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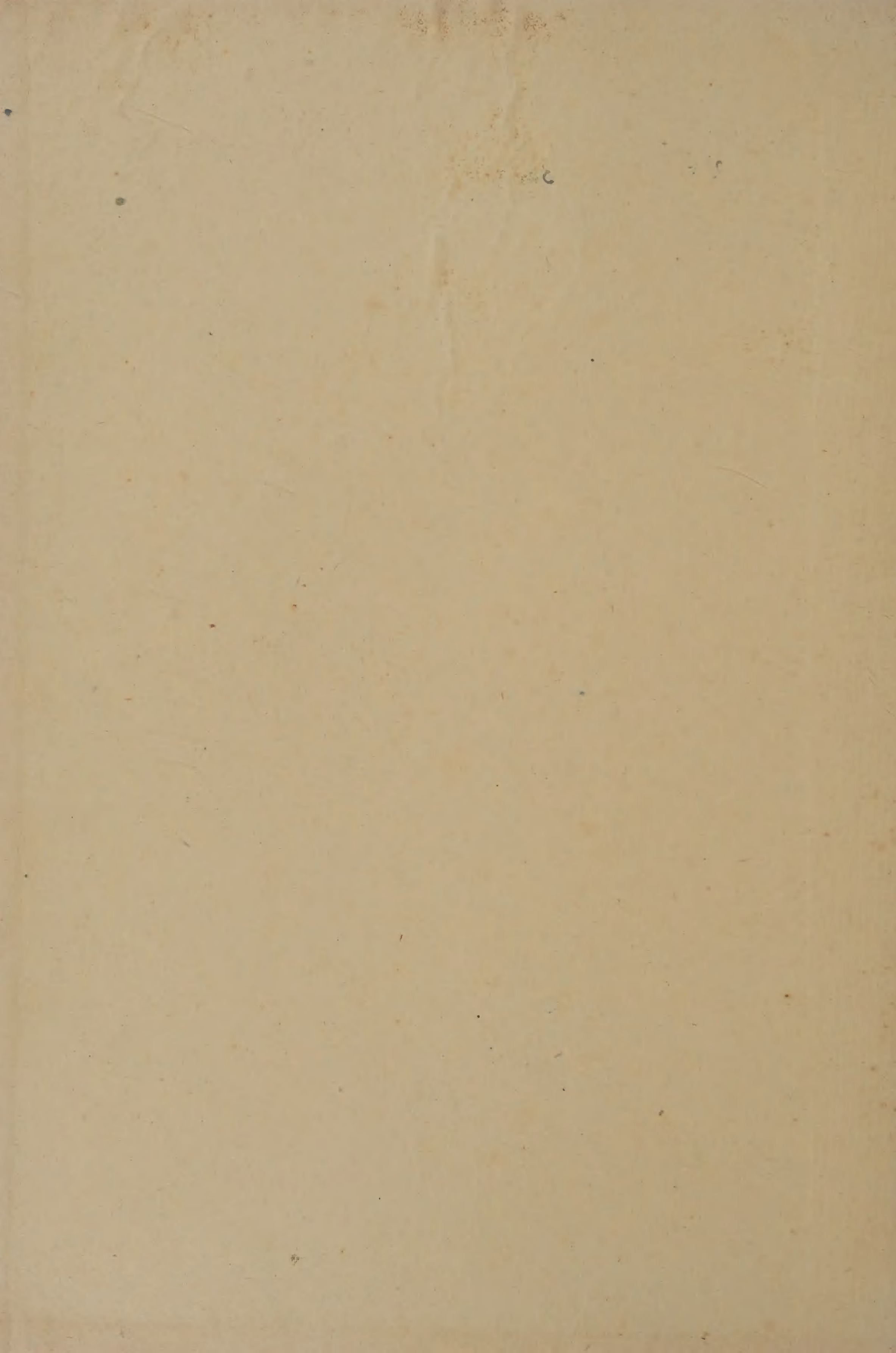

Mam

With Love & Best Wishes from

David

Xmas 1945.

THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN
COMPLETE CONFORMITY WITH
THE AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

The articles, verse, cartoons and drawings in this book have been selected from the issues of *Punch* appearing between 1st July 1944 and 30th June 1945, and are published by arrangement with the Proprietors

THE PICK OF 'PUNCH'

An Annual Selection

1945
Chatto and Windus
LONDON

PUBLISHED BY
Chatto and Windus
LONDON
*
Oxford University Press
TORONTO

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July, 1944

TECHNUKE

"IN our village we don't take the flying bomb more serious than it ought to be taken, if you know what I mean. Only Mr. Egg. We don't all believe that flying bomb hits nothing but haystacks; same time we don't believe it goes circling round and round in the air like a great owl coming this way and that way and looking for Mr. George Egg. That's what *he* thinks.

"We all read the papers, but he reads them most, having more time between hours than what we have. We read a bit about Normandy and a bit about Italy and a bit about those Pacific islands and a bit about flying bombs. But we don't study flying bombs like Mr. Egg. One of the smallest villages in Southern England, ours is—you'll have seen it in the photographs; runs from the Old Tithe Barn at top down to church, and Squire's big house on the left, and then there's a road forks at the right and takes you away to river and bridge. Three inns we have, White Hart and Red Lion and Crown, and I'd been going to White Hart most. You get beer and sausages at White Hart, and beer and sausages at Red Lion. And then at Crown there's sausages and beer.

"Well, one day Old Bob says, 'You ought to go and see Mr. Egg at Crown. It's as good as a play, it is,' and I went, and I was glad I'd been and I went on going. There was old Jim there, and old Jack, and a lot of the others, and they was having a proper game.

" 'What about these doodle-bugs, Mr. Egg?' they says to him, very solemn, and off he goes immediate same as book.

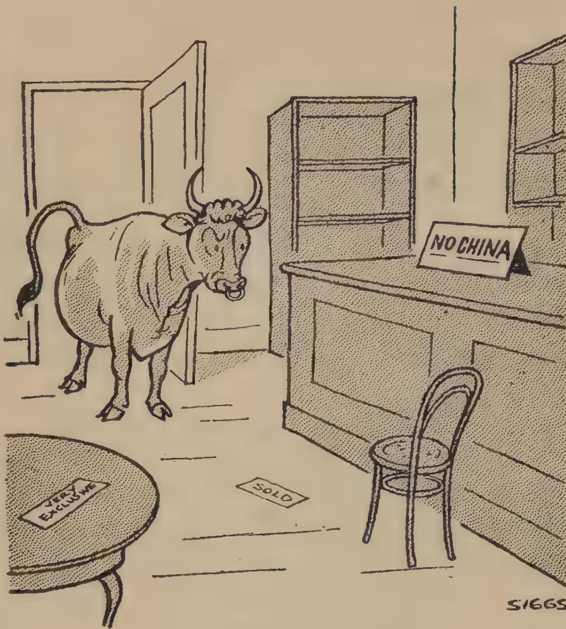
" 'Directly you hears one of them things,' he says, 'you want to go flat down on the floor, on account of the chief danger to the face and hands which is flying glass.'

" 'Flat on your stummick, Mr. Egg?' they say all together like in chorus, 'flat on your stummick, Mr. Egg?'

"Mr. Egg's a very big man, I ought to tell you, a very fat man is Mr. Egg, and they say that to him because they know how he's going on.

" 'No,' he says, 'not flat on your stummick, that's just the point, Bob. If you'd read the papers, like what I have, you'd know going down flat on the stummick's all wrong. If you go down flat on the stummick you get hurt internal, on account of the ground tremmers. You want to go down flat but sideways, in a manner of speaking, and keep your stummick well off ground.'

" 'That's a puzzle, Mr. Egg,' they say, scratching their heads. 'Big man like you, seems to me either you goes down flat and be blowed to your stummick,



or you don't go down at all. It's one or the other, to my way of thinking,' they say.

" 'Well, that's what you got to do,' says he.

"So we go on and on, till someone says, 'Well, if that's so, Mr. Egg, you just come out and show us how to do it. Come out from behind bar and give us a demonstration like,' and out he comes.

" 'Stand back and give me room,' he says. 'Now, then. It's only a matter of technuke. You puts your beer on the bar quiet but firm and you goes down quick like this, not on the stummick, but sideways,' and down he goes a great wallop on the floor, and the sawdust flying, and we not laughing out loud, but only inside like to encourage him, and someone at back pipes up:

" 'I didn't just see how you did that, Mr. Egg. I didn't quite get the technuke of it. Could you do it over again for me?' and if they was lucky he did.

"Seems it had got so that if they treated him serious enough they could get Mr. Egg to go flopping down on the floor two three times every night, and matinées thrown in, and if he wasn't coming along proper you only had to say, 'Ah, but you didn't guard your stummick proper that time, Mr. Egg, there was a good part of it on the floor,' and up he'd get and do it all over again. And old Jim is rather a one for poitry and he made a song about it:

> I'm not very certain
> If we're alertin',
> Or if we have got all clear;
> But we're pulling the leg
> Of old George Egg,
> Over a glass of beer;

and we sings it when we go away.

"But they was selling more beer at Crown by that time than they was at White Hart and Red Lion put together, and more sausages too.

"Then came the day when flying bomb hit Old Tithe Barn, and we hadn't had one in our village till that one come. And I'm blowed if that very moment it

come Mr. Egg wasn't giving one of his demonstrations in Crown to a stranger we'd brought in to see him.

"There was a great noise sudden overhead like what they always make, getting louder and louder and more fearsome like, and then it stopped, and we all ducks our heads, and there was a thundering great smack up at far end of village, and a thundering great smack on the floor. And the smack on the floor was George Egg. We was shaken a bit, and then we start laughing. There wasn't so much as a pane of glass broken in Crown, but all the windows was out at White Hart and Red Lion and post office half-way down street. Then we look at Mr. Egg and he has a great grisly cut on his hand and blood flowing, and Bob and Jim help to pick him up, and tie a bandage on him and take him back to bar parlour.

"I CAME TO ASK FOR YOUR DAUGHTER'S HAND."

"But we didn't say anything not till after about his technuke. He'd got that all right, only one thing. He doesn't forget blast and he doesn't forget stummick. He remembers about flying glass and he remembers about ground tremmers. But he forgets to put his beer down on bar quick and firm before he fall."

CORRESPONDENCE

(*From Abdul Hussein Mohamed to Lieutenant Sympson.*)

June 1st, 1944.

SIR CAPTIN SWIMSON,—Six months I empty swill you satisfactorily carried out and smoothly rendered now I come back go see old sister nine days only what I find rascal Ibraham Ali catch swill.

So kindly awaiting explain.

Reverentially I am,
ABDUL HUSSEIN MOHAMED.
(six months collect very good)

(*From Lieutenant Sympson to Abdul H. Mohamed.*)

June 2nd, 1944.

My dear Abdul,—Nobody regrets more than I do that the exigencies of the service have compelled me to dispense with your valued work. I have always said that as a swill-remover you had few equals in Egypt. But though I am personally all in favour of the Eastern habit of regarding time as unimportant, we reached a point where no more swill would go in the bins and the atmosphere created by the old swill was so strong that the lids came flying off as if shot from a cannon.

So, regretfully, I had to call in Ibraham. He is not in your class as a swill-remover, but needs must when the devil drives, and now he is in I don't think either you or I will be able to get rid of him.

I trust you found your sister well. Please give her my kind regards if you write.

Sincerely yours,
O. Sympson, *Lt.*

(*From Ibraham Ali to Lieutenant Sympson.*)

June 5th, 1944.

Sirs Sinkson,—How no good me catch swill Abdul Hussein Mohamed say and show me letter you say I no catch swill good like for him.

If you say I no catch swill good I no catch swill but moneys yes.

Unless you tell Mohamed go hell I write Mister Churchill.

Awaiting your esteemed favour of reply.

Ibraham Ali.

(*From Lieutenant Sympson to Ibraham Ali.*)

June 6th, 1944.

My dear Ibraham,—I deeply regret any hurt I may have done to your feelings by my quip or jest in a recent letter to our mutual acquaintance, Abdul. The fact is that with two of the world's most expert swill-removers—Abdul and yourself—after the job I am as it were between Scylla and Charybdis, if you follow me. So in future I propose to just bury the confounded swill and leave it at that.

Regretfully yours,
O. Sympson, *Lt.*

(*From Abdul and Ibraham, Swill Contractors, to Lieutenant Sympson.*)

June 8th, 1944.

Sirs Captain Stinkson,—Owing to pressing of business and factories beneath our control and not wishing these peoples Scylla and Charybdis to muscle in Ibraham and me now join up one firm call Tuesdays as usuals.

Trusting agreeably surprise.

Abdul Hussein Mohamed.
Ibraham Ali.

"RIGHT! NOW WE'VE GOT THAT LITTLE LOT OFF, WHAT'S THE TROUBLE WITH YOUR BIKE?"

HOW TO KEEP COOL

(*From our Medical Correspondent.*)

If the Germans have been following the seasons at all closely they will know that it is just about summer-time in England. That is something we cannot hide easily. In an article like this there is a real danger that hints intended for domestic use only may be borrowed by an unscrupulous enemy and used to his advantage. Wherever possible, therefore, I have modelled my maxims so that they would lose heavily in translation.

Opinions are divided on the merits of collars in hot weather. A tight collar undoubtedly restricts the flow of blood.. If a great deal of blood happens to be south of the neck when the collar tourniquet is applied the head will remain pleasantly cool. If on the other hand there is a preference for a cool *body* the front stud should not be allowed to do its work until the limbs and trunk have been drained northwards.

"AND THIS IS MY HUSBAND'S LITTLE DEN."

Cold baths are very cooling. If you can keep the bath water down to less than the regulation (five inches) so much the better for all concerned. Don't waste water that happens to be lukewarm.

The most cooling drink is hot tea. The fact that hot tea is very warming in winter does not necessarily invalidate this statement. Tea will do anything the English ask of it.

Heavy heat-promoting foods such as rations should be avoided.

Iced drinks are tempting but may be harmful if taken liberally on an over-heated stomach. A useful figure to keep in mind is 102 degrees Fahrenheit. Normally the stomach should be tested with the *elbow—not* the hand. As a rough-and-ready guide, however, we may say that a stomach is definitely overheated if it is too hot to hold.

Don't take unnecessary exercise. Even if they happen to be open you will have to struggle to get near the bar.

Above all, keep calm and collected and throw your mind back to the days just before the ban on central heating was lifted temporarily. That should help you enormously.

VANDALISM

"Italian Painting (large); bust with dagger."

Advt. in "The Times."

NEWS FROM THE SUBURBS

My dear Mother,—I may be leaving the Army soon. Nobody was actually killed, but it was a very confused scene, and unfortunately it attracted a good deal of attention from the kind of man who can cause you to leave the Army. It may even have set the war back a couple of days.

It all arose because, for reasons I can't go into now, I had been detailed to give some lectures to some units, and amongst them were some American tanks. This American outfit, as it seemed to be called internally, was very efficient, very businesslike, very cavalry and so on, and had invited me to spend the next day with them. They were doing some sort of problem, they said. If I had realized all that the problem involved I should have left immediately; but there it is, misfortunes are always unexpected.

The major in charge was delightful. He was that type of American who not only knows where the local historic celebrity lived or died or slept, but also what he or she did and how well. He even claimed to be descended from some martyrs

"Coo! A manless soldier!"

"We might as well let Miss Daniells have a holiday. I'm getting tired of all these hints."

that had met the usual fate of martyrs in a local town, which, since the period was before the *Mayflower* boys had worked out the answer to threats of martyrdom, may well have been true.

He was also very proud of his tank and its equipment.

Well, about 10.30 on the morning of this problem we were bowling down a main road in the tank, which was a Sherman, when the exigencies of the battle required that we should stop, which we did. So the major seized the opportunity of showing me how everything worked. I hadn't progressed very far—in fact I was just conducting a series of experiments to see how fast you could make the turret traverse—when suddenly there was a loud cry. A large furniture van was approaching down the road.

A point to bear in mind is that the turret has rather a long gun sticking out from one side, and at that moment the side with the gun in it was swinging from left to right. It had struck someone that if the turret continued at its existing speed and direction it would inevitably spear the furniture van as it passed.

They couldn't have been more right. Fascinated, my arm too paralysed to release the control grip, I waited for the moment. The muzzle of the gun engaged the side of the van, splintered the wood, and swung majestically further into the interior of the van. The van stopped, and I stopped the gun. We had skewered the van. My feelings were curiously mixed.

You can imagine the scene. If I moved the gun, or the driver moved the van, further damage would inevitably result, and the driver was very keen on not having his van damaged any more. At that moment our column of tanks was ordered to advance.

The first to arrive were some Military Police on high-powered motor-cycles with sirens. They dashed madly to and fro. Then came the crews of the tanks behind us, who saw no reason why they should miss any of the fun. There were also two lorries, intending to go the other way but held up by the stationary van, and they were full of jolly sailors. They had no respect for anyone and were very frank in their comments.

Then the senior officers started to appear. A lieutenant-colonel, followed by two full colonels (umpires). Then a brigadier. He was in a jeep, and the driver of the jeep thought he could squeeze past without upsetting the jeep into the ditch. He was wrong. Still, that gave the other tank crews something to do, getting the

jeep out of the ditch. The brigadier got out unaided. He was quite wet, but talking well.

Finally, there was a great deal of hooting at the back of the block, which by now probably extended some distance either way along the road, and an enormous black limousine forced its way forward. It had a red plate on the front with a number of white stars on it, and there was a general inside. That was immediately followed by a wrecker (breakdown lorry to us) and two ambulances, which the M.P.s had ordered up, in case. The scene was now complete. Or so I thought.

The general wasted no time. All available men, including, I am glad to say, the jolly sailors, were ordered to lift the furniture van, fortunately empty, and edge it clear. As it was moved backwards the general's car advanced after it. Clearly

"Situation's still ruddy fluid, Bert."

"They'd love a marker, wouldn't they?"

the general was tired of missing the battle, and who can blame his driver for sharing his impatience? But by a stroke of ill-luck one of the M.P.s had parked his machine just in front of the car, and in the flurry of the moment the driver did not observe this. There was a dull grinding sound as the front axle of the car crushed the motor-cycle, and the car stopped. It was only too clear that the steering-arm of the car was no longer as designed by the manufacturers.

Then the last blow fell. In the silence that followed I heard the wireless operator in the tank reading over in a remarkably penetrating voice a message he had just received. It was addressed to me. It read: "YOUR LECTURE TO 200 ATS COOKS ON MEND AND MAKE-DO ADVANCED TO 1500 HOURS TO-DAY. NICE GOING KID." It was signed by my superior officer. I wish he had not chosen that occasion to be flippant.

There it is. The general jumped into the brigadier's jeep, unfortunately before anyone could tell him that the seat was very wet, but before he left I heard him say, "What was that fool's name again?"

That is why I think I may be leaving the Army. Still, on the whole, I have enjoyed it while it lasted.

Your loving son,
HAROLD.

MEMO TO ORGAN-BLOWER

DEAR MR. HOGWORTH.—In full accordance with the socials sub-committee's desires I am passing on to you an important request which, knowing your ever-readiness to do anything to serve the chapel in a prominent way, we hope you will welcome with open mind. It has been your custom from time immaterial to leave open the blowing-room door while blowing the organ so that you can say hello or other greetings to those of us who have come to take your smiling face for what it is intended. Apparently it does not strike others that way because the christening party that is due at end of this month has intimidated to Mr. Tingle about having

two palms or one laburnum put on the leeward side of the doorway so that you will have some nice greengrocery to look through.

Although the happy pair are used to you themselves they feel that anyone seeing you for the first time and not knowing your peculiar way of doing things and nature's idea of a blessing in the way of your features may be put off from the solemnities of the occasion, and it may upset the infant's outlook on life with frightful associations. The way they put it shows some little misunderstanding of the fact that your blowing of the organ is the one thing that makes you feel you have a claim to civilized activities and are not altogether so ungainly and toothsome a mortal as the unkind infer. The proposal made by one of our own newer members that you take a course in ballet to improve your pumping style savours of bitterness and Mr. Tingle thinks that as the young parents have offered to go up to five pounds for your palm it is a good way out, and we feel sure you will look on it in your usual smiling way.

Otherwise we shall have to shut the door.

J. TINGLE, *Deacon.*

GRAND STRATEGY

How short a while ago it seems
  Since German propaganda said
That all the nations and their dreams
  Must bow before the Nordic-bred,
And if the nations found it hurt
They did not matter. They were dirt.

This was the high ambition then
  (Or so we gathered from their Press)
That sent some fifteen million men
  To put Creation in a mess:
And all the peoples had to die
To make the world a Teuton sty.

But now we note a certain change,
  A softening of the martial tone,
The High Command did not arrange
  To make the Universe its own;
Their object was, we understand,
Merely to save the Fatherland.

For this it was the troopers stormed
And fouled the earth and stunned the air,
The papers had been misinformed
About the scope of the affair,
The Fuehrer went to this expense
To organize his self-defence.

There must have lurked a sort of doubt
Of why he earned his keep and swill
Within the mind of many a lout

"You can rest now, I'm doing the fruit."

Who raised his boots at Hitler's will,
They could not know they burnt and sacked
To keep their native soil intact.

But those who guard the Eastern gaps
And hold the Southern doors to-day
Can praise the Leader's art—perhaps—
In keeping enemies at bay:
And those who stand upon the Rhine
Will comprehend his deep design.

COMBINED OPERATIONS

"Don Quixote went out with his horse Rosinante and sank a Panzer."

Schoolboy's dictation.

August, 1944

AUNT EMMA CAN BE RIVETED

"WHEN the boys and girls get home again," said James, bumping a handsome glass beaker violently against the sink, "there will be one question on the tip of every tongue."

"How much are jeeps going to cost?"

"A question which in my view will dominate the whole post-war political scene," James went on, "though you wouldn't think so by the present apathy of the Government. Simply, WHAT ABOUT THE WASHING-UP?"

"What's wrong with the washing-up?" I asked, letting slip through a hole in my tea-cloth a faded blue plate which bounced dully on the scullery floor before illustrating convincingly the principle of dispersal. "I'm terribly sorry, James."

"Think nothing of it," he said generously. "It was only Aunt Emma, and I dare say something can still be done for her. She was cracked a long time ago."

"You're telling me."

"What I mean about washing-up is that while in some other directions man has progressed a step or two here and there during the ages, so far as dealing with the awful aftermath of eating he is still exactly where he was. Apart from the fact that this hot water has come out of a tap, we're doing nothing two pillars of the Stone Age couldn't have done."

"I doubt if they had tea-cloths with TEA-CLOTH on them."

"They probably had very good absorbent grasses that we've forgotten how to grow."

"But surely, James, there are machines for washing-up?"

"There you hit the bull in the eye. You've heard of the Portal house?"

"I've already been and patted it all over."

"Then you will have observed that in spite of their solicitude on the score of feeding, sleeping, cooling, heating and lighting the homing warrior it is the intention of the Cabinet still to condemn him to slosh his earthenware about in greasy pools. Have you ever mopped up in the wake of a jugged hare?" James demanded with a shudder. "Do you know anything more utterly harrowing than a congelation of pork chops?"

"There is also something unforgettable about the legacy of treacle tart mixed with cigarette ash in equal parts," I said. And with good reason.

James in his anger rapped a fine green coffee-pot against the cold tap, which won.

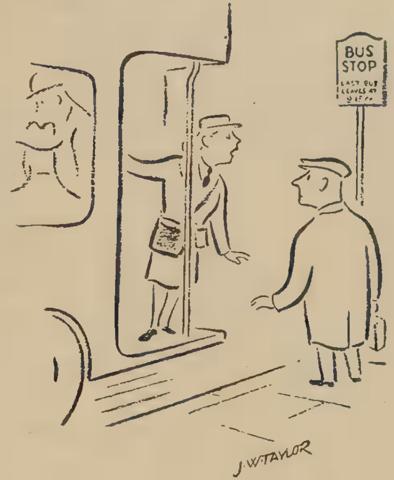
"There goes Uncle Henry at last," he said viciously. "When I consider the patient women who stood about in the deep-field in Victorian basements operating

on the relics of the orgies above-stairs I feel that what is left of this century must be freed from such thraldom. The time is ripe——"

"You are talking big, James," I said. "Have you any practical proposals?"

"Listen. Every house in the country must be equipped, with Government assistance of course, with just such a room as I'm going to build on here directly the war's over. It will be a long room with racks all round it to hold the large quantity of crockery and cutlery which I shall buy wholesale. Enough to last us about a fortnight. And at the end of the room will be a powerful machine capable of clearing the decks in half an hour. Imagine what a profound revolution that will mean!"

"I hope there will also be a nail on which you can hang your gas-mask. You'll certainly want to have it handy at the end of the fortnight."



"SORRY—NO MORE, BERT. AND IF I'VE GONE TO BED YOU'LL FIND YOUR SUPPER IN THE OVEN."

"Well, there'll be plenty of gas-masks," James exclaimed impatiently. "Can you suggest a better plan?"

"I don't know about better," I said. "I once stayed with a Swede who had a house in the country by a lake where he and his charming wife gave magnificent parties. At the end of each meal the dirty plates were piled on a trolley and pushed out on the lawn by the edge of the water. There was a row of clay-pigeon machines there of different calibres, and beside them a gun for each guest and masses of cartridges. Off went the plates, one by one, sailing out over the lake. I can't tell you the satisfaction of putting a load of No. 6 through the earthly remains of one's crayfish."

"What was the shooting like?" James asked.

"That depended on the way the punsch was running. Sometimes very good, sometimes very bad. It's temperamental stuff. But either way it didn't matter, for the lake was half a mile across and very deep."

"Your host must have been horribly rich," James objected.

"He owned quite a big pottery. And his guests ate off the throw-outs. A vanful came once a week."

James looked gloomily at the sink, now richly veiled in a heavy amalgam in which green fat, limp onion and the control surfaces of small fish were the dominant partners.

"I sometimes feel we are very silly to have given up eating with our fingers," he said. "But then what it does to the nails is nobody's business. The more one thinks of it, the washing-up machine has the future wide open."

A sudden suspicion flashed across my mind.

"James," I said, "you haven't sunk Aunt Emma's money in washing-up machines?"

He went across to the stove and turned away his face.

"Coffee's ready," he murmured. "Let's go."

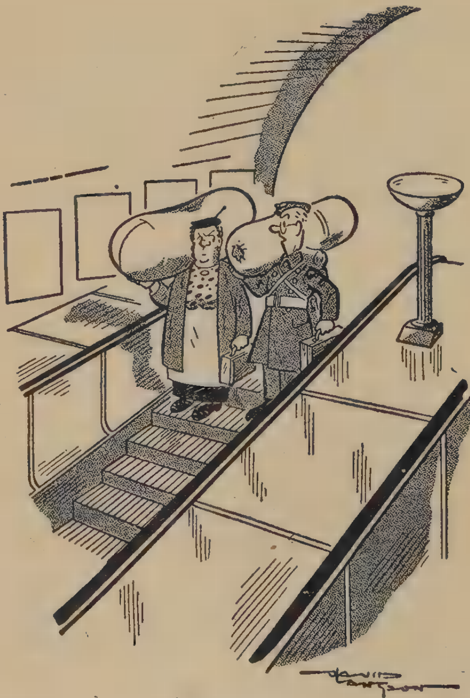
THE RE-VACUEE

Standing on the doorstep surrounded by the ramshackle trappings of the evacuee, some well-worn suit-cases, a tricycle, a fish-basket overflowing with books, boots and toys, I rang the bell with confidence.

Without the romance of the refugee proper, or the standing of the Jew who claimed his years of experience to have reached thousands, still I was an old hand. A re-vacuee.

Hostesses of charm, of hostility and of indifference had been my lot. Great houses and humble, beautiful and ugly, had taken me in. Lifelong friends and complete strangers, relations I had avoided and acquaintances I had once ignored, hotels, pubs and lodgings, clean and dirty, good, bad and indifferent, all had had a turn.

I faced one more hostess without a qualm.



"Posted?"

The conviction that boredom is better than bombs quickly fades; a sigh of relief does not last for ever; a quiet night is soon taken for granted; counting one's blessings palls.

A fortnight was enough. The tales of my hostess's illnesses were long and repeated, her nieces sounded dreary girls, the topic of margarine and lard had become monotonous. I had agreed too often about the handsomeness of her carpets, the daintiness of her lace curtains. I thoroughly understood that the absence of doilies and the silver centre-piece was entirely due to patriotism. I had listened to too many little poems about Dunkirk, and knew both General Montgomery's and Princess Margaret Rose's favourite flowers. She was so fond of doing things for others, she would explain as she hid her sweet ration. She was generous to a fault, but sweet things were so bad for children. She was so

thankful she had a sense of humour, she would add as she retailed the insults she had received. It was odd that no one had been to see her this week: she had so many dear friends, they quite wearied her with their attentions. Was I going down the town? There was the wireless to take, and if I'd call for the potatoes . . . She'd love the walk herself, but the doctor . . . I was wondering how to break it nicely to her that I would look for other rooms when she accosted me on the stairs.

"I think, dear," she said, "that I should be better suited with someone else. I am so devoted to children I shall miss your two dreadfully, but if you could . . ."

How maddening that I hadn't got my word in first! My eager agreement sounded merely polite.

I trudged the streets for hours. My shoes, newly-rescued after six weeks at the Hey Presto Two-Hour Menders, were frayed at the heels. Hot, dusty and cross I returned. I was greeted at the door.

Could I, I hastened to gobble up my humble pie—could I, if I went out to all meals, if I scrubbed the basement, swept the steps, dug the garden, if the children . . . well, could I in fact possibly stay another fortnight?

A sweet smile spread over the smug face of my hostess.

"Of course, dear," she said. "Come in and sit down. You are tired. *Do* take a chocolate . . . they are coffee."

What had come over her? She had realized my merit after all. Oh, well. Or was she sorry for my plight? I had misjudged a kind heart. As we passed the hall table she picked up a card and put it quickly into her bag. But not before I had had time to read:

A. SMITH
Billeting Officer

and across the corner in pencil:
"Calling again at six *re* expectant mother and six children."

OF AMAZONS

I have just been told by a daily paper that "auburn-haired Lieutenant Alexandra Boiko, Commander of a heavy Voroshilov tank, has received the Order of the Patriotic War, First Class"; and that her husband Ivan, who has also been decorated, serves under her command as driver of this stark machine. Have I any complaints to make? None, rude reader, except about that terrible word or compound word "auburn-haired." I will engage that it did not occur in the U.S.S.R. Gazette which awarded Alexandra her well-deserved ribbon. It was some inquisitive Western

"You won't 'arf cop it for being late for the invasion."

journalist, I can wager, who ferreted out with fatuous romanticism the colour of Alexandra's hair, and it is just the kind of thing at which we feminists rightly grumble.

Am I to read in the story of some British battle twenty years from to-day that "laughing, dark-eyed, dimpled Lieutenant-General Ada Robinson, D.S.O., who broke the pivotal hinge of the enemy's key-point, and thrust it backwards with the tri-pronged crowbar of her flailing assault, has a batman also named Robinson. His name is Bill. He is her husband"?

I sincerely hope not.

"Interviewed by our correspondent, Corporal Robinson said simply, 'Yes, oh, yes. We were married on my last long leave. She outsings the nightingale. She walks in beauty like the night. I am just about to press her trousers. Her hair is darker than the raven's wing."

All this has nothing to do with the grim business of battle nor the Order of the Day. Let O.C. troops Millie Tonkins, who has enveloped a hedgehog or shattered a wall of steel, have blue eyes and a little head sunning over with curls; be clad in the beauty of a thousand stars, and make the bright world dim; or let her on the other hand be as homely as a lamp-post and as bald as a coot. We feminists do not care. We want to be rid of this sickly kind of chivalry when it has nothing to do with the business in hand. We will not have a private inditing a sonnet to his sergeant mistress's eyebrow when he ought to be getting along with a sanitary fatigue. No soldier should have a pin-up picture of his girl company commander in his dug-out or his barrack-room. Such things are an insult to the warrior-women of the world to-day, and the world to come.

I am not wrong, I think. There are precedents of course for this kind of sentimentalism. But they belong, I believe, to an age of mythology or of chivalry, when fighting was not so scientific nor so mechanical as it has now become.

You shall drag up against me in vain the story of the nymph Camilla who helped Turnus against the Trojan army under Æneas. Of this lady it was written (and I quote from the English translation in Mr. Bohn's excellent library, because *you* could not translate the Latin): "Not to the distaff or the work-basket of Minerva had she accustomed her female hands." Far, oh, far otherwise. "And soon as the

infant with the first prints of her feet had marked the grass," her father "loaded her hands with pointed javelins and from the shoulders of the little girl hung a bow and arrows. Instead of ornaments of gold for her hair, instead of being arrayed in a long trailing robe, a tiger's hide hung over her back down from her head. Even then with tender hand she flung childish darts, and whirled round her head a smooth-thonged sling, and struck down a Stymonian crane or white swan. Many matrons through the Tuscan towns in vain wished her for their daughter-in-law." Why, I can't imagine. A more tiresome addition to a little family gathering in Northern Italy it would be difficult to discover. Yet so it was.

"Amidst heaps of slain the Amazon Camilla, armed with a quiver, proudly prances over the field . . . and now with her hand in showers tough javelins she throws, now with unwearied hand she snatches her sturdy halberd." Poor Tuscan son-in-law. He would have to carry that sturdy halberd, I suppose. But it was not to be. Camilla fell on the foughten field. A man called Aruns kept pursuing her all over the place in a chariot, waiting for his chance; and after a prayer to Apollo, several lines long and scanning perfectly, sent from his hand a spear which gave "a whizzing sound" through the air, and caused both armies to "turn their attention and direct their eyes to the queen." The spear did its deadly work, and drank deep the virgin blood, whereupon Aruns, "stunned with joy and mingled fear," ran away. But not successfully. The vengeance of Diana was upon him. One of her nymphs rather unfairly intervened and smartly shot him down. Camilla meanwhile had "reclined her drooping neck and head subdued by death, and with a groan her life indignant fled to the shades. Then indeed a prodigious outcry strikes the golden stars." And no wonder. She was a very regrettable casualty.

But I submit that all this has little or nothing to do with Alexandra Boiko. It belongs to the realm of fantasy. And I make my submission with the more confidence because of this same Camilla it is recorded (also in the language authorized by Mr. Bohn) that "even over the topmost stalks of standing corn she could have lightly skimmed, nor once had hurt the tender ears in her career, or along the main

suspended on the heaving surge could glide nor in the liquid plain dip her nimble feet."

You might perhaps write the latter part of this sentence about a lady equipped with an amphibious landing craft, but not the former part about a lady in command of a Voroshilov tank. It would be much better for the prospect of this year's European harvest if you could. All honour then to Alexandra Boiko, and if Ivan, her husband, owing to some domestic squabble about cooking or washing up, refuses to drive straight at a key-point or crash through a cordon of iron, let him be put upon a charge-sheet and have his stripes removed. But let us leave out her auburn hair. Enough to hope that amid the roar of pincers and the hail of hinges, no German anti-tank gunners will remember how to pray, in perfect hexameters, to Apollo.

LADY ADDLE'S DOMESTIC FRONT

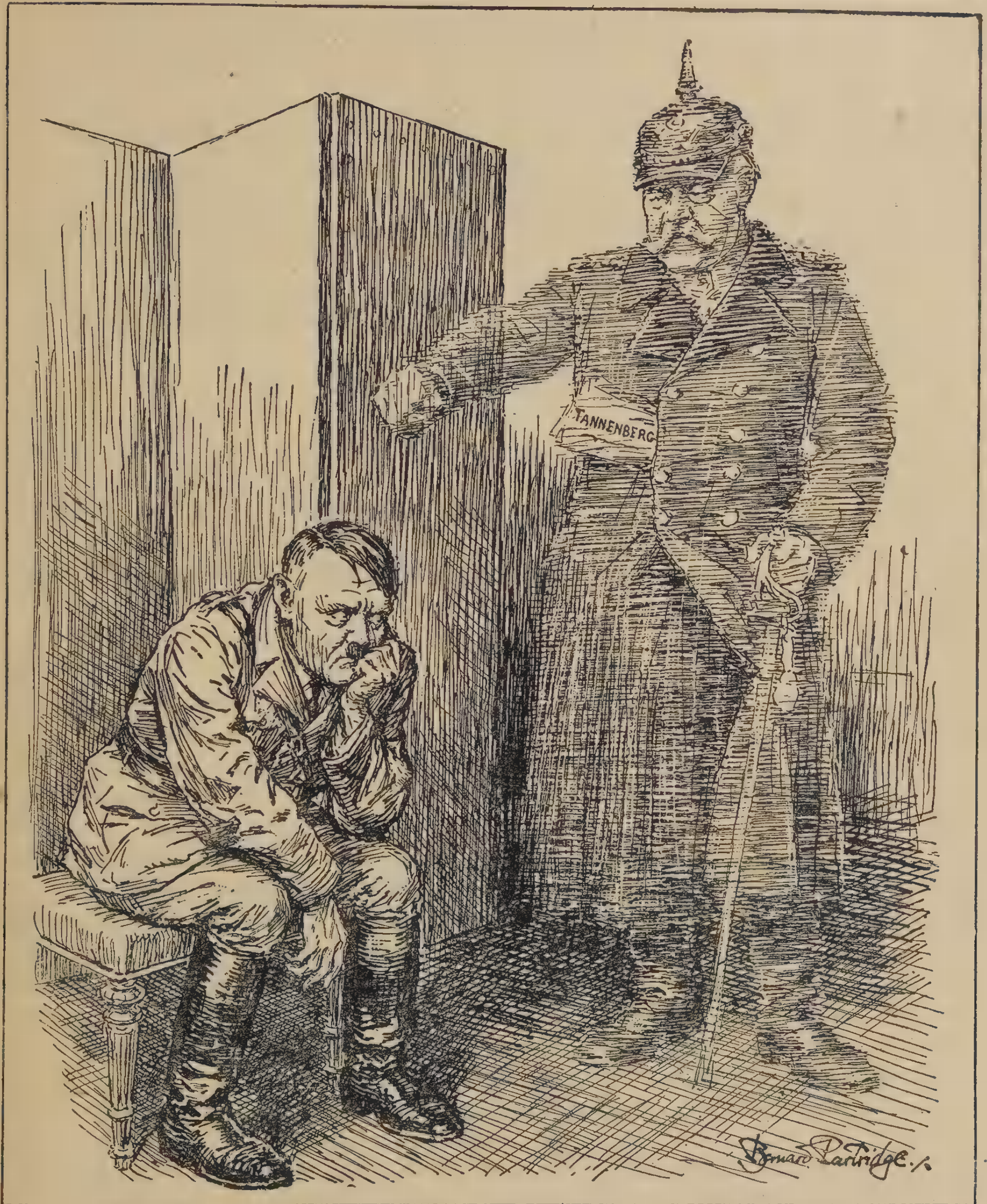
Bengers, Herts, 1944.

My dear, dear Readers,—I feel almost as though I should apologize for writing this week's letter myself, after the wonderful treat we have been given of Mipsie's romantic and fascinating memoirs. Life for her has ever been full and rich and gay and vivid. She has dared all, never counting the cost—indeed she has often said, with her enchanting, whimsical humour, that she has always left someone else to count the cost.

To-day I am going to write about picnics, because I look on them as so essential and delightful a part of our English life, that they cannot be omitted from any chronicle of meals.

I myself love a picnic of all things, and consider that food tastes twice as nice when eaten *al fresco*. My husband unfortunately feels quite the opposite. To begin with, he has a childish dislike—I would almost say "fear" if I didn't know him to be a soldier and a brave gentleman—of wasps. And though I have made for all my friends pretty and useful little brooches in the form of bunches of grapes, the fruit being made of tiny blue-bags in case of bee-stings, and the leaves tinted lumps of soda for wasp-stings, Addle utterly refuses to wear one, and simply flaps *The Times* (which he insists on taking on a picnic always, thereby, to my mind, completely ruining the idyllic spirit) at the wasps, which only seems to encourage them. "Really, my dear boy," I said to him once, "you're behaving like a child of two." "I wish I were a child of two," he replied, "then I wouldn't have been allowed to come at all."

It is somewhat strange that I should still love picnics, for in my childhood these were often rather formal and alarming affairs—at any rate when my grandmother, the Duchess of Droitwich, was staying with us. She was exceedingly fastidious about everything—not only the scrupulous cleanliness of the spot we chose, but other things had to be considered: the sun, lest it should be too strong for her



AFTER TEN YEARS.

"So *this* is how you hold the frontiers of Germany!"

(Hitler became Fuehrer on the death of Hindenburg on August 2nd, 1934.)

complexion, which was wonderful, like painted canvas; the wind, in case it should bring any unpleasant farmyard odours nigh. Then there had to be some trees or bushes near by where the menservants could wait—unseen, yet ready to come immediately when summoned. On one occasion, I remember, the search for the perfect spot continued so long that eventually we arrived back at Coot's Balder at 4 o'clock and ate our lunch on the terrace. My father was much more happy-go-lucky, in fact almost Bohemian, about picnics. He would never mind drinking his port out of a tumbler, and often took only one footman with us on the expedition.

Nowadays, who has time for picnics, I wonder? Old-time, romantic ones I mean. Of picnic food—snatched sandwiches in between war jobs—there is plenty. One friend of mine, Dame Winifred Paddock, boasts that she has had potted meat sandwiches for lunch every day for five years. I am glad to say she has just been given another decoration for her self-sacrificing work. Indeed from the moment she rises at 7.30 till she returns at 8 o'clock to the dinner so beautifully cooked for her by her husband, Admiral Sir Horsa Paddock, her life is almost entirely spent in taking the chair. Sometimes she even takes it away with her from a meeting by mistake, so engrossed is she with the matter on hand. Last holidays, when her two boys came back from Harrow, she did not know them; frequently she does not know on which committee she is sitting till the end of the meeting (for she is chairman of twenty-eight and vice-chairman of seventeen). What man can produce a record like that, I ask?

But to return to picnics, I was quite forgetting our Institute ones, which are still going strong, especially hip and haw, nettle and salvage picnics. For the latter—always nearest my heart—we had a fag-end tea, just outside a camp near Bengers, and had picked up dozens of useful cigarette ends and cartons, when we were rather rudely banished by a sentry. There was also a very successful scrap-metal outing in our woods, with an amusing sequel which I will relate.

We were just going home with a good, but not outstanding, collection of oddments, when one of our most energetic members came running up to me: "Oh, Lady Addle, we have just found a splendid lot of galvanized-iron bins. The others are bringing them along." At that moment more members arrived carrying, to my dismay, several of the new pheasant-feeders which Addle had proudly installed just before the war. However, I couldn't disappoint the members by telling them to replace them, and they were not in use now of course, so we put them on the handcart and took them back to Bengers. Of course the first person we met was Addle! His jaw dropped at sight of us, but before he could speak I cried gaily: "Isn't it wonderful, dear? We've done so well for salvage! We're just going to weigh our lot at the stables, and the Council will call for them in the morning." My husband said nothing, realizing from my words that the die was cast.

That night I slept badly—perhaps I was tired from the day's exertions, or perhaps I was a little worried about the pheasant-feeders, though Addle had said no more and seemed quite cheerful all the evening. Anyway, in the middle of the

night I thought I would fetch my knitting and started downstairs. To my surprise, the light was on in the hall, and looking over the banisters I could see my husband and Crumpet, our butler, descending the last few stairs, carrying something between them. As I waited, breathless, I heard Addle say:

"We must get the weight exactly right or her ladyship will find out. Don't forget, Crumpet, *she must never know.*"

I stole back to my room, my heart warm with loving gratitude to my dear husband, who, rather than distress me, was evidently sacrificing something of his own for salvage.

It wasn't till months afterwards that I found out that he had disposed of some japanned trunks I had in my trousseau—never used, I know, but of some sentimental value. But I suppose one can't expect men to be sensitive about such things.

M. D.

EPISTLE FROM EAST AFRICA

(*To D. Sargent, Esq., Frozen Store and Amazing Grader.*)

Most honoured Sir,—Having heard through rumour that there is a vacancy in your office for office clerk or tallow clerk, I hombly beg to submit this my application for the post.

As regards my qualification I sat at Waa School for three years or more, but owing to no teaching of Cool Store proceedure these was wasted and now I feel qualified for a job on your staff.

My home was near top of Kilimanjaro and therefore I am well used to frigid climate such as your work. You locally known as frozen Sargent to distinguish you from others bearing same name and title both civil and military I pray that there is still some not frozen marrow in your bones to give ear to my humble plea. In re salary this is not important I only require enough to keep myself and my multifarious family and satisfy their clamourous needs pension and war bonus please God will follow us in this case if well esteemed civil servants.

You being a large familyed gentleman will know how I am placed. I am Christian and can therefore work among your pigs and other meats.

If I am successful in my application to obtain this post God damn it old Sir I will do my best and utmost to give satisfaction in as owing to my aforementioned snow born childhood I feel very competent to cope with your frozen insides.

God bless your honoured sir and your venerable wife. May your issues be fertile and multiply exceedingly as has already been astoundingly shown.

I have the honour to be sir,

Your obedient servant,

Mwele s/o Mbanba.

THIS TALKING AT BREAKFAST

"Have you any idea whether the fashion in men's evening clothes has changed at all since the war? I have been out of the country nearly four years . . ."

"I have been in it. So it's no use asking me."

"At least you have been in the places where they are worn."

"The place where mine were worn when last I saw them was the seat. Due to flicking the tails aside each time I sat down. Admittedly they flicked together again when I stood up."

"Out in the jungle we had more than a suspicion that you would be altering the fashion. A dirty trick, we thought, if so. Because ours were new, and if the chaps in the city have been wearing theirs out, we thought, and are now going to think up a lot of novel ideas——"

"Pardon my interruption, sir, but I couldn't help overhearing what you were saying. *I* am one of the chaps in the city, and if you really consider that all this time, while we have had to study endless chains of photographs of you chaps talking to camels, we have——"

"I don't think you can have heard me, sir. I said I was in the jungle."

"Wherever you were, do not talk about the man in the city in that way, or I shall resent it, keenly."

"*I* have been an instructor in a battle school in Dover, and all this talk about camels, *or* about city people designing new tail coats, will shortly make me ask both of you to come outside."

"All right. You have not been in the country. *You* have not been out of it. But I want to tell you I have been in the city, where people walk with their heads permanently on one side, and even if the thing passes over them before it cuts out they only feel they have, rather unsportingly, wished it on to somebody else."

"When we were out there you must try to appreciate that we drew up imaginary menus of the marvellous meals we would like to order, and specified just where we would have them, naming the very wine for each course and describing the girl we would most like to take with us. So now I naturally want to find out whether my tail coat is still all right for the purpose."

"I think I must explain that on the South Coast we have been living in sealed camps, and that apart from there not being any smart restaurants within a hundred miles, we have not even had the chance to see an English pub."

"Of course in the city offices big firms sport their own team of spotters. As soon as the thing can be heard they ring a bell and the directors push back their chairs and assume the position of 'prepare to dive.' If they then get the crash warning they slide down and wait underneath until they hear the burst. It has become such a part of the daily routine that at the appropriate bell an entire board meeting, without a word or a sign, will slide under the table, and emerge later to

continue the meeting as if nothing had happened, and without even remarking on it. If you go to see a business friend, the first courtesy, before you are even offered a seat, is to indicate the best funk-hole should the need arise."

"It does not alter the fact that in the jungle we talked about the old days in the West End."

"And so do we, who live there."

"Well, naturally, that led to the subject of evening clothes."

"Look, old man, in the jungle blood may be thicker than water, but on a condemned anti-aircraft site mud is thicker than both, and by the time you have slept in your clothes for a week their original cut has entirely ceased to matter."

"The other morning while dictating to my typist, who is very fat, we both went under my desk, which is very big, three times. She just put her fingers in her ears and closed her eyes, then came out when I prodded her. So the only difference in *my* clothes is that they are dustier and baggier at the knees."

"My sister is with a hospital unit in Normandy and she says the men talk all the time about . . ."

"My sister lives in Putney, where the young war mothers have invented a new kind of musical chairs when they are out with their prams. They parade round, and pause at each shelter to listen before they run on to the next. . . ."

"If you ask me, I think we have got so used to battle-dress that most of us will wear something of that sort after the war, whatever the time of day, not only for economy, or comfort, but because we so like having eleven pockets."

"Ten surely."

"I always understood it was nine."

"You have forgotten the little pocket in the waist-belt."

"I have no little pocket in the waist-belt."

"It's funny you say that. In the jungle we spent half our time arguing how many pockets there were in tails."

"And how many were there?"

"We could never make up our minds—that's what I've been sent home to find out."

THAT BLANK LOOK

"After using your —— my face started to clear up at once, and after using two jars of ointment it was gone altogether."

Advt. testimonial.

LINES TO NO LADY

Your face was sweet enough to launch a fleet of buses.
  (I wish it had.) Also I liked your hat.
Do you remember me, the little man in glasses
  (last Thursday night), dim and a trifle fat?

Dear lady, your technique was simply marvellous—
  the nimble side-step and the quick cut-in
(it may be you have Rugger Blues for brothers),
  the powerful hand-off, and the kick you gave my shin.

I wonder if perhaps it eased your conscience,
  when you'd jumped the queue and got on to the bus,
to think no doubt another bus would follow?
  Well, if it did, it didn't; hence the fuss.

Forgive me if I hope that They withdraw you
  from whatever occupation you pursue
and direct you to become a bus conductress.
  Your face was sweet—but you're a menace in a queue.

"The bride . . . did not carry a bouquet or the bridal attendants."

Local paper.

There's a war on; let 'em walk.

"In Guam the Americans took a mountain over to the South."

Broadcast News.

Wonderful things, these bulldozers!

THE BRITISH EMPIRIC

Fred and I got talking in The Owl the other night
And pretty well agreed to make the world a better sight.
Fred fixed Africa and I fixed Asia
And we both fixed Europe with a little euthanasia;
Fred fixed America (North and South);
I took Australia and saved it from the drouth;

"He says—after you've done the mines, could you do a spot of threshing?"

Fred fixed islands wherever they occur;
I fixed the oceans and gave them all a stir;
Fred fixed the Tropics of Capricorn and Cancer;
I fixed zones for the habitat of man, sir;
Fred fixed wheat and allocated zinc;
And just about then we were ready for a drink.
But when I fixed the Empire and hung it up to dry,
Fred fixed me with a very nasty eye:
"Please don't talk about the Empire.
Talk about the Commonwealth," says Fred,
"Making certain whether —
You've run the words together . . .
Common Wealth means something else instead.
People who talk about the Empire
Are parasites and sybarites and such,
Reactionary Tories
With the *roughest* island stories
Of the red lines of heroes who demanded gory glories
And the sorry Richard Grenville who disgraced himself at Flores
And Blake who tried to interrupt the Dutch."

Fred says the only use for Commonwealths, he thinks,
Is as a kind of lab. for new experiments, like Stinks.
I said this sounded too imperial for me . . .
Chaps with diggings in the lab. might care to disagree,
For when you have ideas that have never been rehearsed
People like to try them out on other people first.
But Fred said no, we must join him to a man,
For we tend to stick together when we haven't got a plan,
And that's the sort of sticking that gummed us up before
And foreigners will fight us just to obviate a war,
But if by force centrifugal we take the things apart
And fiddle with the arteries and tinker with the heart
And peacefully experiment to make it disconnect,
They'll think we cannot fight them, which is probably correct.
"So please don't talk about the Empire.
Call it the Empiric, if you wish.
Every man a surgeon,
That is what I'm urgin'.
Cut it up and put it on a dish.
The thing about empiric operations
Is, nobody *expects* a big success.

If difficulties floor us,
The world will do it for us,
So just keep a-carving, with a shanty for a chorus:
'This auto-vivisection, far from making men abhor us,
Is going to make us *popular*, no less.' "

CASTING THE NET WIDE

"Wanted, nursing chair, tweed jacket, boy 13, garden hammock, lounge."

Advt. in Leics. paper.

September, 1944

H. J.'S DRAMATIC FRAGMENTS

THE next Fragment originated from a delusion of my wife's that she had only to sleep head downwards to dream accurately of the future. On the night before the publication of the Honours List, in which she took a feverish interest, the foot of our bed was always tied to a large hook in the ceiling, and at intervals she awoke and, prodding me in the ribs, said mysteriously such things as, "Remember, Shaw gets the Thistle," or "Don't say I didn't tell you, there's an Honourable Mention for T. Hoop, Culinary Adviser to the Eel Disposal Board." One night the rain came in the roof, owing to squirrels taking the tiles, and wetted the rope, which contracted, leaving us in mid-air but fortunately well tucked in. The disadvantage was that, owing to the room being on the high side, when morning came we had to remain in bed, and to pass the time until we were noticed. I composed the following Fragment, for which I had ample time owing to my wife's absence from meals being regarded as a mercy into which it would be ungrateful to inquire.

HARK TO THE TRUMPET'S MARTIAL TOOT.

(*The scene is a frontier and* PABLO *is wishful to cross it.*)

IMMIGRATION OFFICER. Are you a hearty eater?

PABLO. No.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER. Good, you wouldn't get a worker's permit if you were. On the other hand you wouldn't get a tourist's permit if you weren't.

CUSTOMS OFFICER. Have you anything to declare?

PABLO. I believe in the Rights of Man. Shall I also make a Declaration of Indulgence? We learned to do them in the Language School.

CUSTOMS OFFICER. Don't bother. Have you any automobile spare parts, jute or copies of Rabelais?

PABLO. I have only my clothes and some sandwiches, and I scraped the paste out of those before we arrived at the station.

CUSTOMS OFFICER. Take your shoes off. They have false bottoms. Why?

PABLO. To keep my feet cool. Do you know where I can get any ice?

CURRENCY INSPECTOR. How much money are you bringing into the country?

PABLO. I have fifty of your excellent bank-notes which I got cheap at my last stopping-place.

CURRENCY INSPECTOR. Fat lot of good that is to us. All right, come inside.

(*Exit* PABLO.)

(*Enter a* PROFESSOR OF GEOGRAPHY.)

PROFESSOR. Good morning. I have a letter of introduction. I am just inspecting the geography of your country. Yes, yes. This seems a very good frontier. There is a river, a range of mountains and a desert between you and your neighbours.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER. But unfortunately there is a pass in the mountains, an oasis in the desert and a ford in the river.

PROFESSOR. They will do for trade. Economic geography is a very popular subsidiary subject nowadays. The only building I see is the Customs shed. Where is the town?

CUSTOMS OFFICER. There isn't one.

PROFESSOR. But there must be; the geographical situation demands it. If I set a physical map of this region every candidate would know there must be a town; it's elementary.

IMMIGRATION OFFICER. There used to be a small wooden one, but the Ten Days Government took it down because it spoiled the scenery. It is scheduled for rebuilding but they haven't yet decided where; it depends where the population has got to.

PROFESSOR. Do you get much transhumance?

CUSTOMS OFFICER. Only a bit sometimes at the week-end. It's the trippers, you know. By the way, don't you think we ought to have some bloodhounds?

PROFESSOR. Ecology forbids.

(*Exit* PROFESSOR.)

"11 PAIRS OF FEET, 12 PAIRS OF FEET—AH, HERE WE ARE, 13 AND 14, ROW F."

(*Enter* LADY "TOTSY" VERE *in native dress.*)

"TOTSY." I am just a wee, intrepid, Woman Explorer who wants to go into the desert and milk camels. I am tired of the humming, hollow life of the great city.

CUSTOMS OFFICER. London?

"TOTSY." Not exactly—Swindon.

PASSPORT OFFICER. Have you got an exit visa?

"TOTSY." Certainly. Here it is.

PASSPORT OFFICER. That's the first I've ever seen. What did they rush you for it?

"TOTSY." Can't a girl have any secrets?

PASSPORT OFFICER. Well, if you must go, go, but you'll find it a very dull desert—all bunker, as you might say.

CUSTOMS OFFICER. This is not the kind of country that people try to smuggle things out of, but as a matter of form I had better search your luggage. What is this?

"TOTSY." My diary, and I don't expect if I tried to stop you reading it it would be a bit of good. I should skip the first three volumes and start on volume four.

CUSTOMS OFFICER (*opening the book and reading*). "Jan. 22nd. Did Exercise 1 this morning. I should now be able to make a camel kneel on its front legs. Jan. 23rd. Exercise 2. Back legs. Jan. 24th. Exercise 3. Supplementary objurgations. . . ."

(*Enter an International Commission.*)

CHAIRMAN. We have come to hold a plebiscite on the Sunday opening of frontiers.

FINIS

HATS

"Confound it," said Lieutenant Sympson, who in an idle moment had been reading some Orders that by an unlucky chance had penetrated to our remote Detachment, "you and I and Sergeant Park and all our East Africans have got to wear caps G.S. Those new things like berets. The idea started in the Tank Corps years ago, and now it has reached us."

"Personally," I said, "I think our Africans will look rather grand in them. Except that having worn slouch hats so long and having been put on so many charges for not wearing them exactly straight, it will take them years and years to become convinced that they will now be put on charges for not wearing the new hats crooked."

"I'm not worried about the men," said Sympson, "I'm thinking of the financial

aspect of the affair so far as we officers are concerned. In civil life, as you know, I was originally a bank clerk, in the days when bank clerks wore bowler-hats. But my first act on leaving the Bank in 1929 was to cut my bowler-hat into small pieces and throw it into the West India Dock. I then became a journalist and purchased one of those green pork-pie hats that were all the rage in Fleet Street at the time. When all the editors refused my articles, however, I had to sell the hat at a loss, and went without a hat. I found that this had such an invigorating effect on my hair, which had previously shown a tendency to fall out, that even when moderate prosperity returned I still did not wear a hat."

He sighed.

"Then I joined the Army, and they gave me one of those silly little F.S. things which were so light that you couldn't tell whether you were wearing them or not. Generally when I should have been I wasn't and when I should not have been I was. However, this was the only hat I got until I was commissioned, except a steel helmet. Then I obtained my first pip and immediately became involved in a perfect welter of hats and caps. An enterprising tailor, when I was on O.C.T.U., sold me a cap F.S. with a red velvet lining, and another cap F.S. with a shot-silk lining, and two caps F.S. with Cellophane linings. I have often wondered why he did not sell me a steel helmet with an eiderdown lining, but presumably he realized that I had come to the end of my resources."

"All right then, Mrs. Scrubbs—but when you've finished with the pin would you please put the 153rd Armoured Division back where you found it."

He sighed again. Sympson makes such long speeches that his only way of getting breath is to sigh occasionally.

"Then I went to the Middle East, which is mostly Egypt, as you know. To go there I had to buy a topee, which nobody in Egypt wears except one member of the Suez Canal Company who saw a picture of General Gordon when he (the Suez man) was a boy and never got over it. Actually, topees are a good idea, like sucking oranges with lumps of sugar in a square hole, but equally not done. So I just threw it away. Then when I joined the East Africans I had to buy a slouch hat, which cost me five shillings and ninepence. To my disgust I discovered that the Colonel always wore a cap S.D., so I did the same, and last week I decided that both my English caps S.D. were worn out, so I bought two more in Port Said. Now I must jettison these and buy a cap G.S."

He handed me the Order and I read it carefully.

"Full colonels and upwards," I pointed out, "may still wear caps S.D. with service dress."

Sympson brightened.

"I hadn't noticed that bit," he said. "My course is now clear. I will exert myself, brush my hair nicely, and grow a moustache. Rather than lose the price of my two caps S.D. I will throw caution to the winds and become a full colonel or upwards."

THOSE KILLING RECITATIONS

"Elocution is what the Americans give people instead of hanging them."

Schoolboy's answer.

"SPLENDID! BUT I *WISH* SOMEONE COULD REMEMBER WHERE WE PUT THE BIT WE TOOK OUT IN 1940."

AHT WIV ALICE

Well, me noo soot's finished and I've got it 'angin' be'ind me bedroom door. I 'ad me fittin' all right, and a proper rum do it was an' all, what wiv the ole bloke scratchin' arahnd wiv a lump o' chalk till I was sweatin' pints for fear the marks wouldn't come orf. Any'ow, I went along a week later and fetched it and lumme it was a fair treat. There was a lot of others 'angin' on a rail wiv it but I could 'ave told mine a mile orf.

"Wrap it up," I said, "afore the moths get a look in. Blimey, I could almost eat it meself!"

"We aim to please," said the bloke, and got 'old of a box to put it in. I tell yer it didn't 'arf give me the jitters to see 'im foldin' it up—made me feel I'd rather 'ave carried it 'ome on the 'anger so's it wouldn't get creased. Still, I shot orf like a streak o' lightin' when 'e'd done in the 'ope I'd get it aht of the box afore the creases set in.

"YOU'RE THE NEW GOVERNESS, I SUPPOSE?"

Well, it seemed all right when I got 'ome—folded kinder cunnin' so's it didn't 'urt—and me Ma came toddlin' aht of the kitchen to 'ave a dekko. Proper took aback she was an' all, but I 'ad to fetch 'er one acrost the knuckles when she put aht 'er 'and to feel it, 'cos she was in the middle of cookin' the dinner an' 'er mits was all covered in dough.

"I'm goin' aht wiv Alice to-night, Ma," I said, "so let's 'ave some 'ot water at six o'clock for a good spruce up, eh?"

"All right, Ernie me boy," she said.

Well, at 'arf past six there I was all done up like a dog's dinner, an' rahnd I goes to call on Alice. When she come to the door she fair 'ad 'er breath took away.

"My," she said, "you don't 'arf look a toff an' no error."

"Like it, Alice?" I said, jest to encourage 'er to rant on a bit.

"Like it, Ernie!" she said. "'Oo wouldn't? Talk abaht a tailor's dummy!"

"'Ere," I said, guarded like, "wot d'yer mean by that?"

"Nuthink, Ernie," she said, "only yer look that 'andsome I'd scarcely know yer."

"That's better," I said. "Well, put on yer glad rags and we'll 'oof it somewhere."

"O.K., Ernie," she said, kinder coy, "you wait in the parlour. I shan't be a jiff."

So I strolls into the front room and when she'd gorn I put on a gasper and

tried aht a few attitoods to see 'ow I looked best. First I stood wiv me legs apart on the mat in front of the fireplace and shoved me 'ands in me pockets wiv me fag in the corner of me mouf, but that seemed too ordinary so I took one 'and aht to 'old me fag and 'ooked me thumb in me trahsis pocket. Then I thought of the pickcher in the book at the tailor's wot I'd chosen the style from, where the bloke was leanin' against the mantelpiece smokin' and 'avin' a quick 'un wiv 'is girl friend, so I dusts the mantelpiece wiv me 'andkerchief, sticks me elbow on the edge and crosses me legs kinder natural like. Proper swell that felt, so I stood there puffin' away till Alice come back.

When she come in I looked rahnd quite casual wiv the smoke curlin' up rahnd me shnozzle and me eyes 'arf closed—and caught me perishin' arm on a statue of Cupid. Dahn it went wiv a wallop into the fender and broke all over the blinkin' place. Made me feel proper soppy an' all.

"Sorry, Alice," I said, bendin' dahn and goin' all 'ot rahnd the collar, "but accidents will 'appen."

" 'Sall right, Ernie," she said. "Pa never did like it, anyway. Proper barmy, 'e always said it was."

Well, that was sportin' of 'er, I thought, so I 'eaps up the bits in a corner and 'ollerin' good-bye to 'er Ma we 'ops it.

"Where we goin', Ernie?" she says.

" 'Ow abaht the 'Eath, Alice?" I says. "The ole bloke said this was a soot for the country, so let's give it a try."

"O.K.," she says, and orf we went.

Of course I might 'ave thought of it afore, but as soon as we gets up there she wants to sit dahn.

"Sit dahn?" I said. "Wot, on the muddy grahnd—in these togs? No fear!"

" 'T'aint muddy," she said, "it ain't rained for days"—and dahn she goes full length.

I began to wish I 'adn't got the bloomin' thing on, 'cos I 'adn't the 'eart to sit there wiv 'er, so I jest stood arahnd feelin' proper foolish. Coupla mugs we looked an' all—'er on the grass and me walkin' rahnd 'er 'ead and twice nearly treadin' on 'er 'ands.

"Oh, come orf it, Ernie," she said. "Anybody'd think the soot was made of gold. Will yer sit over there on that seat, then?"

"All right," I said, " 's' long as it ain't dirty. Honest, Alice, I ain't takin' no chances."

When we got over there I 'ad a good dekko, and so's to be quite sure I laid me 'andkerchief on the seat afore I sat dahn. I took care not to lean back, though, but jest sat as still as still for fear I slipped orf me 'anky. Alice got proper narked abaht it and let off steam summink chronic, sayin' it was the rottenest evenin' she'd ever spent, wot wiv me sittin' there bolt upright like a stuffed owl. I offered to 'old 'er 'and but she went all 'uffy and said she was goin' 'ome.

MRS. PARTINGTON AND THE BREAKERS.

("The times of our sweeping successes lie far behind us."—*German Military Commentator.*)

"All right," I said, still 'opin' she'd calm dahn a bit, "let's sit comfortable in the parlour, eh? Can't think why we didn't do that afore."

"Come on, then," she said, but still a bit rattled, and orf we went.

Then summink 'appened wot fair took the biscuit. We'd jest got 'arf-way there wiv Alice thawin' aht a bit when suddenly I 'ears a lot of 'ollerin' be'ind us and, turnin' rahnd, I got swiped in the westcut wiv a woppin' great iron 'oop wot young 'Erbert 'Iggins was bowlin' in the street. It went spinnin' into the gutter and there was me with a smear of rust orf the perishin' thing right acrost me trahsis.

" 'Oly mackerel," I said, too 'orrified to say more, "that's torn it!"—and I whips aht me 'anky and starts rubbin' like me ole Ma on a wash-day.

"Seem to be makin' it a bloomin' sight worse," I said after I'd been at it for quite a bit, but as Alice didn't make no answer I looked up and saw she'd gorn, so I turned rahnd and looked dahn the street and there she was, abaht a 'undred yards orf, canterin' along like a race-'orse.

"Alice!" I 'ollered. " 'Ere, come back," but she didn't so much as turn rahnd, so I went slowly back to me Ma, stoppin' to rub me trahsis every now and then and feelin' proper fed-up.

" 'Ad a good time, Ernie boy?" me ole Ma said as I come into the back yard.

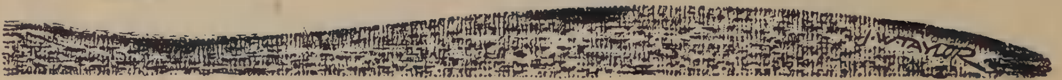
"Proper mucky, Ma," I said, "proper mucky!"

TABLE-TALK OF AMOS INTOLERABLE

Amos always says that autobiographies bring out the worst in him, and although there is no proof that his caustic (and usually interchangeable) expressions of opinion about them are invariably prepared in advance, the fact that a book is an autobiography practically guarantees that his expressed opinion about it will be caustic.

I strongly doubt, for instance, the impromptude—his own word (if any)—of his summing-up of a recent autobiography which he contrived to finish reading, or to appear to finish reading, in our presence. Jerking his head sideways at the portrait on the dust-cover, he said: "That man's life would make a good book."

* * * * *



Mention of autobiographies reminds me of a story he told about his early days in the office of a literary agent. He said that one day there was a tremendous disturbance in the outer office, and he opened his door to look out. "There were the office-boy, and the commissionaire from the main hall downstairs," Amos narrated, "restraining a big man of exceedingly tough appearance—a wrestler, I believe—who was trying to burst his way in to see the boss. He had a short heavy stick in one hand and he was yelling over and over again 'Show me the man that put all them hanging participles in my autobiography!' "

* * *

Occasionally Amos will preface some reversed epigram or twisted platitude with the announcement, "Here comes one of my Flashy Definitions," but in spite of this phrase he is always offended if the Definition does not get as much approval as he thinks it deserves. He was very much annoyed once when, after he had boomed out, "Diplomacy is the continuation of war by other means," a cantankerous dyspeptic-looking sailor who had been arguing with people all the evening suddenly turned and shot at him, "Who in thunder ever asks what *diplomacy* is?"

* * * * *

It is one of Amos's firmest principles that any excuse will do if it is put over with enough assurance. We once heard him say instantly and firmly, when called to the pub telephone to answer a lady who invited him to lunch: "No, I'm sorry, but Thursday is my day for emptying the tobacco-crumbs out of my cigarette-case."

"But didn't she argue?" we asked when he came back to the table after hanging up; and he replied indifferently, "I dare say."

Another time he refused to buy a copy of the *War Cry* because (he told the importunate lady) he had just had his hair cut.

* * * * *

He is profoundly sceptical about the prospects of what is customarily called a Better World After the War. "A lot of my very wealthy friends," he said not long ago, making us wonder where he kept them all hidden, "talk apprehensively as if the post-war world were likely to bristle with sign-boards reading 'Prosperers Will Be Executed.' They seem to be genuinely afraid that they are the last of their kind. Myself, I'd as soon worry about the possible extinction of grass."

* * * * *

He is in fact constitutionally pessimistic, and always contrives to throw the dead cat, or at least the old boot, of doubt into the flashing stream of optimistic chatter. "The most I will admit," he said recently when cheerful forecasts that the war would be quickly over were flying about, "is that this may be the thin wedge of the end."

* * * * *

Always much irritated by factitious enthusiasm, Amos is usually very hard on people who describe things with what he considers unjustified vivacity. An otherwise inoffensive little man in goloshes who joined our circle for one night only annoyed Amos by the extreme animation with which he narrated the somewhat common-place incidents of a country walk he had recently taken. His climax was, "And what do you think? I spotted a great woodpecker!"

Amos lowered his eyelids, drew down the corners of his mouth, blew out some smoke and commented, "A work of supererogation."

* * * * *

He will always take any opportunity of jeering at publishers' and reviewers' clichés, the hollowness of which, he says, is usually exposed if one tries to work out exactly why they stop where they do. Thus once when reading an advertisement he said, "'Ten thousand sold before publication,' eh—you notice they keep quiet about how many were sold *after*. . . ." Another time he contemptuously read out from a review, "'His place is secure,'" and added: "But even this chap hesitates to tell you where it is."

* * * * *

He has no illusions about his own place in the literary world. I have heard him begin sadly, "My fans, who can be counted on the nails of one finger——"

THE BATTLE OF KILLAHOO

I was discussing the war news the other day with my friend O'Hara, whom I chanced to meet on the road, when he said: "The most terrible battle I ever seen was the battle of Killahoo."

"What battle was that?" I asked.

"I'll tell you," he said. "It was like this. There was Michael O'Raherty. You know him? Well, it was he himself. And he'd left a rabbit by the side of the road that he'd taken out of a snare. And there was Hanrahan coming along, a terrible great man too. And Hanrahan picks up the rabbit, and the two of them met. And O'Raherty says to Hanrahan, 'Give me that rabbit.'

"And Hanrahan says: 'I will not.' And it began like that. It was a most terrible great battle."

"How many men were engaged in it?" I asked.

"Sure, it isn't the number of men engaged that makes a battle," said O'Hara, "but it's the terrible fury of the men that do be in it. That's what makes war. And don't be asking me questions, for they might put me out in my memory, and you might lose the account of the most terrible great battle that was ever fought in all the history of wars. Well, Hanrahan says: 'I will not.' And O'Raherty says: 'By the great bull of Coolan and by all the stars in the sky, and by earthquake and thunder, but you will.'

"And Hanrahan says: 'Never for any man.' And he takes a firmer hold on the rabbit, and draws out a knife. And while he was opening the blade of it as well as he could, for he wouldn't put down the rabbit, O'Raherty says to him: 'Me that have stood up against the might of the whole English army! And you draw a knife on *me*.' And Hanrahan says: 'Aye, and it's for your heart.' And O'Raherty says: 'And a little knife like that.'

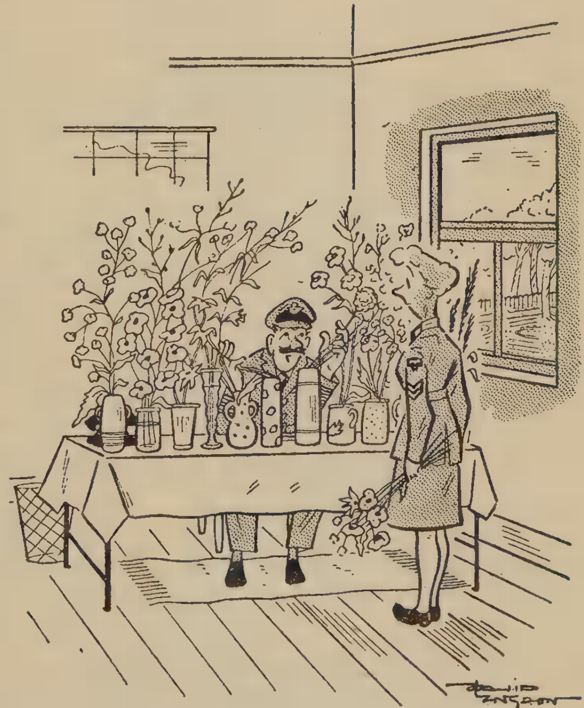
"Now the battle hadn't properly begun, for Hanrahan had said nothing as yet, but now he began to speak, and he says: 'Little knife is it? And stood up to an army, have you? Then you'll not stand up to me, and you'll not keep this knife out of your heart; and if it's too small to whip out your heart with one cut, I'll make as many cuts as may be necessary.'

" 'Begob,' says O'Raherty, 'if it comes to knives, sure I have a knife of my own, and here it is, and it will whip your heart out of you and your gizzard as well, unless you give up that rabbit!'

"And Hanrahan says to him, 'Not for a hundred armies.' "

"Had O'Raherty really a knife?" I asked.

"He had," said O'Hara. "But he didn't show it much, because I'm thinking it was only an old bit of a thing that he used to cut tobacco, and maybe a bit blunt, so he opened it and held it in his hand, but didn't show it too much. Ah, what did the knife matter, anyway? Sure it



"Look, Corporal Tippits, no one likes to be greeted of a morning by a nice vase of freshly-cut flowers more than I do . . ."

was the terrible things he said, and the anger of him boiling in the black deeps of his heart; those were the things that made the battle so terrible. And he goes up closer to Hanrahan, and Hanrahan takes one step back so as to give himself fair room to plunge his knife into O'Raherty's heart. And O'Raherty says to him: 'And I'll tell you what I'll do with your gizzard when I've whipped it out of you. I'll make you eat it before I cut your heart out, and I'll leave your heart in the centre of this road as a memorial of the kind of man that I am, and a warning to all that pass by."

" 'If it's the passers-by that you're thinking of,' says Hanrahan, 'take care they won't slip in your blood, for it isn't only your heart that I'll cut out, but I'll bleed you like a pig all down the middle of this road that you're standing on now.'

"And O'Raherty says: 'You and your little knife! I that have faced an army and have no fear of the Day of Judgment.'

"And when he spoke slightingly of the knife a great change came over Hanrahan, for he felt more about that old knife than he did of his heart. And he lowered his hand with the knife in it and opened his mouth, and I saw from the look in his eyes that he was about to utter the most terrible great oath that would have blasted O'Raherty and maybe the land all round him. A terrible great oath. And O'Raherty stood waiting for it. And just at that moment Hanrahan changed his mind, and I saw he wasn't going to utter that oath after all. And then he says: 'Ah, sure I'll not be bothered with you.' And he walks away down the road."

"And what happened to the rabbit?" I asked.

"Ah, sure they forgot it," said O'Hara, "and Hanrahan threw it away. They forgot it in the heat of the battle. Sure, I ate that rabbit myself."

HERITAGE

("Black Watch in action eleven hours to-day. Severe casualties inflicted on enemy. Own killed two officers, twenty-four men. Details later."—*Chindit Official Telegram.*)

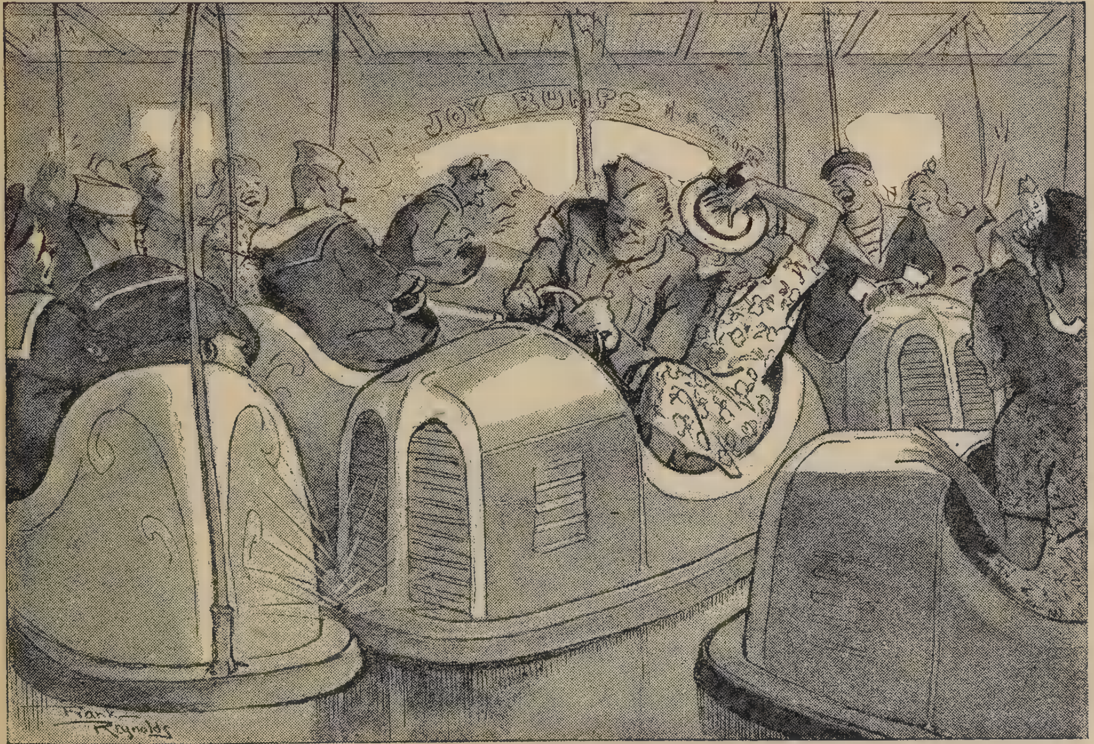
Another field is fought; a little fight
  Not to be famed in chronicles of war,
Not to be noticed in the News to-night
  Nor cabled eagerly to lands afar.
Only upon the regimental scrolls
  Begun long since, the day of Fontenoy,
Among old skirmishes and lost patrols
  They will record to-night this latest ploy.

Now, where to-day the sun blazed overhead,
  In the cool evening moving to and fro
Their comrades bury the immortal dead
  Forever from the sight of friend and foe.

And round them in the darkness sentries stand
  And watch with tired eyes and straining ears,
Even as long ago in our old land
  Their weary kinsfolk leaned upon their spears.

In old wild days, if one should chance to fall,
  The son caught up the broadsword of the slain,
Girt on the dirk and the accoutrements all
  And saw to it the ranks were whole again;
So now, as sure as when in ancient days
  Brave youth espoused the patriarchal feud,
Still, in the fashion of our modern ways,
  The oath of Aberfeldy is renewed.

We know not yet the comrades who are down,
  Who are the two and who the twenty-four
That shall not see again the country town,
  The pithead or the cothouse or the moor,



"Careful! You ain't drivin' the General now!"

From whence they came to fill their fathers' place,
  To keep the long heroic line unbroke,
The seed, the fruit, the harvest of their race,
  The latest warriors of a fighting folk.

From such small battles was a kingdom built,
  By such bold forays was a border held,
By men in hodden grey or tattered kilt
  Who knew defeat, but knew not to be quelled;
And they that fell to-day were of a blood
  That cannot all be drunk by greedy earth,
And whoso fell in honour where he stood
  Fulfilled the purpose of his warrior birth.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

Ten million yards of black-out stuff
  Shall now be torn from windows free,
And, not so bellicose nor tough,
  The partly de-controlled H.G.
Shall fight less hard his endless fights
  By field and pub, and even bear
The tedium of his home at nights
  And turn his sword into a share.

Give me the gas-mask that I loved
  And let me kick it round the room,
And you, ye torches, now be shoved
  For ever to Tartarean gloom,
Now let us sing "God Save The King"
  And cease, in course of time, one hopes,
To save these little bits of string
  And patch perpetual envelopes.

Ten thousand souls that dared not trip
  By ocean waves as heretofore
Shall take their customary dip
  Beside the liberated shore,
And men shall not be sent to jail
  For common words of English speech,
And Andersons are all for sale
  And Morrisons are fivepence each.

The ration-cards are with us yet.
Where has the tub of pig-swill gone?
And roving Ministries that set
Their nightly camp still farther on?
How many a town untenanted
Awaits to have its life renewed?
How many a subterranean bed
Shall lapse into desuetude?

Fast, fast the Wardens fade away,
The watchers from the roofs retire,
And all our pumps of yesterday
Are one with Nineveh and Tyre:
The marching flags have crossed the map,
The beaten foe flies home. But what
We mean to do with all the scrap—
Well, someone knows. But I do not.

October, 1944

TOLLER APPLIES

(*To Messrs. Trayle and Trayle, Detective Agents.*)

SIRS,—Thank you for your letter just received with reference to my joining your firm on conclusion of hostilities. I would, however, point out that with the return of peace detective work will regain its pre-war importance and we will doubtless quickly be in a position to move from the beach-hut now unfortunately occupied by the firm as the result of blast and lack of business.

I regret also to hear that Tralee Trayle, junior partner, has been refused entry into the Security side of the Army and has instead taken up work as a Pioneer, and I can only think Tralee was over-modest at his interview, at which I would have suggested his appearing disguised, whipping it off at the crucial moment.

Should I meet Tralee out here I shall mention the fact that red roses grow on the south wall, at which I shall expect the answer that the new moon means danger, when I shall know it is indeed Tralee. Please tell him this.

I shall in addition, as you imply, do what I can towards transferring Tralee, although I cannot admit I am in any way responsible, since it is four years since I was posted from the Security branch of the forces and any influence I may have left behind certainly did not tend to rejection of men of Tralee's calibre.

With regard to your remarks on my possible future in the detective world, these I appreciate as the light-hearted banter of the tried detective to the new recruit, although I detect a serious note in your reference to seeing a psychiatrist and realize how important is this sort of understanding of human nature to the professional investigator.

On this subject I have already had experience of the unreliability of even normal natures, an outstanding example being my Aunt Constance who, with a friend, was queueing for a bus when the queue became out of hand and my aunt's friend tripped in the rush, Aunt Constance not stopping to help her up but being seen actually to use her as a stepping-stone to leap into the vehicle, only realizing what she had done half-way to Putney.

Another incident of the same sort, but also serving to arouse my detective instincts at an early age, occurred in Jersey while walking with my family to catch a boat. Being more on a level to notice the phenomenon, I perceived a cigar emerge from the end of my father's trouser-leg, followed by a further cigar and after that a number of cigars. On calling the attention of my mother to this circumstance I was told that on no account must I mention the fact to father, who was walking slightly advanced of the rest of the party in conversation with a general, and that

"ELEVEN"-LEAGUE BOOTS.

"And now, Mrs. Brumwall, I see you coming out of a Portal house—sideways."

shortly the cigars would cease and the situation return to normal. I afterwards frequently wondered at this incident, turning it over in my mind as a species of detective problem.

On the subject of detective experience acquired in the Army, and further to my last letter, I omitted to mention that I have taken part on several occasions in Security Weeks during training in England, in the course of which duty I became practised in touring units with a false rank and papers, the rank favoured being that of colonel, since in this way a reward for successful deception was respect from the Commanding Officer, a good welcome to the mess, with drinks on the PMC, and an opportunity to ply majors and captains with sharp questions on their work.

Unfortunately on one occasion I was introduced into a mess where another visitor was a general with whom, as appearing the senior officer present, I was expected to make conversation, this being mainly on the subject of our supposed contemporaries at Sandhurst, so that I was ultimately led to feign intoxication on the general's inability to understand a series of winks and allusions designed to acquaint him with the true state of affairs.

This source of experience, however, came to an end through an innocent design to further my own advancement by mentioning a brilliant subaltern called Toller, languishing unrecognized in an obscure unit, this leading the C.O. concerned immediately to ring up my own C.O. with a view to procuring this officer, whom I described as possessing leadership, resource and every qualification of a Sqn. Commander, and thus unfortunately hearing that I was partaking in a Security Week from which it was jokingly hoped I would forget to return; discovery following and a scuffle in which I lost my trousers.

It will thus be seen that I will have been through the mill to some extent prior to joining the firm within, I hope, a mere matter of months, should I not be required against Japan. Perhaps you will kindly confirm the appointment at your earliest convenience as I have in my battle-dress pocket a communication from Messrs. Snyff and Snyff, Detective Consultants, urgently desiring my services after the war. This firm offers me £8 8*s.* per week.

Yours faithfully,

B.L.A.

J. Toller, *Lt.*

CONVENTION

We have all been told that without conventions of some kind or other life would be impossible; what is more, there comes a time in our lives when we suddenly find we have switched over from being told it to telling it to others. This is undoubtedly a tough moment, but a tribute to the power of convention. So it might be a good idea to-day to turn our minds on to a few conventions and see what they and civilization have made of each other.

One of our best-known forms of convention is of course the process two strangers go through when introduced by a third person. This third person, knowing both of them, starts the ball rolling by telling them what their names are. I mean their own names; it being a well-worn law that neither shall hear the other's name, and equally true, though not so widely acknowledged, that both sides shall hear their own names quite remarkably clearly. (Psychologists are delighted about this, by the way; they say it is absolutely typical.) After the introducing comes the question of shaking hands. Convention gives two people in this position the choice of either shaking hands or not, and it is important that they should agree beforehand, which means each must decide what the other person is thinking, and what the other person is thinking of course is of what the *other* person is thinking, which brings them back to where they started. All this thinking happens very quickly and sets up a communal aura, either positive or negative. If it is positive, the next problem crops like lightning. Convention lays down that it is the right hand we shake hands with; and it is also the right hand with which two people on being introduced will probably find themselves holding a dog-lead, a newspaper, a packet of wheat flakes, two or three cups—each attached to a separate finger by the handle—a clock, a bag of hen-food, or, indeed, almost anything. What is more, they will have to get everything from the right hand to the left without making it seem intentional; and yet—such are the shackles of custom they cannot start immediately on meeting for fear of looking over-keen. All this makes being introduced one of the most difficult social processes known to man. No wonder, psychologists say, that the sort of conversation you get after an introduction is enough to make passers-by want to rush home and write a quietly humorous novel.

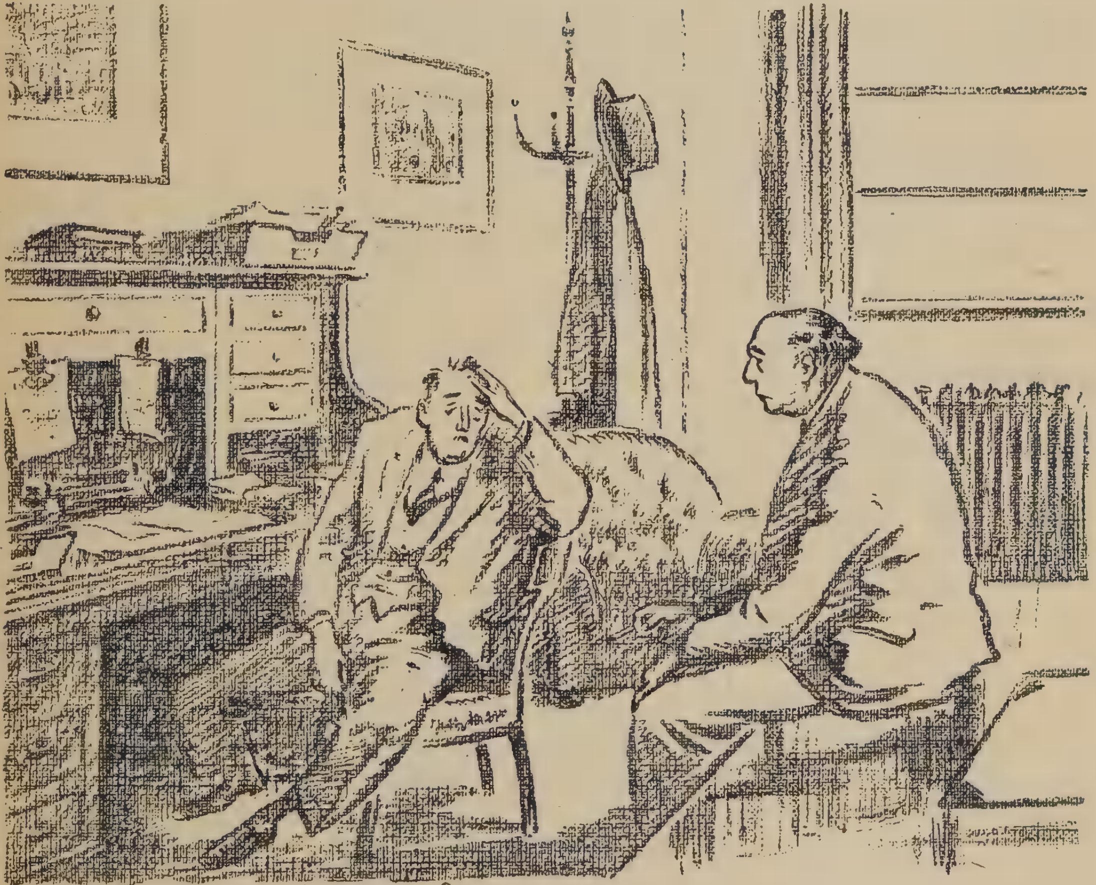
"I *AM* WATCHING FOR THE DICKY-BIRD."

The next set of conventions I want to deal with occurs in letter-writing, where there are many rules governing both business and friendly letters. Business letters are when we put the whole date, year and all, and end "Yours faithfully." Sometimes the public ends its business letters "Yours truly," but this is only when the letter it is answering ended the same way and because it does not want to give offence. It interprets "Yours truly" as someone trying to be nice without overstepping the boundary. The public thinks there is a rule that it can say "Yours sincerely" to, for instance, its bank manager if it has spoken to its bank manager over twice, but if the bank manager answers with "Yours faithfully" then the public is mildly dashed but willing to admit that bank managers are busy men. When the public signs a non-business letter "Yours sincerely" it feels a bit formal, or like someone else, and when it gets tied up with "Very sincerely" and so on it hardly knows where it is. There is also a complicated convention about typing and handwriting. There is a rule that we can, indeed should, type business letters because it shows we are not easily put upon; though bad typers must remember they may defeat their purpose, there being nothing more fallible to the harsh business mind than someone who spells "thank" as "thnak." There is also a rule that we should type letters to people we are inclined to be literary to, because this sort of letter, being subconsciously intended for print, might as well be in print anyway. Letters to people in between are a bit doubtful, but a good rule is that the sort of letter calling for sunny politeness, that is to say with more than six exclamation marks, is really better handwritten because to make an exclamation mark on a typewriter you have to put an apostrophe and then back-space for the full stop. As for letter folding, there is a convention that a letter is folded so that the last page meets the eye first. Some sociologists say this is to warn the letter-reader who has written it, others that it shows at a glance how much blank paper the letter-writer has left, thus getting the disappointment over quickly. Certain unconventional letter-writers do a bit of thinking before folding, and if they have reserved a nasty jar for the last page they may go as far as folding their letter the other way. Others less radical will arrange it in the envelope so that it comes out with the nasty jar upside down or behind. I should add that only the literary bother about this sort of thing, but then the literary count as artists and are entitled to flout convention. A few people habitually fold their letters so that the front page shows, but they are known to be eccentrics, though, if it goes no further, of the very mildest type.

Now for some of the conventions which govern talking, eating and other processes in social life. There is a convention somewhere that it is not polite to argue. Psychologists say we can trace this to our very early lives, when people said it to keep us quiet, and when anyway it was no good arguing. But it is the sort of axiom we are apt to hang on to, though rather wondering why, and it means that human nature will never fail to get a guilty pleasure from a really slap-up discussion, and moreover will often find itself doing all the washing-up after as a penance for having, as it thinks, won. The other main conversational convention is that if other

people tell us something they have already told us we must not say so, while if we tell other people something we have already told them it is their own fault for not saying so. There are so many conventions governing eating that I can only give two, one old and one new. The old one is that when we are offered a plate of cakes there is a certain arc of plate eligible by its nearness, and a certain type of cake eligible by its not being the biggest, and where these two qualifications coincide there we should choose our cake. The new one is that if we take less butter or margarine than we ought to it shall be pointed out to us, but if we take more it shall not, and it says much for mankind that this has worked so well.

There is of course an awful lot of convention involved in calling on people, much of it concentrated into the few minutes when the caller is standing outside and ringing the doorbell. The average doorbell can either be heard from outside



"I FEEL PRETTY WASHED OUT TO-DAY—LAST NIGHT I DREAMT I WAS FIRE-WATCHING."

or not. If we can hear it then we cannot do better than wait for a bit longer than we would give ourselves to get from the farthest point of the house from the front door (estimating the size of the house as well as we can without moving) to the front door itself, and then ringing again. If no one answers, no one is in. But if we cannot hear the doorbell then we are in a fix, because the bell may not work. This will lead the impetuous to start on the knocker, but mankind is better advised to have another try at the bell first, as it is never safe to annoy the people inside a house when you are outside. On the whole, custom has laid down that when mankind has rung a bell twice and knocked twice it has done all it can, and had better make off—quietly, in case hostile eyes are watching. The point for callers to remember is to strike a balance between looking as if they want to get into the house and looking as if they want to break into it.

It would be strange if convention had not made a few rules for dogs, cats and parrots as well as human beings, and, indeed, convention has come out strong here. People conventionally approach a dog by showing it their knuckles and sending out dog-loving thought-waves. Cat-approaching is more complicated. Cat-lovers are traditionally invested with all sorts of artistic qualities which their friends are not so sure they really have, so that cat-approaching means a lot of silly talk from the cat-approacher and a lot of patient waiting from the cat-approacher's friends. A parrot is not so much approached as remarked on, it being bad form not to be surprised when we see a parrot. (Statisticians, by the way, say it is not as easy to see a parrot as we may suppose, and we have probably all missed several in our lives, because parrots blend into their backgrounds like nothing else.)

Finally, a very few words on the unconventional. They are so identifiable that I only want to mention people wearing odd gloves. To the world they are eccentrics; to themselves they are ordinary harmless people who did not realize they had brought odd gloves till too late. As for the purpose of the unconventional, the really unconventional, in this world, this is easy. They are here to make the conventional feel good because conventional, and themselves equally good because unconventional, and psychologists add that if conventions were abolished the unconventional would be the first to miss them.

OFFICE HOURS

Doris says when I first started telling her this was the darkest hour before the dawn it must have been about dusk on a foggy winter afternoon, but here's the dawn really coming along at last with the dim-out, and every time I pass one of those old notices warning you about

AIR-RAID DANGERS
CONCEAL YOUR LIGHTS

—it brightens me up no end to remember all the dismal things we've come through

"Then, I think, we'll attack with the Fourth Cruiser Squadron preceded by units of the Tenth Minesweeping Flotilla."

and forgotten, but then of course Doris and I can't really talk, having been in London all along and not Dover or some of those Kent villages. But it even seems ages ago already since we were emptying the window-sills every night in case we were blown out and piling them up again next morning in case we were blown in with one of those flying bombs.

Anyway, what's the use of saying you can't put the clock back when that's just what we all did the other Saturday, and all I can say is I wish I'd done it myself instead of letting Willie touch the thing, because it's never been the same since. Of course I know most office boys will break a thing as soon as look at it, but I thought we'd trained Willie better, though Doris did say he'd wear it out with looking at it so much and kept telling him he was lucky to have a clock to watch at all nowadays —just look at the street clocks!

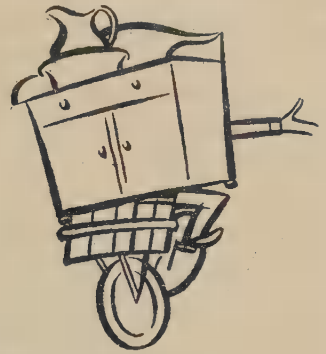
But when the clock kept stopping I told Willie to take it up to the Drawing Office and see if they couldn't do something about it, being very handy people some of them, and he'd better fill the ink-wells at the same time because I had some more forms to fill in. And he'd hardly got out of the door when we heard a crash and the clock came bouncing down from stair to stair, and Jim, my boy-friend in the D.O., came running out to ask who Willie had been bumping off this time, and found him all covered with blood and rushed him off to the first-aid people in the works.

Doris and I got out the insurance policy quick and were just trying to decide whether Willie did or didn't come under consequence, whether direct or indirect, of War, Invasion, Act of Foreign Enemy, Hostilities (whether War be declared or not), Civil War, Rebellion, Revolution, Insurrection or Military or Usurped Power, when in walked Willie, beaming all over with just a bandage on his finger, the rest of the blood being the red-ink bottle he'd put in his pocket.

"Good morning, Mrs. Todhunter. How's the inferiority complex?"

Just like Willie of course to go all through the doodle-bugs without a scratch and then cut himself on the office clock! However, the first-aid people were glad to have somebody fresh to practise on, not getting much variety since we stopped having invasion practices with half the people dying to be casualties for something to do.

So now we've got no clock and I take back all I've ever said about Big Ben, for I don't know what we'd do without him till we get a new one from the Horology Pool,



A JOURNAL PLEADS FOR A SQUARE DEAL FOR THE SMALL HAULAGE CONTRACTOR. HE IS BEING TOO MUCH PUT UPON.

because you can't spend all your time Timming and whenever Mr. Head starts talking about taking time by the forelock it makes me think of Hitler. I think myself the great thing is to get elevenses over punctually by 10.30 and tea early too, because you do your best work after both. Though every time I remind Willie to put the kettle on, Doris is sure to look up and say: "Is it that time already?" though you'd think by now she'd know it must be or else the clock's stopped and it's more.

It's funny how careful you've got to be what you say to foreigners though. The other day when our refugee came in just as she was thinking about lunch, Doris said to him without thinking, "How's the enemy?" before he'd even finished shaking hands, and all he could do was stand there and say "Please?"

He can't make out why people put clocks in dining-rooms, it being the one room in the house you always know what time it is or you wouldn't be there. But he says he's had a clock complex ever since they told him at evening classes when he first came over that the first hand was the hour hand and the second the minute and the third the second till he thought he'd never learn English and got so depressed and blued off he threw a fit of the browns.

He's just bought himself a pencil to learn history by with all the kings and queens in red, white and blue in two tiny little columns, but he'd used it all up down to

Anne 1702 Rd II 1377

when we first saw it, and then Willie broke it and it's now at

Chs II 1660 Hy III 1216

—and he wants to know who discovered England and why it took them till Thousand Sixty-six.

I thought of going to Hastings myself for the second week of my holidays if Mr. Head would only make up his mind when he's going to the Midlands again, but Doris and I think he's afraid to budge in case he misses peace. And Doris's girl-friend who's in the Civil Service is afraid she'll miss it in the dim-out because her wireless has gone wrong and she was relying on no black-out to let her know if it was announced after office hours.

Now she's doing for herself you'd think she'd be getting a bit thinner, but not a bit of it, and our refugee says, there's still too much meat on her in spite of all the chops and changes. He went to help us give her a hand with her spring-cleaning because it's just a year since she moved in, and when he saw all those empty jars he couldn't think how her jam turnover could be so large till she explained she'd been collecting them to bottle.

She's got a pot of honey this month, though, because you always see the jam you want in another grocer's window, and the label said it was made with the addition of invert sugar, and of course that puzzled our refugee and us too. And then she showed us the nice little clothes-brush she'd just picked up which had been released because they were a frustrated export, and he said he'd never realized there was so much Freudian influence in this country and now there are no bombs to speak of he'd quite like to know what she dreamt about nowanights.

She's been lent about quite a bit lately to different departments, but she says wherever they've been evacuated to the address is always the Grand Hotel, and you've got to be careful where you write to which. It all makes a nice change, she says, but she's had one or two disappointments. Knowing the Civil Service she wasn't really surprised to find the Senior Provision Officer hadn't anything to do with rations, but she did feel a bit hopeful when she was transferred to Special Stocking Licences, and you can quite understand what she felt like when she found herself dealing with winter reserves for the Ministry of Fuel.

GREEN ISN'T DEAD

(By Smith Minor)

In case you think the above a funny tittle, Green dose, I will tell you why I have chosen it. You see, once I called an artickle "The Deth of Smith Minor," and althouh of corse I didn't mean it severel poeple thort I did, and it gave them a bit of a shock. In fact, to my surprise, some of them even wrote and told me, it seaming as if they wuold of minded.

Well, the reason I have called the artickle you are now reading, saying you are reading it, "Green Isn't Dead" is to save you getting another shock, saying you got the first one, becorse he isn't. But I cuoldn't save myself getting the shock, there being no one to tell me like there is me to tell you, and I honestly thinking he was going to be.* Of corse, if he had been, it wuold of meant more to me than to you, I knowing him and you not, in fact,

"The world wuold not of wrecked the cost,
But only I, what it had lost!"

Jest the same, one can't help fealing that those who wuold of minded if I'd been dead must of minded if Green had been, becorse what is one of us without the other, *s'ils vous me comprendu*?

Note. My French master said my French wuold improve if I did more, so I hope you won't mind if now and then I drop in *un soupson*, it won't be much. End of note.

Green not being kean on praise, I showed him the above poem to be sure he

* Dead.—*Auther.*

wuoldn't mind my putting it in, and he said he didn't mind if I'd also put in that he didn't agree with it.

"The trouble with you," he said, "is that you idolicize everything."

"I feal sure there are some things I don't," I said.

"Tell me one," he said.

"Earwigs," I said.

It's a funny thing, I can feal for worms, but not for earwigs, becorse somehow I can never see anything in them, and yet, to them, there must be.

Well, anyway, this is what hapened.

We were sitting on a gate, wondering severel things, such as weather anybody wuold ever invent a machine that cuold make time go backwords and weather it wuold be a good thing if they did, we often get a bit deap, but don't worry, this isn't going to be about that, when sudenly we heard a loud clatter coming along the lane. It sounded jest like a run-away horse, and lo! it was a run-away horse.

It was galoping nine hundred and ninety-nine to the dozen, and it went at such a lick that the breaze it made *en passant* almost blew us over.

"Golly!" said Green.

"Same here," I said.

"There's no one on it," he said.

"No, but there may of been," I said.

"That's what I was thinking," he said, "in wich case, where are they?"

"Hard luck about the no-umbrella-when-in-uniform, Judith."

"If we cuold make time go backwords, we'd know," I said.

"No, we wuoldn't," he said, "we weren't there."

"So we weren't," I said, "but if time went backwords, wuold the horse come back backwords?"

"As it won't, it doesn't matter," he said. "What dose matter is that someone may be lying in a ditch in dire distress neading one's help, and that we ouht to try and stop that horse."

"We can't do both," I said.

"We can, if we do one each," he said.

"I see what you mean," I said, seeing.

We desided that he wuold be best at stoping a horse and that I wuold be best at stoping bleading, he having once stoped an escaped camble at a zoo, it was plucky,

and I having once bandidged the head of a tramp who I thort was hurt, thouh he was only asleep, but still I bandidged it. So he went the way the horse had gone, wile I went the way the horse had come, hoping they wuoldn't be too far apart.

I'd realy rather of gone after the horse, becorse there was prescious little chance of catching it up, and so long as you try to do a thing it dosen't matter not doing it, but if a person was in a ditch, well, you'd be bound to find him, and as I went along the lane I expeckted every time I turned a corner to come upon some ghory sight, like, say, a leg sticking out of a hedge, or even, who wotted, an arm all by itself. But luckerly what I came upon wasn't a part of a person but a whole one, in fact, an old man sitting on one side of the road with a biscycle on the other.

"Good afternoon," I said. "Are you hurt?"

"I dunno," he said.

"One must know," I said.

"Then I ain't doin' what I must," he said.

"Well, is there anything I can do for you?" I said.

"Yes, there is," he said, "you can find a horse I was leadin' what boulted and nocked me over."

"It is a mistake to try and race a horse," I said.

"Who said I was racin' it?" he said.

"You said you were leading it," I said.

"I was leadin' it on my biscycle, don't be stoopid," he said.

"Oh," I said. "Is it yours?"

"The biscycle?" he said.

"No, the horse," I said.

"No, it's Mr. Gumble's, what I work for," he said, "and if I lose it I'll lose my job."

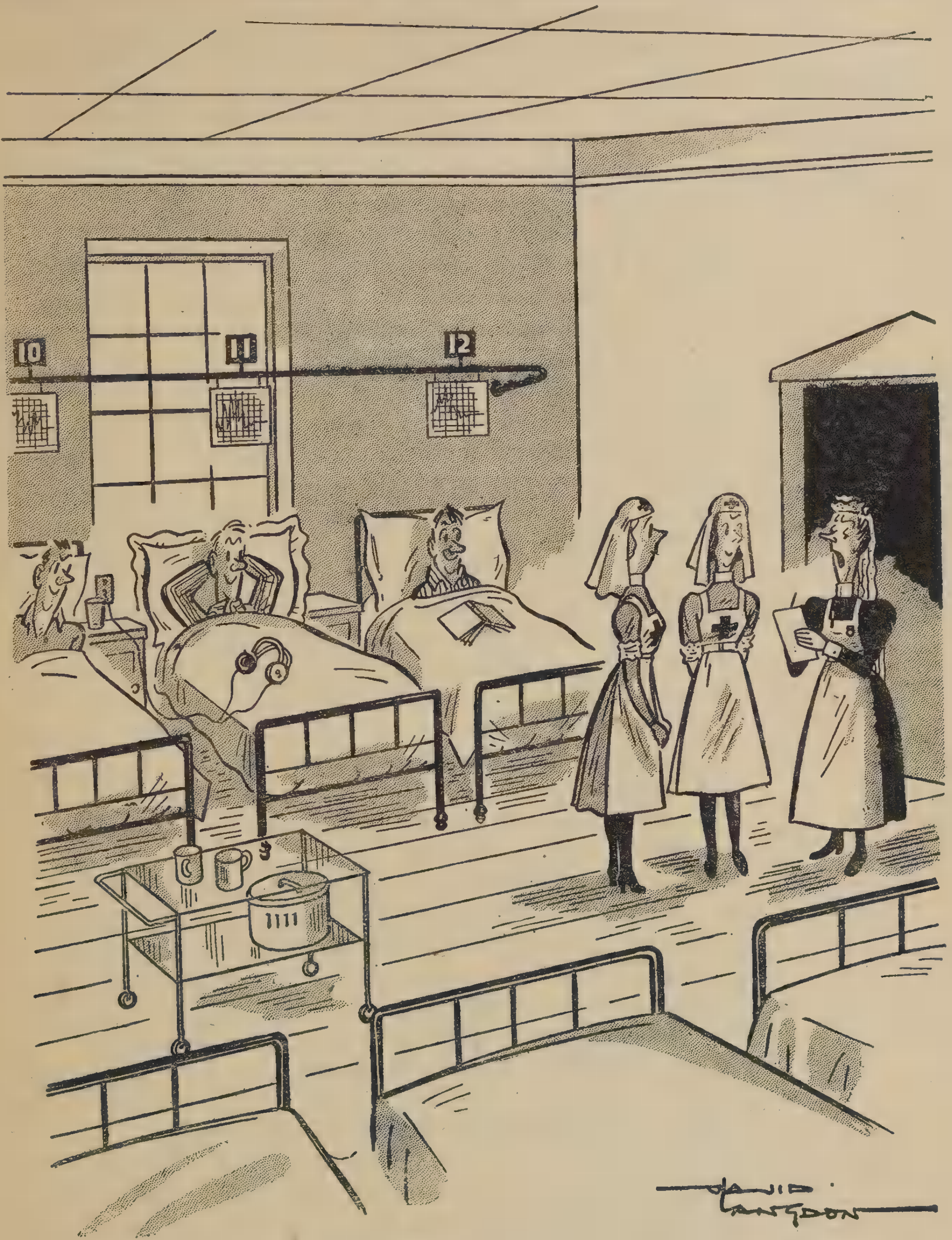
"Well, don't worry," I said, "my friend, Mr. Green, is looking for it."

"Yes, and by gum, he's found it," he said, "becorse here they are!"

And, lo! here they were, for at that moment the horse came galoping back with Green upon it!

"How had he got on to the horse?
 There was no time to ask!
To stay where he had somehow got,
 That was his anxscious task.
With staring eyes and open mouth
 He swayed from side to side.
Who wotted how near he to Deth
 Upon that gharstly ride!"

Now if you don't like poetry, some don't, you'd better stop here, and you can do it with an easy mind as you know from the tittle that Green didn't die. But I've got to go on with the poetry becorse when you feal emosional and don't forget



"Cases 10, 11 and 12 are due for discharge to-morrow, so that will be three apple-pie beds after their bath to-night. Is that quite clear?"

Green and I have been bossom friends for $6\frac{3}{4}$ years and the idea of perhaps having to go on in this rather quear world without him made me feal, well, emosional, one has to burst into verse.

Anyhow, *pour mieux ou mauvaise*, here is the rest of what hapened, weather you read it or not.

"With hair that pointed to the sky
We watched the twain flash past!
Wuold I see Green alive again,
Or would that be the last?
The old man mutered things like this,
'Great Snakes' and 'Holy Mike.'
But, ah! what use by now were words?
I lept upon the bike,
And folowed at a dizzy lick,
Becorse, oh, who cuold tell?
With luck perhaps I'd be in time
To catch him as he fell.
Think not that I expeckted to
Like seeing old Green's end,
But he might have last words to speak—
One dose such for a friend!
But all was vane! At last I saw
A farmer by a gate.
'Please has a horseman come this way?'
I asked. 'Am I too late?'
He looked surprized, so I went on,
'If you are Mr. Gumble,
A friend of mine is on your horse
And may have had a tumble.'
It was! He said, 'Gad's Hooks! I heard
While on my way to tea
A horse trot back into its stall,
We'd better go and see.'
And so we did. And, lo! the horse
Was eating in its stable.
But where was Green? I'll tell you, for
To guess you won't be able—
Subconscious, but alive, inside
The horse's feeding trouph!
He never knew how he'd got on,
Still less how he came off!"

You see, when he came too, we thort he never wuold, it was awful, we asked him how it had all hapened, and all he cuold remember was seeing the horse coming back again, throuh what Mr. Gumble calls the homing instinck, and leaping at it, and the rest was blanque.

Anyhow, *qu'importent*? He was alive, and I sent one-and-nine to the Red Cross, and he sent threepence.

Note. Mr. Gumble didn't realy say, "Gad's Hooks," but I thort I'd put it in. I'm sorry if I shuoldn't of. End of note.

SERGEANT MUNCHAUSEN

. . . Thanks, chum! Mine's a pint . . . Well, as I was saying, we had some proper fine old times in the early part of the war. We were flying Whitleys then—crew of five—skipper, second pilot, navigator-bomb-aimer, wireless operator, and me, the Tail-end Charlie. . . . The ragtime crew they called us on the 'drome, but that was mostly our navigator's fault. Casual he was. For ever getting us lost. We used to say that fellow could lose his way trying to get out of a telephone-booth.

How on earth he kept his job still beats me. Why, when we went out night-bombing, sometimes we bombed the right place and sometimes we bombed the wrong place because the navigator had got us there instead, and sometimes we wouldn't know what place we'd bombed, except that it was where our navigator had got us to.

And as for getting us home again—phew! At one time or another we must have landed at every 'drome in England. I remember wunst we was lost as per usual and nearly out of juice somewhere over England on a pitch-black night, looking for a place to land. Suddenly the navigator spots a flare-path below. "There we are at last!" he says, and tells the skipper to put down. The skipper didn't like the look of it because the flare-path lights were all green ones. However, he went at it, but just as he was coming in, those flare-path lights all changed to amber and then red and we pulled out in time. We'd been about to land in Grantham High Street. 'S a fact! Strictruth I'm telling you.

". . . AND I CAN SAY WITHOUT FEAR OF CONTRADICTION . . ."

I remember wunst another time when we actually had to force-land. We'd been bombing some town or other—we never did know which,

but the wireless op. said he was fairly certain it was a German one because the flak was on the whole a little nearer than that at Margate or Harwich. Well, we'd been forty minutes on course for home when the navigator discovered we were flying on a reciprocal track. Meaning we were on an East-West line all right, but unfortunately going east instead of west. Casual, our navigator was. A hundred and eighty degrees was nothing to him.

So we turned round and started for home properly, but by then it was touch and go whether we'd make it. At last the juice gave out and down we began to come. The navigator reckoned it was the tail end of Holland or Belgium. We landed in a field and at once streaked off, so as not to get taken prisoner, the skipper just staying long enough to set the aircraft alight. We went through a wood and came out suddenly on to a road, and the first thing we saw by the light of the burning crate was a pub called "The Maid of Kent." 'S a fact. Strictruth I'm telling you. . . . Thanks, I'll have another pint. . . .

I remember wunst another time when we had to ditch. That was a queer do. Navigator had got lost and we'd run out of gravy, all as usual, and down we had to come. The skipper hoped it'd be in the drink because it was softer than the land, and I hoped it'd be land because I couldn't swim. As it turned out it was half and half. We ditched into water, but it must have been very close to land because the old kite didn't sink far. In fact there was the back part of her sticking up out of the water and on it the five of us like a bunch of monkeys.

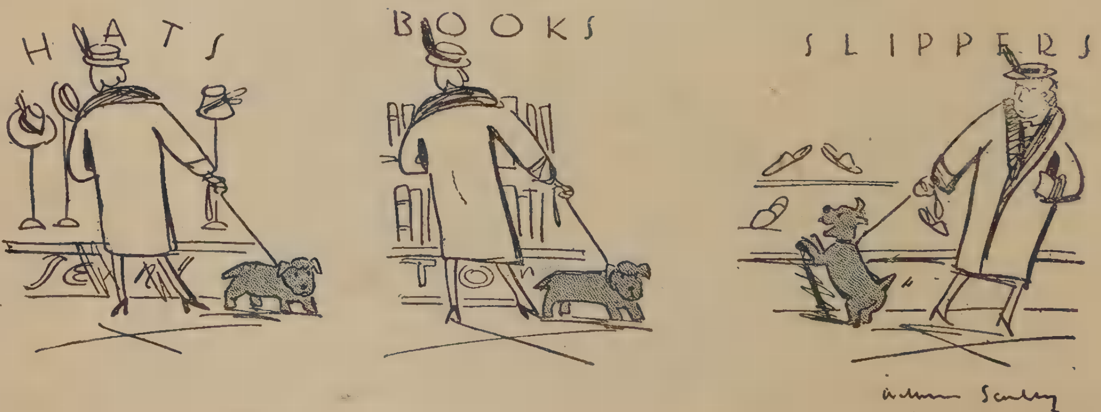
"Where do you think we are?" says the skipper.

"In the drink," says the navigator.

"I didn't ask *where* we were, fathead," says the skipper. "I said where do you *think* we are. Coast of Kent, or Sussex?"

"Or Lancashire?" I says, being funny.

"We wouldn't have had the petrol to get as far as that," says the second dickie, taking it seriously.



"Maybe it's still the Dutch coast?" says the wireless op.

"It'll soon be dawn," says the navigator, "and perhaps we'll see landmarks."

Well, it gets lighter, but no landmarks because there's a mist and visibility is about fifty yards. But suddenly, we hear a dog barking and realize that the shore can't be far off, so after a bit of an argument between the second dickie and the navigator as to whether the dog is barking in English or Dutch, and I've been told off for suggesting it's barking with a Lancashire accent, the skipper says he's sick of sitting on the knobby end of an aircraft and he'll swim to land and get help.

So he strips off all his clothes and we wish him luck and the navigator orders boiled eggs for breakfast and he swims off into the mist.

Well, nothing happens and at last the navigator says he wants to make certain about those eggs and so *he* strips and swims for shore. And once more nothing happens, though the mist seems to be thinning a little. So the second pilot strips and goes off into the great unknown—and still nothing.

So the wireless op. and me toss up who shall go next. I cop for it, but he has to go, because I can't swim.

So off *he* goes and I'm left all alone, and again nothing happens. No rescue, nothing.

I'm just binding away good and proper at the four of 'em when the mist lifts and I see the shore, about a hundred yards away. And then I see it again a hundred yards away on the other side, and London spread all round it, because, believe it or not, we've come down in Hyde Park, bang in the middle of the Serpentine. . . .

I get rescued pretty soon after that and when I meet the other four—in blankets and the police station—I start in on them proper for not sending help. But do you know why? No one would believe their story—and as they came ashore one by one they'd been arrested for bathing without costumes. 'S a fact! Strictruth I'm telling you.

Thanks. The same again. Now I remember wunst another time when we . . .

OCTOBER

On beds of mist, his labour done,
  To gild the coast and sea
Now sinks the manumitted sun,
  And all the stars are free.

Now drifts the gold, the crimson leaf
  Triumphant on the noon
To rescued earth, and not in grief
  Comes up the watery moon.

The tyrant hours have torn their stamp
  From grasslands dim with rain,
The hills have left their prison camp
  And shouted to the plain.

Who gave the mountain stream the word
  That bonds no longer bind?
The forest and the field have heard
  The trumpet of the wind.

The day has tossed his yoke aside
  The night has ceased to fear,
And many a gallant man has died
  To save the falling year.

IMPENDING APOLOGY

"It is at present in use in our hospital, and in the hands of Capt. W. G. ——, R.A.M.C., has proved to be foolproof."

Medical Journal.

November, 1944

HOW I WRITE AN ARTICLE

I WRITE this for the benefit of those who have asked me about my methods but have seemed dissatisfied with my answers; also for those who have not asked me yet, but may do so in the future. I should like to be able to refer them to an authoritative work.

I begin by shoving back enough of my supper-things to make a space on the table about a foot or eighteen inches square, folding back the corner of the table-cloth so that it goes in my soup-plate. Then I fetch my portable typewriter, cursing a little when I hear the sharp *snap*! which means that I have trodden on the eraser attached by string to the machine, the string having snapped with a sharp *snap*!

When I have tied another knot in the string, making it just too short for me to reach either side of my typewriting with the eraser, I remove the typewriter cover and put it down on the floor where I shall fall over it every time I leave my chair. On the top of the machine is a pile of quarto paper. The first sheet says:

~~SPRING-AND-THE-WATERMAN~~

~~"Gosh," said Freddie, looking at me admiringly~~
~~Freddie looked at me admiringly.~~
~~"Gosh," he said~~
~~"Good heavens," said George, looking at me admi~~

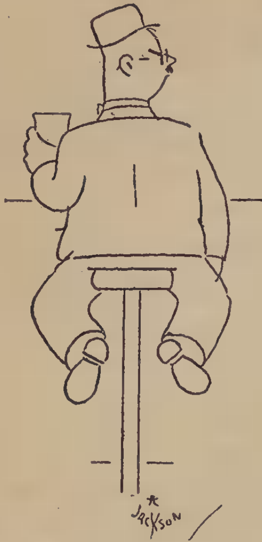
and the second says:

3rd Scene, (same as Sc. 1) Barbers come back, laughing and talking. Go into shop.

There are many other sheets like these—the sort of sheets which, amongst the papers of Dickens or Mark Twain, would by now have fetched a pretty sum in the auction-rooms. For some reason I cannot bring myself to throw them away.

Half-way down the pile I come upon a treasure-trove of unused sheets, and insert the least dog-eared and carbon-scrawled of these in the machine. I sit back and look at it, noticing that the water-mark is upside down and frowning at the blotches of undigested rag which alone (at present) relieve its blankness. It seems hard to believe that I have ever covered such a sheet with humorous typewriting, or, if I ever have, that I ever shall again.

I pull out the unanswered letters from my pockets, and begin to read the backs of the envelopes. I am not such a fool as to let good ideas escape by not making a



"Who's an armchair critic?"

note of them on the spot, and I am considerably cheered to see the good crop of ideas I have here.

Farringdon Street (suit-case on b.)
Standard lamp
"Get down" in Fr. (F/bomb)
Peer Gynt
Sylvia, 271 Grove End Gardens

These are my ideas, accumulated thriftily against such a time as this. The first four mean absolutely nothing to me; the fifth is the wrong sort of idea.

Since I have an unanswered letter in my hand and a blank sheet of paper in my typewriter it seems to me that while my inspiration is on the way I might as well pass the time usefully.

My dear Mother, (I write)—I really want to get an article written this evening, but I feel I can't settle to it until I have dropped you this much overdue line . . .

But even when I have dropped my mother the line I still feel I can't settle to it. For a time the second sheet of quarto remains as blank as the first, until I fill it up with a much overdue line to the uncle who sent me a cutting from the *Sheffield Telegraph*. When I have also written to old Bill Bailey, and to the actor who wrote most charmingly to say he had lost the script I wrote for him, I sit staring at the fifth blank sheet with something very like alarm. I am not at all sure that it isn't alarm.

It *is* alarm.

In the house next door a child begins to cry. I record, for future use, the impression that it is only acting. It is crying without tears, but it is just as noisy as any other sort, so I go upstairs for my ear-plugs, and while I am up there I seize the opportunity (*a*) to pack up my laundry, which has been lying in the fender for some days, (*b*) to get a pair of comfortable, half-forgotten shoes out of my trunk, and, (*c*) to read an article called "If War Comes" in the newspaper wrapped round one of the shoes.

When I come down again my landlady is in the room, clearing away. I fall over the typewriter cover into my chair and gaze at the blank sheet for some moments before I look at her. She is looking at me. Her expression is one of concern. "Sorry, Mrs. Roberts," I say, snatching out my right-hand ear-plug—"what were you saying?"

Her voice and the wails from next door impinge harshly against my exposed drum.

"I couldn't remember whether you said half-tips or quarter-tips," she bawls—"so I didn't take them."

"Half-tips, Mrs. Roberts."

"I'll take them to-morrow."

She goes out.

I stare at the paper.

I remember that some famous writer once said that when he had nothing to write about he just began writing. It was no good waiting on inspiration. I think perhaps there is something in that.

I pound out a line in capital letters, right across the top of my blank sheet. The muffled hammering noise is comfortable.

HOW I WRITE AN ARTICLE

~~When people ask me how~~
~~To some folk the practice of literat~~

I write this for the benefit of those who have asked me about my methods but have seemed dis——

But this is where you came in.

GENTLEMEN PREFER BONDS

If you are observant, dear reader, you may have noticed an alarming development in the British attitude to money. I refer of course to the general unwillingness to accept it at its face value. A few years ago it was unthinkable that a gentleman should count his change. Openly, that is. Sometimes after pocketing it he would engage the shop-assistant in conversation until his thumb-nail had identified and approved each coin in the dark wash-leather recesses—but the atmosphere of trust and indifference was always carefully preserved. A male's carelessness in petty cash transactions and a sweet disorder in the dress-allowance of a female were the hall-marks of gentility.

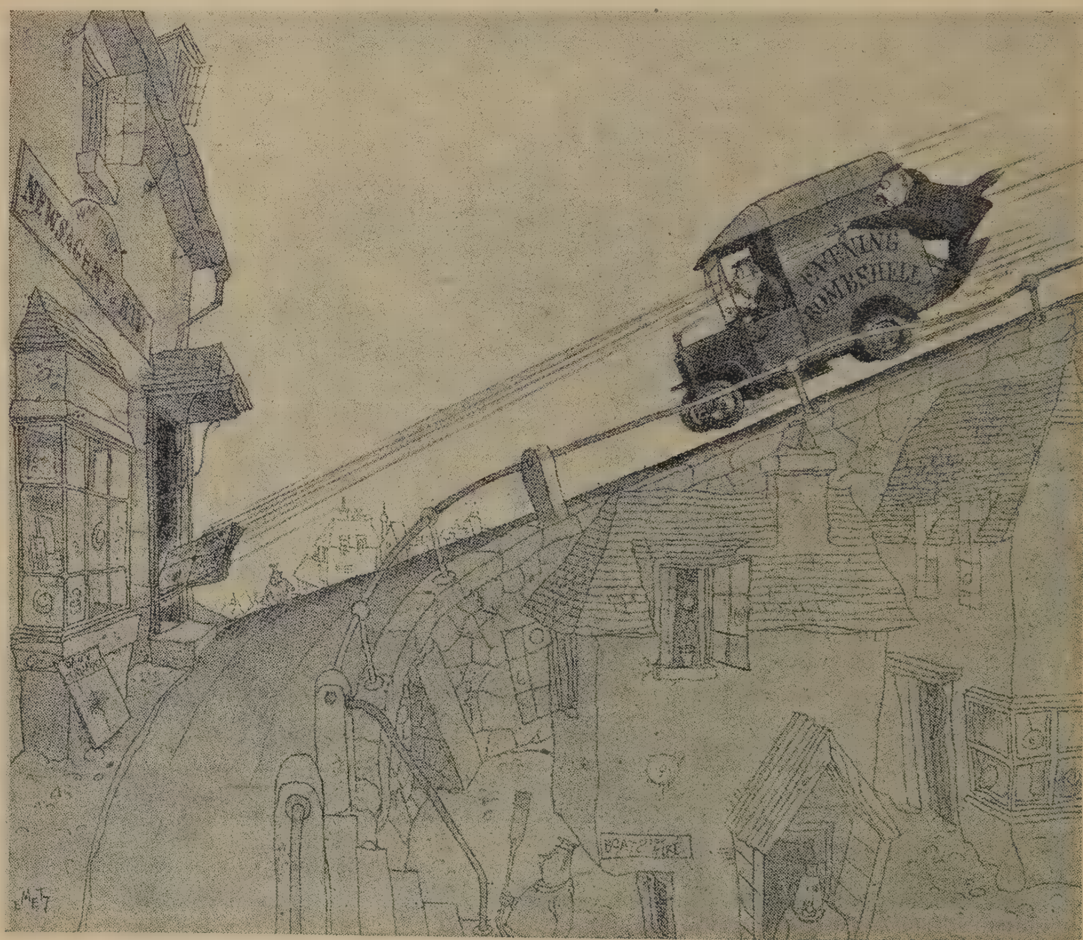
I have a coin before me as I write. It is a tarnished half-crown. The milled edge is worn smooth and the king's head is almost obliterated by pock-marks—dents made by thousands of eye-teeth. That coin is symbolic.

Watch a conductress on a London bus. She takes your coin, tests it for metal content, checks its date for historical inaccuracies

"And the word is Lieutenant-Colonel."

(forgers, I am told, make the most appalling howlers) and announces its denomination in a loud voice. In this way she assures herself of witnesses should a dispute arise. Then she looks at you very meaningly. Not until you mutter "Yes, half a crown," and so confirm the analysis does she proceed to the business of puncturing and issuing a ticket. Notes do not trouble her quite so much. A swift inspection against the light is usually enough. Genuine editions exhibit a standard water-mark, and as with all good works of fiction a thread runs through them.

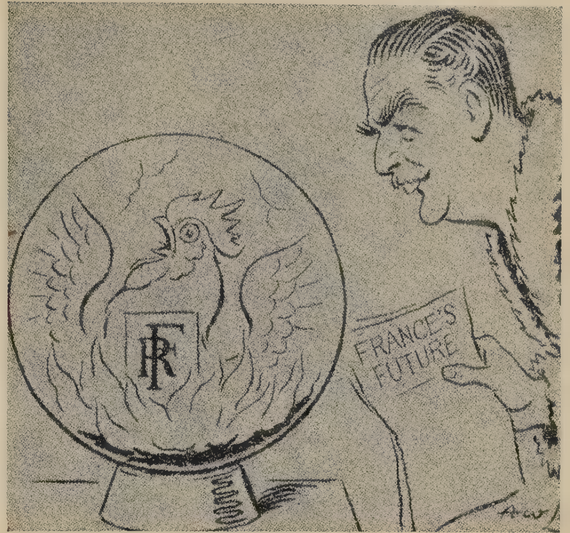
You can judge the length of a conductress's service by the way she tackles these problems. At first she tends to bite the notes and holds coins up to the light. There follows a period of acute lack of confidence. At this stage she stops the bus frequently in order to submit doubtful coins to the pavement test. Confidence



"Now—a steady run up—'old 'er smack on the target . . . *O.K.*—bombs gone!"

begins to return when she has been left behind a few dozen times by an irate driver. A really efficient conductress can identify a counterfeit coin by the colour of a passenger's cheeks.

Now watch a man withdrawing a sum of money from the bank. The cashier hands over the notes and the customer licks his middle finger and counts them methodically. To-day, only the debtor shrinks from this precaution.



PHŒNIX GALLICUS.

THE FOREIGN SECRETARY DIPS INTO THE FUTURE.

What does it all mean? That we are becoming more mercenary? I hope not. That we are losing our gentility? I am afraid so. In the last six months I have encountered only one person who could really be called a gentleman. He was the bald little back-bencher in the House of Commons who commented on the Financial Secretary to the Treasury's announcement that the War had cost £24,000,000,000 with the simple and gentlemanly words "Meaningless symbols."

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

When I had been on duty at the Ministry all Saturday night, and the man due to relieve me on Sunday morning at nine has warned me that he may not arrive until nine-fifteen because of the Sunday trains, and does not in fact arrive until nine-forty, I do not get back to my furnished rooms until about ten-forty-five.

I am not, as I squelch up the wet gravel path, in a mood to make jokes.

It was a surprise to me, then, last Sunday, when, as I reached my door at about eleven o'clock (because of the Sunday trains) a joke sprang to my lips unbidden. There, beside the sodden outside door-mat, were two pint bottles of milk. I decided that as I had to go in, and so had they, we might as well make up a party, the three of us.

It would save Mrs. Childs the trouble of fetching in those bottles, for one thing, but it would also give me the chance to say, as I put my stubbly morning face round the kitchen door, "I have come home with the milk." That was the joke that sprang unbidden to my lips.

It was not the sort of joke which would endanger the roof of the Holborn

Empire, I was perfectly aware of that, but it was a joke, and a joke-analyst would have found virtue in it. To say one thing and very obviously mean another is a form of joke long established, and there was additional fun in this one, (*a*) because of the roguish implication that I had spent the night in reckless gaiety, which was far from the truth, and (*b*) because I was not really coming home with the milk, which had come three hours ago: the milk was coming home with me.

Everything considered, I thought, it was not a bad joke.

My only misgiving—and it came upon me suddenly, even as I entered the house with the bottles—was that my landlady would not see it.

I recalled that six months before, when I had first called on Mrs. Childs and offered myself humbly as her paying guest, I had been uncertain whether her name was Child or Childs. I like to have these things right, so I asked her which; when she said "Childs" my irrepressible sense of fun bubbled up and I said "Thank you. I only wanted to know whether it was one Child or several." To which she replied, "Only one—a little girl, but she's really ever so good."

Remembering this black incident I decided as I approached the kitchen door that perhaps I had better not make my little joke after all. It would ruin my day to have it fall flat, and I had left it too late now to remould it into any more foolproof form. It was a pity, because, successfully cracked, it would have redeemed a bad start to my Sunday.

So all I said, when I handed the bottles round the door, avoiding the rapt gaze of Mrs. Childs's one little girl, who was sitting near the sink, playing with a flat-iron, was, "Here I am." That was the sort of remark with which I felt on perfectly safe ground with Mrs. Childs. And all she said was, "Oh, thanks ever so much. I see you've come home with the milk."

She didn't smile or anything—just put my half-rasher in the frying-pan; but her one little girl laughed like a drain.

H. J.'S DRAMATIC FRAGMENTS

The next Fragment sprang from a letter which reached me unsought and out of the blue, as some people vaguely but vividly say:

The En Tout Cas Scholastic Bureau,
Walworth.

Dear Sir,—We are gratified to remit the following Notice of Vacancy. Mr. Seth Sayce of Hoggs Farm College, near Ploompton, Lancs., requires immediately a master for General Subjects, to take detention periods with all forms and Commercial Civics with Lower V.B. Ability to undertake household repairs an asset. The post will be fully residential. Salary £100 per annum with deduction for keep, laundry and chapel collections. Excellent practice in class management: indoor

"My dear, it's raining: you MUST *allow George to—*

ring up for a taxi and—

when he finds it's hopeless—

to go out—

and—

look—

for—

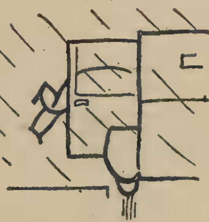
one—

and—

when—

he—

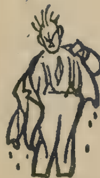
finally—



gets one—

only to find that you haven't been able to wait for it—

to go upstairs and—



get out of his wet clothes, completely baffled—

as to whether his grievance is against you or me or—

the rain or the taxis or just the war in general."

sanitation. Hoggs Farm College is a private boarding school holding its speech-day in July. Write promptly, but taking care of paragraphs and full-stops, to Mr. Seth Sayce, mentioning qualifications or equivalent.

On receipt of this I sent a stamped addressed envelope to the advertiser asking for his photograph, but all I received in return was a printed notice saying I should have a bedroom to myself on promotion to Senior status, and that a gown could be hired on arrival. Not wishing to pursue the matter further I typed Seth a haughty note in two colours and enclosed the following Fragment to show him what he had missed.

A GARLAND OF HYDRANGEAS FOR THE PUBLIC TRUSTEE

(*The scene is a viva voce examination.*)

PROFESSOR HOPP. What is the date of the *Dictionary of National Biography*?
MR. SYMPKYN. Outside my period. *Ultra vires.* No ball.
PROFESSOR HOPP. Pardon. Is sovereignty a good thing?
MR. SYMPKYN. No. I said in my papers that it was. I claim my change of mind is evidence of thoughtfulness and I should receive marks for it.
DR. WRENCH. Do you? Criticize Gibbon.
MR. SYMPKYN. He didn't take enough exercise.
MISS TAXTER. May I just pop in a little question? Who do you think is the noblest character in History?
MR. SYMPKYN. Harthacanute. Can I go now?
PROFESSOR HOPP. But we are only just getting to know you.
MR. SYMPKYN. An expert Board should be able to assess merit at a glance.

(*Exit.*)

PROFESSOR HOPP. Very scholarly and non-committal, I thought him.
DR. WRENCH. I suspect him of being fundamentally unsound—not a man whose footnotes one would trust.
MISS TAXTER. I must say I thought his map of the Peat Trade very stimulating. No one else marked both true and magnetic north.
MR. PITWAY. At my lectures he used to take notes in shorthand. It quite put one off one's mettle. That shows he's an accomplished kind of man.
MISS PAULDING. He's got a face like an emu.
PROFESSOR HOPP. Three for and two against. Let me see, that means a Second.

(*The next candidate appears.*)

MR. TRAGG. I challenge Dr. Wrench.
PROFESSOR HOPP. You can't.

MR. TRAGG. I've done it with juries.

PROFESSOR HOPP. But we are more like coroners. You can't do it to them.

DR. WRENCH. I claim first go. Who was Henry VIII?

MR. TRAGG. Anne of Cleves' husband.

DR. WRENCH. Only *en passant*.

MISS PAULDING. I am going to examine you in Economic History. When did Rent begin?

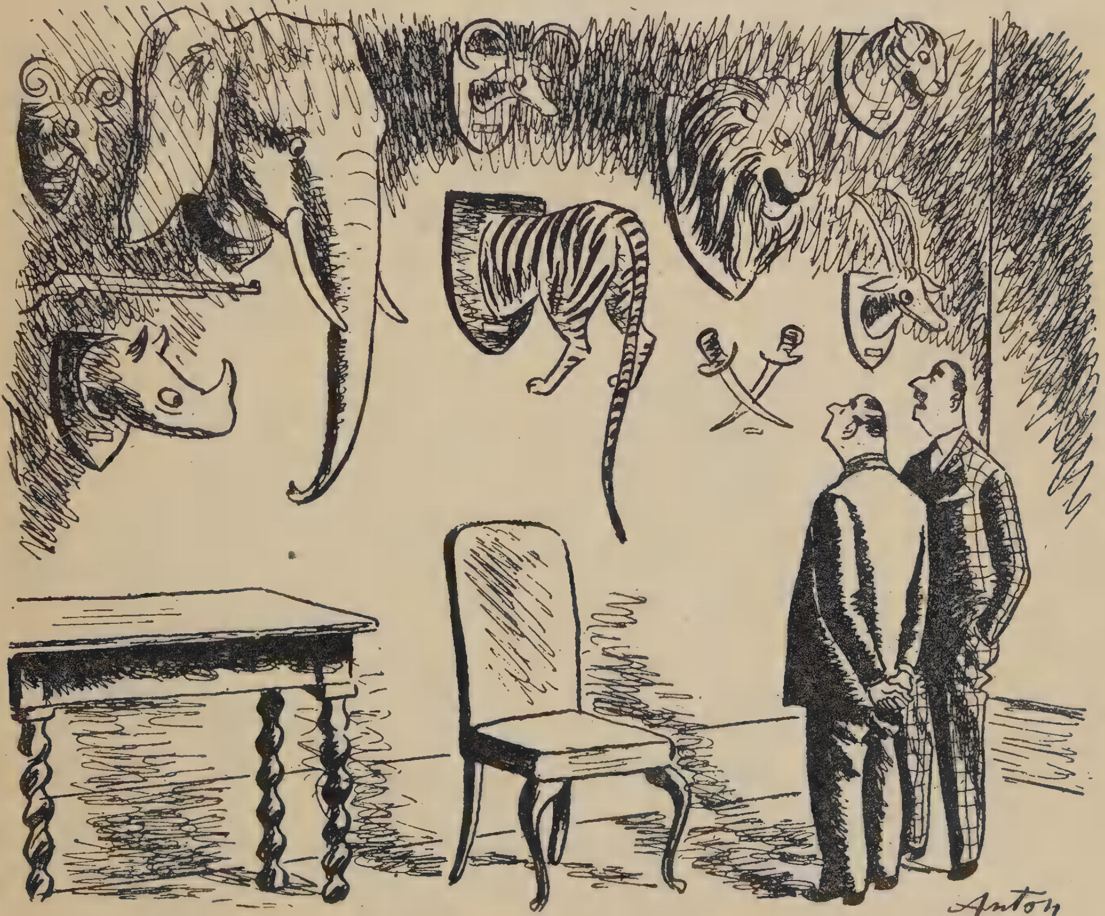
MR. TRAGG. By Roman times. The envious Casca made one.

MR. PITWAY. Quote a beautiful thought from your period.

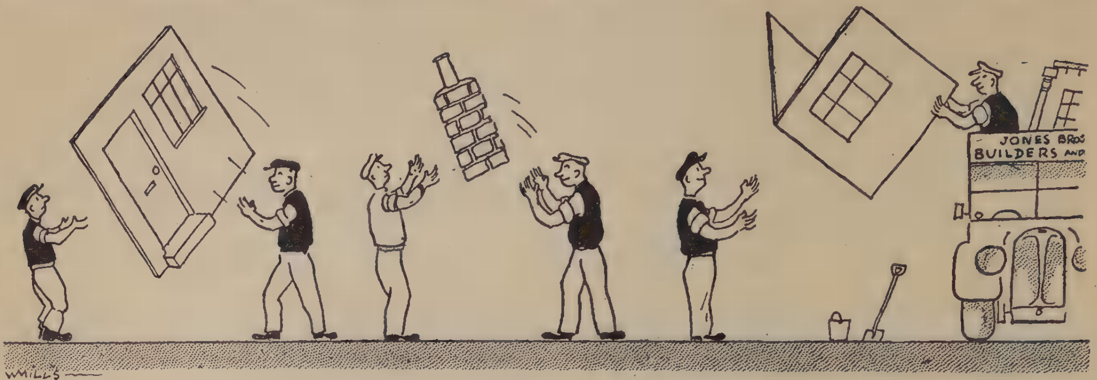
MR. TRAGG. I haven't got a period but I have got a *bête noire* and it is Dr. Wrench. I think he is worse than toadstools.

MR. PITWAY. Every historian . . .

(*Exit* MR. TRAGG *with umbrage.*)



"THAT ONE NEARLY GOT AWAY."



PROFESSOR HOPP. Let's put something insulting about him in the Class List. Let's give him a Third in Maths.

(*The proceedings are interrupted by a chattering mob of sightseers.*)

MISS PAULDING. Observe and ignore these sensation-hounds. Who is that repulsive person with the beard and the hat marked "Whoopee"?

HEDDA SKOLL. He is the Patriarch Potamos, but we all call him Ole Man River.

(*The entry of another candidate forestalls comment.*)

DOLLY McDREE. Oo, you do look frightfully clever. I suppose it's the hoods.

MISS PAULDING. What happened on July 15th, 1875?

PATRIARCH POTAMOS. It was my natal day. Money for jam.

MISS PAULDING. I was not addressing you. Sightseers should be seen and not heard.

PATRIARCH POTAMOS. I am assisting this distressed maiden. With my experience it should be easy to convert these tourists into a ravening mob. Be upright, therefore, lest worse befall.

PROFESSOR HOPP. I think we had better call it a First.

DOLLY McDREE. No you don't. What men look for in marriage is a nice comfortable Third.

MONSIEUR DUBOIS. *Un ménage à trois?*

MADAME DUBOIS. *Il a de l'esprit, mon Epaminonde. Il ira loin. Nous verrons. Parlez vous français?*

PROFESSOR HOPP. *Un tout petit peu, Madame. Comment vous portez-vous?*

DR. WRENCH. *Nom d'un pipe.*

FINIS

WOMEN DON'T REALIZE

I paced rapidly up and down the bedroom. Even a caged lion of many years' standing would have been jealous of my performance. "Aren't you ready *yet*? Your train goes at two-forty-seven."

"Nearly ready, darling. This is the last bit." Womanlike, she thereupon began to unpack the almost filled suit-case.

"You realize, don't you," I said between clenched teeth, "that you are about to go away and therefore packing: you have not just arrived and are therefore unpacking?"

"Quite, dear," she said absently. "I was just looking to see if I'd put my nail-scissors in . . ."

"Is that them on the dressing-table?"

"Oh, yes, darling. In that case I didn't put them in."

I raised my fists to heaven. "If you'd looked to see whether they were outside first, you'd have known you hadn't put them in without having . . ."

I found I was talking to empty air. She's disappeared into the sitting-room, to return a moment later with a library book which she tried to fit into the suit-case in various positions.

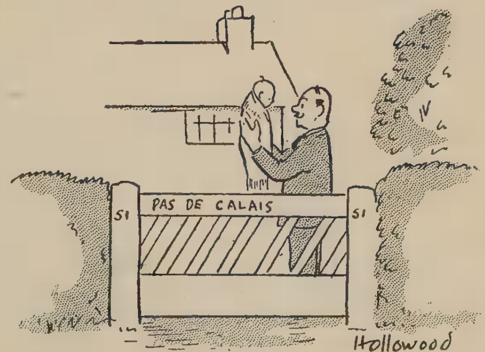
I resumed my pacing. By now even the doyen of all caged lions could have learnt something from a work-out with me.

She finally took the book out and put it in a mackintosh pocket.

"Are you ready *now?*" I said. "Of course you'll never get the two-forty-seven, but with luck you won't have to wait long for another."

It seemed to strike her for the first time that I was impatient. "Darling, why are you panicking like this? We've still nearly half an hour to get to Paddington."

I exploded. "Do you realize that this is war-time? Do you realize that the train will be crowded with people going to see evacuees, people going to fetch evacuees back because the flying bombs are not over, people going to unbanned areas because they're unbanned at last? Why, you'd hardly get on the train if you were at the station this very minute. And it'll take us at least twenty-five minutes in the tube . . ."



"But we'll take a taxi and then you'll have ten minutes to find me a seat. I've got my ticket, anyway." She began leisurely to wrap a pair of bedroom slippers in tissue-paper.

I exploded again. "Do you realize that this is a quiet residential neighbourhood, and even in the heart of the West End there's hardly a taxi to be had? This is war-time, I tell you."

"Oh, we'll get a taxi," she said calmly. "Don't *panic*, or I'll never finish packing."

Except for looking at my watch, clenching and unclenching my fists, sitting down, tapping my foot, looking at my watch, getting up, striding from room to room, and looking at my watch, I kept calm and collected for the next ten minutes till she said: "There, ready now. We'll just do it nicely." I refrained from pointing out that even in peace-time it'd be a close thing. I'd have plenty of time to do that at the station after she's missed her train.

Outside the flat I headed briskly for the tube when I heard her voice: "Taxi!"

A taxi had just set down opposite and was putting his flag up. We got in.

I said, "Well, of all the luck!" She merely said composedly, "There you are, you see." I tried to explain that it had been a one-in-a-million chance, but all she said was, "I told you we'd get one."

We reached Paddington with two minutes in hand. It was a seething mass of humanity. Seizing her by the wrist I and the suit-case became a formidable spearhead of attack. Strong men were flung aside like chaff: women went down like ninepins: I trampled children underfoot. I ploughed onward gasping "Pardon me!" to long past and barely conscious victims.

Doors were slamming as we made the platform. "Never mind your third-class ticket," I panted. "Get in anywhere."

But she couldn't. Carriage after carriage were packed to overflowing: the corridors were a solid mass. Twice I managed to open a door and each time half a dozen people fell out on us, cursing ferociously.

The whistle blew. We were at the moment opposite a first-class compartment with a large Army officer filling the window. The officer pulled his head in and sat down and I snatched the door open.

As I bundled her and suit-case inside I heard the officer say: "I'm afraid my friend hasn't been able to make it; you'd better take his seat."

And as the train started to move I saw her sink gracefully into a corner first-class seat, back to the engine, which she prefers. I just had time to thrust a pound note in at her to pay the excess fare.

I heard later of her safe arrival: ". . . had a lovely journey except that the train was nine minutes late, but I suppose that must be expected in war-time. Thanks for the pound: the train was so crowded the ticket inspector couldn't get along to our compartment, so I'll hang on to it. I can't think why you made all that fuss about missing the train. In spite of your panic we did it nicely . . ."

You know, it's no use trying to explain. Women just don't realize.

TO WINTER

(To be a Green One)

Swiftly the time draws near
When winter, cold and drear,
Will march upon us here
  With savage stride,
Soon will sharp winds begin
To cleave one to the skin
And try, meseems, to win
  Their way inside.

And, Winter, 'tis to you
That I address these few
Soft words, though not, it's true,
  Hoping for much,
Yet should they help to move
Your better self, 'twould prove
That, somewhere hidden, you've
  A decent touch.

In normal times, no doubt
You'll own, we're pretty stout
Of heart and stick things out;
  A bulldog breed
We stoke the fire, nor spare
Cash on our underwear,
While the bright plumber's care
  Helps us at need.

But now, as well you know,
When the rude tempests blow
Our few sad coupons go
  But little way,
We sit morose and numb
Sighing for men who plumb
And coal that doesn't come,
  Ah, well-a-day.

Wherefore, things being thus,
If you'd be generous
To the shorn lamb (that's us)
  'Twould be well done;
Balmy the air and sweet;
None of your frost and sleet;
And, to make things complete,
  Give us some sun.

WHY ARGUMENTS GET HEATED

"Topics are very hot places where you can't keep cool."

Schoolboy's definition.

December, 1944

OUR OPEN FORUM: WORKING POLICY

Mr. William Curlew Noke, who makes this somewhat sweeping contribution to our series of chats on Reconstruction, has often disappointed his followers. A useful landscape gardener and a bit of a bully, he climbed to success with startling rapidity. At Morgan and Tuffnell's he quickly won the confidence and Christmas "sweep" of the packing shop. At Blaggard and Co.'s he froze assets and watered stock with remarkable skill. His first false move—the substitution of window-envelopes for pay-packets at Corbishley and Feathered's—undermined his prestige and rocked the pedestal on which he had perched for so long. His publications include: "To Halifax with Gentleman John!" "From Second-Slip Looking South," "No Bonus for Miss Glandish—a Tale of the Border Wars."

MY friends, I want to apologize in advance for any inaccuracies and verbal slips that may creep into my address. When I was asked to contribute to this series I assented gladly and rushed off to buy the Government's off-White Paper on Employment Policy and Sir William Averidge's *Free Employment in a Full Society.* I should have done neither. I had forgotten that it is now the recognized practice of H.M.S.O. and private publishers to issue "digests" of their meatier reports as soon as enough of the originals have been put to salvage with their pages uncut.

I studied both documents in their unexpurgated and unabbreviated versions. It was a love of labour. After a dozen careful readings of each my head was in a whirl. I found myself unable to distinguish between negative unemployment and mere employment, between non-public disinvestment and private spending. I confused Mr. Ben Nevis with Sir Bevin Williams. I had the most horrible nightmares. I am a sick man.

However, I will do my best.

Before the war the beverage number of unemployment persons in Britain was —let us call it x. This large figure was made up as follows:

(1) Hard core of unemployment;
(2) Frictional unemployment;
(3) Seasonal unemployment;
(4) Quasi-unemployment;
(5) Unemployment resulting from lack of work (the total volume of employable labour, employed and unemployed, less the volume of employable labour gainfully employed).

I propose to discuss none of these in turn.

In his report Sir William Averidge states that the chief cause of unemployment is a deficiency of spending. If this is so a simple solution immediately suggests

itself—increase the purchasing-power of the community by increasing employment and (therefore) the number of wage-earners. Is this one of those simple truths always overlooked by the professional politician? Or is it an unwarranted over-simplification of a legitimately complicated business?

I wonder.

You may be sure that I shall give the idea the most careful scrutiny before I reject it and file it under "Sound but unworkable."

The cynics have suggested that since there is no unemployment in war-time the answer to the post-war problem is perpetual war. This shameful notion is not worth the paper it is written on. It is unthinkable that the war should be continued for one moment after the cessation of hostilities.

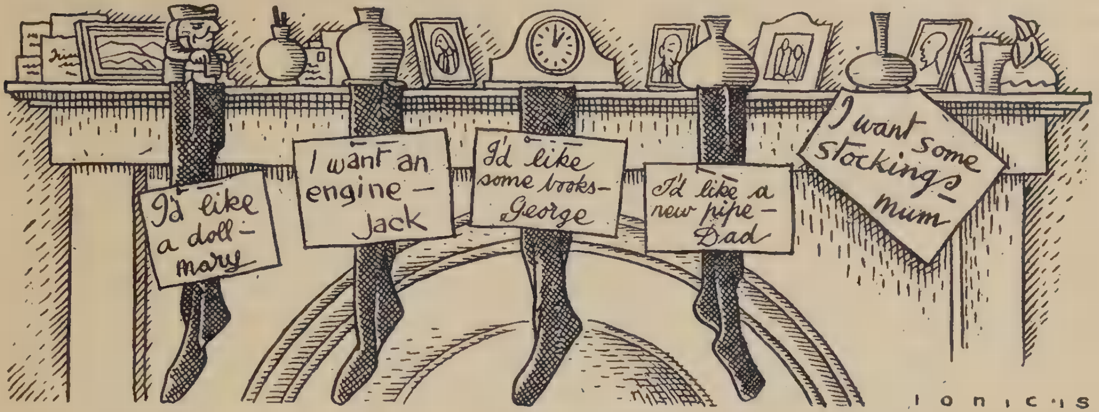
Does this mean that there is *no* solution? Not a bit of it. Mr. Bill Bevis has told us that there will be work for all for several years after the war. Those several years will coincide roughly with the period known as the transition. Could nations threatened by peace and depression go to war by hearsay and propaganda, without bloodshed or unrest, until a negotiated peace—it would have to be negotiated, I'm afraid—ushered in a prosperous transition?

And now, please go on talking among yourselves about these questions. You will—won't you?

INTEGRATION IN FRANCE

I am on an integrated staff, which means that my boss is American, and his boss is British, and so on up to Eisenhower. After that I don't know what happens, and anyhow I am not discussing religion. I do not mind my boss being an American, because the feature of bosses is their bossiness and not their race. What nationality is a toothache? Does lumbago have an accent? My own immediate inferior concurs; or, rather, being an American, he says "Check." If he were British he would say "Couldn't agree more," because that has now passed into the language of staff officers (Br.) to the virtual exclusion of other utterance.

This being a very large staff, it integrates the two nations, both sexes and all four services—Navy, Army, Air Force and Civil Affairs. There is, therefore, a high incidence of the unexpected. They tell you "You should see Smith about that"; and Smith might turn out to be a Group Captain (Br.) or a Master Sergeant (U.S.) or a Junior Commander (in which case I do not mind whether she is (Br.) or (U.S.)). Another unexpected thing is salutes: you have to be ready to cope with anything, from the direct personal sort, for you alone, of the American sentry, through the nose-flattening ritual of the Royal Marine, to the latent social implications of the ceremony as practised by the more youthful A.T.S. But you can't be sure whether you are the particular combination of nationality and service that is on any given individual's saluting list, so you can't be ready anyhow. It's difficult.



Then this matter of uniforms. The Navy is stable, except that every two years or so the Wrens produce a new cap or take to rough crude duffel-coats or some other provocative subtlety. The Air Force remains faithful to its two variations —those in R.A.F. uniform and fighter pilots. The British Other Rank allows himself nothing more than descending variations in spit-and-polish. But the Americans have a sense of the sartorial dramatic that is perplexing to a degree. Your G.I. (this-war for "doughboy") is walking out—pressed collar, pressed tie, pressed pants all proclaim the practised man-about-town; he is at work, fixing a telephone wire—meticulously dirty boots, carefully deformed cap, accurately greased overalls show that he is not the same person—this time he's sure tough. And he has several other metamorphoses to hand to suit weather, duty or location, or to prevent recognition by the semi-integrated.

All this leads to flexibility. Mental flexibility. But with the best will in the world I am not succeeding in making my tummy flexible enough to be fully integrated. I am not, for instance, succeeding in drinking coffee with and between breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner; with the soup, with the meat, with the cake called dessert; not with all of them always. I have difficulty in using sweetened fruit salad as an *hors d'œuvre.* But my main disintegration is breakfast (U.S.). The waiters (Fr.) stand no nonsense at breakfast (U.S.). I sit down, and forthwith a tumblerful of tomato-juice is thrust at me. While I am drinking it an unrecognizable but sweetened semolinoid cereal is issued and obediently inhaled. And then comes the big moment. A plate containing a piece of soft toast, sections of spiced sausage and two flap-jacks appears. While I am identifying and locating the components the waiter attacks from the port quarter with hot maple syrup, sluicing it generously and impartially over everything. The Major (U.S.) opposite me waters at the mouth and passes me butter for the mapled flap-jacks, coffee descends from the starboard bow, and my left hand, groping blindly for support, grips the cake called dessert. Everything in fact is now integrated. But something within me tells me

I cannot make it, and I take suitable avoiding action, partially restoring the situation later in the morning by eating some dry biscuits if I have any dry biscuits.

And if anyone is preparing a triumphal feast (Br.) for my return it is to consist of salt porridge, salt kippers, bitter marmalade and dry toast. Negative coffee. And one by one, each after its kind, as God made them. Not integrated.

STRANGE SCENE IN CONSULTING ROOM

"The trouble with me is," I said, "that I can't drink gin."

The doctor raised his eyebrows, pursed his lips, dipped his pen in the ink and wrote a few words in a sort of book.

"Do you want to drink gin?" he asked.

"Yes, Doctor," I said.

He swivelled round in his chair, gave me a hard look, said "H'm!" twice, took hold of my wrist and held it absent-mindedly for a few seconds, swivelled away again and added something very short to what he had already written; in fact I think he only crossed a "T."

"You forgot your watch," I said.

"And don't forget to bring it back."

"Eh?" he said. "Watch?"

"When you were feeling my pulse," I explained.

"Bless my soul!" he cried, throwing himself back in his chair and laughing heartily. "A doctor can tell whether the pulse-beat is regular without bothering with watches. You're thinking of nurses in hospitals."

"Listen, Doctor," I said. "Do you ever go clean smack over backwards when you do that? I mean, do you?"

"When I do what?"

"When you throw yourself back in your chair and laugh heartily."

A dull flush crept slowly up his large white (or middle-white, as pig-fanciers say) face. Born in the deep creases about his mouth and chin, it spread irresistibly over the pendulous

cheeks, lapped the eyes so closely that one almost expected to hear a slight hissing noise, and finally burnt itself out in the thin stubble above his temples.

A bit of weather-lore from the *Georgics*, neatly translated from the original by Conington or Mackail perhaps, and a favourite of mine at school, came back from the past.

"When the face of the moon is suffused with a ruddy blush," I quoted, "wind may be expected."

He took it amiss.

"Get out of here!" he said. "What the devil do you mean by coming in here and behaving like—like a dragged-up popinjay? Impertinent scoundrel! If I had my way——"

He was trembling all over, and his face which had looked so hearty a moment since was now as white (or off-white, as interior decorators say) as the ceiling. I was alarmed at his appearance, and said so.

"Doctor," I said, "I am alarmed at your appearance."

"Never mind my appearance!" he shouted. "Get out of my consulting room this instant!"

For a brief moment I thought he was going to commit mayhem—and mayhem, in all probability, of a particularly horrible kind. That is the worst of doctors. When they have murdered you they cut you up skilfully and send the pieces to what are called accommodation addresses. This is the sort of thing the B.M.A. would hotly deny, but they are a biased lot.

Now nobody wants to be sent to an accommodation address, still less to several simultaneously. I did my best to soothe him. I warned him of the danger of over-excitement at his age and poured a little water down the back of his neck from a handy carafe.

"The usual guff about Sub-Section 253, Allocation of Raw Materials Order, Board of Trade . . ."

"Lucky this carafe was handy," I pointed out.

He made no reply either to this or to a number of other observations of a similar nature. I accordingly formed the opinion that he was deaf, and I thereupon seized his stethoscope which was about his neck and thrust it into his ears. I then took hold of the business end of the thing and blew down it.

This caused his cheeks to puff out, a thing I have never seen before or since.

"Are you receiving me O.K.?" I shouted.

It was at once apparent from his expression that he was receiving me quite O.K., and I therefore decided to come without more ado to the object of my visit.

"You may be wondering," I said, tapping my pipe out on his head, "what is the purpose of this call, and why my behaviour has been from first to last a little unorthodox. Ah! I see that you *have* been speculating on this matter. Well, the fact is I want you to certify me."

"Certify you?" he whispered.

"Yes, Doctor. Certify me good and proper."

"I can't," he cried, and there was real agony in his voice. "It takes two to do that."

"I'D ASK YOU IN FOR POT LUCK, OLD BOY, IF IT DIDN'T MEAN THE FOWLS GOING SHORT OF SCRAPS."

"Well, here we are," I said.

"Two doctors, you fool."

"Oh, I see. Then it's no go. Not that it matters, because as a matter of fact that wasn't the real reason why I came to see you. The real reason was that I had an argument with a friend about something that came in a book called *Bad Blood Butters No Parsnips*, a murder story actually. There was a doctor in it and——"

"If you don't go within one minute," he said, putting out a hand for the phone, "I shall call a policeman."

"You can't," I said. "He's outside, guarding my bicycle. Well, this doctor got angry about something and said to another character, 'Get out of my consulting-room this instant!' and we argued about whether a man would ever say anything so ponderous as 'my consulting-room' when he was in a rage. *I* said he would simply say 'Get out of here,' or something like that, but my friend (who is outside, as a matter of fact, guarding the policeman) maintained that he might easily say the whole thing in full. We were unable to agree, and bets were laid. The matter could only be settled by experiment. I now find, to my surprise, that both expressions are used and the bet is consequently off. Nevertheless, I should like to thank you most warmly for your co-operation."

It took him some time to cool down, but in the end he was really very nice about it. He said it was a monstrous affront. Then he said such conduct might have been excusable in a man half my age. Then he said he had never heard of such a thing in all his life, adding that he had a good mind to have me up for assault. And finally he decided to see the funny side of the thing, and threw himself back in his chair, laughing heartily.

I didn't stay to pick him up. I was afraid that, seeing him lying there upside-down on the floor, I might be tempted to tell him the *real* reason for my call. So I went away quickly; and now he will never know.

Neither, for that matter, will you.

SPELLING

It would be statistically interesting to find out how many people feel superior to wireless spelling-bees because they know they can spell better, and how many feel the opposite way, which is also superior but only because they are safely out of reach. This is not the sort of thing we are ever likely to know, because then we should know how many good spellers there are and how many bad, and that has always been a problem to sociologists. All they can work out is that there are more good spellers than the good spellers would like to think, though enough bad spellers to make the bad spellers not quite so interesting as the bad spellers hope. Another thing sociologists have worked out is that the wireless revived this form of entertainment because, knowing the effect spelling-bees have always had on even the

least human of us, it hoped thus to restore to the public some of that unjustified self-confidence which has been rather knocked about by points and rations and other restrictions. However, this has little to do with the question of spelling except to show that it is very subjective as well as statistical.

Why, we may ask, can some people spell and others not? Well, one theory is that the very good spellers exist to keep a check on the language, while the very bad spellers are there to mess it up the way they would if the very good spellers were not there to keep a check on it. Thus both sides feel useful. This is not a very satisfactory theory because it does not explain why people belong to the side they do, but it is a step in the right direction. Now for some facts about the different grades of spellers in the world. First there are the very good spellers, or those people who can spell everything. Somehow they stand out from their fellows; they carry a mental aura which has accrued from weary years of being asked how to spell words they thought everyone, even the people asking them, knew. They are considered vaguely literary, or likely to have read *Paradise Lost*, but not likely to leave the address off a parcel. They are also likely to have very small writing, perhaps because the extra effort of reading it would make a word spelt wrong an anti-climax. Next we have the people who cannot spell at all. These also are easily distinguishable. They are always stopping in the middle of writing a letter to ask someone else how to spell some word or other. There are two interesting points about this process; one is that the word is never anything but extraordinarily simple, by which I mean spellable by anyone else in the room; the other is that anyone else in the room find this one word quite fascinating because it is a clue to what the letter is about, and there is nothing more mysterious than what someone else is writing when we are not destined to read it. These people also carry a slight mental aura which, however, is none of their doing but the result of being condescended to every now and then ever since they can remember. They are not considered literary unless they are, when their inability to spell makes them even more so; and on the whole they have kind hearts.

I have said nothing about the stages between spelling everything and spelling nothing at all. This is because, to the public, there is no stage between. You either can or cannot. Nevertheless many of those whom the world takes to be good spellers, that is those who take themselves to be, have faulty patches, notably very long names of flowers. They get round this by not using very long names of flowers when writing letters, except when they have to, when they will laugh it off by explaining that they are now about to write a word they cannot spell; and somehow this seems, to them, to make them better spellers than ever. Another word which a good speller can seem even better by spelling wrong is "embarrass," over which the world makes such a fuss about it needing two "r's" and not one that good spellers can be bluffed into thinking they would spell it wrong if they spelt it right, and thus fall, as they think, into line with one "r." I mean, this is how they explain things when they find they have been spelling it wrong for years. But over such

words really good spellers show their quality in convincing themselves they are wrong and in never slipping up again, or not often. But good-medium spellers, people who are good spellers to themselves and medium spellers to the outside world, have not this power of self-conviction, probably because they do not notice anything wrong. As for bad-medium spellers, these are the people who are bad spellers to the outside world and medium to themselves, except when they want a bit of publicity, so that really they count as just plain bad.

It cannot be denied that the English language is very difficult to spell. I mean, to deny it would take half the fun away from those who manage it; and all the fun from those who do not. Nevertheless it cannot be denied either that dictionaries do spell things all right, so that all bad spellers have to do is look their words up there. But this is where bad spellers fall down. They may look the word up, and tell themselves that all they have to do now is remember. What they do not realize, and what good spellers could have told them all along, is that a word in print in the dictionary has no magic power, and bad spellers, who rely for their kudos on forgetting how words look in print, are going to forget it again right away, just as they did last time. Dictionaries are thus of little use to bad spellers, except at the time. Their main use is to settle disputes, when antagonists will as often as not find that both are right; dictionaries allowing what aggressive spellers think to be extraordinary latitude by sometimes giving the wrong version of a word as well as the right, or, in certain cases, the right as well as the wrong.

"The next gift is for Private Wickens."

It would be strange if spelling difficulties had not left some visible mark on the world; and so they have, on blotting-paper. Traditional blotting-paper, that is blotting-paper which no longer blots, often has all sorts of words written forwards. These are the words letter-writers were not sure of spelling until they tried writing them in different ways, when they found they were no surer even then. Students of human nature may deduce that when two versions of a word occur regularly and alternately on blotting-paper, one right and one wrong, then the writer is not really a bad speller, just human, and had a fifty-fifty chance of choosing the right version. But when three or four versions crop up, some hopeless, then here is a really bad speller at work; unless of course it is some long-named flower, when it is a good speller having a try-out before laughing it off.

I must say a word about surnames. We can all spell our own surnames, but what even the best spellers among us cannot always do is spell other people's. The trouble is that to most people each kind of surname is spelt one way only, and that is the shape in which it first appeared to them. This seems unreasonable to those who thus get their own names spelt wrong, because naturally to the people a name belongs to theirs is the only possible way of spelling such a name, but it is not a bit unreasonable to those spelling it wrong. There are even people who are influenced by early contact with, say, names not having a final "e." It is instinctive to such people never to put a final "e" to any name unless told to, and perhaps not even then. Psychologists say that the position is a bit hopeless, but that if human nature would cast prejudice aside and assess each surname as encountered at its face value, that is, as having the sort of spelling it seems to warrant, things would be no better; and that, they say, is typical of the whole situation in the spelling world.

THE DICKENS OF A TIME

Scrooge pressed his face eagerly against the window-pane. There was only one very little piece of window-pane against which he could press his face, but you may be sure that he pressed it very hard and that his mouth watered at the rare good things he saw inside. There were plums as big as melons, and oranges as big as footballs, and dates and figs enough to stock an Arabian caravan, and fruits preserved in crystals of sugar, like the rime on a frosty morning, and bottles of brandy and wine made of black currants that winked at him saucily, and in the middle of them all a placard with a notice in big letters which said:

PLEASE KNOCK AT THE SIDE DOOR

But behind them all, he could see an evil face grinning at him, a face so repulsive that he only gave one look at it before he turned away.

And when he went on to the next shop, which was a poulterers', he saw a turkey as big as an ostrich.

Oh! you never beheld a turkey as big as that one! It could never have walked on two legs, that turkey; it must have been mounted on scaffolding poles that ought to have been used for the repair of bombed houses. But behind the turkey was another evil face grinning, almost more repulsive, if that was possible, than the first face.

"Come along," said the Dark Ghost of Christmas Present. "You're merely wasting my time."

NEW YEAR IRRESOLUTIONS.

"What have I been seeing, Spirit?" said Scrooge, as the Spectral Hand pointed him onwards.

"Thou hast been seeing the Black Market," said the Spirit, "and there are men all over this town who have been tempted by it to destroy their country and to impede the War Effort of the Allied Nations. Wouldst thou see more?"

"Just a peep," said Scrooge, and in a moment he was standing in a brightly lit room listening to the jolly laughter of his nephew Fred, and the still jollier laughter of Fred's wife, his niece by marriage.

"KEEP YOUR EYE ON THAT NICHE UP THERE. THAT SAINT IN IT HAS GOT A TOMMY-GUN."

Oh, what fun and games they were having in that brightly lit room, partly dimmed-out from the street, and how often amid the roars of revelry the hot steaming bowl of gin and lemons went round the party. There must have been twenty of them at least in that night-club, and every now and then one of them would hold out a glass and drink a toast.

"Here's to poor old Scro-o-o-ge!" they would cry. "What a pleasant evening he must be having to-night!"

He could not repress a shudder as he looked at them.

"Take me away, Spirit," he said. "Take me away. I can bear no more."

Again the Ghost sped on, through the dismal streets, until they reached the melancholy tavern where Scrooge was wont to eat his melancholy dinner, and where the melancholy waiter had given him the melancholy bill of fare.

"Is there anything on?" said Scrooge in a melancholy voice, for he saw that nearly everything on the list had been scored out with a deep black pencil-mark.

"Cold pressed beef," said the melancholy waiter, "and cold boiled potatoes."

"Splendid," cried Scrooge, rubbing his hands. "And bring me a lukewarm bishop of rum punch to wash it down."

"Come orf it," said the melancholy waiter. "Don't try to be funny with me," and he went and fetched a small tankard of a melancholy fluid which was doing its humble best to pretend to be beer.

"Hurry up!" said the Ghost of Christmas Present. "There is much to be done before I have finished with you."

And suddenly Scrooge found himself back in his chamber in the gloomy suite of rooms, in the lowering pile of buildings up the yard, where long ago he had sat drinking port with old Marley and discussing what gifts they would give the needy and oppressed and the sick and poor on Boxing Day.

Most of the windows were broken and pieces of cloth flapped in them and part of the ceiling had fallen down, and there was only one piece of coal on the fire, which was unlit, because merry Bob Cratchit had taken the week off to go down to Brighton with his merry family.

Scrooge tried to light the fire with his petrol lighter, but it would not work, so he gave up the attempt and sat down at his desk.

"Get out your ledger and your pass-book and your accounts," said the Ghost of Christmas Present, "and when you have been through them I shall leave you, but you must expect another visitor."

The slow hours passed, the clock struck twelve, and then one, and at the strike of two the Spirit vanished. Scrooge sat dismally waiting as the shadows thickened around him, until he heard a step on the creaking stairs, and then a loud knock on the door.

A new Spectre came in, and oh! he was the strangest apparition that could possibly be imagined, for he had a beautiful shining face, and held an olive branch in his hand, and his clothes were made entirely of the flags of the United Nations, all woven together with stars and stripes, and crowns and hammers, and crosses and sickles in red and white and blue, and round his waist was a lustrous belt composed of miniature ornaments and ships, from which shone bright jets of light that illuminated the murky room.

"Who art thou, Spectre?" said Scrooge in a quavering voice, "and what wantest thou with me?"

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come," said the Phantom. "How much have you saved this year by scrimping and paring, and going ragged and hungry, and cutting down expenses, and spending nothing, except on worthy objects, and presents and tips and allowances, and devoting all your time to working and sitting on committees, instead of carousing in taverns and making merry on Christmas fare?"

Scrooge looked at his accounts and told him.

"Man of patriotism and good-will," said the Ghost, "I have come to give thee this."

And he left a small piece of paper on old Scrooge's desk, and vanished as swiftly as he had appeared.

Scrooge looked at the piece of paper. It was a Post-War Credit for several pounds. He fainted away for sheer joy, and remembered nothing until he woke up at the postman's knock in the morning, and a stream of bills, circulars, appeals and letters from the Commissioners of Inland Revenue tumbled happily helter-skelter, pell-mell, into the room.

SAID THE SOLDIER

"When I return from the East,"
Said the soldier,
"I'll step along to 'The Drover,'
Where farming folk
May drink and smoke
When the day's work is over."

"I'll tell them tales of the East,"
Said the soldier,
"Which they won't listen to,
So busy they'll be
A-telling me
What the Home Guard used to do."

"But I shan't worry at all,"
Said the soldier,
"Which of us tells the tale,
As long as I gets
My cigarettes
And a tankard of brown ale."

THE PHONEY PHLEET

H.M.S. Dactyl

George Roland was a poet who
Considered that the Navy would
Be rather more conducive to
His muse than, say, for instance, could
The Army, N.F.S., or R.
A.F., and I agree thus far.

But later on when he was made
The captain of the *Dactyl* he
Permitted his civilian trade
To influence his work, *i.e.*,
He wrote his signals out in verse—
Pentameter, or even worse.

To give you an example, when
He'd sunk a U-boat, he'd say "For
The First Sea Lord. We're merry Men
Because we've bagged a Jerry." Or
To take another case, he'd wire,
"The outlook's dire. The Ship's on fire."

Technique of course was faultless and
A signal never went without
His checking closely that it scanned
And that the rhymes were pure. About
The latter point he was precise;
No signalman made false rhymes twice.

"Come along in and get warm."

In spite—in fact, perhaps, because
Of this he did quite well; and by
And large H.M.S *Dactyl* was
The apple of their Lordships' eye
Until that Saturday the 1st
Of June on which the bubble burst.

That afternoon the Twenty-third
Sea Lord was paying visits in
The *Dactyl's* base, and sent George word
That he would come and have some gin
On board. This ranks, you understand,
Not lower than a Royal Command.

George thought he ought to make some sign
Of welcome, and sat down to write
A tactful signal. "Mighty fine!
You're welcome an' You'll stay the night.
Assume you can." He signed it, then
He gave it to the signalmen.

Trained to poetic purity,
They turned the heat on every word,
And, sighting the apostrophe,
Were quite convinced that George had erred.
They changed the "an" at once to "and,"
And, naturally, "can" to "canned."

How sad to see the fulgent star
Arise, grow bright and then expire!
How sad to change "R.N.V.R."
For lesser pendants like "Esquire"—
To swop the hat for one less chic!
How . . . And, in George's case, how quick!

January, 1945

A CHRISTMAS MEMORY

THE time has now come when some at least of the facts concerning the arrival of a cockerel at this house on the 22nd of December can be made public.

Briefly, we had given up hope of a turkey or goose and had ordered through devious but legal channels a common or garden chicken. On the morning of the 22nd, Mrs. G——, the principal agent in this matter, stated categorically but with regret that no chicken would be forthcoming. "I wish I could have managed it," she said, "but you know how it is." We said we knew very well how it was, and no doubt the butcher would be sending a nice piece of pork. Then we went straight home and rang up Mr. S——, a man of influence and resource, whom we ought to have thought of before.

"A chicken?" he said. "Not too easy at this time of day. Now if you'd said a goose——"

We rectified the omission and in a few moments the thing was done. "What a blessing," we said, as we put the receiver back, "that the chicken fell through."

After lunch Mr. G—— arrived triumphant with a cockerel. "Managed it after all," he explained with an enormous grin. "Mrs. G—— was set on not letting you down if she could help it. And by a bit of luck . . ."

"Providential," we murmured. "Well, thank you *so* much, Mr. G——. This has made *all* the difference. A very happy Christmas to you."

"All the best for forty-five," said Mr. G——, and pushed off, whistling.

"Well," I said, "that was all very fine and matey, but what on earth are we going to do with this frightful creature now we've got it?"

"Eat it of course," they said; "for lunch to-morrow."

"But it's covered with feathers."

This statement, which did no more than point out the obvious, put them all in a fine state of confusion. The house rang with cries of despair. "Oh, dear! I do think they might have——" "I wonder if the milkman——?" "Surely one has a right to expect——" "Isn't there some way of dipping them in boiling water?" And so on. Pessimism and futile counsel jostled each other in a manner more fitting for a Greek chorus than an English household, as I did not hesitate to point out.

When it had gone on long enough I stilled the clamour with an imperious wave of the bird, which I still held upside-down by the legs in the proper manner.

"Why all the fuss?" I asked. "*I* will pluck this fowl."

This for some reason caused more fuss than ever. But in the end I managed to

"That was the headquarters of the underground movement."

quieten the womenfolk and send the children to the nursery. Then I issued a few simple directions.

"Let a fire be lit in the dining-room," I said. "Let the smaller pieces of furniture be removed and let dust sheets be spread over the heavier pieces. The carpet is to be rolled back as though for a dance."

When this had been done I caused a large zinc bath to be set before the fire and a porcelain dish beside it. Then I put on a suit of overalls and sat down and plucked the fowl.

There is nothing particularly difficult about plucking. You have only to hold the thing by the legs and pull the feathers out. There are a great many of these. Some come out with ease, others only by the exertion of great strength and with sections of skin adhering to their ends; others again (notably the pinions, or wing feathers) must be removed with pincers. A surprising amount of dust rises from the bird which at times makes visibility poor, and now and again an unusually sharp tug will cause the bird's head to swing up and buffet the hand or arm in a disagreeable manner. There is no need, by the way, to remove the ruff of feathers round the upper part of the neck. This goes with the head, and the further, if I may say so, the better.

When I had made an end of the business, and been praised and petted and given a cup of tea, some busybody must needs say, "Well, and what are you going to do with it now?"

"Singe it," I said.

"But can you? With all those feathers round the head?"

"The head must come off," I said sternly. Heaven knows I had never meant to say such a thing, but my blood was up, I suppose, and I spoke on the spur of the moment. Besides, when one has said one is going to singe a thing, it becomes more or less a point of honour to singe it.

Now, as a general rule, there is no problem about cutting off a head. You take a knife (or chopper) and cut (or chop) it off. But the affair is complicated when you are faced with a neck as long as a chicken's (and, believe me, it is no small matter when the feathers are off). There is such a bewildering choice of places for the operation, and not all of them, perhaps indeed only one of them, can be right.

I like to do a thing properly, so I took the bird into the kitchen and consulted Mrs. Beeton.

Mrs. Beeton is quite definite. "Cut a long slit in the back of the neck," she begins gaily, "in the manner shown in Trussing Illustration No. 1, Fig. 1; pass the knife under the skin, cut off the neck at its junction with the body, taking care not to cut through the under-skin of the neck in this motion. Then cut through the skin of the back of the neck at the place where the first incision was made and through the underneath skin about three inches from the breast, leaving the two flaps of neck skin to fold over the jagged opening (*see* Figs. 2 and 3), and draw out the neck."

I make no comment in this passage, beyond observing that the operation cannot be carried out in this way. "Jagged opening" is right, but the rest is eyewash. And if the text is misleading the illustrations are positively fraudulent. I am sorry to say this about my old friend Mrs. Beeton, but Figs. 1–3 give the student *no idea whatever* what he is up against. They ought, for one thing, to be in Technicolour.

However, the really disastrous thing about Mrs. Beeton is that one always reads on. It is well-nigh impossible to leave well alone. "Then take out the crop——" she goes on seductively. It is a pretty poor sort of chap, one feels, who can't do a simple thing like taking out a crop.

None of us, I am sorry to say, was quite sure what a crop looked like, but there was a general feeling that this particular crop was out already. "Didn't it come out before?" they said. "You know, when you drew out the neck." This raised a general laugh, in which I did not join, but I took a quick look at the neck and was inclined on the whole to agree. A good deal seemed to have come out with the neck, one way and another.

"Right-ho, then," I said briskly. "If the crop's out I may as well make a job of it"; and I bent again over Mrs. Beeton and the bird.

They were very good to me when it was all over. It took four of them to straighten my back, and about the same number of whiskies to get the haunted look out of my eyes. Then I lay on the sofa, while they read to me about rain-washed skies and wide wastes of ocean and placid rivers bordered by meadows rich with the scent of cowslips and wild agrimony. I began to feel better. By dinner-time I felt strong enough to manage a little fish, and

"NOT AT ALL, OLD MAN—ONLY TOO GLAD OF SOMEONE TO TALK TO."

by ten o'clock I was sitting up and stroking the cat almost in my normal manner. Then somebody said: "I wonder if the goose will come dressed?"

My legs doubled up under me and I fell flat on my back with my knees drawn up and my arms folded across my chest about three inches from the breast-bone (*see* Trussing Illustration No. 1, Fig. 4).

LEAVING EARLY

There are units—I know, because I was brought up in one—where a junior officer who wishes to leave early merely says to another junior officer, "I say, I'm leaving early; d'you mind coping?"—and leaves.

Now that I am a junior Staff Officer I find that the arrangements are different. I took the matter up with Major Perilmead as early after my arrival as I decently could. (It gives an undesirable impression if a new man turns up on a Monday and starts making inquiries about time off on the Tuesday. I left the topic quite alone until the Friday.)

Major Perilmead said: "Well, the hours are longish of course at a Headquarters, but that's taken fully into consideration. If you've anything special on, there'll never be any trouble about your getting away. Just mention it to me."

"Thanks very much," I said.

"It goes without saying," he added, "that you will ask the Brigadier. Although you really come under me, you see, your job is really tantamount to being his personal Staff officer. I mean, if he rings for you and nothing happens, he naturally wonders why."

"Naturally."

"And if the Colonel has to tell him you've left early he may feel as if he hasn't been kept in the picture."

"Yes. Er—the Colonel, I take it, will——"

"Oh, of course the Colonel would have to be told. You must appreciate that as the second in command he has to have his finger on the pulse."

"Oh, quite," I said. "So all I have to do——"

"Just let us know you're going," said the Major, opening a file and frowning hard—"there'll never be any trouble. Right-ho."

"Thanks very much. I hope you didn't mind——"

"Oh—and it would be as well to tell Captain Malcolm," said the Major, throwing the file aside and opening another one—"bit awkward for him, otherwise. Right-ho."

"Right-ho," I said.

I allowed a proper interval to elapse before taking any further action in the matter (as Staff Officers say). It was early last week that I got to work. I decided to start on the Brigadier and work downwards.

"The mosques in particular interested me enormously."

"What's all this?" he said, when I took the morning letters in. "Letters, eh? What's in 'em, eh? Lot of rubbish, I expect, what? Well, what are you waiting for?"

"Excuse me, sir—I was going to——"

"What's happened about that thing of Who-is-it's?"

"I'm afraid I——"

"Get me the Army List."

When I got back with the Army List he was telephoning somebody and making a lot of notes on the margin of the *London Gazette*. The morning sped by. I was in and out of his room six times before twelve o'clock. There was no lull in the conversation sufficiently long for me to broach an entirely personal subject. Once or twice I said to myself that a couple more seconds would do it, but each time I was beaten by a mere tick of the clock. The last time we actually began speaking simultaneously, but I felt it my place to give way.

While he was at lunch I decided on a bold line. I slipped a note into his "IN" tray, saying, "Sir: Unless you have any objection I should like to leave at 1730 hours to-day. J. Braithwaite, Lt."

At half-past two I collected it from his "OUT" tray. It had "No" written across it in green pencil. I cursed myself for the way I had phrased my brief minute. I had better have a talk with Major Perilmead, who understood the workings of the Brigadier's mind. I telephoned Lieutenant Flashing and asked him to come down and mind my telephone and bells while I went along to see the Major.

"I was wondering," I said to the Major—I thought this the best way to go about it—"I was wondering if I could leave early to-night?"

"What's that?" he said, not looking up.

"Is it agreeable to you," I said, "if I get away early to-night?"

"Good Lord, yes," he said, looking at his watch without seeing it—"perfectly all right. You carry on. I take it the Brigadier's agreed; he's in the picture, I mean?"

"Well," I said—"he's in the picture, all right, but it's hard to tell what—er—expression he's wearing, so to speak." And I showed him the correspondence between the Brigadier and myself.

"VERY WELL, SMART GUY, IF YOU'RE NOT SMOKING INSIDE YOU'RE STANDING ON THE PLATFORM—ALSO ILLEGAL."

"That seems to be all right, Braithwaite. 'No,' he says—'No,' meaning he has no objection."

"You think that's what he means."

"Absolutely. Not a shadow of doubt."

"Good," I said with relief.

"Unless of course he means 'No, you can't leave at 1730 hours,' " said the Major, hurling a whole stack of files on to the top of the safe—"you'd better ask him; it's as well to be sure."

"Right-ho," I said faintly.

"Right-ho."

It was about this time that I began to consult my watch frequently. If I was to get to the theatre before the curtain went up at the ludicrous hour of ten minutes past six, half-past five must be my positive zero hour for leaving. I entered the Brigadier's room at a respectful run.

"Ask the Colonel to step in," said the Brigadier.

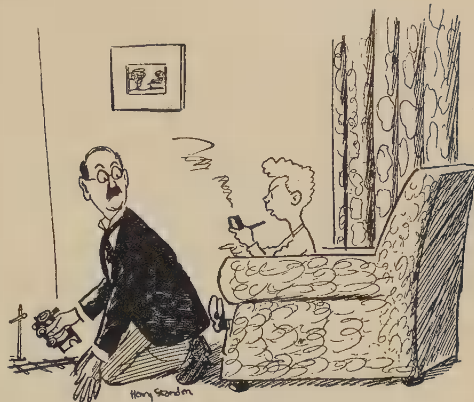
"Have you any objection if I leave at

half-past five, sir?" I said, in a voice I had never heard before.

"What's that?"

"Have you any objection if——"

"No, I haven't any confounded objection. Where's the Colonel? I've put it in writing, dammit, all over a bit of fiddling paper, clear as daylight, no objection at all. Clear out now, if you like. Doesn't make any difference to me whether you ever come in at all. Where are those conference notes about the other thing? You know, about the What's-its-name. Where's the Colonel?"



"AND WHY NOT? YOU'RE PLAYING WITH MY TRAIN."

I knocked on the Colonel's door.

"Excuse me, sir," I said.

"Don't bother me now," said the Colonel, who was sitting in his shirt-sleeves writing a long minute in a huge, slow hand.

"The Brigadier would like to see you, sir."

"Oh," said the Colonel, and left the room at once, putting on his tunic. Lieutenant Flashing was getting restive when I got back to my room. "I say, look here," he said—"I've got some work of my own to do."

I said I was sorry, but I was trying to get something buttoned up for the Brigadier; would he mind hanging on for just another minute while I went to see Captain Malcolm? He said he supposed so.

When I told Malcolm the purpose of my visit he said, "Good heavens, old boy, why ask me?"

"The Major told me to."

"Does he say it's all right for you to go?"

"Well, yes, but——"

"But what?"

"But he didn't actually say so, because he wasn't sure, then, that the Brigadier would say so. But now that the Brigadier said so"—I eased my collar slightly—"I've no doubt he'll say so."

"So you say," said Malcolm. "Well, if you like to let me know when the Major says he agrees, then I'll agree like a shot, old boy. I suppose you've asked the Colonel?"

"Well," I said—"I——"

Lieutenant Flashing came running. The Brigadier was ringing for me. I threw a "Thanks" over my shoulder, to be shared between the pair of them, but I think it got carried away in my slip-stream.

As I ricochetted into the Brigadier's room his clock struck five.

"Thought you were going early," he said.

"Yes, sir," I said—"but——"

"I want all the papers on that sergeant in Scotland," he said—"the one who took the thingummy out of the C.O.'s quarters. Have a good time."

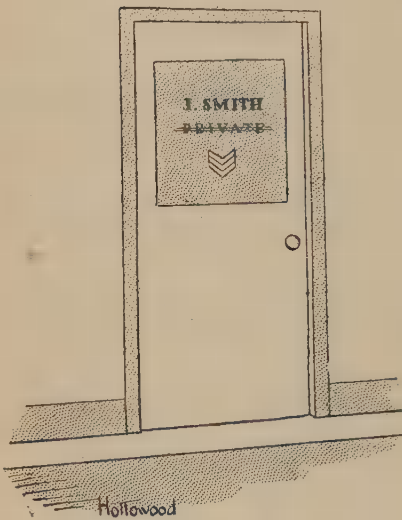
"Thank you, sir," I said.

It took the Orderly Room twenty minutes to get the papers on the thingummy. "Haven't you gone yet?" said the Brigadier, as I finally slapped them on his desk. "Not yet, sir," I said, running out.

"Leave early?" said the Colonel, completing his huge, slow signature with a ridiculous number of curls and lines and dots. "What time do you want to go?"

"Half-past five, sir."

"It's half-past five now," he said. "Goin' to see a show?"



"Yes, sir."

"What show are you goin' to see?"

I told him. He said he had seen it. It was not as good as another show he had seen, whose name he could not call to mind. I tried to call it to mind for him. He told me who was in it, but he could not remember their names. I tried to remember them for him. He had had good seats, but couldn't remember what they had cost him. I tried to remember the cost for him.

My hand was leaving a damp mark on the edge of his door.

". . . .so of course," he was saying, at five minutes to six by his small desk-clock, "we had to go to the Trocadero in the end, and, funnily enough, we had a waiter who looked exactly like that feller in the films——"

"Charles Boyer?" I said.

"No, no," said the Colonel.

"George Sanders?"

"No, no . . ."

We never did find out, though we both racked our brains mercilessly.

"Well," he said jocularly, at ten minutes past six—"have a good time. Don't be late in the morning."

I wiped the door furtively and left the room.

* * * * *

But what annoys me most, every time I try, is not so much the fact that I never leave early, as that the Brigadier and the Colonel and Perilmead and Malcolm all say, as soon as I open my mouth, "*But you left early last night!*"

THE HOUSES THAT JACK OUGHT TO BUILD.

NEWS FROM BELGIUM

My Dear Mother,—I should like to tell you the story of Hendvik, an inhabitant of Antwerp, as it was told me by his cousin Jan, a Belgian pilot, while he was bringing the ship up the Scheldt. Jan says Hendvik should not be considered as typical, but that there are Hendviks everywhere.

Hendvik stayed on in Antwerp after May 1940. Jan says that now he explains it by saying his cycle was punctured, but the truth probably is that Hendvik thought all those stories about the Germans were exaggerated—and, in any case, who would look after his five barges?

At first Hendvik had no complaints. The Germans were very correct, and although they requisitioned his barges, they paid for them. At least, they gave him pieces of paper which Hendvik could change into money, and if he did not always get face value on the exchange, well, had he not overcharged the Germans with that very contingency in mind? So he had the satisfaction of feeling an astute man of affairs, as well as getting a fair rent.

All went well until the R.A.F. sank one of the barges. That made Hendvik very angry. It is too bad, he used to say, that the Allies do not respect the property of those who are, *au fond*, wholeheartedly with them. That was not war; it was carelessness. Worse still, the Germans refused to pay compensation for the barge, although it had been carrying spare motor parts for them at the time, and Hendvik became as angry with the Germans as he was with the R.A.F. What kind of a war is this, he said, when both sides cease to be interested in private property, my private property, that is?

Vegetables became rather short and anything like an adequate supply could only be got by going to the farmers in the Black Market; and Hendvik became very angry with the farmers too, for what was the good of keeping back vegetables from the Germans if all they did with them was to sell them at inflated prices to their fellow-countrymen? If Hendvik hadn't had money from his barges he might have been very hungry, and where would the farmers be if no one could afford their prices? Looking pretty silly, Hendvik implied.

But the war interfered more and more. The Belgian Resistance Movement sank another barge (largely by accident, when they were blowing up a lock-gate) and Hendvik added them to the list. It was intolerable, this uncertainty, this contempt for normal business. There were times when Hendvik despaired of the future of normal business.

After that Hendvik himself became involved in the Resistance Movement. Another Scheldt pilot, a Dutchman, appeared one night and said he was being very closely watched and his only chance of escape was to hide somewhere quite new. Hendvik hid the man for a couple of months and then smuggled him away from Antwerp on one of the three barges left. After all, he had known the man for

years. Hendvik was by now feeling extremely angry. Was he to risk his neck to hide a Dutchman, of all people? And it was not as though he trusted even the Russians either. It looked as though they were quite as capable of sinking one of his barges, if it happened to stray into Eastern Germany, with as little thought for the owner as any of the other Allies.

By now, one of the three remaining barges had been damaged by the Americans during a raid on a motor factory in Antwerp docks. Apart from the French (whom Hendvik, as a Fleming, suspected) there was now no one for whom Hendvik could bear any feelings of friendship.

It was then that he conceived his grand plan. It was becoming more and more obvious that the Germans would be driven out of Belgium and that the British

"Now just look at *that* . . . and the regulation distinctly states that you must *not* be able to see what's inside a room . . ."

and Americans would come to Antwerp again. And there was one thing common to all soldiers. They all wanted cafés in which to spend their evenings and their money. Hendvik would prepare a Liberation Café. A café of which it could be said that no German foot had ever trodden inside it would have enormous prestige.

It was not easy. He acquired a basement near the docks, ostensibly for storage, but when he came to fit it up the undertaking was far from easy. Some things you could acquire by bribing Germans, others could be bought in the Black Market, but it all meant time, trouble and money. Finally, however, the job was finished.

It was an extremely smart café. The dance floor was of black glass, the bar one of the longest in Antwerp, and the fittings had all the glitter of the new and the bizarre. And the stock was considerable and most attractive. The place would undoubtedly be a sensation, and certainly should go some way towards paying for the loss of half his barge fleet.

The café opened on the 6th of September. By the 8th it was crowded from eleven in the morning onwards. On the 9th it was closed. The Germans started to shell the city and the Municipality was looking for air-raid shelters. The basement was only too safe. A month later the shelling stopped, and Hendvik planned a colossal reopening night. A fortnight later the flying-bombs started. In the end the only benefit Hendvik gained from the café was the assurance of a place there every night for himself. And that is the situation to date.

Hendvik, Jan said, has become a philosopher at last. He is now an air-raid warden under the Antwerp Municipality, and says pathetically that the war is just starting for him. I am sure there is a moral in this story.

Your loving son,

HAROLD.

AN OLD MAN'S TALE

This story is of the days before I learned not to question O'Hanrahan, but to accept what he told me and be thankful, for his tales were always a little out of the ordinary, and so worth hearing by anyone that had some taste for novelty. If there was anything that did not quite tally with what I thought I knew of the world, I learned to turn it all over in my mind afterwards and to form my own opinion; but if there was anything that did not appear to me to be completely credible, I learned that it was a mistake to question O'Hanrahan further; such questioning seemed to excite him, and, far from making his story clearer, he was more likely to be goaded to further flights, so that what at first seemed unlikely became frankly incredible. He never struck me as being an old man, but he had the wistful expression of one who had lived a lonely life; how much of it I was never able to guess. But enough of these rambling comments on O'Hanrahan and his way of telling a tale, and I will get on to the tale itself.

It was some years ago, and in Ireland, and I was walking a bog for snipe, and O'Hanrahan was showing me over it. In fact it was O'Hanrahan who had asked me to shoot the bog in the first place: it did not actually belong to him, but he was a man of generous moods, and, if he had only offered the hospitality of the little field that he did own, his generosity would have fallen short of its natural boundaries by many square miles. So he had invited me to shoot a few hundred acres of a fine bog that followed a stream along a wide valley and was as good a place for snipe as you could find. It was singularly deep for a black bog, and whether there had been old quarries there or fish-ponds, or whether it bubbled from natural springs, the ground was deep and shaky, and it was a hard place to walk. Our conversation amounted to very few words an hour, and those in whispers, for it is an unfortunate fact that the human voice is the most dreaded thing in nature, at any rate among snipe, and our voices seem to carry further than we suppose. Suddenly O'Hanrahan spoke out quite loud: "Don't step on that green tussock," he said.

"Hello, Daddy! I've drove Mummy dotty!"

I had come to bad ground and was walking carefully and was close to the bright green tussock.

"Why not?" I asked. For I was younger then, and knew less of the ways of bogs.

"I'll tell you," he said.

He spoke no more then for some while, because of the snipe, but later, when we got to dry ground and I sat down and had lunch on a packet of sandwiches and gave O'Hanrahan his from a flask, he told me why.

"If you stepped on that green tussock," he said, "you'd go down and down through the sumer, and the shaky bog would close over you, and then . . ."

"I'd be dead then," I interrupted.

"You would not," he said. "But you'd be in the elf-king's palace. Did you ever hear tell of him? And there he'd be seated upon his throne of everlasting moss in his robes of twilight, and you before him wondering at his splendour; and maybe he'd give you a drink of heather ale out of a goblet of buried gold, and you'd

drink, and you'd only be there a minute, and you'd struggle and float up to the surface, but a hundred years would have gone by, aye and more nor a hundred. It's the way of the kingdom of elf-land, and it's well known. So don't never step on that green tussock, however inviting it looks, for it's lonely you'd be with the centuries gone rattling past you, and you here all by yourself."

And, as I said, it was in the days before I learned not to question O'Hanrahan.

"How do you know all that?" I asked.

"Sure, I stepped on it once myself."

So solemnly did he say those words that I couldn't help blurting out some flippant remark about my being surprised that anyone who knew the bog as well as O'Hanrahan could ever make such a mistake, and ending up by saying: "How did you come to do it?"

I remember to-day the very words of his answer.

"Sure, I was fleeing from Oliver Cromwell."

ABOUT MY ALARM-CLOCK

When my alarm-clock first came to me it was still in its Upright Period.

"The only alarming thing about it," said my Aunt Isabella, a big woman who got everything a little wrong, in giving it to me, "is its habitual reluctance to alarm." Reluctance was quite the wrong word. The clock was perfectly prepared to carry out the responsible duty for which it had been amply, if not absolutely correctly, designed, but it was a high-mettled article that required finesse in handling. In this it was not unlike my Aunt Isabella, and I think that explains why it was they never really got along.

She had acquired it in 1903 from Robert, the famous clock-maker in the Champs-Elysées, who described it as a *réveille-matin*, which sounded better and proved dearer than an ordinary alarm-clock. At that time it had a large, white face, honest and expressive, and heavily encircled by grained timber. Originally it had two small legs, but my aunt unscrewed one to wedge up a rattling window in an ill-fitting hotel in Inverness and forgot to replace it when she left. I always meant to go north and recover it, but once the clock entered its Lateral Period it seemed simpler to unscrew the other leg, which I did, posting it to the hotel in Inverness so that they could silence a second window. They never acknowledged it. The whole thing was crowned by a large bell, the hammer of which was checked either by utter exhaustion on the part of the spring or by the engagement of a heavy iron arm, in shape and size very similar to the control lever of a tram. On the back of the clock was a regulator working in a slot. One end of the slot was labelled "A" and the other "R." Some took the view that these stood for "*Avance*" and "*Retard*," but there was also an influential school which thought they represented

"*Aller et Retour.*" As Monsieur Robert's own mainspring had failed shortly before I took over the clock I was unable to ask him what he had intended.

I make no apology for these horological details, because when all is said and done what I am writing about is my alarm-clock.

It took to me immediately, partly I am sure because I never expected it to work before ten o'clock in the morning. That summer I had taken a fishing-lodge on the upper reaches of the Orinoco, and luckily I took my alarm-clock with me. Luckily, for the agent who had let me the fishing had forgotten to tell me how vital a part it would play in the tackle needed for the *gumbolola*, or pampus-fish, which was my prey that year. One of the many curious things about this creature, apart from its looking like a pig and tasting like a rabbit and sounding like a horse, was that when hooked it was too shy to admit what had occurred. Wherever it happened to be it remained perfectly still, paralysed by embarrassment, and it was therefore necessary for the sportsman to be awakened from time to time so as to strike his line and make certain nothing but bait was on the end of it. There was no mad hurry about *gumbolola* fishing, and I used to set my alarm-clock for about three hours ahead.

"That Disguise would fool nobody—you look nothing like a tree."

One evening at the very moment it went off I was dreaming I had hooked a brace of enormous fish. (They ran very large, though rather clumsily.) In my excitement I rose from my arm-chair and fell into the turgid waters of the Orinoco, taking with me a bottle of ginger-wine and my alarm-clock that were on the dumb-waiter beside me. The clock reached the bottom before I did, having time on its side, and when at length I was dragged out it was found to be impaled on my knee like a tambourine. The man who normally carried the dynamite for me took it away and plunged it into the tank of oil which we kept for frying *gumbolola*. This undoubtedly saved it from rheumatic fever, but it also radically altered the colour of its face, which from then on was extremely Latin. I will not say its expression was afterwards less honest, but critics insist there has been something a little fishy about it ever since.

As a result of this accident my alarm-clock declined to undertake its duties except on its back. This Recumbent Period was to last about five years, and was only terminated by a meeting with a Portuguese nobleman whose name sounded

"Hark—a buzz bomb."
"I can't hear a thing."
"Then it must be a rocket."

as if it should be drawn off into a decanter and slightly warmed. We were both staying in the Knockerbicker Hotel on Thirty-Three and a Third Street, and as we were retiring to rest early one evening after a visit to the Natural History Museum I happened to tell him about my treasure. He showed interest and assured me that his own clock had also been through a Recumbent Period, which he had cured by kicking it downstairs in a special way he had picked up in Syria. I stoutly refused to permit him to do this to mine, but in the end I weakened on condition the treatment was limited to one flight. Unfortunately the clock's single leg gave it a bias, like a bowl, and instead of one flight it took the whole hotel quite easily in its stride. On the twenty-second floor a fashionable ball was in progress, and the spectacle of my alarm-clock, which had attained considerable momentum and was ringing like a nest of fire-engines, being hotly pursued through the crowd by the Portuguese nobleman and myself, must have taken much of the gilt off it. We were neither of us in evening dress. On the nineteenth floor some Buffaloes were thirstily reuniting, on the eleventh a vacuum-cleaner conference was in full intake, while down on the sixth a number of ladies were busily celebrating some invisible triumph. None of these functions we left exactly as we found them. Having recovered my alarm-clock, which had shattered the window of the office on the ground floor, we returned by the elevator. It says much for Robert's construction that as a mechanism the clock survived, but subsequent experiments showed that the Lateral Period had been ushered in, when it was going to work on its side, or not at all.

There is still a lot I should like to tell you about my alarm-clock, and one day when things are quieter I shall. But I do hope I have said enough for you to understand why it means everything to me.

FEATHER DUSTER

"Capable Woman, light domestic, 6 mornings weekly. 10 till 1."

Advt. in "Liverpool Echo."

THINGS THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BETTER EXPRESSED

"But so obvious a reform should not be delayed and it will be a serious reflection upon the Council if it fails to support its medical officer of health in his last effort before retiring to improve the city's health."

S. African paper.

PHEW!

"R.A.F. GET DAM NEAR NIJMEGEN."

Heading in Yorks paper.

PROLEGOMENA TO A COURSE OF PEDAGOGICS

In many ways this New Year is going to be far, far stiffer and sterner than any that preceded it.

Sinatra the crooner (so I suddenly learned from the papers) is

now going to be Sinatra the teacher. He is giving up some of his singing engagements to give talks to high-school students on such subjects as "The value of education and the responsibility of parents in curbing juvenile delinquency."

I immediately offered to write an introduction to these talks and had it cabled to the other side of the Atlantic. It ran as follows:

Doan get me wrong, goils,
Ahm talkin' to yew,
Handin' out a lecture
To high-school stew.
Ahm a tough guy, goils, ahm hard-boiled,
All edoocation 's
Not dissipations.
Have to be particular
'Bout your curricula
When you get out into de big wide woild;
No time for dreaming,
No time for screaming,
Doan fall over and doan pass out,
That's not de way ter
Get a hold of Plater,
That's not what de Republic's all about.

Dis is a synawpsis,
Take away de corpses,
Listen to my lecture, now goils, dew,
Bring 'em round with brandy,
Give them sugar candy,
Listen now, ma honeys, jes listen to me;
Youm goin' to be mothers
Better than de others,
Coz of your respawnsibilitee,
No time for crooning,
No time for swooning,
Juvenile delinquent
Gettin' far too frequent,
Pull yourselves around, goils,
Try to be profound, goils,
Think of your respawnsibilitee.

I need hardly say that my offer was instantly accepted. Sure the words need music. But that can easily be supplied.

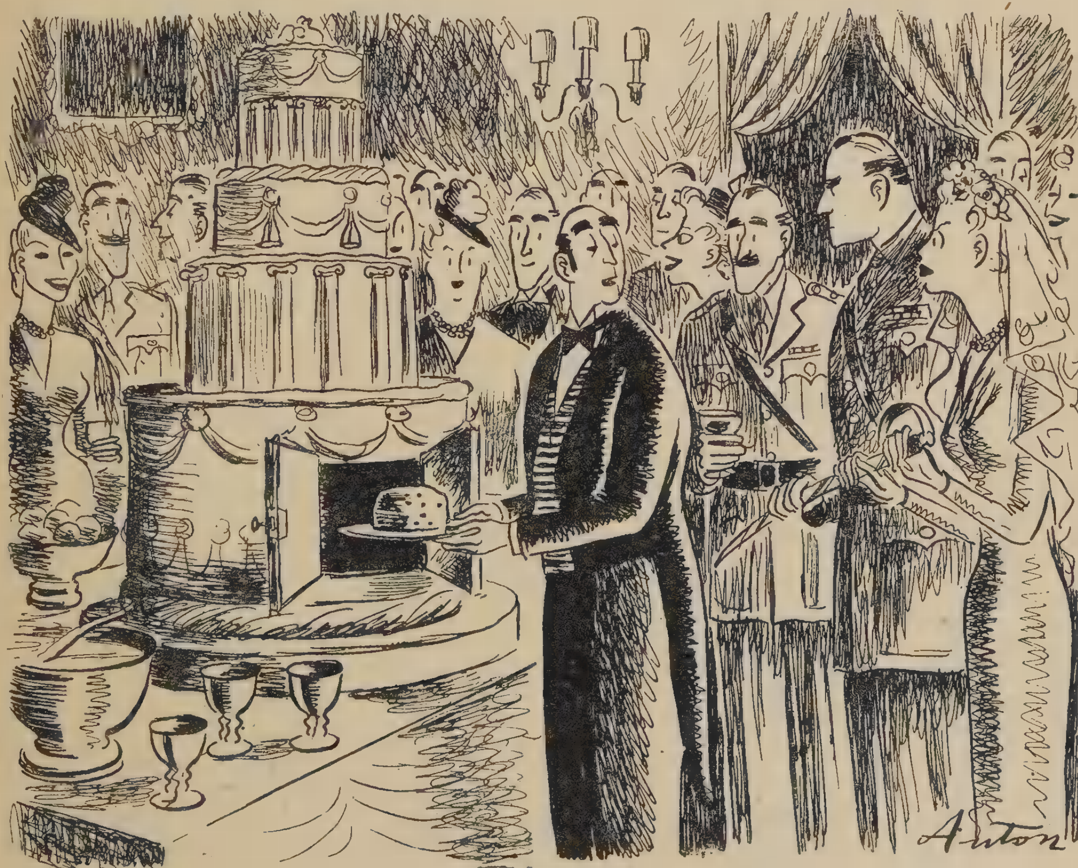
SECRETARIES

Once I had a secretary—such a nice secretary,
Pretty as a picture, lively as a lark;
Flower-like and fairy-like she flitted round the office
Enchanting the establishment from breakfast-time till dark.
Yes, she was attractive, but—her typing wasn't accurate,
Her grammar was uncertain and she couldn't really spell,
So when she went and wed
An officer, I said,
"We'll miss our Ray of Sunshine but—it's maybe just as well."

So then I got a secretary—admirable secretary,
Full of all the virtues such a woman can attain,
Punctual, methodical, reliable, etcetera,
But very, very serious and very, very plain;
And she never could remember the proper kind of biscuit,
She always, always, *always* gave me sugar in my tea—
A thing that I detest,
So I thought it for the best
When she found her mother needed her and took her leave of me.

Next I got a terror—mostly hair and lipstick,
Capable by snatches when she'd condescend to try,
Dashing and disdainful, peevish and contemptuous,
Thought herself too good for us—hoity-toity-ti!
She got called up—can't say I regretted her
(Hope they put her through it in the place where she has gone),
But the job I had to face
Was to fill her vacant place
And maiden, wife or widow—no, they wouldn't take it on.

So that's how I come to have the (almost) perfect secretary—
Pleasant and contented and correct from head to foot,
Mannerly in method and in utterance impeccable,
Invalided out of things and therefore staying put,



"Are you ready to cut the cake, Madam?"

A dab at correspondence (and a wizard with the biscuits),
Knowing all the answers that a secretary can,
So I ought to be in bliss
But the only thing is this,
That he wears a coat and trousers; for I had to have a man.

And isn't it a funny thing how folks are never satisfied?
The girls were full of minuses, the man is rather plus;
Yet here I sit and grumble and I rail at my predicament,
I pester and I panic and I fidget and I fuss,
For even Plainy-Janey—yes, even Hair-and-Lipstick—
Brought something to the office that to-day it seems to lack;
More work's done in it
But—where's the fun in it?
Place is like a prison-house, there isn't any sun in it . . .
Call me anything you like; I wish the girls were back!

February, 1945

THE BACHELOR

Somewhere in Egypt,
January, 1945.

DEAR MR. PUNCH,—May I ask you to express to Mr. Churchill and his colleagues the heartfelt thanks of all the bachelors in the Army for his refusal to be intimidated, by those enjoying wedded bliss, in his preliminary plans for demobilization?

We bachelors are far from being selfish. We have accepted with a shrug of the shoulders the fact that by the way income tax is arranged we have borne almost the whole cost of the war, and if the Government insists that we fill other people's children to the brim with best quality milk, and keep them at school until they are seventy, we shall just laugh lightly and tighten our Sam Brownes.

But on the matter of demobilization we stand firm, because demobilization is a very complicated business for the bachelor. Married men have in many cases still got homes to go to. Even where these homes have vanished through enemy action the wife is already busy making eyes at local officials and other usual channels to get an option on the thin end of a Nissen hut, or where her eyes are particularly big will have already earmarked the parts of a Portal house.

Compare my own position as a pure and simple bachelor. When my country's call became so clamant that I could no longer resist it I was occupying a flat for which I had to pay £80 a year. As a recruit in the Royal Engineers I received about £40 per year, so that by no amount of wishful thinking could I retain my flat. I therefore stored my furniture at a cost of £15 a year, being left with £25 for wine and cigars and to catch up with back income tax which came to several times that amount.

The years have rolled on, and by merit and some queer twists of fate I have advanced in my profession as a soldier, so that not only have I at last caught up with my income tax but I am even able to afford an occasional lime-and-lemon on special occasions like the Fall of Paris and my O.C.'s birthday. And at the moment I may be said to be sitting pretty. But one day, say Churchill what he will, the war is bound to end, and I shall find myself demobilized, with no income (because of course all the jobs must be given to married men), and with this wretched £15 a year to pay to keep my furniture in store.

I quite appreciate that the idea of a bachelor being allowed a portion of a Portal house or even a lean-to under the eaves of a Nissen hut is ridiculous, but if Mr. Churchill sticks to his idea of demobilizing us even-Stephen with the married men, we may perhaps be home in time to secure something in the nature of a disused

Anderson shelter; and if permission could be obtained to found a little Bachelors Colony in some quiet spot (perhaps Epping Forest?) we might be reasonably comfortable. I could then get my furniture out of store, pile it up behind the hut, and hack it to pieces, at my leisure, for firewood.

I am, Sir,
OSCAR SYMPSON, *Capt.*

H. J.'S DRAMATIC FRAGMENTS

The next Fragment was a kindly act towards my cousin, Jem Goblin, and has not, so far, been repaid. For many years he was in french polishing and invented a way of polishing emery paper which got a prize at a Concours; but when this honour did not lead to anything, he took umbrage and went academic and became lecturer at the local Polytechnic. His great difficulty was to show the difference between verse, which he dealt with, and prose, which was done next door, so to clear up the confusion he got me to write the below and pinned it outside his room with a warning that the like was off his beat, but unfortunately his neighbour copied my work and did the same with it. Chaos continued as unabated as before until a professor of composition was appointed to co-ordinate matters, and Jem got the post, as the chairman of the Selection Committee had played with his father when they were both boy bassoons in the Bronx.

DON'T CROSS HIS NIBS.

(*The scene is Very Criminal, with candles stuck in bottles and worse.*)

STOOL PIGEON. To be merely virtuous argues a certain lack of moral enterprise: to do good that evil may come, there you have something.

MOBSMAN. I have no head for abstractions and take refuge in technique. Have you seen this new cosh, now upon the market? Recent developments in plastics augur change in many an *opus operandi.*

FORGER. A craftsman, I. Since the accursèd Industrial Revolution . . .

LOOK-OUT. Pardon my intrusion—hist!

(*Enter a* STRANGER.)

STRANGER. May I shelter from the storm in your den? I am no snob.

MA MANDRAKE. Though tolerably degraded we are not without charity. We can promise you shelter: safety will be a matter of arrangement.

STRANGER. I am poor but honest. For my poverty I expect security, for my honesty, pity. I am a humble snake-charmer and have naught about me but my pets.

MOBSMAN. I counted four, including, if I be not mistaken, a rare species of puff-adder.

"Are there two t's in Attila?"

Stranger. To repay your hospitality I shall forthwith display their talents. A one, a two and a three, Serpents ahoy!

(*The snakes emerge and rear in line on the floor, bowing to the company*).

Stool Pigeon. One marvels at the patience of the trainer but does not require extended proof of it.

Ma Mandrake. I fear they will form fours.

(*They do.*)

Stranger. At this point I am accustomed to prolonged applause.

Forger. As a trainer of audiences you evidently surpass your skill with the brute creation.

Stranger. Alas, my simple tricks strike no cord responsive from your flinty bosoms.

Ma Mandrake. To criticize the bosoms of your hosts is no way to their hearts.

Stranger. I have but one more artifice to compel your delight.

Mobsman. Do your will. 'Twill serve to toughen us.

STRANGER. Give me a sheet of newspaper. See, I fold it thus. I tear it so, and so, and so. I shake it out and what do we see?

FORGER. An utterly debased design, an insult.

STRANGER. No, no. A palm tree. You can almost see the dates on it, can you not?

MA MANDRAKE. If anything, it is a coconut palm, but let that pass. May we take it that your gratitude is now assuaged?

(*Stretching after a sleep, a hideous figure arises from a pile of rags.*)

STOOL PIGEON. Avez-vous bien dormi, Bobo?

BOBO. A merveille! Je rêvais des choses tout à fait psychogeniques; comme mon psychologue se réjouira-t-il! Continuons.

(*Returns to sleep.*)

FORGER. What is in the stew to-night?

MA MANDRAKE. Since yesterday there have been added a bream, a mushroom, and a small packet alleged to contain cucumber.

(*Enter* CARRUTHERS HOPKINS, *Prince of Fences.*)

CARRUTHERS HOPKINS. Hail, fellows, well met.

MOBSMAN. Does that portend some delay in the payment of our cut?

CARRUTHERS HOPKINS. Of course it does. However, I have a fresh enterprise which may recoup you. The Vicar of Small Greeting has a ruby.

MA MANDRAKE. You hint theft?

CARRUTHERS HOPKINS. With violence—the Vicar of Small Greeting has a giggle. The gem is kept in the hall table in an envelope marked "Not to be Called For." One of you will obtain a post as butler.

STOOL PIGEON. It is Bobo's turn. His reference will have to be in French.

CARRUTHERS HOPKINS. "Epatant" is the *mot juste*. When the time is ripe he will deal with the owner as may occur to him and wrest the jewel from its hiding-place, substituting a dummy.

MOBSMAN. We generally use a pigeon's egg; it's just about right for size.

CARRUTHERS HOPKINS. So be it. The feigned flunkey will then make his getaway and proceed by a devious route, which I have obtained from the A.A., to this rendezvous.

STRANGER. I had not realized you were interested in precious stones. Here is a diamond I am keeping for a friend who hasn't room for it. I suppose the interesting thing about it is that chemically it is just the same as a piece of coal.

MA MANDRAKE. I fear it is wasted on you.

STRANGER. Oh, by no means, for in addition to constituting a good turn, it is a reputed preventive against caries.

FINIS

PIANO BUSTER

Me friend the Psychologist says geniuses are often nuisances because of their talents fighting their desires. To prove it he quotes the case of Mischa Staatzenfitz, the great concert pianist. As a boy Mischa longed to be a prize-fighter. His mother, however, bit her nails when he brought the matter up. This was a danger-sign, so he would drop the subject and go on with his piano practice.

The outcome-tax of all this was that Mischa's strength, coupled with his repressions, caused him to bust up every piano he performed on. His touch grew so heavy that his mom decided it would pay in the long run to have a cast-iron piano made. This was done, and Mischa thereafterwards took the instrument around with him by courtesy of the railway companies, who never broke it once. They only lost it. Mischa arrived at one provincial concert-hall to find that instead of his touch-proof piano they had dumped on him a crate of home-sweet-homing pigeons that gurgled at him cheekily. It was too late to do anything but make do with the ordinary stage piano and try to be careful not to turn the performance into a slapstick act.

UPHILL WORK.
MAJOR LLOYD GEORGE.

In the audience was Oscar Bensol, the movie magnate. His ace director and talent-swotter Rube Shuntel had persuaded him to swallow his dislike of good music for once and come and see an exceptional genius who deserved a chance in movies instead of being left to the paltry rewards of a concert top-liner. Oscar listened under dutiful protest to the opening of Mischa's classical recital. Then the piano collapsed. The audience was stunned for half a breath, then a wild crack of laughter from Oscar set everybody roaring. "Take me to him!" Oscar cried. Rube took him backstage to where Mischa was being patched up by ambulance men. Oscar slapped Mischa on the back. "Wonderful, Mr. Slopsenspitz! Never since I made slopsticks do I seen such a gag. Sign him up at once, Rube, at double what he will take."

So Mischa found himself on the studio star-roll for the special job of repeating his piano-busting act in front of the cameras. So tickled was Oscar Bensol over it that he personally took the directing job away from Rube. They brought on a grand piano and Mischa bust it up after a few bars. "A good gag," said Rube, "but don't you think . . . er . . . a little more build-up?"

Oscar turned on him with "Whaddya *mean*, too much build-up? We don't got enough. Do it again, Mischa, only don't let the bust-up come too quick." Mischa repeated the act on another grand piano, and several more after that. Then up came the grand-piano boy to say they had used the last one and the expense so far was nobody's business. So they went into conference and somebody remembered that a man in the carpenter shop knew something about stress and strain, so they consulted him.

"What you need," he said, "is something with more shear stress in its tensile and not so much compression in its momentum." So a cast-iron grand was made, with a special release button to collapse it by remote control from the director's chair.

At this point Mrs. Staatzenfitz got wind of what was happening, and came along, biting her nails ominously. The only thing that made her relax at all was when Mischa explained how much they were paying him. She stayed behind at lunch-time to work this out, because she had eaten on the train.

After lunch the big scene was to be shot. Mischa settled at the keyboard, and Oscar Bensol held the release button. The cameras rolled. Mischa played. On a signal from Rube Shuntel, Oscar pressed the button. *Click!* Mischa still played. *Click-click!* Nothing happened to the piano. After trying the button a few more times Oscar threw it away and sat back to hear the beautiful music. When it was over he turned to Rube, spluttering "Slopstick! You oughta be shameful of yourself with a great artist like this!" and he beckoned Mischa towards his office to change his contract to a musical one.

Mrs. Staatzenfitz got up in a hurry to follow them, and fell over the cables. The pick-up boy picked her up. An electrician picked up her handbag and its scattered contents. His union-conditioned reflexes did not permit of him doing this, but he had spotted among the handbag's contents a screwdriver and a book on *Electric Wiring and All About It*. "She done it!" he screamed, pointing a most provoking finger in Mischa's mom's face. She bit his nails for him, then let go of all her repressions. Five rounds they fought, with all the studio cheering like Madison Square Garden of Allah.

Now, says the Psychologist, Oscar Bensol's unconditional reflexes took over completely. He dragged both Mischa and his mom into the office. "It's my lucky day!" he cooed afterwards to the press boys. "In one day I sign up a great musician and a future world's champion woman boxer! I am so happy I could cry!"

As for Mischa, he did.

IMPENDING APOLOGY

"There was an accident on The Mount on Wednesday, Mr. Morrison, a Council employee, injuring his head when he fell heavily to the ground. First-aid was rendered, and Morrison was severely bruised."

Yorks paper.

IT WASN'T ME

(The astounding revelations which follow were made to Mr. Punch's special representative at Berne, and handed to him in a sealed packet by a Swedish commercial traveller on his way between Ankara and Madrid.)

I loved England. I hated Hitler. That is the secret of the part that I have played in this world drama. Very early I decided that the only way to thwart the Leader's wild ambition was to remain in the inner circles of the party that surrounded him and exercise a moderating influence upon his plans. From the very beginning he distrusted me.

"You are too much the gentleman, von Ribbentrop," he would often say, kicking me. "You lack Kultur." But I was determined, for the sake of England, to remain at my post. Money and power I disdained. My dream was to prevent war and to obtain by peaceful negotiations what the Fuehrer quite obviously intended to take by force.

Shall I ever forget the day when he announced his ridiculous project of marching into the Rhineland?

"Hitler, old boy," I said (only Goering, Goebbels, Hess, Fuchs, Fuss, Schacht, Macht and a few others were allowed to address him in this way), "that must you not do." He was eating a doughnut at the Chancellery when I uttered these words.

"What for not?" he inquired in a muffled voice, between mouthfuls.

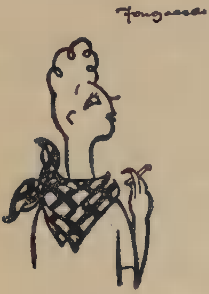
"Because," I said clearly, "it will precipitate a cosmic catastrophe."

Even more ignorant than he was vain, the Fuehrer entirely missed the point of my epigram. Before he could take the trouble to consult a dictionary the fatal order had been given and my good advice had been thrown to the winds.

It was the same with Austria. Many will remember the occasion on which I gave the Nazi salute at Buckingham Palace. That action was widely misinterpreted. It was taken to mean that I owed allegiance to the very party which was trying to ruin my Fatherland and upset the peace of the world. In fact it was intended to bring the party into contempt by demonstrating the absurdity of its claims.

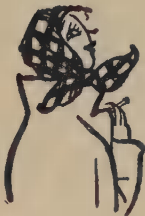
"NOW ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE PROFESSOR? BECAUSE IF NOT HE'S JUST GOT NICE TIME TO CATCH THE SIX-FORTY-FIVE BACK TO TOWN."

UTILITY


Spring

Summer

Autumn


Winter

Hitler was furious when he heard about it. Publicly he struck off my epaulettes, and for a time I remained under a cloud. "Halifax, old son," I wrote, "I seem to have failed in my mission." (Incidentally, I was the only Ambassador who had the privilege of addressing Lord Halifax as "old son.") But when I left England my Chow remained at the German Embassy. Dog-lovers to a woman, the English have often blamed me for leaving my dear dog behind. Little they know that concealed in a note, which was tucked in that dog's collar, was a complete revelation of Germany's war plans for the subjugation of Europe, and the designs for several of our most deadly inventions of war. Unhappily, the dog became hungry and devoured it, thus plunging Europe into night.

There followed Munich. Here I took the side of Chamberlain and Daladier, and did my best to influence Mussolini on the side of Czechoslovakia. But I was unable to force my counsels on the headstrong will of the Fuehrer. For a time I remained under another cloud. This was only dissipated when I pretended to encourage the attack upon Poland. But I kept my tongue in my cheek, knowing well that war with Poland would ultimately mean the ruin of the Nazi party and a triumph for Albion, the land I loved.

I helped to negotiate the pact with Russia. But even as I signed the document I winked significantly at my Russian *confrères*. I knew that the die had been cast and that civilization was in the melting pot. But I perceived also that in the end Right must prevail over Might, and I said to myself that the knell of totalitarianism was being rung.

Hitler came to hear of this wink, and once more I was under a cloud. "You drink too much champagne, Herr Ribbentrop," he said, dropping for the first time, the "von."

I discouraged the attack upon France and the Netherlands. I threw cold water upon the *Luftwaffe*. I threw an ink-bottle at Goebbels. I encouraged the secret mission of Hess, sending with him a private message in code, which he apparently mislaid. I fleered at Rommel; I made fun of the Gestapo; I encouraged the insubordination of the leaders of the *Wehrmacht*. I offered to take entire charge of the armies in the Eastern Front, knowing that was certain to bring about an early cessation of hostilities. But I was constantly flouted and gainsaid.

This was not entirely to my disadvantage, for it must be understood that Hitler was at all times inordinately jealous. It

was his chief characteristic. If any general was successful he was immediately relieved of his command. If any Minister was praised in the papers he was at once degraded. The only way to make him do anything was to suggest that he had thought of it himself. Once, when I was under one of my darkest clouds, I recovered prestige by reminding him that he had taken a vow to ride into Leningrad on a white ass, and saying that I had already selected myself as the animal. This pleased him, for he was in one of his more humorous moods.

He hated Goebbels. He detested Himmler. He abominated Goering. He had the utmost contempt for Ley. He preferred praise of Mr. Churchill to praise of his own generals, who only received Grand Crosses and oak-leaves when they ran away. By continually flattering him, by appearing to be drunk, and by perpetually failing in all my diplomatic relations with neutral countries, I saw that I could remain in his favour and at the same time achieve my ultimate goal, which was to rescue the Fatherland from his tyranny and lay the foundations of a lasting peace. On the day that I burst into his private observatory at Berchtesgaden and told him that thirty-six nations were now in arms against Germany, Uruguay having now thrown the whole weight of her war-strength into the struggle, he actually smiled. "Well, von Ribbentrop," he murmured (he had restored the "von"), "no one can say that you have not done your best."

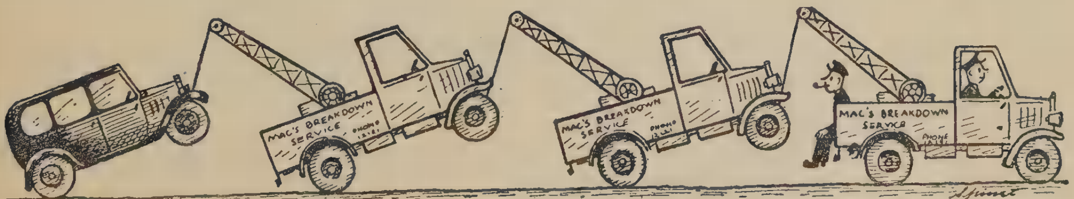
It was by these subtle and secret means that I was occasionally able to make him listen to the counsels of one who was always a good citizen of Europe and (as I have endeavoured to show) a devoted Anglophil, a democrat, a friend of Poland and a supporter of the U.S.S.R.

(*Even more breath-taking revelations of the inner secrets of the Nazi party are likely to follow, when we think our readers have got their second wind.*)

ONE THING AT A TIME

"Sonia Thomas, aged 4, whose parents live at Whitehawk-crescent, Brighton, received a child's needle-work basket as a present from her parents, and when trying to thread her first needle she swallowed it. She was taken to hospital, and was found to be suffering from chicken pox. Efforts are being made to trace the needle."

Evening paper.



COMMUNICATIONS

My landlord punched me hard in the ribs; then he took me by the shoulders and nearly shook my head off.

"That's no way," I said, "to treat a dying man."

"It's gorn seven," he said, and clumped out of the room, whistling a bit of *Madame Butterfly*.

I had a feeling that all this had happened before. As a matter of fact, it had; but last time it had only "gorn six," and my tea was steaming hot instead of icy cold. I drank the tea with a shudder and got down the bed again. I already had an idea that I should not be well enough to go to the War Office that day.

"It's gorn eight," said my landlord, after a minute or two.

"I'm ill," I said—"can you ring up from the call-box for me?"

"Shthink so. Saying what?"

I took the pad I keep by my bedside for the purpose of capturing inspirational dreams, wrote down the telephone number and the message. "Captain Bollinger has a bad cold and will not be in this morning, but may try to get in this afternoon."

"Okay," said my landlord.

"Okay," I said.

He was back almost at once, to say that he'd got the message through.

"You've been very quick," I said.

"It's gorn nine," he said.

Presently I heard him rattling away on his bicycle to his day's work, minding the boilers. I think he minds boilers. I know he sometimes gets called out in the middle of the night when there's a frost. He used to go off to work later and later as the mornings got darker and darker. This seems to me to be a very good arrangement, and I have often wished the High Commands would get together and arrange something of the sort for soldiers.

"Mummay!"

The daughter of the house was awake. Her voice went through my head like a steel knitting-needle.

"Mummay! Wan' samming twate."

"In a minute," said my landlady, sounding surprisingly close. She was coming up the stairs. I have often thought, during the short time I have been at my present address, that I might do something helpful about teaching this penetrating five-year-old the English language. It seemed a shame that she was going to grow up into one of those pretty girls who shrivel everything within hearing as soon as they open their mouths. Her voice followed her mother up the stairs with insistence.

"Wan' samming twate, mummay!"

"I said in a minute. There's others want something to eat besides you, my gel."

THE ROPE-WALKER.

Shade of Frederick the Great: "I know I brought it off—but then I didn't have you on my back."

My landlady, who is a great respecter of the proprieties, opened the door and spoke to me from the other side of it.

"Lily Turnbull's called with a message," she said.

"Who has?"

"Mrs. Turnbull's Lily—*you* know."

I didn't know. I was feeling ill.

"Where you was," explained my landlady—"before you come."

"Oh, yes," I said.

Mrs. Turnbull had been a previous landlady of mine. Out of sheer kindness of heart she had taken me in temporarily and allowed me to sleep in her bed. She had formed the habit of sleeping in the cellar, with the coke. A falling-off in nocturnal visitors from abroad, however, coupled with the colder nights and the sudden demise of her oil-stove, had caused the situation to be reviewed. I had had to go.

Mrs. Turnbull's little girl was a strapping adolescent called Lily. I couldn't imagine why she had called.

"What's the message?" I asked.

My landlady took up a position of concentration behind the door, and repeated mechanically:

"The War Office want the number."

"What number?"

"Don't know. That's what she says."

"Wan' samming *twate*, Mam!"

"In a minute, my gel."

"Telephone number, do they mean?"

"Don't know. Would you like to speak to Lily?"

"I think I'd better," I said.

The small house shook to the mounting footsteps. There was whispering outside.

"Good morning, Lily," I croaked. "What was the message exactly?"

"They wanted Mrs. Bollinger, Mr. Bollinger."

"They wanted *what*?"

"They asked for Mrs. Bollinger, because they said she'd rung them up, and they wanted to ring *her* up, and when Mum said she wasn't there because she'd gone back to East Angular they wanted her number."

The door stirred slightly.

"That's awful," I said; "that's really awful, Lily. I see exactly what's happened. Mrs. Bollinger happened to ring me up at the War Office and they told her I was ill, and she would want to know how ill, thinking I'd been rocketed at the very least, but they wouldn't know how ill, because it's ten to one she didn't speak to whoever got the message I sent, so they said they'd find out and let her know, and so they rang up your house because when I was living there I left that telephone

number on the officers' address book and of course I've never thought to alter it. So now she's waiting for a call from them and she won't get it, because they didn't ask for her number because they thought they had it. Do you see, Lily?"

"I think so, Mr. Bollinger. Should I ring up and give them the number?"

"What number?"

"Mrs. Bollinger's number, Mr. Bollinger."

"Good gracious, no," I said. "They'd ring up with some information about my not actually being on the danger list, or something. I shall have to get up."

"Yes, Mr. Bollinger."

"Thank you for bringing the message, Lily."

"Thank you, Mr. Bollinger."

She thundered good-naturedly down the stairs, leaving the door open. The draught whistled through me like a knife. My landlady, feeling she could do no more, had already gone down. The five-year-old lifted up her voice.

"Wan' samming t—"

It seemed to me that the sentence finished itself in a spoonful of porridge.

From the call-box at the end of the road I called my wife. It took a long time, and call-boxes, which are hot in summer, are cold in winter. When the Exchange had insisted with unrestrained exasperation that they ought to know whether there was no reply or not, I came out into the windswept street, shivering. I should have liked some breakfast; failing that, some lunch. Even a shave would have been something.

I turned up the collar of my greatcoat and set off feverishly for the Underground.

"Yesterday it got down by itself."

Major Perilmead swore when I walked into his office an hour later, and turned white.

"You look terrible," he said. "I thought you were in bed."

"I feel terrible," I said; "and I was in bed. What have you done to my wife?" I chattered my teeth at him and he pushed his chair back to the wall.

"Me?" he said. "Done to her?"

"I mean what have you been telling her?"

"About me."

"Look, old man," said the Major, ingratiatingly. "Your're not yourself. You should never have come in at all to-day. That's what I telephoned to say—but you'd left the wrong number; they said they'd take a message. Hadn't you better sit down?"

I sat down.

"You see," he went on, regaining confidence, "I wasn't here when your wife rang up to say you were ill——"

"Just a minute——"

"No, just a minute, old man—but when they passed on the message about you coming in later in the day I rang up to say you weren't to do anything of the sort."

"I don't see," I said, beginning to feel weak, "why anybody in this building should expect my wife to have a man's voice with a pronounced Middlesex accent—I expect the message came through an N.C.O. who got it from the girl on the switchboard, and he thought she was my wife—though why even an N.C.O. should expect my wife to . . . And I don't see," I branched off, "how I'm going to explain it all to Mrs. Turnbull——"

"What about your wife?"

"My wife's name is Mrs. Bollinger. She is in East Angular."

"And Mrs. Turnbull is your landlady?"

"My landlady's name is Edwards," I said; "but Mrs. Turnbull used to let me sleep in her bed." I was feeling tired. "Though of course that was only during the raids."

"Er—naturally," said Perilmead.

"Her little girl, Lily, brought me the message."

"Your landlady's little girl?"

He really looked worried about me—my health and my whole way of life. I got to my feet, before he set about chafing my hands or something.

"My landlady's little girl is five," I said coldly, making my way towards the door, "and I have something in common with her."

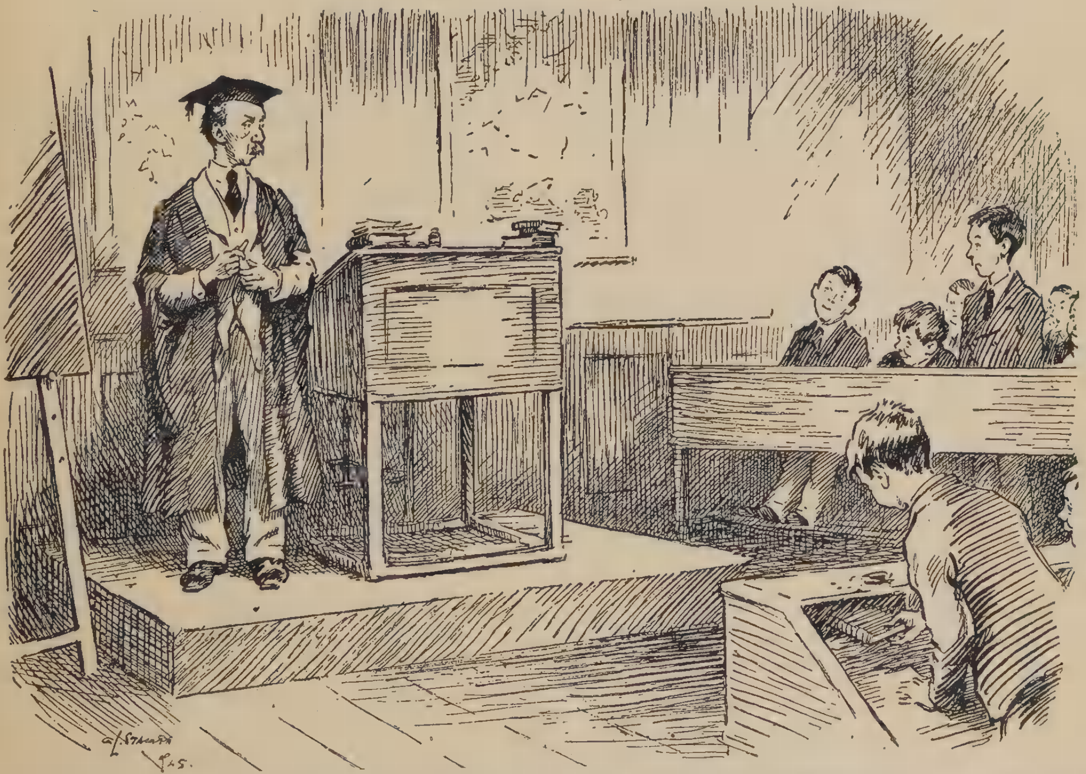
"Oh, what's that?" He was humouring me.

"Wan' samming twate," I said, slinking weakly along to the lift.

He was looking very grave as the gates closed. I expect he is sending a message to me telling me to stay right away for a week. If so, I hope it doesn't get through.

THE POSTE-WIF

With us also up-on our pilgrimage
A poste-wif ther was, of evene age,
And she was cleped Madame Robinson;
Up-on hir fet she hadde longe y-gon
From hus to hus about the tounes lengthe;
Al lithe were hir limbes and grete of strengthe,



"That's the second time this term, Hawkins minor, that you've asked me whether Himmler was once a schoolmaster."

For she on hem had walked many a mile.
Ther nas no man that mighte hir be-gile
To yeven him his lettres by the waye:
She nolde herkne; she wolde him with saye.
Bisy she was, and went fro dore to dore;
Certes in knokkyng nas hir non bi-fore.
I woot she hadde lettres in hir maille
Fro Nederlonde and Fraunce and from Itaille,
And other londes atte worldes ende:
From werre and prisoun wolde men hem sende
That in hir wordes they mighte holde in minde
His tendre wives and childer left be-hinde
In Engelonde, with saddle and hevy chere,
Departed from hir lordes, yere on yere.
At Criste-masse y-lade wolde she be;
Saint Nikolas she was in hir countree.
Under hir piked cappe hir lokkes broune
In wispes softe and crulle hengede doune:
Of blewe was hir cloke, as I was war:
Up-on o fingre of hir hand she bar
A golden ring, ther with she had ben wedd
By hir dere lorde, that now in Fraunce was ded.
But brave she was, and eke of heigh corage:
I rood be-side hir in our pilgrimage.

OVER-ENTHUSIASM

"For Sale, old Italian Mandolin, nearly new, complete with case and music book-stand, £5."

Devon paper.

March, 1945

SEEING A HOUSE

"YOU'LL have to give the front gate a good push," said the man from whom I got the key.

I gave it it. The top of the gate bent back, but the lower part remained immovable.

We both gave the front gate a good push, acting in unison.

It was a wooden gate. The top part broke off completely and fell into the garden.

"I thought it would be a bit stiff," said the man. We climbed over and walked up the path to the house.

It had been a good house. It must have been, because the man said so.

"My wife," he said, "lived in this house. It nearly broke her heart to leave it."

This saddened me, but I rallied. She may, I thought, have had rather a brittle heart.

He told me about the bomb damage, but I did not listen very earnestly. It was clear to me, because of the bits of the house that had fallen off into the garden, and because of the boards that covered the windows, that the house had been harmed. I was trying the lock of the front door.

"It sticks a little," said the man. "Let me have it."

Apparently, by putting the key in the lock upside down and shifting it about a little, and half pulling it out, and a quarter pushing it in again, the lock could be taken unawares.

"There!" said the man proudly.

I turned the handle of the front door and ent——

I turned the handle of the front door and pushed.

"It's the damp, I think," said the man.

I said it was the very word I was about to use myself.

We both flung our weight against the front door, and it opened about two feet inwards. We squeezed inside.

"It'll get easier after a bit," said the man. "Look, it shuts perfectly now."

We went into the first room on the left.

"This is the dining-room," said the man.

He spoke rather like Columbus discovering America. The room was full of glass and wood and plaster and bits of string. Pieces of the ceiling had fallen. The wallpaper had peeled. There was a smell of dry-rot in the air.

"The sun," he said, "used to stream into this room while we breakfasted.

"I LEFT BABY AT HOME TO-DAY—HE THROWS IT OUT."

My daughter was never tired of looking at the view over the common, with the church beyond, from the windows of this room."

I pulled aside a piece of board. In the drizzling rain that half obscured the landscape a girl in overalls was doing something or other to a lorry in front of a row of Nissen huts. "I see," I said.

I looked at the fireplace.

"Somebody has been breakfasting here quite recently," I remarked pleasantly, pointing to a broken cup and a potted-meat tin. I felt rather like Little Goldilocks in the house of the Three Bears.

"It's the men," he said. "That's the worst of them. They *will* strip off the wainscoting to make their tea."

"What do they do after that?" I said with some curiosity.

"They generally get called off to go somewhere else," said the man. "It's the pool, you see."

I envisaged the men sitting round the pool. I thought of the Lake of Lethe. I thought of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. We went on.

"This is the drawing-room," said the man. "It was a most charming room. My sister-in-law is always longing to come back to this room again."

It was faintly lit from one broken window. The floor was carpeted with rubble, like the floor of the dining-room.

"What do the men do in here?" I asked.

He seemed to think that this was the men's dining-room. I was beginning to grow confused about the proper uses of the various rooms.

"Let's go out and look at the garden," he said. "This door leads straight out into the garden."

We unlocked the door and flung our full weight against it simultaneously.

" 'Leads' is not the right word," I said sadly. "Are you much hurt?"

"Only a scratch or two." We got up from the grass and looked at the patch of desolate weeds. One corner had apparently been devoted to brussels sprouts, and another to cabbages. They had not repaid that devotion. There was a small bomb-crater in the middle of the garden, and an old bedstead in the bomb-crater.

"It used to be a lovely garden," said the man. "My aunt is always remembering how she enjoyed sitting in this garden during the summer."

I thought I had never met a man with so nostalgic a family.

"Shall we go upstairs?" he said.

I agreed reverently. We went upstairs. I went first.

"Be careful," he shouted. "There are one or two rather shaky—— Are you all right?"

I took my leg out of the hole. I wondered if his grandmother was often remembering how she used to stamp about on the stairs. But I did not say so.

We examined the bedrooms. He told me to whom they had each belonged. It was very interesting. I tried to turn a tap in the bathroom, and a piece of plaster fell from the ceiling and hit me on the hat. The rooms looked very dirty and very small. We went down again. We went carefully. We went right down into the kitchen.

"It's a good range," said the man. "My wife——"

But I did not listen to him. There was a lot of wood in the grate, and a broken beer-bottle on the floor, and an old newspaper which seemed to have contained food. Apparently the kitchen was the men's luncheon-room.

We went up to the hall again.

"How long do you suppose it would take to get the whole house done up?" I said.

"Done up?"

"Well, repaired," I substituted.

"Oh, that you can't possibly say. It's the men, you see. They come when they can."

It seemed to me that they were canned when they came. But I didn't say so. I went to the front door.

It is a simple fact in dynamics that it is far, far easier to push a front door open than to pull it open. We both tried in vain. I might have guessed it. We were imprisoned.

"Have you a whistle?" I said, "or do we shout?"

"The only thing to do," said the man, "is to

"THE WAY YOU SAY 'SO THAT'S THE TALLEST BUILDING IN LONDON' ANYONE'D THINK IT'S *MY* RUDDY FAULT."

tear away the boards from the dining-room window and jump. We shall have to jump over the basement pit, you know."

We jumped. We fell in the bushes. For some reason or other this seemed to amuse the girl who was still messing about with the lorry on the edge of the common. Perhaps it was partly because we were both smeared with black and white patches from head to foot, and because my hat was knocked in. Still, we got away.

"Well, what do you think about it?" said the man.

"I shall write," I said. As indeed I have.

TABLE-TALK OF AMOS INTOLERABLE

"The night was young," Amos began, "the wine old, the company middle-aged, the wit infantile . . ."

He gulped his drink and sat as if reflecting. At last somebody said, "Aren't you going on?" and he replied, "Why should I?"

* * * * *

"There was a time, many years ago," said Amos, "when they used to make a great point of declaring that radio announcers were supposed to read the news without any 'tendentious inflection' whatever: the ideal was that the listener should get a flat grey impression as if he were looking at a block of newspaper print, and supply all the necessary 'expression' himself when he had grasped the sense. That this rule has, officially or not, been modified," Amos went on, "I do not have to tell any one of you who has ever heard an announcer pronounce the word" (he took a deep breath and opened his eyes wide) " 'treMMMENdous.' "

* * * * *

"In fact," he proceeded, "the tendency now is all the other way. It became necessary for a friend of mine recently to broadcast a passage containing the numbers fifty-eight to seventy-two, spoken consecutively, and by the time they'd finished criticizing him at rehearsals and telling him to correct the monotony of his intonations he was delivering it like this . . ."

Amos stood up and took his coat off, loosened his collar, rested his hands on the table, bent forward, and began ingratiatingly, "Fifty-eight, *fifty*-nine, sixty!" He paused and then said slowly and reflectively, "Sixty-one . . . sixty-two; *sixty-three*, sixty-fo-o-o-our—sixty-five. Sixty-six. Six—tee—seb'm. Sixty-eight. Sixty-*nine*! Seventy!" Then with an implied "but" in his tone: "Seventy-*one* . . ." and finally an angry yell "SEVENTY-TWO!"

Applause broke out, someone crying "Encore! Now give us the upper

eighties!" Amos bowed as he put on his coat again and said, "Sounds quite controversial, doesn't it?"

* * * * *

"And while I am on the subject of radio, may I warn the radio comedian (as he is often called)," Amos said, looking hard at a member of the company who was suspected of having supplied jokes and even whole scripts for broadcasting, "to beware of that popular device of using the deliberately bad joke as a considered effect? I declare categorically that there never has been and never will be a studio audience capable of differentiating between bad jokes and good. The stratum or solid foundation of half-wits in the audience, as well as practically everybody else in it, will laugh harder than ever at a deliberately bad joke, partly because they honestly think it funny and partly because so much fuss has been made over it in the way of painfully forced laughs and elephantine over-emphasis that even the complete morons can realize the presence of some kind of witticism. So they laugh; and where does the comedian's clever effect go? Down the drain."

He paused and then began to add, "Where the whole act——" but checked himself, wrenching his unaccommodating features into a look of benevolence. "I do not wish, after all," he said, "to be unkind."

* * * * *

Once fed himself, Amos is apt to give disconcertingly close attention to the meals of other people. The pub still provides hot meals over the counter, and any serious hard-headed luncher who complains or even shows signs of being about to complain about his food for reasons Amos considers unjustified has to put up with a good deal of criticism, whether Amos knows him or not.

The most recent example was a pop-eyed little man who sat at the counter in his overcoat and bowler hat and made a face when the barmaid told him the choice for the day: "All we got left is pork luncheon meat or sausages."

Amos watched him like a moth-eaten panther.

"Cor," said the little man. "All right, sausages."

Amos stood up sharply and leaned on the bar at his side. "Have you lost all sense of taste?" he inquired. The little man said, "Who, me?"

"Are you under the delusion," Amos said in a grating tone, "that sausages must be better to eat because the other stuff comes out of a tin?"

The little man looked all round, becoming more pop-eyed than ever, and then asked the bar at large, "'Smatter, did I say sunnick wrong?"

Amos tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Can't you taste good meat when you get it? Would you *rather* have skins full of pepper and dough and bits of rubber? Doesn't your palate tell you anything?"

"What's 'e mean, *palate*?" said the man, looking at us. "Ah!" he added as his sausages arrived. "Pass me the sauce, mate."

Amos panted angrily. When the little man looked at him with sympathy and said, "I got a sister-in-law that suffers with the gastric, too," he realized that the only thing to do was to sit down again.

* * * * *

Of a man about whom it might be gently said that he was rather late with his intellectual responses, Amos said, "The day the war ends, he'll sign up for a course in aircraft-recognition."

SHE HAD TO LIVE IN IT

"Yes, this is Garside 218. Oh, hullo darling, how nice of you to ring me. Yes, I heard you were coming. Yes, we're really settled now, been here quite a year and *love* it. It's a fine old house and really in *excellent* condition, except for the roof. But we must meet soon. I take Anna into town every Thursday for her sun-ray. Oh, no, it was only a chill really, but the doctor thought . . . It *is* a pity you couldn't come out. Of course it's *rather* long in the bus, but only a mile and a half through the fields after that. Alison came. Oh, I see, she told you. Well, yes, it *is* just a little out of the way, and not modern like her own very bijou flat, but after all, the only way to *get* a house nowadays is to take one that no one else will have. Everyone else says we've been *very* lucky. Oh, yes, we got a permit. *That* only took six months. We're allowed to spend £400. Isn't that splendid? Oh, no, nothing done yet. The boiler got lost on the railway. But the plumbers came yesterday, and now with the storm coming on they'll simply have to stay and finish the job. *Couldn't* have been better. Yes, of course, they're staying in the house, but after all, as the plumber said, if they're here they're here. And they're sweet with the children, *and* the paraffin stove. Yes, it was *dear* of Alison. She sent it after she'd stayed. Oh, she did, did she? But, after all, we just can't have a kitchen till we slap a door. Well, that's what they call it. It means making a hole in the wall the size of a door. Oh, yes, but you see, dear, we slapped one door already. I mean we slapped the hole, and then the carpenter said he daren't come yet to make the door. Oh, yes, but don't you see, after you get the permit to do it you have to get the permit for wood to do it with. Yes, you fill it in in triplicate. Well, I suppose three people have to read it. And then they all write the carpenter, and he writes back. It's so important not to use too much wood. Oh, well, I expect they do know. No, I don't expect they have practical men in the Ministry. You see, labour's so scarce, they're all needed elsewhere. Oh, yes, he's awfully well. He was home on leave. A great help. It was really he who got the plumber to come. The Army has improved his vocabulary immensely. He just telephoned twice a day, and he was very good with the railway too. Oh, no, I shouldn't think the telephone calls are included in the £400 at all. And then he set out the basins

THE STATELY HOMES OF ENGLAND.

("A sub-standard of accommodation will have to be accepted during the housing emergency."—*Mr. George Hicks, Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Works.*)

"Here we are, sir. Three 'sorry's' and three 'thank you's' and you're there . . ."

at night. Oh, well, that's more the carpenter's job. No, I really can't blame the plumber. He's such a nice man. I'm making them all a cup of coffee. They've just slapped two big holes in the wall, and now they're in the roof. Oh, yes, a three-storey house. What? Someone on the line? Good-bye, darling, so nice of you, it may be the carpenter.

"Garside 218. Hullo. Yes, he *is* here. Oh, no trouble. He's only in the attic. . . . Hullo, I'm sorry, I simply can't get him. He's just gone inside the wall with a candle. At least, my son says he saw his boots disappearing, and we did shout, but then he's a little deaf. What's that? What's he doing inside the walls with a candle? Well, really, I mean I never thought: I supposed it was an essential part of the business of putting in a bathroom, but then I've never seen a bathroom put in before. Perhaps the candle's to light his cigarette. Oh, I see, you have a bathroom. How lovely. Oh, I see—a pipe leaking. But how dreadful for you. And the maid away. Can you give me her address? I mean yes of course you must do something. Now let me advise you. I'm an expert on leaks. You mustn't waste a minute. You must have a succession of bowls and pails, placed as closely together as possible. I'm thinking of writing to the Ministry of Supply, I think you call it—so funny, because they don't supply much, do they? Well, I'm thinking of writing them to suggest that all bowls be made square so that they fit closely together and no drips come down between. But I'll give you a really practical tip meantime. Get a lot of saucers (you'll have lots of saucers) and put one in each gap between the basins. Now you must be wary. The saucers will need emptying very soon. Don't waste effort. Just *tip* them into the basins. Then later on you tip the basins into . . . Oh, I see, you must have the plumber immediately for your bathroom leak. But aren't you very lucky to have a bathroom to leak? But I tell you he's just gone into the wall with a candle to make a bathroom for me. Oh, well, he'll be out for coffee shortly and I can tell him. Yes, yes, of course, an emergency—It's just like a doctor, isn't it? You know my husband is a doctor. He's in the Army now, of course. Yes, misses the children terribly. Well, before the war I was quite accustomed to emergency calls. Now your name and address? . . . Mrs. Anderson, The Beeches. You go right to bed, Mrs. Anderson, and the plumber'll be along immediately.

"Hullo. Yes, this is Garside 218. Yes, the plumber *is* here. Isn't it

splendid? He's just gone into the wall—Oh, I see, your alternator's bust. But what's that? Oh, but you've got the wrong number. This is Thos. Donaldson's, the plumber's, I mean . . . Oh, I see, I didn't know he was an electrician as well. Oh, of course, a dairy farm. An emergency. I quite understand, Mr. Lee. He'll be right along. Lovely morning, isn't it? I mean dreadful storm. *Good* morning.

"I've collected these for you."

"Garside 218. Oh, *hullo*, Doctor, how are you? Oh, yes, Tommy's *quite* better. We're sleeping downstairs now. Yes, yes, of course, and in any case that room can easily be used as a spare room. I mean *one* night wouldn't . . . Oh, you don't think even one *hour*. Oh, well. Oh, but how dreadful for you. In the *downstairs* bathroom too. *And* your electric toaster. Well, of course, the *plumber's* an electrician too. Certainly I'll tell him. What's that? Someone on the line? Good morning, Doctor.

"Yes, Garside 218. Yes, the plumber *is* here. However did you guess? Name and address, please. The Department of Agriculture. I didn't know he was an agriculturist too. Oh, I see, you only want to discuss . . . Well, I doubt if he can spare the time. He has one or two other calls this morning. Oh, yes, I'd be delighted to fetch him to the 'phone. He's only three stories up, but you see he's just gone into a hole in the wall with a candle. But certainly, come along and see him. Do. We all gather round the paraffin stove for coffee at eleven. Yes, aren't they useful? Practically no smell at all. Which is more than you can say for—— Oh, well, but if you want a *real* talk, there's a little spare bedroom on the first floor I'd be *delighted* to let you have for an hour. Oh, no, but a pleasure! Coffee at eleven.

"Hullo, Exchange. Hullo, Exchange. This is Thos. Donaldson, Plumber, Electrician and—I mean, this is Garside 218. The plumber and I—I mean, I'm going away for a week or two. Yes, the Riviera. Cornish, you know. So you needn't trouble ringing. Yes, I'll let you know. *Good* morning."

"Reward—Lost, Sept. 21, . . . small parcel containing nightgown (husband's gift)."

Advt. in Liverpool paper.

All right, *we* didn't say anything!

HAPPY ENDING

When James looks unhappy his face sheds about thirty-nine years of soft living and loose thinking and he appears to be leaning out of an invisible bassinette in search of an out-of-reach rattle. He becomes infinitely pathetic.

"What is it?" I asked.

"Oh, nothing," he said.

"Well, you look as if you'd swallowed a razor-blade. Is it tinned crayfish or only war-weariness?"

"Neither." James gulped slightly. "If you must know, it's my vulture."

"It's your what?"

"My vulture."

I sat down on the edge of his desk and patted his shoulder.

"My dear fellow," I said. "Six years of war unhinge the strongest. Has the blood-pressure been read lately?"

"You don't understand. My vulture is exceedingly unwell. They don't seem to know exactly what's the matter. It sounds like pneumonia, but obviously in the case of a vulture it's not very easy——"

"James!" I cried sharply. "We are old friends. Let there be no beating about the bush. What are you talking about?"

"My vulture. The one I'm supporting."

"Is this a juggling turn?"

"No, a fact. At the Zoo. You see, I was there about a year ago strolling round and I'd watched the lions being fed and felt a bit exhausted by it so I sat down for a breather in one of those tin chairs that turn you into a waffle when you get up."

"I know," I said, as sympathetically as I could.

"I was facing that big cage that looks as if a millionaire had been in debt to his parrot, and doing my best to think of nothing in particular, when suddenly I had a terrific shock."

"A man asked you for tuppence for the chair?"

"Have you ever had strychnine injected into your astral body?" James asked.

"No."

"Nor sat on the live rail at Leicester Square?"

"Never."

"Well, it was just between the two. When I came round I found I was eye to eye with an enormous bird."

"It was probably just an elderly Fellow. Some do get like that."

"It was in the cage. Up on a great perch, staring through and through me. Reading the secrets of my soul. The wisdom of the ages was in its eye."

"Very bizarre and unnerving, I should think."

"Curiously enough," said James, "it was neither. An immediate bond seemed to be forged between us. Do you know about vultures?"

"Not very choosy eaters, are they?"

"No, but what they're like?"

"Rather similar to the better class of undertaker, if I remember rightly, except for somewhat stouter undercarts."

"At first sight the face is like a boat-hook that's been pushed through a feather boa. On further examination there are seen to be panels at the side on which skilled leather-workers have tried out a number of experimental designs. Above the panels are the eyes. And they're pure psychic X-ray."

"It all sounds simply charming."

"William—that's my vulture—has a wonderful way of suddenly dropping his head about a foot and still staring at you, only sideways."

"That's an old House of Commons trick," I said thoughtlessly.

"If you're going to sneer I shan't go on," James muttered, and for a moment icing conditions prevailed.

"I'm awfully sorry, James," I said quickly. "Please."

"There's not much more to it, actually, except that I went straight away and signed up for his keep for the duration. Every leave since I've been to Regent's Park, and the moment he's spotted me he's done a slow roll into the corner of the cage and we've spent the day making little cooing noises at each other."

"You probably have the same wavelength," I suggested.

NO DIM-OUT.

"THE LIGHTS BURN BRIGHTER AND SHINE MORE BROADLY THAN EVER BEFORE."—*The Prime Minister.*

"I shouldn't be surprised."

"Nor should I. How bad is he?"

"They take a poor view. Vultures are very well made, but when they pack up they pack up good and proper."

"Mightn't it help if you went and made little cooing noises at him at opening time?"

"That's the whole point. They think it might just make the difference. But I haven't any leave left."

"Not even a forty-eight?"

"All burnt up. It looks as if poor William's had it."

"Well, there's always compassionate leave," I suggested. James gave me one of his old-fashioned glances.

"K.R.s say nothing about sick vultures," he said.

"You could always go to the Group Captain and say, 'Excuse me, sir, but my vulture is far from well.' "

"I suppose there's nothing to stop me reciting 'There are Fairies at the Bottom of my Garden' to him. Once."

"I quite see what you mean, James," I said, "but for all you know he may have a secret passion for birds of prey. I'm not sure I didn't see him brooding over *Our Feathered Friends* in the Mess the other day."

James stared glumly out of the window.

"It would be a V.C. job," he said.

"You're not altogether a coward," I said. "Are you not the man who wired a bloater, and a ripe one, to the Air Commodore's cylinder-head?"

"Yes. But——"

"And who ordered twenty-five tons of paving stones to be delivered to a certain A.V.M.?"

"*Sshh!*" James exploded, peering anxiously behind him.

"Then go to it. Either William is worth it or he isn't."

"You really think there might be a chance?"

"Of course. Group Captains are very complex mechanisms. Some have hearts, as well as hats, of gold."

James ground his teeth noisily. Then he went very white. Then he went out quickly. A moment later his sergeant came in.

"Telegram for the Squadron-Leader, sir."

"I think I'd better open it for him, Caxton, in case."

"Very good, sir."

"Excellent news, Caxton. The Squadron-Leader's sick friend in London has laid an egg."

"I beg pardon, sir?"

"He is much the better for it."

"Yes, sir. Where is the Squadron-Leader, sir?"

"Just at the moment, Caxton, he is with the Group Captain." And it may have been unfeeling, but I laughed.

"Cook Wanted, March 1st . . . comfortable quarters with radio; own bedroom; help few hours four days a week; two in family; only one who can be well recommended."

Advt. in Hereford paper.

That kills it.

FRATERNIZATION

"The Politics"

Oh! Sergeant! why do you search so diligent my dwelling? Not I to have dictatorial documentaries in concealment.

I am so innocent as a sheep of not democratic attitude and I insist on you not in my house finding tell-tale evidences. I am one who I understand the politics, up to the moment. Fourteen times have I listened to not German radio opinions and so understood many things.

Do not you comprehend us Germans, who we are just the same as you, Nordic in races, and should, therefore, both of our nations be eye to eye? Think how of you ruling the seas with us in conquer of the land, hand in hand, could we not be masters of many peoples?

Sergeant! why do you so grimly handle the wardrobe of my nephew, who he is only a youngling, the poor Adolf? It is true there are many uniforms, but boys do be boys, unhelpfully, remember!

Sergeant, do not behave inhumanitarianly. Remember, it is to us Germans, poor people, to whom us many evils have also been done by the Party. Curse the Party!

But are we not right in not wishing to be Bolsheviks, eh? Yourselves, surely you do not wish to see Liberals snatching over Buckingham Palace, do you? What if a Bolshevik were to be chosen for Chancellor in Commons? What then?

Sergeant, have opinions! Do not be so silent like those of no opinions. It is so unheartening! Do not kick at a down man, eh?

By the way, Sergeant,

"By jove, this Trollope is hot stuff!"

what of America helping itself to some of British Empire? What of that? We Germans, who we think often of British Empire, would not agree we would be of your opinion, there!

What, Sergeant? It is indeed a revolver? Oho, oho. It is only the personal weapon of my daughter, I suppose, who she wishes to defend herself in case of burgle!

Sergeant, why do you arrest me? Sergeant . . . *Teufel!*

THE MEMOIRS OF MIPSIE: COMING OUT

What an auspicious event this was in the good old days, and how different from the present time, when a girl's figure scarcely changes with her début and young people seem old before their teens! "Do you mind awfully if I cut Lord's this afternoon, grandpapa?" my grandson said to Addle just before the war at the Eton and Harrow. "There's a new film I want to see." I was somewhat shocked, I must confess, but Addle said nothing. Indeed, he is inclined to be taciturn during a cricket match, I have noticed, and often his only remark during a whole day is "Wait till the end of the over, dear." (I suppose he thinks, in his old-world courteous way, that the players would have to stop their game if I get up from my seat. He is always so considerate.) I am very fond of watching cricket myself, when with a cushion and a congenial companion one can spend the pleasantest afternoon, chatting of times past and present.

To return to girls' figures in the eighties, what miracles of elegance and womanliness they were ! The tiny waist, the soft curves above and below, the smart bustle behind. I must admit, though, that the right effect was not achieved without trouble and sometimes tears. Gone were the days my mother knew, when she used to lie on the floor while an exceptionally strong footman (blindfolded of course) used to place one foot in the small of her back and lace her up. But a figure was still sufficiently important in 1889 for Elsie Rye (Lord Peckham's elder daughter) on the eve of her coming-out ball, to get her young sister to hammer in a croquet hoop round her waist while she lay on the lawn. Unfortunately the sister was then called in to bed and poor Elsie lay the whole night pinned to the damp grass and had pneumonia next morning. Another friend, Lady Mary Linsey-Wolsey, who had the misfortune to be very flat-chested, bethought her of wearing an air cushion inside her dress; but in the crush of a reception she unwisely mounted a chair—someone's hat-pin punctured the air cushion, and the whole crowd looked on in horror while her corsage collapsed with a long whine.

Another trial was hair. Fashion demanded a hair style which needed great luxuriance of woman's glory, and although of course we Coots all had beautiful hair, others were not so blessed, and were forced to wear false switches or coils pinned on. (I hope my male readers will not be shocked to hear of this deception!) My

cousin Clara Twynge was very unlucky in the management of hers. They kept slipping off, once into the offertory plate, and once into a jug of fruit-cup at a ball, which added somewhat to her natural shyness. Indeed, between that and the fact that she was distinctly plain (I do not know why, for she was a close cousin of ours) she was scarcely ever asked for a dance, and some unkind girls dubbed her "Cloak-room Clara" because she used to spend almost every evening in that sad spot. Eventually Mipsie heard of this, and with her usual warm-hearted sympathy soon put things to rights. At the next ball, when Clara entered the ball-room, all eyes were drawn to a card attached to her bustle: "Still waters run deep." That evening she was besieged with partners and received three offers of marriage, all of which, in her shyness, she accepted, which was fortunate as two of the suitors threw her over next morning.

"There was an extraordinary thing on the wireless last night."

Even in that age of beautiful women Mipsie's entrance into Society created something of a sensation. "*Qui est cette demoiselle là?*" asked the French Ambassador, a great connoisseur of beauty. When informed he said simply, "*Tiens!*" and continued to look at Mipsie. Even his Gallic eloquence was silenced by such loveliness, it seems. The same evening H.R.H. the Prince of Wales—afterwards King Edward VII—was evidently much struck with her. She happened, in the supper room, to drop her fan almost at his feet. In a flash he had picked it up and handed it to her. A few minutes later she tripped on the staircase (she trips very easily, I have often noticed) and his was the hand that came to her rescue. "You are unfortunate this evening, Lady Millicent," the Prince said gravely, while Mipsie blushed vividly at the compliment implied. A royal memory for faces is well known of course, but Beauty in Distress had evidently made an indelible impression on her future Sovereign.

But, indeed, Mipsie was always the pet of royalty. Her flashing wit and brilliant repartee often saved some difficult situation and turned a frown from a royal brow. I remember one party at the Royal Yacht Squadron garden during Cowes Week, when the somewhat austere King Crustatian of Iceland was the guest of honour. A sudden thunder shower had turned all the milk sour and H.M. was

disposed to be annoyed, when: "There shouldn't be any shortage of milk at *Cowes*," said Mipsie audaciously. The royal displeasure suddenly melted into a smile, while everyone blessed Mipsie for the quick wit that relieved the tension.

On another occasion she was able to do great service to her country by saving an Eastern potentate from an embarrassing episode. During a house-party at the Duc de Tire-Bouchon's lovely château for the Chantilly races, the vastly rich Great Curd of Bokhara had ordered a beautiful butterfly brooch to be carried out in rubies, amethysts and emeralds, the Duc's racing colours, as a gift for the Duchesse. This lovely jewel was to be placed, as a charming whimsy, in a naturalistic manner amongst the flowers at dinner. But the jeweller had made a mistake and used sapphires instead of amethysts. There was a nervous pause while everyone looked at the butterfly and wondered what was wrong, for the Curd's face was like thunder. Then Mipsie, suddenly realizing the situation, took the brooch and swept him a deep curtsy. "I am honoured, your Highness," she said, "both by the gift and by your gracious memory of our armorial colours." It was a brave, splendid lie (for the Briskett colours are red and silver), told so as to save a foreign Power from embarrassment. Relations were distinctly strained betwen our two countries at the time, so who knows what political strife, or worse, may have been averted by her noble action? But that is not the only time my dear sister, by her tact and brilliance, has helped her country, I am proud to say. At one time she was known as "The Foreign Office Bag," so many statesmen and State secrets did she hold in the palm of her lovely hand.

FOREIGN OFFICE

Algernon Fitz-Courtney Pease
Speaks five languages with ease.
I wonder if he is such a bore
In the other four.

LINE-SHOOT

"London, of townés a per se . . ."
  So sang the ancient Scottish poet.
"London's all right," he meant; and we,
  Back from the Burma jungle, know it.
Yes, every prospect pleases here,
  Life's neither serious nor solemn,
Rice is on points, there's bags of beer,
  And only Nelson's out on Column.

Here is no enemy to baulk,
  I have no need of any sentry,
My bivouac in King's Bench Walk
  Is guarded by a sign "No Entry."
My breakfast I consume in style,
  No need for rice or roots or berries;
My daily march is but a mile
  Along the Thames to Richmond Terrace;

No foes affright, no woes annoy,
  I have no need of compass bearing,
No ambush threatens from Savoy,
  No doubts about the C in Charing;

"... AND *HERE*, IF YOU PLEASE, IS WHERE THE MINISTRY CHANGED ITS MIND AND SAID 'PERMANENT'!"

I do not have to search bamboos
  In Bouverie Street for ration-dropping,
Nor worry over strange canoes
  Reported yesterday from Wapping;

I do not need to make my bed
  In Temple Gardens, nor to build all
My hopes on what that headman said
  (Interrogated at the Guildhall);
I need no guide to Whitehall Court,
  For if perchance I should be lost I'll
Just ask the way: patrols report
  The natives not the least bit hostile;

There are no Japs in Pimlico,
  Though maybe Subhas Chandra Bose is;
The enemy has left Soho,
  Or so Intelligence supposes;
An agent by the names of Jules,
  Head waiter at the Purple Heather,
Reliably reports that mules
  Can use Pall Mall in any weather;

No ants devour my boots at night,
  No leeches use me as a buffet,
No hungry insects buzz or bite,
  No spiders stalk me like Miss Muffet;
London is just the place to be,
  I wouldn't swap with anybody—
The Thames is good enough for me,
  And you can have the Irrawaddy.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH MY LAUNDRY

I wrote and said "You thieves,
you've stolen my handkerchiefs,"
and thought if they reply it
will be but to deny it.
But no; they just wrote "Thanks
a lot for yours *re* hanks."

April, 1945

POST-WAR PLAN WRECKED BY WHEELBARROW

FEELING, in a moment of complacency, that the war would end in May, I said I would just go and get the car into running order again.

"Put your overalls on," they said, as if I was about six years old.

"I was going to," I said, as if I was about four.

"Do you know where they are?"

"Great Scott!" I said. "You all seem to think I am quite incapable of managing my own affairs without your advice and assistance on every single blessed point."

Nobody had the courage to confirm this, so I went upstairs and searched about. I looked first in the place where I remembered to have put the overalls last time, then I looked in the places they might conceivably have got to, and finally I turned, with more hope, to the places where only a tribe of lunatics would have hidden them away. At the bottom of an old hair-trunk in the box-room I found my opera-hat. I am fond of my opera-hat and I went downstairs with it in a bit of a temper.

"Look here," I said. "I found this at the bottom of the old hair-trunk in the box-room."

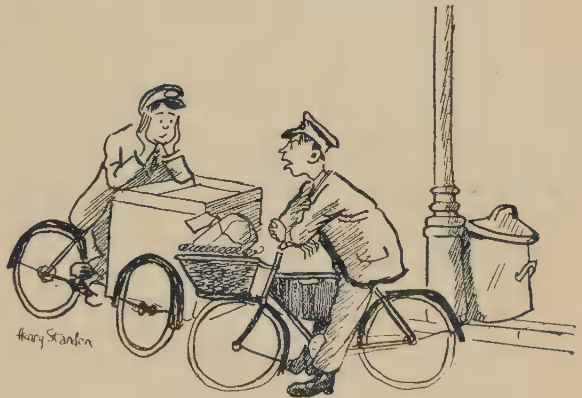
"You don't need an opera-hat to get a car into running order again," they pointed out.

"This is a good hat," I said, "and ought never to have been stuffed away at the bottom of a trunk. You wouldn't like it if I took some of your best hats and bunged them into the box-room underneath a heap of old blankets and bits of Harris tweed. This hat cost money."

"What's the matter with it now?" they asked.

I gave it a flip and I'm bound to say it sprang into position with quite its old zest. I put it on and had a look at myself in the glass. I don't believe there is a man living who could handle an opera-hat for the first time in six years and refrain from taking a swift look at himself with the thing on.

"Look at that!" I said. "It's a king hat. It's a humdinger. It gives me that West-End look right



" 'TAKE THIS TO BALHAM,' 'E SEZ. 'WOT, BALHAM?' I SEZ. 'LUMME, YOU AIN'T 'ARF STRETCHIN' OUR LINES OF COMMUNICATION!' "

"Cab, Sir?"

away." And I tilted it over my right eye and assumed the contemptuous expression with which I used to put Piccadilly in its place in the golden days.

"Found your overalls?" someone asked.

I went upstairs again and put my hat carefully on the bed in my dressing-room, so that I could try it on again privately in the cool of the evening. Then I went back to the box-room and rummaged about for a bit. But I wasn't happy. There was a feeling at the back of my mind all the time that I used to have a white silk scarf with a bit of black on it to go with my opera-hat. Where was it? People who will push an opera-hat into an old hair-trunk will do almost anything with a white silk scarf. It ought of course to be in the top right-hand drawer in the dressing-room, but I couldn't recall noticing it there for at least—well, since 1939. Still, it might be worth having a look.

It wasn't there. Nor was it in any of the other drawers. Nor was it in the pocket of my rather well-cut light overcoat for evening wear. It wasn't even in the linen cupboard, though I found my skates there, and, rather oddly, an old school blazer with a piece of toffee in the right-hand pocket. So, after a final run through the hair-trunk, I gave it up and went downstairs again.

"This is getting beyond a joke," I said. "Why on earth can't people leave my things alone? First, I find my skates and this old blazer in the linen cupboard, where they've no business at all to be, and then when I try to find my white silk scarf, which ought to be in the top right-hand drawer in my dressing-room——"

They saw fit to be amusing at this stage. If, they said, they had known I was going skating they would have had the skates and my opera-hat and blazer laid out ready for me. But I had said nothing about it. On the contrary, I had given the impression that I proposed to spend the afternoon in the garage. In any case, they argued, I could surely do without my white silk scarf. Everybody realized

that in war-time one couldn't be quite as well turned out on the rink as in more normal days.

"The laughter of fools," I said, "is like the crackling of thorns under a pot," after which, as befits a man of sense and breeding who feels pretty sure he has misquoted, I went straight off to the garage.

My overalls were there, hanging up among the rakes and hoes, and I had a quick look in the hip pocket for my scarf, not being able to get the thing out of my mind. Then I had a look for the car wheels, and found three stacked in a corner.

"There are only three wheels," I reported, returning to the house for the purpose.

"Did you count the spare?" they asked. "It's still strapped on at the back."

"Even so," I said.

"We put the fourth on the wheelbarrow," they said. "Don't you remember?"

"I do not," I said. "In any case, why didn't you use the spare for that?"

"The spare was flat," they explained. "Not that makes any difference."

"I see," I said. "So what it comes to is that I've got to mend the spare before I can get the car back into running order?"

"Either that," they agreed, "or put the wheelbarrow out of commission."

"What was the news like?" I asked carelessly.

"Good enough."

"No Day of General Rejoicing fixed yet?"

"No. Not really."

"In that case," I said, "what about carrying on with the wheelbarrow for a bit longer, eh?"

Nobody said anything, for a wonder.

"SORRY, GUV'NOR, BUT IT'S WANTED AS EVIDENCE IN A LIBEL ACTION."

THESE DEAD . . . SHALL NOT HAVE DIED IN VAIN.

"You have a greater task than I had. Slavery must be removed from the whole of the earth."

The whole civilized world heard with the deepest regret of the death last week of Franklin Roosevelt, President of the United States since March 1933, whose unrelenting efforts have been a supreme factor in breaking the enemies of freedom in the West no less than in the East. He will rank in history with Washington and Lincoln. This cartoon appeared in Punch on December 17th, 1941.

THINGS THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BETTER EXPRESSED

"So extensive has been the damage that the Minister of Public Works, Mr. Semple, has described the flood as the worst national disaster since he became a Minister."

N.Z. Forces newspaper.

PERISHABLE GOODS

"FRENCH BUTTER FOR BRITAIN LIE SQUASHED."

Heading in "Daily Telegraph."

A LITTLE LATE THIS YEAR

Spring is coming, spring is coming,
Birdies, build your nests;
Weave together straw and feather,
Doing each your best.

BELINDA SHOETOPS.

These lines, gentle reader, are noteworthy not only for their exquisite imagery and cadence but because they hold a great truth—a truth rarely observed by writers of either prose or poetry. It is this—that spring arrives only after a long-heralded approach. There is no sudden gust of spring in Nature; only a long-drawn-out rustle. In literature spring enters without knocking, almost as if she had a latch-key. One moment winter is in possession and the next he is out on his ear. Yet there is a law against the summary eviction of tenants.

Wordsworth and Coleridge, Browning and Tennyson, Sheets and Kelly—all have erred in this matter. And the novelists are even worse. Look at this:

"AS YOU SEE, PEABODY, YOUR OLD JOB IS STILL WAITING FOR YOU."

"Bennett opened his eyes. Then, one by one, he rubbed them. The atmosphere of the little stripey room seemed translucent, transparent even. Strange wisps of colour flecked the bedsteads, the wash-stand and the walnut what-not. From far away, in some other electoral district, came the thin cries of pranking schoolboys.

"For a moment Bennett lay inert, supine. Then, as if galvanized by some tonic, he leapt from the sheets and danced round the room. 'Eureka,' he sobbed, 'Eureka—spring is here. . . .' "

(Shaun Warples, *Devilled Kidneys.*)

And this:

" 'It's it,' said Kate, 'really it.'

"She had been waiting for this moment for a very long time. She seemed to itch all over. A flake of plaster fell from the ceiling, symbolically. Kate struggled to her feet, filled her lungs greedily at the open window and brushed her hair. Then, her eyes smarting with ozone, she rushed from the room shouting 'Spring, spring, spring, spring, spring. . . .' "

(Molly Bossoms, *My Sister Sarah.*)

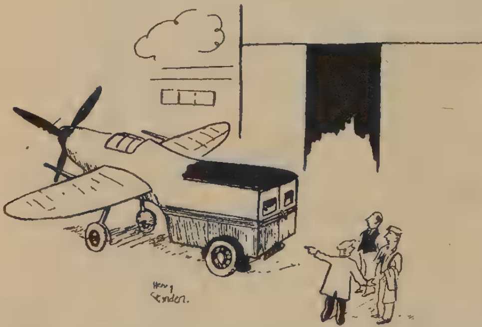
No, spring is not like that. The birds and the beasts know better.

That was not spring we had a week or two ago. Yet Robertson and Chapman (in our office) and thousands of other poor dupes of the literary giants were completely taken in—casting their clouts, oiling their bats, ogling the girls and quoting verse by the quatrain.

And all because of a couple of warmish days, which might well have been this year's summer but were certainly not spring.

ECONOMIC SLANG—A GLOSSARY

There can be no group of thinkers more consistently maligned than the economists. To be asked, "And what do *you* do?" is embarrassing enough even for people engaged in the popular occupations. No ordinary individual confesses baldly, "I am an artist (poet, statesman, professor, statistician, fellmonger, landscape gardener, etc.)." He hedges, plays himself down with, "Oh, I write a bit, you know," or "I dabble in fellmongery." But what answer can the economist give? There are no euphemisms for his calling—none of reasonable length, anyway. And so the poor creature must declare himself and submit to the inevitable ridicule.



"The switch-over from war-production was rather sudden."

When the guffaws have settled into a steady chuckle someone is bound to say, "So you're one of those, are you? Are you still agreeing to differ?" (The chuckle then reverts to guffaws.) It is most unfair. The average man—say someone gainfully employed in the £250–£500 a year income-group—has never forgotten or forgiven the economists' part in the great slump of the early 'thirties. There is really nothing to forgive except some slight ambiguity in the phrasing of their advice. The public could not be expected to realize that the contradictory injunctions—"Be Thrifty, Save!" and "Now Is The Time To Buy!"—which appeared side by side on every hoarding in the country were part of a masterly co-operative plan to preserve the *status quo*.

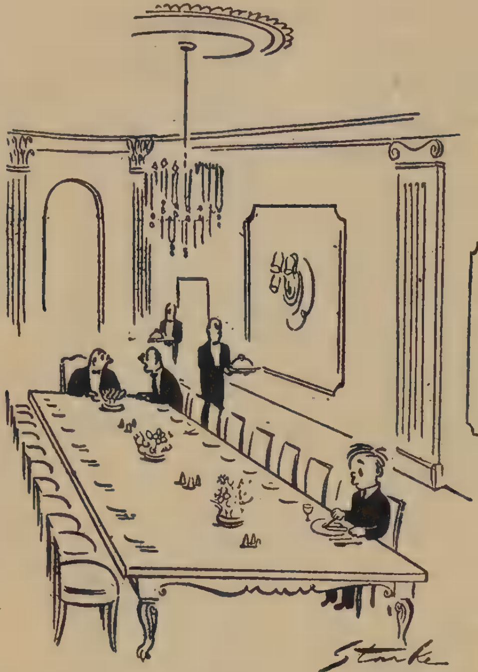
If you, reader, have nursed grievances against the economists on this account I beg you to amend your judgment in the light of this overdue disclosure. And now, perhaps, you will allow me to return to my glossary.

Taxes. There are two main types, both heavy. The "indirect" type are often called popular because the average person finds them less odious than "direct" taxes such as income, death, super and purchase. Indirect taxes are imposed on everything but a few goods we never use. Mr. Gossport, the wit, has called them "daylight taxes"—a bitter comment if ever there was one. In war-time the Government taxes everything up to the hilt, including your memory.

If the rich are soaked more thoroughly than the poor the tax is said to be "progressive." This means that we are approaching a time when everyone will have nothing. If the tax weighs more heavily on the poor it is described, among other things, as "regressive." All taxes lumped together may be called "aggressive."

A chain-smoker (allowing him eight hours for narcosis) pays about £84 a year in tobacco tax and throws something like £12 of this away in stubs or fag-ends. Thus he tosses ninepence or tenpence into the gutter or the ash-tray every day. No wonder a lot of men are trying to make their women-folk give up smoking!

Drink is even worse. The other night I happened to be collecting statistics at the "Crown and Anchor." Believe it or not, the bar-counter was awash with good war-time beer. I estimated the yield in taxation at five shillings. Three dabs with the barmaid's dish-cloth and it was gone. Economists sometimes devise taxes that cost more to collect than they bring in—the idea being to stimulate employment.



"Don't you think these annual staff dinners are becoming something of a farce?"

Overdraft. This is just one of those things you either have or don't have. It beggars description.

Fiduciary Issue. This is the amount of currency issued by the Bank of England in excess of its holding of gold or silver. It is fixed legally at a figure that can only be exceeded by being altered. For this and similar reasons the British Constitution is said to be elastic. Before gold-rationing began you could take £3 10*s.* 10½*d.* to the B. of E. and get an ounce of gold for it. This gold was eleven-twelfths fine or 22-carat. The other twelfth (or couple of carats) was base metal and was included by way of contrast and to help the recipient retain a sense of proportion.

A minion of the Bank told me the other day: "We have precious little precious metal left, but we are not giving up hope. Our back-room alchemists are working overtime. They can produce quite a nice gold, but unfortunately it has rather an offensive odour and rings badly. Until these defects can be removed or reduced production will not be a commercial proposition."

CLOTHES

"Personally," said Captain Sympson, "I shall take the sports jacket and flannel trousers."

We were discussing a paragraph in a newspaper describing the issue of civilian clothes that would be made to us when in the fullness of time we were demobilized. The choice of a lounge suit or sports jacket and flannel trousers is a tantalizing one.

"I have not a shred of civilian clothing left," Sympson admitted. "As I dealt with my editors only over the telephone I had no need to be a dressy man before the war, and what few clothes of distinction I possessed in September 1939 are now lost to me. The heather-mixture lounge suit that I bought for my abortive interview with the editor of *Country Life* in 1928 was destroyed by the incendiary bomb that fell on my flat in Bow during the first week of the original old-fashioned blitz. The tail-coat that I purchased from my Cousin Richard in order to report a dinner of the

Anglo-Berlin Fellowship for the *Weekly Swastika* I lent to a fellow-journalist when I was called up, and I have since heard that it fell a victim to a V 1."

"What about your plus-fours?" I asked.

"I wore them constantly in the blitz of 1940," he said, "and they were so severely damaged on the occasion of my heroic rescue of one hundred and seventy-five bottles of beer from the Bird-in-Bush when it received a direct hit in the cellar that I had to give them to salvage. After that I was reduced to wearing the blue pin-stripe that I bought to impress the editor of the *Poetry World* in 1927. It wore very thin as my entry into the Army was delayed so long, and my eventual call-up in November 1940 came only just in time to save me from obvious patches."

"It seems a pity," I said, "that our Army clothes cannot be worn after the war, with some slight alterations. I have two perfectly good battle-dresses."

"So have I," said Sympson, "and I cannot see any reason why they should not be worn during the day-time for the first few years after the war. They might be dyed blue or green, or even crimson. I think it would be a good idea if one of the daily papers were to form a League of Battle-Dress Wearer-Outers. Members would swear to go to the office in their battle-dress until it was worn out. An odd man doing it would be conspicuous, but if everybody did it nobody would mind."

"And battle-dress," I said, "is quite a convenient assembly of garments, so long as you remember that anything fragile put into the field-dressing pocket always breaks when you sit down."

"For evenings," Sympson went on, "we could wear our service-dress, dyed a nice purple,

"I HAD TO KEEP NAGGING AT HIM FOR WEEKS BEFORE HE WOULD TAKE A HOLIDAY."

and with bone buttons instead of brass ones. And Army overcoats of course would be easily adapted. In this way nobody need buy any clothes at all until they came down a lot in price. And could we not make a friendly gesture to the nice Germans by presenting them with the clothes that the Army intend to give us when we are demobilized? The Germans would then have to go through the mental torture of deciding between lounge suit and sports jacket and flannel trousers."

THE FINAL QUEST

The life of a man has been viewed as a quest,
How justly, all thinkers are quick to attest;
As soon as its days in the cradle are done
The child's on the look-out for food and for fun;
The lad, though to cynics how hopeless it seems,
Devotedly looks for the lass of his dreams,
And when he's outgrown all illusions of youth
He possibly turns to the search for the truth,
Which very well might his attention engage
For the rest of his life—yet he spends his ripe age
In fussily looking all over the place
(To judge by myself) for—his spectacle-case!

SPRING IN TOTHILL STREET

Spring comes slowly to Tothill Street.
No banners. No bugle call.
Three daffodils in a milk jug,
A shadow or two on the wall.

A shaft of sun in the passage
To bless the Government green,
A lovelier light on the ink stains
Where tired elbows lean.

The women who bend over blotters
Can see with but inward eye
Their faraway homes and gardens,
The leaf on the bough, the sky,

"Witheydown? Just 'ee follow that wagon."

The cherry that blows in the orchard,
  The moss growing lush on the fell.
(There are typists with teeth typing Memos
  On the other side of the well.)

Mrs. Huxley may peer from her window
  For banks where bluebells spill,
She will find but a potted primrose
  On the Messenger's window-sill.

Miss Brassey who might be in Berkshire,
  Miss Owen who should be in Wales,
Rest their ears on the telephones
  And listen to sombre tales

Instead of birdsong at morning,
Or rill's song bubbling clean,
And lambs that have called to their mothers
The long, long years between.

Spring comes slowly to Tothill Street.
It passes, unnoticed, each day.
The daffodils in the milk jug
Are dead. Throw them away.

May, 1945

OUR WAR-TIME QUERY CORNER

Ask Evangeline!

Q. WOULD you say that four uninhibited years in a cookhouse could spoil one for interior decorating in cultured homes? Sometimes when I stand gazing into a great panful of simmering stew and think of all the tears and perspiration put into that Renaissance kitchenette I had just completed for a retired snake-charmer when I was called up, or that soul-of-an-orchid boudoir I was planning for a wealthy bucket manufacturer, I feel that if it wasn't for mother I should say to myself, "Dash class obligations! Of what avail is all this hob-nobbing with the great, if the heart is in soups and gravies?"

Pte. Cuthbert Bustard.

A. Only the other day we received a query from a former titled beauty whose life's work will continue to be the raking of the coke stove in the communal kitchen where war has transformed her into a most vivacious Cinderella; thus there is nothing to be ashamed of, Private Bustard, in your ambition to join the ranks of the Lambert Simnels for good. On the other hand, I do feel that interior decorating, like everything else, is on the march. After years of austerity feeding I can imagine that the accent will be on food, so that an ingenious decorator should be able to get soups and gravies out of his system without losing his footing in society. That is to say, let your bucket manufacturer whistle for his soul-of-an-orchid boudoir; do him a tomato ketchup one instead—all gauzy red hangings and salmon-pink lighting. A *décor* should be in keeping with the personality of its owner. Think how very much simpler it is going to be to visualize your clients in terms not of Easter lilies and Alhambran ante-chambers, but of egg omelettes, underdone steaks and warm milk and arrowroot biscuits.

"It's almost nine if you want to hear the six o'clock news, again."

* * * * *

Q. The only really comfortable seat in this furnished flat is a good pre-war

"What is England, Mummy?"

dentist's chair which a previous tenant left fixed in the floor. Would it be correct to assign it to the guest of honour at a rather formal ex-fireguards' hot-pot supper? My wife thinks it might put people off their food.

E. St. K. Tracy Carruthers.

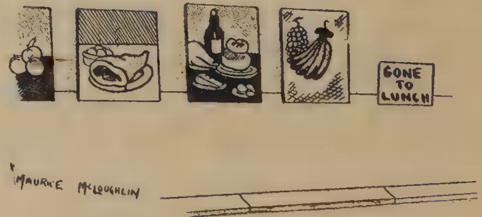
A. In these days of even stricter meat rationing, your wife should be glad to catch at anything conducive to loss of appetite among guests. Otherwise I agree that you need to be careful whom you seat in it. It would be awkward if someone began gargling with a mouthful of soup or tucking his napkin into his collar and opening wide.

* * * * *

Q. My dream of living within reach of Wigan seemed about to be realized when my sister and family offered me part of a very cosy cemetery lodge in the district, but it appears that under a new transport regulation furniture may be conveyed by carrier only one hundred and twenty miles. Being at present situated one hundred and twenty-six miles from the burial-ground in question, I am told my effects will be dumped on the roadside somewhere between Much Offal and Bishops' Tripp. Needless to say, I do not like the idea, as it will seem so public, and in making final arrangements with the carrier I did not hesitate to tell him my views. "And what is going to happen to my grained walnut hatstand, etc.," I asked, "if I cannot count on getting anything reliable out of Much Offal?" He said, "Well, Missis, you've buttered your bread on both sides; I suppose you'll have to lie on it." What did he mean by that?

(Mrs.) Clara Moffit.

A. Probably he meant that one cannot expect perfection in war-time. But why worry? See that all heavier articles of furniture are provided with castors, then go on ahead to Much Offal and get your sister and family and any acquaintances you can whip together to accompany you to meet the carrier's van. The rest is simple. Take one heavy article of furniture apiece, pile smaller objects upon it in a tasteful little still-life group and commence pushing. I can well imagine one might feel a certain shyness about entering a strange town propelling a grained walnut hatstand surmounted by a trio of saucepans and assorted stair-rods, if unaccompanied, but when one's neighbour on one side has a treadle sewing-machine with pianola and



DEDICATION.

foot-bath clasped upon it, and someone behind is grappling with a nest of occasional tables and a couple of curtain poles, I see little cause for confusion.

* * * * *

Q. What is the correct procedure in waving a flag on V-Day?

BARKING LADY.

A. Obviously no infallible rules can be laid down, as much depends upon where the flag is waved—*e.g.*, a wide arm movement would be correct if the person waving were in the middle of Ham Common, but in a congested tube train it would be ill-advised to attempt more than a spasmodic twitching of the wrist. In ordinary circumstances one endeavours to hit upon the technique best suited to one's general layout. The fragile feminine type, for example, moves her flag with a languid, fan-like gesture; it would betray lack of taste if she smashed hilariously from side to side, ramming hats over eyes and plucking neck-ties askew, though this would be all right for the hearty outdoor girl in a state of *tête-montage* or for the tough grandmother used to all-in wrestling. As to *when* to wave, watch others closely and follow suit. Often a comparatively meaningless activity such as the appearance of an L.C.C. dust-cart is sufficient to arouse demonstrations from a crowd out to enjoy itself.

* * * * *

Q. I feel so bewildered when I read about frame culture, offsets and bulbils, etc., yet do not like to ask the other allotment-holders, as they seem so cliquish towards beginners. I was warned that I was taking an allotment among the most exclusive holdings on the site; all the same, I couldn't help feeling it the other evening when I called out, "I say, I'm going to mulch my broccoli!" and they just drew together and pretended to be examining an early marrow. Another worry is that the bottom falls out of my watering-can every now and then, with the result that it sometimes takes me hours to moisten the tiniest radish, and the path from the tap, which is also a right of way to the local lodge of the Ancient Order of Buffaloes, gets quite messy.

H. G. WOOLLEY-URQUAHART.

"EXCUSE ME—DO YOU HAPPEN TO HAVE A COPY OF 'THE TIMES' FOR APRIL 5TH?"

A. It sounds to us as though your gardening life lacks co-ordination in some way. There *is* a pos-

sibility of course that the group apathy you mention sprang from a feeling that sufficient mulching had already been done on the path to the Buffaloes' lodge, but our private belief is that the incident did not, as such, take place. A psychologist's findings would show that, as a child, you refused to eat your greens, and this gives you the feeling that everybody even indirectly engaged in husbandry is in some way antagonistic. Again, the marrow subconsciously recalled the figure of your old maths. teacher, so you imaginatively made your fellow allotment-holders close round it to conceal the recollection that you could never get the square root to come out in quadratic equations. Our advice is that you confine your reading to healthy crime fiction for a while; never mind the offsets and bulbils. Take a rest and try to get things adjusted (beginning with your watering-can). It is fatal to force the pace.

* * * * *

Q. If these portal houses they talk about can be put up in twenty minutes, what is to stop them being took down in twenty minutes? Some nice goings-on there'll be in these parts.

Mrs. Hope Blotcher.

A. I would have thought that the possibility of periodically renewing one's neighbours might have added to the fascinations of the prefabricated dwelling. However, I dare say there will be by-laws formulated to meet the danger—*e.g.*, "Tenants are reminded that residences must be left in the exact position in which they were found"; "Persons littering public footpaths with portions of prefabricated dwellings will be fined forty shillings and costs"; "Passengers carrying with them prefabricated houses on long-distance buses do so at their own risk"; "Persons found erecting portal houses at famous queue sites or in groups opposite to houses of refreshment will be instantly taken into custody"; "Cloakroom attendants are empowered to refuse to accept prefabricated dwellings unless folded neatly"; and so on.

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR SMALL BOY

Having recently had occasion, as they say, to read the prospectuses of some two dozen Preparatory Schools for Boys, it has occurred to me to start a school of my own which will combine the best points of all the schools passed under review.

This is the prospectus. Further particulars will be sent on application, together with photographs of the enormously long dining-hall, the reredos in the school chapel (a silver collection is held every Sunday, to which the boys contribute from their own pocket money to teach them self-reliance) and a corner of the grouse moor.

St. Vitus Hall is a fine old Tudor mansion, 600 ft. above sea-level and five miles from the sea. The school is thus advantageously placed for both sea and

country air, and all boys are at liberty to breathe whichever they prefer according to the direction of the prevailing wind.

The school grounds can only be described as extensive.

Although an old building, rich in historical associations and partly covered with wistaria, jasmine, etc., the Hall has been thoroughly modernized and lacks nothing that can contribute to the comfort, health and happiness of the boys. A constant current of warm air circulates through the corridors.

Unlimited hot water is available for boys with an aptitude for washing.

Staff

The headmaster, C. Gamecock, M.A., is assisted by a highly qualified staff of University Graduates, personally selected by Mr. Gamecock not only for their academic attainments but for leadership, courage, kindliness, knowledge of animal and plant life, depth of human understanding, and ability at cricket, golf, football, swimming, boxing, riding, fishing, music, gymnastics, singlestick, carpentry, thatching, boat-building, basket-work, puppetry, first aid, etc., etc.

Mrs. Gamecock takes a keen interest in anything that goes on around her.

Six fully titled matrons look after the health of the boys. Their ugliness is a special feature.

Organization

The school is divided into six wards, named after the wives of Henry VIII, with whom St. Vitus Hall has rich historical associations. Each ward has a wardmaster, chosen from among the senior boys, who acts as leader under the general supervision of the ward-matron. This system teaches the boys initiative, obedience, courtesy, courage, self-respect, firmness, integrity, truthfulness, staunchness, loyalty and good manners, and at the same time develops strength of character, common-sense and a feeling of responsibility towards others.

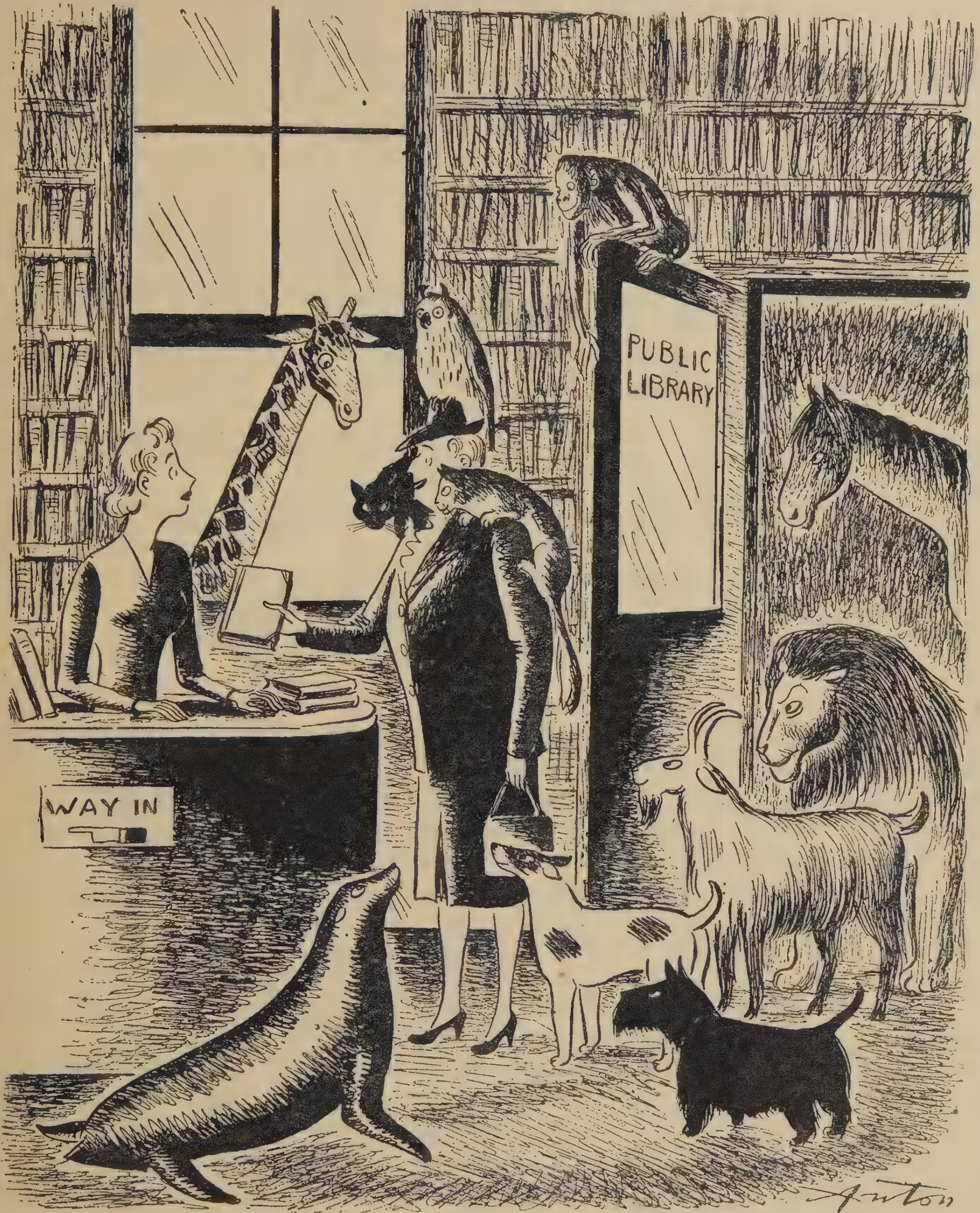
A small extra charge is made for this privilege (2 guineas per term, or 1 guinea for brothers of boys who have held the post of wardmaster within the previous five years).

The most outstanding boy in the school is appointed Guardian of the Keep, without additional charge.

Health and Cuisine

The school is justly proud of its splendid health record. Each boy is weighed on a fully qualified weighing machine at the beginning and end of every term. The difference in his weight is then assessed by the boy himself, and the figure compared with the average increase in weight of all boys of his own age. This system teaches addition, subtraction and long division.

Mrs. Gamecock keeps a careful eye on the boys' food, which is rich and varied.



". . . AND HERE'S 'HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH ANIMALS,' WHICH I'M RETURNING."

The school has its own farm of 140 acres on which the boys are allowed to work as hard as they like. In this way it is possible to supplement the normal diet with unlimited quantities of eggs, cream, and butter, while a love of hoeing, raking, digging and picking up potatoes is inculcated at a very early age.

The school has the longest Milk Bar in England.

Happiness

The boys' happiness is under the personal supervision of Mrs. Gamecock. Each boy is questioned daily by Mrs. Gamecock on this matter, and if not up to the standard of happiness required by the school is sent into a special "Happy Room" which has been designed to eliminate any passing disorder of mind or spirit. This is achieved through the influence of cheerful pictures and magazines, railway posters, light music, old school groups, artificial sunlight, etc., etc.

Extra marks are given to exceptionally happy boys.

Pocket Money

On arrival all boys are expected to hand in their pocket money to the school "Bank." No boy is allowed to draw any money out of the bank (except for the chapel offertory) until the end of term, so that a habit of thrift is inculcated early.

The headmaster cannot undertake to advance money to boys for ANY PURPOSE WHATSOEVER. This teaches parents where they get off.

Hobbies

Ample provision is made for the pursuit of such hobbies as weaving, nature study, heraldry and free-lance journalism.

The school heronry is a special feature. The boys are encouraged to watch the herons building their nests and to keep notes of their progress. In this way a keen interest in herons is promoted at an unusually early age.

The boys are allowed to clean their own boots, under the supervision of a qualified boot-black.

Work

The importance of work is not forgotten. Several hours a day are set aside for the study of geography, Latin, trigonometry, etc., etc.

The boys are forbidden to speak Greek at meals.

Admittance

The school is full up until 1960, but owing to a shooting affray in the Catherine Parr Ward last term the headmaster has a few unexpected vacancies for next September.

The fees are enormous and the extras can only be described as extensive.

BRITISH CRIMINALS

(*With apologies to "Britain in Pictures"*)

The story of British Crime begins with the introduction of the alphabet by the Phœnicians, resulting indirectly in the growth and diffusion of technical knowledge and directly in the development of forgery. Although we cannot but believe that crime in earlier periods reached a high pitch of skill and diversity, there is no archæological evidence of the forms which it took, since Spurlier's attempt to claim all extant stone and bronze tools as jemmies has not found general acceptance among scholars. The Roman Conquest brought Britain into close touch with Continental developments: Mucius Murellius led the way in Criminal Libel, though by later standards his work was careless and open to serious criticism in detail, while the prefect Rubanus imported a Syrian apparatus for garrotting and P. Emilius Vasto, bringing years of experience in foreign cemeteries, snatched bodies with a smoothness and rapidity that have seldom, if ever, been surpassed.

A Coiner in his Den.

The Dark Ages which followed the Roman withdrawal add few characters to our pageant, the distinction between criminal and other acts being somewhat blurred and the incentive to excel being correspondingly lacking. A notable exception to the general level of mediocrity was the Lady Elfwig of Chiswick (late Saxon), whose beautifully designed skeleton keys are to be found in many collections; she also wrote a rhymed manual of Simony, now lost.

Portrait of Scottish Child Stealer.

During the Middle Ages British Crime, though vital and abundant, was crude compared with the work of Italian and French criminals, and in this short survey of a wide field can be only cursorily dealt with. Among the Primitives of special interest are John the Weaver (11th cent. *passim*), Hugh of Westminster (temp. Hen. III) and Mordred the Werewolf (1343–1508). With the Renaissance, Continental methods were introduced, fertilizing and refining the vigorous native tradition.

Antonio Spaldini, a native of Venice, popularized the use of time-fuses in arson. A pupil of Spaldini, Nicholas Dummett, reduced the number of cards used in Spot the Lady from eighteen to three. By the reign of Elizabeth British criminals were no whit inferior to those of other lands and the London fences, among whom Sir Thomas Poston was pre-eminent, rivalled those of Amsterdam and Bremen.

Garotters Carousing.

In the seventeenth century Obadiah Jones gained an unrivalled mastery of barratry in all its forms, a crime of increasing importance with the development of British maritime supremacy. The foundation of the Royal Society and the consequent impetus to the study of pure and applied science were reflected in an increasing attention to the theory as well as the practice of crime. John Hoggling (1600–16?3) wrote "A Short Way with Portals" under the pseudonym Pythagoras Junior. Samuel, fourth Baron Brangham, is the reputed discoverer of Ringing the Changes, though there are other claimants, and a reference in Pliny may refer to it. By the early eighteenth century English highwaymen were the bane and boast of travellers, many gaining a European reputation; but we must not overlook the fact that the performance of Englishmen in other branches of crime, if less celebrated, was no less outstanding. Saul Halliburton (1700 *seq.*) first introduced the method of cutting glass from windows by the use of brown paper spread with treacle. The attempts by Sarah Pringle to popularize the use of other preserves were a failure.

A marked feature of this time was the transition from the domestic to the factory system in industry, and the diary of Septimus Thwaite, D.D., gives a vivid picture of life in a Thieves' Kitchen. "The apartment," he says, "was 32 ft. 3 ins. in length and 18 ft. in width. The height was 9 ft. 3 ins., somewhat greater than that in any similar establishment I had visited. The number of persons varied between thirty-one and twenty-four." By the early nineteenth century the inventive genius of the English people was in full flood. Dr. Habbakuk Crole (?–?) devised an ingenious method of introducing antimony into peaches, but it never gained wide popularity owing to the expense of the apparatus required. The sisters Euphemia and Lavinia Possett (Flor. *circ.* 1810) originated the modern form of Confidence Trick, substituting a wallet for the previously used valise. Hector Vaughan, known as The Modern Autolycus, was the first pickpocket to wear gloves

A Female Poisoner at her Toilet.

for professional purposes. He is buried at Stoke-on-Trent. Old Tom of Sarum trained retrievers to enter houses by the upper windows and abstract articles of value, but his secret died with him. With the development of the Industrial Revolution sheep-stealing became almost confined to remote and mountainous areas; owing, however, to the growth of tourist traffic stimulated by the Romantic Movement (Lyrical Ballads, 1798) the risk of interruption acted as a serious deterrent.

The increased complexity of commercial operations after the Napoleonic Wars led many English criminals to turn their attention to embezzlement, which, for a time, almost eclipsed Robbery from the Person in popularity, although the Twickenham Lily led a short-lived vogue for assault by boomerang, influenced by fashionable interest in the recently-discovered Australasia. The consolidation and amendment of the Criminal Law in Victorian times, due largely to the inspiration of Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832), made new crimes available, and although the old favourites never lost their lead, many of the more enterprising criminals preferred to try fresh paths. Continued experiment and refusal to be satisfied with outworn methods characterized British crime, reflecting in this the optimism and energy which marked all sections of society under the influence of a rapidly expanding export trade and the triumph in economic doctrine of the Manchester School. There is, unfortunately, space to mention only one of the Victorian giants, "Professor" Hatch (1838–1891), whose enormous range stretched from Cat-stealing to Fraudulent Conversion.

Birthplace of the Inventor of the Jemmy.

With the development of new techniques, division of labour increasingly replaced the versatility of the older type of craftsman. Symptomatic of the specialization of the twentieth century is "Gentleman" Willoughby (1885–1933), who strictly confined himself to kidnapping twins. The developments in physical science, which are perhaps the most striking feature of the last fifty years, did not go unmarked by British criminals, no account of whom would be complete without a reference to Walter and William Vincent, who, in the face of appalling difficulties, devoted their lives to the application of the Theory of Relativity to crime, though their early demise prevented the completion of their researches. Of the future it is too early to speak, but we may be assured that, whatever the vicissitudes through which we pass, British criminals will equal and perhaps surpass the achievements of their predecessors,

If England to itself do rest but true—Shaks.

IMPASSE

"No Washing Allowed in the Bathroom."

Notice in a boarding-house.

OUT WEST

My friend Jorkens has never borrowed a sum of money from me in his life, any more than he has actually ever asked me to stand him a drink, though it has often been a pleasure for me to do so. When he is out of cash he prefers to acquire it honestly in various ways, often by making small bets. The only time I ever did lend him a small amount I had practically to force it on him, and he repaid it within the hour; surely almost a record for a repayment. It was at Victoria Station one day, and we were taking the same train into Kent. I was going to Shoreham; I don't know where he was going to. And he only had sixpence on him at the time, which was obviously inadequate. I met him by chance on the platform and he told me how things were, and it was quite a long time before he would accept the loan of a few shillings. Well, in the end he did, and he bought his ticket and we went down into Kent in the same carriage. There were some American soldiers in the carriage with us, and Jorkens sat silent until after we passed Bromley. I fancy that he was thinking. But, when we had gone about twelve miles, he brisked up, and asked one of the American soldiers when he had left home. The soldier looked very thoughtful, and I thought he was going to answer, but he remained thinking for so long that Jorkens turned to another and asked him the same question, and he did not get any more information out of him.

"Fancy letting us insist on washing up?"

"I see how it is," said Jorkens after a while. "You can't pass on information like that. And yet I pick up a certain amount of information myself as I go along. I don't say it's absolutely accurate always, but good enough to bet on."

At the word "bet" I fancied that the American soldiers pricked up their ears a bit. And Jorkens went on: "I can't tell what ports you came from; only a spy could know that; but I think I can deduce when you left the western hemisphere."

"Say!" said one of them. "That's pretty good."

"Not to the very minute," said Jorkens, "but within half an hour."

They looked a bit incredulous at that, but Jorkens brought back the attention of all of them with his next few words, like a shepherd rounding up sheep.

"And I'll bet on it," he added.

"Why!" said one of them. "You'll bet on it?"

"Oh, yes," said Jorkens. "Within half an hour I'll tell all of you when you left the western hemisphere. And I'll have a little bet with anybody who cares to have one."

Somehow or other they reminded me of fish coming up to a handful of grain. They all leaned forward and looked at Jorkens.

"And when did I leave it, Mister?" asked one of them very politely.

But Jorkens arranged the bets first, quite small sums in silver, and they all had plenty of that on them. And then he wrote down the bet. Bromley was far behind us and we began to see orchards before he had everything settled. And then he looked at each man, and one of them asked him the same question that he asked before. "What time did I leave it, Mister?"

"Well," said Jorkens, "you all left it at the same time."

"And when was that, Mister?" asked another of them.

Of course I saw the object of the bet; it was made out of consideration for me, in order to repay the few shillings that I had lent Jorkens; but I did not see much chance of getting my money back. I should have liked to have stopped him, but it was too late now and the Americans would never have let me. So it had to go on, and I must say I was puzzled.

"Five minutes ago," said Jorkens.

"Five minutes!" they gasped.

"Yes, roughly," Jorkens said.

Well, there was a good deal of talk after that, which there is no particular method of printing, so far as I know, because they all spoke at once. Till at last one of the soldiers drew a map out of his pocket and shouted, "By Heck! He's right."

And, whoever Heck was, he paid, there and then. And all the others paid immediately after.

It seems that practically the whole of Kent is in the eastern hemisphere, while Surrey is in the western. I saw at once, as I watched Jorkens collecting their shillings, that this was no way to treat allies that had come so far to help us, and I began to explain to one of them that the bet must have been made in error and must be washed out. But he cut me short at once.

"Not on your life," he said. "That's a perfectly good bet. It's cost me only a dollar, and it will be worth a hundred dollars to me. Why! There's not more than

a hundred million people in the world that know a thing like that. And look how many that leaves that don't. I'll be looking for some of them from now on, and I'll sure have some bets with them."

So, as that was the view they all took, I could only leave it at that.

FAIR COMMENTARY

There is a fair on the common. Do you like fairs?

Yes, father. Take us to the fair.

Perhaps mother will take you to the fair. I will go later with uncle.

Mother will not take us to the fair. She says it is a man's work to take us to the fair.

Is it not lucky that I am on holiday? Put on your coats and hats.

Off we go to the fair. My wife comes with us. She pushes my youngest daughter in her perambulator.

My youngest daughter smiles. No doubt she is happy. The whole world is her fair. My second daughter smiles a faraway smile. She is thinking of the roundabout. My eldest daughter smiles cunningly. She has seen an ice-cream stall in the distance.

Soon we are eating ices. My youngest daughter cries for another. I am strong-minded and laugh at her. She bellows with rage. An interested crowd collects. I buy my youngest daughter another ice. I buy more ices for my other daughters. To show undue favour to one would be detrimental to the interests of the family as a whole.

In the distance there is music. The roundabout has started. My youngest daughter says "La-la!" She has reached the summit of earthly happiness. My second daughter says "Lovely music!" She can see the animals going up and down and round and round. My eldest daughter says nothing. She has seen a board threatening ICES near the roundabout. She presses forward.

Fifty metres from the roundabout we say good-bye to my wife and my youngest daughter. Twenty metres from the roundabout we are beaten back by the music. It is a dance record amplified to thirty-six times its natural strength. I draw my daughters out of the direct line of fire. We approach the roundabout by a devious route. We use all available cover. Too late I find that one excellent patch is an ice-cream stall.

At last we reach the roundabout from the rear. My eldest daughter mounts a motor-cycle. My second daughter bestrides a swan. I give them sixpence and retire with all convenient speed.

The roundabout begins to move. The smiles on the faces of my daughters broaden in proportion to the speed of the roundabout. It does one hundred and

sixteen revolutions at maximum speed. Then it slows up. The music dies away. All is still.

My daughters remain in position. I persuade my eldest daughter to exchange her motor-cycle for a dragon. But I cannot persuade my second daughter to forsake her swan. I find another sixpence. The roundabout starts again.

I go to a coco-nut shy in search of change. I give the lady in charge a pound note. She hands me three wooden balls and thirty-nine sixpences. She exhorts me to show the boys how to throw.

I deliver my first ball with great force and knock a synthetic coco-nut on to its side. I deliver my second ball with even greater force and knock a second synthetic coco-nut on to *its* side. The lady in charge remarks that when she was a little girl her poor old father used to tell the boys never to give up heart. After watching two unsuccessful throws he would advise the boys to knock the coco-nut into the middle of the following week.

I coil myself like a spring. I pause. There is a hush of expectation. Then I propel my third ball with shattering force. It knocks a third synthetic coco-nut into the middle of next term. The lady in charge is surprised. But she is a fair lady in more senses than one (though perhaps not in all). She offers me a prize. I select a large mug. I explain that it will help to remind me of her poor old father. She offers me another sixpennyworth. I tell her that I will come back later and introduce my brother-in-law. I hurry back to the roundabout.

I cannot detach my second daughter from her swan. After a time I entice my eldest daughter to the swing-boats. I persuade her to roll pennies down a groove. I instruct her in the use of fruit-machines. It is understood that I supply the pennies and she collects all prize-money. She returns to the roundabout to spend it.

At last it is time to go home. I am cold and hungry. The sixpences are all gone. I explain to my second daughter that the fair has already cost me a substantial proportion of my taxed income. She refuses to believe this. She weeps. I carry her off.

On the way home I make as if

"Dust in here, Smithers—*DUST!*"

to go by the ice-cream stall. My eldest daughter at once puts out a gale warning. My second daughter sobs as if her little heart will break. I happen to know that it is harder to break than a synthetic coco-nut.

But I go into the ice-cream stall. I draw another pound note from my pocket. The attendant fills my mug with ice-cream and gives me fifteen shillings change. We go home in triumph.

OUR OFFICERS' DANCE

Never again! Never, never, never!

Why we ever embarked on an officers' dance for the local Italian civilians I can't think.

First there was the trouble about the two Egyptian Tummy-dancers. Our Technical Adjutant had picked them up somewhere and they were to have been the *pièce de résistance* of the cabaret. It was only on the morning of the party that we got a curt note from our elderly autocratic Contessa to say that she was instructing all the nice girls not to come, because—well, she gave half a hundred reasons, but the upshot was that we could choose—EITHER we could have Tummy-dancers for the cabaret OR we could have the élite of the local Italian population to dance with for the rest of the evening. But not both. Our Technical Adjutant had found it easy enough in the first instance to persuade his Egyptian friends to promise anything that he had asked them, but he had the dickens of a job to make them understand that, while he himself was still madly keen on Tummy-dancers, his friends had other ideas. In the end he had to stay away from the party himself. He had to provide an expensive dinner for three and then sit alone and very bored through an interminable display of contortion without music.

Then there was the unfortunate incident of the little signorina who wouldn't dance with anyone. She had dark curls and a sunny smile and was unquestionably the prettiest girl in the room. I watched her for a while, and saw her refuse invitations about once every two minutes. Then I tried myself to persuade her, with every smile and gesture. She was so firm that I fetched our Town Major and Master of Ceremonies, who speaks the language. After a while he explained.

"Her fiancé won't let her dance with any British officer."

"What's the objection?"

"He mistrusts them all. You see he works with one and . . ."

"Well of all the . . .! An Italian, I suppose?"

"No. He's British himself. They have only just got engaged."

"Why doesn't he dance with the girl himself then?"

"Well, you see he's in rather an awkward position. He happens to be your batman and you have detailed him for duty in the Officers' Cloakroom."

Distrusting British officers, indeed! Now I know why, for the next three days, my socks were always . . . but that's another story.

Actually (as they say) the party wasn't going at all badly—when all the lights went out. The chaos was intense, because we had foolishly omitted to provide any alternative means of illumination, and the party came to an abrupt end. Not so our troubles.

The failure to provide candles may have been our fault, but it certainly wasn't our fault that there should have been a silver frost during the evening, which was responsible for several falls and much staggering within a few yards of the door. The A.P.M.'s stuffy letter on the subject was quite uncalled for, even though we *had* forgotten to send him an invitation.

The Town Major came off worst, for he had to escort the elderly, and by now very disgruntled, Contessa back to her house. There was some fumbling with the latchkey, and he rashly offered to try his hand at opening the door. It was not awfully funny when the key snapped in half, leaving the business end in the lock and flush with it. If it had been summer . . . but it wasn't. Against his better judgment he tried to force a window at the Contessa's urgent behest, but before he could do so the window opened of its own accord and a jug of cold water and a torrent of Italian abuse was thrust in his face. The window was slammed shut and bolted again. For the first time in the evening the Contessa laughed, but that momentary unbending had worn off long before the Town Major had secured the assistance of two stout Military Policemen to bundle her in through another window.

Nor was the trouble over even when we got our guests back to their dwellings. Dawn saw the beginning of the misunderstanding over my socks, and it also saw the discovery that owing to the swift disappearance of all the money on the roulette table when the lights failed, the promoters of the dance were heavily out of pocket.

I always said the whole thing was a mistake from the beginning. Never again! Never, never, never!

IMPENDING APOLOGY

"The Rev. J. A. —— dispensed communion on Sunday morning to a large congregation in —— Church. It was his farewell service, and at the close he shook hands with each member.

He is now on his way to take up his new post at Haifa, Palestine.

Rev. J. —— of —— officiated at the Thanksgiving Service in the evening."

Scottish paper.

THE TYRANTS FALL

This was the clay they carved out of their madness,
Taken and moulded and cast into the skies,
Till Death grew weary of the torture and the sadness,
And Hell tired of lies.

Tearing the entrails of the Earth for their glory,
They have fallen beneath in the caverns of their stone,
Terror was then their idol, and Ruin was their story,
Let these have their own.

Dust of their temples, seed sown by the thunder,
Quickened by flame is planted in their room,
This be the memory of the nine years' wonder,
And nameless be their tomb.

All that they have wrought for, all that they have builded,
Let Desolation hold for their renown,
Rust lie thick on the monuments they gilded,
And Chaos keep their crown.

Made out of nothing was the glory of their places,
Symbols, and strutting, and shouting, and a scream,
And the turning of a disc, and the printed faces,
And an idiot's dream.

IN A BELGIAN MUSIC-HALL

Snared in a hot vermilion light,
Swoons the unwilling acolyte.
That was the "Kiss of Satan" . . . Now
Enter a blonde embattled frau,
Leading a scarred homunculus,
Armed with a sawn-off blunderbuss;
And, like a vision born of betel,
Limping, a pig-tailed, goggling Gretel,
Trailing along, beneath her wing,
Gustav, her brother, gibbering;

"Relax a few restrictions and you never know *what* some people'll do . . ."

1940. "*When this confounded black-out is ended I'm going to tear down every blind and curtain in the house and make a bonfire in the middle of the road.*"

1941. "*When this accursed black-out is over I'm going up on the roof and I'm going to let off all the fireworks and flares and fog-signals that money can buy.*"

1942. "*When this filthy black-out finishes I'm going straight round to the Wardens' Post, and I'm going to set fire to it and dance round the flames all night.*"

1943. "*When this horrible black-out is lifted I'm going to get up a torch-light procession up and down the High Street, and I'm going to roast a fireguard whole in front of the Town Hall.*"

1944. "*When this foul black-out finally goes I'm going to open every window and turn on every light, and I'm going to go round to every house in the Square and ring the bell and shout 'Put that light on!'* "

1945. "*Yes, it's really very nice to see the end of the black-out.*"

Lili Marlene, too, short of breath,
Pale as the Nightmare-Life-in-Death.
This is the *Volkssturm* . . . backcloth shows
Ruins of houses, rows on rows.
Hitler is there; his fallen face
Glares from a compromising place.
Here is a script in wormwood writ,
Here is a nimble nitric wit,
This is a nation's stored contempt,
This is the dream that long they dreamt,
This is the turning of the knife,
These are the jests that once cost life.
Off they strut . . . then the spotlight centres.
Gaston, the unicyclist, enters.

RATIONAL

In halcyon days we sugared free
  And banqueted at ease,
Could calmly eat our bit of meat
  And wanton on our cheese;
With spread of butter from the cow
  As casual as you please.

Then came the rations. Coupons came
  And have endured till now.
Small store we had of meat, begad,
  Or product of the cow,
We little drew of sugar, but
  We got along somehow.

Yet we foresaw a time when we
  Might spread ourselves anew
On divers fats like plutocrats,
  On meats and sugar too,
Might say farewell to margarine,
  To sausage-meat, adieu.

The Day has come, long looked-for, and
  We learn, instead of more,
By stern duress we're booked for less
  E'en than we had before,
But still we cavil not, for we
  Are noble at the core.

'Tis ours to help at need, and hope
  Th' abominable Hun
Who wrought the ill will pay his fill
  For the vile thing he's done.
That being truly understood,
  I shan't complain, for one.

June, 1945

MAGAZINES

MAGAZINES may be defined as what other people insist on reading when they come to dinner in our house and what we do not get a chance of looking at when we go to dinner in other people's houses. In the literary world they come half-way between books and newspapers, being published intermittently compared with the average newspaper and constantly compared with the average book. Unlike books, magazines are not dedicated to anyone, and unlike newspapers they have no Stop Press column; but on the other hand most magazines are like newspapers in having to keep inside the columns, and some are like books in being held together with the sort of glue which crackles if you treat it roughly.

Sometimes magazines are called periodicals; indeed periodicals are really what I am writing about, because only thus can I include the intellectual reviews. A review does not like to count as a magazine because that would line it up with all sorts of frothy work, and the one thing a review is not is frothy. You can tell that by the looks other people give review-readers in trains; looks which betray that the other people are well aware that someone has paid sixpence for their good opinion. The fact that readers of frothy magazines may have paid two shillings simply for a nice read rather strengthens this point. Another thing about intellectual reviews is that they are written for intellectuals, a fact which proprietors of vegetarian guest-houses have not been slow to seize on. It is an interesting truth that the ordinary public has formed its dreadfully obstinate ideas of intellectuals from reading the advertisements in the intellectual reviews, and psychologists think there would be less bad feeling all round, though perhaps not fewer intellectuals, if both sides realized this. Another thing about intellectual reviews is that they are apt to publish modern poetry; but, as modern poetry can only really be defined as the poetry apt to be published in intellectual reviews, I do not see that I can do much good by going on about it now.

A GOOD DEAL OF SUGAR, WE LEARN, GOES INTO SYNTHETIC RUBBER. BUT THAT'S NOT WHAT THE COOKERY BOOK CALLS IT.

Periodicals, as I was saying, are

published periodically, which means once a week, or once a month, or even less often. Any magazine which appears less often than once a month risks losing its grip on the general public, which tends in its boneheaded way to confuse the next number with the last after all that time. Thus it is that quarterlies are usually distributed by post, a fact which entirely conditions their character; for anyone getting the same magazine by post every three months is asking to be considered remote from the hurly-burly of life. Quarterlies therefore tend to be artistic or technical or something calling for concentrated reading; with the added justification that the reader who sticks at a tough page has three months to sort it out. And while I am talking about dates of publication I must mention the curious fact that if a weekly is published every Thursday it is apt to have next Saturday's date on it, a fact which psychologists attribute to the modern craze for speed without feeling that they have really got the right explanation.

"This is Private Smith, release group No. 1, speaking."

Having said something about intellectual magazines, I want now to mention the opposite kind. The most striking thing about a magazine which is not trying to be intellectual is of course the way each story or article breaks off and starts up again twenty pages later. It is not uncommon for a long story to break off and start up again half a dozen times in a single magazine, and it is very uncommon for anything to get printed without at least two breaks. All this is possibly *because* the magazine is not intellectual and those who write it think those who read it should have something to worry about to balance them up with intellectual readers. But, even so, I do not think that the average editor of this type of magazine quite realizes what the public goes through in tracing the average magazine story or article. Being only human—indeed, more human than most—they get waylaid by other bits of other articles which may lead them back to the beginnings or on to the next bits of these other articles, when yet other bits of yet other articles will waylay them further, so that by the time they have pulled themselves together and arrived at the next bit of the article they started on they will have several loose ends in hand and their heads will be spinning. Of course the idea may be to ensure that everyone shall start and therefore be compelled to finish everything in the magazine, but most readers do feel, however timidly, that if this sort of magazine could possibly find a way of printing the whole of one article before it began another they would by now be so conditioned that they would not know how to find their way about.

Perhaps the most important factor in such magazines is the serial. A serial is a story which the reader may chase right through a magazine without coming to the

end of, because the point about a serial is that *it does not end.* It goes on in the next number. On the other hand a serial is always beginning, owing to the considerate way it starts by saying everything it said in the other instalments. Psychologists call this a compensatory action to make up for everything being cut up into bits. Another notable point about serials, and indeed any magazine stories, is that the illustrations are difficult to link to the story, but not impossible if we keep on at it, like everything else in this sort of magazine. I suppose I should say, to be fair, that some articles in this sort of magazine *do* begin and end on the same page, and that the reader's only reaction is a dim sense of being cheated of the rest of the article. Another reaction familiar to such magazine readers is that fierce resolve, when reading how to take an inkstain out of a table-cloth, to remember next time that this is how you take an inkstain out of a table-cloth.

Finally I must mention the specialized magazine which deals with one subject only, for example, some branch of engineering or of animal-keeping, and swings it; never letting up on its subject except for a few jokes and accounts of club outings, and even these are somehow mysteriously coloured by it. It is not known what effect this sort of magazine has on the experts it is written for; but it is very well known that in non-experts it produces an extraordinary glow of conviction that here is the real world and now they belong to it too. Psychologists say that, while not wishing to detract from the skill of the specialized magazine in putting this conviction over, they do feel that it has rather an unbalanced type of mind to work on, because non-experts who buy such magazines from railway bookstalls do so in either very high or very low spirits; that is, either on a lighthearted impulse or because the daily papers are sold out.

THOSE COLUMNS!

Fountain pen, nib imperceptibly split, property niece naval officer D.S.O. (engineering branch): can be viewed weekdays, not before 7 A.M., or photograph would be sent: £10, alternatively would consider exchange for small unused sponge. N.O. Niece, Flat 527 (no lift), Topgallant Mansions, Driftwood Square.

Piece visibly old lace: cannot be viewed under any circumstances. £50 cash down. Box 000.

Couple lately returned Masangalay Plantations offer pull weight in exchange amenities life sporting, jolly, and rural district; wife equally at home hen-house, scullery, boudoir: while husband, never desirous fritter time away, is nimble with fret-saw; please forward frank personal revelations to Cottonstop, "Malaria," Swettenham.

Lady willing dispose immensely valuable Sable Cape: unwilling reply inquiries as to reason. L.S.D., "Fairweather," Tinselton.

Seven yards rich biscuit pre-austerity plush: offers? Also admiral's pre-last-war cocked hat and epaulettes, together with telescope and portrait sea-going ancestor (¾ length, background of frigate), whole guaranteed lend atmosphere least promising dining-room: best offer secures, regardless marine pretentions prospective buyer. Fence, 123 Old Brixton Road, Tootwick.

Clockwork engine and tender, gauge O, L.M.S. line, practically free rust, key will probably turn up. Hurry! while owner still at school. Box No. *only* 222.

Mother offers her all, and includes 1 pair Wellington boots, in exchange loan capable Nannie 1 week to avert (or postpone) imminent mental collapse. Most probably too late anyhow. "Nuts Birth-rate," The Rambling-Cove.

3 lb. guava jelly (as new); 3 toothbrushes (new, good as); 1 capacious dust-bin; a little bit of elastic; Spode soap (or butter) dish, well riveted; frame excellent tennis-racket; ½ super salmon rod; G violin string; 1 ostrich egg (blown); bold check over-coat (scarcely visited by moth); purchaser's obligation to remove whole collection in dust-bin with maximum rapidity as soon as deal is effected. Mrs. Ransack, Last-legs, Dustley Heap.

Lady, not yet impoverished, but near-distressed, would dearly love Roof over her Head (if not too much to ask); type immaterial, if weather-proof; write, wire, telephone, or carrier-pigeon. "Wanderlust Hell," Poste Restante.

Tiny bunch bananas and minute sealed bottle "Irresistible Night." Steady now!

H. J.'s BELLES-LETTRES

As well as Drama I also write Belles-Lettres. This Belle-Lettre is on Youth and Age. This discussion usually begins with the famous French remark: "If the youth knew and if the old age was able to," which I quote in my own translation, and I wish to begin by pointing out how very misleading this is. Young people have thin arms and tire easily, while the old are as tough as hens but learn with the greatest difficulty. Another flaw is that the aphorism leaves out middle age, either because there is no word for it in French or because the author preferred balance to truth. Before the Great War the old had it all their own way. After the Great War Europe got into the hands of youth movements, and these have taken a good deal of trouble to suppress. It is time that those in between had their chance.

The old curry favour with the young to seem younger and the young curry favour with the old to seem older, and both combine against the middle-aged, confusing the issue by calling them suburban and spreading the calumny that they wear bowler hats. One is apt to dislike the generation next to one's own in any case,

N

and probably not until penicillin, etc., has enabled people to live to 130 will the middle-aged get the praise they deserve.

Shrill and half-boiled is what the youthful are. They are no good at seeing difficulties, and when these are pointed out to them by the trained minds of Civil Servants and others, if any, they become impatient and tend to pass resolutions. They are always in rebellion, but owing to modern theories of education it is difficult for them to find anything against which to rebel. They have no asset but their charm, and that they use ruthlessly, like squirrels. Ten or fifteen years ago they held the stage, but already their power is in decline, and government departments are making desperate efforts to preserve them.

"Of *course* that means 'e's full up—you don't think 'e's doing that to show 'e can drive with no 'ands . . ."

The aged, on the other hand, are oily. They have had it so drummed into them that disliking the world they live in is the first stage in leaving it that they approve of everyone and everything. This makes their company like drinking barley water, tedious but lacking opportunities for criticism. They mention the past only to compare it unfavourably with the present. They are a race of collaborators. No longer bearded and imperious, and no longer able to arouse breathless interest in their wills, they have abdicated, and do not attempt to attain even the façade of the power which once gave them a fearful attraction.

This paragraph is devoted to the virtues of middle age, and will be the kernel of the Belle-Lettre. Good taste did a considerable amount of harm during revision, but it still remains trenchant in the extreme. Middle age is the harvest-time of manly virtues. If one is going to be clever at all, then is the time for it. Brains in the young lead merely to passing examinations and the payment of innumerable fees, while in the old they lead to acrostics. Halcyon is what these decades are. All positions are open to the middle-aged man, even, in exceptional cases, the Cabinet. His wife has had time to get used to him, and though he has ceased to react against

ideas of his father's generation they will have had time to become fashionable again. He has enough memories to keep him happy, but not so many that they overflow on to visitors. He has had long enough to read the books that are worth reading, but not so long that he is driven to writers mentioned only in footnotes. Games have become voluntary but not impossible; nor can he be compelled to attend any kind of lecture, at least during peace-time, of which, one tends to forget, most of modern life consists. His hair does not take so long to cut, but there is still enough of it to hold sweet-scented pomades. He has ceased to be liable to whooping cough, and is not yet liable to be sent to bed while the rest of the family have a sociable evening.

These notes are partly based on scientific observations of an aged uncle whom B. Smith has lent to our laboratory; his name is Elder Freddie Byng, and his exact age is not known, as instead of a birth certificate he has only a bill which says "To twins: 6*s*. 8*d*." He seems very happy in the laboratory and repeatedly says how different it is from the Crimea, where it was very cold and he acted as Florence Nightingale's lamp-lighter. When he was asked what, in his opinion, were the characteristic phenomena, attitudes, reactions, signs and symptoms of eld he replied, "Regretting street cries." On being given a simple intelligence test of the "True-False" type he caused confusion by writing "Moot" in the margin throughout. Thinking he might be filled with old-fashioned courtesy we tried him on my wife, but he dated from so far back that he just swore at her. He eats almost anything and has a special set of teeth with molars instead of incisors for certain of the local foods. He turns litmus green.

The reader may say that all this is very impressionistic and unstatistical. He may want figures, or worse, decimals. Well, until the doctors invent tests for senility we shall have to rely on what directors of education are apt to call "Chronological Age." Ninety is very old and one is very young, so the middle third of this period, thirty to sixty, would be middle age. As the average length of life increases middle age could end later, but retirement tends to start earlier, so that you get a gap; this, I suggest, should be named from history where at the end of the Middle Ages you get the Renaissance.

FINIS.

ECONOMIC SLANG—A GLOSSARY

Mr. Soames Woodley put the matter very succinctly, I thought. "The ordinary citizen," he said, "is very well aware of the progress achieved in other branches of learning. Somebody invents or discovers radiolocation or penicillin, and the results are as obvious as a Brazilian general. The masses look up to their benefactors with gratitude oozing from every pore. Successful 'straight' or pure scientists are treated like gods.

"Now take what we might call the impure scientist, or economist. His discoveries are just as timely, momentous and epoch-making. They exert just as much influence over the life of the common man. *But they are neither appreciated nor understood.* Not one man in a thousand realizes the significance of Drabas's work on block grants, Schumpenfelt's analysis of the entrepôt trade or Issington on pseudorent."

Mr. Woodley is right. This state of affairs is most unfortunate It means that the economist must constantly face the charge of wilful obscurantism. It means that he is classed with the voluntarily enigmatic school of modern poets and painters —and is remunerated accordingly.

This is not good enough.

There are economists walking the streets of London to-day, Wednesday, who earn less in a month than you or I might care to squander in a night. And some of them actually *receive* no more than this. Should you take pity on them and manage, without hurting their pride, to press a little legal tender into their outstretched palms, they will look wistfully at the coin and mumble something about the velocity of circulation. Then, a little shamefacedly, they will shuffle away, these forgotten men, with tears and a preference for liquidity in their eyes.

"Just put Auntie's pen behind my ear, dear—it will save me a special journey."

The economist of to-day is treated badly by the nation. He does not covet wealth for its own sake. If he endeavours to grow rich it is because he feels himself to be the safest repository of public funds. He is obviously in a better position than ordinary citizens to know how and when to adjust his spending to the day-to-day requirements of the Government's fiscal programme. His propensity to consume can be controlled with a precision unknown to the average man. All told, there can be no individual more capable of discharging his economic duties to the State in a thoroughly responsible manner. And the economist looks no further than this to justify his claim for a redistribution of the national income in his favour. Will you bear all this in mind, gentle reader, at the next redistribution?

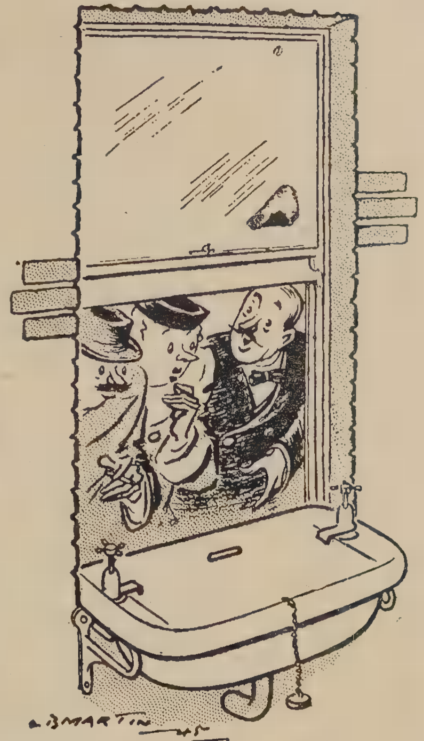
And now, back to the old glossary.

Work. By work the economist means something rather different from the stuff as you and I know it. He means either negative unemployment or the effective demand for the labour factor of

production. An economist thus reduces work to its simplest terms so that it is all set for quantitative analysis and diagnosis. In this way he avoids the term almost completely, so that it is hardly worth pursuing further.

That Sinking Fund. See Reserves, Hidden; Assets, Undisclosed, and Punishment, Capital.

Unearned Increment. Off the coast of Peru there are many small islands. These islands are washed by the cold waters of the Peruvian current which mingles with the hot waters of the tropics to produce lukewarm waters ideally suitable for the growth of plankton or floating fish-food. This food attracts many fish to the region and they thrive and multiply exceedingly. In their turn the fish attract myriads of birds. Now, these birds, flying at all hours of the day over or near the islands, can hardly avoid . . . Wait a minute—you've been to Trafalgar Square? Well, the final result is guano, a deposit thought well of by farmers in Western Europe. The Peruvians collect the guano and sell it abroad. It is an important and heaven-sent part of their national income. Economists call it unearned increment. Certainly the Peruvians do not *earn* it. And it is increment, isn't it?



"ANYTHING THAT SAVES SPACE THESE DAYS IS A GODSEND, SIR."

ISN'T SCIENCE WONDERFUL?

"We are most grateful to Mr. X for his gift of the new couplers to our organ which will enable the organist to change his combinations without using his feet."

From a parish magazine.

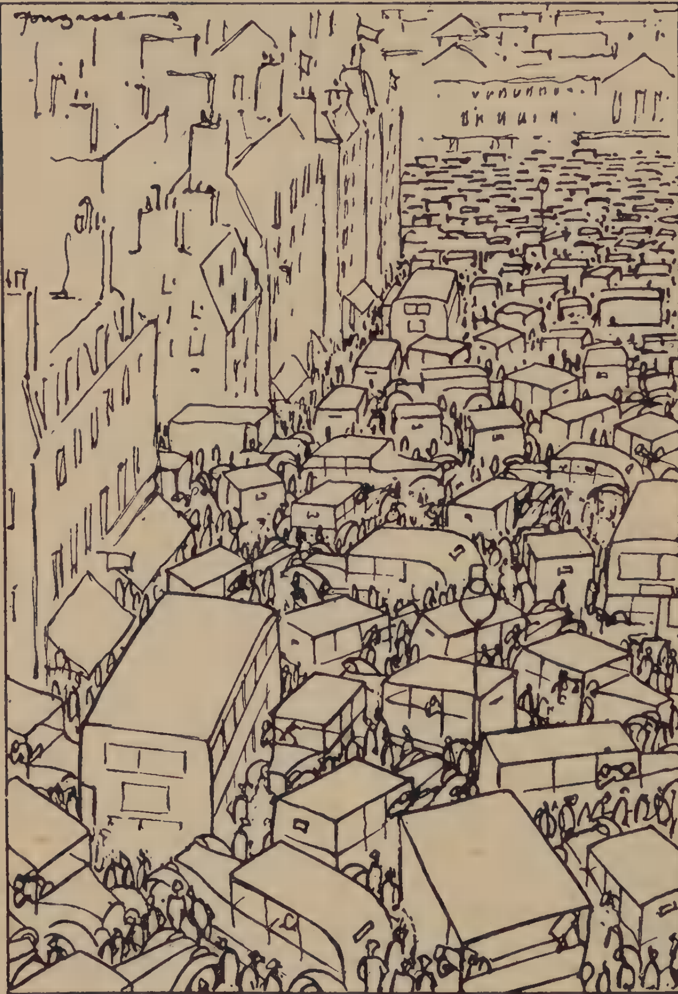
FAIR PLAY FOR SHEEP

"The English," an Arab chief once remarked to Lord Mottistone, "make pets of their dogs and servants of their horses. We do exactly the opposite."

As a matter of fact the distinction is a fine one, especially in war-time, and it would be hard to judge fairly between the two attitudes. Indeed it could be a matter of small concern to anyone if we made pets of our servants and horses of our dogs. The Nandi in East Africa make gods of their cows, if it comes to that. But no one seems to make anything of their sheep but cutlets.

This is a gross injustice. Besides cutlets, the sheep gives us winter underclothes, Harris tweed and ointment; no horse can claim half as much, and, except for the pious St. Bernards that distribute alcohol in the Swiss Alps, no dog. Compared with the ridiculous whinny with which Dobbin greets his master, or the terrifying shout which is Fido's only means of expression, the voice of the sheep is bland and friendly. His face is not half so stupid as the face of a bloodhound or a Saluki; his kick is milder and less freely given than that of a racehorse; his habits are more docile, his customs nicer than those of any domestic animal, except perhaps the tortoise. But precious little thanks he gets.

The truth is that there has long been a conspiracy to cry up horses and dogs at the expense of sheep. See how callously our proverbs treat them—"You might as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb;" what, it seems to say, is a sheep more or less? "Give a dog a bad name," and you stand revealed as a bounder; yet you can give a sheep as bad a name as you like and no one will turn a hair. "Love me, love my sheep," brings no sentimental response; you may love a man and dislike his sheep intensely, and nobody will brand you disloyal.



"Isn't it grand to be getting back to normal!"

You get this tendency throughout our national literature. In every well-established nursery in the realm, Nanna and Black Bess and Quoodle and Brown Jack and Harry the Horse are familiar names; and so for that matter are Ferdinand the Bull and Peter Rabbit and Mrs. Bruin (a *bear*, forsooth!) and a score of other zoological heroes. Wordsworth even hymned the snake and the Lesser Celan-

dine, the one as revolting as the other is insipid. Rin-Tin-Tin and Tom Mix's steed, whose ridiculous name escapes me for the moment, had in their day a following as faithful as Rudolf Valentino's.

Yet, almost alone among the animal kingdom, the sheep is ignored. An occasional lamb finds his way in (though, as in the example of Mary's celebrated pet, he generally turns out to be a stooge); but his adult brethren are rigidly excluded. The pen is empty beside the stall of the Maltese Cat; and that resounding couplet—

> Long you may search and late, in castle and croft and keep
> For a love that is half so great as the love of a Man for a Sheep—

is not by Kipling at all, but was composed five minutes ago as an illustration of what could be done.

By the same token, the Poet Laureate has yet to write a companion piece to *Right Royal* which shall do justice to this other four-footed friend of man. Should it ever occur to him to do so he may care to make use of the following lines, which he can have for nothing—

> Five springs my mother lived to see
> Before she had a lamb like me.
> I nigh on killed my poor old dam;
> I was a most contrary lamb.
> I always hid from farmer's dippers;
> I wriggled under shearer's clippers;
> I roamed unchecked on hill and dale;
> I wouldn't let them dock my tail.
> I strayed upon the turnpike road;
> I fell in snowdrifts when it snowed.
> I reckon I was far the worst
> From Biddenden to Staplehurst.
> The shepherds swore—"You pesky lamb!
> "I'll give you socks!"
> "By jove!"
> "By damn!"
> "Why, drat 'ee!"
> "Dang 'ee!"
> "Rot 'ee!"
> "My word!"
> My wastrel ways became a byword.

Nothing so red-blooded has been written about a sheep up till now, and it could do their cause a power of good. "Gentle as a lamb" is a fair comment—on average lambs; but then a colt or a puppy or a young armadillo is gentle in its way. An adult male sheep can show as much fire as anyone.

Revenons à nos moutons, then—there is a slogan for our bards and our nature-novelists that they cannot with justice ignore. Let them league together to honour the beast whose coat, rather than vulgar horsehair, is preferred as a seat for the Lord Chancellor of England. Let the magnates of the film world devise a new brand of Western, not a horse-opera but a sheep-opera. (It could be the making of the Australian film industry.) What if so fundamental a change of outlook brings on sleepless nights? There is a certain cure: to count—horses?—dogs?—ocelots?

Not on your life. To count sheep.

THE MEMOIRS OF MIPSIE

By Blanche Addle of Eigg

Great Deeds in the Great War

I wish I could say that my own life during the Great War had been thrilling and romantic, as Mipsie's was, but candour compels me to admit that mine was the part of a very humble (except in birth) cog. There were, of course, my knitting parties at Bengers, where, being of an inventive turn of mind, I enjoyed spurring my workers on to new creations, such as knitted pyjamas for hospital patients, crocheted scarlet bands for staff hats, etc. I still think that almost every manufacturing shortage could have been bridged by voluntary knitwork, but the powers that be usually lack my vision, I find. I actually knitted one whole field-gun cover in waterproof wool myself, and got it sent out as a sample to Havre, where the English authorities saw fit to despise it, but the more imaginative French used it for years, I am told, in connection with catching *langoustes*, so my labours were not in vain. Another invention of mine was dog-basket cookery on the hay-box cooking theory, only employing the natural warmth of a dog's body to heat a specially shaped dish, concealed beneath a cushion. It only failed because the dogs used in experiments *would* "make their bed," discover the food and then eat it. Apart from these homely occupations I cannot boast of any excitements at Bengers, and it is not surprising that Mipsie, who took sanctuary with us after her shocking treatment from the Censor Office, soon felt a longing for a more vital and active life. She did splendid work going round to recruiting meetings with Addle, where her winning ways brought many a volunteer to the colours, but my husband found one day that she was giving all the recruits the traditional shilling encased in little lockets, showing the actual king's head on one side and her own likeness on the other. Addle is perhaps somewhat conventional, and he considered this slight infringement of regulations ill-advised, and told Mipsie so. After that her enthusiasm seemed to wane, and she appeared restless. I encouraged her to help our working parties by reading out to us, but I must confess that her choice of books was not always suitable for village people.

One day her pent-up feelings broke out, after a specially long afternoon's work. Throwing the copy of *Three Weeks*, which she had been reading, across the room, she suddenly exclaimed, "Blanchie, I can't go on here any longer. I'm going to France, or anyway to London. I must get closer to the men." Who shall blame her for following the dictates of her glowing heart?

There was at that time a great appeal for châteaux and hotels well behind the firing lines to be offered as convalescent homes to relieve the hospitals. Mipsie immediately offered the beautiful château of her friend, the Duc d'Apéritif, who was of course fighting, so she took his consent for granted, and was soon installed there, making all arrangements for staff and seventy beds for French officers. What was her surprise and dismay when a car drove up to the château one day, containing—the Duchesse d'Apéritif! The Duc in his friendship with my sister had never mentioned that he was married, so she can hardly be blamed for acting in ignorance of the fact, but unfortunately that did not help matters with his wife, who for some unknown reason seemed incensed at Mipsie running a convalescent home at the château, when she had (or so she said!) returned with the express purpose of doing so herself. However, possession is nine-tenths of the law, so, after a very exhausting half-hour for my poor sister, the Duchesse left, threatening to open a home at the large, and before the war very fashionable, Hôtel d'Angleterre at Coquille Plage *one mile away*! The small-mindedness of some women is truly amazing. As Mipsie said, when all that mattered was the wounded soldiers, how anyone could argue about such trivial things as property just passed belief; but the fact remains that the Duchesse did set up what amounted to a rival convalescent home, and what is worse, tried by every means in her power to make it a greater success than the Château d'Apéritif, where poor Mipsie had to labour under many disadvantages—out-of-date equipment, shortage of bathrooms and so on, whereas the Hôtel d'Angleterre was of course completely up to date in every way. My sister sent down almost daily complaints and demands for new domestic utensils, but they were completely ignored. In self-defence Mipsie had then to ignore the Duchesse's orders requisitioning the garden produce from the château. This rivalry became known in the village as *la bataille de rouge et noir*, because the Duchesse always appeared in smartest black, while Mipsie dressed very simply in pure white chiffon, her only colouring being a red cross embroidered in tiny garnets on her snowy head-handkerchief, and

"How does that one feel, sir?"

a bright scarlet arm-band bearing the letter B. and the Briskett coronet in semi-precious stones. (For with wonderful loyalty to her first husband, she always returns, after each marriage, to the rank and title of an English duchess.) The bitter struggle continued for four months, then suddenly the Duc d'Apéritif appeared one day and confronted Mipsie in her office in the Duchesse's boudoir. He told her that she would have to go. That his wife insisted, and the law was, unfortunately, on her side. Mipsie's eyes blazed at this miscarriage of justice. "If I go," she told him, "I take my patients with me."

And that is exactly what happened. One week later my sister left the château with sixty-seven officers—unfortunately three were too ill to travel—and shook the dust of Coquille Plage off her feet for ever. It is not the first time that a worth-while and noble work has been ruined by a woman's petty jealousy, no doubt, but it sickened my sister of war service to such an extent that she spent the following few weeks in sick leave with her patients. Then the old, brave Mipsie returned to her real character and she threw her energies into the selfless struggle once again.

W.R.N.S.—IN PRAISE

This is in praise of the Wrens—
Boat Wrens, Coder Wrens, Steward Wrens,
Quarters Wrens, General Duties Wrens,
Wrens on shore and afloat;
Wren ratings in sailoresque caps,
Spry, but not musical comedy;
Chief Petty Officer Wrens
With the sober three buttons on their sleeves
And, as much as the old school of chiefs,
The backbone of their Service;
Wren officers in their berets
With the flaring proud badge of the sea,
Wrens in white shirts or blue blouses,
Skirts or bell-bottoms;
At drill on the square in the forenoon,
Eagerly dancing at night.
Coming off watch in the morning
Pale, with drained faces;
Wrens with purple carbon-papered fingers
Rolling off signals—"Top Secret. Important";
Wrens in the Dockyard
Saluting like rather shy children;

Wrens on an M.T.B.'s deck
With greasy small wrists and a spanner;
Plotting Wrens, Messengers, Sparkers,
Torpedo Wrens, Ordnance Wrens; Cooks—
Trim, bright, staunch, overworked.
Good hands and good shipmates
And, let it be gladly proclaimed,
Utterly indispensable.
This is in praise of the Wrens.

HAPPY RETURNS

"In July we shall have a genial election."

Schoolboy's essay.

"Fancy stamping joybells on a solicitor's letter."

FALLACY?

I always thought
  that I was poor
until I met
  a rich old bore.

I thought this rich
  old bore had stacks
of cash; but no,
  it goes in tax.

"In tax," he said,
  "I pay, as bound,
some twenty bob
  in every pound."

Since I myself
  pay less than ten,
"Drinks are on me,"
  I said; "say when."

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY BUTLER & TANNER LTD.
FROME AND LONDON