
THE
PICK OF
PUNCH

This year's selection from *Punch* covers July 1943 to June 1944.

The wrapper design is by Enid Marx.

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With love from Jean.

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THE PICK OF 'PUNCH'

An Annual Selection

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July, 1943

THE JAM

"AS I am," I said casually, "going to do the jam to-day, you must make your own plans."

No sooner were they spoken than I regretted the words. But it was too late. There is no playing fast and loose with a thing like the jam. It is no theme for levity. That it was the elected time brooked no argument.

"All right," they said. "We won't count on you."

Obviously they, as I, had conjured up a vision of flustered peace-time cooks, of a ritual marked for days beforehand by the order of no guests to luncheon, and entailing cold meals and no toast for days afterwards, until the festival of the jam had passed.

I began wondering, as they made their plans, how in point of fact one did make jam, and whether I had better not furbish up an excuse of the fruit being unripe or the gas turned off. Anyway, if it was a failure I would hide it somewhere, and they'd only be impressed if I said that jam had to be put away in the dark and not looked at for a month, like bulbs, by which time they'd have forgotten.

As soon as they had gone I rounded up the cookery books and settled down to instruction from the giants. Boulestin and Simon lay beside me, Mrs. Beeton substantially propped my elbow; war-time pamphlets extolling egg-sugar-meat-flour- and butter-less delicacies, cuttings of Esquimo recipes from the papers, little elegant booklets by duchesses on vegetarian triumphs, and on good plain English dishes by north-country housewives, musty old volumes concerned with potpourri and sillabub, with rum punch and *pomade divine*, covered floor and table. I opened the first book at hand, and pressing it down at the page headed Jam, prepared for the worst. I took up another; and another; soon I had them all opened at "J". I fetched the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. For would you believe it, *the whole thing is perfectly easy*. It is all my eye. And to think that for years I'd been in the power of a cook who "could make jam." With what awe I had examined her handiwork, the days out I had given her, the wirelesses I had bought her.

Let me explain at once that all you do, all that the most complicated Ministerial pamphlet can offer by way of advice, is to put masses of gooseberries or something into a pan with water and sugar, and boil madly until it is jam. That's all.

I spent a dazzling afternoon.

It is a fine act of abandon to tip one's sugar ration for the year into a seething cauldron of hot fruit, delicious to stir the bubbling witches'-brew. And the crowning moment comes when you pour a stream of sweet sticky gooseberry lava molten into

jars, and hey presto! There are pounds and pounds of jam looking just like the real jam you buy in shops.

But by the time they came back I had got over the flush of triumph. "Yes," I answered wearily, "it's finished, but of course dinner here to-night will be impossible."

They never hesitated. It went without saying. After my ordeal and achievement I must be taken out and given a slap-up dinner.

I concurred. It is only loyal to guard professional secrets.

MORE ABOUT BASIC ENGLISH

I come back this day to *Basic English*, because there seem to be many people now who say, "We will have an easy tongue of which men from other countries may have knowledge with ease." Thus all men in the earth will be able to make statements in the *English* tongue and have love for *England*. There are only eight hundred and fifty words in *Basic English*, and there are no verbs but come, get, give, go, keep, let, make, put, seem, take, be, do, have, say, see, will, and send. Nor in the list which I have here do I get any word for *me*. Nor for *my*, *our*, *we*, *us*, *him*, *his*, *her*, *they*, or *them*. This makes things not easy for I. But I go forward in the simple hope of a free *Englishman* who will let no dangers stop the road. All the words in this bit of writing be *Basic English* except the words which I have put in *italics*. So, if you go on, you will see.

A man from an other country will not come to this country, when he gets use of *Basic English*, and say "I *am hungry*. I will go to a *restaurant*, *hotel*, *public house*, *inn*, *tavern*, *or refreshment room*." But he may say "I be hollow. I will go to a place where the people get food for money and I will take a meal." He may not say "*Give me beef*, *mutton*, *chicken*, *bacon*, *asparagus*, *sausages*, *rice*, *lettuce*, *beer*, *gin* and *wine*," for the men have no names for these things in this tongue. But he may say "Give I cow, sheep, fowl, pig, strange substances which are put in skins, green foods from the garden, grass, grain, potatoes, bread, and drink in bottles, cups, and buckets. Then the stomach I have will not be hollow but full."

He may then say "I will have butter, eggs, sugar and oranges, if you please." And do I not wish that he will have some?

If the man who lets the man have food makes the question "Will that be the idea of humour that you have?" the man from a far country may say in answer, "It will. So what?" and he can say "Make quick motion. I do be about to go to the pictures when I have put an end to the meal which I will have. Put a sock in it, please." When he goes to the pictures he can go by train, carriage, or cart, but he can not go by a *bus*. If he will go by a *bus* he will say "I come to take a place in the line where you send people to get a machine of the street for all. You

have put the boot which you have on the foot which I have. There be a bad pain in the toe which I have. I will give you a great push in the face if you go on as you go now. Get off this foot, you great green monkey, you." These words will give much help to the man.

It keeps strange that there are so many long words in *Basic English* and not only short words. So that the man from an other country may say "The Government of this country seems to be good. The people have much organization, expansion of industry and political control. The men here have many committees and the representatives of the nation seem to be responsible, electric, important, full of authority, beautiful, bright, chemical, fertile and tall. How happy the history! All have harmony, law, development, distribution, music, weather, insurance, mist, rain, transport, science and art. It seems sad that such men have so little experience of sun."

When he says these things many times to all the people that he makes meeting with, the man will get much love, and the Government, when it has hearing of what he says, will give to the man trousers, praise, buttons, umbrellas, office, society, attention, nuts and cigars. And there will be hope that when he gives ear to the apparatus by which men have knowledge of the news in this country he will now

"We use him, Sir, for softening-up purposes."

"CAN I HAVE THE AFTERNOON OFF, SIR? GRANDMA'S COMING HOME ON LEAVE."

have learning of the tongue and the authorities will make it simple for he.

The man who gives reading of the news at night will say "This country's machines which go by air, and have in them instruments which make a strong burst and a red fire, were out over *Germany* this day. These do much damage and destruction to military buildings and property, when the instruments come down. And here be one of the men who be sent to go by air to say to you the story. 'I take off and see much cloud for a long time, but when I come to be over the place where the flight will go the roofs of the town seem very clear. The other side send many things up at the machine I have, but I keep on and make the attack, and let down all the parcels which I have, and oh young male child, do I see much smoke, and have I the hearing of a loud noise?' "

No. I be wrong. I let the tongue take too much grip of the words I say. I make discovery of the word boy in *Basic English* after all. And I make discovery of the word girl. I make discovery of the word kiss. These things will let the man have learning of the motion pictures the words of which be in the *English* language, for I now make discovery of the word language, and the words pleasure and poison, and the words hot and rhythm, and mother, and family, and flower. It may be that the system of *Basic English* will have more use for peace, when peace comes, than for war. I make no discovery of *tactics*, nor *strategy*, nor *armour*, nor *pincers*, nor *counter-offensive* in this language.

But it be a very beautiful language. The earth will have great pleasure in *Basic English* when the war be over and the peoples of all the nations can make the sword turn to a plough and the engines of destruction give place to the ornaments of order and quiet living (it seems sad to I that there be no word for *life* in this tongue), and when a chance comes again to have pins and pockets, and sponges and shirts, and curtains, and fish, and drawers, and comfort, and soap and cheese. If you take a list of all the words of which I have made use here and let your memory get hold of them you will find that you have a rough grip of the delicate *Basic English* language. If you be a man who comes from an other country, make a start on *Basic English* now. It will do you good. But I have found it hard and I have great pleasure, in which many will take part, that this bit of writing be now come to an end.

THE GROWING MIND

"Don't be surprised if I catch one of those things they talk about in *Childhood's Problems*," said Josephine as she wiped the warden's epitaph off the front doorstep.

"If you mean an inhibition, you'd no right to read that book," said I with the nervous illogicality of the fully grown. "Because it's not for little girls."

"Well, I have read it now," she said sombrely. "And it says that you should always put pencil and paper into young hands, to give them an outcome. The trouble is you've only put a pencil into mine for the last few weeks."

It was no good talking about the paper shortage. Josephine only said, with a wild look in her eye, that the spare bedroom paper would do very well; there was plenty of room between the poppies to write a serial story, if I really objected to poetry on the doorstep.

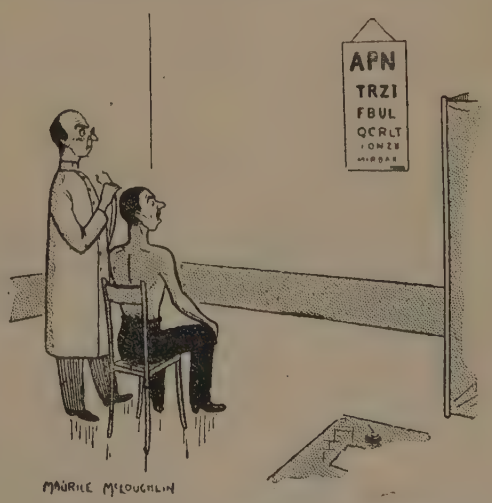
Now the quickest reply would have been to take away her pencil, but I am haunted with the thought of all the things Josephine will tell the psycho-analyst about me when she is forty-five or so. Then I remembered my diaries.

People often gave me diaries in peace-time and I never had the persistence to write up one to the bitter end. At the close of every month or so I would fill in gaps with items such as "Dance with Squiffy," which were completely untrue but would give the casual snooper the idea that I was a debonair sort of girl. So it happened that I had several completely empty ones which I handed over to Josephine.

After a peaceful interval she came to me with the beginning of a story and a dissatisfied look on her face. It read: "Once upon a time there lived a beautiful princess with January the First hair like a golden penny and slow black eyes. Many January the Second princes wished to marry her, but she was January the Third not interested."

It was a bore, but I saw her point. So I said with metallic brightness, "Why not write a real diary?" Josephine said that she could hardly write up this year in an old one, but I, thinking of the wall-paper, was inspired to suggest that she should write her whole life from the year when she was born. And this idea went down fairly well. She began: "I was born on the above date in a little wooden hut on the Thames Embankment while my gay and talented mother was singing her heart out at the Paris Opera House."

Actually it can't have been quite like



". . . M-I-R-B-A-X—PRINTED BY STOLWORTHY & SIMS, LESSER BIDDLECOMBE, HERTS."

that as I can't sing, but I didn't dare say anything. She is now covering the pages at an alarming rate. She has described in detail how she learnt to walk, talk and tie bows, and has exhausted two diaries already.

Whether I am more concerned for my bedroom wallpaper or the impression the psycho-analyst will get of me in thirty-five years' time is what I have now to decide.

SUMMER IN IRELAND

Large hay-cocks orange in the evening light,
A swallow upon swift wings sailing by,
Slow cattle in the fields beyond, all bright
With rays out of the West which on them lie.

The jackdaws chattering from their ancient homes,
Rooks going homeward too, and high in air
A screech from where a wandering heron roams,
And pigeon's voices calling everywhere.

These things are dreams; and the reality
Is not the green grass and the evening mists
Now rising round the trees, but Liberty
Weeping in Greece with chains upon her wrists,

Or lost in Poland, or an exile far
From France and Norway, sheltering by streams
In rocky hills where bands of free men are,
Waiting for victory. The rest is dreams.

IMPENDING APOLOGY

"Mr. —— has accepted the post of organist. An extension of the graveyard has become necessary a year before expected."

Diocesan Gazette.

"Land Army Sick

Pay Cut"

Daily Telegraph.

Well—wouldn't you be?

"How about bringing your wife and some grub over to dinner at our place to-morrow evening?"

H. J. TALKING

I never believe in turning down the offer of interesting employment, and when I received a post card from a very small country asking me to be part-time ambassador I willingly consented. I heard nothing more for some months until a large trunk arrived containing a uniform and a book of treaty forms. Judging by the uniform it was a very hot country indeed. Apparently horses were ridden there, as several sets of spurs and a good deal of miscellaneous harness were included, though however I tried to straighten this out I was forced to the conclusion that animals with a hump were what it was meant to be used on.

As a first step I had some cards printed and tried to leave one at the Foreign Office, but when I arrived it was just lunch-time, and as I tried to breast the stream of officials coming out nobody would accept them, some pushing them away rudely,

others muttering "I am broke," and one handing me a pamphlet on temperance as he tore past. I next posted a card, and a fortnight later received a letter to say that all communications should be on paper measuring not less than 5 inches by 8 inches.

My wide reading had made me aware that one of the duties of an ambassador was to deliver notes to the Foreign Secretary of the nation to which he was accredited, and as I had always fancied myself as a letter writer I proceeded so to do. My first note was as follows:

Cousin of England,—It has been warm lately and the spotted redwings are nesting in the old elm beside my window. Nature, indeed, is putting on its gayest dress. Have you been to any good parties lately? What do you think of the French? My Government thinks highly of your Government (without prejudice).

Yours as between friends,

Harmony Jenkins.

p.p. Santiana (*Rep.*)

To this I received no reply for some weeks and then only a request to buy a ticket for the Foreign Office Benevolent Fund.

Conscientious in the extreme is what I am, and I grew more and more determined that my clients should get their money's worth, so I admitted B. Smith into Honorary Santianan nationality and then tried to get him arrested so that I could take up the case and be active in upholding the rights of small nations. This, however, proved far from easy to do. He chucked a policeman under the chin and called him "Uncle," hoping to be taken up as drunk and disorderly, but the policeman at once insisted he was a nephew and took him home to introduce to the family; and before B. Smith could get clear he had had to eat no fewer than three plates of macaroni stuffed with split peas, this being a dish on which the family prided itself. Next, he tried picking pockets outside a police-station, but all he got were three jemmies and a centre-bit, the owners not caring to complain. As a last resort we decided he should make an inflammatory speech. I wheeled him on a barrow into the courtyard of the Houses of Parliament and there he delivered a speech that had had a very heating effect when he first delivered it at a Students' Union while he was learning science up north. It was on the subject "It is better to be beautiful than good," and he was for the motion. Unfortunately, one and all got the impression he was part of a demonstration some House of Commons committee had arranged on the teaching of English to foreigners by whispering in their ears when they were asleep, and many clustered round him congratulating him on his pronunciation and asking him to say things like "Thither the thistle thickens, doth it not?" Having failed with B. Smith, I was looking round for some other kind of duty to perform when there was a revolution and the new Government informed me that my functions would in future be performed by a multiple store where they already ran an account.

Over my bed there hangs a motto which says: "Snore if you want to; it's

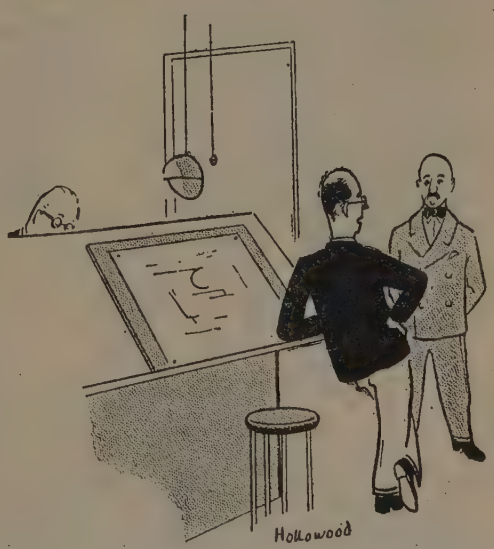
annoying, but not low," and this comforts me very much because it is the kind of thing which might so easily be. I am always very anxious to be a credit to my profession and never crook my little finger in the laboratory even when it would be helpful. One point on which I have never found an authoritative ruling is whether my wife is correct in calling me "Jenkins." It has a vaguely remote and old-fashioned air, as if she were a Scottish chieftain's wife, though in that case she would really call me by the name of my residence, which is 23A. The way she says it, however, is so menacing that I feel almost sure it cannot be *comme il faut*. B. Smith usually refers to her as "that woman" when absent and "this woman" when present, though when forced to address her directly, which rarely occurs owing to great skill and firmness on his part, he calls her Bella Donna, leaving in her mind a faint shadow of doubt.

GOING TO BUDE?

I am a bad citizen. I want to look at the sea again. It is four years now since I last had a look at it (not counting glimpses from carriage windows or through barbed wire) and I want to see if it still comes creeping up the sands with a little foam at its edges, pushing its way just that inch further than the laws of nature allow, until at last it runs out of water and has to go back for more. I want to see if it has lost the old knack of swashing round both sides of a rock at once and meeting itself round at the back with a gentle *glop*, whether it still bites your ankles a bit when you step into it, whether crabs and jellyfish live in it or only mines and spent torpedoes. I want to go and sit in it, as a matter of fact, and wonder once again why my shins are so frightfully pale.

I ought not to want to sit in the sea, I know that. I ought to want to join in the Sports Gala they've arranged for me in the Recreation Ground; a gala specially got up to stop me wanting to sit in the sea. And that's not all. There's the procession of Decorated Bicycles, with a prize of a Savings Certificate for the best entry, and they say there's going to be a dance, too, on the Saturday, with the mayor as M.C., if he's back from—if his other engagements permit, that is to say.

I should be perfectly happy not to go to the sea, if nobody went there at all. But they go there in thousands, the selfish brutes. They are there now, millions of



"At the moment we're working on designs for a bijou bomber suitable as a Savings target for the smaller rural districts."

them, wallowing in the sun, wriggling their misshapen toes about in the warm sand, chasing each other into the sea with hideous cries and stepping, I hope, on multitudes of sharp stones. And those that aren't there now are going in August, or went in June. What's the matter with them all? Don't they know that there's a war on?

And what about me? Haven't I as much right as all these E.P.T. victims to a breath of fresh air? It seems to me that patriotism can be overdone if it means being the only man on Waterloo Station without a spade and bucket.

I ask myself sometimes, as I look through my old snaps of Ilfracombe and the bathing-pool at Treyarnon and that one of King Arthur's Castle at what's-its-name, what difference will one extra in the corridor of the Cornish Riviera Express (assuming one extra in the corridor to be within the bounds of possibility)—what difference, I ask myself, will it make to the total annual coal consumption of Great Britain.

"WELL, WHAT ARE YOU STARING AT—HAVEN'T YOU EVER SEEN A MAN IN A TOP HAT BEFORE?"

I get no answer to this question, for I do not know the figure for coal consumption in locomotives per hundredweight of load drawn. But I do feel that if that is all there is to it, I could square my account by giving up a hot bath some time when I don't feel very inclined to have one.

The next question is, in what way or ways am I directly impeding the war effort by travelling to and from the west coast and by fathering myself on the good people of Bude or Looe for the statutory seven days?

ANSWERS:

1. I am making it impossible for some soldier or civilian of national importance, whose journey *is* really necessary, to get on the train. True. On the other hand I may equally well be making it impossible for some selfish holiday-maker to get on the train, which is a good thing. Fifty-fifty.

2. I am unnecessarily increasing the hardships that will have to be endured by those already on the train. True again. But I don't care tuppence about this.

3. If I reach my destination alive I shall immediately begin to consume food that should rightfully go to sustain the good people of Looe or Bude. Yes. But do the people of Bude never go away and eat the food belonging to other townships? I don't know.

4. I shall be spending money which, properly used, might put Surbiton top of the poll in Balloons for Britain Week. Undeniable. But I shall make the people of Looe so wealthy that they may easily beat Bude's target of £100,000 for Torpedo Tuesday. I can't see any flaw in that.

Thinking things over, it seems so easy to make out a reasonable case for going to the sea that I find it hard to understand why I don't go. I suppose the real reason is that even if everybody else in the country is behaving unpatriotically that is no excuse at all for behaving unpatriotically oneself. A subsidiary cause may be that owing to other people's selfishness every place I try seems to be booked right up.

HYDE-JEKYLL

(*Lines Addressed to His Cat*)

To-night you sit in solemn state,
Impeccable, immaculate,
A creature palpably designed
For culture at its most refined;
Fastidiously exact in taste,
Incapable of heat or haste,
A sybarite in satin vesture,
Civilization's final gesture.

Last night you crouched behind a hedge
With talons out and teeth on edge,
Every barbarian urge astir,
A steel-and-rubber murderer.
Gone the sleek ball of *savoir-faire;*
A stark assassin loitered there
Hunting his victim, grim and gory,
The primitive in all his glory.

Strange creature, that with equal zest
Pursues the vilest and the best,
Impersonating night by night
Man-about-town or troglodyte,
Now roosting with the idle rich,
Now chivvying rodents in a ditch—
Strange backward brute that seeks subsistence
In such a Jekyll-Hyde existence!

But—don't we all? A chap I know—
In time of peace a fop, a beau,
A connoisseur of wines and books,
Old furniture and inglenooks—
To-day commands a tank, and he
Enjoys himself, believe you me;
A tireless tough who takes to slaughter
As cats to cream or ducks to water.

So there we are . . . You great Pretence,
You sit there stuffed with innocence,
Knowing that *I* can throw no brick—
Sic Felidæ; et Homo sic:
The more our tribes attain the heights,
The more, alas! the depth delights
And shall do till our dissolution. . . .
Get up, you fraud; I want my cushion!

BOOKS

I hope it is not giving away a vital secret to divulge that there is a distinct shortage of books in the Middle East. In our mess, for instance, there are only two, unless you count an Army Quarterly for 1939 and an illustrated guide to Torquay with pictures of men in very large bowler-hats and ladies obviously wearing at least five years' supply of coupons.

One of the books is called *Death Gets Our Rube*, and internal evidence suggests that it emanates from America, since the conversation is like the films, only more so, and there are no cars—only automobiles—except street-cars, which the Major says are buses but I think (though naturally I would not contradict an officer of Field rank) are trams.

The Major and Captain McBlow and I all started reading *Death Gets Our Rube* at about the same time, and owing to the Major and Captain McBlow taking advantage of their seniority in the most barefaced fashion, they are naturally well ahead of me, and they have a maddening habit of discussing the book at meals. Last night, for instance:

"Rather neat, wasn't it," the Major said, "the way Yellow Nell got him out of the coffin?"

"But not original," Captain McBlow replied. "I'm pretty sure the same technique was used in a book by Freeman Wills Crofts, or it may have been Agatha Christie. One of the *real* detective writers, anyway."

"I SEE YOUR POINT, MRS. OMEGA. ACTUALLY, THOUGH, I THINK YOU SHOULD HAVE COME WITH THE OS."

The Major fired up.

"I consider Bloomer Q. Sack, the author of *Death Gets Our Rube*, at least the equal of Freeman Wills Crofts or Agatha Christie," he said.

"It depends what you look for in a story," said Captain McBlow rather superciliously, because he favours the dressing-gown and microscope sort of detective who lets Scotland Yard men with stupid blue eyes do all the work for him. "If it is merely large quantities of sudden deaths that tickle your fancy, Bloomer Q. Sack is certainly on top. As far as I have got there have been twenty-three corpses, not counting the headless and limbless trunk that was found in the dog-fish tank at the New York Aquarium."

"The number increases most satisfactorily in the next chapter," said the Major, rubbing his hands ghoulishly. "Two automobiles full of rival gangsters run into one another at a level-crossing, and to make assurance doubly sure a train comes from each direction just as the crash occurs and finishes off any possible survivors. Al Frute and 'Frisco Perce are both killed."

"Confound it!" said Captain McBlow. "I had relied on Al Frute as suspect number one for the murder of Rube himself."

Naturally this preview talk takes half my enjoyment from reading the book, and all this wallowing in blood tends to make the Major and Captain McBlow

tougher than usual, so that our Orderly Room becomes quite a fierce affair. Private Mulamgoosi got five days' C.B. when he had expected a fatherly telling-off, and Lance-Corporal Gastneoada lost his stripe for merely bursting into a fit of hysterical laughter on the parade ground.

However, things will go to the other extreme soon. The Major and Captain McBlow have nearly finished *Death Gets Our Rube*, and the second book in the Mess Library is *East Lynne*, by Mrs. Henry Wood. My fellow subaltern, Lieutenant Hock, rather a strong man who used to run an army prison, has been sobbing quietly over it for several evenings, and when I inherit *Death Gets Our Rube* and the Major and Captain McBlow start on *East Lynne* I feel sure that a soft and sympathetic calm will reign in the Orderly Room.

August, 1943

IS YOUR CONVERSATION REALLY NECESSARY?

"IT'S a well-known family in the north. Of course the person who told my friend who told me didn't give their name, but it's perfectly well known. They had joints from the butcher *every* day."

"Joints?"

"Enormous joints. Beef and mutton and pork and everything else you can think of."

"I don't think I can think of anything else. I never could, even in peace-time. Except perhaps veal."

"Oh, veal cutlets were nothing to them."

"Perhaps the dogs fought for them, out of silver baskets."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing. It was just something out of Dickens."

"Oh, Dickens."

"Yes, that's all. Only Dickens."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know what he'd have said to these people. They had all this meat, and eggs and bacon for breakfast, and sausages on Sundays, and any amount of fish."

"Things like eels and jelly-fish, or what used to be fish in the old days?"

"My dear!—salmon and soles and lobsters. Their fishmonger could get them *anything*."

"But it doesn't seem fair——"

"Fair! Of course it isn't. It's perfectly dreadful. They ought to be denounced."

"But why haven't they been?"

"Well, I wasn't told, but of course it would be a very difficult thing to do. I mean, no one wants to get mixed up. Besides, they're not the only case. You'd be surprised."

"I am already."

"I heard about some people in Wales the other day. I believe it was a titled family. The person who told me had it from a friend of her own aunt's, who'd *seen* the store-cupboard. My dear! Tins upon tins, with every kind of thing. And jars of *foie gras*, and any quantity of marmalade and honey and jam, and as for biscuits—well, this friend told her aunt that if the war lasted another ten years these people *still* wouldn't have got through their supplies. Not possibly."

"But I thought hoarding was very severely punished nowadays."

UTILITY MODEL.

"Ah, yes, but, naturally, only if it is found out."

"Well, it has been found out."

"Not by the authorities. Of course they ought to be told, but that's got nothing to do with me."

"Still, I don't think it ought to be allowed to go on."

"Neither do I. Absolutely not. And there's far more of that kind of thing going on than people realize. I heard about a house in the West of England only the other day."

"From someone who's been there?"

"Well, from someone who'd had a letter from someone who was living in the village that this house is the large house of. You know what I mean."

"Perfectly."

"And besides roast chickens and roast ducks, they had perfectly unlimited butter and cream; and as for eggs, they could literally have *rolled* in them."

"Surely they wouldn't want to do that, would they?"

"Very likely they wouldn't, but the point is that there was nothing to stop them. Even the cat had four or five enormous saucers of milk every day, and odds and ends of fish, and cutlets, and of course cats' meat, which as you know is perfectly unobtainable."

"Still, I don't suppose the cat bothered much about that, if it had fish and cutlets."

"Well, it seems to me dreadful. I mean, really *wrong*."

"I quite agree. Couldn't someone speak to the police?"

"One would have thought so. Naturally, *I* don't even know the names and addresses."

"You couldn't find out what any of them are, I suppose?"

"Well, I'm not very anxious to get involved with any of it. Besides, I don't know—— Why do you *want* the names and addresses, anyway?"

"I was just wondering if any of them would consider taking a paying guest, that's all."

THE PROTECTOR OF FOOLS

An Englishman may have several wives too, but only one at a time because of our magnanimous law."—*Schoolboy's Essay.*

IDA'S

What was not long ago nothing but a huge expanse of heather and gorse studded by gnarled clumps of trees, and where only the cry of the peewit was heard, there a rash of war factories has broken out. The place is slap up-to-date, everybody's needs having been attended to except the travelling representative's. I came out of Nuts and Bolts Incorporated about 12.40 p.m., just in time to see the back of the two-hourly bus wind slowly o'er the lea. During the morning my appetite had been edged by the odour of asphalt, blast-furnace dust, and the emanation from some firm presumably distilling essence of cabbage water. I looked round hopelessly until a bent figure came along the road and told me of Ida's. Judging from my informant's idiom and appearance he was the last of the charcoal-burners, and he said that the place used to be a pull-up for lorry-drivers.

I was hungry enough to try it. It was a rough shack, lit by a few top windows of thick glass which admitted an interior daylight the colour of war bread. I saw that the serve-yourself scheme operated. This was nothing out of the ordinary. The idea has caught on these days among the most opulent caterers, some of those rooms are so furnished with rails and spars that you imagine sometimes you are at a sheep-dog trial. I took my place at the end of a small queue. A middle-aged woman functioned at the serving counter in a pink wrapper and slewed pince-nez. It was Ida. She proved to be a woman with a penchant for endearments.

"Pie or soss, luv?" she inquired.

I elected for sausages. Clutching a laden plate, the necessary cutlery and my umbrella, I looked round for a space at one of the scrubbed wooden tables. I perceived one and, having safely deposited my load, searched for somewhere to hang my hat and raincoat; eventually discerning that a long nail adopting protective colouring had been provided. I squeezed in among a number of boiler scrapers who looked as if they had had a fierce morning. Scarcely had I seated myself before the one next to me—a huge man not unlike the foil to Charles Chaplin in some of his earlier films—mentioned that "he'd swing for Ellaby yet." None the less he kindly passed me the salt-basin. As we

"WAIT TILL 'E SEES YER—YOU WON'T 'ARF COP IT FOR MISSIN' PARADES."

dined I could not resist wondering why the scrapers had scorned a modern canteen to come out to such a place as Ida's. I could only conclude that previously they had been used to dining in the boilers and were accustoming themselves gradually to the full light of the canteen.

Presently I descried the only other man beside myself not clad in overalls. He was a bookish-looking gentleman in the queue. He was obviously embarrassed as he slowly shuffled forward, and the reason for this became manifest when his turn arrived, for he did not require a meal but had entered to ask his way. I suspected that he had entered the queue tentatively and then been too weak to disengage himself. In a directional sense at least he had my sympathy, the area was difficult for a stranger. At the same time I rather expected—and I think *he* rather expected—that it would be conveyed to him that Ida's at its peak period was more for dispensing meals than for functioning as an "Ask Me" kiosk. I was wrong. The whole company commenced putting him right. Ida began it when she heightened the gentleman's discomfiture by going faintly Mexican.

"What's that, chico?" she queried aloud.

The gentleman blushed and shyly repeated his question. Ida stopped the entire proceedings as she slipped under the counter and, gripping the gentleman's elbow, vociferated his question to the assembly. There was a charged pause as dozens of minds assimilated the data, resolved it, and then struggled as ferociously to be first with the findings as players at the game of Snap. Ida stood with her hand still cupping the inquirer's elbow, weighing and analysing the advice. At last a decision was reached and she led the gentleman to the door and set him on

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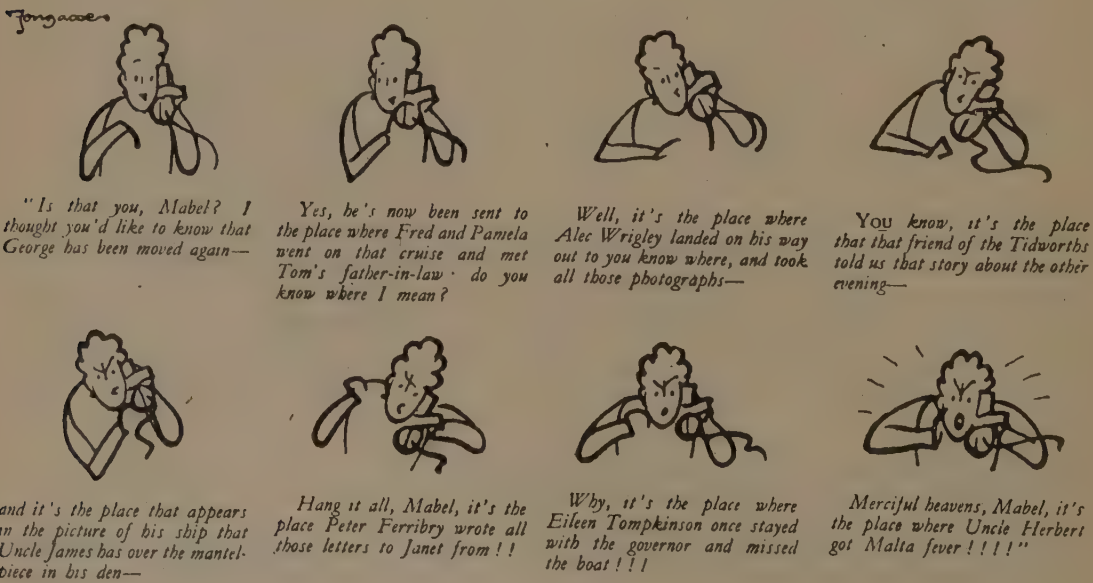


the right path personally. Meanwhile steam from the pans behind the counter rose to the rafters, and those patrons at the tail of the queue looked as impatient for food as a burrowing of moles.

I studied Ida. A faint smile touched the corners of her mouth as she worked. She had the enviable gift of being wholly absorbed in what she was doing at any particular moment. Whether poniarding the exact weight of sausage or sluicing gravy over a war-time meat pie, the same love was in her eyes as must have distinguished the old mediæval craftsmen. She operated the cash register as detachedly as she sloshed an intruding wasp. There was an occasion when a scraggy cook came from between the wings and asked her opinion about a course to appear on the tea menu, and Ida stopped everything to put her fingers to her chin as she helped the woman to ponder on how much egg they must de-dehydrate. More people jammed into the place, but they failed to disturb her equability. I rose to depart and soon was in trouble, trying to put on my raincoat in a paucity of room. Ida was helpful to the last.

"I should wait till I got outside, ducks," she called, "you'll 'ave more room."

THE ENGLISHMAN

Eighty-eight were his years . . .
  But so calmly their passage had run on
You would not have guessed it, and niver afore, it appears,
  Had he been up in Lunnon.

And this thing especially warmed me
  So simple he seemed and so sane
He had had his first ride, he informed me,
  That day in a train.

Some City (not ours) in his head
  Cloud-cuckoo-land fashioned of vapours
He had formed from the nine o'clock news, or had read
  About it in one of the papers.

Not the Abbey, the Tower, nor the Zoo,
  No time and no place of assembly
Had lured him ere this to confront Waterloo;
  He had not been to Wembley.

Far off he had followed his labours
  From summer to winter in peace

Unvexed by new wars and his neighbours
And the county police.

His life had brought sorrows and joys
Much wisdom and little dissension
Two sexagenarian boys
A wife and a pension.

Great tidings had left him unworried
He had felt not the call of the sea
He remembered when Gladstone was buried
And the Queen's Jubilee.

His horses at plough-time had heard him,
He had heeded the cry of the plover,
But seldom the sirens had stirred him
Or planes passing over.

The harvest, the tending of fruit
His features had moulded,
He was wearing his very best suit
Not often unfolded.

But now our street traffic confused him,
Our offices nobly appointed,
Some trouble or other bemused him,
He seemed disappointed.

He had come up—this man of great patience
To all, I should say, an example—
To look at they there devastations;
* * * * *
I showed him the Temple.

HENS AND THE R.A.F.

Last night the R.A.F. Mess, Prangmere, once again went into committee, the first to be held for some considerable period. On this occasion the subject was hens.

Squadron-Leader Undercart opened the discussion by remarking he'd heard he was being posted to another Station and was wondering what to do about his hens.

Pilot-Officer Airscrew said what hens. Squadron-Leader Undercart said the hens he had at the back of his house, he didn't want to leave them to the next tenant, particularly the speckled one that laid so well, his wife was much attached to her.

Flying-Officer Talespin said was she going with him. Squadron-Leader Undercart said that's what he was wondering about. Flying-Officer Flaps said he supposed it depended on accommodation at the other end. Squadron-Leader Undercart said as long as she had a place to scratch she'd be happy all day.

Flight-Lieutenant Lyne-Shute here rose to his feet and registered an impassioned objection to Squadron-Leader Undercart having referred to his wife's habits in such an outspoken manner. Was chivalry so dead that . . .

Squadron-Leader Undercart replied tersely he wasn't speaking of his wife, but of his speckled hen, and Lyne-Shute was a clot. Flight-Lieutenant Lyne-Shute said he apologized . . . had he for a moment . . . never would he . . . why, stap him, he apologized again, would Undercart join him in a noggin of beer.

Squadron-Leader Undercart said he didn't mind if he did, and Flight-Lieutenant Lyne-Shute said quickly, anyone else, too late, boys, waiter, two beers.

"I've smoothed over the quarrel, Eddie—the boys will fight each other after all."

Pilot-Officer Prune said suddenly he'd been thinking this hen business over (derisive laughter, cries of "What with?" etc.), and he thought that if Squadron-Leader Undercart was going to wangle an aircraft to fly over to his new Station . . . Squadron-Leader Undercart, indicating Group-Captain Boost in conference with Wing-Commander Blower at the far end of the mess, said *psstt*, yes, he was, but Groupy didn't know it yet. Continuing in lower tones, Pilot-Officer Prune said in that case why didn't Undercart fly the hens over with him.

Pilot-Officer Nosedyve said wizard, Pilot-Officer Rudder said good show, and Flying-Officer Talespin said he (Prune) had certainly got something there. Flight-Lieutenant Lyne-Shute said it was good enough to have another beer on, let him see, wasn't it Undercart's turn, waiter, the Squadron-Leader wants you.

Flying-Officer Flaps said he could hardly wait to see the day; would Undercart carry them loose in the 'plane, because if so it'd be the funniest aircrew any pilot had. Pilot-Officer Prune said he could just see the speckled hen as "Tailend

Charlie," giving warning clucks down the inter-com. if an Me. were sighted, like the hens that saved the Capitol . . . Pilot-Officer Airscrew said clot, it was geese. Pilot-Officer Prune said blow him down so it was. Pilot-Officer Airscrew said it was a wonder he (Prune) hadn't said they'd saved the Plaza and made a job of it. Pilot-Officer Prune expressed disagreement, and Wing-Commander Blower said not to make such a ruddy row over there.

Flying-Officer Talespin said Undercart would have to be careful lest any of his hens got out of the aircraft and started flying solo; to have an Anson flying wing-tip to wing-tip with a Rhode Island Red at fifteen hundred feet would look undignified and not in keeping with Air Force traditions either.

Pilot-Officer Rudder said he had a brilliant idea. Flight-Lieutenant Lyne-Shute said that if his (Rudder's) idea was to offer him (Lyne-Shute) half a can, he (Lyne-Shute) agreed as to its brilliancy. Pilot-Officer Rudder said didn't Lyne-Shute ever think of anything but beer. Flight-Lieutenant Lyne-Shute said very rarely, waiter, a beer. Pilot-Officer Rudder said here was his idea, why didn't Undercart fly his hens over as a Squadron instead of as passengers, dammit, they had plenty of flying hours behind them, hadn't they.

Pilot-Officer Nosedyve said wizard, he could just see Squadron-Leader Undercart taking off and setting course for his new Station with a squadron of hens formating on him. Flying-Officer Flaps said he wondered whether they were sufficiently hot on formation flying, he understood hens didn't practise it much, preferring to taxi about the airfield with occasional bursts of engine, say, when they saw another hen with a worm at the far end of the runway; with so little experience, if they tried to fly in "tight vic" formation there'd be a hell of a lot of collisions.

Pilot-Officer Airscrew said who was talking about "tight vic," over friendly territory they'd fly in line astern and if challenged would be expected to lower their undercarriages and fire the colour of the day. Flight-Lieutenant Lyne-Shute said he'd give a barrel of beer to see that, no, on second thoughts only half a barrel, beer was too precious.

Pilot-Officer Nosedyve said they ought really to fly in fighter formation in case of hostile hawks; instead of Blue Section and so on, one would have Speckled Section, Light Sussex Section . . .

Pilot-Officer Prune said why this assumption that they were fighter hens, far more likely they were bombers; if that speckled hen were such a good layer as Squadron-Leader Undercart cracked her up to be she'd probably be unable to restrain herself from parking a cookie en route, and if having an egg dropped on you from two thousand feet wasn't being bombed, what was, no, bombers certainly.

Group-Captain Boost here came over and said, oh, by the way, Undercart was not being posted to another Station after all. This naturally closed the discussion.

Flight-Lieutenant Lyne-Shute said all the talk had made him thirsty; waiter, a beer.

ONE DOWN!

WASHING UP

"I will."
"No, I will."
"No, let me."
"No, let me."
"No, everyone, honestly. I will."
"You did last time."
"I like it, honestly."
"*Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath, And after many a summer dies the swan.* I knew I knew."
"You've got a crumb in your hair."
"Is there another cloth anywhere?"
"*Alas! for this grey shadow, once a man.*"
"There's a lot in between."
"Look, you do the putting away."
"Has the crumb gone now?"
"No. There. No, there."

". . . ACCORDING TO HIS CLOTH"?
(*After "The Tailor" in the National Gallery*)

"I have been giving close . . . attention to the question of what number of clothing coupons could safely be issued . . . in order to match the prospective supplies."
Mr. Dalton.

"Oo, you are a cad. You've bagged all the spoons."
"You're supposed to with spoons."
"I do think it's a shame when he's only here for such a short time."
"What about the rest of us?"
"Where did I put my cigarette?"
"I wonder who invented that first you do the spoons and then the china?"
"All superstition, if you ask me."
"I know I put it somewhere."
"I don't think you had one."
"I *know* I did. I remember *putting* it somewhere."
"Darling, you are a pet the way you *polish* the glasses."
"Well, what should I do? Drop them on the floor and jump on them?"
"I say, that was sarcastic."
"I do think it's a shame when he's only here for such a short time."
"This cheese plate has got a sort of smear on it."

"I haven't done it yet, stupid."

"At least I don't *remember* putting it down anywhere. That's what's so funny. I can't have swallowed it."

"I didn't mean you *shouldn't* polish them, darling, I only meant you were a pet the way you *did*."

"Just listen. '"*No*," *mused Sir Henry reflectively*, "*there had been so little time, you see, for such things. Julia*——" *his voice quavered, and stopped.*'"

"And about time too."

"Oh, look. It's in the sink. All soggy."

"Poor man. I expect he had iron-grey hair."

"Not so far. Wait. He's got a humorous half-twist to his mouth."

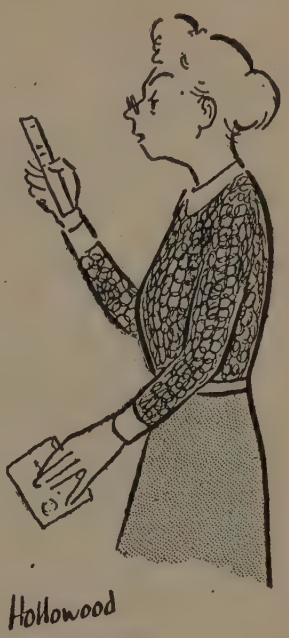
"Honey, the glasses are fairly silting up."

"All *right*. Wait. And an expanse of white shirt-front."

"Living in a little world of his own."

"It's pre-war. I kept that page for a cardigan pattern."

"The snag about this bit is that you pick up the newly washedest plate each time, and therefore the least drained. There ought to be a way."



"HE JUST SAYS 'SICILY IS NOTHING TO WRITE HOME ABOUT.'"

"*Here at the quiet limit of the world.*"

"How would it be if—no, I suppose not. I wonder who invented that you balance the plates against a cup?"

"Superstition."

"If Sir Henry had had a humorous whole twist to his mouth I suppose it would be in a knot."

"*Me only cruel immortality Consumes.*"

"Listen. '*This attractive nosegay is made of bright scraps of left-over silk.*' All *right*. I don't know where they go, even."

"On that shelf, on the left."

"Let me do the cup. I've been waiting for ages."

"That must be nearly all that needs drying except the knives."

"There's a cup-and-saucer here."

"I think it would be much kinder if you did everything before you did the plates you put in the plate-rack."

"*Me only cruel immortality Consumes: I wither slowly in thine arms.* Then *here at* and so on."

"Yes. Then we wouldn't be hanging around waiting."

"You always do knives last."

"There's a pie-dish here."

"And all the saucepans."

"You do them after the knives."

"When I took my spectacles to be mended the man said the frame would have to be pale blue."

"There's a war on."

"I'm not complaining. I just thought it was interesting."

"The number of things you wash up after things."

"I know. The process rises to a mad crescendo."

"It *is* interesting, precious. It's fascinating. I can hardly wait to see them."

"You are a pet, darling. Actually I took them back and I've stuck them up with sticking-plaster while I think if I really want pale blue."

"There's a little jug thing here."

"Next time it will be mauve."

"Actually we've got a Second Subaltern who does wear mauve framed glasses. Oh, dear, I should look like her."

"By the time you do get to the knives the cloths are so wet they only make them wetter."

"She's got sort of mauve hair, though."

" '*Down the old oak staircase, one hand on the shining balustrade, stepped Cherry, wide-eyed, clad in amber gossamer.*' "

"I bet Sir Henry or whoever it was caught his breath."

"It would be Nigel if it was. It's continued on page 67, anyway."

"Thank heaven."

"Tithonus. He lived for ever as a punishment. That was why him only cruel immortality consumed."

"*Now* the saucepans."

"I wish I was clad in amber gossamer."

"There's a pudding-basin under the draining-board. Why, look, and some spoons . . ."

CAIRO LEAVE

It suddenly occurred to Lieutenant Sympson that it was a long time since he had had any leave.

"Nearly a year," he said, "and then it was not much good. Seven days' embarkation leave spent mostly in getting inoculated and assembling laundry and boots. I think I'll apply to Major Fibbing for fourteen days' leave in Cairo."

Major Fibbing did not hesitate.

"Certainly, Sympson," he said at once. "I blench to think how we shall manage to carry on the Company in your absence, but your health is of paramount importance, and you have been looking a bit weary and under the weather lately."

"I've forgotten the title, but I left my clothing coupons in it."

So Sympson went to Cairo with his baggage, and at the Accommodation bureau at the station he approached a very charming A.T.S. girl on the subject of a nice room.

"I don't want much," he said breezily. "I'm used to roughing it. Just a small single room with a bathroom attached. Nothing fancy."

"You can't have a room to yourself," said the A.T.S. girl. "All the hotels in Cairo have put two or even three beds in their single rooms, so you'll have to share with another officer."

"That won't do at all," said Sympson firmly. "I need seclusion. I need to get away from other people, especially fellow-officers. I assure you, my dear girl, that you have no idea how extremely tired one gets of other officers. Are you *quite* sure you can't find me a single room that I can have to myself? Expense, within reason, is no object."

The A.T.S. girl said that she thought it was quite impossible, but he might

"I've called on behalf of His Majesty's Government."

try the Pension Polygon in Sharia Pompey Pasha, and the Hotel International in the Sharia Mlefu, and about ten other addresses which she wrote down for him on a piece of paper. So Sympson called a taxi, and after spending two hours rushing round from address to address, at a cost of one pound fifty piastres for the taxi, he managed to secure a single room at quite a pleasant hotel not far from the river. The hotel had not been on the list given him at the station, but had been recommended by one of the other hotels.

He unpacked all his luggage, and hung things up in the wardrobe, and threw a lot of stuff in one corner for the laundry, and a lot of stuff in another corner for the dry cleaners, and put his shaving tackle and his toothbrush and his nail-file and a little machine for sharpening razor-blades on the glass shelf over the wash-basin, and then, exhausted by the effort, went out to have a drink.

He poked his head into a lot of bars without liking the look of them enough to go inside, and he had wandered quite a long distance before he discovered that he had forgotten the way back to his hotel, and also the name of it. So he got his list out of his pocket again and called another taxi and went round to all the hotels on the list to try to find out which of them had recommended him to the hotel he had fixed up with in the end, and where it was.

This took a long time and a lot of piastres and yielded no result whatever. Darkness came and Sympson came to the conclusion that the clerk who had recommended the hotel to him must have gone off duty. So, determined to resume his quest in the morning, he picked an hotel at random and asked if they could let him have a room for the night.

"Not a room to yourself," they said. "You will have to share. But it's with a very nice officer indeed. A man of great charm. In the Pioneer Corps."

And when he was shown up to the room the first thing he saw were the two piles of clothes he had thrown into the corners, and his patent blade-sharpener and other accessories on the little glass shelf.

He says that if they try to put a third man in the room he will protest. Two are quite enough.

TAKING BY STORM

Alpin and I would visit oftener were it not for our clumsiness. We find the proportions of a drawing-room confining and are for ever fetching up against walls and overlooking furniture. Our hosts may be reconciled to thunderous army boots on their floors, to catching ornaments and righting stools, but what when we start back off the dog's foot on to theirs, or hurl them to the settee with a too-liberal gesture?

We are invited out, say, to a Sunday evening. We crash the gate to with a push and bang the knocker with a touch. Then we're in on them, battle-dress, boots an' all, and the lady of the house is blanching in our grip. "*Do* come this way," she urges, and we pound into the room. In no time I have strewn the floor with sheet-music and Alpin has wrecked the cactus. "Not at all," they say to our ardent apologies. "Not at all," becomes their refrain for the evening. The hardy ones say it with sweetness to the end. The more easily daunted show signs of strain.

The heaviest chairs are allocated to us. We sit down and throw one leg over the other to show we're at home. I raise an occasional-table from the floor: Alpin drags up a rug on a loose heel-plate. "Not at all." We plunge into conversation, rather over-hearty, about our baggy battle-dress and the soldier's life.

"I expect you find it cramping at times."

"We do indeed," says Alpin, in difficulties with his cushion. "Restrictions, you know, bounds and, of course, your rifle. There's always that, ha! ha!"

"Shall I take it from you?" inquires the hostess solicitously.

"Eh? Oh—er—thanks." Alpin has the cushion in his

arms and looks surprised to see it. "As I was saying, food, you know, and then there's always training."

We are both painfully aware of the inconsequence always incident to settling in. I have a go on the civilian side.

"How are your coupons holding out?" I inquire jocularly. "Pretty tight, aren't they?"

"Pretty tight," says my host.

"Like my socks," I run on, "when they come from the army laundry. Look at these!"

And I boot the raffia stool into the fire-screen.

"I think we'd better have the sandwiches, Molly," says the hostess tactfully, and out goes the daughter. She comes back with a laden tea-trolley, the sight of which is enough to bring an apprehensive tightening to our muscles, so fruitfully does it enlarge out scope for sabotage. Put it down to anxiety, put it down to barrack-room habits, put it down to misplaced civilian confidence, but in less time that it takes to write we have them scurrying for floor-cloths, swapping recipes for stains in frocks and apologizing for leaving the sandwich plate on the table—"So awkward."

"Not at all," we say.

Alpin is trying not to take a sandwich at a bite. I'm trying not to drain my cup at a gulp. "There's rather an interesting exhibition," Alpin begins hopefully, "at the Malberg Galleries. Some of Henry Moore's work. You know, the man who did the studies in the tube shelters."

"Yes?" says our hostess with polite eagerness.

"There's something very individual about his style," resumes Alpin, hitching up his slacks. "Those chalk drawings, for instance, they . . ." Then he catches sight of two inches of bare leg above his sock and, as with Mr. T. S. Eliot remarking his expression in the glass, his self-possession gutters. "Well, there they are, I mean," he ends.

"Yes," murmurs our hostess thoughtfully, as if he had made a point, "so they are."

"Is that plate in your way?" the daughter asks me.

"Not at all," I say, both hands fettered with china. "Quite handy, really." I place it nonchalantly on the chair-arm. Next moment she flings forward to save the cup and after some desperate jugglery succeeds.

"I—er had it under control," I explain casually, leaning back and catapulting the plate down the crack between arm and seat. There is nothing I can say.

So the evening goes on. Sometimes we get the measure of the place and learn to move without damage. Sometimes they change the venue and we have to make a tactical study of yet another room.

"I consider furniture," Alpin confides to me, "as just so many negotiable obstacles."

"Query negotiable," I whisper, mechanically upsetting a work-box.

"You don't mind my knitting?" asks our hostess.

"Not a bit," responds Alpin urbanely, "knit away." He swerves past a standard lamp and throws himself into a chair. She looks a little thoughtful, then: "It is so careless of me," she says, "but I believe you're sitting on it." . . . I wonder how long it takes them to clear up the blast after we're gone. "May we come again?" we ask. Our hostess's lips twitch. "Do," she says. "Any time."

I know she has just checked a genuine "Not at all."

September, 1943

FIRE PARTY

IT was a great and memorable gathering on the yellowed lawn. As far as the eye could see, or so I fancied, stretched the immense concourse of fire-fighters, not only from our own hundred and fifty flats but from all the huge buildings round about us. How many squads I know not. We call them squads, but when I think of the writhing tentacles of so many uncoiled lengths of stirrup-pump hose I often feel that squids would be an apter word. It was one of our Grand Practice Nights.

We were met to put out a conflagration artificially kindled in a ruinous house a quarter of a mile away. Old and middle-aged men and women, beautiful girls, and apparently children swelled the mighty host. We could have put out, I fancied, the burning fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar himself.

Presently came the rumour "The fire has started," and the whole army, with its pumps and buckets, poured out into the street, some stepping briskly, some weighed down with years and infirmity, in boiler suits, in siren suits, in old coats and flannel bags.

On the way I met a Home Guard whom I knew. I was carrying an axe.

"What on earth are you doing?" he said.

"Saving my country," I cried. "I know you haven't got weapons like this in the Home Guard but you'll work up to them in time."

We proceeded. As we drew near to the appointed place a cracker was heard to explode.

"Crouch, men, crouch!" I commanded my squad. Three of them in fact were women. One, a man, was very stout indeed.

"I can't crouch," he said.

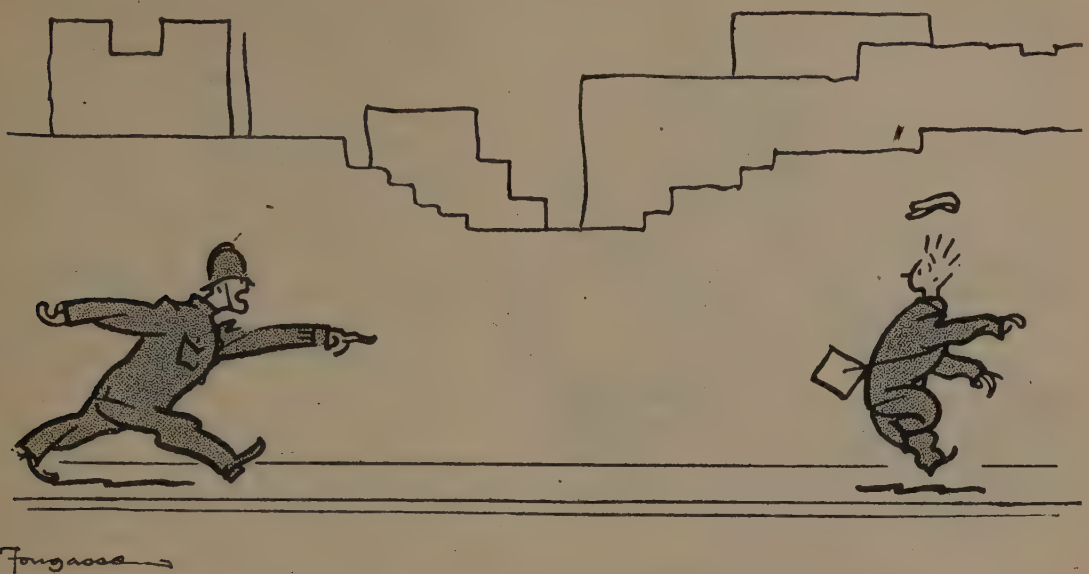
"Then you're killed," I pointed out.

"Can I go back home if I'm killed?"

"Not likely. Your soul goes marching on. And it goes on carrying its stirrup-pump, what's more." For I noticed that the coward had put it down.

My allotted task was to take my squad down a passage and deal with the crisis from a garden in the rear of the street. Several gardens, it seemed, had been knocked into one. Vegetables were growing in them. There were sheds and garages beyond.

I had a bright idea. "No need to look for a tap," I said. "Here is a water-butt. Plunge your buckets in that, my hearties, and let us get to work with a will."



"HERE, YOU—WHAT'S THAT YOU'VE GOT IN THAT BOX?!!!"

They plunged them in. There was a loud cry and a man came running out of a shed.

"You no take my water," he cried. "I cultivator." I said "We are fighting a fire, my good man." "I cultivator," he repeated. "I wish my rain-water for my herbs."

Clearly the matter lay between the Home Secretary, the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for Food. There was no time to appoint an inter-departmental Committee.

"Put his water back," I said, "and find the nearest tap."

They did so. The man retreated to his shed.

"Now up the steps to yonder balcony," I cried. Tripping over the Virginia creepers, entwining ourselves with convolvulus, we ascended. The French window was half-open, but shuttered to the sill. With a blow of my axe and a loud shout I broke the shutter.

"Number One forward! Numbers Two and Three to man the bucket and the pump!"

Number One took a hitch in the hose, lay down, and squirted.

A scream issued from inside the room. Out of the shed the cultivator came running again.

"You squirt my vife!" he shouted. "She in bed!"

I never met so unreasonable a man. Niggard of his rain-water, occupying an apparently derelict house, he had a wife in bed at 20.00 hours on an August evening

"I WANT TO CHANGE MY BUTCHER."

in the middle of a great war. But an error had clearly been made.

"It's the wrong house! Proceed to the next!"

We climbed down, went through a broken wall and up through more creepers to another balcony. There was no doubt this time. A fire of brushwood was plainly visible, burning brightly on an open hearth.

"Beware of the smoke, Number One! Crawl on your belly!"

There was another open window on the far side of the room, and another balcony. A man came in by it, rushed across the room and seized my foremost bucket.

"Just what I wanted," he said.

Number Two hung on firmly to the handle.

I said, "You can't have our bucket. Go away." There was a struggle. The bucket was upset. I brandished my axe in a threatening way. The man fled.

Another bucket was brought forward. Number One crawled into the room. "Water on! Mind the smoke!"

There was hardly any smoke, but he rubbed his face on the floor.

"All shout together, 'Are you all right, Number One?' "

All shouted together.

"All right, damn you," he replied.

He put out the fire.

"Water off!" I said.

Just then an umpire came in by the door.

"You've done everything wrong," he said crossly. "The squad at the other window ought to have tackled the fire first, been overmastered by fumes and dragged out lifeless by rescuers, and then you were to be called in. Now you've gone and spoilt it all."

I took out my automatic lighter. "I am sorry," I said. "Shall I light the fire again?"

"You can't now. The floor's too wet."

So it was. Number One and I looked like sweeps. We retired disconsolately. When we had got downstairs, another cracker exploded.

"They're all killed now except us," I explained. "Stand by to drag their lifeless bodies downstairs."

But it seemed I was wrong again.

"All squads but Eight and Nine to form a bucket-chain," came the cry.

We ambled round from the back of the houses, and joined the jostling mob in the front shrubberies. Bucket after bucket filled to the brim went smartly from hand to hand. Shouts of "Where is that water?" came from a window high up amongst the trees.

"What are they doing with it all?" I said. "It should be streaming out of the windows by now."

"Drinking it, I dare say," said the man on my right. He seemed to be the sort of man who would say a thing like that. "But we aren't getting any empty buckets back again."

I climbed on to a derelict wall. I perceived at once what was the trouble. So vast was the crowd, so confusing the tangle of vegetation, that the buckets were indeed forming an endless chain. Instead of reaching the scene of the fire, they had been diverted and were coming back perpetually without being emptied at all. A link had failed in the organization.

I reported the matter and it was rectified. The chain renewed its efforts, and in a few minutes the house became one of the wettest in London.

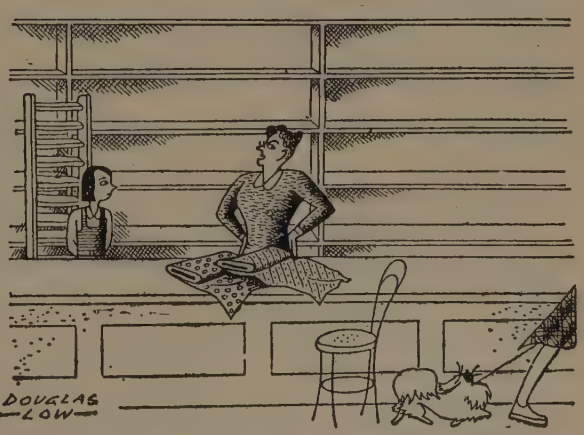
A halt was called. The multitude assembled round the portico of the dark and dripping edifice, stood in the shadow of the trees and huddled far out into the street beyond, where it mingled with the wretched loafers and idlers who had come to watch and jeer. We were thanked heartily, told that owing to our errors we were all long since dead, but with more practice would do better and become alive again. We were told that we were all tiny cogs in a vast machine stretching right up from the humblest bucket-bearer (we blushed) away through the National Fire Service to Mr. Herbert Morrison and even beyond.

"And now," concluded the lecturer, "I want you to give three hearty cheers to the men who gave up their time to come here and build the fires and set them alight for us to practise on."

"Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!" we cried.

The parade was over. I found that I was without my axe. I went round again to the gardens at the back and saw the cultivator. He had my axe in his hand. He also held an Airedale terrier on a lead.

"You come near, I set my dog bite you," he shouted.



". . . MAKES US HAUL DOWN THE ENTIRE STOCK, AND THEN BUYS NOTHING."

"Very well. I shall report the matter through the proper channels to the Prime Minister when he returns from Quebec."

He gave me back my axe. I trotted briskly away and joined my companions.

But how different, I thought, from the puny efforts we used to make, we amateurs, to put out the fires of 1940 and 1941!

KEEP YOUR UNCLES AT HOME

"I should, very much indeed," I said—"I'd no idea you had a billiards room in the house."

"Every amenity," said my wife's Uncle Clarence. "Come on upstairs." He paused on the bottom step and yelled "Fred!"

My wife's Uncle Fred, coming out of the garden carrying a luxuriant weed as tall as himself, said gravely, "Game of pills, is it?"

"Game of pills," affirmed Uncle Clarence, goutily beginning the ascent.

My first thought on entering the billiards room was that it was a little crowded; there would have been more space if the billiards table had been taken out. I wondered, in fact, how anybody had got the billiards table in.

"Clear the decks for action," said Uncle Fred.

Uncle Clarence was already struggling to remove a gigantic needlework frame, as complicated as a loom; it had a half-worked sampler embedded in the middle of its struts.

"Let me, Uncle."

"It goes in the bathroom," said Uncle Clarence, surrendering the task without hesitation—"and the pottery goes in the bedroom next door." The reference was to three huge blue-and-white pitchers which stood on the billiards table itself.

"What about the garden chairs?" I asked a little later.

"Out of the window," said Uncle Fred. "We may want them this afternoon, anyway."

I hung the chairs out of the window over the lawn, as low as I could reach, and dropped them one after another.

"Now then!" said Uncle Clarence, taking a cue from the top of a wardrobe.

"Right," said Uncle Fred. He fell suddenly to his knees beside the arm-chair in the corner and began scrabbling about underneath it. "Lift the chair a bit, boy." I did this, and he dragged out a battered attaché case.

Uncle Clarence tore the patchwork quilt from the table. Uncle Fred inverted the attaché case over the faded green cloth, and the table was suddenly filled with the multi-coloured balls. They rolled about undecidedly for a second or two, then ran gently to the bottom end, where they jockeyed for position against the blackened cushion.

"WHERE'S THE SWITCH FOR THAT LIGHT?"

Casually I took up a near-blue and rolled it briskly towards a top pocket; although it lost speed sadly it managed to climb over the lip of the pocket and fall loudly to the floor; then it rumbled its way back over the linoleum where I fielded it deftly.

The game was Russian Pool. Every man for himself. I was courteously invited to "take first poke." I took a cue from the top of the wardrobe. It could not have been more than a yard long.

"Not that, boy," said Uncle Fred, who was chalking his own cue on the ceiling —"that's for trick furniture-shots. There's a longer one up there. It's warped, but it's longer."

"Thanks," I said, and addressed the ball.

"*Wait!*"

"*Steady on!*"

My wife's uncles had cried out simultaneously. The window behind me, it seemed, had to be opened before any play could take place at this end of the table.

I took my shot, miscueing badly. I am accustomed to using a tipped cue. I noticed that the ball struck the cushion with an unfamiliar booming sound, and did not come away more than half an inch. I was to get used to this presently, for the balls were soon to be distributed round the cushions as if magnetically attracted, making the table look like an educational model illustrating the proper way to park army vehicles in a field.

Uncle Clarence followed, bringing off a neat cannon—a sharp jab stroke played from a sitting position on the oak chest by the fireplace. He had to take down a picture of barges iced up during the great frost in order to do this. I noticed that the wall behind the picture was scarred and pitted. "I am going to make a big score," said Uncle Clarence, surveying the table through half-closed eyes. "Ah, well," he said, and made his way round to the wardrobe, moving edgewise. Opening both wardrobe doors he began to hand out several suits, coats and umbrellas; these Uncle Fred took in a matter-of-fact way and threw into the arm-chair. Uncle Clarence then disappeared backwards into the wardrobe and, after a pause filled with hollow thumpings, neatly potted the yellow. He sighed happily as he re-entered the room and received the contents of the wardrobe back again. He closed and locked the doors.

"I am going to make a large break," he announced climbing on to the oak chest, his cue almost vertical. But he miscued. The ball ran up the table, hesitated, stopped, rolled backwards an inch or two on to the cushion.

"I don't like it," said Uncle Fred, and stood gnashing his teeth ruminantly. "I don't like it at all; not at all; not a little bit."

He glanced shrewdly from the white ball to the bookcase. Feeling behind him for his cue, he grasped the luxuriant weed, which he had brought up with him, weighed it for a moment, decided against it and took up the yardstick cue. "Nothing on the table at all," he said. "Nothing."

He advanced to the bookcase, opened it and took all the bound volumes of *Home Chat* off the top shelf. He stooped, sighted, grimaced, straightened up, turned and removed the top shelf itself from the bookcase. Then he sighted again and potted the pink.

"That's all I shall make," he said, adding, "No, no—don't you bother," as I began to put the books and the shelf back. I continued, however, seeing that it would be impossible to play any more strokes standing on the chest as long as the volumes of *Home Chat* were there.

"Not a hope," said Uncle Fred, looking things over. Then he climbed into the seat of the arm-chair and played a masterly stroke. Not only did he cunningly take advantage of the incline of the table, but neatly avoided the stuffed pike which hung on the wall in that corner. It was a superb stroke. Inman would have been baffled by it. The blue ball curved impossibly into the top pocket, through on to the floor and into the fender.

Uncle Fred declared that there was "nothing whatever on the table." Never-

"PLEES—YOU HAF ROOMS FOR TWO—YES?"

theless his break continued for three more shots. Two of these necessitated his disappearance into the wardrobe (which was opened, emptied, filled and locked on each occasion), and the third was taken standing *in* the oak chest. (I took out a few tennis racquets and a concertina for their own safety.) For this last he held the cue above his right shoulder to avoid the woodwork of the overmantel. But he muffed it somehow. He picked some fragment of something off the table afterwards, carried it carefully to the window and threw it out with the garden chairs.

I studied the table, weighing up the possibilities.

I could get in the wardrobe and pot the yellow; I could manage a cannon, yellow on green, by taking the yardstick cue into the bookcase; or I could pot the pink, via the arm-chair and stuffed pike. I had practically decided on this when the gong sounded.

"Lunch!" cried my wife's uncles, throwing their cues on the table and leaving the room.

"Fetch the vases, boy!" said Uncle Clarence from the landing.

"Bring back your aunt's needlework!" said Uncle Fred from the stairs.

Their voices began to fade. But as I barked my shins on the needlework frame and toiled beneath the blue-and-white pitchers, I heard Uncle Fred make some rather derogatory remarks about my skill at the game.

Uncle Clarence defended me, though, and I was grateful to him. He reminded Uncle Fred that the light at this time of the morning was apt to be confusing.

THE PHONEY PHLEET

XXIX—H.M.S. Double Face

Though, generally speaking, nice
  Lieutenant Heep estranged his pals
Because he formed the loathsome vice
  Of sucking up to Admirals.

In port he'd always stay on board
  Dressed up in case some Sea Lord came
And, if one did, he'd wear a *sword*
  And, probably, white gloves with same.

He offered wine and costly buns;
  He listened to their past careers;
And when they left he banged off guns
  And made his ratings give three cheers.

This constant toadying to nobs
Worked wonders, I regret to say;
His ship escaped all dirty jobs
And Heep got leave and extra pay.

But every Sin involves a Fall,
And so it happened in *this* case.
The Foremost Sea Lord of them all
Called on his ship, the *Double Face.*

Heep carried through his usual drill
But when he got to buns, "I wish
No part of these, they make me ill;
Bring me," the Great One said, "some fish."

This quite original request
Made Heep hinge slightly at the knees.
He took it as a subtle test
Of his ability to please.

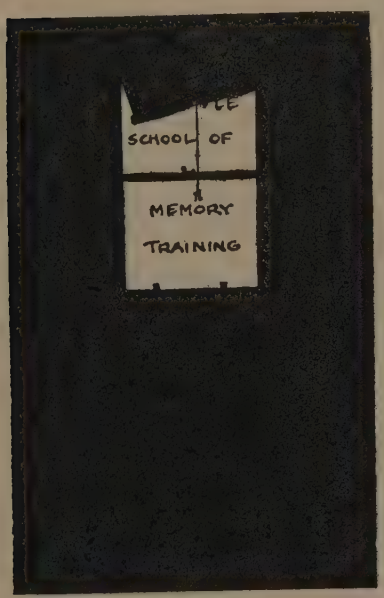
Forlorn inspection of the fridge
Revealed no foodstuff with a fin;
He staggered blindly to the bridge
And shouted "Heave a depth-charge in!"

A battleship or two went down;
The *Double Face* was blown on shore;
Some public buildings in the town
Collapsed; but really nothing more.

It seemed to me a bit severe
When, later, Heep was shot at dawn,
But there you are, the moral's clear—
Be nice to people *but don't fawn.*

THE NOVEL READERS

My friends are either Great Readers, have no time for reading, or can never find anything to read. The Great Readers tell me that they were always found curled up with a book on window-sills or in ingle-nooks from a very early age. As they grow too old to curl up they take to joining libraries and buying class "A" subscriptions in order to get books just before everybody else starts to talk about them. The trouble is that their book-lists are so long that the people who have class "B" subscriptions often catch up with them on a sensational novel while they are still dutifully reading through things like *Forward Russia*, *Backward Britain*, *Right-About Germany*, *Upside-down Roumania* and the rest.



Far worse are those who have no time for reading. They are smugly busy with what they term "a hundred and one little things," and at the end of the day they fall asleep as soon as their heads touch the pillow as though they were fitted up with some electrical interlocking device. But on long railway journeys they are revealed. They sit with glazed eyes for slow miserable hours, or wonder what the next station will be. If you offer them your paper they are not above glancing at it, but so quickly do they gently lay it on your knee again that you feel rebuked for having time and imagining that they have time, even in a railway carriage, for reading. One day I hope to catch one of these fellows glancing at a newspaper upside-down, and then the whole sticky sham will be exposed.

We who belong pathetically to the class who can never find anything to read have not received the guidance we have a right to expect. My father will willingly read anything you put into his hands and the whole world will be dead to him until he has reached the last word on the last page. For weeks afterwards he will give you little snippets of the plot or uphold the author's views against heavy odds. But after that, unless you quickly find him another story, he will take to reading labels on jam-pots and conversation will consequently narrow down and become technical.

Writers will not cater for this class, often thinking it smart to write a short book. The reviewers, who are paid by the piece, are naturally not going to object to this, and seldom mention the matter at all, but my father's first comment will be "I don't think the author can be very clever to write such a short book," or "His circle must be very limited if he can only put six active characters in the whole tale." In fact my father demands quantity in a writer, and I support him absolutely.

Along with other members of the class in need of guidance I like a novel (we call them books, but some people make the distinction) to teach me something. Mind you, the writers who take it on themselves to teach me about life in general are going rather far, because I have probably had more time to get about than they have. I mean that if the story is staged in a wine shop I must be told how much they keep in stock, where the bottles come from, what profit is made and what sort of insurance policy the seller takes out. When I have mastered all these details I am prepared to be interested in the rounded white throat of the wine-seller's daughter.

Once I read a fascinating story woven into the organization of a gigantic hotel. By the time the hero and owner had found the right wife I was quite equal to managing the largest hotel in London. Detective stories are often cunningly laid in hospitals or advertising offices, so that even if you do not spot the murderer till the final show-down on the operating-table, you can ever afterwards hold your own with the leading surgeons of our time.

I hope that I have made it quite clear that we are the backbone of the reading public and that we must have books (novels, you know) long and full of sound detail. It may be worth throwing out that there is still room for a masterpiece on the black market, the sale of sham antiques, and the canal system of Great Britain. I repair machine tools myself, and could give any ambitious young writer a wealth of detail which I suggest he builds up into a book called *The Romance of the Turning Lathe* or *The Mystery of the Missing Gear-wheel.* Frankly, it would not matter which, once the technical background was on a sound basis.

CONFESSIONS AND SUPPRESSIONS

I have certainly done some pretty shabby things in my time. Indeed, when I look back my life seems to be made up of misdemeanours, misalliances, disgraceful intrigues and miscellaneous mischief. I am going to tell the sordid story (though not all of it—I have no wish to hurt those of my former associates who are still alive) because it is typical of an era. Thousands of men in my age-group have records as black as mine. To describe the conditions which fostered our hatred of society; to probe deeper and unmask the men in high places who were responsible for these conditions—these are the tasks I have set myself in making these revelations.

As a schoolboy I suffered dreadfully from low marks in algebra. One day I made a nought into a ten by placing a stroke before it. In next to no time the whole school had adopted the stratagem and marks became universally good. In the end the masters evolved the idea of placing their marks as near to the left-hand edge of the paper as possible, thus making alterations exceedingly difficult. Later they improved on the idea by writing the marks (in words) after the numerals—but by this time I was an old boy so the change did not affect me.

Another thing I did as a schoolboy was to sell flags every year for the National Yacht Club's sinking fund. I made many of the flags myself, marking them "N.Y.C.," which stood (in an emergency) for "Next Year's Christmas." I never used the official collecting box, preferring my own money-box neatly labelled.

I once tore the frontispiece (a portrait of the author) from the *Collected Plays of G. B. Shaw*, a book belonging to the Scunthorpe Public Library, and wrote across it: "To Wilfred with affectionate memories—from George Shaw." I kept it in my pocket-book for many years.

When Britain went off the gold standard I became a rabid Conservative. At the conclusion of an open-air meeting during the general election campaign of 1935 I asked the Socialist candidate for his autograph. Next day the Conservative press published a facsimile of a document which read as follows:

If I am elected I shall certainly feather my nest at the ratepayer's expense.

I shall immediately introduce a private bill to get Castlefold's industries transferred to Nuneaton. I shall make it my business to see that all licensed premises are closed by 7.30 each evening, except on Saturdays and Sundays, when they will be closed all day.

(Signed) J. W. Broadribbs,
Socialist Candidate for Castlefold.

Afterwards I felt rather guilty about my share in the defeat of Socialism.

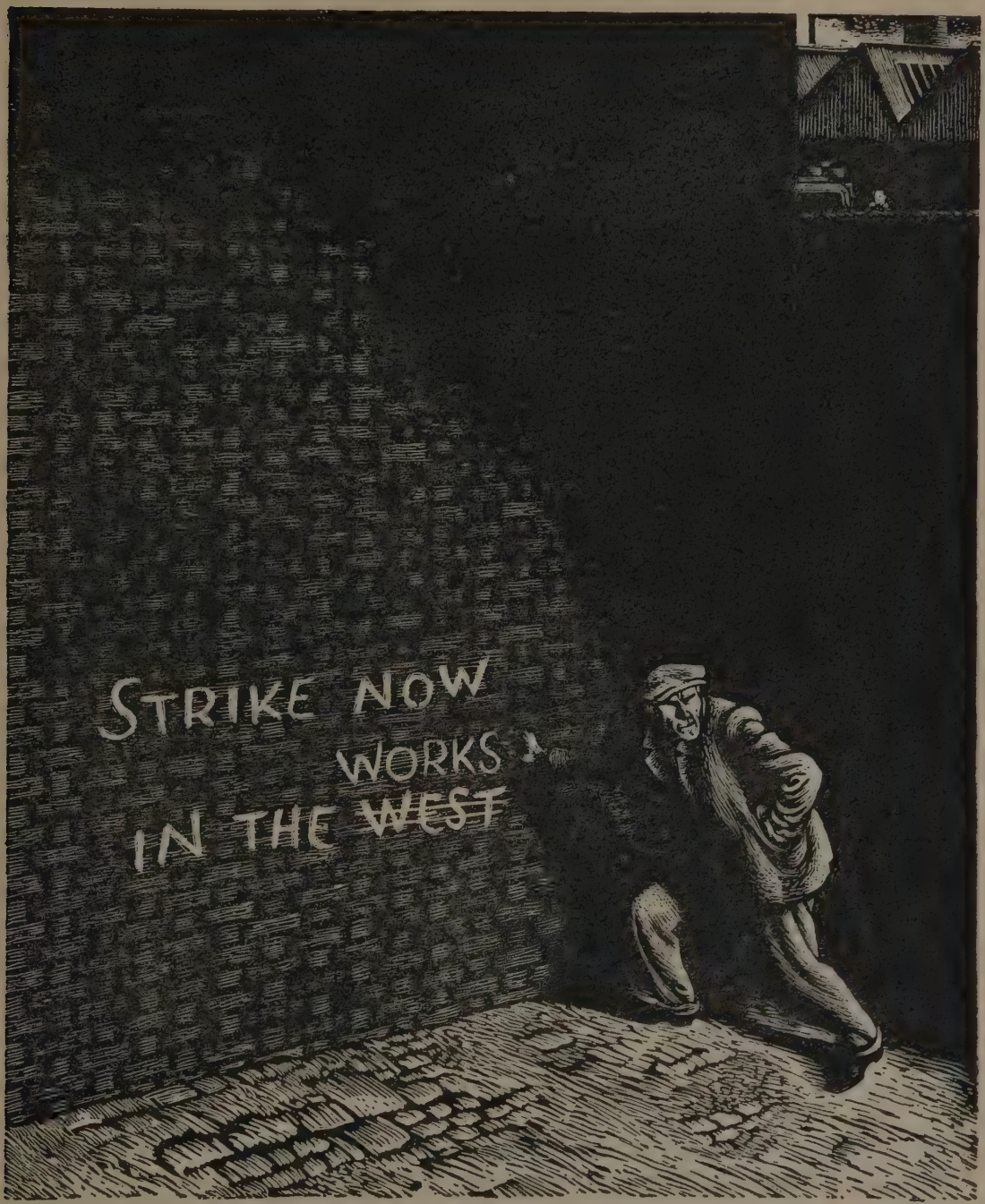
When I was a young man I fell madly in love with an American girl of noble birth and good breeding. We met in Cheltenham at the Second Annual Convention of the Junior Communist League. We exchanged addresses and because I was ashamed of 273A Baxter's Alley I gave mine as Farleigh Hall, Nr. Oldham. Immediately on my return to Lancashire I informed the post-office of my change of address to Baxter's Alley and asked that all letters addressed to me at Farleigh Hall be redirected. After six months I persuaded my ageing mother to allow me to rename our rude tenement. The postman and the neighbours were very bitter about Fosdyke Court but my correspondence with Sophie became more and more intimate. Then, without warning, the blow fell. She wrote a brief note in which she severed all relations "with one whose worldly fortunes are hopelessly inconsistent with his professed equalitarian ideals." That was about the time of the Wall Street crash.

BENEVOLENT THOUGHT

"Tell me, dear, would you speak of the Misses Dodge, or the Miss Dodges?"

"Actually, Miss Littlemug, I suppose we ought to say the Misses Dodge, but of course what we *do* say is Miss Dodge and her sister. Or else Miss Dodge and the asthmatic Miss Dodge. Or even just the *other* Miss Dodge."

"Good heavens, dear, I don't wish to be rude, but you're not allowing me to



SABOTAGE

get a word in edgeways! And my question was purely academic. I have the type of mind that positively enjoys probing into the abstract, I believe. But in point of fact I only wanted to speak of the asthmatic Miss Dodge. You know what bad nights she has? It has suddenly occurred to me that she might be helped through them. Tell me, have you any brocade, or velvet, or even chintz?"

"I'm afraid I haven't, unless you count the curtains and chair-covers, and I couldn't possibly spare them. Besides . . ."

"I know precisely what you're going to say, but *don't say it*. You'll regret it bitterly if you do. After all, it would involve very little sacrifice on the parts of any of us."

"But the coupons, Miss Littlemug! All those things need coupons, and most of us haven't got any."

"Dear, coupons play no part in this whatever."

"You aren't thinking of the Black Market, are you, Miss Littlemug? Because nowadays . . ."

"I can only say that, after all these years, you know me very little if you can suggest that I should defy the law or help the enemies of my country. No, dear, I'm not in the least angry, I'm only hurt, and it was the purest accident that my hand brushed all those books on the floor. I am *not* given to violence, any more than to treachery, and I must ask you not to bring these accusations against me, and not to attempt to pick up the books, either. I *prefer* them on the floor."

"I'm terribly sorry . . ."

"Why, dear? If you like to think of one of your oldest friends and nearest neighbours as a Fifth Columnist of the most despicable kind, pray do so. I only hope you may find satisfaction in it. And perhaps, in all these very painful circumstances, we had better drop the whole subject of the patchwork quilt."

"The patchwork quilt?"

"Naturally, dear. What else did you suppose I was talking about? It would be a complete change from perpetual knitting and reading books about the Russian women fighting in the snow, and collecting the pieces would be an interest to all of us, and she could work away quietly at it when she can't sleep."

"Does Miss Dodge like doing patchwork?"

"That, dear, I am not in a position to tell you. But I propose to collect a number of pieces, and the old pattern that I found when I was turning out the letters that my dear father wrote to his eldest sister when he was in Afghanistan, and take the whole thing over to 'Olde Wisconsin' as soon as possible."

"Olde Wisconsin?"

"Since we heard that American troops were coming, dear. It was Miss Plum's idea to change the name. She thought it would make them feel at home, and convey more than 'Ye Olde Bunne Pantry.' I suggested 'Ye Transatlantic Cookie Parlour' myself, but for some reason that didn't appeal to them."

"Better to call it 'Ye Patchwork Quilt,' perhaps."

"They say they're looking for the Colorado beetle."

"Dear, I can't honestly say that I find that in the least amusing. I've spent a very great deal of time and trouble on the question of pieces, and I don't care to hear the whole thing turned into ridicule. In church itself, I'm sorry to say, I caught myself on Sunday wondering if Mrs. Battlegate couldn't very well spare a few inches of crimson velvet from that bag of hers. And I distinctly saw how easily a piece could be taken from behind the collar of your Aunt Emma's purple satin without its showing in the least.

"I hope Aunt Emma will see it too."

"She may, dear, if I put it to her in the right light. I'm giving up the train of my grandmother's grey *moiré*. I shall probably never wear a long train again, and the moth has been in it once already, owing to the fur edging."

"Well, I think I could find some pieces."

"I *know* you could, dear. I've been thinking it over most carefully. There's

that orange house-coat of yours, which certainly has a turn-in, unless I'm completely mistaken, and it would not be difficult to unpick the blue velvet ribbon from your black hat—plain black is really far more useful and goes with everything—and didn't you once tell me that your husband had a quilted satin dressing-gown? I think, dear, we'd better make a list. It's what I've done for most people."

"I see. And have they found it a help?"

"Ah well, dear, I haven't been round yet. But the lists are all ready, and I'm deliberately taking with me a *very* sharp pair of scissors."

MY WAR SCRAP-BOOK

I missed some good things at the beginning, of course. The covers were to have been made from cardboard taken from one of the German tanks that people continually collided with before the war, but I never happened to meet anyone who had kept a piece. Then the first page was to have been occupied by the R.A.F. leaflet dropped in the opening raid of the war, but here again my rather narrow circle of acquaintances failed to provide the material, and so did the M.o.I., though it was eager to help.

Other items of historical importance also eluded me in tantalizing fashion. I missed by five minutes the little adhesive ticket from the last banana sold in England, and though I actually obtained the silver paper from the last tangerine, it was so badly trampled that I had to abandon it; and a "pleasure motoring" petrol-coupon that was to have had a place of honour was eventually surrendered to a garage-hand somewhere in Somerset so that my car could give out on Exmoor.

Still, I have a most interesting collection, which has considerable documentary value. It begins with a newspaper of Monday, September 4, 1939, a very thick newspaper that is now a little yellow at the edges. I was offered a large sum for this by a film studio, but refused to part with it. It appeared that a scenario writer had thought of a new and forceful situation. Everything was to be going comparatively well with everyone in the picture until, suddenly, three thick letters were to spring menacingly on the screen—WAR!! After that, newsprint roaring through the presses, headlines of papers thrown rapidly one on top of the other, and newsboys, with bundles of papers under their right arms and placards grasped in their left hands, were to be flashed in quick succession before the audience. Obviously for this novel idea the studio needed a very large supply of papers printed on 3rd and 4th September 1939, and it had learned that I was one of the few people who had kept a copy. However, I resisted the temptation of the large sum offered, and I believe the studio is now experimenting in printing new copies from old models, which raises questions of morality that I do not care to go into here.

Next comes a Government leaflet, "What To Do In Case Of Air Raids." This I put in the scrap-book later on when I found I did not need to refer to it in practice.

The leaflet is followed by a series of cuttings about the phoney war that followed hard on the opening of hostilities, and then come the menus from some contemporary dinners that I no longer care to examine in detail. I remember, however, that we had indignant speeches at some of those dinners about the phoneyness of the war, and wanted it placed on a proper footing, and, whether it was our influence or not, this was presently done.

A couple of pages further on is a souvenir of a pleasant meeting I had with a soldier on the railway platform at Salisbury—a piece of paper in which he had carried half a litre of cognac. He had wrapped up the bottle to conceal it from the Custom authorities, of whom he had felt so apprehensive when making the crossing in a lighter that he had wanted to turn back. However, he had told them on landing that it was a new kind of bomb invented in Finland, and they had let him pass through the barrier quickly.

". . . NEXT YOU TAKE TWO TRIANGULAR BANDAGES, FOLD THEM ON THE CROSS, HEM THE SEAMS, ALLOW ENOUGH MATERIAL FOR A BOX PLEAT AT THE BACK, PUT IN A COUPLE OF DARTS, PRESS ON THE WRONG SIDE, AND YOU HAVE A MARVELLOUS BLOUSE—AND NO COUPONS."

Occupying most of the next sheet is a target-card of regulation pattern that I took from the range after winning our L.D.V. trophy in 1940. I keep it because it has a real flavour of active service. The marks of the projectiles show how good the grouping was—and, indeed, the score was remarkable, considering that the pull on the left side of my weapon was greater than the pull on the right that day, owing, possibly, to the damp affecting the stretching-power of the two pieces unequally.

The small and jagged fragment of paper on page 12 might puzzle many people, but I have added a footnote that it is a piece from a letter received by my junior partner's wife, informing her that there was a place for her as washer-up in the canteen of a linoleum factory in Wigan. I picked this scrap from the floor shortly after she

left. The junior partner tells me everyone has grown to love her there, and she is doing so well that she may be promoted to joint-assistant-cook soon.

Facing this on the opposite page is a five-shilling stamp-book, as sold in post offices, except that there are no stamps in it. This is preserved because it was the only volume left in the village after the Boy Scouts had come round collecting books for blitzed libraries.

To give balance, a bus ticket is glued below the stamp-book. I removed the bus ticket from a litter basket after I observed the Minister of War Transport, who alighted in front of me, dropping it in. It gave me at the time a pleasant feeling of being in the heart of things, and for a considerable period afterwards my friends came in of an evening to ask me what I thought about the war.

After this come some cuttings which say the German people are good, followed by some more which say the German people are bad. I like these very much.

Overleaf is a circular explaining how to fill up the enclosed income-tax return, and giving a general indication of how much one might be expected to have left. Then come some tickets which I am afraid I must detach, for I find it inconvenient to be without a timepiece, and would prefer to be without the wireless, which, since it has a broken valve, is out of the war in any case.

There are many other items of interest, but I am rationing space in the book now as I wish to leave plenty of room for my final entries—the covers of my clothing books, a small square of black-out material, and my identity card.

* * * * *

At this point I went to examine the book again to see if it would not be a better plan to buy a new one and thus allow a really generous space for anything that might happen, but I could not find it anywhere. My housekeeper, to whom of course I have made over the house, is a most trustworthy woman, and she says she knows nothing about it. No stranger has crossed the threshold for weeks, except her nephew, a splendid little fellow whose eagerness to help the Scouts when they came was delightful to watch, and he of course is no stranger.

I think I shall begin my new scrap-book with Billy Brown posters, and look more carefully under the beds at night.

"Alone, as if he knew the way from habit, the Prime Minister walked to the gate leading from the platform."

Daily Mail.

Épatant!

October, 1943

DEHYDRATION

The Wine-god's votaries would like to know
How far this *drying* process is to go.
"Dried eggs," they say, "dried milk and meat and veg.
May prove to be the thin end of the wedge:
Dry wines we like; but we must draw the line
At dehydration of all kinds of wine.
Sherry in sacks! Champagne like Eno's salts!
Shall we ere long store such things in our vaults?
Dry, if you will, your marmalade and jam,
Blend powders savouring of pig or lamb,
But "plumpy Bacchus" must be left alone.
Who'd care to drink a desiccated Beaune?

HOW TO GO ON LIVING IN YOUR LARGE COUNTRY HOUSE

IT is essential that post-war life under post-war conditions should start *now*, in the pre-post-war era, so as to be ready for it when it comes.

Youth must be the basis of everything.

Some of our gallant allies have understood this and have been putting it into practice for years and years. Some of our schools have some of the pamphlets published by some of our allies on some aspects of the new education, and they—and Youth—will form the basis of the Three-Day School that you are invited to attend.

Please remember to bring your own soap, towels, sheets, rations for the first evening's supper, and cretonne overalls or slacks.

The course will cover Community Cooking, House-planning—building—and decorating for post-war civic and rural areas alike, Dancing, Agriculture, Mime, Mother-(and Father-) craft, Remodelling, mending and patching of clothing, and Basic Russian.

Sleeping accommodation will consist of palliasses, and no pillows will be provided.

You are asked to remember that we are at war and that you will therefore be expected to make your own bed, assist in the gardening, the sweeping, dusting and

scrubbing, and the cooking and serving of meals for between eighty and a hundred people daily.

The Manor House is situated in the heart of unusually beautiful mountain scenery, and has been compared, both as to climate and outlook, to the Steppes of Russia. It is eight and a half miles from the station and transport cannot be provided. Students are therefore expected to walk, carrying their luggage in convenient form. (A rucksack is recommended in preference to the old-fashioned type of suitcase or trunk.)

The first session will commence at 6 a.m. on Tuesday, and in order to work through the programme it will be necessary for students to bring a three days' supply of sandwiches. These will be eaten in the garden or the great hall, according to the weather, during the midday lectures.

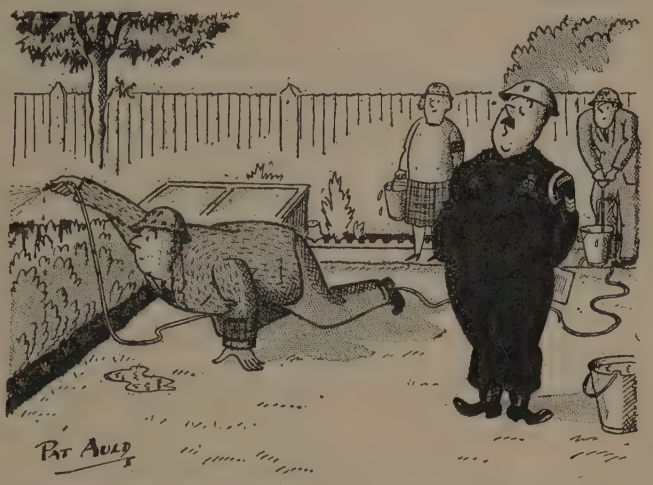
These lectures will cover a full Post-war Europe, Post-war Youth, Post-war Labour, and Post-war Life, Work and Culture. As the Manor House is equipped with over ninety windows and skylights, mostly very large ones, students are reminded that they will divide the responsibility of the black-out arrangements between them-

"Half a sovereign if you get to Waterloo before all the taxis have gone!"

selves. They will be equally responsible for any fines which may be incurred should their arrangements prove inadequate.

Please note that flat-heeled shoes will be required by all those who wish to take part in the classes for basic, educational, rhythmical, eurythmical, occupational and pastoral Mime.

(The importance of Mime in the rebuilding of the world after the war cannot be sufficiently stressed. It is hoped that the students will take part in a demonstration of Mime in the magnificent old Tudor billiards room of the Manor House at 7 a.m. on the last day of the course.)



"I THINK THE MARROWS HAVE HAD ENOUGH WATER NOW, SO WE'LL TAKE THE SECOND BOMB, WHICH, BY A LUCKY CHANCE, HAPPENS TO HAVE FALLEN SMACK AMONG THE TOMATOES . . ."

Particulars as to booking fees, cost of meals, and payment for sleeping accommodation will be sent on application. No part of all or any of these will be returnable under any conditions whatever.

Students are reminded that the post-war world will depend entirely upon Youth, and that Youth will be the moving spirit of the School. Students of all ages will therefore be expected to adopt the outlook, activities and appearance of Youth, and to embrace the entire School Schedule, even if this should necessitate being in several places at once and following a number of different lectures at one and the same time.

LUNCHER'S LAMENT

I went to lunch at ten to two,
And as I read the menu through
The waiter came and did declaim
A melancholy creed:
"*The Soup is off, the Meat is off,*
The Salmon and the Sweet is off,
There's little left indeed;
For Hash is off, Goulash is off,
And Sausages-and-Mash is off—
There's only Curried Swede."

I went to lunch at one next day,
The menu bore a fine display,
I made a choice and then a voice
Sad tidings told and true:
"*The Boiled is off, the Roast is off,*
The Grilled Sardines on Toast is off,
And Tongue and Irish Stew;
The Crab and the Cocotte is off—
There's just the cold (the hot is off)
Austerity Ragout."

I went to lunch at twelve-fifteen
And hungrily surveyed the scene,
Then in my ear with accent drear
Somebody said to me:
"*The Duckling and Green Peas is off,*
The Macaroni Cheese is off,
And Soup and Savouree;
The Pudding and the Fish is off,
And ev'ry other dish is off
But Carrot Kedgeree."

Were I to lunch at half-past ten
It's my belief that even then
With features glum the waiters come
And whisper with a sigh:
"*The Pork is off, the Sole is off,*
The Chicken Casserole is off,
The Veal and the Volaille;
The Ham is off,
The Lamb is off,
Even the Hot Boiled Spam is off . . .
There's only Woolton Pie!"

ON THE WAY HOME

It all began when the new M.O. of the people to whom Sympson's detachment is attached asked if an interpreter could be sent each morning with our sick parade.

"I'll go myself," said Lieutenant Sympson to Sergeant Pumper, who is the only other white man on the detachment.

Sergeant Pumper just grunted in a way to show that he thought Sympson's trying to pass himself off as an interpreter was a bit funny, but next morning he

managed to rake up the largest sick parade the detachment had yet had. Six in all. It was quite a grand sight to see Sympson marching off at their head, and it was not his fault that with true Kugomba courtesy they all hung back to keep pace with Corporal Kikomeko (bad foot), so that Sympson marched into the M.I. room five minutes ahead of the party.

The M.O. pushed a thermometer into his mouth and grabbed hold of his wrist.

"You'd better go into hospital," he said, "for observation. I can't be sure, but you're a bit up, and there's a lot of it about."

"A lot of what?" asked Sympson, but the M.O., who comes from Glasgow and does not waste words, was already examining Corporal Kikomeko's foot. The upshot was that half an hour later, after a rather bumpy ride in an ambulance, Sympson found himself in bed in No. 892 General Hospital talking to a man in the next bed with a bad stomach.

"When are you going?" asked the man with the bad stomach.

"Going where?" asked Sympson.

"Home, of course," said the man. "There's no need to make a secret of it. Practically everybody in this hospital is going home. Most of the Surgicals and Stomachs are going to-night. Or perhaps you're a Lung?"

"To tell you the truth," said Sympson, "I've had a bit of a headache for a couple of days, but I wasn't bothering about it. I only went to the M.O. to act as interpreter."

Presently a lot of sisters came flashing in and tied labels on to the patients, and a new-looking sister stopped in front of Sympson's bed and said "Jolly?"

"Quite," said Sympson. Actually his headache had got a lot worse and he was feeling far from jolly, but there was a fellow with two legs missing who was laughing like anything in the opposite bed, so Sympson felt that he couldn't admit to being anything less than jolly with a mere headache.

So the sister tied a label to him and he cocked his eye at it and found that he had become Lieutenant Jolley.

"Why, you *are* a Stomach," said the man in the next bed, who had also cocked his eye at the label; "so you're coming with me to-night. What's the first thing you're

"My golf remains much the same, but I think my cycling improves."

going to do when you get to England? Personally I'm going to find some real grass. Long grass with buttercups and ladysmocks in it, and I'm going to bury my face in it and then roll over and over. I'm going to drink beer till I can't stand up. Stomach or no Stomach. Half the sickness in Egypt is caused by lack of good beer. . . ."

By this time Sympson's brain was in a bit of a whirl, but he managed by a great effort to attract the attention of a doctor, who de-labelled him and diagnosed a mild attack of sand-fly. Sympson holds firmly to the belief, however, that if he had been unpatriotic enough to keep quiet he would have gone home as a Stomach and probably been bowler-hatted and pensioned off.

Instead he lay there and watched the others go. The Surgicals, the Stomachs, the Lungs. Each day as the sun set pinkly over the hot sand the ambulances pulled up outside and stretcher-bearers carried "lying" cases inside. Other patients hobbled on crutches down to the waiting train.

Sympson is not a sentimental man, but he says that it moved him strangely to see these men going home. Old grey-haired fellows with the medals of two wars on their tunics. Fresh youngsters who had been damaged in their first battle; yet all subtly the same, all tremendously cheerful, all seemingly quite unconscious that they had left a leg or half a lung in this barren foreign land. Sympson told me afterwards that he had been feeling a bit browned off to be left in Egypt, just a sort of skivvy clearing up the mess that the real fighters had left behind, but that somehow the sight of those Stomachs and Lungs and Surgicals gave him courage again.

He saw the train pull out of the station and disappear into the purple Eastern night. His last glimpse was of his late neighbour the Stomach settling down to a game of bridge with two obvious Surgicals and a young chap with laughing eyes who looked suspiciously like a Lung.

"MAN wtd. for Overwoodhill; all farm duties; wife to attend poultry and feed man occasionally."

Advt. in Aberdeen Paper.

Just enough to keep him quiet.

"WHY'S THAT LADY BLACKED OUT, DADDY?"

WOODEN SHOES

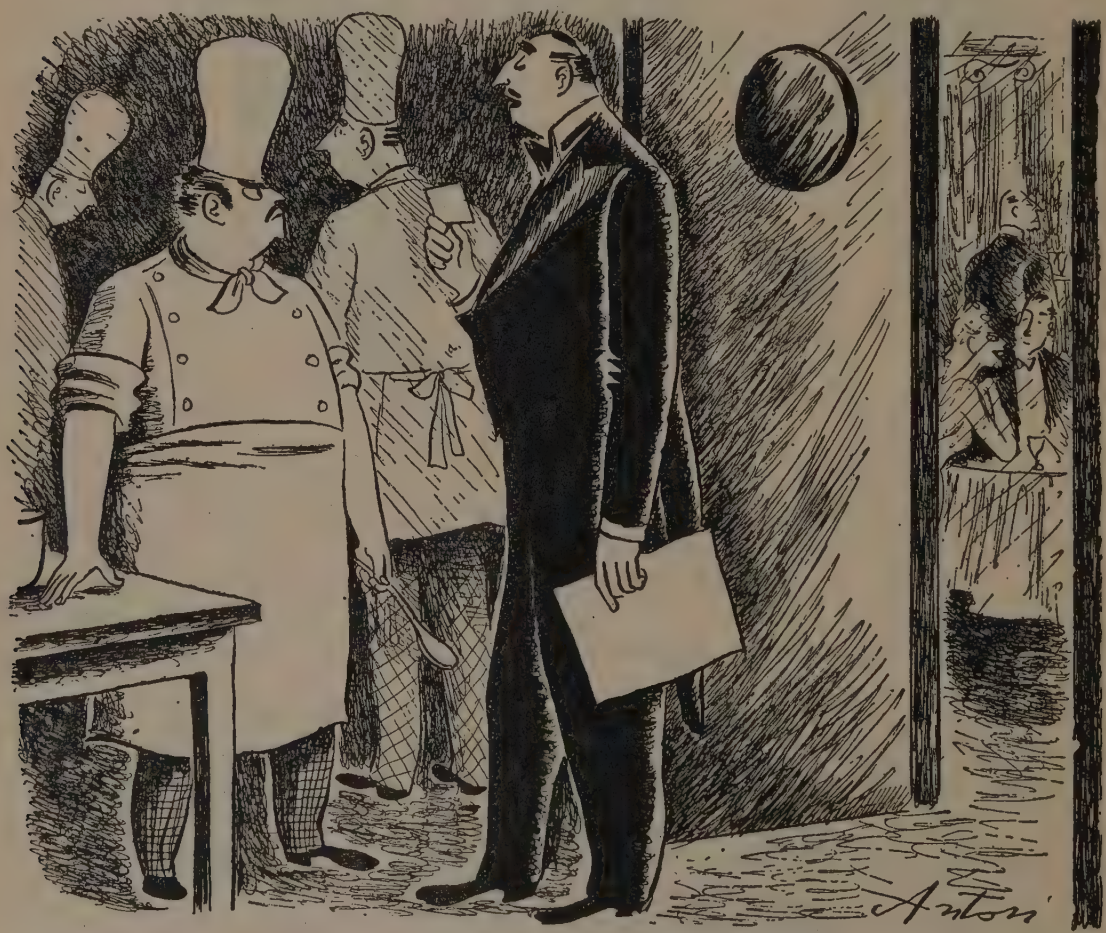
(A "LUNCH HOUR" REVERIE)

Oh some have silver sandals
  And some have shoes with holes,
In bags of rag the wandering tramp
  Ties up his weary soles,
And some have shoes like thunder
  And some have shoes like flame,
All God's children got 'em—
  But they have not all the same.

E

To shoe the honest worker
  Since Adam sinned his sin
There's scarce a beast that (when deceased)
  Renounces not his skin:
The deer, the sow, the snake, the cow
  To cobblers' lasts have gone,
And I ought to be shot for talking rot
  But I still go drooling on.

In buskins high goes Tragedy,
  In pumps the Comic Muse,
And some are said to walk about
  In co-respondent's shoes,



"A Mr. Dixon of the Ministry of Supply's Synthetic Rubber Research Department would very much appreciate your recipe for Crêpes Suzette."

The P.M.G. performs his task
With wings upon his heel,
The mounted knight went out to fight
In footwear made of steel.

Without surcease through isles of Greece
Shall march by scores and scores
Well-booted feet in hides of neat
Out of the Q.M. stores,
Amphibian tanks shall rise in ranks
Amongst the dolphin schools
Where once the foam-born Venus sprang
Not even wearing mules.

Then here's (for us) the oak-tree shoe
For which no ox has died,
"Put off," observed John Nicholson,
"Put off those shoes of pride."
In hornbeam and in wych-elm now
Shall fairy feet be shod.
I care not much if brogues are Dutch
That on mine own have trod.

In shoes of wood both stout and good
The cotton worker goes,
And any stuff that's tough enough
Can sheathe a patriot's toes,
And when the trees by slow degrees
Have worn beneath my tread—

* * * * *

I will fashion a pair of shoes to wear
From the crust of war-time bread.

ME AND THE W.A.E.C.

Apparently I have a large farm. The idea came to the local W.A.E.C. last month, so they sent me a bluff notice to plough up three acres by order and sow to wheat for the coming cropping season.

On receiving this I went out and had a look at my resources. They appeared to be a spade, a shovel, and a hoe, a hand-roller used for the late cricket pitch, a

"I'LL BE ROUND IN TEN MINUTES, SIR, IF YOU'RE REALLY *QUITE* SURE IT'S A *TAXIDERMIST* YOU WANT?"

tennis marker, and a ball of tarred string. As these did not seem to be the tools for the job I picked up a telephone and explained my feelings to Mr. A of the W.A.E.C.

Mr. A worked swiftly. He took immediate action against B, C and D—B being the machinery officer, C the foreman i/c machines and D the driver of a tractor controlled by C, who, as you will not remember, is the foreman who acts on instructions from the machinery officer.

This blue-print of the job being as satisfactory as all blue-prints are to me, it only remained for someone to put in the machines and start them up.

In a week—underline week—before I had time to arrange for Pepys (a horse) to have his meals out, a tractor, complete with a man to drive it and a plough to pull, was burying poor Pepys' food. The next day the poor animal, neighing loudly, was anxiously walking round and round a diminishing pond of pasture. (Luckily, before the end came, I was able to make arrangements for him to double up with some friends.)

One day more and I should have seen the finish, but by the post there came two forms—one green, one not. On both I had to record, under penalties for not recording (I always read the penalties first, being rather superstitious), the numbers of my sheep, my oxen, my asses, my horses, my geese, my hens, my hat . . .

There was no column for remarks, complaints or testimonials, so I wrote a letter, in duplicate, saying how pleased I was the Minister of Agriculture had started me in this business, assuring him of my best attention at all times, and sincerely hoping that when it came to threshing I'd still have some ink left.

ON THE MEND

"I'll take your gym shoes to be mended this morning, darling," I said to my son. "It won't take a moment."

I stuffed the shoes into my string bag. My shopping went well. There is a pleasant lack of responsibility in demanding "Rations, please," from one's grocer, without any further thought.

I had, as was my wont, left the conservatives to wait gloomily in the tomato-queue, and the snobs to the sole. With the dash of the pioneer I had bought a huge frilly gourd and a poisonous black radish of grotesque proportions, and in spite of having forgotten my bit of newspaper had been graciously handed a wonder of the deep, more suited to the aquarium than the frying pan, with pink wings and a horrid leer.

So I was free to think about shoes. I would go to the reputable shop I had known since the pram.

Approaching the formidable matron whose respectable face was so familiar, I laid the shoes on her desk.

"Madam," she said gently, "requires some work done? But we are taking no orders for three months. If Madam would care to go on our waiting list?"

I humbly turned and walked away over the thick carpet.

The next shop had a still more old-world character. A few strips of crocodile skin hung in the window and a pair of hunting boots stood gallantly by the door. In the entrance was a small glass case.

I could hardly believe my eyes. Archaic splendour! Edwardian glamour! For there on a bed of white velvet rested three pairs of silver shoes, high-heeled and bedizened, and three of glittering gold.

I might as well have been seeing orchids, ostrich-feather fans, the flash of a tiara, a bunch of bananas. Did we ever wear such fancy dress?

"You are always so kind," I ventured, "I wondered . . ."

"Madam . . ." a pitying shake of the head.

I saw I had gone too far. I hastened to apologize. I would go elsewhere. I would trouble them no further.

But I was becoming brazen. Into shop after shop I plunged. Large shops, small shops, smart shops, shoddy shops. Shops with one shoe in the window, shops with a thousand. I cajoled, I pleaded, I urged. I threatened, I bribed. Money, it went without saying, was no object. I offered a coupon.

"Madam would sell the shoes? They are in very good condition, the uppers hardly patched. We should be pleased . . ."

I fled, for the assistants were gathering round, the manager had taken his hands from behind his back.

HOME FRONT.

Wandering, a little dashed, down a side street, I came to a small and dingy shop. Bunches of boot-laces hung outside and a strong smell of blacking came through the open door. A very old man sat in the window hammering.

Inside was a narrow bench. A row of patient clients awaited their turn. I joined them. I ran my eye along the line of feet. A queer assortment. Strange, too, where chic now lay. The neat black shoe with the mincing heel had an out-of-date look beside the clog, stiff and clumsy below the thick trouser.

Some curious shoes had appeared lately in the streets. The last line of defence. A ski-ing boot, a bright sandal from Juan-les-Pins, a pair of embroidered moccasins. There was style, queerly, in these relics, even if fashion were dead.

I wondered if in the Napoleonic wars a pretty foot had been thrust into a Cromwellian boot.

I was startled from my reverie, for my turn had come.

No, I had brought no canvas with me. . . . If they could put on anything—a bit of sacking, a sliver of oilcloth, or I would try to bring something to-morrow.

I leaned wearily on the counter. There was a little sigh at my elbow. I could think of no comfort to offer the elegant man-about-town whose patent leather shoes had been pronounced beyond repair.

He picked sadly at the toecap and turned away.

My verdict was better than I could have hoped. In three weeks I might call and see if they were ready.

No matter that I had missed an appointment, that I had fasted since breakfast, that the fish should have long ago been in the fridge and the gourd in the pot. It had been careless to have come without a torch, for it was a singularly starless night.

As I stepped into the blackness I heard a shout behind me.

"You won't go recommending us now we have taken on your job, will you?" it said.

As if I'd be so ungrateful.

OUR ONYON

(By Smith Minor)

Before I begin this artickle, wich really begins a long time ago, and if you don't know what that means you will presently when I explane, Green and I want to send his and my good wishes to all onyon growers who are trying to do their vegertable bit, and to say good egg if they are being succesful, or jolly rotten luck old chap, or old girl, if they are not.

I know one dosen't generelly send messiges to readers, and at first Green was against it.

"Why?" I said.


OUT
KEEP TO THE RIGHT
EXIT OTHER SIDE ONLY
PULL PULL
NO SMOKING
LOOK LEFT
Pass right down the bus, please
CROSS THE ROAD BY THE SUBWAY
NO ENTRY
Good Heavens, boy, CAN'T YOU READ?!!!!!!!!!!
KEEP OFF THE GRASS

CITIZEN

"WOULD YOU MIND GIVING THIS TO THE CONDUCTOR FOR A 1½D. FARE, AND TELL HIM I WAS SORRY I DIDN'T HAVE ANYTHING SMALLER."

"Well, firstly, it waists space," he said, "and secondly, will they want it?"

I replied by saying that (1) what was a cupple of lines, and (2) some wuold want it, and I didn't think that the others wuold mind.

"I shuoldn't think that any wuold want it," he then said.

And I then said, "That's where you are wrong, Green. Haven't you notised that when two poeple start doing the same thing they get more akin? Say they both grow runner-beans, they chumb up at once, and it's even more so with onyons."

"Yes, that's true," he said, he being the fairest person one has ever met, and always admitting a thing is true if it is, even if he has sworne it isn't. "You remember how old Boggle and Woggle* used to hate each other, foaming at the mouth when they met, but now they've both gone in for sweet peas they almost kiss."

"There you are," I said.

"But still," he said, "a messige from one onyon grower to another will waist space for those who, say, only grow parsnips, and thouh you say it only takes a cupple of lines, if I know you you'll write out all this conversashun, too, and that will mean much more than a cupple of lines."

"Well, I will only write out the conversashun up to here," I said, and, as you see, that's all I'm doing.

Now, what I meant when I said that this artickle begins a long time ago was that it began last autumn when Green and I

"Felt our Moral dropping faster
After months of grim disaster,"

and were wondering what cuold be done about it, if anything. You see, that year we'd gone in for twenty-seven (27) diferent kinds of vegertables and the only ones that had come to anything were the radishes, they being woppers, you cuoldn't get away from it, and one lettice which I grant you cuoldn't eat, but wich we thort worth wile becorse it grew almost a mile high, but as for the rest, well, most of them seamed to have gone down insted of up, baring those that were suposed to go down, like carots and parsnips, wich didn't go anywhere. So, anyhow, after a lot of thort we

* Two masters who we call Boggle and Woggle.—*Author.*

desided that next year, i.e., this year, but it then being next year, we'd go in for only one vegertable, but go in for it thorouhly. The question then was, wich?

"Why not onyons?" said Green.

"Why not?" I said.

So as we both cuoldn't think why not, we made it onyons.

Well, the next thing to do was to get to know more about onyons than we knew alreddy, wich wasn't dificult as we didn't know anything, so we bought three books and borowed nine, and as they all said the same thing we thort that was enoufh.

I will now tell you what one has to do, in case you are one who ever has to do it, i.e., as follows:

(1) Prepair the ground, you do that with manure.

(2) Come the spring, work it up (the ground) to what's called a light tilth. None of the books said what a tilth was, so we had to guess, but perhaps you know.

(3) Sew the seeds. You can put them straiht into the tilthed earth, or you can tilth it a bit more with soot, that is, if you can get the soot, wich we cuoldn't.

(4) When the onyons begin to come up, saying they do, thin them out, in other words pull out all the onyons on each side of the ones you don't pull out, the reason being that you get less but bigger, that is, the onyons do.

(5) Keep a hot look out for onyon flies, and if they come give them a dose of caromel.

(6) Keep another hot look out for mildue, and if that comes, one knowing it by white spots, look up your book if you've forgotten, I having, and do what it says, or it may be streaks, not spots, or who knows, both.

(7) Get up all the weeds with (*a*) a hoe, or (b) your fingers, or (*c*) both, being careful not to get up the onyons, too. If the hoe, being sharp, slisces off the top of the onyon, it's no good trying to put it back, the thing's finished, and you can thin it right out.

(8) When August comes, bend o'er the tops,
For if you don't, then ripening stops.

(The above is by Green.)

(9) When they have stopped dig them up.

(10) Hang them up.

(11) Eat them up.

Well, that was what we had to do, so now for what we did.

"THEY'VE GOT NO WHISKY, NO GIN, NO SHERRY AND NO BEER. WHAT'LL YOU HAVE?"

(1) We went to a farmer for the manure, we knowing one, but fealing *un peu* dowbtful owing to the shorthage. We had to wait a bit as he was catching a bull that had gone into an old lady's kitchen, we ofering to help him but he luckerly not neading us. When he had got the bull and found the old lady, she having gone out of the kitchen when the bull had gone in, he came and asked us what we wanted.

"Manure," we said.

"What for?" he said.

"Onyons," we said.

"I don't know that I can spair any," he said.

"ONE SLIGHTLY UNCOMFORTABLE SINGLE SEAT."

"We ofered to help you with the bull," we said.

"Well, how much wuold you want?" he said.

"How much wuold you think?" we said.

"How do I know?" he said.

"If you don't know, how can we?" we said.

"Well, how many onyons do you want it for?" he said.

"We don't know till they come up," we said.

"Do you know anything?" he said.

"What?" we said.

"How big is your alotment?" he said.

"Five rods, poles, or perches," we said.

"Then half a lode shuold do you," he said, "and I can jest spair that if you can spair five shillings."

We jest cuold.

Of course, when I say "we said" I don't mean we both spoke together, that wuold be silly, but first one spoke and then the other, Green begining. You can work out wich said wich if you think it is worth it.

Well, came the manure. It came in one of those tip back carts the backs of wich tip back. Unforchunately it tipped back before I thort it was going to, so you might say, if you wanted to be funny, that I got manured before the onyons did, but mind you, the farmer hadn't done it on purpose, so one cuoldn't say anything. After that we dug the manure in and then waited.

I will now get over the things that came next more quickly.

"HURRY UP, THERE! WE'RE WAITING TO BLOCK THE ROAD."

(2) Came the spring. We worked up the ground with all the tools we had, hoping that what we worked up was tilth.

(3) Came the seeds. We sewed them till they were all sewn.

(4) Came, at last, some onyons, at least, the beginings of them. We didn't thin them out becorse, well, they were thin alreddy.

(5) & (6) Came the onyon fly and mildue. We did all the things the books told us, and also severel other things we made up, but none stopped them. All the onyons that had begun to come up, there weren't many, got soft and mushy and sort of died, wile all the onyons that hadn't begun to come up never did. So when

(7) started to beat us, and this is the worst of the lot, well, we let it, becorse what is the use of getting up about two million weeds when there is nothing in the middle of them after you've done it?

(8) Came August, and with it came a Notise of a Vegertable Show.

"WHAT SORT OF JEMMY?"

"All we've got to show are weeds," I said.

"Yes, let's go out and bend their tops over," said Green, "I'm sure we've got a prize thisle."

So we went out to look at them, not having lately, becorse the sight of five rods, poles, or perches of nothing but weeds make one feal a bit depresed.

"But as we gazed into the jungle
That is the Fate of those that bungle,"

Green sudenly said,

"What's that tall thing?"

"They're all tall things," I said.

"Yes, but I mean the one that's tallest of the lot," he said. "Let us wade to it and see."

So we did, and, lo! it was an onyon!

Yes, beleive it or not, but I feal you will, one onyon had stuck it like a soljier fighting all alone against seathing odds, and when we had cleared away the seathing odds, lo! again! it was almost as big as our Maths. Master's head!!

We bent it over.

(9) We dug it up.

(10) We hung it up.

We didn't (11) eat it up. No, insted we sent it to the Vegertable Show, and it won First Prize.

What we're trying to work out now is weather we're Onyon Orthorities or not? Perhaps someone wuold tell us.

ANY WIFE TO ANY HUSBAND, AND BACK AGAIN

To pass the time and to keep me merry
I shopped while waiting to catch the ferry.
There wasn't much that we needed, you know,
But isn't it funny how money can go?"
"Not very."

November, 1943

MORE FIELD NOTES

STRANGE things happen to us naturalists, even to beginners. I was leaning over a gate the other day giving my whole attention to a small white horse eating his lunch, when I was surprised to see a man walk up to the animal and begin whispering to him. It was clear from the expression on the face of the horse that though he knew exactly what the man was saying he was not impressed by it. The man had a shock of black curly hair and a rolling blue eye like a mad marble. He whispered something at last which made the horse look at him quite differently, and suddenly the horse lay down. The man nodded approval and came across to me.

"Another convert," he said with great satisfaction as he climbed over the gate.

"To what?" I asked.

"To the underground movement I have the honour to conduct." The man twiddled one of his big toes in a conceited way, where it protruded from his boot. "You will not deny, I take it, that the horse has been grossly put upon by the human race?"

"No more than the human race has been put upon by the weather, colds in the head and the Germans," I replied quickly, for I always like to put in a word for the human race when I can.

"There must have been a moment in time," the man went on, "when it was a sheer toss-up whether the horse went about on our back or we on the horse's. We happened to think of it first and have taken advantage of that ever since."

"Well, what are going to do about it?" I asked a little peevishly, for it seemed to me the man was talking rather big.

"I am arranging for horses as a whole to lie down instantly on the approach of a human being. Sportsmen, jockeys and draymen throughout the world will shortly be faced by millions and millions of tons of perfectly inert horse. Good morning." And he went striding away up the lane. But he turned back for a moment. "Only the donkeys will be left standing," he shouted.

On this important question of leaning over gates, I have observed with approval how much time is spent by really good naturalists in doing nothing else. In this respect I have the makings of a very good naturalist indeed, I find that the ordinary ready-made gate fits me well enough, though one day I intend to have a five-barred gate made to measure, well-padded on top and electrically heated for winter gazing, which will last me the rest of my life. But not of course until I have done something to earn it, like discovering that chiff-chaffs were mammals up to the Wars of the

Roses, or inventing a machine, as my Uncle Athelstane so nearly did, for calibrating the emotions of marriageable snails.

* * * * *

In all the vast and turgid literature of bird-watching I can find no mention of a bird-watcher turning up at his hide to discover that a bird-watching dog had got there before him. A long khaki dog with ears like sound-locators and so little ground-clearance that it was difficult to tell whether it was standing up or lying down, it was in a fever of concentration, studying the traffic on the pond. Each time a new make of bird glided in to refuel it wagged its tail excitedly, and when at length a young heron arrived it set up an ecstatic moaning. I was in the act of wondering if so remarkable an animal would care for the loan of Coward or Thorburn when unfortunately I sneezed and the poor dog's day was ruined. It turned to me with a look of the utmost shame on its rather plain face, which was not unlike that of a cousin of mine, and crept away in spite of all my sympathetic gestures. The thought that but for an accident of birth such a pure passion would have brought it a knighthood at the least saddened the rest of my morning.

* * * * *

As Mrs. Amworthy, who rushes in for me, had never tasted whelks either, we decided to give them a fair trial together. (I make no apology for whelks getting into my field of observation. It is a large field and there is plenty of room in it for whelks.) We disagree on everything we can think of except winkles, which represent heaven to both of us in a modest way.

"Slop on the vinegar, dear, I always say," said Mrs. Amworthy. "Keeps 'em quiet inside."

"Don't you think they're dead?"

"Will be in a minute, dear, anyways. To look at they puts me in mind of a nice bit of cow-heel."

"Do people bite them or just swallow them, Mrs. Amworthy?"

"Goes by families, dear, ordinary, though you never can tell. My George he comes of whelk-biting stock and they chew and they chew. But he had an aunt, and you should have seen 'em slide down her. Lovely to watch, it was."

"Shall we bite the first one?"

"Here goes, love."

"Good whelking, Mrs. Amworthy."

A moment later, looking at each other through eyes half-closed with nausea, we knew that whelks had joined winkles on our common ground, but on the other side of the fence.

* * * * *

I wonder if I am the first observer to discover that caterpillars cannot carry their

liquor? One dropped off my hat at the "Jolly Farmer" last night, looking like a chipolata sausage wrapped up in a small Persian rug, and fell into my beer. By the time we got it out it had had all it wanted. For a few happy seconds it stood up on the counter and waved its head round and round as if about to lassoo itself. Then it fell down slap in one of the most impressive comas those present had ever seen.

It was still right out at closing-time.

MORE MEMORIES

A foolish reader has written to me saying that he doesn't believe I ever turned *The Adventure of Silver Blaze* into blank verse drama. Of course I did. It was that one of all my transcriptions which combined, I fancy, the most startling elements alike of the mysterious and the bizarre.

Silver Blaze (is it necessary for me to say) was the first favourite for the Wessex Cup—the year is not stated—and was being trained for some reason or other at Kings Pyland on Dartmoor. He came of "Isonomy stock." His owner was Colonel Ross. His trainer was John Straker. The horse had vanished. The trainer was found dead. His skull had been "shattered by a savage blow from some heavy weapon," and "there was a long clear cut" on his thigh. I must not (much though I should like to do so) weary you by a recapitulation of the story as told by Sherlock Holmes to Watson or of the details of the investigation on the scene of the crime. They compose the first two acts of the play, and contained some of the finest lines I have ever written. Allow me to quote merely:

W. Pause for a moment. Did the stable boy
When he went forth, night foundered, with the dog
Leave without fastening the stable door?
H. Excellent, Watson. That was excellent.

or that other notable passage—

Col. R. Is there aught else to which you fain would call
My notice?
H. To the curious incident
O' the dog i' the night.
Col. R. (*testily*). Tut, tut. The dog did nothing.
H. (*quickly*).
That, Colonel, was the curious incident.

and then pass on rapidly to the Wessex Cup. The race was run at Winchester, and the great detective and his friend were driven to the course by the Colonel in a drag. The Colonel, who had been informed by Holmes that his horse would run after all,

in spite of having vanished, looked not unnaturally rather cold and stern, and his first words (Act III, Scene I) are an indication of his feelings.

COL. R. I have seen nothing of my horse as yet.
H. And would you know your horse if you did see it?
COL. R. I have been twenty years upon the Turf
And none, ere now, has asked me such a question.
A child, the veriest child, would recognize
The semblance of our worthy Silver Blaze
With his white forehead and his mottled off foreleg.
W. That was an Alexandrine. How's the betting?
COL. R. That is the most peculiar part of it.
But yesterday you might have got fifteens,
To-day the price is shortening momently,
You would be lucky to get three to one.
H. Someone knows something. That is evident.
But hark! I hear the roaring of the ring.

(*The ring roars.*)

COL. R. We scratched our other entry and put all
Our hopes upon the promise of your word.
A card! a card! My kingdom for a card.

(*He is given a card. The ring roars again, this time more articulately.*)

What's that? Can Silver Blaze be favourite?
THE RING.
Five four against the worthy Silver Blaze!
My shirt upon the noble Silver Blaze!
Fifteen to four against poor Desborough—
Poor spavined Desborough! Five to four the field! *
W. Look at the tic-tac men, how urgently
They wave their arms like mere automata.
The numbers have gone up. All six are there.
COL. R. All six. My horse is running. I don't see him.
W. Five only yet have passed. This must be he.

(*Silver Blaze canters by.*)

COL. R. No, no, my friends. That cannot be my horse.
That beast has not a white hair on his body,
Not one white hair. You fool me, Mr. Holmes.

* The objection has been raised that the ring does not really roar like that. The objection is not sustained.

"I HOPE I WON'T HAVE TO STAND WITH MY BACK TO THE ENGINE."

H. Let us observe the race as it proceeds.

(*He looks through his field-glasses.*)

Behold them! They are coming round the curve!

(*The excitement of the drama at this point can only be realized if one remembers that* HOLMES, WATSON *and* COLONEL ROSS *are all standing dressed in black frock-coats, black top hats, and field-glasses, with their backs to the audience, while the horses made of cardboard like the tic-tac men are very rapidly and jerkily pulled across the back-cloth on a continuous belt by stage-hands in the wings, now one horse, now another forging to the front.* This is done five or six times until at last "Desborough's bolt is shot," the Colonel's horse wins by six lengths from a horse which is not named, leaving the Duke of Balmoral's Iris* (see "*The Adventure of*

* There were no "moving pictures" in those far-off days.

the Noble Bachelor") *a bad third. Silver Blaze's number is now hoisted on the board* (R.).)

COL. R. (*mopping his face*).
It's my race anyhow. Yet I confess
I can make neither head nor tail of it.
Have you not mystified us long enough?
H. You shall know everything. Come wind, come weather.
Let us go round and see the horse together.

The second scene of Act III takes place in the "weighing enclosure where only owners and their friends gain admittance." The scene had to be changed because now a real racehorse is brought on to the stage, as so frequently happened at Drury Lane. Holmes, Watson and Colonel Ross are discovered examining it. The best part of this scene is embodied in these lines—

H. An you but wash his face and off fore-leg
In sprites of wine, you will at once discover
He is the Silver Blaze you owned of yore.
COL. R. You take my breath away. Where did you find him?
H. In a vile faker's hands.
COL. R. The horse is sound
After that perfect gallop, he sweats well.
H. He is. I ventured on the liberty
Of running him exactly as he was.
COL. R. You have done wonders. You could do still more
By telling us the murderer of John Straker.
H. I will. I have the murderer. He is here.
COL. R. Here? Where?
H. At this same moment in our company.
W. (*with a note of disapproval*).
Another Alexandrine. Do explain.

(HOLMES *steps up to Silver Blaze and "lays his hand upon the glossy neck of the quadruped."*)

COL. R. *and* W. (*together*).
THE HORSE!
H. The horse. It may redeem his guilt
To say the late John Straker was a man
Wholly unworthy of your confidence
And the horse did the deed in self-defence!
But hist! I hear the bell.

(*A bell rings.*)

I have adventured
A little money on the ensuing race.
It starts. An explanation of the crime
Must be deferred until a future time.

The explanation was in fact deferred until the last scene, in which the three friends are being "whirled" back to London in a Pullman carriage of which they had an "empty corner" to themselves. Tears blind my eyes and prevent me from quoting any more.

NOTHING TO DO

Private Green has made his bed and is lying on it. His expression is one of boredom. Private Brown has drawn a form up to the stove and is gazing into the red fire despondently. Private Green stirs.

"Done me darnin'," sighs Private Green—"polished me brasses, polished Nobby's brasses . . ."

"Wrote to the missis?" asks Private Brown gloomily.

"Wrote to the missis, twice."

Private Brown gives the stove a kick.

"Wrote to mine. And the kid, *and* the old folks."

"Cleaned yer rifle?"

"Cleaned me rifle. Blancoed me webbing."

Silence. There is a hum from the loudspeaker over the door.

"*Attention, please, all personnel. Attention, all personnel. Remember that the Recorded Music Circle will meet at* 1930 *hours to-night in Building One-four-one to hear a recorded programme of works by Brahms. All music-loving personnel are invited to Building One-four-one at* 1930 *hours. That is all.*"

"Want anything from the Naffi?"

"Got me fags and razor-blade dinner-time. You want anything?"

"Wanted some polish, but Ginger give me 'alf a bottle."

"Be a long queue at the Naffi."

"You bet."

Private Green turns over on his face and says in a muffled voice, "Anything on the pictures?"

"Something about Vienna. Seen it, I think."

"Where the girl marries the bloke in the what-is-it?"

"Think so. Seen it?"

"Yeah—seen it me last camp. Got whiskers on it."

"*Attention, please. Attention, please. All personnel wishing to learn Russian are reminded that a Russian Class will be held to-night in Building Ninety-three, opposite*

"D'YOU KNOW, DEAR, I SOMETIMES THINK YOU'RE A LITTLE *too* ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT THIS STREET-SAVINGS GROUP OF YOURS."

'A' Company Naafi. Personnel wishing to attend are to report to the instructor, Sergeant Armstrong, at 1915 *hours. That is all.*"

"Goin' on leave end of next week."

"Go on?"

"Seven days. Tried for nine, but Popeye wouldn't wear it."

"Watcher going to do?"

"Dunno."

"Built a duck-shed me last leave."

"Ah?"

"Cement floor."

"Ah."

"*Attention, everybody, please. It is proposed to produce the play, 'Tilly of Bloomsbury,' in the Station Gymnasium. Will all personnel interested in amateur theatricals report to Captain Gregory, Building Twenty-two, at* 1930 *hours to-night, when a first reading will take place. End of message.*"

"Cor, there ain't 'alf a draught from under that door. Feel it?"

"Told the Corporal yesterday."

"Did 'e report it?"

"Shouldn't think so. Give me a long talk about when 'e was in Iceland."

"I got a mate in Iceland. Ack-ack."

"What's he say it's like?"

"All right. Not much to do."

"Bags of entertainment, though."

"Bags. I used to think Iceland was all ice."

"So did I."

"*Attention, please. Attention, please. Personnel who put their names down for the Winter Art Classes are to note that the first class is to-night at* 2000 *hours in Building One-two-nine, and not to-morrow night as previously announced. That is all.*"

"It's Greenland that's all ice, ain't it?"

"Think so. None of the boys in Greenland, though, is there?"

"Don't think so. Ever 'ear anything from Ropey Stevens?"

"Yeah. Airgraph. Owes me another now."

"Wish I was in Italy."

"Me too. Missis ain't so keen, though."

"Nor mine."

"Better than bein' bored to death, though."

"I'll say. Have you read Orders to-day?"

"Why? What's on 'em?"

"Dunno. Ain't read 'em."

"Nor me. Don't suppose there's anything on 'em."

"Don't suppose so."

"*Attention, please, all personnel. Station Choir. A rehearsal for the Station Choir's performance of 'The Holy City' will take place at* 2000 *hours to-night in Building Seventy-two. All singers are welcome to attend, particularly tenors and baritones. End of message.*"

"What's the time?"

"Dunno. Why?"

"Just wondered. Gorn supper-time, I expect?"

"Xpect so. Don't this stove stink, though!"

"You're sittin' too close. It's all right 'ere."

"What did you do in civvy street in the evenin's?"

"Oh, I dunno. Mucked about with two or three mates. Wish the war was over, eh!"

"Yeah."

"Did you 'ear old Bingo on parade this mornin'? Give the 'Eyes right' instead of 'Right dress.' "

"What about Captain Sutton, then? Give 'em 'Order Arms' from the 'Stand easy.' "

"What did they do ? "

"Wrong order. Stood fast."

"Bet 'e felt daft."

"Went ever so red."

"*Attention, all personnel. Attention, all personnel. All personnel interested in learning shorthand and typewriting should report to Building One-sixty at* 2015 *hours to-night, where the first class of the winter is to be held. That is all.*"

"Where do all the boys get to in the evenin's, d'you reckon?"

"Down the village boozer, I s'pose. I bet Nobby an' Ginger an' Curly Blewitt's down there."

"Down the boozer, eh?"

"I reckon so. Got a new girl in the bar. Cheeky piece. Slapped Ginger's face Saturday."

"Bet 'e was wild."

"I'll say. Spilt nearly 'alf a pint of mild."

"What's the mild like there now?"

"Not bad. All right Saturday."

"Feel like a pint? Then come back an' kip down?"

"I don't mind."

"Okay. Gotter do something in this camp to stop yerself goin' barmy."

"I'll say. Put a bit on the fire."
"Yeah. Taking yer greatcoat?"
"Naow. 'Tain't cold."
"Fit, then?"
"Yeah."
"*Attention, please, everybody. Attention, please, everybody. . . .*"
But the door has slammed, and there is nobody to pay attention this time.

COMPLACENCY IN THE OFFICE

"Nobody expects the war will be over for years and years yet," said Doris. "Don't they?" I said. "Well, I do, and I'm not nobody, am I?" So Doris said I was complacent. "Well," I said, "if I never get anything worse than that said about me I shan't do so badly." Because I'm just about tired of all this talk about complacency, and it's my belief if the war ever does come to an end they won't dare release it till they've had time to revise all their pep talks about a long dreary road ahead yet before peace comes into sight.

As for all those people who keep warning us far worse trials to come when the war's over, well, all I can say is they must have been having a pretty nice war all on their own all this time—much nicer than anyone else I know's. They'll be telling us next thing that peace will only be the beginning of the beginning and we must be prepared for a long dreary road ahead before war comes into sight again.

I could do with this war if you ever knew where you were two minutes together. It used to be mustn't have any alarm and despondency and ready to run you in for pulling a long face, and now everybody jumps on you if you say it's four years nearer the end than it was. And if it isn't they shouldn't have all these Victory drives and Victory stockings and things putting ideas into your head.

One thing though: there's lots more cafés open now and any amount of dairies where you can get a sandwich and a cup of coffee if you're in a hurry before they close at 2.30 for their own joint and two vegs. like the day Mr. Head gave me a ticket for his Horticultural Show.

He's as pleased as a dog with two tails all because some of his special tomatoes are going to be tried out at their experimental place. But I wish he'd go in for apples instead, and then perhaps I should find out what's happened to all the russets this war, not having had one for nearly as long as no oranges.

I must say I never saw such lovely apples, especially being about the only thing there I hadn't to look at the label to make sure what they were. What with pear-shaped tomatoes and tomatoes looking like vegetable marrows, and red marrows just like tomatoes, and Black Beet and Scarlet Carrots that said Tender and True just like a valentine, there was so much camouflage about that I was hardly surprised when I went to look at some dahlias to find they'd taken a prize for being chrysan-

"IT WAS JUST HERE THAT WE HEARD THAT WOODPECKER—REMEMBER, DEAR?"

themums. The first thing that made me feel at home and might be back in our own works was something about the effect of storage temperature on bolting till Mr. Head said it was only onions. He bought his wife the *Book of Rarer Vegetables*, and if that's his idea of a Christmas present, if I were her I'd give him rarer vegetables!

It never rains but it pours, and if he didn't take another afternoon off for another show last week, saying we must all of us Grow More Food as if he'd never set eyes on our tomato-shaped, tomato-coloured tomatoes up on the roof, being quite beneath his notice nowadays. So Doris and I thought we'd better make hay while the sun shines and have a good blitz on his room the minute we'd given him time to come back for something he'd forgotten. Because the way stuff piles up it'll take a demolition squad to dig him out one of these days: he can't bear to throw anything away or have his routine upset. Reminds me of when we got the new filing cabinet and the time we had getting him into that.

Though clearing out isn't a job I'm fond of myself if it wasn't for salvage. Nothing to show for it and I often think it's like eating fish and you end up with more than you began with, and look at the time it takes too, and that's why I can't

be bothered with herrings, though Jim, my boy-friend in the Drawing office, says it's only because I'm bone lazy.

And all the time Doris and me waiting for the new forms back from the Ministry and wondering which would be here first, Christmas or Willie. If I had a hundred pounds for every time I've said to that lazy-bones, "Now don't you go getting complacent, Willie," it'd pay for quite a few seconds of the war I often tell him. You can't let the office-boy think he can get away with anything just because there's a war on. If I've told Doris and him once I've told them a dozen times there's a lot of people going to miss this war when it *is* over, and it'll take a bit of getting used to not having it there to put the blame on.

Still, you can get used to anything. Look at Doris's girl-friend who's in the Civil Service and afraid every minute the All Clear would go the other night and longing for the guns to start again so she wouldn't have to go out to a fire-watching practice, tin hat and pail but no water and all, just when she wanted to finish washing a piece of carpet. Now some people would call that complacency, but I will say she's made a good job of it and by now it looks quite the kind of carpet you wouldn't mind chewing yourself.

She's gone all so domesticated since she started doing for herself that there just isn't room in her head for anything but housekeeping. The other morning she got into the bus, took out her shopping list and pencil, held out her fare to the conductor without looking up, and asked for "A small wholemeal, please."

CARELESS TALK

"He was admitted to the Royal Portsmouth Hospital Annexe suffering from discussion."

Hants Paper.

"BUNGALOW; double-bedded room; sleep 3; mouth of the Alyn, under the Dee."

Advt. in "Liverpool Echo."

Any old trout think of retiring?

THE IMPOSTOR

I picked up a handful of the big coloured wooden letters and let them drop on the table in front of him; I always fell back on the letters when everything else failed. Early that morning Pte. Smith, who couldn't manage even his signature yet with tracing paper, had unexpectedly produced PLATFORM and had thereafter continued to produce PLATFORM every ten minutes or so, varying the colours a little

and accompanying each new achievement with the same grunt of delight. I told him that he had done very well for one day and that he mustn't be selfish. "Now, Corporal, see what you can do with these—perhaps it will come more easily now." "It" was DOLLY, his wife's name.

"I will give you a hint: Brown—green—blue—blue—yellow."

Next time I got round to him he had produced NELLY, and looked at me with his eager, rather intelligent, inquiring eyes.

"No, that's not your wife yet, Corporal Joy—not *quite* your wife—that's another woman; she wouldn't like that, would she?"

"Oh, no, Sarge! and her comin' to-day, too!"

"Well, that will be very nice for you. I bet she'll be surprised, too, when you tell her what you are doing this month—that you'll soon be able to write to her, to send her letters."

Something like a look of horror spread over Corporal Joy's thin, eager, Cockney face.

"Oi, I couldn't do that, Sarge! *that* would give the whole game away, wouldn't it, Sarge?"

"I don't quite follow, Corporal; I don't see what you mean."

"Well, it would, wouldn't it, Sarge? She's eddicated, see? She used to teach in a Sunday school, see?"

I was just beginning to see, but I wanted to make sure. "You've been married ten years, I think you said?"

"Yes, that's right, Sarge."

"And you mean to say she doesn't know . . .?

"Oh, it sounds funny when you look back on it now, but it's been a terrible dance really," he said with conviction.

"It was bad enough in peace-time, when I was living at home. I 'ad to be on my toes right from breakfast on. We 'ad the paper every day—the wife used to put it up against my cup when she laid the table. 'Well, Tom,' she'd say, 'what's the news this morning?' and there was the blinkin' thing in front of me, with big letters across the top. 'Oh, nothin' much new, Dolly, take a look yourself,' or I'd look at the bloomin' thing for about five minutes, turnin' over the pages, makin' sure it was the right way up—I could tell that from the picktchers, see?—and then I'd say: 'Much the same as yesterday, dear,' or 'God knows what they puts in 'em these days,' which was true enough—and this, every day, year in, year out—but that was easy. It was worse when we got letters—she knew the writing, see. 'What does Ted have to say?' she'd ask, and I'd look at the letter and say: 'He's in a mess again,' well, he always was, see? and he wouldn't write if he wasn't. 'Take a dekko at it yerself, dear,' I'd say. But it was worst when she said what about writin' to Maggie for 'er birthday, or for Christmas, or somethink—'O.K., dear, I'll send her a line,' and I'd get out the paper very slow, see? and a pen and a bottle of ink: then I'd look at the paper a bit, see? and then I'd feel in my pockets and say:

'Dolly, d'ye mind goin' to the shop to get me some fags?'—or matches maybe—'I'll get on with Maggie's letter,' and she'd go down and as soon as I heard the door up I got and was out with the paper and pen and across the road in a flash to my Uncle Ned's—he *knew*, see?—and he'd write me out the letter very quick, and me back again in no time. I generally got there first but sometimes she'd be there waitin' and I'd say: 'Just bin to see Uncle Ned about Ted's trouble'—or somethink—and then I'd say, very sweet: 'Like to put anythin' in to Maggie, dear?' but she never did. It was Dolly made me wear these specs, see? 'Cos I couldn't see the signposts and street names properly when we were out walkin', see? And in the Tube it was somethin' orful. Still, I stuck it for seven years. Oh, it seems queer when you look back, but I found it no joke then.

"A LITTLE BIT OF SUGAR FOR THE BIRD."
THE NEW CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER.

"Well, then the war came and I got into an Infantry mob. Dolly made me promise to write to 'er once a week and I was in a jam all right. Well, I had a chum who wrote for me every Saturday, see? And when 'e went on leave, 'e left me one or two letters already wrote out and with the dates put in. That was O.K. for a year—it was quite a rest, not havin' to think about it all day, and then I got moved to this mob. 'That's done it,' I said—'cos my chum 'e stayed in the old mob, see? I *was* in a state, I can tell you. I found another chum to write, but the writin' was different, see? So I said: 'Bert, you write it in pencil, they say people writes different in pencil and p'raps the wife will think that's why it's changed.' After three letters I gets a letter from the wife. 'I see you've lost your fountain-pen,' she says, 'I'm sendin' you another.' So I 'ad to get Bert to explain that there was no ink in the new mob, and that I was afraid I'd get the pen pinched if I used it, see? Dolly swallowed that one too, and so for these two years Bert's wrote in pencil. Then they sent me on this 'ere course—it's a good thing my mob's not far. I goes over every Saturday and Bert does the letter and I comes back and posts it from here—I told the wife I was sent on a technical course, see? Well, it is sort of technical, in't it?"

Pte. Coia was calling for help. "Sarge, tella me how I write dis: 'Dearest Margarita' (yesterday it was Antonia, last week Anna and Constanzia), 'I thinka you all time I come see you send thus an embrace'—Is that good wrote, Sarge?"

Pte. Coia was my star turn. He wrote letters for all the boys. Pte. Rhyddoch's wife had sent a very nasty one back on learning that Pte. Rhyddoch was

coming "on leev with little ATS girlfriend Anita." Of course, I had to make a few alterations before reading the letter to Pte. Rhyddoch. I left Pte. Coia to attend to Pte. Angus's vowel sounds.

At the week-end I came on Corporal Joy and his wife in a café. He beckoned me over to his table. They both seemed to be rather worried about something. "Just choose what you want, Dolly," Corporal Joy was saying, and he slipped a gravy-stained menu over to her. She stared at it and handed it on to me. "What about the Sarge choosing for all of us?" she said hastily. Later, while the Corporal was absent for a moment, she asked me how he was making out on his Wireless course. "Of course," she said, "Tom's eddicated. You know 'ow it is: I've never liked to tell 'im; it's been a blessing 'aving Ma at home—for 'is letters, I mean. I know it ain't nothing to be ashamed of, seeing as I never 'ad the opportunity, still 'e wouldn't like it if 'e knew, you know."

I agreed that it might be rather a shock to him if he did.

WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

The scene—a morning train for town.
  She entered with a shrinking man,
Lit up, and settled calmly down;
  Then she began,

And from that point to Waterloo,
  Regardless of her broken friend
The lady talked for nearly two
  Good hours on end.

Her voice was low; its tone was flat;
  And all the time I never heard
(And humbly thank the gods for that)
  One blessed word.

Only I saw that long stream glide
  For ever like the poet's brook,
And on the sad face at her side
  A sadder look.

At first a murmured Yea or Nay
  Faintly escaped him now and then
While he looked round and seemed to say
  "I ask you, men."

But, later, silent and withdrawn
He sat as one in numbed despair
And when he once confessed a yawn
She didn't care.

And still as onward drove the train
And no pause came however small
"Had she," one asked, "a power of brain
Or none at all?"

Till I observed at Waterloo
That she was at it e'en when walking:

* * * * *

I don't believe the woman knew
That she was talking.

December, 1943

LOVE QUIZ

THIS test is designed for you—the women of Britain. It will help you to decide once and for all, whether you are genuinely infatuated or merely in love. There is no age-limit. Read each question carefully and answer it truthfully, "Yes" or "No." Then turn to page five and have a shot at the crossword.

1. Do you make a point of taking him to see pictures featuring the Dead-End children?

2. Do you laugh at his jokes because they are funny or because you have strong white teeth?

3. Has it struck you lately that the bubbling noises in a juicy pipe are quite pleasant musically?

4. Do you dare remind him of your birthday?

5. Do you find yourself absent-mindedly signing cheques with his surname?

6. Are you darkly jealous when he reads books by women authors?

7. Can you identify his sneeze in a crowd?

8. Do you enjoy hurting him? (removing bits of lint from his collar, smoking his cigarettes, etc.).

9. Would you rather dance with him than listen to his plans for post-war reconstruction?

10. Has the theatre-organ suddenly developed a new meaning for you?

11. In your heart of hearts are you glad that the jeweller is taking so long to repair your watch?

12. Did you answer these questions because of some uncertainty in your emotions or because of some habit that you have acquired during the war?

CRIES OF CAMBRIDGE

["Visions of a revolution in the food habits of the nation . . . for the last three years almost all the work at . . . Torry, Ditton and Cambridge has been devoted to dehydration . . . Cabbage, storage time two years."—*Daily Telegraph.*]

"Give us of your copper,
Give us of your gold,
Buy our Cambridge cabbage
(Dehydrated cabbage),
Cabbage two years old!"

So the men of science
To the housewife cry,
"Quit the local market
(Stupid local market!),
Come to us and buy!"

Housewife, does your household spurn its cabbage with a frown?
Say it comes from Timbuctoo and they will wolf it down.
Cabbage from Alaska, cabbage from Turin,
Cabbage from Siberia, cabbage from Pekin,
Cabbage from Coolgardie, cabbage from Jodhpore—
But never from the little man who grows it round the door.

"Give us of your copper,
Give us of your gold,
Buy our Cambridge cabbage
(Dehydrated cabbage),
Cabbage two years old!"
So the men of Cambridge
And of Ditton cry
With the men of Torry
(Where on earth is Torry?),
"Come to us and buy!"

Science still will have its say and middlemen their grab,
Take the British cabbage and consign it to the lab,
On a lorry into Torry (where is Torry?) green and gay,
Where you desiccate its noble leaves and squeeze its heart to hay
And pack it up in cellophane and label it complete
(Say at Ditton), and the Briton gets the residue to eat.

"Give us of your copper,
Give us of your gold,
Buy our Cambridge cabbage
(Dehydrated cabbage),
Cabbage two years old.
Meat is better mummied,
Milk is nicer dry,
But the pick is cabbage
(Dehydrated cabbage),
Come to us and buy!"

ELEPHANTASMA

"Being on a common like this I dare say you have rights of turbary," said James. He was lying on his stomach in front of a large fire, going through the deeds of my house.

"Of what?" I asked.

"Of helping yourself to turf. The least inflammable substance known to man, not excepting asbestos. One of the more maddening things about the Irish is the way they make it burn."

"If you were any use as a solicitor," I told him, "you'd be able to tell at a glance what I can do and what I can't. What do I pay you for?"

"You don't, you ask me for the week-end instead," said James, but without rancour. "The trouble is there's something missing here. This deed of 1688, your earliest one, simply says: 'together with such rights of commonage as may be appendant or appurtenant thereto.' That may mean anything. Common of piscary in the pond, for instance."

"That would give me a part-share in the tench-syndicate?"

"You could probably tether a sea-lion on the verge."

"Of starvation, I'm afraid. Have some more beer."

"What it all boils down to is immemorial custom. I had a cottage in Hampstead once which carried the right to hang out washing on the Heath. My pyjamas were a scandal and affront to all decent-minded folk, but they couldn't touch me. Either people have been doing something so long that the Lord of the Manor daren't say No, or they haven't, in which case you can only try it on and pretend they have. With the help of a good solicitor, of course."

"Do you mean I could graze an elephant on the common if I felt so inclined?"

"I can't see anything to stop you, except the elephant."

"How many ordinary cows could I put out?"

"Levant and couchant upon the land, as we say in the trade? It used to be the number you needed for your plough. Why not ask your fellow sokemen?"

"Because they all want to sell us milk."

"I should let them. Cows are revolting creatures in the home."

"But it does seem a pity in these days to have feudal rights and not exercise them."

"All right, then keep your elephant."

"I don't believe sokemen ever had elephants."

"That's what would be so nice. You'd

take advantage of a custom to do something which had never been done before."

"Well, quite seriously, why don't private people keep elephants?"

"I think because elephants only do about two miles to the hay-stack. But here on the common there's fodder galore. And litter."

"Of course the barn might have been made for an elephant. And the stable-yard. Have some more beer."

A NORTH LONDON BABY IS TAKEN OUT IN A WHEEL-BARROW. AT THE FIRST SIGN OF RAIN THE OCCUPANT PUTS UP THE HOOD.

"A quiet reliable beast about to be pensioned off from a circus, with its keeper. Quite inexpensive. The keeper to be also your gardener."

"Well, there's a lot of heavy work to be done before we knock this place into shape. Trees to fell, ditches to clear, paths to lay."

"Child's play to an elephant. And another thing. You've always lived too quietly for a writer."

"How do you mean? I'm not good at noises on."

"If you were to inject a little theatre into your life you'd treble your income. Just think if you rolled into Guildford once a week in a well-polished howdah and drank a small gin while it waited outside."

"It would be lovely to be famous. Have some more beer."

"Thanks. And of course you could pick an elephant with some really dramatic trick, like playing the Japanese anthem on a mouth-organ. It's a magnificent idea."

"We mustn't jump at it too recklessly, James. After all, I'm a family man."

"An elephant's just what children need. It gives them a sense of proportion."

"There must be some objection, if we could only think of it."

"You'd have a coupé howdah, in this climate. That goes without saying."

"James, as my man of law it's your job to pull me up."

"I'm blowed if I do. Ring the Lord of the Manor immediately."

I got through to Mrs. Harrington-Osgood without difficulty.

"I have a rather peculiar request to make," I told her.

"Then I suppose you're something to do with the Home Guard," she said kindly in her silvery old voice.

"I wondered what you would think of my pasturing an elephant on the manorial waste as soon as the war is over?"

"An elephant? Well, I believe the sporting rights *are* still mine, but I sold my husband's elephant-gun years ago. The animal would be quite safe."

"But you wouldn't mind it?"

"Why should I? I hope it'll frighten all those damned cows away. Too many of 'em. What are its habits?"

GUM—

"It's going to play the Argentine anthem on an oboe and pick its keeper up by his toes. His name will be McMurtrie and he will have a small moustache. Together they will take my children to school each morning."

"Splendid!" said Mrs. Harrington-Osgood. "I am with you all the way. But just for form's sake I had better speak to my solicitor. Good-bye."

"She is with us all the way. She is obtaining her tort-hound's concurrence."

James's eyes had lit up curiously.

"You don't say she also is one of your victims?" I asked.

"And unlike some of them, she pays for my advice."

"Which will be?"

"Entirely dependent on my finding another bottle of your beer."

And he went in search of it.

NOT VERY KINDLY

"Oh, oh," he cried, sat down on my sofa and put his head in his hands.

I switched on the two upper branches of the Yule log and waited.

"Have you seen what Basket wrote about my new book in *The Trumpeter*?"

"Of course I have," I said. "I thought it was characteristic, but rather rude."

"Rude! Can't you see that I've got to do something about it at once? What would you do yourself?"

"I should go up to Basket and say with a frank and manly smile, 'Basket, it is Christmas Eve, let us be reconciled. Drink with me, Basket!' Wouldn't that embarrass the fellow a good deal?"

"It's not enough. I must write something about him in *The Counterblast*. Can't you write me a rough draft?"

"Give me about twenty-five minutes—if you don't mind verse, and a rather antiquated style. Read the papers and drink rum, if the women have left any in the bottle. As a rule they don't."

There was calm.

"How would this do?" I said. "Of course it needs a lot of polishing and better antitheses. I've called it 'Lines on a Hostile Critic.' You wouldn't want to mention his name, I suppose."

"Read."

A STUDY IN PERPETUAL MOTION.

I began:

"His task it is to lead the herd astray
And teach the doubtful public where to bray,
No better guide than he, in whom are knit
A boor's behaviour and a maltworm's wit.
Of ancient books he knows but half a score
And turns their well-thumbed pages o'er and o'er
To find some borrowed lighting for the head
Of the last author whom he has not read.
Reflection's arduous aid he leaves alone
Save in the mirror where he sees his own,
Yet taste he has: like dogs and ale and cheese,
And when he wants for wisdom prates of these.
So the poor mob that came to learn of books
Hears how a pointer points, or scullion cooks.
Yet lacks he not the loud Shakespearean line
To gain the plaudits of the asinine,
Ribbons of aged plays and Gallic tags
To hide the fustian of his mental rags.
These taking down at random from his shelf
He interlards with praises of himself,
And doubly proving all his labours vain
Astounds the idiot, and insults the sane——"

"Isn't it rather strong?"

"Strong!" I said indignantly. "Two hundred years ago, that would be a mild reprimand. A rap over the knuckles. The beginning of a ripple on a quiet pool. Between Dobson and Hobson, let us say. You are Hobson. What does Dobson do? There's nothing in the lines really. Each of them might have written them about the other, just as you might have written them about me, or I about you. But they suggest an atmosphere of hostility. After a few days Dobson replies with an epigram.

'OF MR. H——

He dipped the pen, of which he owed the cost,
In viper's poison, but the nib was crossed.' "

"Nib should be neb."

"Never mind. The argument is that Hobson is badly in debt, has lost his temper, plagiarizes, uses rotten writing materials and doesn't know how to write. Hobson now begins to show a trace of pique. He writes:

'TO MR. D——

The nib, though crossed, could splatter on the page
Enough to drown a midge, not worth my rage.'

He wouldn't say 'midge' of course. I've bowdlerized that word. Dobson would be knocked back for a while. But not for a long while. Recovering he would say:

'OF MR. H——

The midge that hoped to bleed poor Hobson white
Found him on tasting too diseased to bite.'

I'm afraid the language has become progressively modernized, but that is the general idea. Hobson would now have a difficulty in keeping the discussion within the bounds of good taste or even of the facts of insect life, but it would so happen, and very fortunately, that Dobson was taken by a fit of apoplexy or an ague, and died, and Hobson (that is to say, you) would content himself with a dignified epitaph like this:

'OF THE LATE MR. D——

The insults that were heaped on Dobson's hearse
Harm not his memory. His sins were worse.'

Then he could settle down to his great ode on the Spirit of Harmony and Universal Goodwill. But it's not the manner of this century at all."

"SOME PEOPLE GET ALL THE LUCK!"

"What is the manner of this century?"

"We are far more interested in psychology, which means hitting below the belt. What you ought to do is to remember who is Basket's most important rival. Let us say it is Barrel. Write then a tremendous appreciation of Barrel for *The Counterblast*. Make it really fulsome. Go down on your knees to Barrel. How could

anything annoy Basket more, since it is the one thing that he dares not do himself? It is quite likely that if you did that Basket would come round and kill you, and I have always thought that this would be a very good kind of case for Scotland Yard. What is the motive? No one can say. If anyone has been wronged it is you. The police would be entirely baffled in the absence of the customary clues. Won't you do that, please?"

"But I don't want Basket to kill me."

"Always self, self. No one seems to have any idea of sacrifice for art's sake. Why not do as I said at the beginning? Send Basket a Christmas card with a robin on it. A Christmas card if possible with two robins on it, touching each other's beaks, and a few simple Victorian lines:

"I WAS PLOUGHED IN GREEK."

'Never a Christmas passes,
Never an old year ends,
But a vile man makes a squabble
And a good man makes amends.'

It will show how trifling you think your petty quarrel seems against the awful background of Armageddon. And it will only cost you fivepence if you don't gum down the envelope."

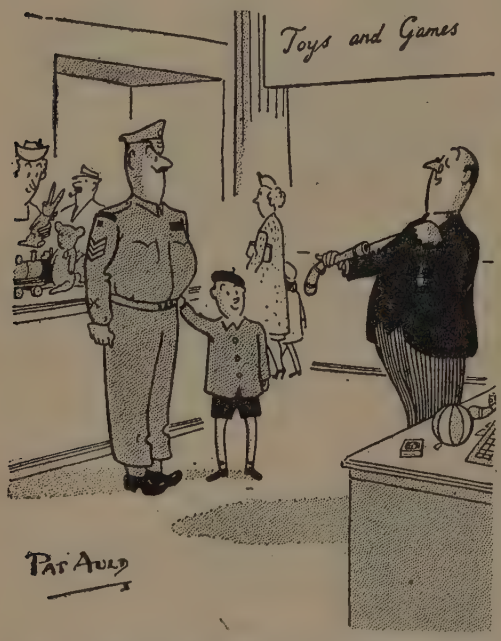
I thought he seemed a little more cheerful when he went away.

BOOKS

Books, it has been said, furnish a room. I am making this my opening sentence not because it is particularly true or untrue—I mean, it would all depend on the size of the room, the number of books, and so on—but because it strikes the right note. What I want to tell my readers about is not so much the literary aspect of books as their appearance, habits, character, significance and relation to the people they have to deal with.

First, then, for their appearance. Books may be almost any colour, and psychologists have often wondered if the colour of books has much effect on human nature, but have not been able to find out much more than that dark-blue books

are rather apt to be old-established, red books show up more, and pale-coloured books are likely to be considered flippant from a distance. What psychologists think rather interesting, though, is the fact that all books, when lumped together in book-shelves, look the same whatever their colour; that is, they all look like different coloured books rather than books in different colours. Another interesting fact about the appearance of books is that they are quite often coloured to match along the top edges of the pages. This is interesting because human nature is not sure if it is done to show the public which way up the book goes, or to hide the dust, and also because human nature, in its inmost heart, never fails to be impressed by publisher's cleverness in colouring the edge, or thickness, of a page without getting the colour on to the page itself. Yet another thing about books which impresses human nature is the undeniable fact that one page by itself has no thickness, while three hundred pages pressed together have. One way and another, then, books have a pretty good hold over the public and will always remain an insoluble mystery, even when the back of one comes off and the public can see that it is no more than gum and old newspaper; this, indeed, the public finds the most interesting fact of all.

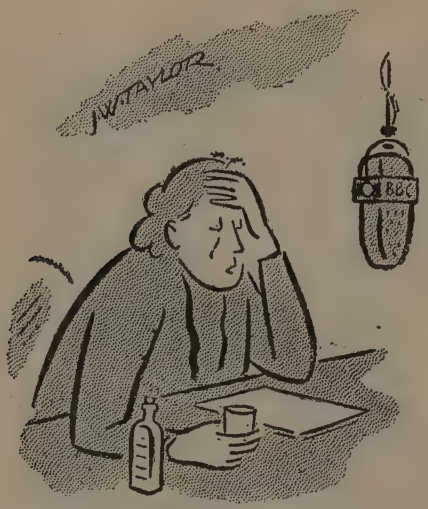


"But there now, why am I showing you? You probably know how to use these things better than I do."

The title of a book is either printed straight on to the back or on a label, and a book with a label has the distinction of looking very clean indeed until its owner notices how dirty it is. Providence has allowed for this by putting a spare label at the end of the book where, as likely as not, it will never be found; but anyone finding one and, after scraping part of the old label off with half a pair of scissors, managing to stick the new label on so that none of the old label shows, experiences the biggest thrill allotted to book-owners: the satisfaction of having bound and printed the whole book, if not written it. Psychologists are not, however, so interested in this as you might think, because they say it is just what they have come to expect of human nature. They are more interested in the relation between book-owners and book-jackets, pointing out that book-owners start by being unconsciously grateful to book-jackets as showing the rest of the world, from several yards' distance, how new the book is, and end by being consciously ungrateful when, after the book has been a week in its book-shelf, they realize that their instincts are right and they must throw the book-jacket away. No one has ever thrown a book-jacket away with-

THE KEEPER OF SILENCES.

"I represent the papers of the entire world. To what do you attribute your eternal reputation for getting in last with the news?"

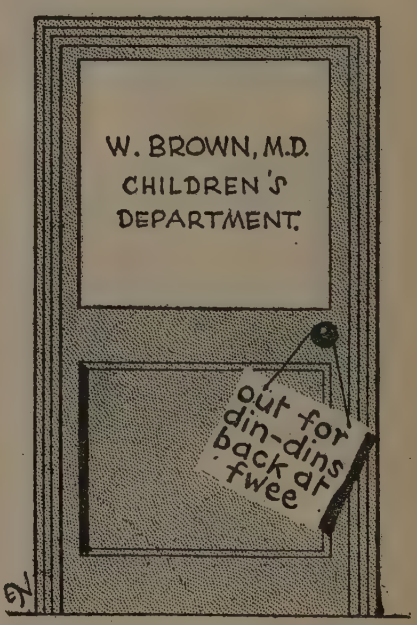


"I WONDER HOW MANY OF YOU SPOTTED THE MISTAKE IN YESTERDAY'S RECIPE?"

out feeling a literary vandal, and psychologists consider this a very hopeful sign.

Books, as I have hinted, are kept in bookshelves. There is a certain amount of accumulated convention in how they are arranged, with a strong tendency to having the smallest books in the top shelf, working down to the real hamdingers at floor level. Psychologists consider this a hopeful sign, too, this time of human nature's innate artistry, but add that it may have something to do with the way bookshelves tend to have wider spaces between as they get lower. However that may be, it makes it a fairly safe bet that anyone getting down to floor level in a book-shelf is either out for improvement or looking for something to put on something which has just been glued together. Psychologists point out here that there has been a lot of woolly thinking about heavy books, and that it is time we faced up to the truth that books which are heavy and nothing else must expect to be used as heavy and nothing else, and that people using them thus to glue things together need feel no more than what they actually do feel—a faint literary smugness superimposed on pleasure in a job well done.

The maintenance of books is on the whole a fairly simple matter, amounting to no more than dusting them and keeping them from being borrowed. Most books are dusted by being pushed to the back of the shelf while the front is dusted, and then being pulled forward into place, the last bit being the difficulty. Anyone who dusts books properly, by taking them out and putting them back, runs the risk of getting caught up in a hitherto uninteresting book and being compelled to read the end half backwards, and this takes too much time to happen often. As for borrowing, a lot has been said and written about book-borrowing, but not enough, I think, about a very strong factor without which the situation would hardly exist. This is the extraordinary, almost fanatical, compulsion which comes over people who have read a certain book to insist that someone who has not read it shall read it at once. It is only natural that



if the person who has read the book and the person who has not are both standing within reach of the book-shelves, the person who has read the book should actually take the book from the book-shelves and—to such lengths does fanaticism carry human nature—actually put in the hands of the person who has not read it and—to such lengths does fanaticism drive human nature—not in the least want to either; and it is still more natural that anyone walking out of a house with an unwanted book feels dimly that the book was a present and that it would be a kindness to keep it.

LETTER FROM A QUIET VILLAGE

Dear Mum and All,—This is a very quiet little village. Our Tank park is in the middle near the church and the school. The school is so small if you kick a ball hard it goes right through one window and out of the other. We are a quiet lot we start at seven getting the Tanks going, also the lorries, we do a lot of night driving in convoy, also by day we go out frequent, but the roads are so narrow we have to go very slow, especially the Ls, or you keep hitting things, the Ls do, it is difficult, the bridges are so small if you wobble you go right through and over. I wish there was a cinema, but it is too quiet a village for that! Only two pubs, and not enough beer to get drunk, except Dick, you know Dick, he would get drunk on a dessert iland. Saturday we had a dance in the village hall, only two fights, it was a quiet dance, there was a siren in the middle, but no bombs at least not in the village, a wood caught fire and we had to go and put it out, there were three fire engines came through the village, we went in lorries. We are only two miles from Jim's areodrome, the bombers come back about three in the morning, in the day they practice hedge-hopping. I have seen Jim twice. Sometimes they fly a target plane and the Ack-Ack fire at it. There are ranges a mile away but I have not been out yet, but some of us have. There are 300 of us here, we are in huts or billitted, I hope we move soon, I do not like such a quiet place. Cheerio for now, Bill.

LETTER TO A TOY-SHOP

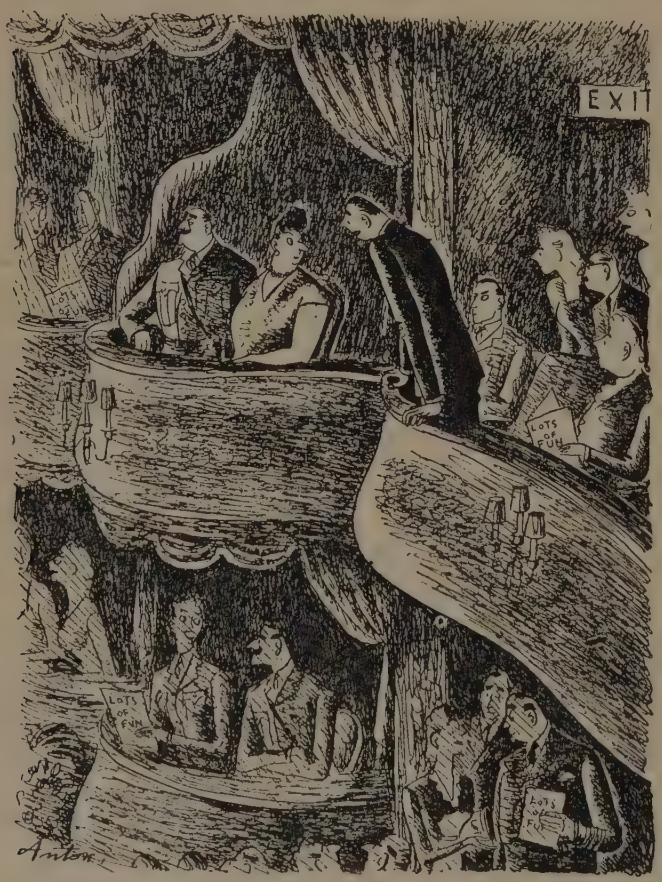
(*To The Juvenile Novelty Emporium, Googe Street, Hardcaster.*)

Sirs,—I want to tell you how pleased I am with the wooden engine (green) which I purchased at your emporium a week or so ago. In conformity with my usual practice I removed this engine, together with certain other juvenile novelties, from the top shelf of the linen-cupboard and carried them down to the sitting-room in order to make a few final tests before wrapping them up for delivery. This was on Christmas Eve—a cold night, if you remember, even for the time of year.

It should not be necessary for me to explain why these articles are kept normally in the linen-cupboard. Some parents prefer the top of a wardrobe, others pile

everything into the oak chest and hope for the best; but the best and wisest choose a place high up with plenty of natural cover in the shape of bolsters, blankets and perhaps an eiderdown. The principle on which birds build their nests should always be followed in these matters.

In any case it is clear to me, on reflection, that it is no business whatever of yours whether I keep my presents in the linen-cupboard or not. What does concern you is the fact that when I took hold of the piece of string you provided, with the idea of pulling the engine along the floor, it (the string) came clean off at the first tug. With a heavier engine I should, I dare say, have fallen over backwards when this happened and possibly have done some injury to my back. A nice Christmas we should all have had then, with the head of the house unable to move without help, and a crowd of doctors and nurses about the place constantly demanding hot water. As things turned out I kept my balance and simply set about tying the string on again. I knotted it twice, a precaution which ought obviously to have been taken before the engine left your shop. Imagine my amazement and disgust when, halfway down the first run from the door to the fire-place, one of the wheels fell off. Note that I say "fell off." Had it been knocked off against the leg of a chair or wrenched off through becoming jammed in the space between the floorboards, there might be some excuse—though even then I should like to point out that engines designed to be pulled about by children must expect an occasional collision with the furniture, nor can they always rely on a perfectly smooth and regular permanent way. But this wheel just naturally fell off. If you want to know why, I suggest that you take a look at any similar wooden engines you may have in stock. I don't mean that that in itself will necessarily fetch the



"JUST TO DECIDE A SMALL BET, MADAM—ARE YOU GOING TO BE PART OF THE SHOW?"

wheels off, but I do say that you will be well advised to turn your head away when you cough.

Well, I put the wheel on again by pushing the nail back into its hole with my finger, and to make a good job of it give it a final tap with the cast-iron elephant you charged me eleven-and-six for, you rascal. That the wheel would break in half and the other three wheels simultaneously come adrift and roll across the carpet was perhaps to be expected. What I did NOT expect and cannot forgive is that the elephant itself disintegrated, one of the larger pieces falling directly on the roof of the driver's cabin. This was the first intimation I had had that the cabin was made of cardboard; but to you it will of course come as no surprise to hear that the whole structure collapsed like a house of cards.

At this point I gave the engine a kick in the boiler, and I want you to know that it stood up to it remarkably well. The funnel flew off, but apart from that the toy (or novelty, as it is better described) suffered little or no further damage. This seems to me a remarkable tribute to the solid construction and sound workmanship of the goods you sell, and I shall not fail to tell all my friends about it. In these days of flimsy and undependable products it is a pleasure to get one's toe up against something fairly solid; perhaps you will allow me to repeat the sensation next time I call at your emporium.

Please make any use of this letter you see fit.

January, 1944

DOGS

IT is a long time since I told my readers anything about dogs, and then it was only how to keep one. I propose to-day to be a bit less practical and talk about dogs in general, dogs in general being well known to have a certain set of characteristics which no dog in particular has. To put it in another way, a dog belonging to someone has only the good characteristics, and a dog belonging to someone else has only the bad; a useful measure devised by Providence to keep dogs in with, but subordinate to, the human race.

There are so many dogs in the world that an attempt to hit the average in dogs' appearance has left statisticians baffled. They point out, however, that dogs fall naturally into two categories, plain or patterned. Plain dogs may be brown, black or dirty white, and patterned dogs a mixture of any of these three colours, and the interesting thing about a patterned dog is that it enjoys a very mild kudos, there being at the back of its owner's mind an idea that the dog thought the pattern up itself. Furthermore, a patterned dog provides what logicians call something to talk about, many an awkward gap in conversation having been bridged by a dog-owner pointing out that one of the blotches on its dog is the exact shape of a map of Australia. A dog may also have long or short legs. Scientists tell us that short legs tend to make a dog seem less self-reliant and therefore give it a better time. All dogs have collars with metal discs which tinkle when they scratch behind their ears, and all dogs scratch behind their ears. A dog's ears may be any size or length, but are eligible for publicity only when they justify a special eating-dish. A dog's tail too may be any size and length provided there is enough there for the dog to wag or not, its tail being a dog's strongest moral weapon. A dog's next strongest moral weapon is of course its eyes, all dogs being equipped with very big brown eyes which all dog-owners are deceived into thinking unique, no dog's owner realizing that *no dog has small blue eyes*. Scientists and psychologists think this an interesting point.

Dogs are very fond of walking, or rather they are very fond of their owners walking, the idea being that the owner should follow a set path which the dog can check up on every now and then in passing. (There is a tradition, by the way, that a dog thinks that a walk is called a walkies, and so it is always called such when being spoken of to a dog. The result, naturally, is that every dog *does* think a walk is called a walkies.) A walk makes a dog either very muddy or very wet. When a dog is wet it stands still, gathers itself together and suddenly, as it were, buzzes all over; this sends the water off in a fine spray, leaving the dog merely damp. A

muddy dog dries more slowly by evaporation, and the mud flakes off gradually on to the carpet. Certain types of dogs carry permanent burrs and thistle-heads in their ears and legs; such dogs, two or three times a year, have most of their hair cut off, when their publicity value takes a sharp upturn until they become themselves again. Thus its owner can never really feel happy about a dog like this, because it always has what its owner considers too much hair or not enough. Statisticians say, however, that a dog with too much hair tends, like a dog with short legs, to have a happier life, and for the same reason.

The eating and drinking habits of dogs are full of interest and have a long tradition behind them. All dogs are noisy drinkers, but as a rule the bigger the dog the noisier the drinker. Owners are always pleased to see their dogs drinking, because they know that their dog is now about to be not thirsty after having been so. Dogs are also noisy eaters; the noise here is caused by the dog pushing the tin plate its food is on round a stone floor till it pins the plate into a corner where it can do no more than rattle it. Dogs have to push their plates round because they have to push their food round the plate before they can catch it. It must all be very difficult, but it is so traditional that we can hardly expect any individual dog to work out a better plan.

"This is the most realistic Assault Course of the lot."

Traditionally, also, dogs bark at strangers, or any noise outside the front door. Originally this was to keep burglars away, but mankind has learnt that it has other uses; as an extra door-bell, for instance, and as a substitute for the first five minutes of conversation with whoever has arrived, so that on the whole it works quite well. Dogs do not as a rule bark at other dogs; the average dog, on sighting another dog at a hundred yards, registers by telescoping itself to half its length and twice its height and whistling. All dogs, however, bark at cats; on a high, sharp and primeval note which rather shows up the bark they use on strangers as phoney, or done to humour their owners.

Dogs are essentially civilized animals, by which I mean that they have had to fit their lives into civilization as well as they can. Sometimes civilization has made things easy for them; for example, by inventing a round basket with a gap in the front for the dog to get in by. Most dogs climb over the side of their baskets, but every now and then they do get in by the gap in the front; as good a tribute as any to the co-operation between dog and man. Stairs, though, are another matter. Stairs were invented by man for man, and dogs, especially small dogs, have had to do their best with them, their best usually being a sideways jump for going down and a forward jump for going up. As for doors, everyone knows what dogs have

to put up with in the way of doors, and doors in the way of dogs. There have been several theories explaining exactly why, if a dog is on one side of a door, it has to be on the other and, as soon as it is on the other, it has to be on the other side from this other side—that is, the same side as it was, though that does not make it any easier for the door-opener. One theory is simply that dogs think doors are clever. They like to see them open and shut. They cannot see them open and shut too often. They think that the people opening and shutting the doors for them like it too. I myself think this as good a theory as any, because it should convince even the dog-owner opening the door of the inherent goodness of the dog; and this, statistics tell us, is the one time when a dog-owner feels its convictions wavering.

THE SUCCESSOR

Taking over a Detachment of Kugombas from Lieutenant Sympson has proved to be no joke. Not because he has set a high standard, but because he seems to have conducted affairs in what I can only characterize as a very peculiar and unmilitary manner.

"What hours do you open the canteen?" I asked the British sergeant.

"Mr. Sympson," he said, "used to serve the men at all hours. Except of course with beer. Mr. Sympson disliked rules and regulations of any sort. He said that if there were no rules or regulations nobody could break them and there wouldn't be any crime."

At four o'clock on my first morning I awakened suddenly in my tent and found myself surrounded by six fierce-looking Kugombas with fixed bayonets and glaring eyes.

"I am at your mercy," I said in my best Swahili, "but I warn you that I am a British officer and, as such, obliged to sell my life dearly. What do you want?"

"Cigarettes, effendi," said the ringleader. "We have just come off guard. Bwana Sympson always used to sell us cigarettes when we came off guard."

"Help yourselves," I said, "and pay me in the morning."

After that I made fixed hours for the canteen, but though I would rush back from lunch or some other meal to be there punctually, nobody ever come at the proper time, but always just after I had locked up the canteen box. As they always had splendid excuses for not being on time I went back to the old system, except that I arranged for the British sergeant to have a stock of cigarettes in case any were needed in the night.

Another trouble I had was that Sympson had put off doing an enormous number of jobs during the previous few weeks on the excuse that as he would be leaving soon it would be much better if his successor handled them. All morning on my first day people were ringing up about various things. "Mr. Sympson put off my monthly inspection of the camp till you came," said the sub-area sanitary

corporal. "What day would suit you?" Then there was the Garrison Engineer and the Welfare Officer and the Education Officer and the Entertainments Officer and the Sports Officer and the Medical Officer and an odd man who called himself a Liaison Officer, and all the other officers without which no modern army is complete.

I told them all that I would ring them up later, and started to deal with the queue of Kugombas lined up outside my tent. The first man said he had had a letter from home saying his wife had run away with another man and taken the cows as well, and Bwana Sympson had told him that when I came I would know exactly the best thing to do about it.

I listened to ten other problems and then rang up my O.C. at Company Headquarters and said that I had changed my mind and would be delighted to volunteer for the vacancy on the Battle Drill Course which he had so kindly offered me. Was it too late?

"Not at all," he said. "I will send Sympson back to replace you at once."

I then told all the Kugombas to return with their problems at 10.45 next day, and made appointments with the Salvage Corporal, the Garrison Engineer, the Education Officer, the Welfare Officer, the Entertainments Officer, the Sports Officer and the Medical Officer for 1100 hours sharp.

THE PHONEY PHLEET

H.M.S. Prang

Minesweeping brings the same delight
As mushroom-picking, by and large;
The crop that burgeons overnight—
The search—the harvest (free of charge).

Lieutenant Platt chose this career
And nobly Whitehall played the game.
The gave the *Prang* the finest gear
And full instructions for same.

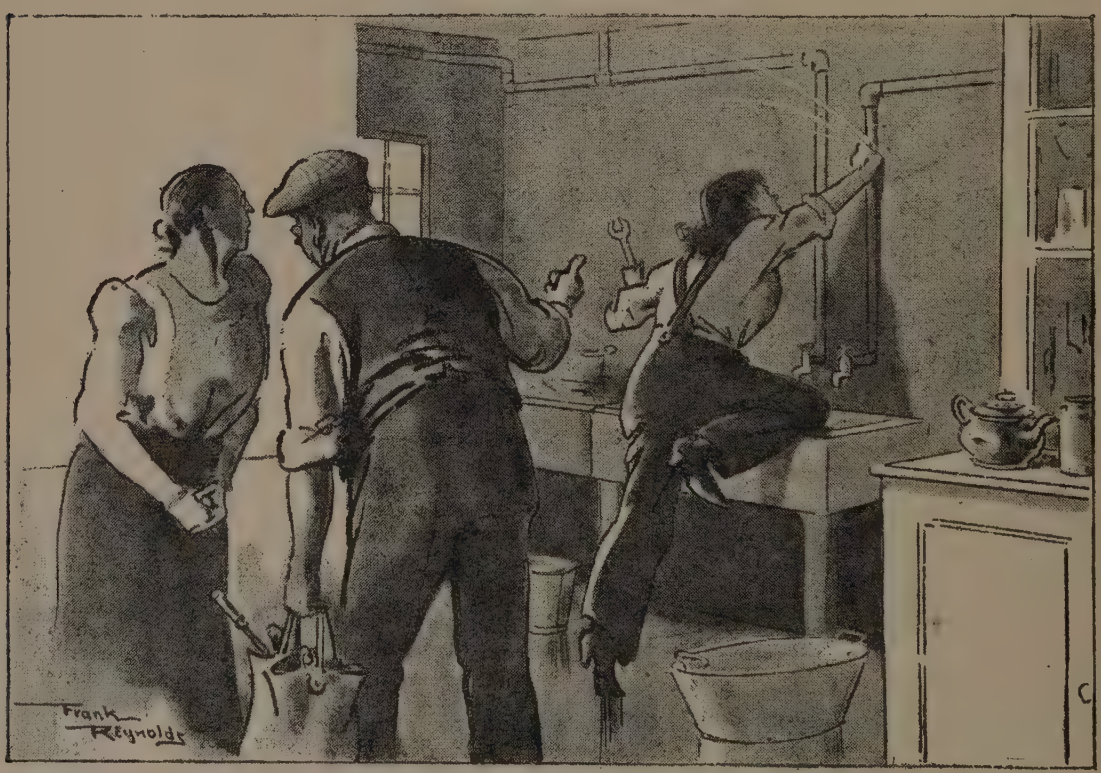
A gallant ship, respectful crew,
Devoted captain . . . mighty fine!
But—this was literally true—
They'd never found a single mine.

Not *one*. At every other base
A daily dozen strewed the path,
But here, this desert of a place
Was safer than a baby's bath.

What made it ten times worse was that
A British minefield richly stocked,
Lay round the headland; and to Platt
It seemed those mines sat up and mocked.

Yes, mocked him in their serried lines
With sneering unexploded grins.
He raved "You wait, you bally mines!
You eggs! You wait and see who wins!"

The weeks, the months dragged on. His score
Remained consistently a duck.
He couldn't stand it any more;
On June 6th he ran amuck.



"WE'LL 'AVE THIS LITTLE JOB FIXED FOR YOU IN NO TIME, MUM—MY MATE'S GOT AN APPOINTMENT FOR AN 'AIR-DO!"

He'd show those mines what *Prang* could do!
And charging down their ordered rows
He one by one (or sometimes two)
Dispatched them, shouting "Up she goes!"

He knew that this was . . . (Wallop!) . . . sin,
That he would probably . . . (Bang!) . . . shot,
But what of that? His eye was in
And he . . . (Crash!) . . . detonate the lot.

At last but one remained intact
Of all the plethora there'd been.
He bumped it off and—this is fact—
It bagged a German submarine.

* * * * *

This shows that Virtue's Just Reward
May come by Many Devious Ways;
Alternatively, If You're Bored
Cut Loose—it Very Often Pays.

MY HAT, PLEASE

"You are in lof with me, no?" The Baroness removed a cigarette from her scarlet lips and blew a pillar of smoke into the air, accentuating her likeness to a surfacing whale.

"No," I said, for want of a better answer.

"It is strange, that," said the Baroness without rancour. "In Hungary always I have one, two, three, four, five, *six* men at my feet. But you English—pah! You are as cold as cheese. You do not like my long nose, is it?"

It was, but I didn't say so. "We are a nation at war, Baroness," I reminded her sternly. "We have no time for lof. We make the fight, yes? And while we make the fight we must subdue our fires; yes, yes, we must seem cold. But when all is over, when peace comes, then aha! we are so hot as—as turpentine, if you understand my meaning."

"Zut!" cried the Baroness, with appalling vehemence. "You draw my legs. See this—now—this old goat that dances here by us. Observe him well. He makes the lof and lets the war go scram, is it not so?"

"Hush!" I said, scandalized. "It is the Assistant Minister of Pulp. If, as you suggest, he dances with a certain intentness, be assured that it is for the war effort. Not for one moment does he forget the war effort. The lady, it may be,

is a Swede, and Sweden, as is well known, is rich in pine-forests, from which our dwindling supplies of wood-pulp might with advantage be replenished."

"'Drindling'? 'Replenished'? I do not know such words. You must speak more plain, please, or else I am silent."

I apologized. "'I dwindle,'" I explained, "means 'I shrink, I grow smaller, I become less and less.'"

"You are sick, yes?"

"No, no. I am all right. I am well, thank you. It is only that—I am explaining, I make clear to you what is to 'dwindle,' 'I dwindle—I grow less' Yes?"

The Baroness instantly became motherly.

"Waiter," she screamed to a passing admiral. "This gentleman, he drindles. Bring wine, if you please, or whisky-bitters. Only make it with haste."

I looked about me wildly. The band had not stopped, and here and there a couple danced doggedly on; otherwise it seemed to me the whole world was listening. I dared not look at the admiral. I had not even the courage to take refuge in open flight. Instead I turned my scarlet face to the Baroness and begged her to accompany me to the supper-room. "You would like, perhaps," I muttered, "a trifle or something." The thought crossed my mind that if I could interest this terrifying woman in food I might find an opportunity to slip away and drown myself.

"Ha!" she said, rising to her feet with a girlishness impossible to exaggerate or forgive, "you invite me to the supper-room, is it, and then perhaps to the *conservatoire*. No? Bad man! I make the mistake when I say he is cold."

"Yes," I said. I had never felt hotter in my life. "Come along, or the—the smoked salmon will all have gone."

* * * * *

"In my country," said the Baroness, surveying the display on the supper-table, "we have not the sandwich."

"No?"

"No."

"Oh."

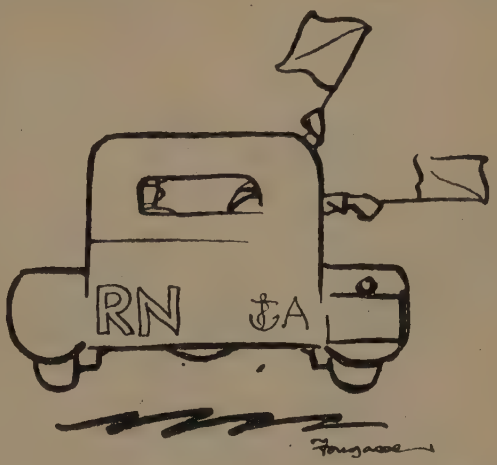
"No. We take the meat and about it the bread each ways. So." She turned her left hand palm upwards, laid a chicken wing on it by way of illustration and pressed the palm of her right hand firmly down upon it.

"That is a sandwich," I pointed out, "in any country. It may be rather a thick one, but anything that has meat in the middle and bread on both sides is a sandwich. May I get rid of that piece of chicken for you?"

"Bad boy!" she cried in a voice that rose clear above the clatter of knives and forks. "You must not make lof to me here. See, all your English friends regard you with raised eyes. Let us have a plateful of salami in quietness."

I did not attempt to explain that in this country, whatever may be the case in Hungary, there is no passionate significance in an offer to relieve your partner of

a wing of chicken. I did not attempt to explain anything. I simply stood there and drindled, while the Baroness tackled a plate of spam with noisy enthusiasm. Of all the times I have been miserable at dances I do not recollect an occasion when I have been so miserable as this.



"You do not eat," said the Baroness, observing me. "In my country we have a saying, 'The stomach that has least in it makes the most noise.' It will be well that you have a dose of chicken or engage this trifle."

I engaged the trifle. All nightmares, I reminded myself, have an end. After all, I had only to say "Excuse me one moment, Baroness," put my fingers in my ears so that I should not hear whatever misinterpretation she chose to put on the remark, and quit the building for ever. What could be simpler? I thought to myself, engaging the trifle more closely.

However, as it happened, a better plan presented itself. Further down the table a colonel with a very fine moustache was eating nuts and eyeing the Baroness with the curiosity natural to a man who had never seen jelly and spam eaten together before.

"Baroness," I whispered, "who is this English colonel who makes lof to you so openly with his eyes?"

Instantly, as I had hoped, her passionate Magyar blood was aroused.

"Introduct me," she commanded, sweeping the colonel with a glance that seemed to take all the iron out of his moustache. "He is a type, that."

I did not know the colonel's name, and could not recollect the Baroness's, but it is a poor man who stumbles over trifles.

"Baroness," I said loudly, "may I present Colonel Mumble? Colonel Mumble, the Baroness Bumble of Rumble."

"Bad man!" the Baroness was saying, as I fled for the cloak-room. "You are in lof with me, no?"

Judging simply from the colonel's face, I thought not.

SAVE YOUR BACON

"Never waste a scrap of old rag, or carpet, or old rope, string or swine."

Kent paper.

MILDEW MANOR

"If I want to change the name of my house I don't see why I shouldn't go ahead and do it," I said.

"A grave step into the unknown," James objected. He says things like that just as though he were Mr. Gladstone contemplating some outrageous frivolity on the part of the Tories. Even when his mouth is full of toast and marmalade.

"It isn't as if it were a dog or a child, James. A house doesn't have to come when it's called."

"Just as well, when you think of the confusion if somebody shouted 'Kia-Ora' on the Kingston by-pass."

"It seems to me terribly important when you buy a house to make certain its name will go on sounding right, down through the centuries, in case you happen to be starting a famous line. You never know when one of your descendants might have to accept a peerage."

"I wonder what he'll think of the hot-water system here," said James, who had been robbed of his bath by a clinker.

"By that time water will be deservedly out of date. People will breathe a gas called lavogen once a week instead.

"What's the matter with 'Lord Littlehurst,' anyway?"

"Everything. 'When Lord Littlehurst sat down there was a dead silence in the Chamber.' No good. 'It is understood to be the view of Viscount Littlehurst that the situation in the canning industry is pregnant with change.' Hopeless. 'The Earl of Littlehurst and friend . . .' It won't do, James. It's just not fair to the great unborn. It's a hell of a name."

"It only means 'little wood.' "

"Well, I don't want everyone to think my pond is a football pool."

"Houses have roots," James said. "How long has it been 'Littlehurst?' "

"Only since 1880, when a go-ahead pepper merchant bought it and decided the name it had had for two hundred and fifty years was worn out. 'Birdover's' was a grand name."

"Did a Birdover really build it?"

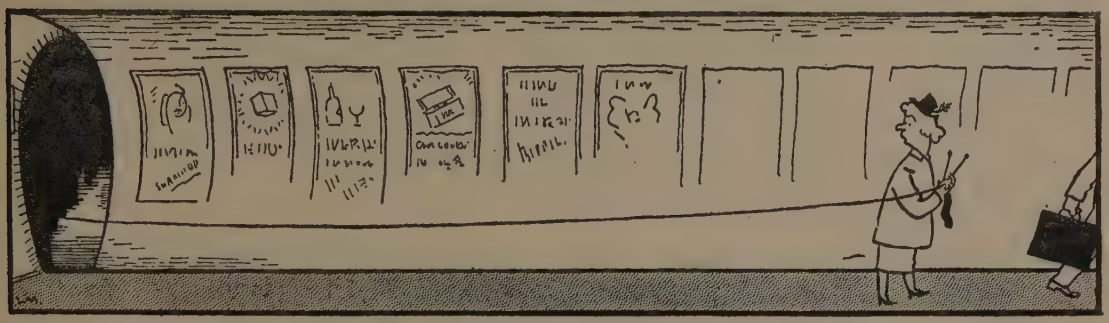
"This middle bit. Built it and lived in it and made wheels here for forty years, and then left it to his son George, and so on almost up to the pepper merchant."

"What a pity the name's been snooped. The gentleman with the mustachios wouldn't care to swap?"

"Not even after being softened up with my last bottle of decent sherry. I can't blame him. The whole Common is called 'Birdover's' and he lives on it too."

"I suppose you could take out a sort of deed poll."

"I thought an ad. in *The Times* would be enough. Something like: 'I, So-



and-So, having entered into possession of the messuage known as Littlehurst, on the Common of Birdover, in the County of Surrey, and being after due consideration convinced that the aforesaid title is unworthy of and indeed an insult to a dwelling house of age, character and integrity, do hereby declare that in future it will be known as So-and-So.' "

"If you did I could follow it up next day with a shorter one: 'Your messuage received and understood.' "

I ignored this.

"Perhaps the simplest thing would be just to buy a new die-stamp and tell the Post Office."

"Yes, but what?"

"Haven't you any ideas, James?"

"It depends which sort of name you hanker after. Some think the Agricultural goes well."

"Such as?"

"Oh, 'Iron Harrows,' or 'Loam Farm,' or 'Outcrop,' or 'Ploughblades.' "

"I can't imagine milord Ploughblades making much of a mark in debate."

"Well, it's your house. I'm afraid you're a bit late to plunge into the Feudal."

"You mean 'Birdover Hall' and that sort of thing?"

"Yes, and especially if you really mean to put in electric light after the war. There's always the Tree category."

" 'The Cedars'——"

"—Muswell Hill. Or 'Five Oaks.' How many oaks do you think you've got?"

"About eleven," I said, looking hurriedly out of the dining-room window.

"It's an awkward number. Hilda once knew a man who got asthma from pines and called his house 'No Firs.' "

"I'm off trees. Of course there's the Architectural."

" 'Low Gables' and 'Black Barn' and 'Phoney Timbers'?"

"Yes. The trouble with them is that in the course of time someone may quite

reasonably want to raise the gables or paint the barn white, and what then? Too cramping."

"You could call it 'Birdover's Once.' "

"I suppose I could."

"You haven't thought of 'Pixie Corner' or 'Elf End'?"

"See if some more black coffee will help."

"It's difficult."

"We're getting away from a suitable handle for my illustrious afterbear."

"When's this nasty little snob going to turn up?"

"I can't say exactly. Give us a century to flower comfortably."

"Gracious, they won't still be making peers by then. They'll probably be cancelling so many every year instead."

"You've been listening to the week-end Herbert Morrison again."

"I believe in political Evolution," said James, rather too heavily.

"And you have some jam on the end of your nose."

"We've forgotten the Antiquarian category. The parish records will be full of good things like 'Stowgumber's Wold' and 'Boglington's Hundred.' "

"If we were going in for nonsense of that kind we should have to drag old Birdover in. It wouldn't be fair not to."

"Then that brings us back to where we started."

"I'm afraid it does."

James pushed his plate away firmly.

"Do you know," he said, "I shouldn't be surprised if you called this place 'Littlehurst.' "

"Do you know," I told him, "I shouldn't be surprised if we did."

THE METAPHORS THAT GREW

"He was opposed to a fence round Japan and letting her stew in her own juice, as it would create a festering sore with permanent explosive tendencies."

Mr. Joseph Grew, quoted in "The Times."

H. J.'S DRAMATIC FRAGMENTS

What follows came about as the result of a misunderstanding, I having thought my wife wanted me to get rope, and soap being what she actually required. The rope I bought her had got tarred while at sea, and was very thick indeed, a fine specimen of its kind being what I thought it was. It was very long and inclined to crinkle, so the only way to keep it straight was to tie it to a chimney stack and let it hang down the side of the house. This had the disadvantage that people tended to climb it

and I therefore made out a notice that said "This is a private rope; trespassers deserve to be prosecuted," the wording getting round the legal difficulties. I put the notice first of all in a triangular frame for cheapness, but my wife made me add a fourth side as she said our home might otherwise be mistaken for an inn. It was while making this adjustment that the below occurred to me.

FANDANGO FOR HARMONIUM AND ORCHESTRA

(*The scene is out East. Within view are a harem, a caravanserai and a bazaar.*)

First Camel Driver. O foul ill-favoured brute! Curses upon the day I purchased thee from the menagerie in Preston, Lancs.

Second Camel Driver. Would that the Master change back once again to Fords!

Third Camel Driver. To hear is to obey: thank heaven I'm deaf.

A Houri. I hear waterfalls: I smell spices: I see almond blossom.

(*A camel bites her. Exit* Houri.)

A Slave Dealer. Here is a fine Nubian. He can straighten horseshoes with his bare hands, cook omelets and do elementary bookbinding.

A Bystander. Are the gems of his virtues set in the gold of cheapness?

Slave Dealer. Not so that you would notice.

A Fakir. Attend, lords and nobles! I shall now do the Indian rope trick.

(*He throws up a rope, climbs it, and in a few moments descends, angrily hauling with him another fakir he has found at the top.*)

A Sage. Harken to the wisdom of Suleyman, the son of Abdullah, the son of Perkins: Speak not well of those who are absent; you may be talking to their enemies. Consort not with winebibbers; beer is cheaper and more nourishing. Seek not to adorn a woman with precious jewels; if she be beautiful it is unnecessary, if ugly, pointless.

A Cobbler. To-day is the birthday of His Excellency the Chief Torturer. Ring out, wild bells.

A Coppersmith. I hear he has perfected a new invention called "The Eezi-squeeze." The first performance is a matinée on Tuesday.

(*Enter the* Grand Vizier, *gorgeously attended. Someone tries to sell him a carpet. Someone else tries to tell his fortune. They are removed into a wheeled cage which accompanies him everywhere.*)

Grand Vizier. It is our pleasure thus to move unnoticed among the populace and harken with humble ear to their comments on the political situation. Ho, beggar, what thinkest thou of the Government?

BEGGAR. Their mercy is as the sand of the sea. Their wisdom is as grass upon the mountain. Their honesty is as the stones of the Great Wall of China.

GRAND VIZIER. Ah! a supporter. Let the chief of my bodyguard shake him by the hand.

(*Exit.*)

A POET. Here is a ballad I have written fair upon a scroll and dedicated to the laughing eyes of the maidens who draw water from the well:

Girlikins, girlikins, whither so swift?
If you wait for my camel I'll give you a lift.
Be free with your favours and toss a pert ear.
To-day is for lovers, so spend it, my dear.

"OF COURSE, I KNOW LONDON'S THE HUB OF THE EMPIRE, AND ALL THAT . . ."

A sardine of silver, a mullet of gold
Remind us that misers are clammy and cold.
Girlikins, girlikins, thus ends my song.
I hope you won't think it a trifle too strong.

(*As the* Poet *finishes, night falls, which distracts attention from him. A caravan of merchants on elephants arrives, followed by a caravan of merchants on yaks and another of merchants in the station bus. The rabble of a defeated army queue up at a wine-shop.*)

Enter the Crier of Glad Tidings *and the* Crier of Woeful Tidings

Crier of Glad Tidings. Rejoice, the lotus is awash with bloom.
Crier of Woeful Tidings. Lament, the vultures hover seedily.
Crier of Glad Tidings. Rejoice, the Government are repaying a loan.
Crier of Woeful Tidings. Lament, the holders have to reinvest.
Crier of Glad Tidings. Rejoice, a ruby-studded fan is found.
Crier of Woeful Tidings. Lament, a wife called "Stone i' the Plum" is lost.

(*Exeunt.*)

An Ancient Potter. My eyes have seen many and curious sights and I have visited Bagdad in youth. My hands are cunning and my knowledge of pottery extensive. But I notice, and point out to those less observant, that the curtain of dusk is pulled across the face of light and that the comfort of the hearth is to be preferred to the desolation of the street. I therefore take up my wheel and such of my merchandise as is both unsold and worth trying again to-morrow, and pass out into the night with the grace and deportment that are the results of a prolonged and intelligent devotion to virtue.

Finis.

GRAND SPLASH

". . . that any of voluntary workers who have spared no effort in making sure that the old city once again turned up trumps and swamped its target."

Rugeley Mercury.

"She is a member of a family that has been farming in the Hurunui electorate for four generations. In 1918 Miss —— joined the New Zealand Army Nursing Service as a masseuse. She has served on several local bodies."

New Zealand paper.

Which felt much better afterwards.

SCHOOLDAYS

The millionaire Globrich whom I often meet is not only fond of boasting that he never received any education as a boy; he has a positive distaste for the thing.

"Show me an educated man," he says, "and I will show you a fool." One could comment on that remark and say that it took many centuries of education to enable the mind of Globrich to mould it, and his tongue to utter it, but the comment would be lost upon Globrich. He does not care to argue about phrases. When I tell him that the war will soon be over he invariably answers "Though, mark you, I think Hitler may have something up his sleeve." When I burst into tears as I always do on hearing this statement he cannot understand the reason for my great

"Is this the crocodile for a number 96 bus?"

grief. He thinks it is mere timidity. I once went down on my knees in the hall of his club and begged him not to say at any time during the lunch which he was proposing to give me that the Germans were a tough nut to crack.

"Because, if you do," I said, "I shall have a nervous breakdown."

But he did not understand. It is better to talk to Globrich about education and the post-war world.

"I learnt all I know," he tells me, "in the hard school of life. I had no book-learning in any shape, sort or form whatsoever. And here I am at the age of sixty-five——"

"Sixty-seven," one corrects him, "according to *Who's Who*."

"There you go with your arithmetic. Sixty-five or sixty-seven, it's all one to yours truly. I never had any time for sums when I was a youngster. The ten fingers of my two hands were plenty good enough for me."

"Many people," one reminds him, "have only eight."

"Scholarship," he cries again contemptuously, "Pah!"

And when one asks him whether he has not sometimes regretted, as the director of so many huge financial concerns ranging from glue to railways, his total inability to read or to write—

"Read?" he says. "Why should I read? There are plenty of people to do that for me. Write! Haven't I got hundreds of stenographers?"

He waves his hands a good deal from side to side as he says these things, and one has a vision of huge offices and polished desks and a multitude of slaves called up to do his bidding by the mere magic of those ten fingers which are all he uses to count their numbers and compute their weekly salaries.

He then goes on impressively, "While you were learning to read and write what do you think I was doing? I was herding pigs, selling newspapers, running errands, holding horses' heads. It was years before I had a farthing in my pockets. But when I did get one I knew what to do with it."

This always confuses me, so that I choke a little over my soup. Why didn't they ever give him any farthings for so long? What was the current rate for holding horses' heads when Globrich was a boy? Did he ever lose any of those pigs after a recount? And where did the newspaper-selling come in? I try to imagine that it was an agricultural newspaper offering a pig to every registered subscriber who arrived on horseback. But how then did Globrich keep his register?

And meanwhile I hear him saying, "If I'd wasted my time as you did reading a lot of musty books at school, God bless my soul, do you think I should be where I am to-day?"

That of course *is* the problem. Would he be? And where is he? And has God in any marked degree blessed his soul? After all he is giving me lunch, and somebody, I suppose, since he cannot read the bill, will tell him what to pay and he will take a glittering handful of farthings out of his pockets—and then I have a sudden idea.

"Scene III—The sea-coast of Illyria."

"If all education were totally abolished," I suggest, "I suppose we should all be Globriches."

He seems to think it possible.

I attempt to envisage a world of Globriches. It is a bright and beautiful world but I detect an economic fallacy in the scheme.

"But then we should have no clerks and stenographers," I point out rather cleverly, and he is forced to admit that viewed from this angle compulsory education may indeed be a blessing in disguise.

"The thing to do is to escape it. You were one of the lucky ones."

"I had a spirit of adventure, let us say."

"Some people believe that the great adventures are those of the soul."

I should like to put down the answer that Globrich gives me to this rather pious observation. But it is one that he must have learned, I think, a long while ago while holding horses' heads or driving his pigs afield. I now have another idea.

"If everybody had to be educated, and well educated, there would be no Globriches at all."

"That's right."

But it is now nearly three o'clock and I have to say thank you, and go away, leaving Globrich to pour out several thousand farthings on the pay-desk while he puffs at his cigar. The dilemma is too hard for me, but it is one that each succeeding President of the Board of Education has to face. If he had caught an infant Globrich, would he have known what to do with him? Would he have stuffed his mind with arithmetic until the poor lad was reduced to becoming a mere clerk? Would he have taught him to read and write until culture had left him with no better brains than those of a stenographer?

Unhappy Board of Education! It has to steer between Scylla and Charybdis all the time. Much money has been spent on my education and most of it in vain. None has been spent on Globrich's and look where he is to-day. Still at his club, very likely, and smoking a second cigar. Possibly all the years of our childhood should be spent in selling newspapers and herding pigs, and education should be regarded as a kind of solace for those who have failed out of that adventure to become plutocrats. At any rate when I learned that Globrich had recently endowed a new Chair of Philosophy at one of the senior universities I knew the reason only too well. He was afraid of competition. The more people he could arrange to educate, the better for him. A millionaire with a more generous outlook would have endowed a Chair of Hippodamology, and given the young men a chance. To send his sons to Harton (and he did this also) was merely parental cruelty.

February, 1944

ILLNESS IN THE OFFICE

IT all began with Willie. We'd told him so often he was too slow to catch cold that we were a bit taken aback to find he wasn't, and when he was away it struck Doris and me how much more you miss the office-boy than the managing director, because there's nothing we like better than knowing Mr. Head is safely in bed for a day or two. The Works typists still talk about the time they had that time the Works manager had measles that first winter. He was one of those people who'd never had anything the matter with them before, and when he came back he and the man from the Ministry who couldn't stand each other before used to sit there hours and hours telling each other how bad they'd been, and they've been quite matey ever since.

But I shall always remember how sick our refugee was when he heard he'd got a mild attack of German measles and said he'd far rather have had the English disease, and nobody knew what he meant till the doctor said that was what Germans called rickets.

Of course once Willie started the ball rolling we all caught it in turn. I've always noticed illness is like the summer holidays. Once they start it just goes round the office till everybody's had theirs—except in the summer you do know who'll be the next person not there when you want them.

It makes you wonder sometimes how it would work out if anybody who didn't have any sick-leave for so long was given well-leave like a Sunday School prize for Regular (you needn't say Punctual) Attendance, and they could leave out the Good Conduct too. Because when all's said and done, if you've done everybody else's work in turn while they were away, it stands to reason you begin to feel you deserve a day or two off yourself when they're all back.

Though I'm not one of those people myself who like lying in bed with crumbs all over the place, but I always say you might as well make the most of it. It all makes a change: what gets me is knowing just what you were doing yesterday at this time and the same to-morrow. And after all there's no washing and ironing to speak of after a week in bed when you do get up which is a blessing. Saves the rations, too, and I will say people are all very kind. Or how on earth invalids would manage on no milk or eggs or fruit I don't know. There's not much pleasure in being ill nowadays. Not like the old days when Mr. Head used to come back after his January flu and end all his thank-you letters, *Yours grapefully.*

And when you go to see someone in hospital what *are* you to take them with flowers costing the earth? Though Doris had a bright idea with her aunt in the

". . . AND LIFE IN THE A.T.C. CAN BE MUCH EASIER IF YOU CAN PLAY THE PIANO."

country who keeps hens who lay there just not knowing what to do with herself while they were making up their minds whether to operate till Doris took her the pattern and wool and everything, and now Doris will have a lovely warm jumper all ready for the summer. And by now her aunt's nicely on the mend and darning all Doris's stockings for her.

Some of the big offices even have their own hospital ward of course, but I must say if it was me I'd feel like asking for a list of who was in already. Anyway hospitals are a bit too full of fresh air for me and as bad as All Clears for waking you up in the middle of the night. Why they should choose the moment you're ill to put you on night shift, for that's what it comes to, is beyond me. And Doris's aunt says the same.

But there are people a hospital just can't keep out, they enjoy being ill so. One office I was in there was a supervisor who'd had her teeth out and her appendix out and her tonsils out till you'd wonder how much there was left in, especially with a floating kidney. The last I heard of her she'd just booked her summer holiday in a nursing home at the seaside.

And of course there are illnesses and illnesses. Like when Doris's chilblain burst and she couldn't get her shoe on but got all her snaps sorted and mounted and it was like a holiday for her till her mother thought it would be a good idea to start the spring-cleaning while she had her at home to help.

Besides in an office being at home ill doesn't always mean to say you're ill. Because as a rule it's the only way to get off for an interview, and even then it's better to stay away two days while you're about it, because a one-day illness people always smell a rat.

Though I did know a girl once and after she'd lunched from three to four on Monday and her train derailed on Tuesday and gone to the dentist's on Wednesday, and been a bridesmaid on Thursday, the chief clerk, who always had something on the 3.30, said what about having a little bet on it. Suppose she had all the time off she wanted the next week, but if she didn't land her job then she must settle down where she was for another year.

I always think myself the awkward thing about being away from the office is not knowing beforehand and having left everything there you want. Look at Doris's girl-friend who's in the Civil Service. Everybody in her room had been

off and when she suddenly felt all queer and shivering, they all told her it was her turn and be sure and take it in time, so she tidied out her drawer just in case, and took her library book home with her and her sweet coupons and her knitting, and went straight to bed with a hot drink and aspirins. And then next morning she was halfway to the office before she remembered she'd gone to bed with flu and hadn't got it.

SCHOOL TESTIMONIAL

(*From Tyrrell and Tyrrell to the Headmaster.*)

DEAR SIR,—J. B. Smith Robinson, who has recently left your school, has applied to us for the post of Office Junior. We shall be obliged if you will let us have his school report.

Yours faithfully,
TYRRELL AND TYRRELL.

(*From the Headmaster to Messrs. Tyrrell and Tyrrell.*)

DEAR SIR,—In reply to your letter, *re* J. B. Smith Robinson, I shall be glad if in future you will kindly quote the school number of candidates, as you will realize that they cannot all be known to me by name; moreover this will facilitate the search in my Statistics Book. For your information, this applicant's number is 1066.

REPORT ON 1066 J. B. SMITH ROBINSON.

Has drunk 82½ gallons of grade A milk, 18½ gallons of orange juice, and eaten 1923 meals. His weight and height have been supervised throughout, and the increase has been normal. Objected to orange juice at first, but became reconciled. He has picked 3 cwt. of blackberries for the school canteen, 17 cwt. of horse chestnuts in connection with the scheme formulated by a well-known firm of dentifrice manufacturers, and 5 cwt. of acorns. The amounts picked each year are in proportion to his increasing years. 1066 has collected 5′ tons of salvage and has been given a badge, which in turn is now required for salvage, also 2 fur. 5 chns. 18 yds. of books.

He has knitted 7 pullovers, 60 scarves, 21 pairs of mittens for the Merchant Navy Comforts Fund. He has been absent for 69 sessions to help the local farmer with my permission, and another 16 with his own permission. He has saved £23 through the School Savings Bank although I regret that owing to his frequent withdrawals he has never been in credit more than 2*s*. He has killed and skinned 72 rabbits belonging to the School Rabbit Club, and has air-dried and dressed the skins. For this he has received a badge. During the last two years he has been supplied with 40 supplementary clothing coupons because his weight exceeds 7 st. 12 lb., or the size of his footwear is greater than 5½, or his height exceeds 5 ft. 3 ins.

Now, in return for this information, I shall be grateful if you will fill in on the enclosed slip, ref. 1066, your opinion of his educational attainment. Nothing elaborate is required. Just a few lines on his Arithmetic, Reading and Writing, or if you notice that he is good at any particular subject, and why. This will enable me to complete his dossier, and inform any of my Staff who may be interested.

Yours faithfully,

M. Jones (*Headmaster*).

THE CONTORTIONISTS

". . . We wish to state clearly that we have no need to plagiarize, our staff being sufficiently competent to stand upon its own bottom."

Trade paper.

LETTER HOME

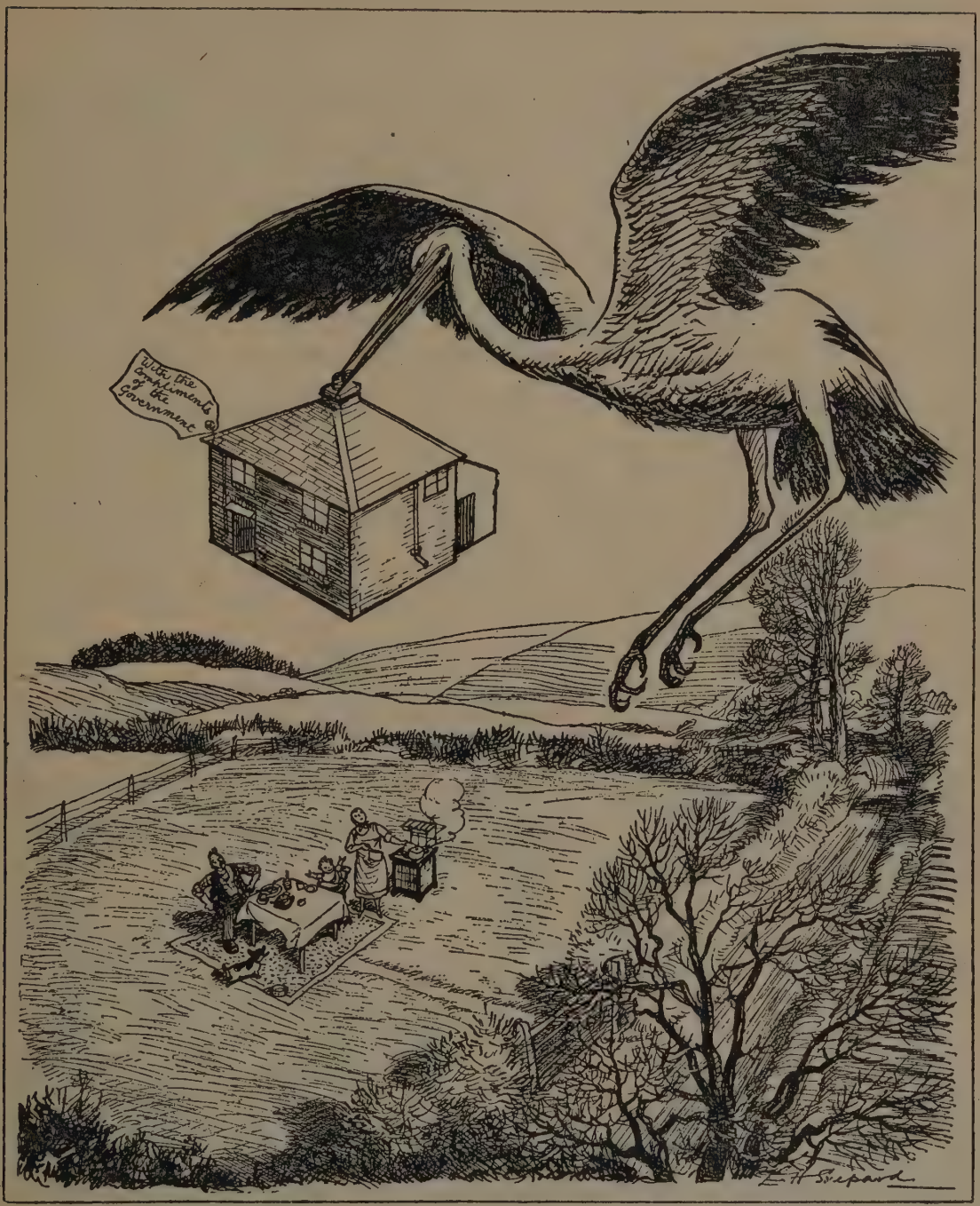
Egypt,

January 30th, 1944.

Dear Edith,—Yes, I know you will say "Still in Egypt? Surely he must have developed some lingering disease, or his mind must have become unhinged," but this, oddly enough, is not the case. While there is of course a decided tendency for British troops in Egypt to be suddenly whisked away to closer contact with the enemy, everybody except the Naafi knows that there are still a lot of us here.

Most of us spend our time wondering which way we will go home in the end. The other day I overheard a Yorkshire lance-corporal say that he hoped to be allowed to go via Greece and work his way up gradually through the Balkans and then through France—fighting of course all the way. He said that only by this method could one gradually get used to the British climate again. If a man went home direct, by air, he would be almost certain to suffer from severe colds for a long time. It would be much healthier to fight one's way gradually back.

Personally I am not so much worried about how I will get there, because, despite its odd ways, the Army generally delivers the goods, even if the goods are



THE HOME-COMING

[Pre-fabricated houses are now said to be in the air.]

only soldiers who have been left too long in Africa. But I think a good deal about my actual home-coming, or home-going.

I want to arrive in England on a rainy day. I am more home-sick for rain than for almost anything else—except, oddly enough, pork sausages and clean laundry. English pork sausages, I am told, have very little pork in them now, but I hope that by the time I get home they will be back to the old standard. The flavour of sausages in Egypt is indescribable. Old hands out here do not of course allow them on their plates, and always watch with awe the expressions of newcomers who make the foolhardy attempt to eat them. The pleased smile of anticipation, the raised fork, the quick exploratory bite, and then the contorted and amazed visage of realization. A few hardy fellows, mostly Yorkshiremen, take a second bite just to make sure their imagination has not been running riot, and then leave the room

"AN' REMEMBER—AS YOU CHARGE OVER THE FIELD DON'T DAMAGE THE SCARECROW."

"PITY YOU COULDN'T HAVE SEEN THE GARDEN A FORTNIGHT EARLIER."

hurriedly. Even in their shape Egyptian sausages have a sinister aspect. They are very long and thin and straight.

As for clean linen, it is quite unknown in Egypt. Reasonably white clothes go to the dhobi and come back grey. After you have worn them for a few days the dirt from the laundry begins to shake off a bit, but however long you wear them they never come quite clean again, so you have to buy new ones when you want a clean change, and you cannot get new ones because by a strange chance whatever size you are the Officer's Shop always has all the other sizes except that one.

Your loving husband,

LIONEL.

WINTER IN IRELAND

Primroses are blooming here
In midwinter, and near by
Snowdrops in their grace appear
Under January's sky.

At a time when fields should freeze
A periwinkle shows her face.
And Peace is with us too, like these,
Beautiful and out of place.

ANON.

"For Tired Eyes.—2. Cupping the eyes. . . . Close the eyes and lightly place the hands in a cupped position over the eyes. Gently press against the eyeball so that you see black. Raise the whole eye and draw slightly outward."

Beauty Hint.

Don't forget to replace.

THE COURTS—WEEK BY WEEK

Crime Marches On.

Eustace looked a forlorn and dejected specimen of humanity. His beard, a trifle moth-eaten, was as red as that of a Mahommedan but recently returned from Mecca. His eyes were bloodshot and peered resentfully through a pair of mother-o'-pearl opera-glasses. He wore his pink plus fours and his orange sombrero with the air of a man to whom Savile Row was the daily pilgrimage.

He stood in the dock at Low Street and gave Mr. McSenna back stare for stare. Injured innocence was written in every line of his wrinkled face and his Adam's apple wobbled in indignant protest.

Mr. McSenna pushed his spectacles behind his left ear, parked his chewing-gum on the Bench and sighed audibly.

"The charge," he said, "is loitering with intent to commit a felony. Have you anything to say?"

His cultured tone and verbiage betrayed Eustace's proud origin.

"I never done it, sir. I never done it."

Mr. McSenna looked dubious.

"The constable says you did," he declared mildly. "He says he found you outside a block of flats with the upper part of your face masked and a loaded revolver in each hand. One of you is telling stories."

"That's quite right, sir, I was there. Me and my mates was playing cowboys an' injuns."

Mr. McSenna smiled indulgently.

"I see," he said genially. "Boys will be boys. The constable made a mistake. Now off you go and finish your game."

* * * * *

Mr. McSenna recovered his chewing gum and the court relaxed while he refreshed himself. Dispensing justice is a dry business.

"Call the next case," he said at last, and Gladys hoisted her sixteen stone into the dock, permeating the musty atmosphere, it seemed, with the smell of wild thyme. Gladys had been found wandering without visible means of support.

Mr. McSenna stroked his jaw reflectively and playfully punched the clerk of the court who stroked his.

"You have heard the charge," he said to Gladys. "What have you to say? Do you deny that you were without visible means of support?"

"You bet I do, buddy," she replied, and as the soft lilt of her voice fell musically on their ears, hardened constables and thrice-hardened inspectors vowed silently to linger that evening in Berkeley Square.

THE LAST THROW

"If I must fall, at least I shall not fall alone."

Seemingly unconscious of the chords she had struck, Gladys continued. "I'll say I deny it. Take a look at this footwear. If a guy can't see no support there, then I guess there's some'p'n wrong with his eyesight. Yes, sir!"

"I'm afraid you have misunderstood," said Mr. McSenna. "When the constable stopped you, you had no money in your possession, nor have you a fixed abode."

The light of understanding dawned in the eyes of the accused.

"I get it," she said. "So what?"

Mr. McSenna abandoned the uneven contest and turned to the court missionary.

"Have you made any inquiries about her?" he asked.

"She appears to have been directed into a London factory from somewhere in the country to make room for a Land Army trainee, sir. I gather that, apart from a passion for George Raft, she's harmless enough. She has expressed a wish to study art at the Polytechnic."

Mr. McSenna nodded, then turned to Gladys.

"You hear what the missionary says: I'm going to give you a chance. You will be kept in custody till one o'clock to-day, after which you may go."

"O.K., baby, suits me," said Gladys brightly, and waved a cheery good-bye as she waddled to the cells in the wake of a kindly gaoler.

* * * * *

Richard was a youth of indeterminate age and irreproachable manners. Mr. McSenna regarded him searchingly.

"You are accused," he said, "of causing an obstruction. According to the evidence you carried a grand piano into the middle of the road, hung a card on it bearing the inscription, 'Ex-Service Man,' and proceeded to sell tips for last year's Derby. Have you anything to say in extenuation of your conduct?"

"WELL, MRS. TOBIN, IF WE MAKE YOU A PARTNER WOULD YOU DO THE FLOOR *AND* THE WINDOWS?"

The youth flung back a recalcitrant lock of hair which hit the gaoler behind him in the eye.

"The tip was a good one, sir," he said ingratiatingly.

Mr. McSenna appeared to reflect.

"You don't look old enough to have been in the services," he said at last. "How old *are* you?"

"Fourteen, sir. I am of course too young for this war. It was the Boer War I served in."

Mr. McSenna somehow still didn't seem satisfied. "Has he a record, Inspector?"

"Nothing much, sir. Arson, forgery, burglary, embezzlement and two cases of attempted murder."

Mr. McSenna shook his head as if loth by his harshness to precipitate a life of crime, then delivered judgment.

"You're dismissed this time under the 'Probation of Offenders Act.' "

Richard bowed his thanks with the grace of a prima donna taking a curtain, but Mr. McSenna scarcely seemed aware of it. He was unwrapping a fresh piece of chewing-gum.

ABDULLA

I have a new batman. His name is Abdulla Wegusa, and he is only four feet six inches high. My late batman was six feet six inches tall, and the noise his woolly hair made scraping along the roof of the tent when he brought my morning tea used to make me shudder, so when he was to leave I said "Fabiano, before you go, kindly arrange to get me a short batman—a very short batman."

So he brought me Abdulla, whose shortness is absolutely his only qualification for the job. He cannot speak Swahili, which is the only African language I even partially know. He cannot press clothes, or if he presses them he always leaves packets of cigarettes in the pockets and they are the only things that get pressed, coming out flat like the Turkish cigarettes you used to buy in England.

At 0600 hours he wakes me with a cup of cold tea. Zeal and not laziness is the cause of the cold tea. He gets up at 0400 hours to make it rather than risk being late. The first morning I did not drink it, but waited until he had gone and then poured it away into the sand. Unfortunately he saw the tea-leaves on the sand and put two and two together. He was very upset.

"I will get you another batman," he said simply; "I am no good."

So of course I had to say that he was excellent, and that I had really drunk the tea and thrown away only the dregs. After that he used to wait by my bed and watch me drink it each morning.

The language difficulty between Abdulla and myself leads to some awkward moments. The other day I wanted a glass of cold water to drink in the middle of the morning, and he brought me a bucket of hot water to wash in. So I took off my collar and tie and washed, and as I was doing so the Major arrived from H.Q. and looked at me severely.

"I'VE JUST ORDERED ANOTHER FIVE HUNDREDWEIGHT; THAT WILL MAKE THREE TONS WE'VE SAVED THIS WINTER!"

"This is rather late to be getting up," he said.

So I tried to dress hurriedly, but found that Abdulla had taken away my collar and tie to wash and iron them. As all my other collars and ties were already hanging on the line, I had to go round the camp with the Major without a collar and tie. The next day I got a letter saying that while he appreciated

that we were at war, officers should still observe dress regulations whenever possible.

Abdulla cannot read or write, and one bit of paper or book is to him much like another. He lines the drawers of my filing-cabinet with Secret and Confidential Middle East Orders, and all I can ever find in the Secret file is bits of old copies of *Punch* and programmes of Shafto's Cinemas for 1941.

With all this to his discredit he still thinks he is the perfect batman, and his pleased smile when I give him his weekly bonus of five piastres makes up for a lot of small inconveniences. Even so, I still hastily evade his inquiries about the climate of London, and whether I am likely to have need of an intelligent servant after the war. The Grand New World they are so busy planning is going to be quite difficult enough to live in, I feel sure, without having Abdulla haunting my London flat.

VINEGAR'S WAKE

Ray Rab and Tam MacMegaphone,
Those wells of Scottish undefiled,
To doubtful Sassenachs best known
As Caledonia's Sterne and Wilde—

These wits, when with eupeptic glee
They praise soused cod and souseder mullet,
Leave no one less amused than me.
No sour sea-food goes down *my* gullet.

Nor Gaelic wit nor Highland fling
Nor Attic salt my taste can tickle,
For such an uninspiring thing
As strips of fish rolled up in pickle.

We read in Denizen's *The Deep*
(Alfred, Lord Denizen's, I mean),
The words "Cry Haddock! and let sleep
The dogfish" on page seventeen;

And though I deprecate the puns
(If such they be) I would not wish
To dodge admitting that for once
I quite agree about the fish.

To-day, when zoning schemes deny
So much to all, opinion differs
("O Zone!" is now the tradesman's cry
As well as that of seaside sniffers);

Now window-dressing's the despair
Of fish-man just as much as grocer:
Untenanted his slabs and bare,
Withered his show (oh, withered show, sir). . . .

But though the trouble's gone so far,
I'll not abate one jit or tottle
My view that though fish-strips may jar
Most certainly they will not bottle.

March, 1944

THESE GROWN-UPS!

They say They're wearied by the War,
They say Their worries never cease.
What about Me? Wrong side of Four,
And never had a moment's Peace!

TRAINING MEMORANDUM NO. 00000

NOTES FOR CARRIER PIGEONS.

DON'T dawdle in flight. The practice of catching insects on the wing is forbidden and will cease.

Start your flight promptly, as soon as briefed. It's a slack bird that stops to wipe his beak on his own loft.

Refrain from alighting on an object just because you see another pigeon there. He may be an enemy agent.

Encourage a loitering pigeon to move on. He may bear the policy letter of which you carry the cancellation.

Avoid the company of "tumblers." Their aerobatics are insidious and waste time, besides being undignified.

Keep a sharp look-out for hawks. If encountered, take avoiding action.

Avoid gratuitous observations on the messages you carry. Remember that you are a carrier, not a critic.

Don't puff out your craw just because you think you are the bearer of an important operational order. It may only be a War Office letter for all you know.

Fly round high peaks, not over them. This way you will save altitude and the time wasted in attaining it.

Avoid loose cooing. The very clouds have ears.

Don't grumble at your grain. Every peck of it has to be brought in by our brave merchant seamen.

Keep your beak out of other pigeons' rations. The greedy bird is seldom air-minded.

Keep your feathers always in good trim. Nothing shows up the slacker like ruffled plumage.

Be careful of your deportment whilst on duty. Avoid rummaging under your wing with your beak.

Have your plumage overhauled when off duty. Carry out frequent pinion inspections on your own. Make full use of the Imping Stations now established on all trunk flights. Bear in mind that *well feathered is well flown.*

Be a willing flier at all times. Feigning a broken wing is the lowest form of malingering. Leave that to bush birds and the like as unworthy of a War Department bird like yourself.

Take a pride in your wing power. Don't be a penguin.

If a superior calls you a "kiwi," peck his eye out in preference to writing to your M.P. No disciplinary action will be taken against you in either event.

If brought down by an ignorant sportsman, don't give in. Try to deliver your message on foot. Remember, it's the staunch carrier who "gets there."

Conserve your strength whenever opportunity offers. If blown off course, make use of one of the many "Rest Perches for Storm-Tossed Carrier Pigeons" (RPSCP) now established on all regular Carrier Routes.

Overissues of grain will be written off during the present emergency, except in the case of officers.

Claims in respect of arrears will in future be admitted for the full period, except in the case of officers.

Remuneration will continue at normal rates throughout the entire moulting period, except in the case of officers.

Promotion in future will be by seniority plus flying service. To make this clear, a bird with not less than thirty-six months' carrier service may multiply that figure by the hours actually flown, less the number of feathers lost en route, whichever is the greater, except in the case of officers.

LADY ADDLE'S DOMESTIC FRONT

Bengers,
Herts, 1944.

My Dear, Dear Readers,—In spite of the wonderful success of my first book, *Lady Addle Remembers*, which sold over two hundred copies (this being a record for a peeress's autobiography, I am told, and considerably more than my old friends, Carrie, Countess W., and Princess R. de la B. O., sold of *theirs*—but I will mention no names for fear of offending these dear people), I had determined never to take up my pen again. I felt that I had put all of myself into that saga of my life, and that a heart bared once should not be bared again.

This resolve was strengthened by my publisher—whom I visited almost daily at the time of the book going into production—and who, hard-headed business-man though he might be, showed to me, a woman, all the courtesy and sympathy I should expect only from my own family. "We are glad you are satisfied with the book,

Lady Addle," he said later, "but the directors do not feel they can undertake publication again." I understood. They felt the responsibility weigh too heavily upon them. Indeed, the secrets of a noblewoman are no light burden.

But now a new and clarion call comes. All of us have a part to play in the great struggle; to some it is to fight—indeed my own family are all "in action." My sons, James and Hector, both having done brilliantly in the Home Guard, the first being a sergeant and the second a lance-corporal after only two years' service, while my dear Margaret has a trusted position in the A.T.S., being in sole charge of the gramophone in their mess, and entirely responsible for buying literally thousands of needles during the year.

"Please have you got any books for the book-drive?"

"I SUPPOSE SOME PEOPLE THINK THEY'RE FUNNY, TAKING THE POOR MAN'S PAPERS AND LEAVING A STONE OR A HORSESHOE FOR 'EM."

To others belongs the task of the home —Dulce Domum, as my father, who was a fine Latin scholar, used to call it—to preserve the domestic front.

If my front happens to be wider and more all-embracing than that of others, is it not my privilege and pride, and above all my duty, not to hide it under a bushel but to show the women of England what we women of the old school can do?

We have suffered at Bengers, of course. What stately home has not? All the young maids and men are gone, and we rely mostly on Crumpet, our dear old butler, who is becoming so forgetful that he brings the port decanter in at tea-time! "Don't stop him, poor old chap," Addle says, "it might hurt his feelings." And he even drinks a glass each evening for Crumpet's sake. That is my dear generous-minded husband all over.

It is the same consideration that prompts him to walk up through two miles of park to the "Addle Arms" every Tuesday and Friday, when I cook dinner. (For we have no regular cook now, only the North lodge-keeper's wife, who cannot come in every evening.) "It will be one less for you to cook for," Addle says. My heart bleeds for him when I see him trudging off, sometime through rain or snow, but I feel proud of his splendid unselfishness nevertheless.

Then—back to my kitchen, for I have work to do! Eight evacuees to cook for is no light matter. They have offered to do for themselves many a time, dear good souls that they are, but I will not have it. "Hospitality was the hall-mark of *my* generation if not of *yours*," I tell them gaily. Besides, I like cooking. I would willingly cook for my three remaining servants too, only they begged me not to. "It would not be fitting, m'Lady," Crumpet says, and I respect his fine sensitive feelings.

But, indeed, there is nothing unsuitable in my giving cookery advice. For was not our old home, Coots Balder, noted for its cuisine? There is scarcely a crowned head that has not enjoyed our scrambled eggs, which were always served up on toast cut quite simply in the pure shape of a coronet; or our famous black-currant jelly (a jelly made from black currants), a tiny pot of which was always packed in every visitor's trunk when he left. How well I remember my brother Humpo*, who was an incorrigible practical joker, substituting a jar of live black beetles in King Ferdinand of Rumania's luggage. We heard afterwards that H.M.

* Hon. Humphrey Coot.

was very angry because they got out somehow and crawled into his sponge! Foreigners, of course, have not got our sense of humour.

But to return to cooking. My dear mother was determined, though born in the purple, that we should know something of the sterner side of life. So each day one of us would accompany her to the kitchen, to go through the day's menus and translate them into French. I can see them now, neatly written out by the cook, who would also place a slip of purest white paper in every page we should need in the dictionary. I think my love of kitchen work started from that time, and my love of inventing names for dishes too! For I would delight to vary the menu by substituting an English name, in compliment to one of our distinguished guests. Gladstone Puffs, Chamberlains on Horseback, Pickled Prince, Délices de Pankhurst (this last came later, after I was married and espoused the cause of Women's Suffrage very wholeheartedly) were some favourites. Even to-day I stick to menus, and have tried to keep Bengers up to date with such dishes as Bevin Hotch-Potch, All Clear Soup and Joad-in-a-Hole.

But more of these frivolities anon.

H. J.'s DRAMATIC FRAGMENTS

I wrote the following when a friend of mine called Tim from Crewe took up character-divining from hand-writing and asked me to let him have some manuscript. I had nothing suitable about me, owing to my wife experimenting with a paper box instead of a hay box for cookery, and so I wrote a Fragment. What Tim from Crewe said it showed was this, "Is ambitious to excel but easily discouraged. Should therefore either not be discouraged or should stop being ambitious to excel. Lucky stone: wolfram. Colour: off-white."

ROSELEAVES, BUT ONLY JUST IN TIME

(*The scene is a fashionable restaurant.* SIR RANDOLPH VERTUE *and* DILLY, LADY DODD, *enter and seat themselves at a small table.*)

HEAD WAITER. As this is gala night paper caps will be served instead of hors-d'œuvres. What's it going to be, thick or clear?

SIR RANDOLPH. One thick and one clear; we'll mix 'em.

DILLY, LADY DODD. What is the fish?

HEAD WAITER. A plate of whitebait or the equivalent in cod.

SIR RANDOLPH. Whitebait for two. You usually get brown bread and butter thrown in.

HEAD WAITER. Not here, you don't. I'll send the Wine Waiter along. He's a substitute. Be kind to him.

(*Exit.*)

DILLY, LADY DODD. Now that we are alone we can make plans. . . .

(*The* LEADER *of the Orchestra leaps from the platform and hurriedly plays "Ta-Ra-Ra-Boom-De-Ay" on the violin close to her left ear.*)

SIR RANDOLPH. How much would you charge to go away?

LEADER. Four shillings, and sixpence entertainment tax.

(*He is paid and retires.*)

(*Enter the* WINE WAITER. *He is bearded and wears rimless pince-nez on a thick black ribbon.*)

WINE WAITER. The wine list is rebinding. I will recite it from memory: Amontillado, Beer, Chablis, Drambuie, Egg Nog (hen), ditto (duck) . . .

DILLY, LADY DODD. Have you no red wines?

WINE WAITER. Madam, red wine would be under "R," which I have not yet reached.

SIR RANDOLPH. What were you before you took your present post?

WINE WAITER. An expert witness to an insurance company. Anyway, you leave the choice to me. I'll root about in the cellar and find something.

(*Exit.*)

SIR RANDOLPH. If we could only get the use of a mule or something . . .

(*Enter* HEAD WAITER.)

HEAD WAITER. Well, how are you two getting on?

DILLY, LADY DODD. We haven't had anything to eat at all yet.
HEAD WAITER. Hearty congratulations.

(*Exit.*)

(*Enter* DETECTIVE-SERGEANT BREAM *in plain clothes.*)

BREAM. Whoopee! I certainly am having a time. I'm the advance guard of a raid. They've offered me a job in the bar and when the others turn up I just won't serve any of them. Not a single solitary one.

(*Enter* BEAGLE BIGLIANI, *the proprietor of a rival restaurant.*)

"ANYONE FROM TEXAS ON THE TRAIN . . .?"

BEAGLE. What on earth are you sitting in here for? It's cruel. You poor, poor dears! Come over to my place and get some food in you.

(*He is removed by the chucker-out, who also gathers* BREAM.)

DILLY, LADY DODD. Quick, if we cannot eat we may at least discuss the future. How much will Cyrus pay?

SIR RANDOLPH. Nothing until we deliver Flossie intact, though he might take seven-eights.

DILLY, LADY DODD. We have still to decide about the bridesmaids and the mortgage.

(*Enter the* HEAD WAITER *bearing a large Christmas pudding which he places on the table and lights. It burns with a bright green flame.*)

HEAD WAITER. I managed to get this out of the chef for you, and my advice is: Eat it, lest worse befall.

SIR RANDOLPH. I can feel a coin in mine. No, it's a medal.

HEAD WAITER. That's right. Waziristan 1886.

DILLY, LADY DODD. Why are you hovering?

HEAD WAITER. To present the bill. Couvert for two 3/-. Use of table 1/6. Two goes of pudding 6*d*. Share of rates 1/-. Contribution to Cashier's Benefit Night 8*d*. Clerical fees in connection with bill 1/3. I'll toss you double or quits.

SIR RANDOLPH. Heads.

HEAD WAITER. You win. Now quit. I'll count up to five. One—two—three . . .

(SIR RANDOLPH VERTUE *and* DILLY, LADY DODD, *rise and move hastily from the room, pursued by the jeers of the band.*)

FINIS

THAT CONCLUDED THE PROCEEDINGS

I stayed last week-end with Jean Salvardine, the famous pianist. I've known him for years and his real name is Timothy George Salmon, but he long ago realized that, as a name, Tim Salmon was perhaps a handicap to a serious musical career. At school we always called him "Sardine."

During the week-end I attended a directors' meeting. Admittedly it is unusual to have directors' meetings on Sunday morning in country cottages, but the fact is that Tim has for some while been a private company—"Jean Salvardine, Ltd." It is not of course one of those tax-dodging one-man companies registered abroad, but a perfectly legitimate way of carrying on his profession of piano-playing. He

has merely to put himself on the same business footing as any other trading company. Tim himself of course is managing director and is officially employed on a salary-cum-expenses basis to earn money for the company. His wife is the only other director: in fact they *are* the company.

Tim was talking about it on Sunday when he suddenly said to his wife, "I say, why shouldn't we have a directors' meeting? We've never had a proper one." She said, "But what about Jack?" Jack is the family solicitor and official secretary to the company. Tim said, "Jack's idea of just writing up the minutes of a meeting we've never properly had and sending them to us to sign is all very well, but it's giving him ideas above his station. Dammit, he's only a servant of the company. Come on! Let's show him!"

Since I know shorthand I was deputed to take down the proceedings verbatim, and here they are:

MINUTES OF A DIRECTORS' MEETING HELD IN THE DINING-ROOM OF HEATHSIDE, SURREY, AT NOON ON SUNDAY, MARCH 12th 1944

Present:

Mr. Timothy Salmon (in the Chair).
Mrs. Timothy Salmon.

In Attendance:

. Official Shorthand Writer.

The managing director, after formally expressing regret at the absence of the secretary, reported that the Company had had a pretty good year on the whole. He'd done several big concerts and had made a pretty good—he should say, had made on behalf of the Company a pretty good income. Conditions in the piano-playing world had been most favourable for the Jean Salvardine products—was he going too fast for the shorthand writer? The shorthand writer replied No, it was O.K., old boy.

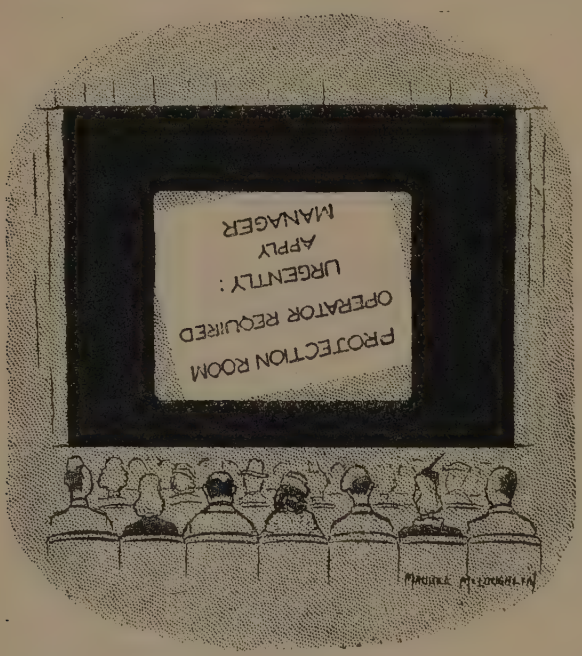
Resuming, the managing director said he would have had great pleasure in presenting the balance sheet and the profit-and-loss account to the meeting, except that he hadn't got them. He did not understand the things and left them to the secretary and the auditor, who hitherto had always drafted them out in the

"NOW LOOK AT THE CURTISS MOHAWK IV."

former's Strand office and then met him later at the "Cheshire Cheese" to explain what it all meant, subsequently sending copies along for signature.

A director asked why the "Cheshire Cheese," and the managing director replied, in a somewhat defensive manner, because it was handy. A director asked why should not all three meet in the secretary's office. The managing director said there were technical reasons for that into which he would not go at the moment, and hurriedly continued his report.

As far as he could estimate, without the exact figures in front of him, the balance of income over expenditure was pretty good, even after allowing for the managing director's usual salary and his travelling and other expenses.



A director asked what were the other expenses and what proportion of them was directly connected with meetings at the "Cheshire Cheese."

The managing director said the secretary and/or auditor would no doubt be able to answer that query, meanwhile the meeting had to consider the question of the distribution of the Company's profits. His own proposal was that the Company should distribute the whole of the profits as a bonus to the managing director in recognition of the excellent work he . . .

A director asked what about the other directors, didn't they get anything? She thought they jolly well should, seeing she had to run the house, look after the managing director, see that he got to the concert halls in time and . . .

The managing director said Oh, very well, he would propose that the directors receive a fee of £100 for the year, and it would darn well come off her dress-allowance. After all, she'd swiped half his coupons that year already.

A director said the managing director seemed to have forgotten all about the housekeeping.

The managing director said that was amply provided for.

A director said that was what *he* thought was it, well, let her tell him . . .

The shorthand writer here tactfully but unofficially drew the managing director's attention to the business in hand, and the managing director requested the shorthand writer to mind his own business, and anyway not call him "Sardine." He then

formally moved that the Company's profits for the year, less £100 to be distributed as directors' fees, be paid to the managing director as a bonus for his unremitting exertions on behalf of the Company and his unswerving loyalty. A director said Come off it. Amidst some disorder the resolution was put to the vote, the result being: For—1; Against—1. The managing director thereupon gave his casting vote in favour of the resolution, which was thus carried.

A director then said rather huffily so that was the way things were worked, was it? If she wasn't to have a proper say they could go on swilling at the "Cheshire Cheese" in future for all she cared, and now she must go and look at the joint in the oven, she had other things to do besides talk. If the managing director wanted cocktails the gin was in the cupboard, he could mix her one too while he was about it, and not to go and drink it himself either with any of his casting vote funny excuses.

All the Board, with the exception of the managing director, who was busy getting out glasses, then left the room, and that concluded the proceedings.

LAMENT

Rare red gold on the pavement,
Spurned by the hurrying heel,
Would my typewriter could utter
All that I think and feel.
May the witless creature that tossed it
Thus wantonly down in the grime
Revisit the scene in the black-out
And slip up on his heinous crime.
Weep, weep, for the shredded sunshine
Even this little bit would have made!
O rare red gold on the pavement
That might have been marmalade.

RUSSIA AND SO ON

The trouble about the Russians is that they have always crossed another river before we have found out what to call the last. How I was laughed at when I spoke of the Dnieper!

"You poor fool," they said. "It's the Dnaper."

If I had been a selfish man, I should have been sorry that we had crossed it at all. I should simply have taken away the pontoons. And no sooner had we crossed the Dnyper than I was floundering in the Bug. I have got that all right now. One has only to remember the old English saying "As snook as a book in a rook,"

"BUT WHY DO THEY WANT TO HOLD A BY-ELECTION HERE OF ALL PLACES?"

and the whole campaign becomes easy. The Pruth however remains. It will need an entirely different action. The lips should be shot forward with a sudden armoured thrust and a kind of guttural engagement take place simultaneously at the rear.

It seems only too probable that Russians do not decide how to pronounce their rivers until they have actually got over, and this is what throws Allied strategy into confusion. In the same way when they heard that a man called Badooklio was in command in Italy they said "Let's send him an ambassador" without considering that this was only their way of pronouncing him and probably he was not in command at all.

I have given up the Russian generals. I did not wish to, and we parted reluctantly on my side at any rate. There were too many of them all over the place and they got me muddled. As soon as I had crowned Timoshenko with laurels and flowers I lost him, and succeeding commanders so baffled me that I thought I was in danger of compromising the whole advance. There was a time when our own generals were almost as confusing though easier (in some cases) on the jaw. And this reminds me of the problem that exercises so many of us, "What makes a great general?"

I have asked a great many authorities and got no satisfactory reply. One soldier said "The greatest general is the luckiest one." Another told me "A great general is made by his staff," and yet a third "A great general is made by his biographers." A fourth was even more pithy and epigrammatic. He said "The best general is he who wisely judging and weighing every conceivable course of action and taking care that his equipment is better and his men more brave and better fed than those of the enemy, and choosing with skill the hour when it is most propitious to strike at the points at which the attack will be most likely to succeed, combines in the hour of onslaught reckless intrepidity with deliberate cunning and, not forgetting to be prepared against an unexpected counter-blow by the enemy, proceeds to put into operation his original plan, or some other that he has chosen in case the first should fail, or some entirely different plan that occurs to him as the fighting proceeds; and by so doing ensures the result that the enemy either retires or surrenders or starves to death or commits suicide."

These few simple words made a great impression on my limited intelligence and I shall always remember them. No one who studies them carefully should

fail to be a great general if he gets the opportunity. I feel I could do it myself. But my informant was not contented to let it rest at that.

"The principles I have stated," he went on, "have governed mankind in warfare (little though they may have thought about it) since the time of the Pithecanthropes, but it still remains to be said that even when a general has so made his designs and so executed them, he may be foiled by some sudden convulsion of nature, like a frost if he is fighting the Esquimaux in Arabia or an abnormal heat wave if he is fighting against Africans at the North Pole, or by the sudden engulfment of his troops in an earthquake, or an avalanche, or (as happened in one famous battle) because mice have gnawed the bowstrings of his army during the night. If cheese was used to soften the bowstrings on that occasion we can call it an error of administration by the Quartermaster's department. If the mice were merely hungry it was a bit of bad luck. If the mice were long and carefully trained to gnaw string by the enemy, we may say that the Intelligence Department was at fault or that defeat was inevitable, whichever we please."

"Do the Russian generals know all these things?" I asked him. He thought that they did. He thought that they even knew about mice. He seemed to think that an unexpected gnawing of the bowstrings of the Cossack cavalry would seriously delay the Russian commanders this year. But I have given up following these great men. They go so fast and I, burdened by my great Pronunciation Dictionary, so slowly. And when I catch them up I only get confused among them by trying to memorize their names. In time, no doubt, when the historians get busy, we shall learn the Pruth.

April, 1944

APRIL

Strange are the wherries that
Swim in the waters,
Keen is the spear's edge and ready the shaft-rain,
Men of the Northland and men of the Westland
Waiting the watchword
Armed for the stour.
Dark is the day now
Under the sky's hall
Heavy with noise of a terrible harping,
Song of the air host, the slayers, the savers,
Dirge of their outgoing
Deafens the wind.

Roll the long wagons
Down to the tide-ways,
Not for the feasting and not for the fair-time,
Hooded and painted and
Wombs full of bane.
Hard went the rider who
First in the onset
Hunted the Earth Beast and
Stayed him and stemmed him, the
Stormer of cities, sea-weary and land-worn,
Dinned by the desert and stunned by the blast-blow, and
Hard shall the lot be of
Him who comes after.
Turns the young year now,
Trembling the sloe-tree
Shakes down her petals on
Helmet and shield.

Stern be their anger and
Strong-knit their armour—
Fire of the furnaces—

Leaving behind them
Gold-hoard and word-hoard,
Fireside and hearthstone
Endlessly forth sent
Sailing the swan-path and climbing the scaur-side,
Men of the Northland and men of the Westland
Stubborn to stand fast
Steel upon steel.

Sound then your trumpets,
Flowers of the Spring-time,
Grey be the grass-blade and
Stiff be the ash-wand—
Bright is the spear's edge and thick is the shaft-rain—
Lift up the stars now and shake out the crosses,
Loosen the leopards, let
Falcon have wing.

Hard went the rider who
Hunted the Earth Beast,
Hard shall the lot be of him who comes after,
Scheming to manage the
Might of the monster
Lain low in his lair.
Fierce shall his tooth be and
Many shall stumble
But bright is the wind-flower that leaps from the wound-stroke,
Bud of the blossom that flames for our freedom,
Dark is the day now
Under the sky's ball
Throng of the vanguard that thunders before them,
Men of the Northland and men of the Westland
Waiting the watchword
Armed for the stour.

LET ME EXPLAIN

I locked myself out of the house last night
While seeing if I was showing a light.
It really was very bad luck because
I found that I was.

PERSONAL RECORD

THAT telephone again. When I get a moment I am going to lay a piece of orange-peel on the tomb of its inventor. As I cannot remember who he was I mean no personal disrespect. But he did more to disintegrate society . . .

"Who goes there? *Qui vive?* We're not supposed to say 'Hullo' any more, and they may be listening. Yes, I'm afraid she is. Laryngitis. Well, just a whisper. The funny thing is her whispering makes me shout, as if she were deaf or an Esquimaux. Luckily I've got a week's leave. Oh, easily. I'm a very good cook, and getting plainer every day. . . ."

"ARE YOU TOGETHER?"

Now for half an hour in the kitchen. Let us work up a culinary rhythm. Calmness is everything, they say, coupled with a deep love of one's work. To the born cook even paunching a rabbit is lyric exercise. What is that hissing? It is the milk crossing the Dniester. A moment ago it was cold. How it bubbles as it spreads over the stove! . . .

"ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?"

"Yes, thank you."

"NOTHING YOU WANT?"

"Could I have a bottle?"

"RATHER . . ."

I have been convinced for such a long time that women waste a tremendous lot of time and energy putting things away that I am glad of this opportunity to spread all my essential requirements round me in a semi-circle, so that I need only reach. No stooping, and none of that damned burrowing in cupboards before and after meals. Can it be that I have poured the hot milk into the hot-water bottles. Such was not my intention. Never mind. The great thing is, it was hot. It was probably burnt too, so let us say no more about it. . . .

"WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE FOR LUNCH?"

"Anything. You needn't shout."

"Sorry. We've been sent a nice book of French war recipes, one of which I should quite like if it were slightly altered. It has the blessing of Madame Prunier and a charming name, *Morue Aux Topinambours.*"

"What does that mean?"

"A cod and several Jerusalem artichokes."

"You couldn't alter that cast much."

"Yes, I could. I could have a Jerusalem artichoke and several cod, BECAUSE I LIKE COD BETTER THAN JERUSALEM ARTICHOKE."

"You're shouting again. What is there?"

"An ominous slab of cold fat bacon."

"No, thank you. Egg . . ."

Whenever I set about rehydration I feel a great personal sense of gratitude to the loyal, sensible, generous, hardworking, democratic little hens of America. It is really uncommonly decent of them to go on filling packet after packet for people like me.

Wyandottes of Minnesota!
  Laying for the Allied cause,
I am on your shell-less rota,
  And I greet you with applause!
You must, with us other toilers,
  In the Peace Procession march,
We by then will all be boilers,
  Underneath the Victory Arch.

I am not quite happy about the last two lines, which seem to strike an unintentional note of pessimism, and I must make certain that Minnesota is in the Egg Belt and not the Great Conveyor Belt of America. There is a man at the door.

"Yes?"

"How much?"

"How much what?"

"Why, bread."

"How much do we usually get?"

"Dunno. I'm new on this."

"Well, give me about half a yard."

"There you are. What did you think I was selling?"

"Why, radishes. Good morning . . ."

One of the things I find difficult about plain cooking is where to stop. In what one might call ballroom cooking it is seldom out of order to throw in at the last moment anything that specially hits the eye, such as a knob of grouse or a brace

"YOU ARE TO BE CONGRATULATED ON YOUR RABBIT-PIE—OR WHATEVER IT WAS."

"Look, Ernie—Gothic!"

of truffies or a pint of cream, and indeed some of my greatest successes have been scored with a bottle of port in one hand and a marizpan-gun in the other. The resulting mess will almost certainly be accorded high praise and earn a reputation for brilliant inspiration. But with plain cooking it is so easy to say too much. I have just added an eggspoonful of fish-paste to a quiet little salad I have knocked up for my invalid tray, and cannot help wondering if I have perhaps committed an indiscretion. There is a woman at the door.

"Does Major Uppuncle live here?"

"By no means."

"I thought not, but I just wanted to make sure."

"Naturally."

"You know there's a smell of burning?"

"I think it's only something I put on my moustache."

"Oh, I beg your pardon . . ."

She was right though. It was the toast. That is another thing I find hard about plain cooking—timing. What is wanted in every kitchen is an automatic machine which does all that for you. You would simply press keys for the things you were going to cook, and when the machine had sorted it all out it would issue its orders in a well-oiled voice: "Turn the toast! Now put on the grill for the kidneys! Watch the milk! Eggs in! . . ."

In the meantime we part-time workers must just go on doing our best to be nourishing but not pretentious.

THE PHONEY PHLEET

H.M.S. So-so

For rather more than twenty generations
  The Hedgers had been lawyers to a man
Peculiarly strong on arbitrations—
  They saw both sides at once. Few people can.

'Carew, the current holder of the title,
  Possessed this family bent in marked degree;

On any point at all, however vital,
He always had two views and sometimes three.

When war broke out young Hedger joined the Navy
Though not because for once he knew his mind;
He did it since the sea was nice and wavy,
Not rigid, unilateral, defined.

After a while they gave him a commission
Appointing him to H.M.S. *So-So*.
Which placed him in the horrible position
Of having to say "Yes" or even "No."

For instance, if a man fell in the ocean
The crew appealed to him. "What do you think?
Shall we restrain the *So-So's* forward motion,
Or shall we, sir, leave Nobby in the drink?"

They'd see an iceberg. "Sir," the men would clamour,
"Hard a-starboard, sir, or soft a-port?"
They'd meet a cruiser. "Please, sir, do we ram her,
Or go on leave, sir?" Questions of that sort.

His ancestry no less than his profession
Impelled him to be fair, yes, *Laissez-faire*;
But this involved a somewhat lengthy session
For which there wasn't any time to spare.

He used to stand there havering and rambling
"Solution A is wrong; but is B right?"
At last he took to open barefaced gambling—
"Heads we vamoose or tails we stay and fight."

Alack! (and I am speaking with precision)
This method was a shattering success
Carew had what appeared to be prevision.
But *did* it get his morals in a mess!

Believing that some special revelation
Was given him alone of all mankind
He cast the die in every situation,
Abandoning all effort of the mind.

There came the Peace. Men melted down their helmets,
Their cannon, into bars of useful pig.
Sailors transformed their hammocks into pelmets,
Carew re-knitted his to make a wig.

Restored to what had been his growing practice
He took the new philosophy too far.
"Who cares," he cried, "one button what the Act is?
Let's toss a coin! Up she goes! Houp-là!"

This means of handling knotty legal questions
Found very little favour with the Bench.
The Privy Council proffered some suggestions
And Hedger was disbarred. This was a wrench.

The family accused him of defacing
Those twenty generations with a blot.
Carew, most deeply moved, went in for racing
And made it pay like billy-o. So what!

COMPLIMENTARY

It was an American true-life story that gave me the idea. It told how a poor, plain, gap-toothed girl of seventeen years was transformed by a compliment. When Bill O'Malley the drug-store attendant greeted her with "My, but you're prirry!" he started something. Lilian bought herself a mirror and studied the reflection of her angular features very carefully. She decided that O'Malley was right. The rest of the tale is unimportant. How Lilian began to wash regularly; how she passed her screen tests with flying technicolours; how she won her "Oscar" for a superb performance in the screen adaptation of *The Sky is Overcast* by the brilliant new novelist William O'Malley—all this and more may be surmised. It was the compliment that impressed me. For a long time I had been looking for some new way of helping the war effort. The inadequacy of my "Salute the Soldier" contributions troubled me sorely. I am not a rich man.

But compliments are cheap enough.

"Good-morning," I said to the girl in the tobacco kiosk. "Do you mind if I tell you that you look remarkably pretty this morning?"

She looked up showing a lot of white in her eyes.

"Really?" she said. "How interesting! Well, we still haven't got any matches, see!"

"I assure you . . ." I began.

"Oh, stow it!" she said.

The conductress was handing me my change. I looked at her and smiled.

"What the 'ell you grinnin' about?" she said. "An' if you can *read*, mister, it says kindly 'ave exact fares ready—if you *can* read."

"I'm so sorry," I said. "I was merely thinking how very pretty you look this morning."

She straightened her back and raised her battery of bus-tickets menacingly.

"Listen," she said, "you're the fourth to-day who's made a crack about my 'ay-fever. Come to look at it, your map don't look too sparklin' neither."

At Oggolindo's in the Strand I tried again. The lift-girl did look really most attractive in her bright uniform. Her hair was close-cropped and jet black. Her tunic was olive green with gold buttons and epaulettes. The red girdle matched the stripes down the sides of her trousers.

"Fourth floor, please," I said; "and if you don't mind my saying so you look very, *very* pretty this morning."

"MONSIEUR HAS RESERVED A TABLE, YES?"

The look that greeted this innocent remark was rather terrifying. Only a cavalry officer—a South American cavalry officer, that is—could have looked so many daggers.

By this time I was bitterly disappointed. My shorthand-typist wept a little when I told her how well I thought her spectacles suited her. The waitress at Moot's complained to the manager.

I felt very miserable when I reached home. After supper I tried to read, but concentration was difficult. At two minutes to nine I asked my wife to switch on the wireless. She did not move. She was lying huddled up on the settee. She was crying softly.

"Oh, Bertrand," she said, "you're so different these days. I'm sure you've stopped loving me. You used to tell me . . ."

STORY WITHOUT A MORAL

"The trouble is," said the pigeon, "that every time I take a step my head jerks backwards and forwards. Look! Jerk, jerk, jerk, jerk. I tell you, Doctor, I can't stand it."

Dr. Clavicle, the eminent Harley Street consultant, pressed the tips of his long nervous fingers together and looked with interest at his unusual patient. For a moment the words "You had better go and see a vet, my good woman," trembled on his tongue, but curiosity, a certain weakness he had always had for the bizarre, restrained him.

"You find this—ah, reflex distressing?" he asked gently.

"Well, wouldn't you?" said the pigeon. "Nid-nod, nid-nod, every step you take."

"Hum!" said the doctor. "Yes, yes. No doubt. You realize of course that thousands—I may say *all* pigeons suffer from the same complaint? If you have been inclined to brood over what may perhaps seem to you an embarrassing idiosyncrasy but is in fact a perfectly natural intra-muscular reaction——"

"You lot all get colds," interrupted the pigeon rather rudely, "but you don't seem to enjoy them any the more on that account. As for brooding"—and here for a moment a sort of ruffle, that might but for the feathers have been a blush, passed over her face—"I ought to have mentioned before that I'm not—not married at present."

"Quite," said Dr. Clavicle. "I see. Well, now, we must see what we can do for you. How is your general health. Good? Good. And in ourselves, our mind? No special worries, apart from this little, ah—Exactly. Sleeping all right? Taking our oats—well, no, of course; that is just a little expression we use. Taking our—our grain and so on satisfactorily? Good. Now then, just follow the tip of this pencil round with the eyes. Only the eyes, please. Try to keep the head

THE HAUNTED WOOD

"HERE ARE TWO MORE FOR OUR MAGAZINE LIST OF OLD BOYS SERVING MARTIN MAJOR, MINER; MARTIN MINOR, MAJOR."

rigid. What's that? Of course, yes. I beg your pardon. Just the right eye only then, please. Good. Thank you. Now the left. Hum! Now open the—um. Thank you. No trouble there, no trouble at all."

"It's about my head," began the pigeon impatiently.

"Exactly, yes. I'm just coming to that. Now this—er, oscillation of the head and neck of which we complain. We are not troubled by it, I take it, when at rest? Or in the air? Just so. Purely a peripatetic phenomenon."

"Eh?" said the pigeon.

"Only when walking," explained the doctor. He stepped to the window and stood for a few moments with his back to the room, deep in thought.

"Suppose we give up walking for a little while?" he suggested suddenly, wheeling round on the pigeon. "Just till we get over this. Concentrate on our flying, eh? Then perhaps later on—v-e-r-y gradually at first of course—we may be able to resume the use of our legs without distress. The neurosis will have——"

"Can't fly all the time," said his patient. "A pigeon must eat."

"In that case," said the doctor briskly, "there is only one thing to be done. We must put the neck in a splint."

It was a delicate operation, but Dr. Clavicle was used to delicate operations, and in a very few minutes the splints were in position and the bandaging neatly secured.

"There," he said, stepping back. "Is that quite comfortable?"

"No," said the pigeon. "It's hellish."

"Ah, well. A little discomfort at first perhaps until we get used to it. The strangeness will soon wear off. Now, will you walk home, or may I call a—that is, shall I open the window?"

"I'm late," said the pigeon. "I must fly. But—er, what do I—how much is the——?"

"Just leave whatever you feel inclined as you go out," said the doctor urbanely. "*Good* afternoon."

"Hum!" he muttered to himself a moment later, lifting a shapely white egg from the window sill in practised fingers.

"Not married, eh?" But he was not shocked. He had seen too much of the seamy side of life in the exercise of his profession to be conscious either of surprise or disapproval.

* * * * *

Two days later the pigeon reappeared, made a crash landing on the doctor's desk, picked herself up and angrily demanded her fee back.

"Tut!" said Dr. Clavicle. "I've blown it. Is anything the matter?"

"*Oh* no!" cried the pigeon furiously. '*Oh* no! Everything is *perfectly* all right. I came to you because I couldn't walk without jerking my head about. Well, it's still true, only now because I can't jerk my head about I can't walk. Any fool ought to have been able to see that that would happen. I can't even take a couple of steps. Watch."

"Steady," said Dr. Clavicle. "You're in the inkpot. Dear me, yes. It's purely a matter of balance of course."

"Whatever it is, I won't stand it," said the pigeon. "Can't walk. Can't even bend my head down to eat. The only way I can get a mouthful is to lie on my side and scuffle round in circles. I tell you I've been the laughing-stock of Trafalgar Square."

"Well, well, that's easily remedied," said the doctor, and with a few quick, deft movements took off the splints. "How does that feel?"

"My word, what a relief!" exclaimed the pigeon, and she took a few quick steps up and down the desk, her head going to and fro like anything. "Lovely to be able to walk about again. Always was fond of walking—from the egg, as you might say."

"No discomfort?"

"Discomfort!" repeated the pigeon. "Not now you've taken that frightful contraption of yours off."

"Splendid!" said Dr. Clavicle. "A most satisfactory cure."

"Cured?" said the pigeon thoughtfully. "Why, yes—I suppose I *am* cured. What an amazing thing!"

"Nothing amazing about it. A perfectly straightforward case. If we become conscious, too conscious, of some perfectly normal function, operation, reaction or what-you-will of our bodies, there is always

"SWISHED?"
"PSYCHOED."

a danger that it may become a worry to us. We brood on it. In the end it may cloud the whole mind and even in extreme cases unseat the reason. A famous judge, as you may have heard, became so conscious during long hours in court of the workings of his internal organs, heart, liver and so on, that he was compelled in the end to leave the Bench. I have known hundreds of cases. And the remedy, my dear madam——"

"Miss," said the pigeon.

"—the remedy is to deny that operation to us for a while, to stifle it, so that very soon we long to have it back. We realize it is necessary to us. Instead of being a nuisance it becomes——"

"You could hardly do that to the judge's liver," interrupted the pigeon. "However, I see what you mean. It may happen with quite ordinary habits, I suppose, of which one is normally unconscious, such as putting the tips of your fingers together?"

"Putting the tips——? Hum!" said the doctor, thrusting his hands into his trouser pockets.

"Don't let it worry you," said the pigeon kindly.

"Worry me, my dear madam!" pished the doctor. "We medical men are hardly likely——"

"They're together again now, you know."

"Tchah!" said Dr. Clavicle.

"If you *do* find the habit getting on your mind at all," said the pigeon cheerfully, "just lash your hands together behind your back for a day or two. You can easily rest your head on the plate when you're eating. And now I really must be going. No, please don't trouble. I'll walk."

"Nid-nod, nid-nod," cried the doctor fiercely after her retreating figure. "I don't know how you can stand it."

TEA

How many of my readers have ever paused half-way through a cup of tea to reflect that life would not be what it is, whatever it is, if there were no tea in it? The answer is, briefly, all of them. Tea has built its reputation on this sort of thing. So let us to-day think of some of the aspects and characteristics of tea and its drinkers.

The origins of tea-drinking in this country are obscure to all but those who happen to have just looked it up in an encyclopædia, but most people would agree that it was probably brought here with everything else by Sir Walter Raleigh or, if not then, some other time. I think this is all we need to know about tea in olden days. Present-day tea is really what I want to talk about. Present-day tea is sold in packets which are very interesting to the student of sociology, because they are all, no matter what the tea inside, done up in the same way—folded in four points each end and stuck down with a round label. To open this packet the tea-user has to

get under one of the points and follow it through the label, and although there is no real top or bottom to a tea-packet most people are so well-drilled by tins and bottles that they will spend a few preliminary seconds reading the print on the packet to see they have it the right way up. The print on a tea-packet is a bit inclined to be sober; it does not promise that the tea-drinker will be made healthier or more beautiful, but it does sometimes mention that this particular tea is aromatic, or blended, or something to bring subconscious comfort to the well-drilled. After the packet is open the tea is usually put in a tea-caddy, or hereditary tin which no one bought but someone must have. Of course there are and always will be people who keep their tea in glass jars or even pale-green tins marked "Tea," but then some people will do anything to be different.

To make tea you put some tea in a warm teapot and pour boiling water on it. This is an easy enough process. In fact it is too easy. It is inconsistent with life's obstacles. Mankind has therefore sought to make it difficult by encouraging experts, or naggers, to come forward with *their* theories. These experts do their job by taking the old formula—it is significant that even they could find no other—and italicizing a word here and there. To make tea, they state, you put some tea in a *warm* teapot and pour *boiling* water on it. This expert advice is ever-present in tea-makers' minds. It does not worry them when alone, but it is just enough to undermine their confidence if asked to make tea in other people's houses, when they are apt to wonder if they ought to put the teapot in the oven first. There is, however, a convention that errors in tea-making are expiated by the tea-makers repeating a few phrases of under-apology while pouring out the

THE SUBALTERN IN THE SERVICE CLUB

first cup—phrases which do not interrupt the general conversation but are known to ward off evil spirits.

Tea-making, then, is in practice, which is to say in theory, a simple process. What really happens is this. Whoever is making the tea puts the kettle on and after watching it for a few seconds realizes that eternity is all it is made out to be, and seeks distraction in the nearest scrap of newspaper or cookery-book. I am assuming that the kettle has not been put on beforehand and left to boil while the tea-maker does something else, when of course it is the swift passage of time which proves to be what it is made out to be. To go back to the tea-maker who does it all in one, the next stage, after mentally noting that there is more in cookery-books than you would think without reading them, is to get the tea-caddy and wash up the teapot. This is not a satisfactory process; it leaves round the bottom of the inside of the pot a shallow rim of water and a few bloated tea-leaves. However. The tea-maker now pours some of the water from the kettle into the pot and out into the sink, thus rendering the pot theoretically warm. The tea is put into the teapot with a special spoon, wide, flat and of a curious dull brassy texture, with an ornate handle. The amount of tea which goes in used to be matter for experts and to depend on the number of people about to drink it, but nowadays it does not depend on anything except the public spirit of the tea-maker. This having been done, the tea-maker notices that the kettle is not nearly boiling and realizes that the pot will be cold by the time it is, if anything so subconscious can be called a realization. The tea-maker now collects on a tray the cups and saucers and so on, getting quite enthusiastic and stopping only when the kettle lid rattles to indicate that the water is boiling. It now only remains to fill up the teapot and as much of the water-jug as there is water for and carry the tray into the appropriate room for the tea-maker to have earned a quite disproportionate burst of gratitude, together with exemption from being the one to go and fetch the milk-jug.

"WOULD YOU PEOPLE MIND SHOUTING 'MIND THE DOORS!' RATHER RAUCOUSLY WHILE I NIP IN FOR A QUICK CUP OF TEA?"

A few words on teapots. They may be any shape and made of almost anything, but experts have pronounced that a brown earthenware pot gives the best results. Mankind translates this into the sort of chocolate-coloured teapot which, if it did not originally buy because it had to, it is not likely to buy now unless it does. The non-possession of a brown earthenware adds further to tea-makers' sense of guilt, which all helps. All teapots (except silver ones, whose lids are hinged as valuable books are chained up) have detachable lids which can fall at will—their own, not the tea-pourer's—inside the pot; and all teapots, especially silver ones, will sometimes pour out of the lid instead of the spout. This is a well-known scientific principle which, scientists tell us, is governed by the natural law that some people are more impatient than others. Another scientific principle is that a teapot must be left for a few minutes so that the tea-leaves can dye the water the necessary dark brown. This, scientists say, depends for its success on another natural law—the fact that tea is drunk either alone or in company. Tea drunk in company has a chance of being left alone for the right interval. Tea drunk alone has little chance, because the tea-maker will either pour it out at once and drink what amounts to hot water, or forget it for half an hour and drink what amounts to cold tea.

It is well known by all tea-pourers that some people like strong tea and some weak. That is, all tea-pourers know how they themselves like it, and have learnt to tolerate the fact that other people behave like other people. Most people have a very small circle of friends whom they subconsciously classify as strong tea, weak tea, strong tea no milk, weak tea no sugar, and so on, and also, when they think of it, one or two friends whom they have never even asked but who don't seem to mind. It is safe to say that people who must have no milk in their tea have only themselves to blame if they don't speak up, and that those who must have sugar only have themselves to blame nowadays, and had better not speak up either. There is a smallish block of tea-drinkers who, given the right company, will ask to have the milk put in last. This is a useful starting-point for a scientific conversation, but, as far as the outside world can see, has little further justification. As for strong or weak tea, I can only say that either side regards the other with extreme suspicion. It is not, either side would tell you, that they are unsympathetic towards those who drink tea stronger or weaker than they themselves do; it is just that they can't see why they *want* to.

APOLOGIES TO THE PRESENT VICAR

"When I was vicar of St. John's, ——, people left their door-keys outside their doors. Who would feel safe in doing that now?"

Church newspaper.

QUID PRO QUO

"No, old boy, it wasn't quite like that. I'd actually been through E.F.T.S. and S.F.T.S. and got as far as O.T.U."

"You skipped I.T.W., I suppose, because you were originally in the V.R."

"That's right. Then at O.T.U. the M.O. decided I was u/s."

"What on earth are you two jabbering about?"

"We're talking shop, grandma. You wouldn't understand."

"Don't make obvious remarks."

"Would you like me to explain? You see, E.F.T.S. is Elementary Flying Training School. S.F.T.S. is Service Flying Training School. O.T.U. is Operational——"

"That doesn't help at all. It's still Greek to me."

"Sorry, granny. Shall we go into the other room?"

"No. I see little enough of you when you're on holiday as it is."

" 'Leave,' grandma."

"Leave what?"

"Oh, nothing. Skip it. . . . As I was saying, Bernard, I came unstuck at O.T.U. I was a bit cheesed at having got so far, so I asked to see the C.I. and he wheeled me in to the C.O."

"Bit unusual that, wasn't it?"

"Most. Anyway, as luck would have it the A.O.C. was there that day and the C.O. actually put my case before him."

"Good Lord! Was it the A.O.C. or the A.O.C. in C.?"

"The A.O.C."

"I see."

"I just don't believe it! There couldn't be any sense in that!"

"There is, grandma. The A.O.C. is the Air Officer Commanding and the A.O.C. in C. is the Air Officer Commanding in Chief. Well, as I say, the A.O.C. was there and proved to be a charming old boy. He said he'd take it up personally with the S.M.O. at Group and see if there was any hope."

"WHY SHOULDN'T HE SIT THERE? ANYONE WOULD THINK *YOU* HAD CAUGHT THE RABBIT."

"And was there?"

"Unfortunately no. I was given a C.M.B., found to be quite u/s, collected a 657, went back to the unit and looked up A.M.O.s, underwent a sort of T.T.B., and am now awaiting a course as an L.T.I. at C.L.T.S."

"You've made me drop a stitch!"

"Bad luck, granny. Can I help?"

"Yes, you can. Read this bit from the pattern; I can't find my glasses."

"O.K. Let's see. 'Cast on 4 sts., p.1 (k.1, p.1) 3 times, sl.1, k.1, p.s.s.o., p.1 (k.1, p.1) 8 times, k. 2 tog., p.1 (k.1, p.1) 3 times.' Great Scott! does that really mean something to you?"

"Of course, you stupid boy! . . ."

OPEN HOUSE

I dumped my kit in the darkened hall and passed through the length of the house into the sunshine. Half a dozen soldiers sprawled on the terrace asleep. Beyond, on the hard courts, four more were playing tennis; that is, they had rackets in their hands, but the dun-coloured ball lay in the folds of the half-tautened net, pending the settlement of a discussion. I walked over.

"You can't 'ave forty-fifteen, not serving from that side!"

"It's dooce!"

"Look 'ere! Ginger 'ad first serve——"

" 'Oo's asking 'oo served first? It's the score in this game we're talking about, ain't it? I say it's dooce, because if it was forty-fifteen——"

"Oh, 'ell, it's too 'ot, anyway. What say we chuck it?"

"Okay."

"Okay."

"Okay."

They threw their rackets down.

"What's the court like?" I asked Ginger as they came off. He had dropped behind the other three.

"Not bad, Corp. Gettin' a bit churned up. Ever played?"

"A bit."

He wiped his freckled forehead with an unclean handkerchief, then nodded towards the big old house.

"Whatjer think of the billet?"

I explained that I had only just arrived, and asked him how many were billeted there.

"About twenty-five," he said. "Not bad, as billets go. Darby an' Joan have a couple of rooms up the top somewhere."

"Who do?"

"The old freaks it belongs to. Darby's as bald as an egg, an' Joan 'as her hair done up in a sort of cake. They're not bad."

"Been here long?"

Ginger said he supposed about a hundred and fifty years.

"No, I mean the chaps."

"Oh, no. Only come in Tuesday. Darby starts creating about our boots on the parky floor, or something, so we keeps outside mostly. Like me to show yer round? It ain't bad. There's a billiard room, but the cloth's got tore. Look at that. That's a bird-table. The old girl puts bits of bacon on it, an' we have to go past quiet in case we scare the ruddy sparrers."

We climbed the steps on to the terrace and went into the shade of the house.

"It's all right to smoke," said Ginger. " 'Appen to have a fag on yer?"

I said No, I had been meaning to get some.

"I'll get some," said Ginger—"hang on a minute."

He disappeared stealthily through the door on the left and reappeared almost as once holding two cigarettes in his fingers.

"There's a box stuck at the back of a desk-affair in there," he explained. "Only don't let on, because only me an' my mate knows about it. There was some stinkin' awful cigars in there too when we come, but the old geezer moved 'em sometime on Wednesday."

He paused under a picture in the hall.

"That's the old girl," he confided hoarsely—"painted by oils, or something. Done in 'er youth . . . about ninety year ago, I sh'd think. See what I mean, about the quaffure?"

I nodded. The hair-style certainly was rather cake-like.

"Got a son in the Army, she has—called Aubrey. Bet 'e ain't 'alf an Aubrey too. There's some pictures of him she showed us last night in the tunnel, in a short coat an' top 'at. Smashin'."

"In the tunnel?"

"Had Jerry over last night. Pops over every now an' again in these parts. They got a sorter tunnel through to some property on the other side of the garden. Use it instead of an Anderson."

We were going up the broad curving staircase now.

"Mind yer boots on the varnish," said Ginger, "else old man Darby'll start creating. These is smashin' banisters to slide down, only the old buzzard cops Tiny Wheeler whizzin' down 'em first night we was here 'an got 'im torn a strip off."

"Too bad," I said. "I like sliding down banisters."

"All these is our rooms," said Ginger proprietorially, as we gained the landing —"beds in there, beds in there, an' beds in *there*. But you'll be up top, I expect, being a corporal. I think there's a spare bed in the room Sarge Busby an' Corp. Rigby shares. Come on."

We climbed the last flight of stairs. Ginger dropped his voice.

"You'll 'ave to be as quiet as a ruddy mouse, livin' up 'ere, because you're right bang next door to the old trouts. The C.O. tried to get 'em to shift out altogether so's we could play the accordion and 'ave a sing-song, but they turned stunt——"

"Turned what?"

"*Sh!* Turned stunt—you know, stubborn; dug their blinkin' 'eels in an' wouldn't 'op it. Trouble is with old people——"

Ginger stopped. A door had opened, and in the flood of sunlight there appeared a silhouette. It was familiarly cake-shaped at the top.

"Oh!" said the voice; and then, very evenly, "Why, come in, dear!"

I asked Ginger to excuse me. After all, I hadn't been home for four years.

May, 1944

SUBJECTS AND OBJECTS

"IT may be all very well for some people," said Mrs. Parker judiciously, "but it wouldn't suit my husband and I."

"My husband and *me*," said Mr. Parker. Correcting his wife's grammar in and out of season was a little idiosyncrasy of his.

Mrs. Smyth laughed merrily. "You mean your *wife* and you," she said to Mr. Parker, missing the point as usual. Mr. Smyth had seen it, though.

"What Mr. Parker meant," he explained, "was that Mrs. Parker should have said her husband and her, not her husband and she."

"Let's not go into it," said Mr. Parker. His wife had just caught his eye.

"It's perfectly simple," continued Mr. Smyth, as much for his wife's benefit as for Mrs. Parker's. "All you have to do is to leave out 'my husband,' which only confuses the issue, and imagine that the verb has a single object. You wouldn't say 'It wouldn't suit I,' would you?"

"By all means," said Mrs. Parker grimly, "let us leave out my husband. I get pretty tired of him continually pulling me up in front of people." If Mr. and Mrs. Parker had a fault, from the point of view of their friends, it was their habit of conducting their little tiffs in public.

"There again," said Mr. Smyth, jumping in where Mr. Parker had not intended to tread this time, "you don't get tired of *him* pulling you up. You get tired of *his* pulling you up."

"If it comes to that," said Mrs. Parker, looking very steadily at Mr. Smyth, "I should soon get tired of *you* pulling me up. You're as bad as him."

"You mean," said Mr. Smyth, "you would soon get tired of *my* pulling you up. I'm as bad as *he*."

"I mean you're as bad as *him*," repeated Mrs. Parker.

"Leave me out of it," urged Mr. Parker. He had only recently recovered from one argument in which he had been severely, if unfairly, mauled by his wife, and he was not inclined to take another beating just yet.

"I think you can get a lot of fun out of these arguments about grammar," went on Mr. Smyth, who was perhaps inclined to be a wee bit pedantic on occasion. "It's all so perfectly straightforward to anyone who has learnt a little Latin. Every sentence has a subject and an object, and the object goes in the accusative case. In Mrs. Parker's sentence 'her husband and her' was the object of the verb 'suit,' so 'her' goes in the accusative case. What could be simpler?"

"You mean her husband and her *were* the object," said Mrs. Smyth, acutely for her.

"Surely her husband and *she* were the object," put in Mr. Parker, who had not been following very closely. "Or, to put it in the more usual order, she and her husband were the object."

"*She* could not possibly be the object," said Mr. Smyth. "*She* is always the subject. *Her* is the object."

Mrs. Smyth laughed merrily again. She had got him this time. "How silly," she said. "Imagine saying 'her is.' If you want to use dialect, you should say 'her be.' Nobody ever said 'her is.' "

"You could say hers is," said Mr. Parker, carried away by philological enthusiasm in spite of himself. "Hers is a nice hearse, hers is, for instance, like ours is a nice house, ours is." He caught his wife's eye again and was abruptly silent.

"Now in the other case," said Mr. Smyth, "when Mrs. Parker said she would soon get tired of *me* pulling her up, she should have said of *my* pulling her up, because the verb 'pulling' used in this way is really a participial noun and requires the possessive of me, which is my, in front of it."

"Like your telling me," suggested Mrs. Smyth brightly.

"Your telling me what?" asked Mr. Smyth, getting slightly adrift himself now.

"Nothing. Just your telling me," repeated Mrs. Smyth.

"CALLING F FOR FREDDIE, CALLING F FOR FREDDIE—JUST PEEL OFF AND ZOOM OVER TO YOUR GRANDMA'S FOR THE TIN-OPENER."

"But, darling, you can't just say your telling me. It must be either something something your telling me, or your telling me something something."

"No need to be coarse," put in Mrs. Parker primly.

"He isn't usually," said Mrs. Smyth. "And anyway he didn't really say anything. Only something."

"Well, stop him doing it," returned Mrs. Parker. "I don't like it in mixed company."

"Now there's a point that often puzzles me," said Mr. Smyth. "Should you

have said 'stop his doing it' or 'stop him from doing it,' or is it permissible to say 'stop him doing it,' as you did?"

"You may find this difficult to believe," said Mrs. Parker, "but I simply don't care whether it's permissible or not. I've been doing it all my life, and I shall go on doing it, and neither you or any other half-baked little pedant is going to stop me doing it. And now I'm afraid it's time for my husband and I to be going. Unless he wants to stay and swop subjects and objects with you."

And she swept from the stricken field. Mr. Parker meekly followed her.

"The secret of 'Big Bertha' was never discovered, though the Allies to-day, if they thought it useful, could build a gun that would fire even father."

Worcester paper.

And you know what a fight *he* puts up.

BO-BO

The omens were silent. It came without warning,
That sudden uplift to the heart.
I took up my paper this wonderful morning
To glance through the personal part,
And there as I gave it a casual inspection
I saw with a rapturous thrill
A greeting in terms of the warmest affection
To Bo-Bo from someone named Bill.

Of Bill as a fact, be it frankly admitted,
I reck not; I may as well add
That, since he's for poesie wholly unfitted,
I can waste my time on the lad.
But Bo-Bo, yes, Bo-Bo—a girl who can fairly
Live up to a pet name like that
Is one who, if ever, you'd come upon rarely,
And this, let me tell you, is flat.

She may be as fair as the lily or darkish,
Her eyes may be blue, brown, or grey,
And whether she's sober or modestly larkish
I find I'm unable to say.
I'm sure, when she comes, that the neighbourhood's brighter;
She speaks, and the thrushes are still;
She laughs, and the most misanthropic old blighter
Would swop with the fortunate Bill.

O more than my fancy has hitherto painted
I hold her, and strongly I'd back
The view that all persons with whom she's acquainted
Acclaim her the pick of the pack.
Go forth, good my page, through the width of the globe, oh
The quest may be weary and long,
But kneel to that girl with the sobriquet Bo-Bo
And offer this tribute of song.

THE UNBELIEVER

I met a man about a week ago who took a very firm line about badgers. He said they didn't exist. "Somehow or other," he said, "the idea has grown up that the people wish to be told stories about this preposterous animal, and letters are written to *The Times* and to *Country Life* about it. But there aren't any. If there were, I should have seen one—and I haven't."

I said I had.

"Where?"

"In a wood."

"Pure hallucination. A lot of people have told me that they have seen ghosts. But I don't believe it. I've seen none myself. What was this thing doing?"

"Moving about."

"Was it eating anything?"

"Not that I noticed."

"Did it emit any groans?"

"No."

"Did it carry its head in its hand?"

I was thoroughly annoyed. "One of my earliest recollections," I said, "is that of being taken to see a live badger in a cage. It was in Leicestershire. It was kept by a clergyman. His name was Twigg."

"How do you know he was a clergyman?"

"How do I what? Well, he wore black clothes and a dog-collar."

"Just as I thought. It was probably a disguise."

"There were badgers," I said, "in Ken Wood at Hampstead quite recently. They came into people's gardens."

"Did you see them there?"

"They came at night, and left their traces."

"You're sure you don't mean burglars?"

"Look here," I said. "There is a badger at the Zoo."

"Probably a small Panda."

"How do you know there is a Panda at the Zoo?"

"IT'S THE FASHION ALL RIGHT, GERT."

"I've seen it."

"How do you know it wasn't a large badger?"

"Because there aren't any badgers."

"When I tell you that I know farmers who give a guinea a year to badger-digging parties, because they say the badgers eat their young lambs, when I say that you can see the traces of badgers at any time in hundreds of places, when I assure you that books have been written about the lives and loves of badgers, photographs reproduced of badgers and their young——"

"Ectoplasm," he said.

"Badgers make admirable pets. There are people writing to the papers who honour and cherish them. These people sit down to tea with their badgers and drink milk with them. Badgers are very tidy. They live in setts, and are drawn by dogs——"

"Like the Eskimos."

"They are plantigrades. They bring out their beds to be aired. They are obstinate. They bite. They eat roots, beetles, worms, rabbits. The shriek of a badger at night is a very terrible thing."

"So is the shriek of a ghost."

"Probably many of the stories about ghosts originate from the cry of a badger."

"You might just as well say that many of the stories about badgers originate from the cry of a ghost."

"Possibly the trolls and gnomes were badgers."

"Possibly the badgers were gnolls and tromes."

"Badger-baiting was one of the most popular sports of our ancestors."

"So was killing dragons."

"What do you *really* believe about badgers?"

"In an excessively urbanized country it is found necessary to invent stories of glamour and mystery about the countryside, and the wild creatures of the woods. Badgers is one of them."

" Are one of them."

"Is one of them. There may have been badgers long ago, just as there were dragons and griffins. But they are gone."

"Shaving-brushes are made of badgers' hair. I once wrote a poem about one that I had to throw away. As far as I remember it began:

> Shall I pour water on thee from the geyser
> Badger on that that was a tuft of thine
> Or strew soft shaving papers silently
> Or scatter old blades from my safety-razor . . .

It was a very beautiful poem, and seems more beautiful now. It went on——"

"Are you asking me to believe that this utter rot is any evidence?"

"Hundreds of thousands of people have seen, loved, hated, killed and lived with badgers."

"So you say. I've seen foxes, stoats, weasels, stags, hares, but I've never seen a badger."

"There must have been birds you haven't seen."

"Very few. Some may have got by without my noticing them, but I am prepared to take them on trust. You don't suggest that badgers fly from tree to tree or sit about on telegraph wires?"

"They are nocturnal."

"So are owls. I've seen lots of owls."

"Look here. Have you never seen a stuffed badger in a glass case?"

"Synthetic, probably."

"There must be plenty of post-war planners in this country that you've never seen except in photographs. But you believe in them."

"I accept their existence. There would be no point in inventing them. I've told you the reason for inventing badgers."

"If I took you to a certain wood, and you waited long enough in a certain place without moving until it was dark, then you would see a badger come out."

"How could I see it if it was dark?"

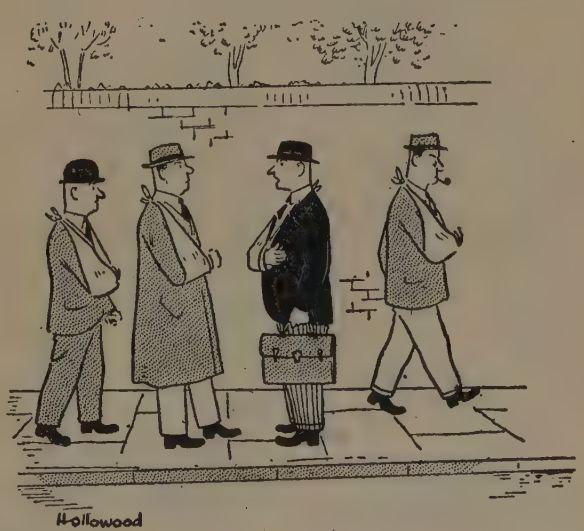
"Well, you'll have to go and see a badger dug, that's all."

"I should not do that because it would be cruel."

"How could it be cruel if there aren't any badgers?"

"It would be if there were."

"Do you deny, then, the whole testimony of Natural History books, encyclopædias and zoologists?"



"DID YOU HEAR THAT REMARKABLE MISTAKE IN THIS MORNING'S 'DAILY DOZEN' PROGRAMME?"

M

"Paid propaganda."

The man was becoming tiresome. "Just because you've never seen a badger," I said, "you say there aren't any. Very well. Do you often go through Trafalgar Square?"

"Almost never."

"Can you believe there's a haystack in it?"

"No."

"I thought so. Just because you don't pass by Trafalgar Square every day on a bus as I do, you think there is nothing there except loud-speakers and lions and Nelson and flags and advertisements, and people going to hear music at the National Gallery, and American soldiers covered with pigeons, and you suppose I'm a liar when I say there's a haystack in it."

"Yes, I do."

"Very well. Come and see, then."

We went. There wasn't. Some idiot had burnt it down.

"Don't ever talk to me about badgers again," said this man.

I shall not.

"My very last butt of Malmsey, and there was a duke in it!"

THIS TALKING AT BREAKFAST

"Personally I should have thought that if a man had a bow and arrow on his battledress sleeve, pointing skywards, it ought to mean he was in the Anti-Aircraft and that a polar bear should mean he had been in Iceland."

"You are confusing divisional signs with puzzles in children's newspapers."

"I don't see how you can help it."

"If the signs of military formations were as easy to understand as you would like, the Germans would understand them too, and it is precisely so that the Germans will *not* understand them that we make them completely unintelligible to anyone."

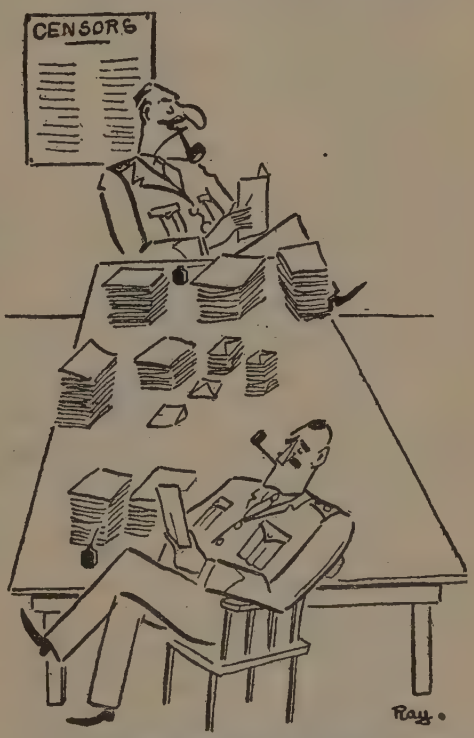
"I'll bet you every German spy is issued with a complete key to them all, printed, as like as not, in Paternoster Row, and that he carries it in his pocket. Mind you, I am fully aware that soldiers like dressing up, but what I am getting at is that, even if you can interpret the whole blooming art gallery of signs on sleeves, you haven't *got* anywhere. And the same with berets. Can you honestly tell me *you* know exactly what each colour means?"

"The plum-coloured one is Airborne."

"Yes, they kindly tell you that in plain English on the shoulder."

"The black one, like Montgomery wears, is the Tank Corps."

"They also tell you that, by means of a tank embroidered on the arm, though I have heard of people who mistook that for a pigeon and said it meant the Royal Corps of Signals. What is the green one?"



"I STILL THINK SERGEANT EDWARD'S EARLY STUFF IS HIS BEST."

"As a matter of fact, now that I think of it, that black one goes for the whole Armoured Corps."

"Ah! You are uncertain already. You *think* so? Which units have been issued with the khaki beret so far? Any idea? And what about the blue one?"

"Air raid wardens."

"Have you never seen a soldier in a blue one . . . bright blue?"

"Oh, some foreigner, maybe."

"No, an Englishman. Have you ever seen a chocolate one?"

"Yes, yes, with cream on top."

"FOUR DOUBLE WHISKIES, FAILING THAT FOUR SINGLES, FAILING THAT FOUR GINS, FAILING THAT FOUR BEERS, FAILING THAT ANYTHING YOU LIKE."

"What was that?"

"Catering Corps?"

"The point I am trying to make is that even if a chap does walk along like a piece of tapestry he conveys nothing to any of us. The whole thing suffers acutely by comparison with the willow-pattern plate, which tells a complete story."

"You are not suggesting a willow-pattern beret?"

"No, but the infantry don't even wear anything to indicate whether they are Royal or not."

"Royal? My dear fellow, the whole service is Royal."

"Excuse me, the Army is *not* Royal. That is where most people make a great mistake. The Navy is Royal, and the Air Force is Royal. The Marines are Royal. But the Army for some reason is *not*. A sailor puts R.N. after his name, the soldier puts nothing but R.I.P."

"He puts R.A."

"Only if he is in the Royal Artillery. And he can put R.A.P.C. if he is in the Pay Corps, but the foot-slogger can put nothing, even if he belongs to some favoured regiment like the 'Royal' Fusiliers or the 'Royal' West Kents. It is NOT, repeat NOT, the 'Royal' Army."

"You propose, then, that Royal regiments should wear the Royal Standard in their buttonholes?"

"I propose that all these sheets of transfers soldiers buy and cut out and stick on their sleeves should at least tell a connected story."

"Did you ever hear of the man who had an entire hunting scene tattooed all over his body? You would have liked that."

"I want to be told, by symbols, that a man was at Dunkirk, say, and wounded; that he went to West Africa . . ."

"How would you show that?"

"Little black men running."

"After him, or away from him?"

"My dear man, I am not talking about Badoglio or Abyssinia."

"But little black men running . . ."

"Oh, well, squatting down and making tea, then. He could also wear something to show he had been torpedoed on the way home."

"Wouldn't his relatives have to wear that?"

"If he survived *he* could show one end of a ship sticking out of the water."

THE SPORTING INSTINCT

"With himself clinging to it! Supposing on the other hand that he himself had fired a shot which sank a German battleship?"

"How many have done that?"

"If only one has he is entitled to show it."

"All right, let *him* show the end of a battleship, and the other fellow can wear a life-belt."

"By this time, old boy, a sergeant in your precious unit will not even have room for his stripes."

"Exactly; and in my precious unit a sergeant-major wears his crown, for that very reason, level with the wrist. Good morning."

A GOOD START

"Now there's not much motoring you have your chance to practise writing," said the editor of a motoring paper to a new member of his staff. "I'll want you to cover the social side. You'll handle the beauties of Nature and the Roman remains. You'll visit and describe celebrated view-points, and don't forget how well your engine pulled on the way up. You'll go to John o' Groats on Aztec petrol—your engine will run sweetly with never a sign of knock—and to Land's End in a Placard—you will appreciate for the first time the roomy comfort of a modern Placard. I know I can leave the technical side confidently to you, but here are some hints to improve your style.

"Never leave a word alone; that's amateurish. It isn't a climb, it's a severe climb. Better still, a somewhat severe climb. There's a nice touch of diffidence about that. You're not ramming your opinion down your reader's throat. For the same reason, make play with 'as it were.' That takes the offence out of a statement.

" 'The Cotswolds provide a vantage-point, as it were.' 'The road forks, as it were.' Your reader may think different. You don't do a thing outright: you make an attempt, so to speak. Don't force your opinion down his throat.

"And not too much of the 'I.' I don't know," continued the editor thoughtfully, "whether you could say 'One got out of my car,' but you can and should say 'One may obtain a magnificent view'—or rather, 'a somewhat magnificent view—of the Pentlands.' I have it," he exclaimed. " 'The traveller, if he cares, may obtain a . . . The enterprising traveller,' " he cried, inspired, " 'The—the . . .' "

" 'Somewhat enterprising traveller'?"

" 'The enterprising lover of the Great Outdoors,' " cried the editor, in full spate. "Be picturesque. '. . . of the Great Outdoors may obtain a somewhat magnificent view of these justly-famous hills.' " A touch of caution crept into his voice—" '. . . as it were.' See?

"Now for material. Never pass a plaque. Keep a look-out for tombstones.

"NOTICED WHERE HE FILES HIS MILK FORMS?"

My old chief used to say 'Where there's a stone there's a story.' Our readers like a funny epitaph or an inn-sign said to be unique. Do it this way. 'After a run down'—no, 'after a well-deserved run down,' that's the human touch—'our Placard drew up smoothly opposite a fine old byre. Here the curious may discern a tablet securely let into the wall commemorating the last squire to shoot deer with a blunderbuss. This is reputed to be the only one of its kind in the vicinity, and will serve to remind the speculative traveller of how far modern progress has carried us.' You'd better explain that. 'Nowadays, we no longer use a blunderbuss and deer are comparatively few and far between.' "

" 'As it were.' "

"No," said the editor, "you might risk that.

"Work in your technical touches deftly. 'A single gallon of petrol will take you to the spot where Sir Thomas More was burned at the stake.' 'Over these rough roads, where harsh braking should be avoided at all costs for your tyres' sake, Lady Jane Grey was dragged to execution,' or it may have been John Knox. Verify. Some of these historical people had a nasty habit of dying in their beds.

"Don't be too learned, though. Keep it simple, like this. 'The traveller in search of a really satisfying repast might do worse than pull in at one of those grand old English hostelries and sample the fare of the house. They might be prevailed

upon to regale him, as we were, with a generous slice of ham and half a dozen appetizing eggs. In our case, we had scarcely started to commence our collation before a clatter in the yard heralded the approach of a belt-driven, side-valve, double-declutched Trudge Eagle. The door opened and there was Mr. Atkinson, that veteran roadster and confirmed motor-cyclist, spattered with mud, and his wife, Mrs. Atkinson.'

"That's the kind of thing. Homely, intimate. Vivid expression, interesting topics, casual technical detail. Do you think you can do that?"

"I will make an attempt, so to speak," replied the new man spiritedly.

TABLE-TALK OF AMOS INTOLERABLE

Amos tended to get disproportionately annoyed by certain popular phrases, and to behave as if he had been personally insulted when anybody used them. One that roused him to positive fury, for some reason, was the expression "all the way from," used as in the statement "This came all the way from China." Once when a temporary barmaid, who had already irritated Amos by giving him three threepenny bits in his change, artlessly moved to the back of the bar so that we could see her better and announced that her stockings had come "all the way from America," Amos sprang up from his table and seemed about to claw his way over the counter as he snarled, "Are you under the impression that if you hadn't told us that, we should have thought they *hadn't* come all the way? Where do you suppose we think they are now? Mid-Atlantic?"

The barmaid was not offended. She said to me later, when Amos had gone, "That gentleman didn't seem to realize how far away America is, like. Funny how some people don't *think*."

* * * * *

Amos's greeting to a Mr. Stamp who had returned to our circle after a few weeks' absence was "Ah! We haven't seen you philately!"

* * * * *

He always tried to make a small dramatic scene out of the expression of his views about a book. Thus he was once to my certain knowledge compelled to carry about with him constantly for nearly four months the latest *Life* of a certain very popular subject of biography before a favourable opportunity offered for him to appear to finish reading the last page, close the book sharply (releasing some dust), and say in a loud confident tone:

"This"—(he paused)—"will take its acknowledged place in the long row of other biographies of X." He paused again. "Right at the end."

It is true that an eager but not very bright member of the company seriously

piped up "Which end?" but by sweeping several glasses to the floor Amos was able to create a distraction in which the anticlimax passed unnoticed.

* * * * *

Sometimes Amos felt called upon to produce what he described as one of his bits of Homely Wisdom in proverbial form, and occasionally it even happened that one of them was apposite. However, it was out of a clear sky, with no reference to anything that had been said, and solely (I imagine) because he could not be bothered to save it up any longer, that he suddenly declaimed "Ah, well—the windscreen-wiper never goes so far up one side as it does the other."

* * * * *

Many reporters and newspapermen frequented the pub, and Amos used to get very angry when he detected signs of what he would call Reporters' Arrogance. By this he meant the superiority and condescension sometimes shown by people who wrote about facts ("as they call them," Amos said) towards other people who lived by fiction and other imaginative work.

"Where would reporters be," Amos would inquire, "without fiction, which first arouses public interest in the situations of real life? It is fiction that prepares the ground, that provides the egotistical reader with the necessary associations to make him pay any regard whatever to the inherently dull and pedestrian doings of other people. The stories in a newspaper interest him only," Amos declared once, making a determined effort to furl his cigar, "as so many fables gone wrong, or incompletely told. The nearer they are to resembling neatly-worked-out pieces of that fiction with the hero of which he is accustomed to identify himself, the better he likes it. I'll back the nearest twopenny library against the Great University of Life any day of the week."

He rather obscurely added "Except Tuesday."

* * *

Referring to a wealthy business man of his acquaintance who had finally softened up and lent him a small sum, Amos benevolently observed, "Dear old 'Oxy' Acetylene! I often wonder what will become of him on that grim day

"NOT YOU . . .!"

in the future when there is to be weeping and wailing and nationalization of industry. . . . He will probably regret that he did not realize his early ambition, which was to be the Berserk," Amos said, "of some college at Oxford, I forget which."

* * * * *

On one of the exceedingly rare occasions when we were privileged to see Amos handing over any substantial sum of money himself, he happened to be paying somebody for a second-hand six-quart ice-cream freezer that he had undertaken to buy, no one knew why, for three pounds five shillings. He paid entirely in silver and slapped the jingling handful down on the table with the words "There you are—three pounds five."

The other man suspiciously spread the coins out, counted them twice, and then said "There's only thirty-five bob here."

"My word," said Amos ruefully, handing over the rest, "you drive a hard bargain."

TA, BERT

Dear Bert,—This 3*d.* a day extra, Bert Higgins, I hopes as you'll make this over on your allotment, Bert Higgins, quick to your loving wife.

Road sweeping was wot you done before you join H.M. soldiers, Bert Higgins, I grants you that but you got no call to make out as you is a tradesman because you sweeps the billet daily, Bert Higgins, so if that 3*d.* a day don't turn up on me allotment I'll know why or I'm not J. Higgins (Mrs.).

The kids is all well and sends love and so does their ma.

Your loving wife,
J. Higgins.

DRAKES OF TO-DAY

When the Armada came
Howard of Effingham
And Drake with his ships of flame
  Drove them away to sea.
Who, when Hitler tried,
Stopped him and broke his pride?
And a ghost to the thought replied,
  "Well, I suppose it was we.

We were out on that day
And we saw their boats under way
Stealing out of a bay
  And we let our oil-bombs go;

And they burst, and the water churned
And calmed again, and then burned,
And that startled them and they turned,
How many years ago?"

For time was no more to him.
Long since out of the dim
Of evening over the rim
Of a Kentish hill fell he.
England was all his care,
And he spoke from I know not where,
But I heard his voice in the air:
"Well, I suppose it was we."

June, 1944

H. J.'S DRAMATIC FRAGMENTS

THE following fragment was produced when I became interested in writing very small on postage stamps. To begin with, it was as much as I could do to get my initials on, as I have many Christian names which I do not generally use, among such being Miguel, Deirdre and Bram, but with practice I could get on quite long pieces, for example, the index to Trevelyan's *History of England*, and finally I grew so expert that I actually had room left over and on this I wrote drama, *e.g.*, the below.

DESTINY GRANGE *or* WOLVES IN SHEPHERD'S CLOTHING

(*The scene is in Ancient Times.*)

SOCRATES. Have you got that down?

PLATO. Yes.

SOCRATES. Then we'll have a character called Thrasymachus. We'll make him fairly easy game. Take this . . .

(*Enter* CLEOPATRA.)

CLEOPATRA. Has anyone here seen Antony?

SOCRATES. There is an Antony being tempted over there. Is he the one?

CLEOPATRA. It doesn't sound like him. He never needs it.

(*An eagle drops a tortoise on* CLEOPATRA'S *head.*)

EAGLE. Sorry. I thought it was Æschylus.

(*Enter* DAME SYBIL THORNDIKE.)

DAME SYBIL. Oh, woe is me, my head with grief is bowed,
I, who was once so regal and so proud.
The Halcyon. . . .

PLATO. What you want is a good laugh. You ought to go and see Aristophanes' new play.

SOCRATES. Yes. It's all about an awful ass whose head is always up in the clouds. I laughed till I cried.

(*Enter* CASSANDRA.)

CASSANDRA. I am going to have the mumps. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter a large crowd, which is addressed in turn by several orators.*)

BRUTUS. Unless we can maintain our export trade . . .

HECKLER. What about all these quinquiremes from Nineveh?

BRUTUS. I was just coming to the question of mercantile marine. Now once Britain begins to utilize her resources in raw materials to dominate the overseas market . . .

CHAIRMAN. Time. Next please.

ODYSSEUS. Here's a bargain. Warps, woofs and wefts woven by my wife. Any buyers, any buyers?

CHAIRMAN. No advertising. Next, please.

VITELLIUS. The great problem of this age is undernourishment. Indeed . . .

CHAIRMAN. That concludes the open forum. There will now be a short interval for community shouting.

"I'M THE COMPANY'S OFFICIAL WAR ARTIST."

CROWD. Cake and circuses! Home Rule for Socrates! Stop Hannibal destroying our scenery with vinegar!

(*Enter* THEMISTOCLES *with a Persian prisoner.*)

THEMISTOCLES. What is your name?
PRISONER. Omar Khayyám.
THEMISTOCLES. Who is your next-of-kin?
PRISONER. Well, I've always known her as "Thou."
CROWD. Any offers for the Roman Empire?
TRIBUNES. Avaunt! Elsewhither, plebs!
CROWD. But you are supposed to protect us.
TRIBUNES. We have been bought by the Patricians.
CROWD. Oh, all right, all right. Off we go. (*They leave singing Brekekekex coax.*)

(*Enter* PALLAS ATHENE.)

ATHENE. It is bad enough having an owl on one's wrist, though I suppose that is better than being Prometheus with his vulture; but what gets me down is being perched on by this raven.
RAVEN. Nevahmaw. Nevahmaw.
ATHENE. Do try to learn some new words. If you knew you would never master more than one, why did you choose that? Something bright and lively, like "cheerio," would have been better.
RAVEN. Nevah-nevahmaw.
ATHENE. I wish my wisdom included elementary speech therapy.
OWL. Too-whit, too-whoo.
ATHENE. Don't you start.
OWL. It is generally considered a rather merry note.

(*Enter a* SPARTAN *in a tartan.*)

SPARTAN. Three times round the jolly old Coliseum. Now for a bath.
ATHENE. There are only hot baths, which I think sensible but you probably despise.
SPARTAN. Not if they are boiling. Then a good rub down with pumice and I'm ready for anyone.
ATHENE. But is anyone ready for you?

(*Enter heavily a* DEUS EX MACHINA.)

D.E.M. I wish somebody would invent the spring.

FINIS

FRÄULEIN METL COMES OVER

(From our Ankara Correspondent)

A strike of tram and bus-conductors in Ankara is at the moment holding up the desertion of enemy agents to the Allies. The situation is aggravated by the shortage of taxis in the city.

I heard to-day the full story of Fräulein Metl, the beautiful and talented agent of the Nazi O.S.P.I.*

Fräulein Metl, it may be remembered, began her amazing career as a shorthand-typist in the advance-sales department of the Stahlwerksverband. It was there that she was spotted by Gröbbler, Kaum's deputy. Immediately he began to groom her for espionage. She was taught seventeen languages; she learned to distinguish the various countries on the map; she was excused her contributions to the People's Car.

In 1937 she was entrusted with her first serious mission. She was sent to Moscow to obtain the plans of a new tobacco kiosk that had been erected outside the Kremlin. It was a test-case. She was completely successful.

"THIS EXERCISE IS RAPIDLY DEGENERATING INTO A FARCE, WITH ALL THESE FRANC-TIREURS SKULKING AROUND."

In 1943 she was made Inspector of Disinterested Propaganda (Lithuanian Division). Once again her work proved of the highest order. She was promoted to Ankara. It did not take the Allies long to realize that, for her height, she was one of the most dangerous of enemy agents. Various transfer fees were discussed but somehow the deal never came off. That was in January of this year.

In February Fräulein Metl was summoned to the Fuehrer's headquarters on the Russian Front. She reached Dnog two days after Hitler had retired to Vubosk. At Vubosk she learned that her master was in Kriboshniki. At Kriboshniki . . . Well, it happened a dozen times in all. Always she found herself two days'

* Initial letters of the Nazi O.S.P.I.

journey east of Hitler's headquarters. Distraught and weak from continuous rough travel, she at last gave up the chase. At Hitlergrad she wrote this letter:

MEIN FUEHRER,—Would it not be safer to meet at some place further west? As I write the Russians are only two hundred and fifty miles behind me. They are advancing at the rate of ten miles a day. May I suggest Berne as a suitable rendezvous?

Of course the foolish girl meant Barne—the Polish market-town. It was her first mistake. She was summoned to Berlin.

And now she has come over to the Allies. She is reported to have brought her cat with her.

BILLET-DOUX TO BANGLE

BANGLE,—You're late, have left for me work, supper is on the plate over sauce-pan on stove which switch on immediate if wanted hot, soap-flakes for washing up is in-jar Plum and Apple Full Fruit Standard under sink and it wouldn't half be a surprise if I come home to-morrow a.m. finding the cupboard door mended.

The kitchen floor do need scrubbing, don't it?

Don't forget the black-out in the lounge got tore in the mangle wot is under the window and wants repair before in use again, Bangle.

Make your bed proper in the morning, Bangle, and none of your getting out careful neither, I can always tell, wash your things after breakfast before you goes.

The milkman I shan't be back till after so pay him.

Have left your this weeks fares and baccy money wrapped in that bit of paper about equal pay for equal work wot you tore out.

Hopes you won't be lonely,

Your loving wife,
MRS. BANGLE.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON IS FACED WITH A DIFFICULT QUESTION

XXXI

Now here, now otherwhere, I range
On doubtful feet the echoing floor,
Where from the dim unshutter'd door
I hear the silver ring of change;

And in my heart I question why,
And fondly ask, "If this be so,

If, caring nothing, others go
Their destin'd journey, why not I?"

But, yearning for the stranger's land,
Where once of old we twain would rove,
I pause, and through the shadows move
The fingers of a mystic hand

That writes in flaming words of fire
A fateful question on the wall,
And, rooted to the dusty hall,
I quell the lust of strong desire.

Above my head the voice is clear:
"Too long delay'd thy train is due";
And truly false, yet falsely true,
I turn and, hearing, will not hear.

XXXII

Unquiet Truth, that round the Pole
Guides every bright and wheeling star,
Upholds me in the equal war
Of rebel flesh and fighting soul.

I feel it, in the drear recess
And homeward beating of my way,
I hold it true—to answer Nay
Were better than to answer Yes;

Or palter with the truth, and take
The tardy and infrequent train
Where billows of the northern main
In crisped lines of silver break

Unwatch'd along the sandy shore,
And dusky veils of evening fold
In tender sleep the windy wold
That once we trod, but tread no more;

No more, till all the thunders cease
Upon the ramparts of the world,
And tower to tower the flags unfurl'd
Wave in the twenty years of peace.

ON THE BLACK

Owing to a combination of unusual circumstances which will perhaps never be fully understood, even by historians, my overdraft at the bank has temporarily disappeared. For the last few hours, while living to outward appearance a normal life, I have been moving in a state of suppressed rapture through fairyland.

Such times occur, no doubt, in the lives of most of us; and when they come I think we are prone to wonder why the bank shows so little emotion on a matter of vital interest * to itself. Not that we in these sophisticated days expect the display of flags and bunting our grandfathers would have demanded; the bank's customers are now so numerous that large-scale celebrations would soon be made stale by repetition. But I have often thought that when the happy creditor walks in to present his next cheque the entire staff might gather round and sing a short greeting in simple harmony; or if, as in my case, he lives so far away that he cannot visit the bank in person he might be sent a special statement of account on parchment, freely decorated and initialled by everyone from the manager to the junior clerk. Nothing like this happens; no official notice is taken, though of course word is passed round the building that X. Y. Z. (I ought perhaps to explain that these are assumed initials) is "on the black" this morning, and few of the neighbouring branches are informed by telephone.

I believe I have hit on the reason for this neglect. I am—I regret to inform my readers—growing older every day, and it occurred to me that the happy event I have recorded might be seldom repeated in my lifetime; unless, therefore, I took this present opportunity to ponder its true significance it might go unpondered altogether. I could not possibly allow this, so I settled down this evening to a financial brood. I allowed myself only five minutes on the job, for by that time I could perceive one or two stiffish unpaid bills gradually rising to the surface of my consciousness and it was time to stop before I understood too much. But in that short period an important thought had crossed my mind.

"HERE HE COMES—I BET HE'S FORGOTTEN THE CIGARETTES."

Put simply, it was that a victory for the customer is a defeat for the bank. The creditor has become the debtor; why should it

celebrate the fact? The calm confidence of solvency has given way to the anxiety of debt and nervous speculation about the uncertain future; the potential harrow has become the prospective toad. Surely the typist moving her ribbon across to black as she makes up my account can hardly announce a red-letter day?

All this must be admitted without question. But I have my answer ready—the answer any decent man must give. After all, the bank has trusted me for many years; can it seriously imagine, now the positions are reversed and it has fallen on evil days, that I shall act less generously? Never. As long as it stands I stand with it; be the colour black or—let us face the possibility—red again I shall remain loyal; and if the bank is broken I shall go broke as well.

TIME'S REVENGE.

I hope this declaration, made in good faith, will be noted by my manager, for I have just noticed something. It is only a single letter *s* near the head of the official statement, but it makes a lot of difference. That *Mrs.* X. Y. Z. is solvent I can readily believe; she always is. But as for *Mr.*, when his turn comes—well, on current form his chances are not very bright.

SING OF BEANS

People wonder nervously whether in years to come this century will be judged by its poetry, and as very few of us can read modern poetry we may well be nervous. We tremble to think that a thirtieth-century professor may make whimsical deductions about us from the fact that some big stiff wrote "Thought is elliptical, so is sound." It would not do at all. And suppose that the professor got hold of this:

only at nightfall ethereal rumours
revive for a moment a broken
Coriolanus

or this:

and mazurkas about tweak-
ing his wing collar pecking at his im-
peccable cravat

with no commas, what's more. Of course we realize that these chaps leave out the punctuation in order to protect themselves against being dipped into, but future generations will put a much sterner interpretation on the whole thing.

However, I have a pretty shrewd idea that our popular songs, and not our unpopular poetry, will be called on to justify us in years to come—those words that pour from music shops on to the passer-by and haunt us as we devour jolly little pink sausages at lunch in our favourite café. If you doubt me cast your mind back to the Elizabethans (cast it still further if you are a B.A. and can). By what do we judge the Elizabethans? Song-hits from popular plays of course: things about Marion's nose being red and raw and sigh no more ladies and then come kiss me sweet-and-twenty. Subjects that you might bring up in ordinary conversation without losing face. And that is how we too must be judged.

What if we did sing "I like bannannas because they have no bones"? That was in one of our weaker moments. Bannannas, they will say, these research students, were evidently regarded as a source of lyrical inspiration. We also sang "No love, no nothing till my baby comes home," and "He calls me lollipop, I call him sugar-plum." A fanciful crowd, they will think, going to the sweet-counter for metaphors. Gay, they will call us, and debonair; the Elizabethans will seem dim by comparison.

All accusations of sacrilege are confuted by a little experiment I tried on my father. I was playing Shakespeare's "When birds do sing, hey ding a ding a ding," syncopated on a gramophone record, when my father came in and screwed up his face. "Shakespeare," I said in a sepulchral tone, and he brightened up at once and said so it was, the Bard himself. Whereas if I had arranged "You're the cream in my coffee and the salt in my stew" as

a madrigal and had it played for him, he would have said in one frozen syllable the word *jazz*.

Having established my thesis I must admit to cold feet in one direction. Let no one judge us by "Never trust a Jumping Bean." It is going too far. It caught me unawares at the pictures where I went to see something good, and it came over in a not so good forerunner. The American, disguised by earrings as an Italian Mexican, called it a "jomping bean" with a soft j, which added to the impression of the bean's general unreliability in a way a hard j could never have done. The singer explained at length that the great thing she had against this bean was that "it jomps and it jomps."

As she sang all the adjectives that I had ever flung at the Elizabethans, like "carefree" and "frivolous," seemed to come back in my teeth. It was wonderful and terrible that we could sit there, soldiers and sailors and income-tax collectors, tired after our day's work, and accept without question the injunction never to trust a jomping bean. This sturdy generation, the research student will write, could take anything.

HONOLULAW

"He was working out his income tax, and needed the drink he took."
—*Press Report from Honolulu.*

The man was drunk and the facts were clear;
Oh, tight as a drum was he,
But his counsel, wiping away a tear,
Came out with a heartfelt plea:
"Though it might be said he was slightly lax,"
He said in a voice that shook,
"He was working away at his income tax
And needed the drink he took."

The court sat up with a startled air
For the drink, as drink, was proved,
But he pondered awhile in his high-backed chair
And His Honour was plainly moved,
And the silence deepened as still he mused
Till he spoke: "I have heard men say
That a dose of alcohol rightly used
Is sound in a medical way.

"Prescribed when the current of life runs low
Its tonic effect is sure,
Employed as a solace in times of woe
It rapidly works a cure;
From which of the two did you seek relief?
My friend, as you're on your oath,
Was it physical languor or mental grief?"
The prisoner answered "Both.

"Fed to the teeth, as a man distraught
By riddles that gave no clue,
A deep oblivion was all I sought,"
"And a very good reason too,"
The magistrate said. "I find no sin
In medicine used as such,
And I don't think a patient should be run in
For taking a drop too much.

"Go forth, young man, from the face of law
With a character free from stain,
Though I may as well hint that you'd wisely draw
Things mild if you suffer again.
Don't, as your counsel remarked, grow lax,
Although, as we've heard him plead,
When plugging away at your income tax
Good liquor is what you'll need."

LETTER TO GERMANY RE RAILWAYS

DEAR GERMANS,—I was very sorry to see, during all that pre-invasion bombing that went on, that you were having trouble with your railway system. The papers over here point out that all this smashing-up of marshalling yards by Marauders, Liberators, Lightnings, Fortresses, A20s, B26s, Mustangs, Typhoids, Spitoons, Mosquitoes, Hellcats, Hulls and Halifaxes would not have mattered so much if it weren't for the difficulty you find in replacing the damaged material. I understand you have plenty of straight rails but are distressingly short of points.

This naturally interests me very much because we used to have exactly the same difficulty in the nursery at home in the old days. Plenty of straight rails, and of curved rails for getting round corners not a few, but an absolute paucity of points. The result was of course that we could lay out as big an oval as you could wish to see—or rather not quite an oval, but whatever a thing is called which has straight

"SHALL WE LET 'EM PLAY THROUGH?"

sides and a semi-circle at each end—with possibly one loop line and a branch to the book-case by the window, but beyond that we were unable to go. And as you know, or soon will, if you haven't found it out already, one cannot run a satisfactory service without a decent number of lines branching off the main system and rejoining it again somewhere else. There is also a requirement for sidings.

Why people always gave us straight rails instead of points I never discovered, until in the fullness of time I became a buyer of rails myself. The fact is that points come a great deal more expensive—on account of the moving parts, you see. But of course we didn't know that, so we used to keep hammering away at people to try to persuade them to put the line on a workable basis.

"*Dear Father Christmas,*"

we used to write—(not "Dere Father Christmas," having no time to waste on whimsicality):

"*In connection with the widespread distribution of goods customarily undertaken at this season under your orspices*"—a difficult word that for a child of six—"*we should like to draw your attention to our urgent requirement for rails. Not straight rails. Straight rails are in stock to a marked degree. What we want is points—also crossovers.*

"*In respect of points we should like left-hand points and right-hand points, only rather more left than right on account of the sidings which must lie to the left of the main station unless you want us to have table-legs in the goods yard, up with which no self-respecting stationmaster will put. With regard to crossovers we don't care whether they cross over from left to right or from right to left, the result being the same in either case as you can eezily*"—we spelt it "easily" actually, but I'm putting it like that to give an air of verisimilitude to the thing—"*eezily see if you look at the letter* X, *of which there is a good example at the end of this letter.*

"*There would be no harm if you put in a turn-table while you are about it.*

HAPPY XMAS."

Well, a fat lot of good that did us. Not a trace of permanent way in anyone's stocking, and about two hundred lengths of straight rail from grandfather on the breakfast-table. So we had to make do without points, and that, dear old Germans, is what you will have to do too.

"I THINK YOU'RE MISTAKEN, DEAR. BEFORE IT COULD TASTE OF PARAFFIN WE SHOULD HAVE TO HAVE A PERMIT."

We found there were only two ways of running a railway without enough points to go round, and if our experience is of the slightest use to you, you are perfectly welcome to profit by it.

You can *pretend* there are

points where there aren't any. That is to say, you run your branch line from wherever it is going to almost up to the main line and just simply leave it with the two little sticking-out bits one normally uses for joining-up purposes—well, just sticking out. Then when the train that ought to go off on the branch line comes along you quickly take a section out of the main line ahead of it (just opposite the branch line of course), or you needn't take it right out, pulling the pieces apart is just as good. Well, naturally the engine falls over with its wheels buzzing round like anything, and you immediately whip it up and clap it down on the branch line, being careful to see you've got all the flanges on the inside of the rails, and away it goes to wherever it is going to. After that you mend the main line again, and there you are.

"YOUR C.O., DARLING? WHICH? THE ONE WHO NEEDS A HAIRCUT OR THE ONE WHO HASN'T SHAVED?"

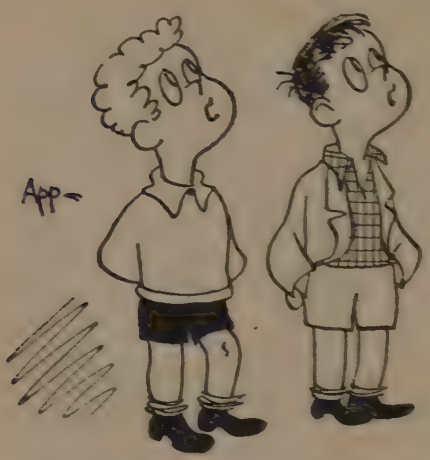
Well, that's one method, and I can see very easily that it's going to be more of a problem for you than it was for us, partly because of the difference in weights, and partly because plenty of your engines fall off the rails anyway without your going out of your way to do it intentionally.

So you may prefer the second method, which is simply a matter of taking up the points you *have* got the moment they have been used, and rushing them over to another section of the line where their presence is urgently required. Supposing, I mean, you've got one train due to branch off to Etaples or some such place, and another one hoping to get back on to the main line near Cambrai. Well, as soon as the Etaples train is clear of the points you must dig them up, transport them very quickly (by air, I suppose, just as we used to do) to the Cambrai sector and pray like anything you'll be able to get them in place before the train comes along.

If you don't like this method either, you'd better try writing to Father Christmas.

SWEETS

I hope it will not depress my readers much if to-day I write about sweets. Indeed, it seems rather a good time to do so. The past few years have shown us that the chief effect of circumstance on sweets has been a heightening of their emotional content; if my readers doubt this, let them imagine themselves being offered



"YES, THAT ONE IS STILL ON THE SECRET LIST."

a peppermint lump and compare their self-abasement with how they felt in the old days.

In the old days—to keep on at them for a moment longer—one of the features of the sweet world was the chocolate-box. It had a top like a picture postcard and was fastened with a ribbon specially tied so that it could be slipped off and worried back by furtive eaters, and inside there was a great deal of dark-brown paper which could be rearranged by these same people for the same reason. The thing was, my readers will remember, to remove the paper cup which went with each chocolate and give the row a shake. There were also non-furtive eaters who, every time they took a chocolate, removed not only that paper cup but all the spare ones left by others. Psychologists say that these people have lately proved themselves natural leaders of empty milk-bottles.

The chocolates themselves were arranged in rows between little paper fences, and the last few rows in the last layer were a let-down, or paper whiskers. Nowadays, of course, chocolates are arranged in bags. It does not make any difference to the chocolates, but it does to those trying to choose the kind of chocolate they hope they are going to get. Life is not so easy now for those people who liked to spend five minutes hovering over the box, uttering, to make it more interesting for the others, little cries of anticipation. Nowadays, they have to take more or less what is on top of the bag, and so now more than ever it is necessary to think quickly and to remember that a square chocolate is either hard or soft, a round chocolate is either soft or hard, a chocolate peppermint is the one somebody else has just taken, and if there are three chocolates the same shape left at the bottom of the bag there must be some reason. One baffling facet of a chocolate-eater's life is that those who do not like coffee chocolates have never been able to pick out any other kind. Scientists have not yet tried to explain this, probably because they themselves like coffee chocolates and so always get something else.

There has always been a slight mental war between those who prefer hard chocolates and those who prefer soft; each side knowing itself to be better and cleverer than the other. In the same way, and for the same fundamental reason, those who bite boiled sweets and those who suck them have never stopped nagging each other. The biters know the suckers to be the sort of people who would eat the pastry of a jam tart before the jam, and the suckers consider the biters to be headstrong, ill-balanced and calculating; what they are calculating being another boiled sweet before the suckers have finished sucking. Biters are also apt to go for the acid and lemon drops and leave the pink and mauve sweets for the plodders. It is easy to see why

psychologists have always regarded a bag of boiled sweets as one of their best observation fields.

Now I come to a kind of sweet as firmly embedded in the public's affections as it is usually firmly embedded among the rest of the sweets in the bag or jar. This is the bull's-eye. Sometimes it is called old-fashioned on the label, to plunge the public into a still deeper nostalgia. When the public thinks of bull's-eyes it thinks that modern sweets are not what they were. It would not matter if the public was swamped daily by bull's-eyes, it would still go on thinking that sweet-makers do not make bull's-eyes any more. This is all the more remarkable because bull's-eyes are, of all sweets, the most stable and traditional, even to the broken-off bit at each end. No one knows, by the way, how bull's-eyes are made, but everyone knows that the process looks so difficult that it must really be easy, like seaside rock. Seaside rock of course has a tremendous pull on the public because it is the only sweet you can read, unless you count the wrapping on toffee-paper; but as the words on toffee-paper are apt to end in the middle, the public has never accorded them the same literary respect. To go back to bull's-eyes, no one has ever sucked or bitten one up without feeling a bit whimsical. Psychologists say it is something to do with the stripes.

I don't know if my readers have had any Turkish delight lately, but they will not have forgotten what a complicated psychological business it is. Turkish delight is normally made in round wooden boxes with an Oriental lid, to show up the greedy by their glad murmurs of recognition. I should add, to be fair, that it is not the greedy who will get the biggest pieces. It is a well-known fact that these people are driven by their consciences to take the smallest size but one, while those who are too busy talking to notice will probably get two pieces stuck together. All this makes for a submerged atmosphere which might be awkward if sweet-makers had not, by putting such big and so few pieces in a box, and swamping them with icing sugar, made the whole process more of a ceremony than anything else.

Home-made sweets are not of course made so often now, but they never were made so often as they were going to be. Science tells us that for every one person

"DIDN'T I TELL YOU IT WOULD START ON THE SIXTH?"

who ever made home-made toffee there were ten people who hinted that they knew how. Toffee has always been the most frequently made home-made sweet, because, as is well-known, almost anything will turn into toffee if the maker is not careful. Partly owing to the chemical properties of sugar, and partly to the fact that some households are stronger-willed than others, home-made toffee is usually eaten either liquid or as hard as a brick. But the emotional result is the same; human nature, as represented by the toffee-maker, has beaten life, as represented by shop toffee.

Mention of shop toffee reminds me that I have said nothing about another and even better example of what scientists call the basic sweet. This is chocolate in the singular, that is, in bars and blocks. One interesting thing about chocolate is that it is rarely home-made, because the easiest way to make it would be to melt down and boil up some already existing chocolate, and this hardly seems worth while. Another interesting thing is that it is divided into little units so that owners can share their chocolate with their friends. This has led to quite a code of conduct among chocolate-sharers. Anyone offered one unit is supposed to be grateful, anyone offered two should ask if the offerer means it, anyone offered three should have a quick look round at what the others are getting to see there has been no mistake, and anyone offered more should protest but take it. This applies of course to all sweets. I mean the taking. Psychologists tell us that people do not offer other people sweets unless they mean them to take them. Not that anyone would think they did. I just wanted to mention it because it is not often that we find psychologists so keenly in line with the rest of humanity.

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