept in the shade, under a tree, where Anaxagoras slept in 453 B.C. And while the others rode on donkeys or admired broken Ionian columns, I always had a beer or two at a place where Aristotle, the master, would have had his beer if he were alive. Provided he had not emigrated from Greece to avoid the tourists.

A BLESSED CRISIS

A few days before I arrived in Hollywood, Kurt Jürgens threw a tremendous party. There were eighty guests, top stars, top executives, top scenario writers and top socialites – all those whose present income or ancient rank reached the required dizzy heights. And, of course, the press – whose intrusion on such occasions has been so often and so bitterly deplored – was also cordially invited. I do not know if '48,000 hybrid roses were attached to eight trees in the ballroom' or if 5,000 chrysanthemums were or were not 'dyed a bluish pink to match the icing on a 300 pound cake' – as contemporary reports assure us was often done in the olden and golden days. But I do know that in spite of the disparaging remark of one of the guests that 'the whole do couldn't have cost more than five or six thousand dollars', it was a great occasion. It was also a symbolic and significant occasion.

What the guests wore I could not describe even if I had been present. But whatever else they may have been wearing, they all wore an amused and knowing smile on their lips. They knew that such parties were out of fashion and belonged to a happier, more flamboyant and very much bygone age. But Jürgens, being a European – and a German at that – has an out-of-date and immutable picture of Hollywood. Once upon a time – he knows – Hollywood was famous for its sumptuous and ostentatious parties so, not to be outdone, he threw a sumptuous and ostentatious party. It was most impressive; it was also about fifteen years out of date.

But the party's symbolic significance lies elsewhere. By the following morning everything – and I mean everything – had gone. Not only were there no signs of the orchestra, the

caviar and champagne, that is quite natural; but gone were the butler, the maids, the valets, the chauffeurs of the household; gone was all the silver, all the precious crockery and even the tablecloths – everything safely returned to one firm or another; gone were the cigars and even the ashtrays; the palatial house was evacuated and the inventory was being carefully checked by an estate agent's clerk; and the illustrious host himself was on his way back to Germany. One hears so much of the 'crisis of Hollywood', it is an obvious association of ideas that prompts one to ask oneself the melancholy question: is it possible that Hollywood itself is not only changing fast but disappearing? Is it possible that – metaphorically – by tomorrow morning it will have gone: silver, glitter, crockery, caviar, tablecloths, cigars, ashtrays, films stars and all?

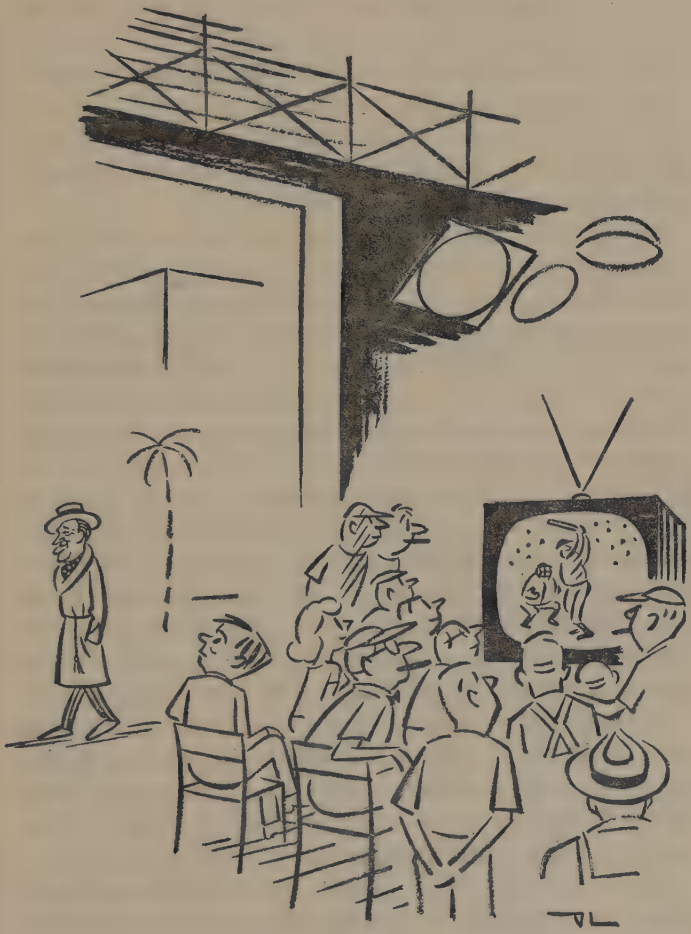
Arriving at this gloomy provincial town, this huge conglomeration of sombre suburbs which, for many years, has had the reputation of being the most glamorous spot on earth, you will notice at first nothing peculiar. Sunset Boulevard and the Brown Derby restaurant are still there; some film stars still live in pink houses; the Pacific Ocean is in its allotted place; young actresses and extras in tights and canary-yellow pullovers still congregate at Schwab's drug store. Volatile agents and middle-aged producers still repeat such age-old saws as: 'Hollywood is a warm Siberia . . .' or: 'Every star is exactly as good as his last film.' The place is still full of 'characters' (a character being a person who lacks character) and exhibitionists (exhibitionism being the urge to show ourselves to the world as we are not). Glossy magazines and silly gossip-columnists are still hard at it trying to convey the impression that all is well and Hollywood is still living in the '30s. But worried people in executive offices and thoughtful observers are convinced that all is not well in Hollywood and frequently turn their minds to the questions

posed by Mr Jürgens' party.

I set out to find the answer to one simple question: what has changed in Hollywood? But to sense the atmosphere of the place and feel at home you must, first of all, smell the air of the studios. Los Angeles is, in area, the largest city in the United States and in population the second largest, having just overtaken Chicago. People in Los Angeles are quite likely to direct you to a place by saying something like this: 'Drive six miles along Wilshire Boulevard, turn left at Robertson, turn right and go eight miles along Pico and it is just the second turning on the left. Quite near.' In this city there is only one means of communication: the automobile. (Besides, should a policeman catch you walking among the villas of Beverly Hills after sunset, he will question you. All pedestrians are suspect.) In a hired, light-blue Ford which seemed to me rakish and elegant and to everybody else a ramshackle, four-year-old tin box, I drove out to the studios of Twentieth Century Fox. Luckily the place was in my immediate neighbourhood, barely fourteen miles away. I was received by one of the publicity chiefs and taken for lunch to the inner sanctum of the vast canteen. I sat there watching a few well-known faces, a large number of heavily made-up young ladies in huge hats, fashionable in Paris in the heyday of the can-can, a few scar-faced gangsters and great numbers of electricians, stage-hands and typists, all of them, of course, outside the barrier which separated us from the common folk.

After lunch I was driven around and saw Maurice Chevalier in a bathrobe: a lonely figure, walking across the courtyard. When we returned to the same spot about ten minutes later, M. Chevalier – still in his bathrobe – was standing in the doorway. No other human being was visible on the horizon.

'This place seems pretty derelict,' I remarked.



It's O.K. for Chevalier

'It's O.K. for Chevalier to walk about,' my guide replied. 'He's a Frenchman.'

As I failed to grasp the logic of this statement, I looked enquiringly at my companion. He smiled.

'You don't follow? ... Today is, we hope, the last day of the World Series. Chevalier as a Frenchman is not interested in the ball-game. Everybody else is.'

Indeed they were. Of course, I had known of this event because it was quite impossible to spend twenty-four hours – nay, twenty-four seconds – in Los Angeles without learning that the Los Angeles (formerly Brooklyn) Dodgers were playing the Chicago White Socks in the baseball championship. This is America's Cup Final – except for the fact that it may consist of as many as seven matches, not one. I knew that people – to use an understatement – were interested in the 'ball-game', nevertheless, the picture that greeted me on entering the studio was something of a surprise. The ubiquitous Maurice Chevalier and Louis Jourdan (another Frenchman) and poor Frank Sinatra were on the stage, rehearsing a café scene with Walter Lang. (Chevalier's bathrobe had by now been exchanged for a waiter's white jacket.) A crowd of about three hundred people, presided over by Shirley MacLaine in a yellow gown, actors, actresses, extras, dancers, musicians, stage-hands, make-up men, hairdressers and all, were sitting silently in front of a huge television set in the corner (with the sound turned off) watching the ball-game with breathless excitement. One middle-aged actress was knitting but she too kept her eyes fixed on the screen. I also noticed a number of ghosts walking round the studio, slowly, with hesitating steps, gazing into the air with empty looks, rather like sleep-walkers on rooftops. These were stage-hands on duty, all carrying portable radio sets in their pockets and plugs in their ears. One of these ghosts sleep-walked up to Miss MacLaine and indicated to her with vague motions of his hand that she was

wanted on the stage. Whereupon Miss MacLaine got up and moved toward the stage, looking backwards all the way.

'You asked me what the difference was between the new Hollywood and the old,' said my companion. 'You have seen a lot of it already. Stars are not treated like sacred animals any more. A few years ago you'd never have seen the stars and the extras eating in the same canteen. You'd never have met Chevalier standing around in the courtyard. He'd have come in a Cadillac with a chauffeur, he'd have been taken to his dressing room and kept there like he was God almighty. No one could have talked to him without fixing an appointment. Appointment? . . . Audience! And look at that crowd in the studio. Shirley MacLaine – and you gotta know she's Hollywood's Number Two female star – mixing with extras and small time dancers! Oh, no!'

He spoke and then he disappeared. He went to watch the ball-game for a fleeting hour or two.

When we were reunited, we walked over to another set, *The Seven Thieves,* starring, among others, Edward G. Robinson, Rod Steiger, Eli Wallach and Michael Dante. They were about to shoot a scene in which Mr Dante, in white dinner-jacket, arrives at the ground floor by lift. The lift door opens, Dante gets out, looks at something on his left, registers alarm and walks away briskly. Rehearsals went off splendidly but when they tried shooting, the lift door would not open. While it was being mended, distances between noses and the camera were measured again with a tape measure and at last off we went once more. This time the door opened halfway and then closed again with such ferocious rapidity that Mr Dante was nearly trapped. Someone shouted nervously: 'Quiet!' – although no one had stirred. Another attempt: this time the lift-door opened but with heavy jerks. I found this very amusing but apparently no one else did. The director, Henry Hathaway, burst out: 'Fix it!

Fix the damn thing!' After five minutes' feverish activity, the door was fixed. Hathaway wanted to see if it really worked. It worked beautifully three or four times. 'Just once more.' said Hathaway. The door stuck. Hathaway was getting a shade impatient. 'Fix that damn door so that it works!' Another five minutes. Then another five. The door was tried. It worked six times: it worked a dozen times. 'Let's go ahead, at last!' said the director and indeed they would have done so but for Mr Dante who had disappeared in the meantime. He had gone to watch the ball-game. Frantic search for Dante. And so on merrily. I felt I had sensed the atmosphere I wanted. I could go on with my enquiries.

The basic trouble with Hollywood is simply this: since 1946 – which year saw the peak of popularity of the American film – cinema-going audiences have been cut by half. The various year books contain endless statistics on the decline of the film industry. They make pretty gloomy reading, no matter whether you study the number of picturegoers, or the rapidly declining number of picture-theatres or else the make-up of what the Americans call the 'recreation dollar'. These last figures, by the way, make it clear that television is by no means the only enemy of the film industry although it is the most formidable; bowling alleys, amusement arcades and miniature golf courses, too, account for a great deal of the time and much of the money of those in search of entertainment.

By now, the big film studios are all making television films – so Films and Television seem to have come to uneasy terms with each other. As this turn of events seemed always imminent, the uninitiated – like myself – might well ask: why did it not happen sooner? Films for television can be just as profitable as the average cinema-shown ones, so why did the studios put up such a stubborn fight and why did they try so

hard to strangle television? The answer is simple: the big studios owned many thousands of cinemas all over the world and TV films do not benefit these at all. It was hard for the big film companies to try to prosper as film-makers and watch, in the meantime, the withering away of the other half of their empires.

I do not propose to go into the whys and wherefores of Hollywood's crisis. It is enough to say that a grave long-term crisis is known to be on; that Hollywood is examining its future with a complete lack of self-assurance; that it awaits the coming of money-in-the-slot television (which may well prove the saviour of the film-industry) or some other miracle with growing impatience. The only question that interests us here is this: what is the new status of producer, starring actor, and writer? How are Hollywood's attitudes affected?

As there is less money pouring out of the pockets of picture-goers, one would expect that everyone would be cautious; that less money would be spent on individual productions; that all film-makers would be forced to tighten their belts; and that all sectors of the Industry would be doing worse than before. But Hollywood is not Hollywood for nothing. The actual result of the crisis is that while fewer films are being made, much more money is being spent on a few large productions than ever before; that stars make much more money than ever before in film-history; that actors are doing better and certain films bring in astronomical sums undreamt of even a few years ago. Hollywood is booming in its slump – it's enjoying its blessed crisis.

Let us have a look at the Dramatis Personae, one by one.

I ran into an old friend of mine in a restaurant and asked him how he was doing.

'Thanks – I'm ruined,' he replied. 'Totally ruined. You remember I came here during the war and played Japanese

villains. [My friend is an Austrian who happens to have a rather Oriental face.] I made a fortune out of Japanese villains. I grew rich as a Japanese villain. But I played so many Japanese villains that now they would let me play nothing else. And Japanese villains are out of fashion right now.'

'Can't you play Chinese villains instead?' I suggested helpfully.

'No, I can't play Chinese villains, or North Korean or Vietnamese villains,' he shook his head sadly. 'Foreign villains are out.'

I did not quite understand this, so he explained it:

'You know that cinema audiences are declining in the United States but – at least in proportion – they are growing abroad. Foreign markets are becoming more and more important. That's why foreign villains are dying out in American movies. Haven't you noticed it? I thought everybody had. A villain must be a white, Caucasian, American nowadays, and as I am not a white, Caucasian, American, but an Austrian Jew with Oriental cheekbones, I'm not the right sort of villain. And so I'm out of a job. And that's all there is to it.'

This, however – although my friend would hardly agree – is a minor change. The major change is that the so-called epics and grand musicals on Cinemascope and other devices cost much more to make than films used to. An average film – if there ever was such a thing – cost $700,000 in the good old days; some films today cost several millions – *Can-Can* for example, being shot in the Fox Studios while I was there is reported to have cost six million dollars. And *Cleopatra*, a few years later, has dwarfed even these sums. This is stupendous money but if such a film is a success, then the sky is the limit for its takings. Such films as *The King and I*, *South Pacific*, and *Gigi*, made fortunes; the record-holder of all is *Round the World in Eighty Days* which cost about

10 million dollars and it is estimated that in the next eight or ten years it will make a 50 or 60 million dollars profit. The result of this development is easy to see:

(1) All film studios are after these 'gigantic, colossal, epoch-making spectacles' and the small, honest, artistic films count less and less. They have to make them – they must use their employees and must feed their still existing film theatres – but it does not really matter much if they make or lose a few hundred thousand dollars on minor efforts when they are to make millions on one or two films. One major studio makes thirty films a year but only two of these really count.

(2) Some of the large studios have departed from our midst. The survivors go on and so do a few independent producers. The Independents belong to one of two classes: there are a few acknowledged artists – such as George Stevens, the creator of *Shane, Giant* and *The Diary of Anne Frank* – who are appreciated and can do more or less as they please; and then there are the gamblers who, obviously, either win or lose. If they win on a super-spectacular historic epic they become millionaires; if they lose, they can go and sell matches on Sunset Boulevard.

(3) The most significant change in this new development is that the producer – that fabulous figure who once loomed so portentously over the horizon of the Industry – is dead as the dodo. It is not long since Darryl F. Zanuck, the uncrowned head of the Twentieth Century Fox Empire, presided over luncheons and if a writer was placed on his right that meant that he had arrived. No one cares now who sits on Mr Zanuck's right or left and the place is no longer much coveted. There are no writers sweating in cubby-holes working on the twenty-fifth version of a story, trying to guess what the producer wants while he has no idea of it himself. The producer who decides on the spur of the moment that the film version of *Macbeth* should have a happy ending or

that a new gag-man should be employed on the latest screen version of *Anna Karenina,* is an extinct species. Too much money is needed for the giant films of today and it is not the erratic, temperamental and flamboyant figures of Hollywood who finance the epics and the musicals but cool, distant and stony-hearted bankers in faraway New York. No one can flatter *them* because no one knows them. Wall Street is the Provider and no one can sit on the Right Hand of Wall Street. 'Happy Ending' for Wall Street has only one meaning.

That faraway, mysterious and compelling figure, the New York Banker, looms much larger on the Hollywood horizon than has hitherto been realized. He has not only dethroned that legendary figure, the Producer, but his influence – or should we call it remote control? – is ubiquitous. The position of the stars has also changed enormously in the last decade and this change may be expressed almost exclusively in terms of Star versus (or at least: vis-à-vis) Banker.

'What is a star?' I asked one executive of a large studio. He had his answer ready: 'A star is not just any famous film-actor or actress. A star is a rare phenomenon: someone with sufficient box-office draw to make any film he or she appears in a certain success.'

'On this basis who are the Hollywood stars?' I asked.

'There are very few. About a dozen altogether. The Number One male star of Hollywood is Marlon Brando and Number One female is Marilyn Monroe. [That place, alas, has since been taken by someone else.] There is no doubt about that. The others? . . . I may leave out a name or two I ought to mention but these are the names which occur to me without much thinking: Gina Lollobrigida, Brigitte Bardot, Gregory Peck, Laurence Olivier, Sophia Loren, Shirley MacLaine, and Elizabeth Taylor.' He thought this over for

a second and then added: 'I forgot Hollywood's Number Two male star: William Holden.'

The stars – even if on reflection a few names could be added to my informant's list – are few and far between today. In 1938 there were fifty-four actors whose annual income exceeded $100,000 – and who consequently counted as peers of their profession. (The list was headed by Claudette Colbert with $426,944 per annum, the centre positions held by the Misses Loretta Young and Deanna Durbin with sums around $175,000 and the tail was brought up by Edward G. Robinson with a paltry $100,000.)

Thanks to the crisis in the film industry, the number of leading stars has – as we have seen – been reduced from fifty-four to about twelve; but the financial position of that Bright Dozen has – thanks to the New York Bankers – improved almost beyond recognition. The earnings of the 1938 stars sound rather pitiable today. Now, Marlon Brando or Elizabeth Taylor can command a million dollars *for a film* but usually they ask for more, because no star is satisfied today with a lump sum: they ask for – and get – shares in the profits.

Why must the increased earnings of stars be attributed to the Bankers? For a simple reason. The Men of Wall Street, before okay-ing a budget of several millions for a film, are both unable and unwilling to examine the treatment, the script, the dialogue, the gags, the jokes, the music, the episodes, the ending, etc – in other words all the problems which used to pre-occupy the old-fashioned producer mean nothing to him. The Banker simply says: 'You can have the money if you get (say) Elizabeth Taylor.' This new practice has, naturally enough, greatly increased the demand for stars and the Bankers know only too well that if the demand increases, the price of the article in demand increases, too.

This Remote Control is responsible for even more

thorough-going changes. It has, indeed, changed the stars' outlook, way of life and character. The era of idiotic spending and ostentatious waste is over. It is not in vogue – it is no longer admired. You cannot squander hundreds of thousands of dollars if you live in the shadow of Wall Street. (It is true that heavy taxes are also partly responsible for this change of attitude.) Today's stars do not throw tremendous parties for six hundred guests; do not purchase 5,000 bluish pink chrysanthemums, and no star drives up to the studio accompanied by his suite of secretaries and other satellites, in a fleet of six chauffeur-driven Cadillacs. Today's star employs a business manager who will collect his salary and dole him out a miserable weekly sum in cash. Should he want more for any special reason, he has to make humble application, give satisfactory reasons for wanting more of his own money, and he must fight for every penny. All frivolous expenditure is turned down with chilly disapproval; parties are kept within bounds: nothing that is not strict professional necessity is permitted and the expenses are, of course, charged up against Income Tax. The bulk of the star's earnings will go into shares and other investments. The traditional picture of Hollywood as a large number of gay, rich and happy people drinking champagne and floating in the blue waters of their own swimming pools is receding, maybe for ever; today a number of worried investors are studying the Closing Prices of the Stock Exchange before going on the set to perform a wildly passionate love-scene.

The star must also employ an agent, an accountant, a publicity man, a secretary and a lawyer. All this may cost him up to 300,000 dollars a year which must be a terrible nuisance. But no top star can afford to do without them – not because he really needs this retinue but because their existence is a symbol of success and the symbol is even more important in Hollywood than success itself. Well, I personally

am not a great party man and can easily do without bluish pink chrysanthemums in my drawing room or six Cadillacs in my garage; but I should prefer spending my money on chrysanthemums and Cadillacs to spending it on agents and publicity managers. But they have no choice.

My film-executive friend, having defined the notion of 'film-star' for me, went on to tell me that Alan Ladd owned a chain of hardware stores; Dean Martin, a number of restaurants; George Raft had a gambling casino or two; Burt Lancaster and quite a few others had their own film companies; Esther Williams promoted swimming pools, owned by, and named after, her; Dick Powell owned quite a few large television companies; Bing Crosby had oil interests as well as a gramophone record company; Victor Borge had a huge poultry farm in Connecticut and . . . Well, he would have gone on almost endlessly if I had not stopped him.

Worried shareholders are not inclined to behave in an irresponsible manner. They do not walk off the set in a huff for trivial reasons: mindful of the employees in their poultry farms and hardware stores, they realise that they must avoid setting a bad example. Besides, such behaviour might have been understood and even forgiven by the old-fashioned Producer – a man of artistic temperament himself – but would be regarded as a heinous crime by the cucumber cool and utterly un-artistic Bankers in New York.

So it is easy to see that money, shares, business profits and a board-room atmosphere have come to stay in Hollywood while glamour is on the way out. This has not happened unnoticed. There were two figures in Hollywood who stood above all rules, who were so strong and so much in demand that they were a law unto themselves: Marilyn Monroe and Marlon Brando. It was they who managed to keep up something of Hollywood's glamour, who displayed more originality and temperament than was permissible in the last few years

and who thus – unwittingly – further strengthened their position because even the Bankers of New York began to understand that Hollywood needs more glamour than Wall Street and now they insist on a little glamour. But Monroe is dead and Brando not quite what he used to be. In spite of the Bankers' order, Hollywood has grown even less glamorous.

So Hollywood is doing quite well in its grave crisis. Actors – who are not stars – on the whole, are also making much more money than ever before – television sees to that. About two-thirds of all television films are made in Hollywood and television films need the small actors, too, not only the stars. New consignments of artists keep arriving from the East. The New Yorkers all go to stay in the Hotel Monte Cito – that is a must. Lists of new arrivals are displayed in the hall and carefully scrutinized by all interested parties and if you have not been registered in the Monte Cito, you have not really reached Hollywood. Soon, however, the New Yorkers become more Californian in their habits and appearance than the natives: they wear open-necked shirts, no ties, white trousers, acquire a tan and divide their leisure between swimming and playing tennis. And before they notice where they are, they have turned into commuters. A considerable proportion of the television industry is still in New York; and Broadway, of course, is still in New York, too. So many of these people find themselves travelling the 3,000 miles between East and West coasts almost as frequently as any decent City man travels between Brighton and Fenchurch Street. I talked to one gentleman who had flown to New York and back to Los Angeles sixty-seven times in the last fourteen months, and he holds no record, by any means.

Television almost killed Hollywood: now that the two seem to have come to terms of peaceful co-existence with each other, television may save Hollywood. All the big film

studios are engaged in making television films; nearly all the stars have a finger in the television pie. Some introduce shows – doing thirty-nine introductions in one single day and snatching huge piles of money for their services – and the medium and small actors 'never had it so good' as the saying goes. God knows what would have happened to Hollywood if this television crisis had not come.

And television has its beneficial psychological effect, too. Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz may be richer than almost any of the orthodox film stars; their studios may have more stages than Twentieth Century Fox or M.G.M.; when they fly to New York – as they did while I was there, but they don't fly *together* any more – their station wagons may drive right up to the aircraft and they may be given such V.I.P. treatment as is today awarded to few or no film-stars; yet, they are the new rich and the television industry is an upstart. In other words, television has rendered an invaluable service to the film industry by giving it some patina. If you can look down upon *something,* you can bear your lot with fortitude. And indeed, films have become almost *avant-garde* compared with television: they can treat certain subjects which television would not dream of touching. Because nowadays a great many films do not really count financially – they are needed to feed the cinemas as I have explained earlier – they even dare experiment. And since in the last few years a new and glorious blow has been struck for freedom, and female posteriors can now pass the censors, films have certainly reached new artistic heights, leaving television – if I may use a most appropriate word – behind.

It was my last evening in Hollywood. I knew more about the place than before my arrival but it was only in these last few hours that I really came to understand it. I was driving along one of the famous boulevards with a newly acquired

but very likeable acquaintance when we came to a dazzling scene of splendour: a large floodlit shop, complete with neon-lights and red and yellow and blue bulbs – thousands of them; red carpet and flowers; a bunch of elegant, prosperous and obviously self-satisfied people; a few starlets, one of them cutting a purple ribbon with golden scissors. I thought maybe the President of a South American state was being officially received but I was wrong: a new Supermarket was being opened.

'That's nothing,' my friend remarked wryly, 'you ought to have seen the celebrations down-town last week when a new gasoline station was opened. That was the day, my friend.'

And then I suddenly understood. Maybe after all, Hollywood is not really becoming more sober and dignified; it is simply that the world around us is becoming so unbearably Hollywoodish that Hollywood itself is forced to try a new line.

And during the same evening I learned another secret – at least a secret for me: my friend confided to me that they had struck oil under the studios of Twentieth Century Fox and subsequently the studio sold a large part of its ground at a phenomenal price. Now Paramount and M.G.M. are desperately boring – in a novel sense of the word. Well, it is all very simple; this is the obvious solution for the film-crisis: strike oil under your studios. And the arts will be safe.

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