



PICKOE




PUNCH





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THE PICK OF 'PUNCH'

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THE  
PICK OF 'PUNCH'

*An Annual Selection*



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TORONTO



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July, 1948

LA PERRUQUE DE MME MONTARGIS

"IN NO CIRCUMSTANCES WILL MONKEYS OF WHATEVER SIZE OR COLOUR BE ADMITTED TO THIS HOTEL EITHER AS RESIDENTS OR CASUAL VISITORS."

"I've been wanting to ask you about that," I said to M. Tarragon, who came wandering in from the kitchen in his slippers, vaguely beating an egg.

"In that case I must tell you of a small, grief-ridden monkey whose eyes burned with primeval reproaches against the human race. It belonged to a somewhat bilious Mme Boillot, and in my customary softness of heart I was prevailed on to allow it to accompany her to the restaurant, where it sat beside her soberly enough. Now, among his clients every hotelier has a few of whom he may not be especially fond but whom he is obliged to treat with respect owing to their agreeable habit of ordering for themselves the best of everything. One of these was Mme Montargis, a shrivelled little woman with a vile temper but lots of money and admirably expensive tastes. You know what the restaurant is like on a Sunday, at lunch? Well, that was the time chosen by this infernal monkey to revenge its family's grudge against society. In one movement it bounded across the table, whipped the wig from the head of Mme Montargis, and disappeared through the window. Often we had wondered if this really was a wig. Now we knew. Her skull was like an egg.

"*Figurez vous, mon ami*, the drama! Mme Montargis screaming '*Assassin!*', Mme Boillot screaming '*Lulu!*', all the restaurant laughing like madmen, while Hortense, the waitress, pelted the monkey with apples as he sat outside on the sign-board wearing the wig and looking only a slightly more desiccated reflection of his victim. At last one of the apples got home, and after shouting some unforgivable things at Hortense the monkey streaked across the square and began climbing the church."

"Still wearing the wig?" I asked.

"A little askew. From gargoyle to gargoyle he went, shaking with rage. Speaking not as an hotelier anxious for the comfort of his guests but as a man of the world, I must admit it was magnificent entertainment. A large crowd left the monkey in no doubt of that. On reaching the top of the spire he briefly employed the weathercock as a merry-go-round before planting the wig firmly on the central spike, and then he disappeared down the far side.

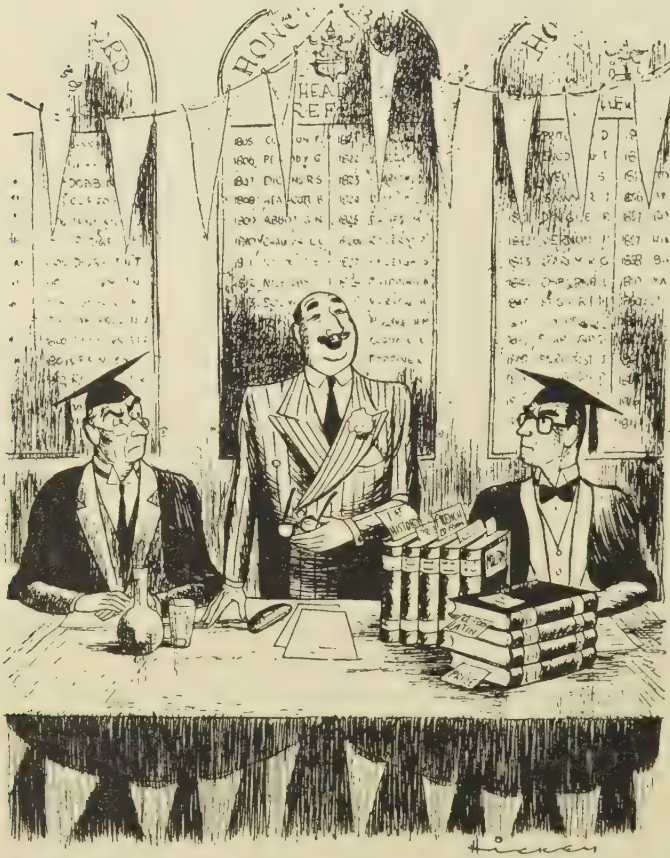
"In spite of its comedy the situation was grave far beyond the good name of my hotel, for our annual regatta was next day. The mayor and my brother councillors came to me in consternation, and we were heartily agreed that to have a wig on the top of the church at such a time would assuredly make us the laughing-stock of

all Normandy. Just as we were considering what reasonable men should do, the monkey reappeared on the tower with a bottle of eau-de-vie he'd filched from a café on the other side. This he drank slowly and purposefully, with the air of one satisfying a long-cherished ambition, and as soon as he'd had enough he started to climb down the face of the church.

"In my time I've witnessed many prodigies of fuddled agility, but none in any way comparable. As you know, there is much fine old carving on our church. At one moment the monkey would be clinging by nothing but his tail to the halo of a saint, at the next he would be holding by a single finger to a devil's snout. All the time, however, his senses were fighting a losing battle, and half-way through this remarkable exhibition the eau-de-vie triumphed. If it had not been for the outstretched arm of St. Peter which miraculously arrested his fall, the monkey would most certainly have been killed. I told them to take him to the kitchen and give him plenty of black coffee, and our council meeting was resumed. Steeplejacks? It was

Sunday, and they would have to come from Rouen, with special ladders. *Pompier*s? M. Lasserre, our local commander, was frank about the limitations of his equipment. He couldn't guarantee his biggest jet to wet St. Peter's feet, much less dislodge the wig of Mme Montargis. Rifle-fire? The sergeant of *gendarmierie*, brought hurriedly into consultation, declined to be responsible for filling the air with bullets on Sunday afternoon. 'The fact is, gentlemen,' said the mayor, 'only one person is capable of helping us—and he's tight!'

"We laughed, but our laughter stopped short as though someone had cut it with a knife. For *the monkey was climbing the church again!* Very deliberately this time, with a



"I WILL NOT DWELL AT ANY GREAT LENGTH ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING UP TO MY EXPULSION IN NINETEEN HUNDRED AND SEVEN."

puzzled frown on his face that suggested he was trying to remember something absolutely vital to his happiness. He'd sobered up a good deal, but I imagine he must have had a formidable headache, and every now and then he missed a hold and only just saved himself. This time there wasn't any cheering down in the square. Not a sound. Up went the monkey, up, up, up. When at long last he reached the weathercock he became tremendously excited at seeing the wig again, and he clapped it passionately on his head. 'Bravo, Mme Montargis!' somebody cried. And then, having taken all that trouble to get it, in a moment the monkey grew tired of the wig. That seemed to me charmingly human of him, a beautiful justification of your M. Darwin. He grabbed it off and just flung it away, so that it floated down across the crowded square like a small auburn parachute. And it landed—where do you think?"

"In the Seine?" I suggested.

"On the very window-sill of Mme Montargis's bedroom!"

"And the monkey?"

"You ask of the strangest thing of all. The creature made off across the roofs, a little unsteadily to be sure, like a farmer going home on Saturday night, and never was he seen again. I suppose it seemed a heaven-sent chance to get away from Mme Boillot. In case he ever thinks of returning from the *maquis* I hope I've stated my position politely but with sufficient frankness?"

"Indeed you have. And Mme Montargis?"

"She didn't come near us for twelve years, until last week. Her curls are still in the very latest style."

## THE NURSERY END

When chasing small boys from the lamp-post opposite my house I always explain to them first that my objection is not to cricket as such—far from it. I was indeed largely responsible for fomenting the original Wiffles End C.C., many years ago, and after I retired it was long before the selection committee broke themselves of the habit of putting me down as twelfth man as a start and building a team round me.

Only the other day I had occasion to reprimand a party of infants outside. One of them had hit ten fours in succession, but a six into my front garden brought me out in a hurry. The next ball was a beauty. I have no patience with a batsman who bursts into tears when clean bowled.

"Dash it all!" I said sharply. "A straight bat for a straight ball, I always say. All this blind slogging won't do for Lord's, you know."

"I only wanted one for me fifty," sobbed the infant.

"It serves you right," I said, seizing the bat. "I'll give you a short demonstration, and then you can all go away and practise somewhere else."

The bat was a home-made thing, hacked out more or less at random, and it took



me some time to settle into my old stance and glare over my left shoulder. As I explained, you can often put a sensitive bowler completely off his game by baring your teeth and laughing through them.

"Overs or unders?" piped the youthful bowler.

"Mix 'em up," I replied, pointing my left elbow at him. "I'll treat each ball on its merits."

The bowler toddled off for his run up, and I glanced quickly round the field. He had three slips, shoulder to shoulder, no wicket-keeper, third man sitting on my garden wall, and deepish mid-off prodding a hedge with a length of gas-tubing.

He bowled. I watched it carefully, leaned forward to it and played my favourite scooping shot.

"Note my left elbow," I said, remaining poised after the stroke.

"Out," said the bowler.

"We'll try it again," I frowned, returning the ball from the base of the lamp-post. "Now watch me closely."

I came down rather late on the next one, but it was undoubtedly a classic stroke—the bat fairly whistled in the breeze. I called their attention to this.

"Out," said the bowler in, I thought, rather a vindictive tone.

"Footwork," I said loudly, "is another important point."

I demonstrated the swing of the bat and awaited the next ball. Third man had come in a bit to stroke a cat. There was also a square leg, two wicket-keepers wrestling, and a silly mid-on counting his marbles.

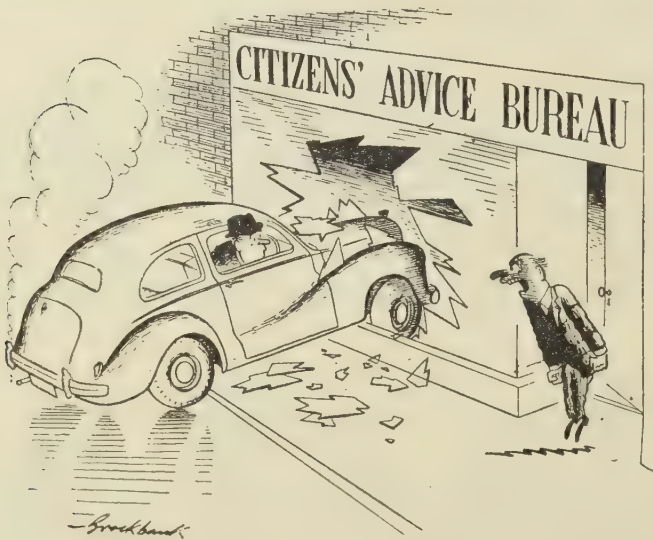
The ball stood up sharply and seemed to hover in mid-air for a moment. I was in two minds whether to cut it or turn it round to leg.

"Out," said the bowler when I had regained my balance. "Why don't you hit 'em?"

"Hit 'em?" I shouted, squaring my shoulders. "Very well, my lad. You've brought it on yourself. The next one is going for six."

I glanced grimly round the field. He had gully chasing second slip, extra cover, and fine leg going home.

He bowled—a shortish lob. It bounced twice and came off the kerb with more



wobble than spin. I clenched my teeth and jumped out to it. There was a sharp crack and I opened my eyes with a smile. We gazed into the sky and watched the thing rise to an incredible height and drop behind my roof. There was a very satisfying tinkle of glass.

"Six," I observed, quietly returning the bat. "I remember, years ago——"

"Out," sniffed the bowler.

"It went for six," I said, turning on him hotly. "You saw it go—we *all* did."

"That was the end of the bat," they said, gathering round to inspect it.

Some three inches or so of the blade had detached itself.

"I see," I said, thoughtfully. "The ball, then, is doubtless lying as usual somewhere near the wicket?"

It was, and it seemed best to leave it at that. It is perhaps a mistake to force very young players; the finer points of the game can come later.

I waited long enough to see the next batsman belting the ball all round the wicket, and then set off to buy a pane of glass for my greenhouse.

At the corner I thought I heard another sixer, and I decided to buy two panes and ring up 999.

### ALL ARTY-CRAFTY

I'd love to go all warp and woof and weft,  
 All loomy, peasant-weavey, folk-designy,  
 And wear my hair dead straight and dress all Left,  
 But . . . well, I *so* adore things smooth and shiny;  
 I'm weak—I fall for textiles which  
 Don't itch.

I'd love to go all adze and gouge (or googe?),  
 All feeling-for-material, way-of-grainy;  
 Perhaps I'm just a mass-production stooge,  
 But woodwork "lightly-waxed-of-course-no-stainy"  
 Looks sort of, you know, prototype—  
 Unripe.

I'd love to go all leather-craft, with thongs,  
 Hand-tooly, suedy, floppy and embossy,  
 Dark purple "Igor Plotsky—Seven Songs"—  
 But then the things in shops are firm and glossy,  
 And kind of leathery *both* sides—  
 Not hides.

I'd love to go all underglaze and slip—  
 It's so divinely squeezable and squishy—  
 All torso-without-arms (the arms *do* chip),  
 And beakery and ewery and dishy . . .  
 But aren't they always, somehow, *thick*—  
 Like brick?

I'd love to go all dress-length, make-my-own,  
 Just-nipped-in-at-the-waist and *rather* flowing.  
 But why do they always look, well, overblown,  
 As if they'd left a lot of room for growing?  
 I want to sort of feel I've dressed,  
 Not guessed.

I'd love to go—I *am*, deep-down inside—  
 All self-expressy and creative-urgey;  
 It's the results I can't seem to abide.  
 I know I'm wrong—it's some sort of allergy—  
 But every time my verdict goes  
 To pros.

### THE RADIO DRAMATIST

When I first began to make a study of radio drama I was at once struck by the remarkable fact that no attempt appeared to have been made to put King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table on the air. How was it, I asked myself, that a playwright would take infinite trouble and care to create a character like Dick Barton, when Merlin stood at his elbow, arm-in-arm, if I do not seem too fanciful, with Lancelot? I set to work to consider how the thing might be done.

I first decided that the knights must speak ordinary everyday English. That is to say, that while there would be nothing like "Whither, fair son?" or "Well said, true heart," neither would the knights make use of such expressions as "Let's get out of here," or "Why, you dirty double-crossing rat . . .!" It was clear that the tales would have to be fairly freely adapted, owing to their lack of jokes and humorous situations, and here I realized that great care would be necessary. To involve Galahad in knockabout farce would be to strike a false note, and I fixed upon Gawain as the most suitable character to provide comic relief. I considered that I had ample material to furnish twelve episodes, each ending at a particularly thrilling moment.

It seemed to me that I could have no better introduction to my first episode than a few bars of stirring music of a kind which people would associate automatically with King Arthur and his knights. (Exactly what that type of music was I did not know,



THE BIRD WATCHER

but had I ever sent my play to the B.B.C. I should have left it to them to make a choice.) The introductory music would fade away, to be replaced by the cries of seagulls. This was rather a subtle touch, I thought, and I was doubtful about it. I meant, of course, to remind my audience of Cornwall, with which so much of the Arthurian legend is associated, but I was well aware that some might think perhaps of Mr. Arthur Askey rather than of Cornwall, and others, having got as far as Cornwall, of pasties, cream or tin, and this would naturally do them no good when they were plunged immediately afterwards into Camelot. One of the points in favour of the seagull idea was that I knew beyond doubt that the B.B.C. were in possession of such a sound-effect.

Then, into the cries of the seagulls, I proposed to introduce three voices in this way:

*First Voice.* England, A.D. 500!

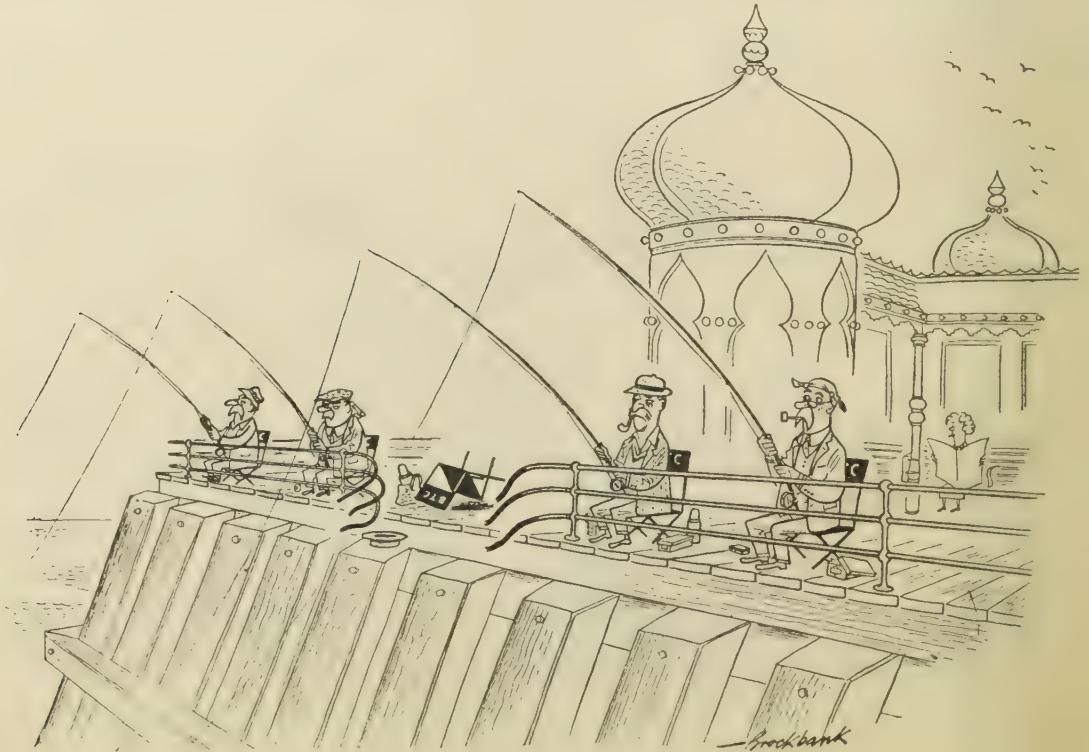
*Second Voice.* Sudden death of King Uther!

*Third Voice.* Heathen advancing on a wide front!

*First Voice.* Arthur on the throne!

*Second Voice.* Heathen split! Great victory celebrations!

*Third Voice.* And so—over to Camelot!



My next direction was "Confused roar of voices and clinking of drinking-vessels." The sound of the drinking-vessels I should have left confidently to the B.B.C., but for the confused roar of voices I should have made it clear that I wished for something better than the half-hearted "Wurra, wurra, wurra" which one so often hears. A few remarks at any rate I wished to be heard above the rest. These might be: "Did you see that white hart rush through the hall a moment ago?" "Merlin has disappeared!" "I was able to sever the head from the trunk at the first attempt. The Queen cried out 'Very neat!'" "There's Merlin again!"

At this point I was forced to belabour my wits in earnest, and for some time in vain. What I wanted to do was to make Galahad come bursting into the hall with a white-haired old man, and my difficulty was to give this information to the audience, using only sound-effects and dialogue. At last I managed it, rather neatly, it seemed to me. Creaking noises were to be heard, as if a massive door had opened, and a lull in the knights' conversation was to be broken by the clatter of hurried footsteps. Then I tackled the dialogue.

*Galahad.* You must think it very odd, King Arthur, for me to come bursting in like this with a white-haired old man——

*King Arthur.* Not at all, not at all.

*White-haired Old Man.* His name is Galahad.

*King Arthur.* How do you do!

Shortly after this the white-haired old man addresses a provocative remark to Merlin, who makes a sharp rejoinder. Galahad joins in the quarrel, and Merlin threatens that unless he is out of Camelot within a week it will be the worse for him. Arthur naturally wants to keep in with the wizard, but he feels that Galahad might well do good work against the heathen. The atmosphere grows more and more tense as the end of the week approaches, a wild tale is circulated about a strangely-marked ferret which has been seen leaving Galahad's room, and then—bang! Merlin goes down with tonsillitis! We hear Galahad and the white-haired old man chuckling and slapping each other on the back, but a note of suspense is introduced, on which the episode ends, when one of the knights recalls how Merlin, hampered by an attack of earache in an attempt to change a heathen chieftain into a badger, nevertheless succeeded in so far as the head was concerned.

I was well satisfied with the work as a whole, but my object in attempting it was merely to improve my technique, and I never submitted it to the B.B.C.

## GHOSTS AND THE BLACK MARKET

"So you didn't get your telephone?" he said. He was very kindly giving me a lift in his Packard.

"No," I said, "I didn't get my telephone. The man told me the only people who can get telephones installed in Kensington are doctors and M.P.s. I don't



"WHAT! THIS OLD THING?"

before. So I says to him: 'Where did you get your plate, Charlie?' 'Don't be soft,' he says. 'I slipped the man at the office a score.' That's what we call slipping him something, say twenty quid. 'What's more,' he says, 'I'll give you the name of the gentleman.' That's how these things are done."

"Amazing," I said. "I'd never have believed it."

"Take eggs," he said. "The other week I was down Hampshire way, staying with the wife's people. So we meet a farmer I know, and I says to him: 'Here, Bert, any chance of any eggs?' 'Eggs?' he says. 'Many as you want. See that case over there?' he says. 'Condemned. Unwashed. See that case over there? Condemned. Got the markings of my washing on them.' What happens? Week or two later the Ministry official would come along and say he'd take the lot for a fiver, take them off his hands. The Ministry official, he's in the game too, he knows where to sell them. Don't you worry."

"Extraordinary," I said.

"Yes," he said. "So, as I'm there before the Ministry official, I take a case off of this farmer for a fiver, and later I sell them to a customer of mine, name of Maxie Rosen, for fifteen quid. That's how it's done."

know which is the best thing to do, qualify as a doctor or stand for Parliament. It takes longer to become a doctor, but you wouldn't have to mix with such awful people."

"You're right there," he said. The Packard accelerated at a pace I'm not used to.

"Did you try slipping him a score?" he said.

"I beg your pardon."

"Did you try slipping him twenty quid?" he said. "I'm sorry, I forgot to talk educated."

"No, I didn't."

"Ah."

A woman broke into a run and pushed her pram just clear of the wheels of the Packard.

"Well, these things are all according," he said.

"Now take my business. I run a hire-car business in the West End, worth ten thousand pounds of anybody's money. Well, the first thing I know they make me take two of my cars off the road. Won't give me a plate. That's what we call a licence." He was being most helpful in explaining things.

"So what happens?" he said. "I meet a man I know, name of Charlie Yates, and I see he has a new plate. A car he didn't ever have on the road

The Packard cut inside an ambulance.

"Then there's another thing," he said. "C.D."

"What's that?" I said.

"Core Diplomatic."

"I don't quite follow," I said.

"Well, it's like this. Some of the boys hire themselves out as chauffeurs to some of these foreign legations. They get as much petrol as they want, specially the countries that's bankrupt. Police can't stop them either. Not allowed to look inside the car. There's one legation I know drives down to ruddy Penzance for lunch every Sunday and then turns back again. And I can't get the petrol to take the wife and kiddies to Bournemouth for the day. It's wicked, you know."

"Yes, it is, isn't it?" I said.

He let the Packard out as we swept through Maida Vale.

"Then there's another thing," he said. "There's phenobarbitone. There's ways of getting that if you know how."

"Are there?" I said. "That must be very useful."

"Then take whisky," he said.

But before we'd taken whisky I thought I'd ask him a question myself.

"There's one thing I'm particularly interested in," I said. "It isn't for me, it's for a friend of my wife's. She's just had a baby, and she finds the clothing position rather difficult. I would like to get her some coupons if I could. I hope you don't mind my asking you."

"Ah," he said, "clothing coupons."

"Yes," I said, "clothing coupons."

"No," he said, "no. Never bother me head with them—never bother me head with them. Of course there's no difficulty in getting them, none at all."

"No," I said, "I don't suppose there is, provided you know how."

The Packard came to a standstill for the first time.

"Well," he said, "this is where our ways part. You want to go to Hyde Park Corner, and I go straight on. And I'm very pleased to have met you."

"And I'm very pleased to have met you,"





I said, and I watched the Packard till it swept out of sight past the Mount Royal Hotel.

Then I began to realize what an upstart, what a parvenu I was. There I had imagined myself rubbing shoulders with the new aristocracy, talking, as I had supposed, on easy man-to-man terms with someone who knew all about petrol and eggs and telephones and phenobarbitone, and the moment I had staked out a claim for myself, what had happened? The paltriness, the banality of my proposal appalled me. I realized that I had talked out of turn, that I hadn't known my proper place. I felt ashamed of my own gaucherie in the way all upstarts feel sooner or later.

I was still smarting when I got home, so much so that I immediately told my wife all about it. My wife, however, looked at it quite differently.

"It's what I always thought," she said. "The black market's really just like ghosts."

"Like ghosts?"

"Yes" she said. "You've never seen a ghost, I've never seen a ghost, yet everyone we know knows somebody who has seen a ghost. When you tie them down to it you find they haven't actually seen a ghost themselves, they just know people who have seen them. I sometimes wonder whether it isn't like that with the black market."

Of course my wife's essentially rather simple. She doesn't appreciate our uniqueness. Not to have seen a ghost—well, there's nothing very remarkable about that. But not to know how to buy in the black market, of course it's unique. At any rate that's what I tell my wife.

## ELEPHANTS AREN'T STRIPED

An advertisement in an American magazine of "National Convention Ties"—I counted sixty-four elephants in the Republican sample as shown—started me wondering what could be the origin of so quaint and useless an article of dress. I was thinking of ties as a class, of course—not of these particular specimens; if a man must knot a silk noose round his neck and let the ends of it trail over his shirt, there may just as well be animals on it as stripes or whorls, as I see it.

I put the matter to Austin, a tie-wearer if ever there was one. "Who," I asked him, "do you suppose was the first man to wear a tie, and why?"

"Oh, that," he said. "The tie is of course a development of the cravat, which reached its—er—what is the word?—it's——"

"Apogee?"

"—its full flower during the Regency. Beau Brummell, it is said, used to take upwards of two hours over the arrangement of his cravat, allowing his chin to sink by imperceptible gradations on to the towering structure until the whole had settled, fold upon fold, into a compact and flawless poem in muslin and lace."

The worst of these well-read people is that from time to time they manage to get a piece off by heart.

"It is related of the Emperor Vitellius," I said by way of reply, "that there was prepared for him upon one occasion, a feast, in which were served—of fish two thousand dishes, of various sorts of fowl five thousand dishes, and one dish called, from its enormous size, the Shield of Minerva, and made, among other costly ingredients, of the brains of pheasants, the sounds of the fish called scari, and the spawn of the lamprey brought from the Carpathian Sea——"

"What has all this got to do with ties?"

"I imagined we were both coming to that, in our several ways. My own preamble," I told him, "was taken from *Dombey and Son*. What about yours?"

Austin is a man upon whom irony is altogether lost. "It is a mistake, in my opinion," he said, "to search too far back in history for the origins of modern social customs and behaviour. One has to remember how wide and deep was the tide of barbarism that swept between our western world of to-day and the ancient civilizations of the Mediterranean, and how irrevocably it submerged beneath the flood all but the name, the monuments, and a few poor hoarded relics of the literature of Rome."

"You mean Attila wore no tie?"

Your thorough-going bore is never distracted by interruptions.

"It would no doubt be possible," he said, "to trace, or at worst to adumbrate——"

"No, Austin," I said. "Not that."

"—to adumbrate some link between the Roman fondness for the bath and that insistence upon personal cleanliness of which Brummell made such a fetish. Indeed, from the Baths of Nero or Titus at Rome to their counterpart at Aquae Sulis is but a very short step (you spoke just now, as I remember, of Minerva, with whom of course the Roman legionaries equated this same British goddess Sulis); and once at



"FREE MILK, FREE STRAW, FREE ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE OF NEARLY FIFTEEN POUNDS PER SQUARE INCH—I WONDER IF YOU CHILDREN REALIZE HOW LUCKY YOU ARE."

Aquae Sulis, or Bath as we prefer to call it to-day, we are within close hail of Beau Nash and so of that other Beau, Brummell, who was in so many ways his spiritual successor."

"The Emperor Vitellius," I began, having only one string to *my* beau (Ha!), "is credibly reported——"

"The Emperor Vitellius," said Austin, "is quite another pair of shoes. In any case, if we are to get to the kernel of our present problem, we must leave imperial Rome and take a leap forward of some eighteen centuries . . ."

I let him leap forward alone. Men of Austin's type, who answer the most casual question with a lecture of an extent and aridity (if I may borrow his phraseology for a moment) comparable only with the Sahara, cannot be stopped or diverted. They just roll on regardless. Let them roll, as Mr. Churchill said on another occasion.

The room was warm, my chair was comfortable, the interminable voice boomed on. Slowly, by imperceptible gradations, my chin sank forward on to my cravat. Not even the most hysterical haberdasher, I reflected, could describe the thing I was wearing as a towering structure . . .



"AN ÉCLAIR, BUT KINDLY NOTE—IT WAS FILED UNDER 'SANDWICHES.'"

When I awoke the shadows of my knees had lengthened along the carpet and the slanting sun was shining full upon the multi-coloured stripes of Austin's flamboyant tie. "The slovenliness in attire," he was saying, "of such men as Dr. Johnson and Charles James Fox has passed into history."

"They might just as well," I said, speaking my thoughts aloud, "be elephants."

For once, Austin was startled into acknowledging an interruption. "There," he said almost vehemently, "I am unable to follow you. Samuel Johnson, for all his unwieldy bulk——"

"No, no, NO, Austin," I cried. "I am not *talking* about Samuel Johnson. I don't know what Samuel Johnson is doing in this conversation, anyway. I am talking about ties. Specifically, I am talking about the stripes in yours."

"I thought you said elephants."

"I did."

"You said they might just as well be elephants?"

"Yes."

Austin ran his fingers through his hair. I could see he was troubled by this thing, but I just hadn't the stamina to go into it now.

"Elephants aren't striped," he said at last.

We let it go at that. The statement may have left my original question to some extent in the air, but, taken on its own merits, it would be hard to fault it.

## CRICKET AND HAM

Just as, if you have been at either of them, there are only two universities, so again (if you have been at either) there are just two preparatory schools, Puffins and Guillemots.

When Guillemots come over to play cricket against us, their team arrives the night before and we put the boys up in the sanatorium. We always play fair over this and have the place disinfected first.

There is of course a master in charge of the team. This term it was a man called Gull. We none of us much like Gull.

One of the features which distinguish Puffins (and Guillemots, from whom we adopted the practice) is that the boys have dinner at night and we, the masters, dine with them, sitting at a High Table. Like an Oxford or a Cambridge college, as the Head says; he takes pride in the fact that it teaches the boys good manners. I wish it did.

So on the night before the match this term we were at dinner, masking as best we could our hostility to Gull, our guest, and our anxiety about the Guillemots slow left-hand bowler.

It was a vilely unpalatable meal. At the end of it Old Turtle, the oldest of

us, an acidulated old drop, said to Gull, "Do you have the rule at Guillemots that the boys have the same food as the masters?"

Gull said, "Yes—and you have the same food as the boys?"

We pricked up our ears. Was this *gaucherie*, or was it a very offensive remark indeed?

After dinner he took a lot of money off us playing bridge.

We were all down to breakfast in Common Room before him the next morning, and on the sideboard was a vast intact ham.

There had been a lot of excitement over that ham.

Puffins is proud of its distinguished Old Puffins—admirals, generals, ambassadors and the like. But until a week earlier we had not been particularly proud of an Old Boy called Toat. In fact, I doubt whether any of us would have called him an Old Puffin at all.

He was American, and, after he had been with us for two years, his parents came over from America, saw the school, and at once removed him. They objected to the plumbing. We told them all about our distinguished Old Puffins—the generals, the admirals and the rest—and they just said, "Sure, but we don't like the drains."

That was fifteen years ago. Then, the week before the Guillemots match, there arrived, unexpected as fruit blossom in winter, this ham. It was from young—now, I suppose, not quite so young—Toat. It came from America with a letter. The letter just said, "The school may like this; even fifteen years ago, I seem to remember, the food wasn't that good."

We considered this for a long time and decided that by "the school" he must mean the masters. And we thought quite seriously about putting his name back on the roll of Old Puffins.

So here on the Saturday morning of the Guillemots match we waited for Gull and surveyed the ham. Young Ratcatcher, our latest colleague, said, "I shall say to Gull, 'You were unlucky last night over dinner. It was a stinker. But you are lucky in being here this morning to help us eat our ham.'"

Old Turtle disagreed.

No, he said. This was an opportunity to score a point. We should wait for Gull to express astonishment, wait for him to say, "What, do you have ham every morning?" And then we should reply calmly and without excitement, "Why, don't you?"

We agreed. We all felt a bit vindictive about Gull.

He came down. He saw the ham. He went to the sideboard and helped himself liberally. We had decided on a slice apiece as the daily ration; he gave himself three. As he sat down, he showed no emotion at all, neither exhilaration nor surprise.

Could it really be the case that at Guillemots they had ham for breakfast every morning? Simultaneously we were chilled, all of us, by the same dismal thought.

Young Ratcatcher had less self-control than the rest of us. He said, "We haven't given your boys any ham for breakfast. We thought that, not being used to it, they might make hogs of themselves, and if we won the match we shouldn't like to think that we owed our victory to a trick of that kind."

Gull glanced up from his plate with a glazed, over-fed look and said, "Oh, and what about your own boys?"

Ratcatcher said—we thought it very smart of him—"Oh, they insisted on going without themselves too, out of courtesy to their guests."

"Nice of them," Gull grunted. "I suppose that they will have it to-morrow instead?"

We couldn't lie. We half-nodded, which wasn't the same thing at all.

Gull helped himself to more ham—another three slices.

It was a big ham—but all the same.

Ratcatcher was the one whose nerves broke down completely. He astonished us by saying to Gull, "Like to come and see our pig-sties after breakfast?"

What did he mean? We have no outbuildings at all, nothing that even by the wildest imagining could be thought to be a pig-sty.

Gull answered calmly, "No thanks. I saw the school last time I was here."

There is a limit to rudeness.

And yet, we reflected, it might be that he was just *gauche*.

On the whole, yes. He did not strike any of us as a subtle man.

But it was a bad beginning to the day.

There was nothing to redeem the day itself. Guillemots beat us by a hundred runs. It was an unprecedented defeat and



"I MUST INTRODUCE YOU—YOU'VE GOT SO MUCH IN COMMON."

hard on us all, particularly on Old Turtle. We rallied round and did all we could to cheer him.

What made it worse was that the boys themselves did not seem to mind at all. They were grinning all over their faces when they came off the field.

We managed somehow to have something else to do when Guillemots were leaving, and none of us said good-bye to the hateful Gull.

I walked out to the empty cricket-field and there, as I expected, I found Turtle.

For a long time he said nothing.

Then young Spratt, our head boy and cricket captain, came out of the house. Normally he is a delightful child and a good cricketer, but on this day he had played a disgraceful innings and hardly seemed to have his mind on the game at all.

We thought he wanted to apologize for losing the match. That, after all, would have been a proper thing for him to do, after playing so badly.

But not a bit of it.

He grinned at us, showing no shame at all.

"What does ham taste like, sir?" he asked.

"Ham?"

"Yes, sir. We're going to have it for breakfast to-morrow morning, aren't we, sir? The Guillemots master, sir. He told us just before we went out to bat that, if we lost, we were going to be given ham for breakfast to-morrow, sir, to console us. He said he'd seen the ham, sir. He said he thought it was very decent, sir. He said there were some schools where it was only if the school *won* a match they'd be given ham for breakfast, sir."

*August, 1948*

THE SIGN OF THE FIVE RINGS

IT was easy to tell the man was not an Englishman. He was too well, or too newly, dressed, for one thing. For another he spoke some language which an expensive education enabled me to identify as neither ancient Greek nor Latin, and certainly not English. It was the kind of language that has more spit than vowels about it, if I may so express myself, and seems to lead nowhere.

"Sorry," I said. "I don't get it."

He repeated his question, or so at least I surmise, and I listened in some amazement. In a fairly wide experience of being accosted by unintelligible foreigners, I have never heard a stream of sounds so apparently incapable of division into words or even sentences. The only impression I got was of a long viscous snake pouring out of his mouth, with the last yard or two curled sharply upwards in the form of a question-mark. But that he was making real words and sentences in his own tongue I have no doubt at all—if only because otherwise I do not see how he could have known when he had got to the right place to stop.

I felt a great desire to be of use to this man. He had a pleasant, slightly anxious face, and if his hat was a little wider in the brim and a shade lighter in colour than would be approved of around St. James's, well—one ought not to allow considerations of that sort to stand in the way of a chance to cement the bonds of friendship between this country and Egypt—shall we say—or perhaps Albania. Besides, we were nowhere near St. James's; we were at the corner of the Strand and Villiers Street, a place where a foreigner might well be excused for wanting encouragement and advice.

I asked him where he wanted to go. This is a perfectly safe question to put to a foreigner at almost any time and place, the chances being overwhelmingly against his wanting to stay indefinitely just where he is. At the corner of the Strand and Villiers Street it is cast-iron.

When he spoke again, it seemed to me that somewhere in the middle of the flood there coagulated, like a lump in a bowl of half-cooked porridge, the word or sound "Olympisch." I leapt at it like—well, like a writer leaping nimbly from one simile to another, or, as some would say, like a goat.

"Olympisch?"

Sometimes, I know, we imagine that which we wish to see, but I could swear that something like a ray of hope lit up his face.

"Olympisch?" I said again, and without doubt he nodded. I immediately—and, in the event, rightly—concluded that he wanted to go to the Olympic Games.



That, after all, is what a foreigner may be supposed to want to do in this country at the present time.

Now a more thoughtless man might perhaps have taken this lost visitor by the arm and thrust him down the nearest Underground leading to Wembley. But the fact is that by no means all the Games are taking place in or about the Stadium. Rifle-shooting, rowing and equitation, for instance, take place elsewhere; and it would be tiresome for him, I thought, if he had come all the way from Bolivia to see the preliminary heats of the Coxwainless Fours, to be packed off by a blundering Englishman to the semi-final of the 3,000 metres steeplechase. I make no apology, therefore, for attempting to discover, by means of dumb-show, which particular event he wanted to see.

The statements made later to the police by a woman in a purple blouse were false and tendentious. "First 'e come at 'im crouching," she said; "with 'is 'ands out, proper vicious." This is no way, as even a constable should have realized, to describe the characteristic posture of a wrestler in the Greco-Roman style. "Then 'e makes as if to shoot the gentleman with 'is umbrella, and after that 'e come on at a run and a jump, so to say, like a mad thing."

"I seen 'im," put in a bystander.



"SYLVIA ROBERTS, UNMARRIED, LIVES AT HOME, LIKES FILMS AND GOOD MUSIC."

"There you are, then," said the woman. "Down on all fours at the finish, as anybody'll tell you."

"'Ere's his broolly in the gutter," a thin bearded man pointed out keenly. "'E can't get past that."

"What have you got to say about this?" asked the policeman.

In executing the pole vault the athlete twists his body in the air at the top of his leap, at the same time thrusting the pole away from him clear of the bar. The trunk must be practically horizontal, and for this reason the landing is apt to be made on all fours rather than on the feet only. This is particularly the case where the jump is made, with the aid of an umbrella, on to hard paving-stones. But to explain technical points of this nature to a constable at the corner of Villiers Street and in the presence of a hostile crowd is a waste of valuable time.

"Ask *him*," I suggested, indicating the stranger.

The stranger, as I had hoped, accepted the constable's invitation to state his case and replied at great length and in his own language; and the crowd, after the fashion of English crowds faced with something they do not understand, drew closer together and began to mutter.

"Orkard sort of talk," said the thin bearded man.

"Polish, by the sound of it," suggested another.

"More spit than Polish, if you ask me," said a third, obviously a man of some culture. But nobody laughed. It is of course a joke that goes better on paper.

The constable took out his notebook, perhaps to gain time. "Foreigner, eh?" he observed, more or less at large.

"You will rise high in your profession, officer," I said bitterly. "You have instinct and intuition."

"Never mind that," he said. "What's he want—and what do *you* want, come to that?"

I explained that in my view the foreigner wanted to attend the Olympic Games, but *which* game in particular I was unable to say. My own idea had been to try to discover, by the use of dumb-show and gesture, what sport he was anxious to patronize. Perhaps I had been ill-advised. No doubt the lady in the purple blouse could suggest some better way of settling the matter, such as the summoning of additional policemen or the wholesale distribution of accusations of disorderly conduct, whereby a breach of the peace might have been occasioned. I knew nothing about that. All I had done was to act according to my lights. For myself, I wanted nothing—beyond a speedy end of this ridiculous situation.

"Olympics, eh?" said the constable, going to the heart of the matter.

"Olympisch!" cried the foreigner eagerly. "Olympisch!" And he began to trace great circles in the air with his hands.

"Crikey!" said the woman in the purple blouse. "There's two of 'em."

"You see, officer," I said. "The Sign of the Five Circles."

The policeman turned heavily to the foreigner, and the crowd, losing hope of an arrest, began to melt away.

"There's all sorts of Olympics, sonny," the policeman said tolerantly. "There's rowing and running and jumping and horseback—gee-gees, savvy?—and cycling and a bit of football and lord knows."

"Fwotba!" cried the foreigner delightedly, and seizing my bowler hat from my hands (I had taken it off at an earlier stage, I remember, with some idea of adopting the attitude of Myron's *Discobolos*), set it on the pavement and kicked it with extraordinary precision under a passing taxi.

"That's it, then," said the constable. "Soccer"; and taking the foreigner by the arm began to lead him away with the obvious intention of thrusting him down the nearest Underground for Wembley.

"Hi!" I said. "What about my hat?"

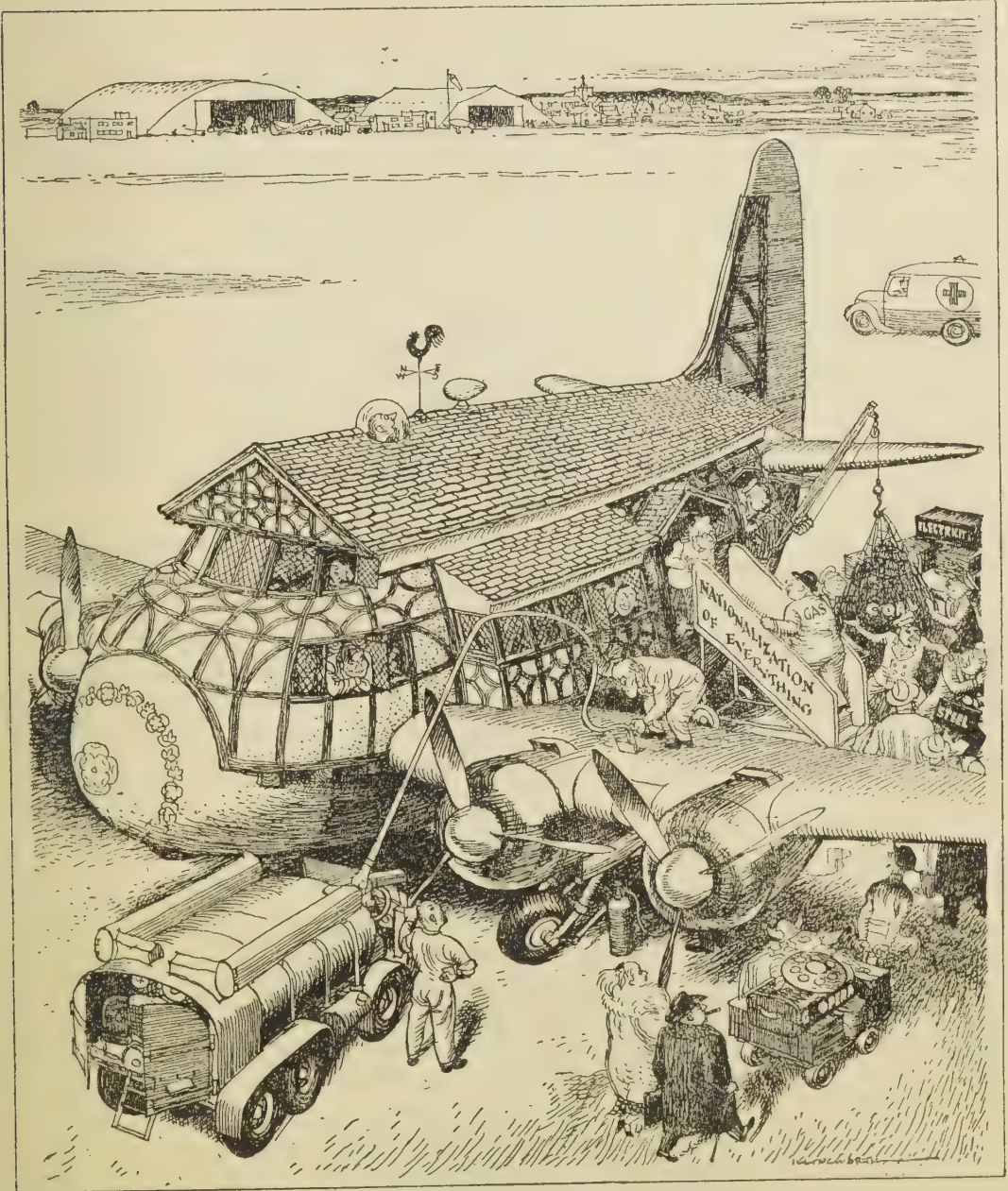
"You'd better keep that," said the constable, grinning like a fool. "You might meet another of 'em."

## CONFIDENCE

I hope you don't mind my popping in like this, old man. I just happened to be passing and I saw that the front door of your flat was open, and I remembered that you were making your important speech this evening at the Area Rally, and I thought I ought to take the opportunity of wishing you luck. If you can make a real hit it will do you a lot of good in the Party, with Lord Cottonstone and all the other big noises sitting there on the platform lapping up everything you say and wondering whether to earmark you for the Cabinet if by a miracle you get elected to Parliament.

When I saw the front door open I didn't ring the bell because I thought the porter would probably answer it and say you had given strict instructions not to be disturbed. I know myself how maddening it is to have people popping in and nattering all sorts of nonsense just as you are trying to concoct something really de-lousing to say about Aneurin Bevan. But your last three speeches have been such terrible flops that I thought a few words of cheer and comfort might be welcome.

I've listened to most of your speeches since you were adopted as a Parliamentary candidate, old man, and for a long time I've been racking my brains to lay my finger on just where you fail. It seems to me that it isn't what you say that lets you down, but the perfectly awful way you say it. One expects a lot of platitudes and padding in a political speech, but a really experienced speaker can say something perfectly puerile in a way that makes it sound quite astoundingly original and brilliant. If you could speak a bit more like Churchill and a bit less like a third-rate auctioneer trying to sell a cracked aspidistra-pot on the last day of a four-day sale I don't think it would matter that your actual stuff is so very mediocre.



TUDOR STYLE II

Your voice I suppose you can't help, but there are just a couple of pitfalls, if you don't mind my being perfectly frank, old man, that I think you ought to try to avoid. When you are speaking quietly you don't need to adopt a dreary and inaudible monotone, and when you raise your voice for the highly-coloured passages you want at all costs to try to sound a little bit less like Donald Duck.

Then of course there is the way you walk to the front of the platform to start your speech. There is an art in this. Watch any experienced speaker and you will see that when he is called upon by the chairman his face lights up happily and he strides boldly forward, adopts an easy and confident stance, and smiles round pleasantly before he begins, as though he were quite certain that a good time was about to be had by all. If you'll forgive my saying so, old man, you always creep to the front of the platform with a hang-dog air as though you were going into the dock to face a particularly mean and sneaking charge. If you had the bold-faced swagger of a really red-blooded criminal people would not mind so much, but you have the air of a man who has stolen toffee-apples from children or milk from the doorstep of a blind man. Then you look round the audience in a hunted sort of way as if you wished that both you and they were sitting quietly at home listening to the wireless.

But this is your big chance this evening, and you can rely on all your old friends being there to lead the applause when you sit down, even if you have made a complete hash of the whole thing. Well, I must pop off now, and I hope I haven't disturbed your train of thought. I only looked in because I knew that a few friendly words of cheer would help to give you confidence for your task, and confidence is clearly what you need more than anything else, because if you fail again to-day I am afraid a lot of the Committee will be inclined to start looking round for another candidate.

### THE TIDDLER SPECIAL

The tram that takes me home to lunch  
Goes clanking through a belt of slums  
To pass a trim suburban park  
That boasts a lake; when summer comes  
And school breaks up, out from the dark  
Alleys and courts there bursts a stream  
Of little tousled shouting boys,  
Clutching at jars and fishing-nets,  
Hot ha'pennies and the golden dream  
Of tiddlers by the silver score.  
They board my tram, a squealing bunch  
Of clamant and vociferous joys.

All elbows and unruly boots,  
 They swarm by dozens up the stair,  
 Out from the top-deck window shoots  
 A fringe of craning heads; the air  
 Streams with their cries for half a mile—  
 A starling-song, a treble roar;  
 Their trampled fellow-travellers smile  
 And bear with them contentedly,  
 The sober vehicle forgets  
 Its workaday identity,  
 And carrying this happy freight  
 Of young-eyed cherubins in quire  
 Becomes the street-car named Desire  
 And sets them down at heaven's gate.

### QUEUE FOR ME, GIPSY

"At Liverpool Street Station, the home of true democracy, where their motto is 'First come, get in the crowd with everybody else,' " said Cogbottle with a touch of bitterness——

"Your judgment is warped," protested Upfoot, "by the holiday season."

"My judgment is warped by nothing more than the design of so many of the platforms at Liverpool Street," said Cogbottle, "which encourages ticket-collectors to save themselves trouble by letting through an enormous queue without waiting for the train to come in first. The mechanics, the ballistics of the queue—what did you say?"

"I made a slight sound," said Upfoot, "indicative of concentration."

"Good. As I see it, a queue without the actual presence of the object for which it is queueing is a blank, a meaningless dead phenomenon. It is the object's presence that gives it significance, that fires it, that strikes it, that sets it off. In other words, a train queue is not a—*a fulfilled queue* until the train is there, and any ticket-inspector who lets it through beforehand to gather in clots all along the edge of the platform is guilty of backfiring his gun, of short-circuiting his battery, of deliberately letting the air out of his tyres. But that isn't what I wanted to talk about."

Upfoot looked resigned.

"I wanted to discuss a question," said Cogbottle, "that came into my head while I was *in* one of those abortive, frustrated and unnecessary queues. It concerns what may be called immediacy of reaction."

Upfoot said "Never mind what it may be called—what *is* it?"

"I am thinking of the strange people who are, to judge from the crowds at



"HE'S OVERDOING THINGS, AS USUAL."

railway-stations," said Cogbottle, "prompted by unexpectedly good weather to go away for their holidays."

Upfoot stared. "What's wrong with that? Do you mean strange-looking people?"

"On the contrary. I mean perfectly ordinary people. The strange thing about them is their immediacy of reaction, or alternatively their positively arachnidean prescience—by which phrase I mean to refer to——"

"I know," said Upfoot. "You mean those spiders in Cornwall that foretold the heat-wave by beginning, in cold weather, to build webs to catch hot-weather flies."

"Exactly. Now when do you suppose people going away last week-end to a

popular seaside resort had to book their rooms?" said Cogbottle.

"Say March. A bit before the papers reported that motor-coach seats were being booked for next Christmas."

"Very well—March. And yet, four months in advance," Cogbottle said, "they hit a week-end of perfect holiday weather when the stations were to be packed with unusually large crowds of others doing the same thing."

"Wait a minute, you haven't thought this out," said Upfoot, looking pleased. "One of the terms of your proposition is being used twice, or something. *Either* they're long-range weather-forecasters, in which case immediacy of reaction doesn't come into it—*or* they catch a train for the seaside when it's a fine day, and I must say I'm blown if I see why they shouldn't. You can't have it both ways."

Cogbottle rubbed his brow reflectively, and at length declared, "You're oversimplifying."

"The subject can stand a little of that," said Upfoot with some warmth.

"No," said Cogbottle, rubbing his brow again, "listen. Consider the after-

noon edition of a London evening paper on a fine Friday—or still more, a fine Saturday. What do you see on the first page?"

"The early afternoon edition? I see a huge headline," said Upfoot, "reading THOUSANDS DELAYED, and under it an enthralling story about how enormous numbers of City workers were late at their offices in the morning because, on a train between Mark Lane and Cannon Street, one of the doors got stuck."

Cogbottle waved a hand dismissively. "On Fridays and Saturdays they give that a rest and count the people at the *main-line* stations. Always, on a fine day, there are thousands more than usual. Station-masters have never known anything like it."

"But damn it all, of *course* there are more," said Upfoot. "A fine day——"

"All right—a fine day, in other words a spur-of-the-moment decision. What kind of character is it who can start his holiday and set out for a fortnight at the seaside, family, luggage, dog and all, on the spur of the moment? Gipsies aren't *in* it."

"Perhaps gipsies *are* in it," suggested Upfoot. "That would explain the whole thing. Every queue full of gipsies. Send Your Caravan By Rail. Babies under every seat, mountains of clothes-pegs in the van. Excuse me, madam, this is a First Class carriage—I must ask you to cross my palm with silver. That goat in the corridor has a lucky face. There's too much wind through the window, brother."

"I had hoped," said Cogbottle, "that we might discuss this problem seriously." Upfoot said, "I preferred to short-circuit your queue."

## THE PASSING OF ANGUS McSUMPH

Ploughing the placid waters of the Indian Ocean one day was the reasonably well-found screw steamship *Porpentine*, homeward bound from Port Pirie with a cargo of peanuts, paw-paws and (by a happy coincidence) pickled pork.

The sea was a mill-pond; the crew, disposed in varying attitudes of repose about the deck, were endeavouring to insert full-rigged ships into empty bottles; and the captain from his deck-chair on the bridge surveyed them with an indulgent eye.

Suddenly the calm was shattered by a rending crash from the engine-room. The ship stopped dead, a jet of thick black oil spurted from the bridge speaking-tube, the anchor began to raise and lower itself with frightful rapidity, and sixteen feet of the funnel fell heavily on to the deck.

McSumph, the chief engineer, was in his cabin at the time, enjoying a bowl of cold porridge. Cautiously opening the door, he saw the second engineer hastening along the alley-way.

"Are ye seekin' me, McLosh?" said the chief.





"TURNED OUT THAT NEITHER OF US COULD TIE A WHITE TIE PROPERLY."

lessly fitting uniform emerged from an adjacent doorway. It was the fifth engineer, Godfrey Fitzherbert. Crossing briskly to the chief's cabin, he knocked on the door and entered.

"Good morning, sir," said Fitzherbert.

"And whit can I dae for ye, ma bonny man?" said McSumph offensively.

"I couldn't help overhearing your conversation with McLosh, sir——"

"Aye, your lugs are lang eneuch," interjected McSumph with gratuitous rudeness.

"—and I thought, sir, I might perhaps be of some assistance."

"And whit dae ye ken aboot the intricacies o' a ship's engines, ye scunner-faced Sassenach?" inquired the chief, his accent becoming broader as his anger mounted.

"Well, sir, I have a diploma, and—I beg your pardon, sir?"

"The Gaelic," said McSumph, "for 'diploma.'"

The boy flushed angrily and, drawing himself up to his full height, replied: "I will not remain here, Mr. McSumph, to be laughed at. I shall proceed to the engine-room and endeavour to repair the damage brought about by the ignorant

"Aye, chief. I thought ye wad like tae know the deefereential valve-coupling's got entangled wi' the Mitchell reduction-gear."

"Aweel, McLosh," said the chief, drily, "ye'd better disentangle it."

"Aye, chief," said the second gloomily. "Could ye gie me ony indication o' how ye wad like me tae set about it?"

"Na, na, McLosh. I dinna believe in interferin' wi' ma juniors: it destroys their ineetiative. Tak' McWhisht and McHavers—ye'll find them under the table in the saloon—and dinna waste ony time. Time's money tae the owners, McLosh. Forbye," he added, "I hae twa grape-fruit in ma bunk that'll no' keep mair than sax months."

As the second departed morosely in the direction of the saloon and McSumph retired to his cabin, a clean-cut young man in a fault-

rule-of-thumb methods of McLosh, McWhisht and McHavers. I lay no blame on you, for your sole visit to the engine-room this voyage has been to ask the third engineer for the loan of a haggis. Good day, sir."

\* \* \* \* \*

Twenty-four hours later there was a knock at the door of the captain's cabin, where he and the chief engineer were seated at a table. There entered Godfrey Fitzherbert.

"Ah, come in, Mr. Fitzherbert," said the captain. "The chief and I were just discussing this unlucky business in the engine-room," he went on, pushing the pack of Happy Families under the table-cloth. "Perhaps you could offer some helpful suggestions."

"I have effected the necessary repairs, sir," said Fitzherbert quietly, "and the ship is once more under way."

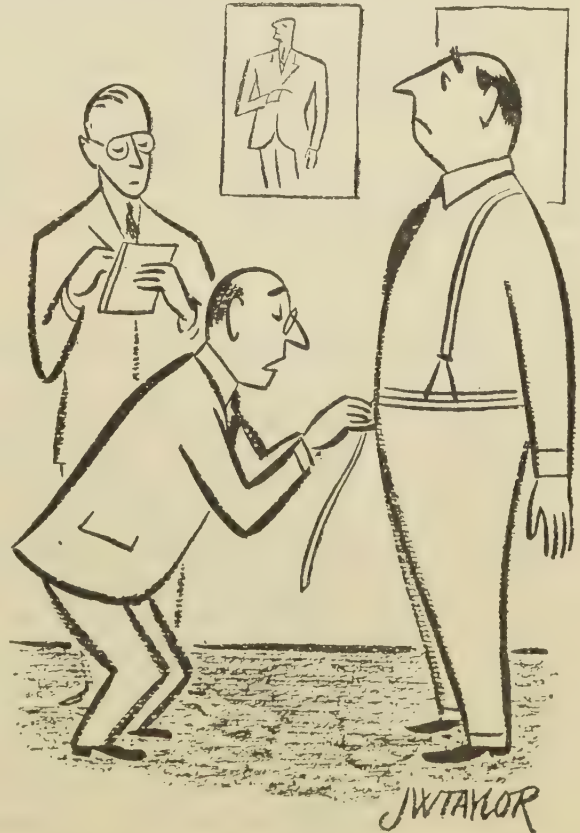
"Why, bless my soul, so she is," said the captain, looking out of the port-hole. "I confess the resumption of our motion had escaped my notice. If you will excuse me, gentlemen, I will go upstairs and make sure we are pointing the right way. Well done, Fitzherbert—well done, indeed!"

As the captain left the room McSumph rose from his seat and spoke with assumed heartiness. "Mr. Fitzherbert," he said, "I confess I misjudged ye, man. Ye've the makings o' a great engineer."

"Mr. McSumph," said Fitzherbert coldly, "I fear I regard your praise as little as I heeded your censure. McSumph," he went on, fixing the other with a steely gaze, "you are an impostor!"

The chief covered. "Dinna be ower hard on me, Fitzherbert. I may be a when rusty in ma technical knowledge, but——"

"I am not referring to your professional shortcomings, McSumph; though it is admittedly hard to understand how any qualified



“. . . LESS FIVE PER CENT. ESTIMATED DEPRECIATION.”

engineer could have failed to realize that all that was necessary was to unscrew the Crompton Lamancha swivel-piece and file down the crossheads to slide freely in the supplementary scuppers. No, McSumph, the fraud goes deeper than that. When I helped to carry you to your bunk last night your diary fell from your hip-pocket; I retrieved it and read it from cover to cover before I realized that the contents were private. McSumph," said Godfrey Fitzherbert, sternly, "you are an Englishman!"

The chief engineer buried his head in his hands.

"Your true name," went on Fitzherbert relentlessly, "is Percy Algernon——"

"Gentlemen," said the captain, reappearing in the doorway, "we are in sight of a picturesque harbour, which I have some reason for supposing to be that of Cape Town. With your permission, I propose to put into that port to replenish our stock of provisions. Do we require any coal, chief?"

"Captain," said the chief engineer, "ye maun address that inquiry tae ma successor, Mr. Fitzherbert here. After his superrb exhibeetion o' engineerin' skill, I couldna presume tae ask him tae serve under me. Forbye," he went on, with a look of anguished entreaty at Fitzherbert, "I've aye had a notion tae try ma hand at growin' oranges. Ye maun sign me aff at Cape Town, captain, for the ocean shall see McSumph nae mair."

\* \* \* \* \*

On a fruit farm near the little town of Dirtigroot Wildebeeste, in Cape Province, lives a retired ship's engineer by the name of Hendrik van Tromp. His oranges are famous for miles around.

## THE SIKH WITH THE SKY-BLUE PUGGREE

On Saturday night I met a Sikh  
 With a sky-blue puggree wound in a peak;  
 He was tall and tawny, the colour of teak,  
 And his eyes were the hue of a blackbird's beak.  
 I said to him, Sir, do you breathe and speak,  
 Or are you the ghost of an ancient Greek?  
 And are there others of your physique,  
 Or are you exclusively unique,  
 A kind of Phœnix, a natural freak,  
 Like the Mumbling Mouse of Mozambique,  
 Or the cuneiform cat with the crimson streak,  
 Or the piebald stag or the skewbald peke?  
 Pray pardon, I said, extremely meek,  
 It is wisdom and knowledge alone I seek.

But swollen with anger and pride and pique  
 He hooted and snorted and said, What cheek!  
 And boarded a bus for Barking Creek.  
 Perhaps I shall meet him again next week.

## GRAMMATICAL NOTES FROM PARIS

"I am fleeing from Copenhagen," the lady said, "by the airboat."

We considered this carefully. Since my admission into the inner circle at Mme Boulot's, M. Albert and his friends have evinced a steadily growing interest in the English language, and I thought it unlikely that a remark like the above would pass unchallenged by my pupils.

M. Albert did not fail me.

"You have flown, madame," he corrected her politely, "with the airship?"

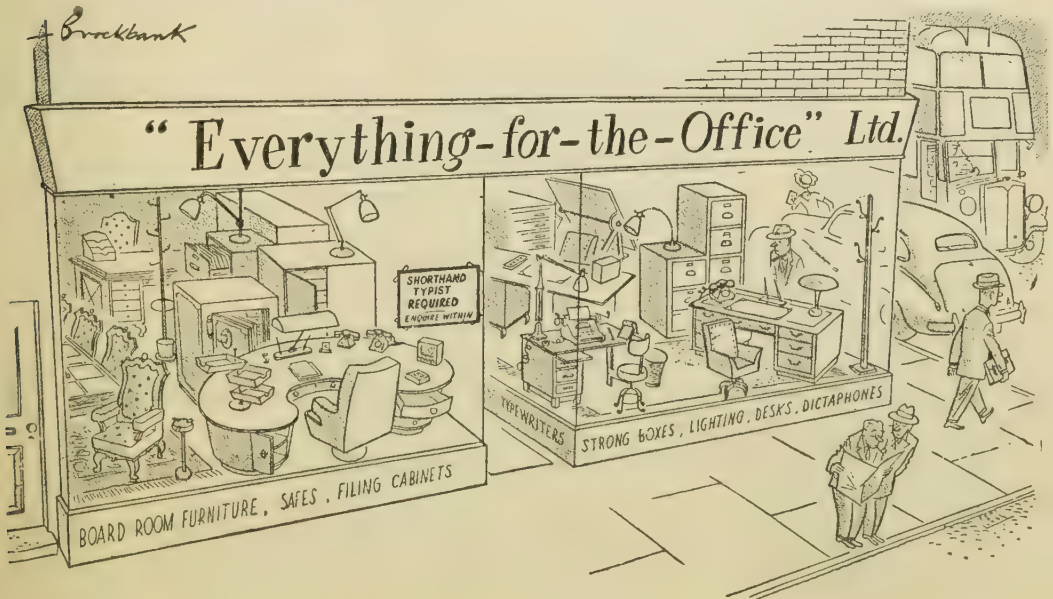
The lady stiffened. It was intolerable that a Frenchman should presume to improve on the English of the near North.

"I am fleeing," she said firmly, "from Copenhagen till London by the airboat."

M. Albert looked worried, and addressed me in his own tongue.

"I ask myself," he said anxiously, "if the dame has reason."

This oblique approach caused me some embarrassment. I could not with



integrity agree with both parties: I could not wound a charming bird of passage; and to offend the staunch ally that M. Albert has shown himself to be, in joint conflict with Mme Boulot, would be unthinkable.

Fortunately, M. Jean-Jacques came to my rescue.

"The thing is perfectly clear," he said confidently. "The lady wishes to say 'I am *flowing* to London.'"

"I think, perhaps," I began cautiously, "that——"

"My friend," interposed M. Jules, "do not give yourself the pain of taking part in a conversation which without doubt causes you acute discomfort. Happily, I am capable of furnishing the just word." He swept the assembly with a commanding glance. "I have *flowed* to London," he said firmly, and with a graceful bow to the lady from Scandinavia he retired to the bar.

Mme Boulot announced her entry into the arena by her customary method of knocking over a wineglass kept handy for the purpose. (I need hardly say that it is empty and unbreakable.)

"It is not of the least significance," she said with dreadful calm, "that I found myself for many years in Edimbourg."

We shifted uneasily in our seats. This form of preamble was only too familiar.

"One could not expect," went on Mme Boulot mercilessly, "that one who for so long preserved the narrowest relations with those whose English was of the most impeccable——"

"In Scotland," cut in M. Albert innocently, "one speaks then English?"

Mme Boulot affected not to hear.

"—might have acquired some slight knowledge of that tongue."

She turned royally on MM. Albert, Jean-Jacques and Jules.

"I am overflowing," she said with massive dignity.

The situation, especially now that Mme Boulot had made an official pronouncement, called for the most delicate handling—but happily I had been there before.

"The English grammar," I began evenly, "is fraught with pitfalls, even for those of the highest intelligence."

This would do for a start, I thought. There was an approving silence as I planned my next sentence.

The lady rose, and in her eyes was the fierce light of her conquering ancestors.

"I must flee," she said, "till London."

She swept out.



"LOOK, MISS JONES! RANUNCULUS BULBOSUS, THE LITTLE CHILDREN'S DOWER—FAR BRIGHTER THAN THE GAUDY CUCUMIS MELO!"



"ANYHOW, WE COMPELLED HIM TO OBSERVE THE BASIC ARCHITECTURAL RULE OF THE DISTRICT."

## CHAT WITH A SURVEYOR

I came to the point quickly, knowing that consultations with professional men are apt to be charged by the minute. "I have called," I said, "to hear what you thought of No. 4, The Wasteland."

Mr. Monarch coughed and gave me a practised glance, assessing my age and general state of repair. Even sitting in his swivel-chair he seemed to stoop, probably from long years spent in false roofs poking his fist through spongy rafters.

"Sit down," he said, indicating a chair. "It's badly worm-eaten."

I got up again.

"Not the chair," he said, scowling. I sat again. "You are seriously considering buying the property?"

I supposed he meant the house. When I had first written to the agents saying with indecent bluntness "I want to buy a house," their reply had noted that I was "desirous of acquiring a property."

"Well," I said, "my wife——"

Mr. Monarch, who may have been leaning against a damp streak somewhere, coughed again. He gazed up at his own ceiling's dry, smooth plaster. "Take your chimney," he said. "Expense in connection with it must be anticipated."

"You mean it's going to cost a packet?"

"The property is semi-detached, and the attics extend the full width of both properties; therefore the six-stack chimney of No. 4 is partly in the attic of No. 5, while the six-stack chimney of No. 5 is p——"

"Vice versa, eh?" It was rude of me to interrupt, but time was money.

"——partly in the attic of No. 4," he concluded loudly.

"Just so," I said.

"So that any defects in the six-stack chimney of No. 4 may cause difficulties in the attic of No. 5, while any——"

"Any defects in the sax-stick chamney of——"

Mr. Monarch flexed his jaw-muscles, rubbed the edge of his desk and examined the palm of his hand without, apparently, finding traces of dry-rot.

"Take your roof. Each roof extends over both 4 and 5. Expense in connection with them must be anticipated. The rear of No. 4 has access from No. 5, and the front of No. 5 has access from No. 4; that is to say that without agreement on an equitable arrangement for maintenance of roofs and gutters, considerable complications——"

"I see that."

"The valley gutter also extends over both 4 and 5, and expense in connection with it——"

"I do see that," I said.

"——must be anticipated." Mr. Monarch coughed again. "You want re-battening and re-tiling. Your flaunchings want repairing. You want treating," he ran on malevolently, "against the ravages of worm."

"Isn't that putting it rather strongly?"

"You want your laths and plaster stripping. They are"—he ground his teeth slightly, with a noise like a party-wall slowly subsiding—"in a very defective, dirty and worm-eaten condition."

"Thank you," I said. "Mrs. Billings feels——"

Mr. Monarch waved my wife's name aside as if it had been a request to survey a gasman's shelter. "Take the shed. Its roof is a lean-to continuation——"

"By 'shed,'" I said, "do you mean what the agent's specification described as a 'delightful sun loggia?'"

There is nothing, after all, lower than a shed.

"—of the roof of No. 5, whose internal wall is also an internal wall of the shed. The roof receives the rainwater from adjoining roofs. Both roof and wall are in a defective condition. Take the garden boundary wall . . ."

I withdrew my attention for a moment, reflecting with relief that the bank had already agreed to lend me a large sum of money against this mound of wet plaster and brick-ends.

". . . to report on them," Mr. Monarch was saying, "without a much more extensive survey."

"I'm sorry. I didn't quite——?"

"I'm taking the drains."

"Oh. What's wrong with the drains?"

He shifted in his chair. Either it was a trick of the light, or the tip of his nose quivered a little. He shrugged.

"Impossible to tell." He leaned forward and sank his voice a shade. "It seems probable that you and the adjoining property will drain together."

"Snug," I said. "But, Mr. Monarch——"

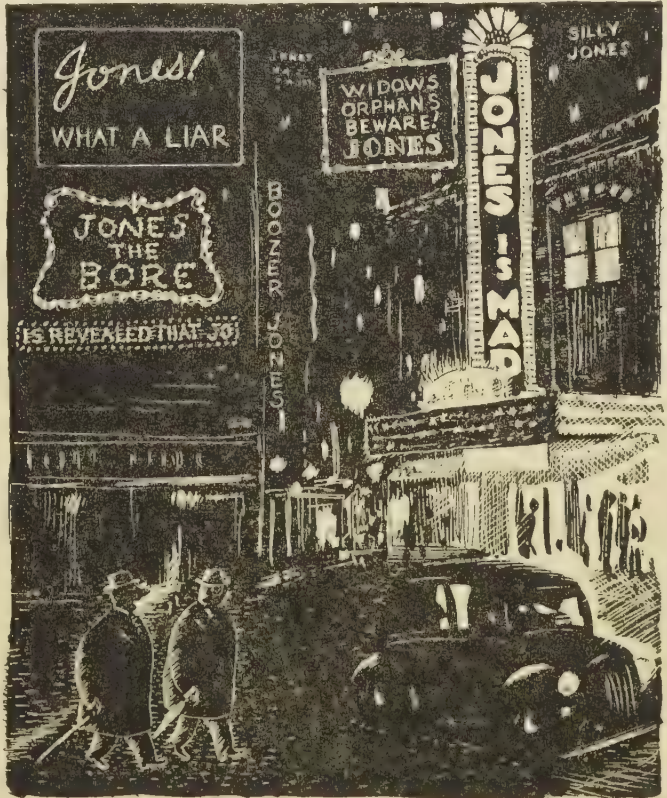
"Take your south wall," he said, back in his stride. "It shows signs of long penetration by the weather."

"You mean by the rain?"

"Should it become necessary to erect scaffolding to repair the tile-hanging, or the wood-studding under the——"

"We thought the bow-windows rather quaint," I said, "and the surrounding creeper. As a matter of fact, my wife——"

"Take your external joinery," said Mr. Monarch, disregarding this.



"I HEAR JONES OF CITY SIGNS HAS SACKED HIS MANAGER."



"The sills are perished and covered with lead. They will not last indefinitely. The——"

I stood up.

"Mr. Monarch," I said firmly. "I think I should tell you that Mrs. Billings is very taken with the house. Especially when referring to it as a delightful Regency Cottage with a delightful Sun Loggia. She is enraptured by the bow-windows, captivated by the creeper. She——"

"You should have told me that before," said Mr. Monarch.

"I tried."

"Because, naturally, nothing I say can prevent completion now."

He rose, touching a bell-push on his desk.

"I should merely like to know," I said, "how many of these matters need immediate attention. You have used the word 'anticipated.' Does this mean that, before the house actually falls down . . .?"

He sat down again as the door opened behind me.

"You ought to get it seen to," he said, "within the next . . ." He paused, calculating.

"Yes?" I said. "Yes?"

". . . Five years," said Mr. Monarch. "Good day to you."

I wished, as I left, that I had managed to get the question in earlier. The interview had been a long and harrowing one. Expense in connection with it must be anticipated.

*September, 1948*

UNDER OBSERVATION

THOSE of my readers who are familiar with the Stoke d'Abernon method of Civil Servant selection will, I am sure, be interested in a somewhat similar experiment I have just carried out in my own home.

In my case, the post to be filled was that of jobbing gardener. The candidates were three in number: Maincrop, a wizened little stick of a man who spent hours leaning over my front gate, watching me with hurt, reproachful eyes; Foljambe, a rather more resourceful character who was constantly sending me photographs of himself sitting astride enormous marrows and holding—for some reason I have never been able to discover—a double-barrelled shot-gun; and Larsen, a morose Swede who insisted on wheeling my brief-case to the station every morning in his barrow.

Unwilling to make a snap decision which I might later regret, I called the three men together one Saturday afternoon and outlined my plan for a trial week-end. The potting-shed, I told them, would be at their disposal; light meals would be provided; they would, of course, be under observation from the moment they moved in.

They went away, muttering among themselves, but at five-thirty—the time I had fixed for the course to begin—they were waiting for me at the potting-shed. Maincrop and Foljambe carried neatly-rolled bedding; Larsen a flowered sponge-bag with a trowel protruding from it. I showed them to their quarters with a certain amount of trepidation.

The night passed quietly enough. There was an occasional burst of folk-song from Larsen, but at 7.30 next morning all three reported for breakfast looking fit and refreshed. Larsen had a small bruise on his forehead, but this, as Maincrop pointed out, had been caused by a subsidence of flower-pots during the night.

I watched the men carefully during breakfast for some clue to their characters. Larsen stared moodily at the hot-plate, muttered something that sounded like "What? No smörgåsbord?" and mooched off into the garden. Maincrop and Foljambe ate with a relish that, in an hotel or restaurant, would have warmed one's heart to see. Of the three, Maincrop impressed me as the most promising; he did at least tuck two-thirds of his table-napkin into the top of his shirt before beginning his meal. It was not until I was making a quick inventory of the linen after their departure that I realized he must eventually have tucked the other third in.

After breakfast I set them a simple TEWT (Tactical Exercise Without Tools). Larsen's task was to remove the weeds from the front lawn; Maincrop's to lift a few rows of potatoes; Foljambe I set to making a marrow-bed. I put them on their

honour not to make use of tools of any description and went indoors to prepare the questions for the afternoon's written examination.

I emerged shortly before lunch to find that Larsen had removed not only the weeds from the front lawn but also half the turf. When I remonstrated with him he went off into some incoherent story about the Swedish word for "weeds" being the same as that for "turf." While I was looking for a dictionary to confirm this he removed the rest of the turf. Maincrop, I learnt, had come over dizzy while lifting his second potato and had gone to lie down on Foljambe's marrow-bed. Foljambe was reading to him from a seed-catalogue.



I called them in to lunch with as much good humour as I could muster. Larsen had recovered from his sulkiness and ate heartily. Maincrop and Foljambe, who were now inseparable, rather went down in my estimation by asking for a second helping of fish-pie. When I refused they began beating on the table with Larsen's fists, which were bigger than their own and consequently made more noise. I was glad when the meal ended and I was able to send them out into the garden for a short break.

After I had swept the dining-room floor I set the table with pens, paper and blotting-pads and called the men in to do their written examination. After warning them to write on one side of the paper only

I retired to my invigilator's desk at the end of the room.

For some time there was silence, broken only by a verse and two choruses of a sea-shanty from Larsen. I had to reprimand Maincrop once for looking over Foljambe's paper, and Larsen twice for making a giant dart out of his blotting-pad. When I came to collect their papers I noticed that Maincrop's and Foljambe's were identical in every respect, even down to the mis-spelling of the word *eschscholtzia*. Larsen, with whom I was fast losing patience, had carved his answers on the top of the table with a jack-knife; although, as he took care to point out, he had carved them on one side of the table only.

The examination concluded with a short visual test. For this the men sat facing the french windows while I ran quickly past outside carrying a different specimen of flower on each journey. Their task was to jot down the name of each flower

in turn. When I rejoined them, a little out of breath, Maincrop and Foljambe confessed that all the flowers were completely foreign to them. Larsen complained that not only the flowers but also Maincrop and Foljambe were completely foreign to *him*.

Somewhat piqued by their attitude to the whole business I ordered them to proceed on a ramble and collect any interesting botanical specimens or edible roots they might find. They set off in high spirits, Larsen taking my bicycle with him. I then sat down to tot up the points I had awarded and select the winning candidate.

It might surprise you to learn that, after careful consideration, I gave the job to Larsen. The fact that he came back from the ramble with half a dozen hen's eggs may have had something to do with it.

### SYNCOATED SOLILOQUY

Though the rhythm  
 is monotonous,  
 monotonous,  
 monotonous,  
 the sun is beating hot on  
 us, so hot on  
 us, so hot on  
 us, and in the  
 corridor, the  
 corridor, the  
 corridor, we're  
 rather thick upon  
 the floor, upon  
 the floor, upon  
 the floor, and  
 the atmosphere's  
 oppressive, most  
 oppressive, most  
 oppressive, while  
 the fares are quite  
 excessive, quite  
 excessive, quite  
 excessive, yet  
 it mustustustust be  
     admitadmitadmitted  
 that the Railway has its *points*.

## REPORT TO THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL

*People's Deputy for the Zingrelian A.S.S.R. reports:*

Comrade-deputies! This year has been a memorable one in the life of our beloved nation. The peasants and workers of our dear A.S.S.R., numbering over 3,500,000 souls, are able to boast that in all their efforts they have acted as one man. Critics have claimed that we should have acted as more men, but we are not dismayed by the carping of an unimportant minority. The attainment of targets has been highly satisfactory and I am glad to report that at no time has the production of targets been so high as this season. The proportion of targets attained has been 105.7 per cent. which augurs well for the future. The Cloudberry and Melon Jam Collective, "April the First Red Currant," of the Workers' Co-operative at Krasnoyutsk have assumed the obligation to turn out one jar for each inhabitant of the State plus .4 of a jar for each .73 inhabitant of friendly States. The success of this scheme

will depend much on the ability of our workers to finish the Gorsk-Polshchina Canal-in-the-name-of-Vassili Efremovich Zaslupov before the autumn. Undaunted by the diversion of our only River Strelina 250 km. from our Republic borders, we have undertaken the project, approved by the Centkom-politorg, of transporting a reach of the White Sea to the canal area in sections where it will be hoisted into the canal bed and thawed. The gracious offer by the Central People's Council of the Baltinsk A.S.S.R. of the next three months' output of sky-hooks for this enterprise has been regretfully declined as we cannot put upon them in this way and must achieve rationalized glory in our own manner. (Applause.)



The Combined Leather and Footwear Co-operative is surpassing all previous records, despite an initial setback when by a crushing majority the Stitching and Welting Brigade declared, for mistaken doctrinaire reasons, in favour of assembling only left boots. Their error was pointed out to them with the utmost clarity and quotations from recognized authorities, including Hegel's emphasis on thesis and antithesis as the prerequisites of rational synthesis. Their leaders have expressed the deepest gratitude for the people's realistic and far-sighted criticism. (*Applause.*)

Of the forty-one new schools projected thirty-seven are now complete, and of them, in the two in which instruction is actually proceeding, there has been an encouraging attendance by teachers and pupils alike. They are not dismayed by their having to come 50 km. across an arm of the Yatan Begh Desert, some of them on foot, and some of the more desperate by tunnelling.

The standard of political awareness among pupils is high, and last May we had to report that the members of the senior class at Slomsk Lower Normal School accused the headmaster of Trotskyist deviationism and had him liquidated. His deputy, Shock-Instructor and Hero-Pedagogue Azazian, immediately assumed command, having taken measures to liquidate the upper class as a precaution. (*Applause.*) The democratic method introduced, of allowing pupils to elect their own masters, has succeeded beyond all expectations. In the majority of cases they found in favour of appointing masters *from among themselves*, with the result that over the past trimester the percentage of boys with full marks has risen from 09 per cent. to 87·2 per cent., thus rebutting criticisms of the system voiced in the reactionary press.

In conclusion, I wish to report that now more than ever are the peasants and workers of the Zingrelian A.S.S.R. truly conscious of the destiny of their glorious Fatherland and State; we pledge ourselves to put out the utmost output per man-intake, to produce one Five-Year Plan at least every three months and to unite in the glorious struggle for the Enfranchisement of the Workers, Operatives and Labourers in the name of our great leader and teacher, under whose leadership and teachership . . . (*Loud applause.*)

## ON BICYCLING ON SAND

This is a subject oddly neglected by essayists, from Hazlitt to Macaulay and beyond.\* Even Lamb, not slow to enthuse over simple pleasures, is silent on the matter. Yet, to a man searching for something to write about, there is much to recommend bicycling on sand as compared, say, with roast pork or Warren Hastings.

It is tempting to treat of bicycling on sand under two main heads: Bicycling on Soft Sand and Bicycling on Hard. I shall give way to this temptation—with the proviso that between these two poles lies a world of varied experience that can best

\* It has been objected that there were no bicycles in Hazlitt's day. This objection is valid, so far as it goes. There was, however, plenty of sand.

be described as Bicycling on Sand that is Neither One Thing Nor the Other. My advice to the reader is to avoid this intermediate kind of sand.

Bicycling on soft sand can in general be dismissed as impossible, if by soft sand is meant that kind of deep white powder which is to be found above high-water mark and so often degenerates into dunes. It is not merely that the back wheel spins round in the loose surface without imparting forward movement to the machine. If that were all, it would be feasible to put a foot down and dismount again in an orderly manner. What in fact happens is that the back wheel, at the first pressure on the pedal, describes a slithering arc in the general direction of the front wheel (which remains motionless) but broadside on, so that the rider falls more awkwardly under the framework than the neophyte, with experience only of orthodox spills on the highway, would suppose possible. Of course soft sand has its advantages for a fall; no bones are broken. But there is all the inconvenience of clogged ears and nostrils and, for those who cycle in bathing slips, the minor absurdity of tyre marks on the chest. And no progress, it ought to be remembered, has been made.

I recommend pushing the machine through soft sand. But even this I do not recommend strongly. It is laborious work.

Hard sand is sand that has been washed over by the sea and subsequently left uncovered long enough to dry to the consistency of a thick wad of damp blotting-paper. This drying process takes time. Beginners forget, in their impatience, that sand which has been covered to a depth of only three feet at high tide (a very moderate figure) has been subjected to the equivalent of 36 inches of rainfall in the space of a few minutes. Compare this with a fall of 7.77 inches in twenty-four hours at Blaenau Festiniog (the record for 1928), or with a total *annual* rainfall in London for the same year of 26.04 inches, and it will be seen that it is ridiculous to expect a firm cycling surface until the tide has been falling for at least three or four hours. Experienced sand cyclists prefer to wait even longer. I do not myself set out until an hour after low water.

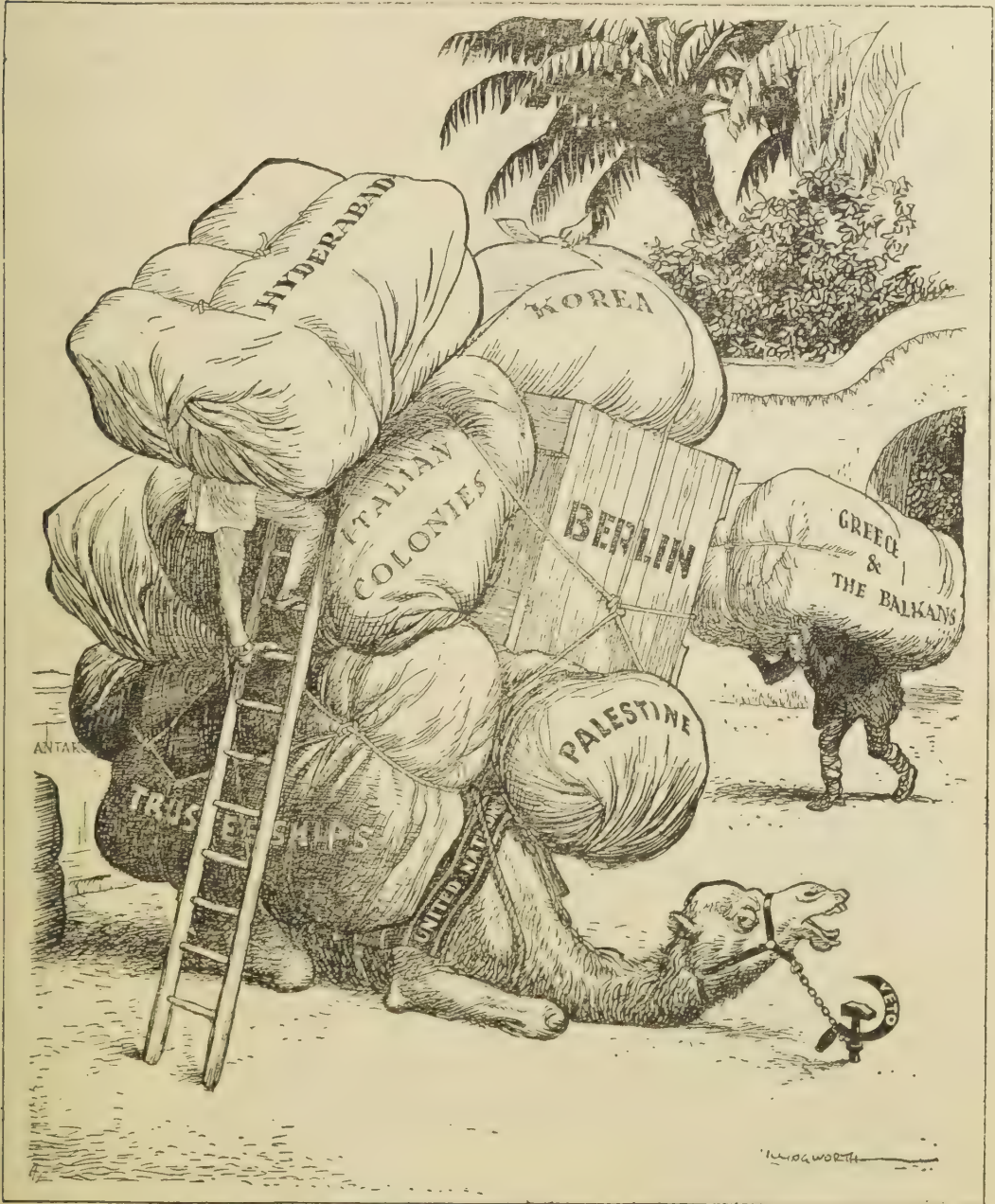
I have been asked by one or two University dons, who have been kind enough to glance through the rough drafts of this essay, What is the use of bicycling on sand? In the sense that the rider does not set out from any given point, nor arrive at any other given point, there is no use in it at all. But consider these advantages:

Since the rider is not going anywhere in particular he can get off at any time and sit down with a clear conscience.

He can ride for a hundred yards in a straight line and then turn round and follow his tyre marks back, wiggling his front wheel on the return journey and thus making a pattern not unlike the staff of Æsculapius, only longer.

He can turn imaginary corners at great speed, trace loops and figures-of-eight at will, or ride, should he be so disposed, in ever-decreasing spirals until he falls flat on his back through sheer pressure on space. He is entitled to disregard the Highway Code at all stages of these manœuvres.

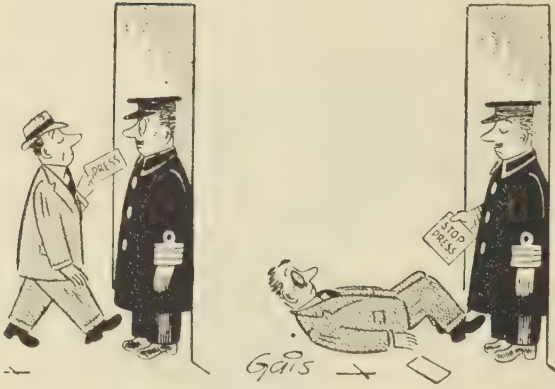
He can steer his machine straight into the innumerable laughter of the sea,



THE UNCOMPLAINING CAMEL.

"WHAT DO I CARE? I CAN'T GET UP, ANYHOW."





causing his knees to be flecked with spindrift, which is an experience denied to ordinary road-users. He can also charge groups of seagulls, ringing his bell, to which the same comment applies.

These are clear-cut advantages enough. When it is added that the passage of the tyres over shells and dry seaweed gives out a pleasant popping and crackling sound, such as would be afforded, to draw a parallel at random, by tramping on small

electric light bulbs in rubber boots, it will be seen that the question of what *use* is bicycling on the sand hardly arises. The thing is pleasurable. It is free. It is legal. The keen salt air stings the nostrils. There are jelly-fish to swerve round. The whirling spokes glitter in the sunlight. Out at sea, a school of porpoises . . .

"My dear sir! A thousand apologies! I fear my attention was distracted by a school of porpoises. . . ."

Tyre marks on somebody else's chest are more than a minor absurdity.

### THINGS OUT OF WOOL

The first time I noticed anything peculiar about Rodney was on a foggy night in September, when I called at his flat to borrow something.

His wife was sitting under a standard lamp reading *Hard Times*.

"Rodney out?" I said.

"He's in the bedroom," she said. "Did you want him urgently?"

"No, no," I said. "I can wait. What are you reading?"

"*Hard Times*," she said. "He may be a long while."

This struck me as odd, because Rodney was never the sort to hide away in bedrooms and avoid his friends.

"Is he doing anything important?" I said after a minute or two.

"Well," she said, "I don't quite know. He's making things."

"What things?"

"Things out of wool."

I licked my lips nervously. I couldn't hear a sound from the bedroom. The whole flat was quiet.

"Have a sweet," said Rodney's wife.

"Thanks," I said. "Er—does he have to be alone?"

"Oh yes," she said. "He can't work unless he's by himself. He has to concentrate. It's been like this for a week now."

I couldn't tell from her voice whether she was proud of this or just resigned to it.

"It's foggy, isn't it?" she said.

I began to feel just a little uneasy.

We sat in silence for some minutes, while she read *Hard Times* and I sucked a boiled sweet and frowned over the pictures in *The National Geographical Magazine*.

Presently the bedroom door opened in a sinister way and Rodney's head and shoulders appeared. His hair was tousled and he seemed pale.

"Irma," he said, "have we any more small glass beads?"

She looked up thoughtfully. "I'll see," she said, and went out into the kitchen.

"Hello, Rodney," I said.

He blinked, seeing me. "Hello," he said. "Well, well! I was rather busy."

His eyes narrowed for a second. "Here," he said, "come in here a moment. What are you eating?"

"A boiled sweet," I said, and wondered briefly if it was poisoned.

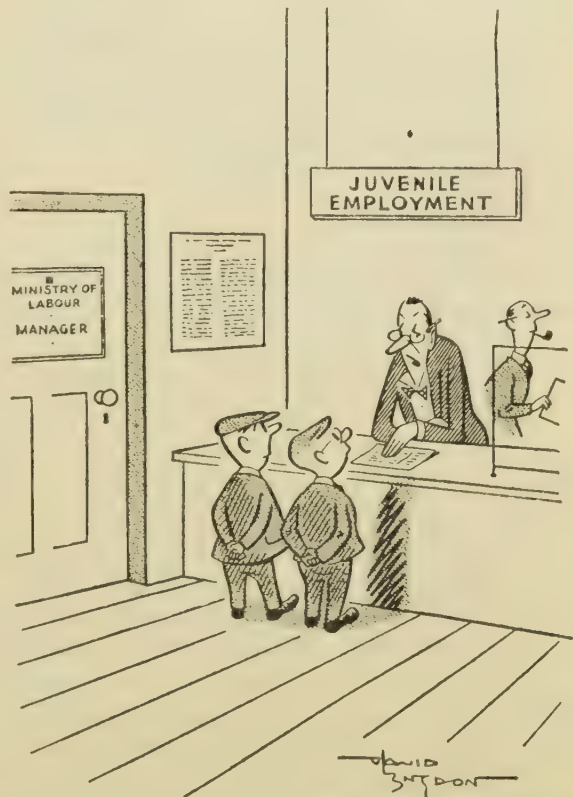
"They're no good at all," said Rodney. "I tried that." He beckoned to me, and I followed him cautiously into the bedroom.

He had evidently been sitting on the bed working at a bedside table. Near the pillows there was a vague mass of coloured woolly objects, some with a couple of small glass beads sewn on to them. They looked spongy and detestable. On the table there was a single coloured woolly object with a single glass bead sewn on to it. It looked positively fiendish. Beside it lay a few sharp tools and a confused bundle of bits of wool and what looked like minced sacking.

He closed the door behind me, and I looked instinctively to see if the window was open. It wasn't.

He sat on the bed and pointed to the table.

"Here," he said. "What d'you think that is!"



"THERE ARE VACANCIES IN THESE NEW GOVERNMENT BOARDS, STARTING OFF AT A QUID A WEEK AND RISING BY FIVE-BOB ANNUAL INCREMENTS TO EIGHT THOUSAND POUNDS A YEAR."

I looked down at the object, uneasily aware that his eyes were on me, gleaming with an inner light. I scratched my chin.

"A little horse?" I said.

"Nonsense!" he said, moving impatiently. "How could it be a horse?"

"Well . . ." I said.

"If it's a horse," he said, "where's its mane?"

I saw his point.

"Yes," I said, "of course, there is that."

I bent to examine it more closely. I was tempted to suggest that it was meant to represent a piece of bread-and-butter pudding with one currant, but I felt somehow that there was more to it than that.

"It isn't surrealist?" I ventured.

Rodney snorted. "Purely representational," he said.

"Functional?"

"No."

"Ornamental?"

"Ah," said Rodney. "It depends what you mean."

"It might be a sheep," I said.

"It might be," said Rodney judicially, "but it isn't."

"A very small elephant?"

"Impossible. No trunk."

"Is it life-size?"

"Bit smaller."

It measured, as near as I could tell, about eight inches long, or high, and was of a distinctly irregular shape. The colour was a dusty mauve.

"Well," I said at last, "I suppose it's a squirrel."

"I ask you!" said Rodney disgustedly. "Does it *look* like a squirrel?"

"If it comes to that," I said rather huffily, "does it look like *anything*?"

He stiffened. I braced myself for an attack. He pointed dramatically to the table. "That," he said, "is a tawny owl. And all these," he said, pointing dramatically to the heap on the bed, "are rabbits."

I swallowed. I must say I felt very relieved.

"Of course," I said. "A tawny owl."

"You see that little thing there," said Rodney. "That's his beak. Cork."

"Oh," I said. "It's a male owl, then?"

He looked at me in a funny way, and I tried to kick myself. I pointed out quickly and cunningly that it only had one eye.

"Ah, yes," he said. "I just ran out of little glass beads."

"Well, there you are," I said. "No wonder I was confused. Whoever saw a tawny owl with one eye?"

"For that matter," he said, "who ever saw a horse?" He jabbed me in the shoulder and laughed very heartily, and I grinned back carefully.

Irma came in at this point with a handful of small glass beads. He seized them avidly, and sat on the bed without another word. A hush descended on the bedroom while Rodney's busy fingers ferreted among the beads. I murmured a farewell, and backed out. Irma followed me and closed the door, either with reverence or boredom, I wasn't sure which.

"Well," I said, having forgotten what it was I had intended to borrow, "good night. I hope he'll be all right to-morrow."

"What?"

"I mean—I hope he gets the owl fixed up."

"I don't think he'll bother much with the owls," she said. There was a dreamy look in her eye. "It's a difficult pattern. I believe he'll concentrate on the rabbits."

"I hope so," I said, "I do indeed."

She was picking up *Hard Times* as I left.

I was not surprised when my young daughter received a package by post on her birthday a week later containing a woolly object from Rodney and Irma. My daughter, on the other hand, was astonished. We spent many a bewildered hour trying to identify it. We could get no assistance from Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne*. My daughter was convinced it was a penguin with an enlarged stomach.

My wife maintained it was a toad. I, of course, kept repeating placidly that it was only a rabbit. "Either a rabbit," I said at last, grudgingly, "or a male tawny owl."

Eventually my daughter pulled off its eyes to make ear-rings, and gave the creature to the dog next door, who ate it.

A day or two later I met Irma in the public library. Before she spoke I had time to observe that she was carrying a large book entitled *Anatomy*. We passed the time of day, and Irma said, "Did your daughter like her present?"

"Oh, yes," I said. "She was most intrigued. She's very fond of rabbits."

Irma's face clouded momentarily. "Oh, dear," she said. "What a pity. Rodney ought to have done one for her."



I realized my mistake at once. "Instead of a tawny owl?" I said cleverly.

She looked blank. "No," she said. "Instead of a horse. He took your advice, you see. It's horses now."

"Oh, of course," I said, "a *horse!*" And we laughed as pleasantly as one can in a public library.

"Er—by the way," I went on, "how did all this start?"

"It's occupational therapy," she said. And then added rather wistfully, "Or it was."

"Good heavens," I said, "I had no idea Rodney had been ill!"

"He hasn't," said Irma. "Not yet. But you see he happened to mention to a very eminent doctor in a tube that he wished he could give up smoking. And this very eminent doctor prescribed occupational therapy. He said all Rodney needed was something to take his *mind* off smoking. I'm afraid I suggested the woolly things. He started in quite a small way, but the thing's got hold of him. At first he just meant to make enough for Christmas presents this year. But now he's beginning to talk about a factory. It's really rather worrying, but I suppose it will pass."

"Yes," I said, realizing for the first time in my life how very wise I am never to mention things to very eminent doctors in tubes. "And is he cured of smoking?"

"Oh, no," said Irma, as gaily as she could. "He smokes more than ever now. It helps him to concentrate!"

## DAN

His father had made quite a thing  
 Of "By Appointment to the King"—  
 The wines he sold were good, and he  
 Was pretty strict on C.O.D.  
 Young Dan, his son, a likely lad,  
 Was no discredit to his dad;  
 He managed early on to get  
 A job with someone in *Debrett*;  
 Joined up and went to fight in France,  
 Fought well, and then, by some mischance,  
 Was put into the bag. He waited  
 And duly was repatriated.  
 Still young, Dan's next step was to go  
 Backdoor-wise into the F.O.  
 He did some jobs for them, and he  
 Was *très bien vu* in Italy.  
 But then he ceased to want to roam;  
 He found himself a girl at home

And married her, and settled down  
And got himself a job in Town.  
The Customs—a Comptrollership,  
And Dan was then a well-paid VIP.

However, this success was short.  
It seems some dirty work at Court  
Scuppered his job, and Dan was out,  
With lots to scratch his head about.  
His wife, who'd had a modest pension,  
Not much perhaps, but worth a mention  
To bank and creditors, had died;  
Dan hadn't put much cash aside,  
So, thanks to those palatial whims,  
Soon Dan was riding on the rims.  
Still on the better side of fifty  
He didn't much like being thrifty.  
He made a little with his pen,  
But had to take odd jobs, and then  
Go out and take odd jobs, again.  
He died at sixty, did old Dan,  
A good, but rather chastened man.

Well, that was Dan. Oh, yes, he wrote—  
This is a point I ought to note  
To keep the record on the rails—  
He wrote *The Canterbury Tales*.

## A ROARING IN HIS EARS

As my heels fell suddenly silent on the carpet of human hair my resentment at having had to ring up three times for the double appointment faded, and exhilaration took its place; for the barber and the manicurist were waiting for me with hushed subservience, their implements at the ready. I was a king. When the barber had garrotted me respectfully with his dust-sheet and the manicurist had bent her pretty head with devotion over my battered cuticles I relaxed almost to the point of unconsciousness.

I don't know whether it was his voice that roused me or the rough nudge he dealt me in the ear as he spoke.

"You're mad on it," he said. "That's what it is."

"I beg your pardon?" I said amiably, not realizing at first that they were resuming some suspended discussion.

"Dah," said the girl. It was an exclamation of rebuttal. The back of her neck took on a stubbornness as she unscrewed the lid of some beautifying unguent and shook my fingers into a loose bunch.

"Speedway mad," said the barber, striking my head under the bulging part at the back. "That's what it is."

"Yap, yap, yap," said the girl. Beyond shooting out one leg spasmodically I gave no sign that she had gouged me with her entrenching tool.

"Wearin' his colours on a flipping sweater."

"Can if I like."

"Can if you're that daft," retorted the barber.

"All right, I am, then," she said. "He's a man, he is."

I thought for a moment that the barber was going to spit. He resisted the impulse, if it was ever there, and instead tried to study himself side-face in the mirror as if for reassurance.

"A man?" he said presently. "That What's-is-name Cooper a man?"

"Buttsy Cooper," said the girl. "You never seen 'im ride. Oughter been down West Ham, Tuesday."

"West Ham Tuesday," said the barber with distaste. "Wouldn't lower meself."

"You can say what you like."

"I will, don't worry."

"I'm not worrying."

"Well, I'm not." The barber gave me a thump on the neck. "Trooping down there every night—daft hats, sweaters, long scarves, rattles and all that carry-on. Watch a lot o' twerps."

"You be careful," said the girl, cutting me to one of my quicks.

"You be."

"Buttsy Cooper!" said the barber. "Waste of flipping petrol, that's what."

"It's sport," said the girl.

"Are *you* sport."

"Dah," said the girl.

The barber stepped back and snipped the air savagely. He had the stocky good looks of a professional footballer, but his eyes were dark and brooding.

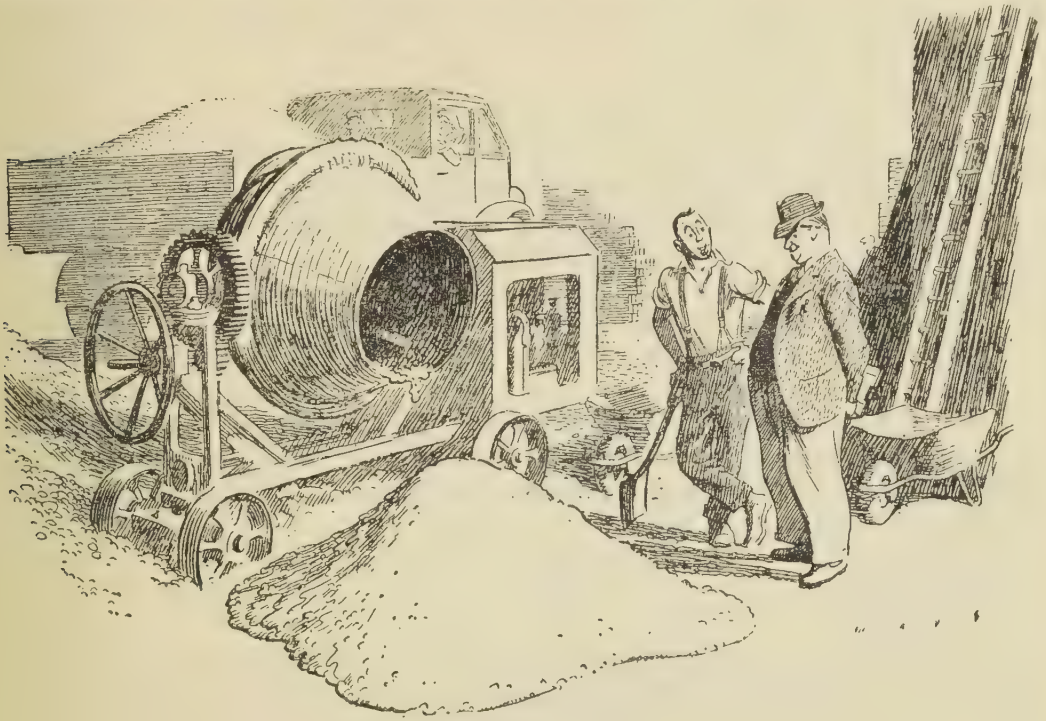
"What the world's comin' to," he said. "All that noise an' stink."

"Like to see you try." She threw one of my hands at me so hard that it hurt, and snatched up the other one by its thumb.

"Like to see Cooper try cutting 'air," said the barber, lopping off one of my side-pieces with a conscious flourish. The girl flung up her head and uttered a small, contemptuous titter.

"Said somethink humorous, have I?" inquired the barber.

"Not you. Just visu'izing you on a supercharged whizzbang, that's all."



"TURNED OUT NICE AGAIN, 'ASN'T IT?"

"Look," said the barber, tapping me on the crown with a whippy comb, "when I was in the Army——"

"You was cutting hair," interrupted the girl nimbly. "All you're good for. Why, Buttsy wouldn't soil his hands!"

I think I might have said something there, but the barber boxed one of my ears and said tensely, "Christian names now, is it?" His scissors fouled on a few short hairs and he wrenched them free.

"Anyway, he ain't called *Claude*."

The barber blushed suddenly to the tips of his distended nostrils, but managed to answer with some dignity:

"One can't help what they're christened."

Filing industriously at my thumb, the girl threw her next line away, confident of its effect. "Got his autograph Wednesday," she said.

"Oh, did you." It was the best he could do on the spur of the moment.

"Yes, I did you."

The barber made his mouth small and piped with shrill mimicry, "Please



Mr. Cooper could I 'ave your autograph!" Then, in his normal voice, slightly roughened: "Night he broke Foxy Carter's leg, wasn't it?"

"So what?"

"Some sport."

The barber kicked a secret lever and the chair pitched my head forward into the bowl. Through the hiss of the water I could hear the girl talking defiantly, but when the barber dragged me back into a sitting position she was concluding weakly . . . "so there. And you can say what you like."

"I will, don't worry."

"That's all you can say. Poll parrot."

"What about the poll parrots bawlin' 'Come on Buttsy, Come on Buttsy!'"

"I tell you it's sport."

The barber cracked a towel deafeningly. "Blood-lust," he said, and assaulted my scalp with iron fingers. The exercise lent his speech strange inflexions. "*Lot of bobby-soxers trooping after motor-bikes all over London 'oping to see some twerp bust his flipping neck.*"

"Oh, you," said the girl. "I'm fed up of arguing."

"Not 'ealthy."

"Healthy or not."

"Morbid," said the barber, and suddenly closed his eyes, squeezing them up tight for some moments. Then he opened them and said in a peace-making voice, "Tell you what. I got tickets the Victoria Palace, Friday. What about it?"

"Friday's Forest Road," she said.

He was quite still for a second or two.

"What's Forest Road?"

"'What's Forest Road,' he says! It's only the Rockets' home track, that's all. Fizzer Puttock and Scoots Mooley, that's all." She finished the polishing before adding, "And Buttsy Cooper the guest rider."

The barber beat my head with brushes. He wrenched the towel out of my collar with a violence that set the chair revolving. The manicurist did not look at him, but threw her equipment into the tray and dusted at the front of her white overall. She rose to go.

I also rose and thanked them both. Neither of them replied, unless the barber's blind presentation of the bill and an automatic "Pay downstairs" could be so construed. I offered him a shilling, but he was watching the girl as she began to descend with a slight flounce the stairs leading into the body of the shop. I waved the coin about widely, hoping to catch his glazed eye, but he walked quickly to the head of the stairs and shouted, "You're speed-way mad!" He came back and took the shilling without looking at me, then ran to the stairs again and leaned far over. "You're mad on it," he shouted. "That's what it is!"

I wished him good-day on the way down, but might have saved myself the trouble. I was no longer a king, if I ever had been. I was absolutely nobody.

## FRIDAY, AUGUST THE THIRTEENTH

Like a lot of women who listen unguardedly to the vote-catching blandishments of the politicians, Mrs. Pattison really believed that she was a drudge and a martyr. On weekdays when Mr. Pattison came home from his office at the Imperial Quart Glass Bottle Co., and at the same time on Saturdays and Sundays when he didn't, she would say, "I'm nothing but a drudge and a martyr." It used to get on Pattison's nerves. Once, inspired by a glass of mild ale, he asked her why she couldn't be a martyr and a drudge for a change, and Mrs. Pattison threw a plate of shepherd's pie at him. After that Pattison cut out the wisecracks.

Every night, just as the nine o'clock news had cleared its throat of the dull political stuff about productivity and war and was opening up on sport, obituaries and the weather, Mrs. Pattison would put down her knitting, sweep some imaginary cigarette-ash from the rug and tell her husband that she was tired of working her fingers to the bone, tired of trying to make both ends meet, waiting on him hand and foot and struggling to keep up appearances. "One of these fine days," she would say, "you'll come home and find me gone for good." Pattison knew better than to interrupt these fulminations, but their final threat always made him flush with excitement and wild, irrational hope.

On Friday, August 13th,



Pattison arrived at "Holmlea" to find the table set for one. For a moment he stood scratching his ear, puzzled. Then he ran to the foot of the stairs and shouted. The ensuing silence made his heart beat quickly. He took off his mackintosh and sat down. His forehead was damp and his glasses were opaque with steam. He lit a cigarette, took one long pull and threw it into the hearth. Then he jumped up and ran through the kitchen to the back-door. Slowly he

unlocked and opened it and stood with his eyes closed, trembling and praying for strength. One quick look should have been enough, but somehow it pleased him to peer up into the apple tree and trample down the clump of hydrangeas. He even kicked at the top layer of the compost heap. When he returned to the house there were bright-red spots below his cheek-bones.

Mr. Pattison stood in the middle of the sitting-room and wondered what to do. He lit another cigarette and threw it away. He unlocked the pantry door, broke a large untidy piece out of a new apple-pie and stuffed it into his mouth. Then he went back to the foot of the stairs. "Clarice! Cla-ricel!" he shouted. A dozen times he ran to the sitting-room and stood stock still listening, and a dozen times he ran to the stairs and shouted. At the tenth call his voice took on a sharp edge of imperiousness. Exciting ideas were simmering in his head. He saw himself, tanned and



"AS A MATTER OF FACT I AM SPEAKING WITH A HOT POTATO  
IN MY MOUTH."

muscular, striding the boundaries of a fine section in Saskatchewan. He saw himself asking Mr. Treadmill for a transfer to the Manchester branch, holidaying with Ben Timson, chatting to Polly in the bar of the Four Horseshoes. . . . A hundred delightful scenes flitted before his gleaming mind's eye.

Now he knew what to do. He grabbed his hat and rushed from the house, across the crescent and up the Cardew's drive. Mrs. Cardew opened the door. "She's gone for good!" Pattison moaned, and lurched into the hall. They could get nothing more out of him. "She's gone!" he said. Mr. Cardew poured out a stiff

whisky and Pattison gulped it down like a pill. "She's gone for good!" he moaned. Then Mrs. Cardew, her brows smock-stitched and lowering, took her husband aside and whispered. Something about Pattison's eyes, his demoniac leer, the ceaseless wringing of his hands and the clay on his shoes had put a terrible suspicion into her head.

"I'll go," said Cardew. "Better let me go."

"No, Clarice was my friend," said Mrs. Cardew. "You stay and keep an eye on him."

She ran across to "Holmlea." The front door was wide open. First she looked in all the cupboards. Then she examined the garden. With a fork she prodded the freshly-dug flower-bed and the disturbed compost heap. She didn't think of looking into the apple tree.

She returned to the kitchen. Her mouth was a thin line of determination, but she was shivering. With a flat-iron she broke and prized up the square red tiles from the floor. With her bare hands she scooped up the rubble beneath. She worked rapidly, feverishly. She levered three boards from the floor of the out-house and tore down the panelling round the drawing-room chimney. Then she gave it up and hurried back to "Crofters." She found Mr. Pattison moaning more determinedly than ever. Mr. Cardew seemed to be crying. The whisky bottle was empty.

Mrs. Pattison caught the 6.30 bus from Enfield. She had enjoyed her afternoon in the sick-room with Mrs. Brindle. It had done her good. Two little halos of self-righteousness hovered over her black floral hat. As the bus trundled through Southgate she began patiently to work up her evening recital of abuse.

She was shocked to find the door open. She screamed when she saw the ruin of her kitchen. One glance at the uneaten food on the table and another at the unopened note on the mantelpiece and she rushed to the telephone. Then, stupefied by the violence and range of the destruction, she sat down and wolfed her husband's tea.

By this time Mr. Cardew had opened a bottle of rum and was now tramping in unsteady circles round Pattison's heaving frame. Mrs. Cardew was crying quietly as she turned over the pages of an old photograph album. Suddenly a movement in the crescent attracted Cardew's attention. He beckoned his wife and together they stood at the window and watched the policemen arrive at "Holmlea."

"I say, old boy," he said, placing a hand on Pattison's shoulder, "I should begin to make tracks if I were you."

"She's gone!" said Pattison, playing for time and enlightenment.

"Yes, I know," said Cardew. "Are you all right for money? There's a train leaving Victoria at eight-thirty. You can get the seven-fifteen bus if you hurry."

"She's gone for good!" said Pattison, struggling to his feet.

"No, this way, you idiot; get out the back way and cut across the allotments."

"Gone! Gone!" said Pattison.

At the back door he shook hands with Cardew. "She was one of the best," he said, and raced down the path.

October, 1948

NEVER A DULL MOMENT

“IF you had your time to go over again,” he said, “what would you be?”  
“Forty-two. Why?” I said, holding my glass up against the light.

It wasn't a very smart answer, but it made me feel a little better. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Halletson wince with annoyance. That was something. And if you knew Halletson you'd agree. He's one of these Never-a-dull-moment boys. Ordinary conversation about this, that, and the other doesn't interest him. Nor does a good old-fashioned silence. As soon as the talk becomes desultory or bitty—or earlier if possible—he takes command and tries to galvanize the company into intense but futile mental activity. His usual gambit is the “What would you do if . . .” type of question. You know the sort of thing—“If you won £20,000 in the Pools what would you do?” “If you weren't you who would you like to be?” and the one about being on a desert island with six discs. Halletson is really an old-time bore brought up to date by the B.B.C. and its energetic quiz merchants.

This time I was determined to have a show-down.

“What d'you mean, forty-two?” he said irritably.

“What I should be if I had my time over again.”

“You don't understand,” he said, “I mean——”

“Oh, I *see*,” I said with a show of enthusiasm, “you want to know what people are *called* when they get a second stab at life—reincarnation, transmigration, metempsychosis and all that. Well, I should be a——”

“No, no, I mean what would you *do*?”

“All depends. If I came back as a pig I suppose I should grunt, for one thing.”

“Listen, you idiot. I said what would you do if you had your time over again. What kind of work, what job?”

He dabbed at his mouth with a handkerchief.

“There's no need to lose your temper,” I said, “merely because you're too proud to admit you don't know what metempsychosis means.”

“Who doesn't?”

“You're hedging,” I said.

“Don't be ridiculous. Metempsychosis is . . . Look here, this is getting us nowhere. I'll start again. You have your life all over again. You can follow any trade or profession you like. What is your choice?”

“Depends.”

“Can't you give me a straight——”

“It would depend on whether other people were having *their* time over again

or not. If they were I should wait and see what jobs they chose—science or the sea, most likely. Anyway, I'd pick something different. No use entering the crowded professions, you know. Common prudence."

"You are the *only one* living his life over again."

The barman came across under the impression that Halletson was shouting for a drink.

"Ah, well, that's different," I said. "If I'm the only one I should probably sit in a barrel at Blackpool or Brighton and make a fortune as 'The Only Man Who's Had His Time Over Again!' They'd simply flock——"

"Really, you're impossible!"

"Or else I should sell my body to the Royal College of Surgeons for post-mortem analysis, and live on the proceeds."

Halletson pushed his hat well back on his head and closed his eyes.

"Look," he said very softly, "I'll tell you what *I'd* do if I had *my* time over again. Then you'll see what I mean. Well, I'd——"

"I thought you said I was to be the only one. Be consistent, man!"

"If you're so utterly stupid that——"

"Now, now!"

"If I were *you*, then, and *you* had your time over again, *I'd* be——"

"Say that again."

"I'm being *you*, because you're the only one living his life over again, and I'm telling you what I'd do in your place."

"Clear as mud. Where do I come in?"

"You're out of this. I'm you, having your time to live over again. Get that into your thick skull!"

"*Your* thick skull. You're me, remember."

"I give up. You're hopeless."

"Very well," I said woundedly, "if that's the way you feel. Anyway, what're you drinking?"

We drank our way through two beers in prickly silence. Then I asked whether I could give him a



"THAT'S FINE, GILMOUR, FINE—A VERY HAPPY BUS."

lift. We walked round the corner and got in. Just before we reached Piccadilly Tube Station he seemed to soften.

"This is a nice bus," he said. "Runs like a bird."

"She's not so bad," I said, "but if I had my time over again I'd go in for a Falcon Fourteen—if I had my time over again."

He scrambled out and ran down the steps, his face the colour of mud flats at dawn.

## JUMBLE LORE

"Have you any jumble?" In pre-war days this clarion call in feminine voices could be heard ringing down the village streets of England about four times a year. It betokened the approach of the four quarter-days of Church Bazaar, W.I. Sale, Mothers' Union Annual Party and the Faitanflarshow.

The call could be heard in varying tones—diffidence (one doesn't really expect she *will* have anything)—hope (she *may* have just decided to turn out that old trunk in the attic)—embarrassment (one hardly likes to suggest that she possesses *anything* which isn't of the best and newest)—and grim determination (one is going to get *something* out of her, otherwise not a thing does *she* get when it's her turn to ask, come next Churchbazaartide).

The net result of it all, however, was that four times a year converging streams of cast-off clothes, shoes, books, ex-children's ex-toys and so forth met and coagulated in one large heap on a couple of trestle tables labelled "Jumble Stall." Thence it was profitably redistributed throughout the village, a fair proportion of it playing return dates come next Faitanflarshowmas.

But that was in the good old days. The days when old clothes were just not-so-new clothes one had got tired of. The war has now changed everything on the jumble front. To begin with, there are five quarter-days, the War Memorial Playing Field Fund having also been added to the list. On top of this everyone, thanks to coupons and shortages, is now living on the jumble standard. So when at its appointed seasons the clarion call rings down the village street: "Have you any jumble?" the answer is generally a cold and defiant: "Yes, and I'm still wearing it!"

The once diffidently hopeful hunt for jumble, in short, has developed into a cut-throat competition with no holds barred. Private enterprise—and that is a euphemism—flourishes wickedly despite the Socialist Government. For a period after each quarter-day the best-dressed people are those who have been so kindly running the jumble stall, and who have thereby got first pick. In Little Poppington and several neighbouring villages there exists a definite ring among jumble sales women to sky the prices of certain coveted items out of the public's reach, and come to a reasonable agreement afterwards in the vicarage drawing-room. Indeed, there was a most unsavoury case at Upleigh Magna last July when a practically new dress-suit came suddenly on the market owing to Colonel Golightly's son taking up a job



in the Far East. Two ladies, with sons just leaving school, had to be separated by an archdeacon.

The buying public, too, is getting pretty tough. At Fiddleham the village constable is always on duty at the jumble stall and is reputed once to have actually drawn his truncheon. At Little Lipton the gates were rushed at the Mothers' Union Party, owing to a rumour, via the cook at the Hall, that the Honourable Jane had come back from the Waafs twice the girl she was and was getting rid of a large proportion of her pre-war wardrobe. Moreover, the fact that a lot of the jumble at any given quarter-day has been appearing regularly on several previous quarter-days at gradually decreasing prices introduces a new factor. It requires nice judgment, for instance, to decide whether to snap up an article at six shillings which originally made its debut two sales ago at ten bob but is only worth four; or wait till the Playing Field's Garden Party, when it'll be down to half-a-crown, *but* running the risk meanwhile of Mrs. Truman, who also wants it, suddenly doing you in the eye by springing the extra florin.

It is, however, in the securing of jumble that the worst chicanery and downright double-dealing is apparent. A bad example occurred at Slush Episcopi only last May over young Commander Random's ten-year-old herring-bone lounge, which he was generally expected to discard nicely in time for the Church Bazaar, till the Horticultural Society organized its prettiest daughters to keep telling him how nice he looked in it, in the confident hope of inducing him to defer his decision for a while—say, to the Faint-flarshow three months later. Then old Miss Mallory, well known as a stooge of the Vicar's, asked the Commander to a party where a glass of her horrible home-made elderberry wine was spilt "by accident" all down his trousers, thus very definitely nailing the suit for the Church Bazaar after all. A particularly nasty feature was that on the day of the Bazaar she "found" an old





"THIS HURTS ME MORE THAN IT DOES  
YOU."

hovering, trying to get in a word about a mysterious burglary the day before when the house was empty and he was working in the garden. The jumble saleswomen were all jubilant. Never before had they had such attractive lots as a pair of lady's fur motoring-gloves, pair gent's ditto, bowl of roses, electric torch, shopping bag complete with purchases, silver salver, dinner-gong and, in particular—Mr. Jesper always gardening in his shirt-sleeves—gent's sports coat complete with pipe, tobacco-pouch, silver pencil, diary, and wallet with three £1 notes.

It took Mrs. Jesper four days, a lot of acrimony and even more money to retrieve her property. Still, jumble warfare knows no rules.

recipe for removing elderberry wine stains, and the suit, in excellent condition by jumble standards, fetched a handsome price.

But perhaps the fastest one of all was pulled at Over Mellow last month. Right up to the very morning before the W.I. Sale young Mrs. Jesper's W.I. Sales-resistance had remained unbroken, till the General's wife, a noted shock-tactician, was called in and bludgeoned her into promising a few things which Mrs. Jesper said she'd leave in the hall to be collected that afternoon, as she herself was just off to London for the night.

Returning next day she went straight to the show in great contrition to apologize to the General's wife for having, after all, forgotten, but before she could speak the latter was thanking her enthusiastically for the *lovely* jumble she'd left out. In the background Mr. Jesper was

### BLOTTED OUT

She has taken it away. Yes, it is gone,  
The lovely blotting-paper whereupon  
The legend of my future life was writ!  
Bring her to me! She shall account for it!

Let her come forth, that fiendish busy bee  
Who dared to make a prisoner of me,  
Caging me in my lodging like a beast  
Because I can't remember in the least

The dates or times of friendly assignations,  
 The temporary homes of my relations,  
 The number that was given me by TRU  
 Of Ettie Ramsden's house at Milton Hooe,

The hour written in the left-hand corner  
 That I was asked to see a film by Warner,  
 The HOP that circumscribed the central blot  
 With numerals inside a flower-pot.

Oh, is it Monday lunch or Tuesday tea  
 That Betty brings her aunt to visit me?  
 And where are all those measurements I made?  
 And oh! that man who renovates brocade!

What is his name and where does he reside?  
 Fiend! Fiend! to take away my joy, my pride,  
 My hopes to welsh, my every plan to scotch!  
 Oh, give me back my little piece of blotch.

#### A PLACE OF ONE'S OWN

I shall miss my study, I know I shall. It was on the first floor, at the back, the room I had chosen as my own the first time I looked over the house. Although I have lost it for ever I can still see in my mind's eye the broad walnut desk under the window, the long book-shelves just caught by the beam from the parchment desk-lamp, the gentle fire-glow bringing out the reds nicely in my Persian rug. I did a lot of good, quiet thinking in that little room (well, not actually in it, but thinking I was in it) and if only I had been able to keep it I know I should have produced some fine work there.

It was referred to as "the study" in all the preliminary planning, and it was very pleasing for me to notice how, yesterday, the removal men caught on to the idea; after their first trip up there with a broken firescreen and a papier mâché bath full of old music they began to ask confidently as they brought in other articles of unspecified destination (pot umbrella-stands of purely sentimental value, armfuls of mildewed hats), "The study, Missus?" And Missus, worried about other things, would say with the faintest hint of impatience, "Oh, yes, please—the study." So before very long everything went up to the first-floor back that seemed to have no obvious reason for going anywhere else.

Where removal men are concerned I am not one with any great air of authority, and when it was found that I had diverted to the study a Persian rug and a parchment

desk-lamp officially ear-designed for the basement dining-room, I lost face utterly, and when, a little later, I saw the long book-shelves being smoothly borne into the drawing-room and cried out "The study, surely?" the men shook their heads in a kind but inflexible manner. They said (throwing me a crumb) that they believed Alf was taking a load up to the study, and they even went so far as to call him back down the stairs a step or two to show me the tea-chest he was carrying, stacked with empty medicine-bottles and the rusty components of a long-deceased sewing-machine. Close behind Alf was Ern, with the top of my wife's maternal grandmother's washstand and a torn fire-screen made of pasted illustrations from *Good Words*. I did not ask him where they were going.

Last night, when the men had left, and darkness, silence and dust had settled, I crept up the stairs to the room on the first floor, at the back, the room I had chosen as my own the first time I looked over the house. How the men had managed to half-jam the door from the inside I do not know; I suppose something had fallen down, perhaps the heavy wardrobe mirror that has needed re-silvering ever since we left Dulwich in 1932, or some old and splintery mangle rollers. I did just manage to get a lighted match through the four-inch gap (the electric switch seemed to be swinging on its wires, free of the wall, and when I touched it something fell and rolled away) and through half-closed eyes saw under the window the broad walnut desk I hadn't been able to afford after all when I saw the bill for the drawing-room carpet, the gentle match-glow bringing out the holes nicely in the bare floorboards . . .

Then a voice called me, saying that there was work to be done still, so I went down. Asked where I had been I answered quietly, "Just looking in the junk-room," and when the appellation passed without comment I knew that I had lost my study for ever. I shall miss it, I know I shall.

## DRILLS, FIRE

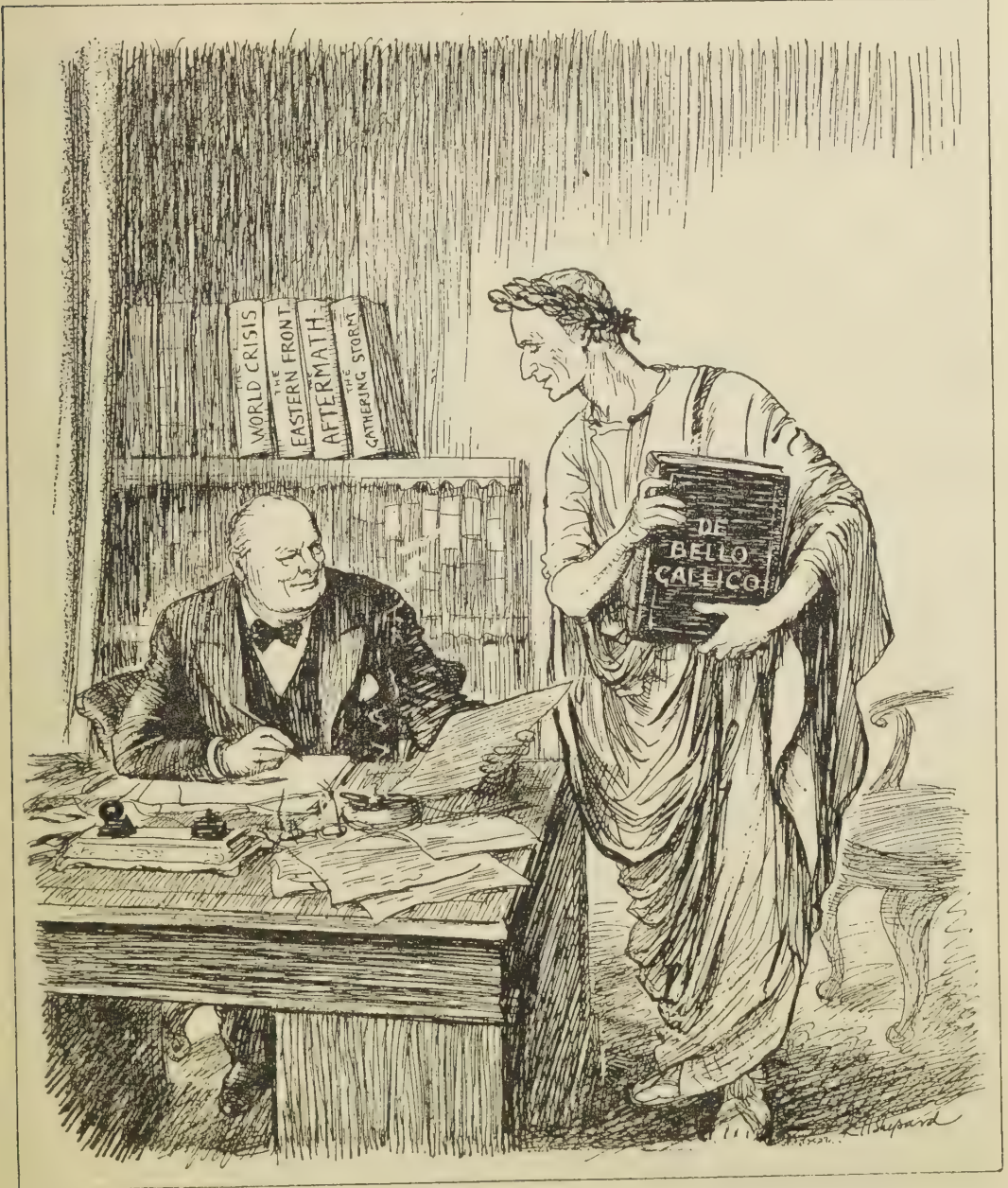
### *The Chief Clerk.*

Further to National Circular N 123/48 and to your local instructions on the same subject, I have to report the result of a fire-drill held in this Branch.

On August 16th Mr. Wratters and myself started a small conflagration with oily rags on the main staircase (which is of stone and therefore suitable for a "semblance of reality"—para. 7). After starting the "incident" between the ground and first floors it was possible to watch developments from behind two filing cabinets on the landing without being observed by officers in the normal course of their duties.

The "fire" was intended to start at 3 p.m. At approximately 3.4, however, it went out. (In relighting it Mr. Wratters dropped his pocket-watch and is now inquiring as to the method for obtaining repairs at Official expense—File "A" attached.)

By 3.15 p.m. there was a fair quantity of smoke, but this did not appear to



TWO HISTORIANS

"DO YOU EVER WONDER WHAT A TREAT THIS IS GOING TO BE FOR SCHOOLBOYS IN A.D. 4000?"

attract any attention. The smoke had begun to clear before the Misses Goodchild and Betts (Temporary Female Clerks III) appeared on the first floor with the apparent intention of descending. They studied the smouldering material and went away without taking "the appropriate action." At 3.20 three Male Clerks ascended the stairs, and one of them, Mr. Sidenote, kicked the remains of the conflagration to ground floor level. At this point the Misses Goodchild and Betts appeared on the Ground Floor, having apparently descended by the back staircase. Some private conversation ensued between the Male Clerks and Miss Goodchild as a result of which Messrs. Sidenote and Chapman (encouraged by Miss Betts) held the former officer by her hands and feet respectively over what was left of the "fire." Again, no "appropriate action" with regard to the outbreak was taken. The incident was then closed by the chance appearance of the Temporary Male Cleaner, who blamed those present for the smell and the mess and threatened to advise myself of what had taken place.

It is considered that the exercise was unsatisfactory, and before a further drill is arranged you will perhaps consider the issue of a suitable reminder to the staff on the "appropriate action" in the event of fire.

J. SILVERWORTHY,  
*Accounts Branch.*

*Mr. Silverworthy, Accounts Branch.*

Read with interest. A further *Strong Reminder* to the staff has been circulated, as suggested, and a second exercise seems necessary in order (a) to give practice to the staff, and (b) to ascertain weaknesses, if any, in the fire precaution arrangements.

It is suggested that the hours of 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. should be avoided as the authorized tea-breaks may involve the absence of key-personnel from duty points. No exercise should take place on Fridays when wages are being paid.

It is presumed that suitable disciplinary action has been taken with the officers named in your report.

R. RICHTONE,  
*Chief Clerk.*

*The Chief Clerk.*

Noted, and suitable action taken.

A further exercise was held at 11.40 a.m. yesterday morning, and I have to report as follows:

Experience gained led Mr. Wratters and myself to use more oil and more rags. (There appears to be no sub-head for local purchase of these items, and with your permission the cost will be included under Materials, Cleaning, Misc., in the weekly statement.)

At 11.42 a.m. a member of the public entered the building, but retired immediately upon seeing the smoke. (The person subsequently proved to be the mother

of Miss Toddy bringing sandwiches for the latter.) At 11.42½ Mr. Whitton (Clerk, Male, Higher Grade) appeared on the first floor landing and followed the correct procedure, by pressing the alarm. Within thirty seconds members of the staff were filing out of their rooms, though with the exception of Miss Goodchild not holding hands in pairs. On finding the main stairs "impassable" there seemed to be no general move towards the back stairs, and the landing was full when the first fire-party (Messrs. Potter and Fish, Ledgers) arrived with an extinguisher, the knob of which had been struck prematurely. In consequence, several officers received a fair



"I MUST SAY THIS MODERN TREND DOES GIVE ONE AN OPPORTUNITY TO COMBINE ART AND UTILITY."

quantity of foam on their clothing, and they have to-day made certain representations (see File "B" attached).

Fire-parties Nos. 2 and 3 turned out from the second floor bringing additional extinguishers together with sand- and water-buckets. One officer, Mr. Legge, carrying two water-buckets, discharged them before he could "reasonably ascertain the seat of the conflagration" over Mr. Wratters and myself just as we were emerging from behind the cabinet to bring the exercise to an early close.

At this stage the public Fire Brigade arrived. It has been confirmed that they were not summoned by any member of this staff but by Miss Toddy's mother (see para. 4). It is difficult to see how such an eventuality could have been guarded against except by a flat prohibition on the bringing in of sandwiches.

Seeing the smoke, the Fire Brigade began operations before I was able to establish my identity with the officer-in-charge, who then reluctantly withdrew.

Adverse comment has been made by the police, who considered the crowd which collected outside an unnecessary obstruction in an already crowded thoroughfare, and one of the extinguishers which was carried outside, still discharging, is alleged to have damaged a sergeant's cape. (See File "C".)

I should perhaps mention that there appears to be no official method of replenishing sand consumed from the fire-buckets. Several of the buckets are, in consequence, empty, and this should be noted should it be decided to hold another drill in the near future.

J. SILVERWORTHY,  
*Accounts Branch.*

## JE M'EXCUSE

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty . . . how quite unnecessarily complicated. Things would be simple, really, were it not for the ravelling and contorting nature of Man, which, spelt like that with a big M, and sometimes even without, includes, as we all know, Woman.

The facts leading me to this depth of thought and feeling are simple. Mrs. Constantly and myself live within about four miles of each other. We like each other, and when we see each other we are pleased to see each other; and we act as if we were deliriously so. The children can sometimes be jockeyed into seeing each other. They do not think very much about each other at all. Mine sometimes say the Constantly children are all right: sometimes they say they are unbearably bossy, and sometimes that they are unspeakably dumb. What the Constantly children think can be but hazily deduced from a rather reserved expression they assume when we are sighted. The name Constantly is not spelt or pronounced like that: it has been so spelt and pronounced by my children because they say that Mrs. C. is Constantly on my mind. And whenever a rather longer gap of time than usual has

passed without our seeing each other I—it is equally plain—am on Mrs. Constantly's mind.

Why? That is the first unanswerable question.

The other day we had not met for about three weeks. I felt a perhaps slightly embarrassing awareness of the passage of time: on Mrs. Constantly the pressure from her complex was such that she rang me up.

"We've been longing to see you," she cried.

"We've been *longing* to see *you*," I called back.

"It seems ages!" said Mrs. Constantly.

"I think it seems *years*," I replied.

Mrs. Constantly then explained that the thing was that time *whizzed* so. I agreed that time *did* whizz; it was one of its most characteristic qualities.

"One scarcely realizes the holidays have begun," I said, "before they have ended."

"Or that the term has started," said Mrs. Constantly, "before it has finished."

"Or that it's Christmas," I carolled on, "before it's..." but Mrs. Constantly had taken a deep breath and committed herself.

"You *must* all come over."

"We absolutely must,"

I said.

Why did we think this?

We both spoke with conviction: and, to do ourselves justice, it was conviction we felt.

"What we thought," said Mrs. Constantly, "was supposing you all came over to lunch on Wednesday."

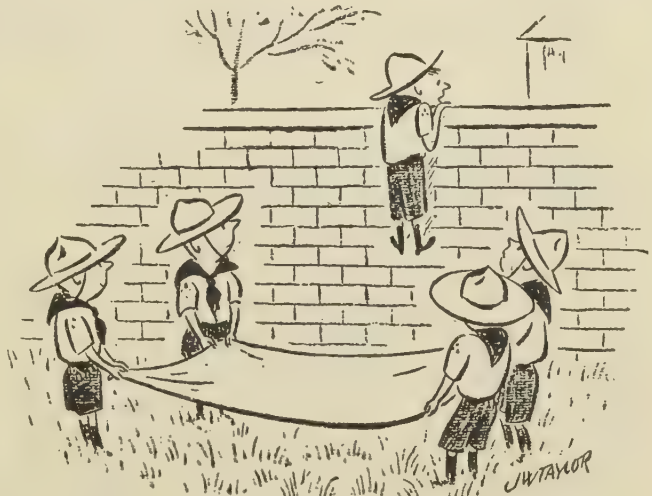
"Oh, not *lunch*——" I began.

"Well, tea," said Mrs. Constantly, giving ground with rather disconcerting speed. "Come early!" she added, adroitly recovering her balance.

"That would be the loveliest idea possible," I said. "May I think a moment about *Wednesday*?"

"Do think about Wednesday!" said Mrs. C. unstintingly.

I thought about Wednesday. I could see nothing but a row of darkly reluctant



"COULD WE HAVE OUR SCOUTMASTER, PLEASE?"



faces. I saw myself casting about, against time and without hope, for a clean skirt. The telephone waited inexorably and pipped.

"May I look in my little book a minute?" I said.

"Do look in your little book a minute," said Mrs. C., without reserve.

I put my hand over the receiver and looked blankly at the advertisements on the page of a weekly paper. "Four out of five have gum trouble—but not me . . .!"

"Oh, dear," I said into the telephone, "how could I have forgotten the wretched dentist?"

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. Constantly.

"All of us," I said, "all the afternoon—one after another——"

I could see us plainly now; all standing in a national queue.

"The boys have got stoppings, and, as it's free now, I feel I might as well avoid gum-trouble; and it's been fixed for *weeks*."

"Oh, well," said Mrs. Constantly, "it's terribly disappointing."

"We couldn't be *more* disappointed," I said, "*all of us*——"

Why didn't we leave it at this satisfactory conclusion? The second unanswerable question.

We nearly did. But something—something perhaps in the curiously demanding quality of the telephone, which will brook neither silence nor finality—forced from Mrs. Constantly's lips the words "Well . . . what about Thursday?"

I couldn't manage it all over again.

"Thursday," I said, "would be absolutely heavenly."

Thursday was, in fact, an absolutely heavenly day. When I woke up I realized that the sinking feeling that it would be a bore to go out to tea on Thursday had crystallized into the knowledge that it was simply not possible to go out to tea on Thursday. At breakfast it appeared that it had been impossible all along. The children behaved as if no one had ever mentioned such a project to them. They had arranged quite other occupations: such as collecting maggots, writing poetry, and, unexpectedly enough, otter-hunting. For myself, I had no clean skirt. I took a cup of strong black coffee to the telephone.

"It's so perfectly awful!" I said, when Mrs. C. answered, "but did you ask us to tea this *afternoon*?"

"Well," said Mrs. C., after a moment's temptation, "yes."

"How could I," I said, "have been so idiotically vague!"

"Can't you come?" said Mrs. Constantly's voice, several shades lighter than before.

"The tremendously fearful thing," I said, "is that we can't."

"Oh, dear," said Mrs. C. in a resilient tone, "*how* disappointing!"

Was that not enough? Since we were all happy, why didn't we leave it at that? The third unanswerable question.

The nature of man is profound: I sometimes think the nature of the telephone is profounder. For in a matter of seconds I had added: "It seems so incredible

that if I hadn't found her postcard inside the encyclopædia I should have completely forgotten my old, old aunt."

"Plant?" said Mrs. Constantly, ready for anything.

"No—aunt. Old—old! You know how impossible it is to put off one's very old aunt when it's all been settled for *weeks*——"

I liked Mrs. C.'s instant sympathy.

"Over seventy," she said, "people get so that they can't rearrange their plans——"

"She's over eighty," I said.

"Oh, *well*," said Mrs. C.

"She knew Disraeli frightfully well," I heard my voice telling her.

"I've got one," said Mrs. Constantly, "who knew Dickens."

"*That's* interesting," I said.

"Has she far to come?" asked Mrs. C.

"Oh, yes, from Tavistock," I said. Why should *Tavistock* be hovering so blithely on the edge of one's subconscious? "She lives in a cottage on the moors," I went on, "with no one to help her—and keeps bees——"

"You wouldn't like . . ." began Mrs. C., and I had a moment's premonition that she might feel compelled by some power outside herself to add the words "to bring her over, too?"

"And then, you know," I went on a trifle wildly, "there's this long-expected *otter-hunt*——"

We had had twelve minutes by the time we drew to a close.

I sat down on the window-seat, exhausted by the speed of invention; and contemplated the clear, the blue—the simple—sky.

Mrs. Constantly and I are really great friends. Why, in the first place, did she



"THE TRAIN NOW ARRIVING AT PLATFORM TWO HAS, I'M AFRAID, CAUGHT US COMPLETELY ON THE WRONG FOOT."

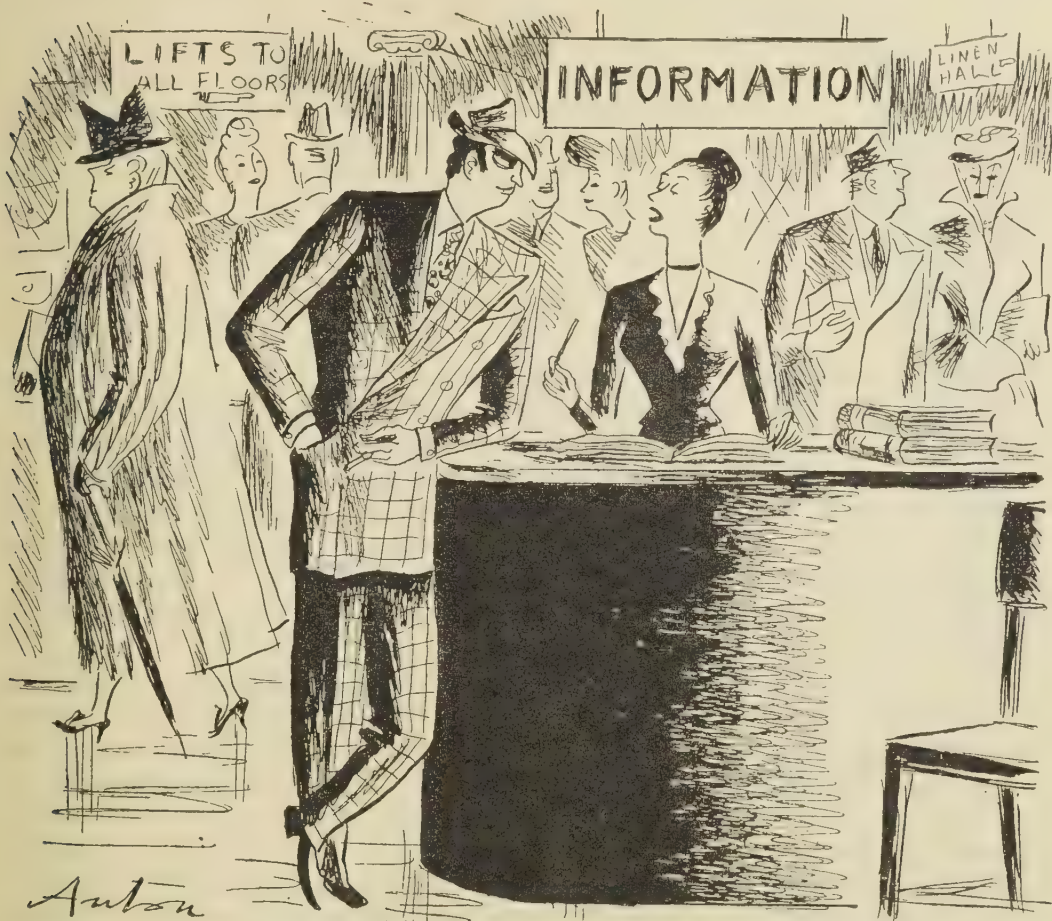
feel constrained to ask me to tea? Why, in the second, did I not say we couldn't come? Why did we spend so much time, money, and nervous energy? What a piece of work is man! How infinite in faculty . . . in reaction how swift to panic, in expression how dishonest, in slavery to the mechanical devices of his own making how complete. How base, how involved. How extremely peculiar.

Yet Mrs. Constantly is still on my mind: and I, and I, on hers.

### I PURCHASED A BOOK

I purchased a book about Edible Fungi  
 (Min. of Ag. Bulletin number two three)  
 With pictures of bad ones  
 And pictures of good ones,  
 With details of field ones  
 And warnings on wood ones,  
 And ones you can fry  
 And ones you must stew,  
 Psalliota Campestris  
 (That's Mushrooms to you)  
 And Blewits, called Blewits  
 Because they are blue.  
 To avoid any mishap  
 I studied the Death Cap,  
 I noted its gills  
 (Decurrent or free),  
 Its veil and its volva,  
 Its number of spores,  
 Its texture, its scent  
 And its olivish hue.  
 The study of Edible Fungi was child's-play to me.

I indited an Ode to Edible Fungi,  
 They smelt so superb sizzling there in the pot,  
 Sliced succulent puffballs  
 And gold Chanterelle  
 Boletus Edulis  
 And common Morel.  
 I broiled them in milk  
 And I fried them in fat  
 With a soupçon of this  
 And a soup spoon of that,



*Anton*

"THEY'RE COLLECTED ON FRIDAYS AT HALF-PAST TWO FROM THE ZENITH BANK, ON THE CORNER OF TOMBARD STREET, BY MR. SIMPSON OF THE ACCOUNTS DEPARTMENT."

With a stir and a prod  
 And a look and a pat,  
 Oh, I knew the right genus  
 For every gill-fungus.  
 It is perfectly easy  
 To know which is what,  
 You can make no mistake  
 Once you know what you're at.  
 They are all of them really remarkably easy to spot.

I published my Ode to Edible Fungi.  
*Miserable dictu!* I only ate half.  
 They have taken my Ode to Edible Fungi  
 And made a reprint  
 As my  
 Epitaph!

### HAMMER HEADS

“What,” said Héloïse, “is this of 'ammer 'ead charks?”

We imported Héloïse under a scheme, with the grudging connivance of the War Office. She is not very reliable about grease between the prongs of forks, and we do not now allow her near the cooker, but she brings round the early morning tea quite beautifully, and when the archdeacon was staying with us last week he sang “Bright the Vision that Delighted” for twenty minutes in the bathroom after she had gone. She is Laureate-in-Natural-Philosophy of a university so central and so European that it has no vowels in its name, and so cannot be mentioned in conversation.

We were passing the eighty-foot hoarding which—presumably ever since one of Augustine’s monks laid its foundations—has screened from the world the south-west elevation of the parish church. Before the war it used to glow like a splendid though worldly Morality, calling upon us to Eat More, Drink Deeper, Smoke Faster, Keep Abreast Of Our Surfeits With Crates of Liver Pills, Drive Farther And Faster In More Expensive Motors, and Leave All The Lights On Every Night. Since we came back there has been a change. Now, it tells me, as an able-bodied male, to divide my time between the Royal Air Force, the Coal Mines, Forty-three Different Civilian Trades which rather surprisingly constitute the Modern Army, and a Permanent but rather smudgy beige-coloured Occupation called Times Are Better On The Land. If, adds a rather tattered postscript from the Prime Minister, I do all these things, and whatever else I am doing, only ten per cent. harder and more often, we may well be all right.

I have learned to speak Héloïse’s English, and I knew she meant Hammer-Head Sharks; as a natural philosopher, she is particular about species. The sharks were new to me—we do not often drive into the town these days. Still, there they were on the hoarding, swaying alcoholically upon their tails, one towering over the other, leering horribly.

*Some, hiccupped the larger, Make Big Stuff, Some Make Small, More From Each Is More For All.*

The sea beneath them changed drunkenly from wine-dark to hangover orange as he spoke.

"Those are not sharks, Héloïse," I said. "They are Government Spanners. The big one is an adjustable spanner, of the sort which the Law calls a Blunt Instrument. The little one is one of those curly spanners that are tied by boot-laces to the handles of mowing-machines, but do not fit any of the nuts on them. It is, no doubt, an appeal by our Government to two new classes of people to co-operate in the great drive for Recovery—to those whose profession is assault and battery with Blunt Instruments, and to those who, like myself, spend much of their time tinkering with old mowing-machines. Increased co-operation between these two facets of our national life, claims the poster, will result in an increase in the size of the National Cake which will benefit one and all."

I think rather highly of myself in this vein, but Héloïse, who usually has excellent manners, was not listening. She is a keen student of our national life and culture, and as we drove home she sat in silence and seemed to ponder deeply.

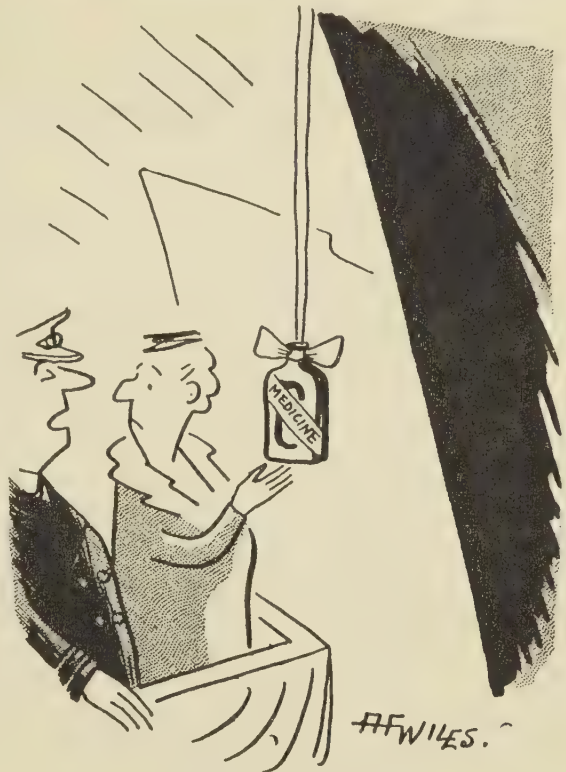
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I went through to the scullery as usual after lunch, to help with the washing-up. Héloïse, trailing an unconvincing dish-cloth, was talking, while my wife scoured out the frying-pan. "Two charks," she was saying, "only the Major explain, not fisch but spinners. Propaganda of your Goffermint. The Big Spinner is your Goffermint. 'E make Big Stuff, Posters and Offices"—Héloïse, and we on her behalf, have had much to do with Government offices since she arrived—"and the Little Spinner, 'e is your industry. 'E make small, because all your workers are rich, 'e do not need to make big."

Héloïse, like all Continentals, believes in her heart that we are really immensely rich, and that our new talk about bankruptcy is perfidious Albionism.

"Well, what about *More From Each Is More For All*, Héloïse?" I said.

She frowned alarmingly, gathering her linguistic powers for a great effort.



"IT'S A HOSPITAL SHIP."

"Big Chark make more Offices," she said. "Little Chark make more smalls."

"Yes, Héloïse?"

She braced herself for a supreme effort of translation.

"Do for us all!" she said triumphantly.

November, 1948

TOUJOURS LE GUIDE

WE were approaching the castle. I was saying "On your left you see the castle of Gruyère." I sat down again, for what more could I say; I had never seen the castle before in my life. If it hadn't been that I remembered how they'd said "... and the castle is called Gruyère" as they pushed me into the coach with my packed luncheon, I shouldn't even have been able to say that. I should have had to use the old formula "On your left you will see a sixteenth-century castle. Apart from its picturesque position on top of a hill it is of little importance," and pray that the horrid little man in the back seat had lost his place in the guide-book.

Suddenly I remembered what else they had said as they pushed me into the coach. "You stop there for two hours. You spend an hour going round the castle." The coach drove relentlessly on up the hill leading to the castle and into the old square. The coach stopped. The old Swiss driver got out and made his way towards the hotel, where doubtless a glass of white wine and a fine meal were waiting for him. I got up and said in a knowing way, "We stop here." Now if you have ever had the fortune to be a guide you'll know that there is nothing that a coach-load of people like better than to be told a fact which is perfectly obvious. My remark was greeted by delighted mutterings throughout the coach. Everybody was smiling except the little man in the back seat, and I could hear "We stop here" being bandied about as though it had been the latest saying of an Oscar Wilde. I waited for silence, rather like a comedian after a good joke, and then let drop another pearl of wisdom. "I now take you round the castle." Now of course everybody has a weakness for castles, and a coach-load of tourists in Switzerland is no exception. I couldn't have pleased them better if I had said: "On our return you can all stay at the Grand Hotel." For the Grand Hotel was on the lakeside "and ever so expensive, dear, and of course we wanted to save our francs."

I got out. Everybody followed suit. That's another thing you learn if you are a guide: you're part of a giant follow-my-leader game. I could tell you about the time I got out of the train at Paris—but that's another story. I looked around: painted on a wall I saw "*Visitez le Château—60 cents.*" The little man with the book asked me "How much is it?" He was from Bradford. "Sixty centimes," I said, as though I'd known all my life. I led the way up to the castle. The rest of the coach-load of thirty followed. The old women washing at the fountain looked up, without excitement, and continued their washing. We reached the entrance to the castle where there was an old man selling tickets. "*Bonjour, monsieur, je suis le guide,*" I said. "*Ah, bonjour, monsieur, ça va?*" he wheezed. "*Ça va bien,*"





I said. And there it had to end. I had told them in London that I spoke German, so I had been sent to the French part of Switzerland.

We went through the gate and there we were in a grass-covered courtyard, surrounded on all sides by the walls of the castle and, far above, old wooden galleries. On one wall was painted a huge picture much worn by time. I took up my position to one side of it and stole a hasty look at it while they closed in on me. In one corner cowering amongst some trees was a shepherdess and approaching from all sides were armed horsemen. "This painting," I started, "was done in the latter part of the sixteenth century." I could see I was impressing them and I hadn't even begun. To my left I caught a

glimpse of an American taking notes on a pad supplied by some airways line; this nearly unnerved me, but I took a grip on myself, adjusted my badge more firmly in my buttonhole and continued, "It is believed to have been painted by a minor Swedish historian while staying here to investigate the ancient history of the place." When you are a guide you learn that half-measures never work; I was warming to the task now. The American was scribbling away contentedly. I continued: "Experts differ slightly as to the context of the scene depicted, but I think the most widely held view is as follows." Well, perhaps it wasn't widely held yet, I thought, but by the end of the season it would be. "The incident took place in 1246, when a young shepherdess was caring for her sheep in the woods near the castle—you saw them as we drove in, didn't you?" "Yes," they all said happily—they were thinking how observant they'd been. "The lord of the castle was hunting with his men-at-arms when suddenly he caught sight of the beautiful shepherdess and there and then decided to make her his lady. This he did and he brought her back to the castle with him, causing much jealousy amongst the lords and ladies already in residence. Later on you will see the room where the shepherdess slept." (This was quite safe; the Swiss always keep one room in their castles with a bed in it.) While finishing the story I had been looking for the next port of

call; seeing a door near by I led the party towards it. In we plunged. Easy—this was obviously the guard-room.

By the time we had gone round they had a good idea of the history of a castle I had visited a few years before in Scotland. I led them down again to the little village, being careful to avoid the stall selling English guide-books. "This is the best place for tea," I said, pointing towards the only hotel, and in we marched. "*Bonjour, mademoiselle,*" I said. "*Je suis le guide.*" "*Enchanté, monsieur,*" she said, and brought me a bowl of cream and four large meringues.

Over tea the American said to me: "Did it take you a long time to learn up all those facts? The folks back home will sure be interested." "Oh, yes, simply ages," I said, and thought of my instructions for this particular trip: ". . . and the castle is called Gruyère."

### SPOTLIGHT

I must tell you what someone told me to-day—I never can remember her name, but she always knows me; like Daphne, only older, so stupid—*she* isn't, but to forget, I mean; I shall think of it presently. You have seen her about, I expect, but I think she stays with relations in the country, so I only meet her now and again. She always makes for me and tells me the latest while I am trying to think who she is. To-day she mentioned her brother who had flown over to Berlin, and said didn't I think it was a ticklish business. I said I supposed it was, but they had been at it so long that nobody thought of danger—something like that—so she said people did now, and when I said you mean passengers, she laughed and said no, she meant the situation. I had nearly got her name, but had to pull myself together when she switched over to Paris and launched forth about fifth columns and the strikes, and disclosures by some minister. I had got to G, so I just said the French were very clever and soon found things out. We had a French governess who could knit and translate Racine while my sister practised, and we could never hide anything from her for long.

Then it came to me; her name is Grange—you know, over at Uphill. Which reminds me, do you remember those people at Stoddington when you were there, who took the Grange for a time and gave themselves airs? *She* appeared yesterday among the kettles at Jeavons when I was looking for a griller thing. She has done something to her hair and I didn't recognize her at first, but of course it is some time ago and, as she said, much has happened since then. She told me her husband was attached to something in Paris and sat on a board—sounded like a monkey—such an uncomfortable position, stuck there when he has things to do over here, but it was all very serious, and she rattled on about pacts and the veto, joint notes and western defence—the usual thing, but of course difficult to follow; and we are not told everything I am sure, because I happen to know a little—things you won't see



in newspapers, I mean, which makes it easier for me to put everything clearly in a situation like this which is changing all the time but remains the same. Of course I like change; it does make a *change*, if you know what I mean—a break. *We* are going to Scotland, to Edinburgh; I have never been there, and it is so unenterprising, though there is lots to see; I mean unenterprising not going there when I had a chance, because my uncle lived in Midlothian and we used to stay with him. He, you know, spent some time in Russia, but it was before they had this iron curtain and fixed ideas, so he got back safely.

I always wanted to go there and sit on a cossack and drink out of a samovar. But their language! It is dreadful, I am told, but I am good at that sort of thing and soon pick it up. But even without going there I can read between the lines. The Russians seem to have been rather off-hand, and personally I believe that has caused all these discussions; and now the atom bomb has come to the fore—nobody likes a thing like that held over their head, and I wish Marie Corelli had never started it; I used to think the ordinary bomb was dangerous, and was laughed at for saying so, but they don't think this one is a mere bagatelle, though I believe it is quite a small ball which you could keep about you for emergencies—shows what things have come to, and they are quite right to be particular, only if they have a commission sitting on it till something is decided, the position must be giving them some anxiety, I mean they evidently want to handle it carefully; but goodness knows now how they can feel easy with or without it, and you may be sure that is why they have an iron curtain. But I do hope there won't be war; we've had so much of it, and it would be the last straw when even as it is we are nearly worn out by the peace.

I should have to wash up in a canteen or something just when that death-trap of a shelter has gone and I've got the garden right. Besides, it doesn't do people any good, it makes them so odd afterwards, and sets all the young people marrying as hard as they can. I'm sure it's catching, because they plunge into frightful misfits and don't count the consequences or consider what is to happen to the children—they are a detail, but as Joyce says, you can't be callous. Now *she* has the children of her husband's first wife's previous husband's former marriage, or something, and they have the same name though they are no relation, because the mother was only an adopted daughter and inherited a property and the husband took her name, so she isn't callous, and they are such dull heavy children, both girls, who say yes and no—she'll never get them off her hands unless there's a war at the right time, but I dare say we shall manage to keep the peace if we get angry and threatening enough. You

can see now, from what I have explained, how things are; I hope I haven't given anything away, but you will be careful, I know—I shouldn't like all I have said to get into the papers.

### LITTLE TIM BRANNEHAN

Either to deceive the Germans in case they should come, or some more local enemy, the people of Sheehanstown had twisted sideways the arms of the signpost that there is a mile from their village; and as some years later, when I came that way in a car, the arms had not yet been put straight, I asked the way of an old man who chanced to be walking by. And one thing leading to another, we got into conversation, and I asked him how things were in those parts. "Terrible. Terrible," said the old man. "Sure, they're terrible. And it's the same in the whole world, too. It's all going to ruin."

"As bad as that?" I said.

"Aye," he answered. "And worse."

"And what do you think is the cause of it?" I asked.

"It's all those inventions that they make," he replied. "Sure, I can remember when bicycles were new. But that wasn't enough for them, and they must go on till they invented aeroplanes and wireless and I don't know what all. And no good came of it, and the hearts of men has corrupted. Listen now, and I'll tell you. Did you ever hear of the house and family of Blackcastle? No. Well, I was thinking you came from a very long way away. And once there was no country in the world that hadn't heard of them; but they're all ruined now. And it happened like this: the estates fell into the hands of a young Lord Blackcastle, that had a hard, dry, withered heart. So that was the end of their greatness, for no man can be great with a hard heart. Aye, that was the end of them. God be with the old days."

"What did he do?" I asked.

"Do, is it?" he said. "Sure, he had a hard, withered heart. What could he do?"

"Did he commit a crime?" I asked,



"Begob, it was worse nor a crime," he said. "Sure, you wouldn't mind a bit of crime in a man. He grudged a sup of milk to a child."

"He shouldn't have done that," I said.

"It's what he did," said the old man.

"How did it happen?" I asked.

"Sure, the good Lady Blackcastle, that had been his mother, died," he said, "and there was nobody to look after him then. And he went abroad, and he went from bad to worse; and he comes home, and that's what he did. Mustn't a man have a black heart in him indeed to grudge a glass of milk to an ailing child?"

"Are you sure he did it?" I asked. "And did he mean to?"

"Did it!" he said. "And mean to! Sure the whole thing's down in writing. Look now. It's in my pocket. I have it there night and day. Can you read that?"

And he pulled out an envelope holding a half-sheet of notepaper, with writing in faded ink; and, crumpled and thumbed though it was, I could still read the old writing. "Let a pint of milk a day," it said, "be given to little Tim Brannehan, since he is weakly. Moira Blackcastle."

He gave me time to read it and time for the import of the note to sink in, as he stood before me, a tall, white-bearded, reproachful figure, looking at the evidence which I held in my hand of the ruin that was coming to the world.

"He comes home from abroad," he said, "and goes into his dairy, and he stops that pint of milk being given out any more. And I shows him that very letter. And it has no more effect on him than a snowflake in the face of a charging bull or a wild lion. And you have seen the letter yourself, and a man must have a hard, black heart to go against a letter like that, written by such a lady as was Lady Blackcastle, now in heaven among the blessed saints. Sure, the world's going to ruin."

"But when did all this happen?" I asked. "And who is little Tim Brannehan?"

"Sure, it happened only the other day," he said. And the old man drew himself up to his full height, straightening for a moment the limbs that the years had bent. "And do you think I don't know what I'm talking about? Sure, I'm Tim Brannehan. And I was never refused that milk for seventy years."

## PIG-KEEPING

We decided to keep a pig. We learned that first of all we had to register the pig with the Ministry of Food and then register ourselves for monthly allocations of pig-meal. We learned that we had to undertake that the pig would live regularly on our premises and be fed and tended by ourselves or by a living-in member of our household. ("Fed," it was explained, meant "being served with food at feeding times.") We learned that we had to make a declaration of intention to slaughter, and when the hour struck apply for a licence to slaughter. We learned that slaughtering was only



"No, OLD MAN, YOU HAVE ONE OF MINE."

to be done by a slaughter-man approved by the Food Office, the nearest being twenty miles away. We just about decided not to keep a damn pig after all.

Then we thought of rashers of bacon by the half-dozen, of ham, of lard, of . . . We bought the pig—and are now what you might call Capigalists.

My son and I and our Mr. Friar built a sty. The pig arrived. That, by the way, is the correct order of events. The reverse constitutes a Grave Problem. The sty was built at the farthest end of the garden, because. As a result we couldn't get the trailer in which the pig arrived anywhere near the pig-sty, so we had to carry it. The pig, not the trailer: a trailer hasn't got two convenient ears and a tail. The pig squealed in high falsetto chords all the way, till we felt like three approved slaughter-men. It wasn't from pain or even fear, though—sheer resentful indignation tinged with reproof.

The pig was installed in the sty and in its first five minutes ate two cabbages the size of footballs, supplied by my two daughters, and causing bitterly jealous argument. ("Daddy, it ate *mine* first!"—"Daddy, it liked mine *best!*")

Next came the naming of the pig, which in our household means voting-papers

and cold war, culminating in a rough-house something like free democratic elections in Eastern Europe. The name emerged as "Penelope." The real choice had been "Pygmalion," but certain vital facts about our pig had for the moment escaped us, and the emendations, "Pygfeemalion" and "Galantea" were over-ruled. The runners-up were "Low Pressure," because she was always in the trough—closely followed, because she looked like a Rumanian Cabinet Minister, by "Mrs. Pauker." "Gadarene Gertie"—my contribution—was howled down.

Now the basic idea of pig-owning of course is that for some months you keep a pig and then for some weeks the pig keeps you. There are, however, certain mis-



"SO YOU'VE GROWN OUT OF THAT TELL-MY-FATHER NONSENSE, MAYDEW. BRAVO!"

conceptions about the business in the lay mind. One is that you just feed a pig on "scraps that come out of the house." Try mentioning that to your wife some time. Grey with insulted fury, she'll explain to you that if you think she's such a bad housekeeper that anything eatable is thrown away . . . Well, you soon see her point, probably long before she's stopped explaining it. At meal-times the phrase "I wouldn't give that food to the pigs" occasionally recurs to your mind with quite a new interpretation.

Another misconception is that a couple of meals a day during which the pig eats itself silly and treads in the rest is all that's required to fatten it. Our Mr. Friar soon disabused me. Our small sounder is being cosseted as never animal was before. It has a few tasty odds and ends, turnip and what-not, thrown in first

thing in the morning before it gets up. During this, its breakfast is being boiled up. Mr. Friar doesn't actually wear a chef's cap and taste the brew at intervals, but he comes very near it. At midday it has a cabbage, not from the old bed we eat ourselves, but from the better bed, the ones we don't even send to the church Harvest Festival. It has another pailful of, I must confess, extremely savoury-smelling "goo" at four p.m. And last thing at night it has another cabbage as a snack before retiring—its night-cabbage, as it were.

In between it is expected to lie down and grow, not rush around the sty exercising its hams and rashers away to nothing. Luckily a pig has, situated somewhere

about a foot back from the shoulder and six inches down, a kind of switch or button, which on being scratched with a stick slowly folds the legs up under it and makes it collapse with a satisfied grunt. Mr. Friar likes one or other of us to stand by during meals to work the undercarriage button when the pig is ready.

Mr. Friar watches the pig with an eagle eye. He says it's getting a nice straight pig now, a good square pig, he says. One morning he reproachfully mentioned that it looked a bit hollow-sided and accused me of having failed to give it its snack of cabbage the night before, when it was his afternoon off. He even moved the whole chicken-run one day to another part of the garden. I understood the pig was being upset by the chickens. The continual clucking and the occasional pæans of feminine triumph over a dear little new baby egg were disturbing its afternoon nap and interfering with the gammon-growing. If they still talk loudly enough to annoy the pig I expect we shall have to give up keeping chickens.

Meanwhile I have made my own personal contribution. I picked a peach which was going bad and so had been spared by my daughters, and solemnly gave it to Penelope. She ate it—stone and all—with a noise like a bilge pump; so early next year, we hope, we shall be offering visitors a slice of genuine peach-fed ham.

I say we hope. But already I can see storm-clouds. And the moment we have obtained our licence to slaughter they will break. "Daddy, you can't *murder* Penelope!" "Daddy, I forbid it!" "Daddy, she's the darlingest pig: I love her!" "Daddy, you're *horribly* cruel!" And we shall by then have undertaken to surrender fifty-two weeks' bacon coupons.

## THE NEW LOOK IN ECCLESIOLOGY

I am what Mr. Betjeman  
would call a  
church crawler  
and withal a  
tetchy man  
bristling with views  
on pews,  
altars and psalters,  
hassocks and cassocks,  
processional crosses  
and reredoses.

I am what the Art Historian  
would call a Neo-Victorian.  
being highly allergic to  
hangings of Mothers' Union blue



(but don't praise  
me for the phrase)  
and preferring the deep blush  
of dusty plush.

I am the mourner  
in the Children's Corner,  
but I could dance for joy  
on aisles  
of encaustic tiles.

I am numbered among the folk  
who detest unpolished oak  
and love the sticky feel  
and smell of varnished deal.



"Now, REMEMBER, WHEN WE GET TO THE DESSERT YOU TELL YOUR FUNNY STORY OF HOW I BROKE SIX PRICELESS  
SPODE PLATES HELPING TO WASH UP AT THE ROBINSON'S."

My spirit yearns  
after memorial urns  
and the flamboyant bust  
of the just,  
the just-so  
and the just so-so.

To me in part is due the boom  
in the Nineteenth-Century Tomb,  
in spires  
by Butterfield and choirs  
by Gilbert Scott,  
not  
forgetting the huge in-  
terest in Pugin  
and the fact that you  
may have had a few  
offers this year  
for your Landseer  
and your grand and great-  
grandmamas's  
vases.

### OUR DUTY IS CLEAR

Searching feverishly through my newspaper for something about something else (if I make myself clear), I find the following:

"Six almond-eyed, soft-voiced Tibetans, led by Tsepon Shakabpa, have arrived in Paris on their way to England to offer for sale the scent of musk, the wool of yaks, and furs of the snow leopard and golden bear."

Good. We are always glad to see almond-eyed Tibetans over here; we see far too little of them in the ordinary way. I say this in a spirit of pure friendliness, not as the suspiciously-minded may suggest with any idea of doing a deal with them personally. I do not wish to buy the scent of musk, having no immediate requirement for same. I should not know what to do with it if I had it. Nor am I interested in the wool of yaks, or, at any rate, I am interested only in the most general way. It is not the kind of stuff, to my mind, that one wants to have in the house in its unmanufactured state. The fur of a golden bear, now, I *would* like, but I know very well I shouldn't be able to afford it. You have only to take a look at me to see that I am not the kind of man to buy a golden bear, even on the H.P. system.

Welcome, then, without *arrière pensée*, to the six soft-voiced salesmen from Shangri-La.

What do they come to seek in return for their precious wares? Not pound notes, surely, which could be of little use to a man in those far-off fastnesses? Cotton, then, or pressed cheeses or motor-cars or the wool of sheep and rabbits? Fortunately the answer is given, in part at least, in the news item from which I have already taken the liberty of quoting. "We have heard" (says Shakabpa, who is Finance Minister) "that in England it is possible to buy mowing-machines that can be drawn by horses. They would be good to have in Tibet."

How this news first reached the ears of the central authority at Lhasa I am at a loss to guess. Sir Francis Younghusband, who was over there with a mission in 1904, may have mentioned the existence of these ingenious contrivances to the Dalai Lama, who fled, taking the secret with him; or the first hint of what was going on in distant England may have leaked out even earlier, for Mrs. Bishop, I see from my bibliography, was *Among the Tibetans* as far back as 1894, and there is no reason to doubt that she had ample opportunities of seeing horse-drawn mowing-machines in action before leaving these shores. The difficulty here of course is to account for the long delay between the arrival of the news and the dispatch of the present mission; and for this reason I am inclined to think that Tibet remained in ignorance of the

new invention for many years more, perhaps until some exhausted traveller, his mind still dizzy with the marvels he had seen at the Great Durbar of 1911, came staggering over the Himalayas into East Nari. It is easy to picture the scene. The wondering groups of villagers pausing scythe in hand to listen to the scarce credible tales of the stranger, their almond eyes fixed in astonishment on his puny calves (for the Tibetans, says my encyclopædia, are broad-shouldered and muscular, and present a striking contrast to the weak-calved Hindus), and their soft voices breaking in now and again to question the



"E ELEVEN AND TWELVE; TWO PROGRAMMES; NO COFFEE IN THE INTERVAL; AND WOULD YOU VERY KINDLY GET THIS FILLED?"

possibility of cutting grass by means of revolving cylinders of iron. To the south of them, as they nod and murmur together, tower the giant peaks of Kamet and Nanda Devi, their mighty shoulders beginning to redden (though this is beside the point) in the rays of the westering sun. From mouth to mouth, from hamlet to hamlet, the story is passed, now treasured in the breast of some herdsman as he drives his yaks along the shores of Lake Manasarowar, now ferried to the very gates of Shigatze in the vessels of wood and hide so characteristic of the upper reaches of the Sanpo River. Progress is slow. In this strange country, I read, an arctic winter prevails from May to October, when owing to the dryness of the atmosphere the air loses its conductivity and "the inhabitants, dressed in sheepskins, give out long electric sparks on approaching conducting substances." We must suppose that during this trying time intercourse of any kind is at a standstill, so that for long months the news of the horse-drawn mower must necessarily have stagnated, till the warmer weather came again.

But in the course of years the tidings reached Lhasa. Strange whisperings disturbed the peace of the long galleries in the palace of Po-ta-la. The Dalai Lama himself lent an indulgent ear . . .

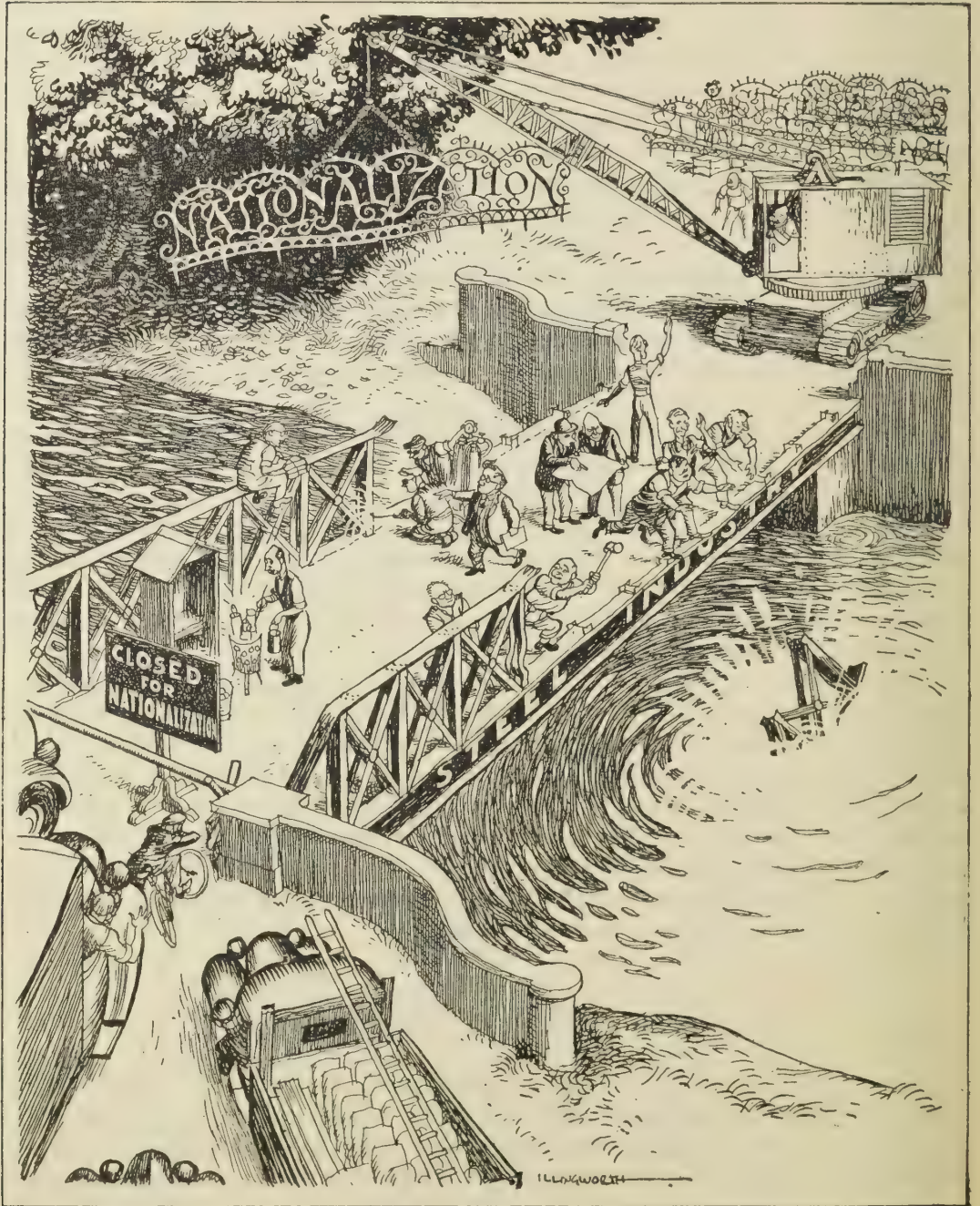
Somewhere about 1938, I fancy, the licence to import horse-drawn mowing machines was finally issued. Followed the nagging delays of war, the return of better days, the revival of the cherished project and at long last the departure of the mission, laden with yak's wool and smelling strongly of musk, on the tedious voyage down the mighty Brahmaputra.

It is an affecting story. The Spirit of the New Age triumphs in the Forbidden Country, the blessings of civilization speed on their way to revitalize the drooping tableland, and soon—perhaps before another decade has passed—the whirr of mowing-machines and the steady clip-clop of horses' feet will be heard where only the swish of the scythe and the long-drawn cry of the snow leopard have for centuries past re-echoed from the guardian peaks. Whatever our own difficulties may be, we must not disappoint these kindly muscular people. If necessary we must be prepared to go short of horse-drawn mowing-machines ourselves, for, as Tsepon Shakabpa has finely said, "they will be good to have in Tibet."

## THE FORM IS OBVIOUS

I took in the situation at a glance from my side of the road. There was my car. A few yards to the right, where a lorry had been standing when I parked my car, was one of those yellow cones inverted on top of a pole, indicating a restricted parking area. And a few yards to the left was a large City policeman, grim and forbidding.

"Been here fifty minutes," said the policeman, advancing on me. "Restricted area. You know the regulations."



DESIGN AT WORK

I averted my gaze and murmured something about the lorry obscuring the yellow cone. "The lorry," the policeman said, heaving his chest, "was delivering stuff. You can deliver stuff up to a reasonable time. The yellow cone and all these here markings have been here for months." The circular movement of his hand indicated at least three bright yellow pavement markings in the immediate vicinity. "Couldn't have painted them while you was gone," he said ironically, disabusing me of the sudden thought I had actually entertained. "Mind you," he added humourlessly, "there was enough time for that too."

With the gesture that is the despair of the motorist, the policeman's right hand began slowly to unbutton his left-hand tunic pocket. I automatically produced my papers and noted the flicker of pain on his face as he opened my driving licence and saw that I had remembered to sign it. He then made a brief circuit of the car to inspect my road licence and index number, waved a few morbid passers-by aside, and handed my documents back with a hint of regret that they seemed to be in order. I left him adding a few riders in his notebook and looking, if anything, more grim and forbidding than when I had first seen him.

In the club bar that afternoon I raised the matter with all in earshot and awaited their individual views. Jim the barman said it was nothing: a five bob fine and Bob's your uncle. Upjohn the actor agreed and said the form was to send a letter of abject and ignominious apology and throw yourself on the mercy of the court. Joe, the other barman, said they were both mistaken, that it wasn't just an ordinary parking case, but a yellow peril case. "Chap next door but one to me's brother-in-law," he said discomfortingly, "got done five pun for the same thing." Upjohn said now he came to think of it, didn't someone get three months recently just as an example? "Well, anyway," I said, quickly trying to bring some humour into the situation, "they have abolished the death penalty." It was a weak joke, so I had to laugh for the others by proxy. And then Parry the insurance man piped up. "You're all wrong," he announced, staring into his pink gin. "The form is not to write letters but send your lawyer along. You've got a lawyer, dammit, haven't you? Well, send him along, man; save you time and money in the end."

When my summons arrived it seemed obvious that sending a letter of apology was out. There was a footnote to the effect that no written communications regarding the case would be considered. I mentioned this to Upjohn when next I saw him, but he pooh-poohed it as officialese. I saw then quite plainly what the form was. The form was to go to court in person, as the summons seemed to require.

I arrived at the court punctually after parking my car and met my policeman on the steps. He nodded brusquely at me and opened the door politely. Inside the small court were many policemen minus helmets, a number of harassed-looking men who were obviously errant motorists, and an equal number of men with wing-collars and brief-cases who were obviously lawyers. I suddenly felt homesick and lonely and wished I had taken Parry's advice about employing a lawyer. I was first case. The clerk read the charge, the policeman enlarged on it and quoted more or less

verbatim what I had said to him; another policeman shouted that there was nothing known against me in that court, and the alderman on the bench asked me from behind his spectacles whether I had anything to say. I muttered something incoherently and before I was halfway through the alderman said "Pay ten shillings. Next."

With much relief I split a pound with the policeman who had not known anything against me at that court, and feeling more and more sprightly joined the motley group at the side to hear the next case. It was one similar to mine, but the motorist charged had done an Upjohn on the court and sent a letter of apology, in spite of the footnote on the summons. The apology was most abject and ignominious and I felt a little sick. "Pay two pounds. Next," said the alderman. This, I thought, was great stuff. Wait till I get back to the club bar.

The third case was a typical Parry case. Here a lawyer had come to plead for his client. In a long speech he mentioned his client's quarter of a century's driving without a blemish, the rarity of the occasions when his client came up to town from the country, the unfamiliarity of his client with the restricted area regulations, the general illegibility of the yellow bands, particularly when obstructed by other parked cars. It was cogent, persuasive, rhetorical. It moved me to extreme compassion and sympathy. This, I thought, was obviously the form, to send your lawyer. And when the lawyer ended with outstretched arms and an impassioned plea to dismiss the case under the Probation of Offenders Act, I felt as though I had literally thrown ten bob down the drain.

The clerk whispered to the alderman and the alderman blinked back at the lawyer. "Pay three pounds," he said. "Next."

A gasp went up in the court and I felt embarrassed when I realized that it was a solitary gasp and that it was mine. But disappointed as I was on behalf of the



"AT AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE I ATTENDED RECENTLY  
IN NEW YORK . . .

lawyer and his client, my self-confidence in the way I had defended my own case came back with a rush. I nodded brusquely to my policeman and left the court with swinging stride. The form was obviously to go to court in person, brave the attack and defend yourself with honour, distinction, and a ten bob fine.

When I reached the street I took in the situation at a glance. On the other side of the road was my car. A few yards to the right was a lamp standard where a lorry had been parked. It had a vivid yellow band painted round its waist. A few yards to the left stood a large City policeman, grim and forbidding.

The form is obvious. I must write a letter to the court.



December, 1948

EARLY STRUGGLES

MR. ZONIMAN'S thumbs turned back so remarkably that a geometrical protraction of them would have resulted in a quite small circle. I noticed this as he drew them slowly down the edge of his heavily hand-stitched lapels. "Well," he said to me, affecting a grimace purporting to be whimsical but only materializing as a faint leer—"what do the rising young screen-writers think?" He had lately taken to addressing me as if I were more than one person.

"Since you ask us," I began humorously—but the question had been rhetorical, and he cut me off with a bang as he struck his cedarwood desk masterfully with *Hearts on Toast*, slightly splitting the dust-jacket.

"All the horse-racing sequences will have to come out for a start—won't they, Walter?"

The Director designate was holding a match to the end of his cigar. He nodded weightily, and sighed.

"Never forget *Turf on His Mind*," he said. "Six thousand they paid for hire of horses, not to mention putting steam-rollers over the course at Gatwick every day for three weeks."

"That's right," said Mr. Zooniman.

"Besides," said Walter gloomily, "if you find an artist who looks like a jockey he can't play a love-scene without the leading lady's stood in a trench."

"That's right," said Mr. Zooniman. "No horses, then."

"No horses."

"The only thing is," I said, in a voice that always seems to pipe at these meetings—"it's a horse-racing story. If we take out the——"

But a thought had struck Mr. Zooniman. He said to Walter: "Why didn't you buy them?"

"Buy what?"

"The horses."

"Buy them?"

"When I was associate producer on *Neck and Neck* with Bernie Grost we bought forty old ones for five hundred pounds, and one three-year-old for close-ups at two hundred."

"In *Turf on His Mind*——"

"Then when we finished shooting we sold them. The front office was very pleased."

"Sold what?" said Walter.

"The horses."

"Front office!" said Walter with great distaste. Then, controlling himself, "In *Turf on His Mind* we didn't have a horse in the close-ups. Keithy Margrave straddled a chair and the property-men rocked it. It was a very fine effect."

"I don't remember it," said Mr. Zooniman.

"We didn't use it," said Walter, without bitterness.

Mr. Zooniman flickered a few hundred pages of *Hearts on Toast* through plump fingers. "Of course," he said—"Distance Pictures shot four thousand feet of this when they first bought the subject in 1938."

"Four thousand? Actually in the can?"

"Actually in the can."

"Why don't we use it?"

"They lost the can," said Mr. Zooniman.

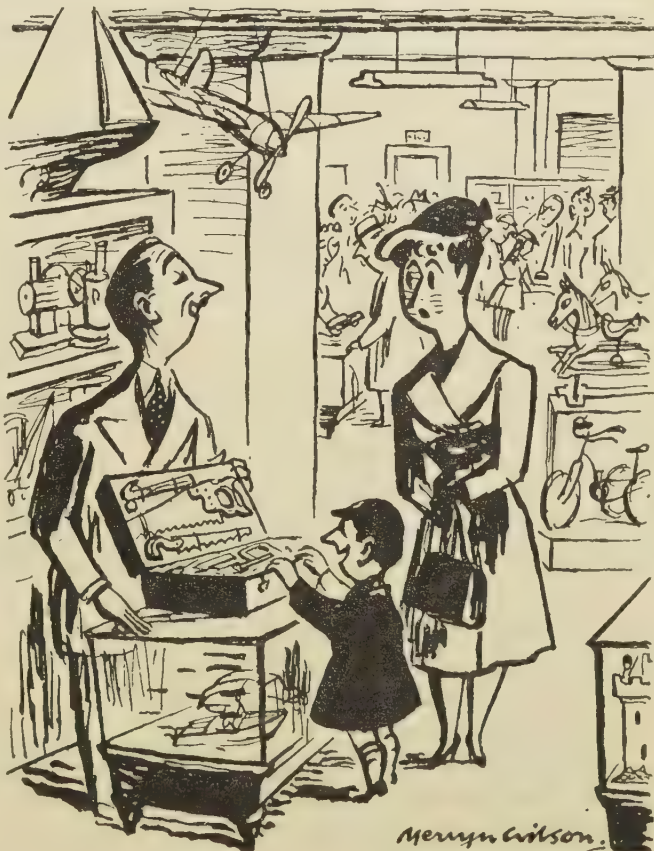
"HA-ha!" burst out Walter suddenly. "What did the front office say about *that*? I'll bet there was a touch of drama about *that*." He laughed again, and Mr. Zooniman joined in, wiping his eyes presently with a monogrammed silk handkerchief.

"But," I said, remembering the figure mentioned in my contract and feeling that I was not earning it—"if we're not going to *have* any horse-racing sequences, it doesn't matter what Distance shot, or what's happened to it. Reading the book, I——"

"Those exterior scenes in Ireland," said Mr. Zooniman—"they'll have to come out."

Walter drew a long breath on an inward "Ooh," at the same time nodding emphatically. "Right out, those," he said.

"Unless the front office would stand for a second unit going over there for a couple of months."



"I PRESUME YOUR LITTLE BOY IS THE NORMAL DESTRUCTIVE TYPE."

"Couple of years, more likely," said Walter. "When we made *County Mayo* only one day in ten was fit to shoot. Wet as muck."

"And all the Irish scenes are racing," said Mr. Zooniman. "Means shipping the horses, running up costs."

"By the way," said Walter—"Isn't Wooden-puss a bit pricey for a second feature?"

"Wooden-puss?" said Mr. Zooniman, puzzled.

The Director designate mentioned the name of a lady revered by millions. "And another thing; the storm scene, where she wears a blanket—whose legs are we going to photograph?"

"Relax," said Mr. Zooniman, flapping a hand downwards in a soothing gesture. "We can always get some legs; they don't have to remember lines. No, she's not pricey, not since she was barracked at a personal appearance."

Walter relaxed, and began piercing another cigar with care.

"There's a passage in the book," I piped, "that's going to take a bit of getting over . . ."

I paused for the interruption, but to my surprise none came. Mr. Zooniman lay back and looked up at the ceiling. Walter, his cigar canted rakishly, slowly massaged his chin with the palm of one hand.

"It's going to be difficult," I went on, encouraged, "to establish that Pennimore did the first killing; he's the only one that knows, and if *he* gets bumped off before he's told anybody the audience won't get it."

They appeared to consider this. Then Mr. Zooniman said, "If we *bought* the horses . . ." He did not finish, but slightly raised an eyebrow at Walter, who nodded almost imperceptibly. "You're thinking what I'm thinking," he said.

"And we needn't worry about the extras either," went on Mr. Zooniman, "because I learnt my lesson when I made *The Inhuman Race*. We hired Kempton Park for that, with seven hundred extras lining the rails, and all we got on the screen was a blur."

"So what?" said Walter.

"So cardboard cut-outs, that's what."

"Ah-h-h," said Walter, seeing a great light. He sat up in his chair and stretched his well-covered shoulders forward with a slight grunt. "And you can't beat it for suspense."

"It's psychological," agreed Mr. Zooniman. "And as for rolling the track—hasn't anybody ever thought of coconut-matting?"

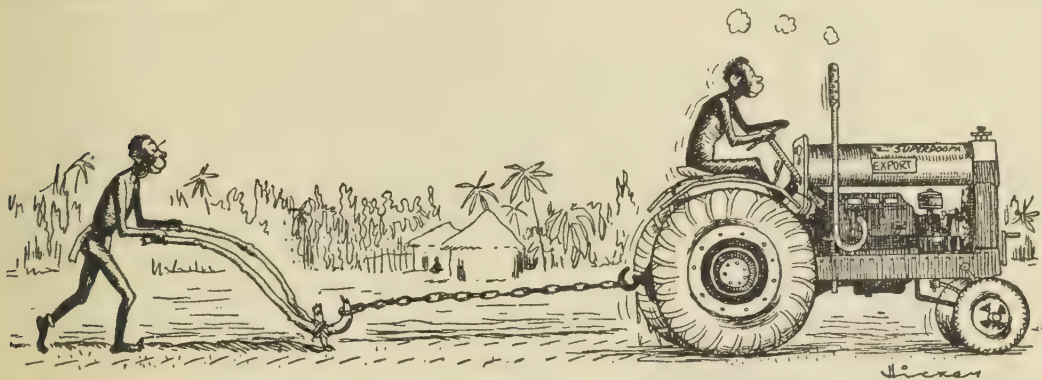
Walter snapped his fingers.

"Cheese!" he said.

"We should want—let's see—say, half a mile, and about, what, sixty feet wide?"

"I'll tell the art department," Walter said.

"And what," said Mr. Zooniman, leering affectionately at me—"what do our young scribes think?"



“Well,” I said, “if you’re going to take the horse-racing sequences out——”

Walter got up and put his hat on. He took up the copy of *Hearts on Toast*. “Good title,” he said judiciously. “I suppose I’d better read it now.”

“It’s a horse-racing *story*, after all,” said Mr. Zooniman. “Anybody can see that.”

“But that’s what I’ve been saying,” I said, as Mr. Zooniman opened the heavy walnut door.

They both turned on me a gaze of mingled amusement and forbearance, and Walter, in accents only slightly less disparaging than those he reserved for the front office, said with a shake of the head: “Writers.”

“Bless their little hearts,” said Mr. Zooniman, pushing me genially out into the corridor.

### SOLID SILVER CUP

Mummy! Mummy, is tea ready yet? Mummy, I’m going to win a cup: a *solid silver* cup. It’s a new one, nobody’s ever won it yet—only a little one, but *solid silver*, and the others, the big ones, are only *plated silver*. Well, it’s for behaviour, and always being polite, and having good manners, and all that sort of thing—you see you don’t have to *know* anything, so everyone starts on the same level, so I should think I should *very probably* win it, wouldn’t you, Mummy? *Why* don’t you think I should *very probably* win it? *Why* don’t you think I should? Mummy, I *am* always polite—well, I mean I *can* be if I try to win a cup: I don’t see why I *very probably* shouldn’t.

Christopher said *he* would *very probably* win it, so when he’d pushed me off the pavement twice he remembered Miss Bickley might see and he stopped; and I’d only sloshed him *once*, Mummy, so if she did see I don’t suppose it would count, do you? I mean, just to slosh your own brother *once*.



"NINE NINE EIGHT! WELL, LOOK HERE—I WONDER IF YOU'D MIND NIPPING NEXT DOOR AND TELLING THEM MY HOUSE IS BEING BURGLED?"

Martin said *he* hadn't pushed or sloshed anyone yet, so very probably *he* would win it. He couldn't slosh Hilary because she was away because she had a temperature yesterday and their mother said she couldn't come to-day. Mummy, she was *quite well* to-day but she couldn't come because she wasn't quite well *yesterday*. Why couldn't she come when she was quite well to-day and only not quite well yesterday? Why? Mummy, could we have tea soon, please?

Mummy, we had a good idea, Christopher and me, and the good idea was to go and see Hilary because she didn't like having to stay in when she was quite well, and then we could tell Miss Bickley we went to see her and it might be counted *considerate*, because that was one of the things we had to be she said; and Martin said it wasn't fair because Miss Bickley would never think it was considerate for him to go and see his own sister when he had to be there

anyway, and we said it *was* fair because it wasn't fair he hadn't had Hilary there to slosh so he hadn't pushed or sloshed anyone yet, so then we should *all* be fair: anyway, if Miss Bickley had seen us. Don't you *see*, Mummy? Well, I can't explain it all over again. And anyway Martin had a new stamp to show us that his uncle sent him from South Africa.

Well, we couldn't really *play* anything with Hilary because when we got there she was being an electric eel, so we should have been killed if she'd happened to touch us. So we played dominoes without her. *No*, Mummy, nothing to do with threes and fives or any black dots. What you do is, you stand them all up on the *thin* end, not very far apart but not close against one another, and make them go *round corners*—well, you needn't make them go round corners, but it's much more interesting than a straight line—and then you say "One—two—three—DOWN!" and give the end one a gentle little push and they all are *swept* down, like grass blowing over sideways. Well, Mummy, I was the Captain because I thought of dominoes first, and *I* had to say "One—two—three—DOWN!" But Martin said they were *his* dominoes, so he was the King and the King was over the Captain. And then Christopher *very meanly*, Mummy, just *pushed* them, without being anything at all. So I sloshed Christopher and so did Martin slosh him, and Hilary asked Christopher if he'd like her to sting us to death, and their mother came in just then and said it was time for their tea and who was being massacred. Mummy, *massacred* is a nice-sounding word, isn't it? *Massacred*.

Mummy, did you know, if you have a match and you want to blow it out and you have a water-pistol but no water in it, you can *blow out* the match just with the air out of the pistol? Did you? It's a useful sort of thing to know, isn't it? Mummy, is tea nearly ready now? If Christopher pushes me off the pavement *once more* I shan't slosh him, I shall just *not tell him* about matches and a water-pistol, because I don't suppose he's ever thought of it, and I shall tell him I'm not telling him something, but not slosh him—anyway not till we get home because in case Miss Bickley sees us, and you know—the Cup!

### IT'S FUNNY THE WAY THINGS HAPPEN

It now seems a reasonably safe bet that my outdoor tomatoes are not going to ripen after all, and I would like to take this opportunity to exchange condolences with all who are similarly placed. I would also like to explain that I grow tomatoes because my wife's brother's name is Alec.

The connection may not be immediately obvious. At the time of Alec's baptism in 1911, there existed two strong schools of thought about what his name should be, one school of thought (Uncle George) maintaining the child should be named George, the other school of thought (Uncle Alec) consistently advancing the claims of Alec. Uncle Alec won on a show of hands and Uncle George at once went abroad in a fit of pique lasting three years.

During Uncle George's absence on pique his house, which he left untenanted, fell into serious disrepair. The roof leaked badly—always a noticeable sign of serious disrepair—and what it leaked on to was the grand piano. This was fortunate in one way—the piano intercepted and absorbed the water as it



"ARE YOU THE MAITRE-D'HÔTEL THAT THIS IS A LA?"

leaked, and the floor was thus saved from damage. But it cannot be overlooked that the piano depreciated steadily in value, as did its contents; for Uncle George, after many futile attempts to learn to play the piano, had finally given it up as a bad job, and used the instrument as a repository for minor valuables.

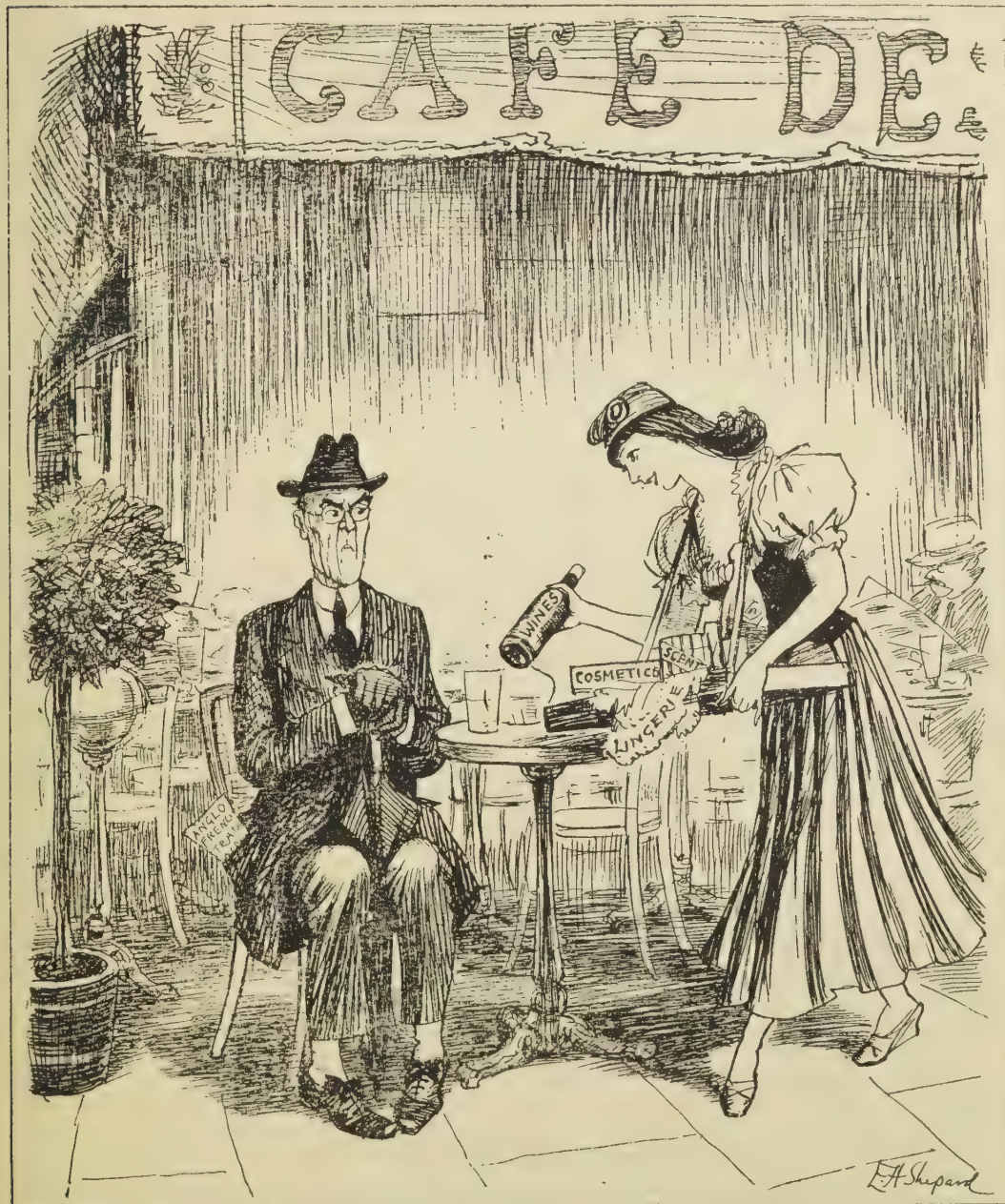
Included among these minor valuables was a book called *The Pickwick Papers*, although the actual title has nothing to do with my tomatoes. Across the flyleaf of this book was written "Edward L. Kemperton." Edward L. Kemperton was sorry to hear of Uncle George's departure for foreign lands, as he wanted to read *The Pickwick Papers* again, and was hoping that Uncle George might be persuaded to return it to him. However, he possessed his soul in patience until Uncle George's fit of pique had spent itself. When Uncle George had been back in residence twenty-four hours Edward L. Kemperton went to see him and, after the conventional inquiries, asked if he had finished with his book yet.

This placed Uncle George in a very awkward spot indeed, for the book had been reduced to pulp, as would happen to any book, no matter what its title might be, if it had spent slightly more than a year inside a grand piano awash with rain-water. Uncle George, playing for time, said he had not yet had a chance to read it, but promised to return it in one week. He spent his week of grace scouring the second-hand bookshops for an edition of *The Pickwick Papers* similar to that ruined by his negligence. His search was rewarded, and after some practice on the backs of old envelopes he succeeded in forging "Edward L. Kemperton" across the flyleaf. He then posted the book to Edward L. Kemperton with many expressions of gratitude.

Edward L. Kemperton was not in the least deceived, mainly because he had written his name in ink and Uncle George had written it in pencil. Further investigation revealed that the flyleaf already bore another name—the name, in fact, of one Lilian Smith. Edward L. Kemperton at once concluded that Lilian Smith was yet another victim of Uncle George's casual habits with borrowed property, and he therefore resolved to restore the book to her—a gesture of some nobility, as it would leave him without a copy of *The Pickwick Papers*. He ascertained Lilian Smith's address—no difficult task, as it was written below her name on the flyleaf—called on her, and explained his mission.

Lilian Smith, who was bitterly ashamed of having sold her book to a second-hand shop, did not enlighten him. Instead, she offered Edward L. Kemperton tea and muffins. Within a week Edward L. Kemperton was calling daily for tea and muffins, and within a year Lilian Smith was Lilian Smith no longer, but rather Lilian Kemperton.

One of the features of the wedding was a large and hideous floral horse-shoe in which the happy couple stood to receive felicitations. It was supplied by a local florist, and to get it done in time, he had to keep his staff at work until almost midnight on the eve of the wedding. His staff included—or rather comprised—an innocent and beautiful young girl who was supposed to be going to the pictures with



A DIFFICULT CUSTOMER



her sweetheart at seven-thirty. At nine-fifteen her sweetheart, through with women, swept out of the cinema foyer and swept into a public-house in a hell of a temper. Standing next to him at the bar was a middle-aged man of seafaring aspect. A casual remark—its exact purpose is neither here nor there—served as an introduction, and at first light the following morning the chief mate of the *Camberwell Beauty* was astounded to notice among the hands mustered on the f'c's'le . . .

But I am getting away from my tomatoes. I casually mentioned to my brother-in-law Alec that I had half a mind to try my hand at outdoor tomatoes this year.

"I'll give you a dozen plants for your birthday," he said.

"I say, will you really?" I said.

"Certainly I will," he said, "sure as my name's Alec."

And, as his name was Alec, he did.

## TAKING CARE OF THE VOCAL

*I'll be yours forever.*

Yes, it's you I'm singing at; you with the baton, Mr. Clever.

*I'll be yours—*

Not that you care—all you want is admiring applause.

*I'll be true,*

But look at me—*just look at me!*—you big lug, you.

*I'll be waiting in the twilight*

While the mauve spotlight dazzles me, and that fog of smoke sails up to the skylight.

*With one star—*

And Harry Blitz half-cut again, judging by the occasional sour notes from that guitar.

*Breaking through—*

Still, he's no worse than the rest of your seedy crew.

*I'll be there to give my kisses*

And I don't mean that bright peck you occasionally aim at my cheek, which as often as not it misses.

*When you smile—*

(My stockings are wrinkled; that's the worst of lisle.)

*When you cry;*

I shall go straight home and have supper all by myself and finish up the pork pie.

*And we'll build a little nest*

It'll be good to get out of these glad rags—this diamanté orchid is prickly on my chest.

*In the sweet—*

(My stockings are bunching up underneath my feet.)

*By and by*

I shall take four aspirins and say "To hell with you" . . . Well, anyway, I'll try.

*When it's Springtime on the prairie*

Wonder if I'll be early enough to get half a pint of milk from the Dairy?

*And the bluebirds sing*

Then I'll have a nice saucepan of cocoa on the ring.

*We'll be sweethearts, darling—*

If only I can keep going for another seven foxtrots, four quicksteps and two sambas without actually snarling . . .

*In the Spring*

And that's polished off *that* stupid little thing!

## A SURFEIT OF DOCTORS

The normal state of woman is to be distraught. It is comforting to be told this fairly often, so that when you fear you are mad you can hope you are only being too average.

No normal distraught woman would want her husband to have influenza, but it was a consolation that he should be the first to fall, and this not just because he would be convalescent in the family's darkest hour. His health would be built up by the simple exercise of running up and down the stairs every few minutes with nourishing drinks for us all and cutting-out games and plates of jelly for the children. But apart from all this unselfish service, he would at last be able to use his public doctor. The children are not registered at all because their doctor is so good with children but not national, so there is an extra sting if they are ill.

Even my husband was a little pleased that he was burning and aching free, and Doctor A, when he came, was just as kind and triumphant as doctors always are when they find a healthy happy man temporarily condemned to being a sad invalid.

The two children went down next, a little too early, if my husband's convalescence was to be really useful, and Doctor B came, and was kind and unalarming as good doctors always are with children. The maid, who is called Miss Jennings in case the other title should offend, collapsed the next day, a plate of jelly in each hand. I put her in bed, took my husband's temperature in the doomed hope that he was already convalescent, and sent for Miss Jennings' doctor, who is not ours, because she was on his panel before. I then began to move rapidly towards the average I mentioned at the beginning.

My husband's Doctor A arrived at the door just as the children's Doctor B was mounting the stairs. Miss Jennings' very busy Doctor C leapt out of his car and

puffed up the garden path just in time, he must have thought, to observe another doctor slip through in front of him and slam the door in his face. He pressed the bell, not briefly.

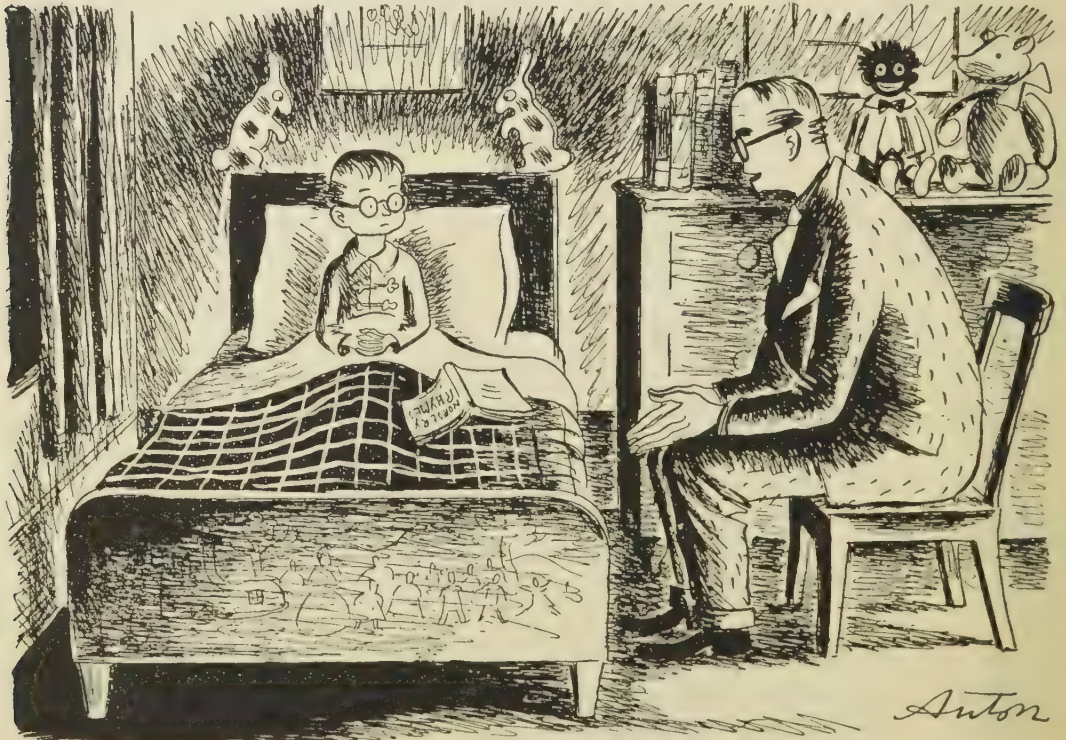
"The grocer, the gasman, the window-cleaner," I murmured to Doctor A. "Perhaps you could find your own way up?"

I went to the door and admitted Doctor C. While I was leading him upstairs, Doctor A, almost a stranger to the house, had stumbled into the children's bedroom, bounced off Doctor B and his stethoscope, and retreated to the landing with a very professional expression.

"Oh, Doctor A, this is Doctor C," I said, as graciously as possible, picking a plate of jelly from the floor. "I do hope you don't get your patients mixed. This is Miss Jennings' room," I added wildly, pushing Doctor C into my husband's bedroom.

"Perhaps it is unnecessary for me . . ." Doctor A began.

"No, no," I said, putting the jelly down on the floor again and plucking Doctor



" . . . AND MRS. JACK SPRAT, OF COURSE, WAS MERELY ENDEAVOURING TO CORRECT A VITAMIN B DEFICIENCY."

C out of my husband's room. "Miss Jennings is here, Doctor C. My husband's temperature is rising, Doctor A, Miss Jennings is quite ill, Doctor C. Do ask me if you want anything. I must just see what Doctor B has to say about the children."

Doctor B was already leaving the children's room, his face set in polite unconcern. He said "Good morning" to us all, stepped on the jelly, pressed an unnationalized prescription into my hand, and went downstairs. A few minutes later I had Doctor A's nationalized prescription, and shortly afterwards the wonderful happiness of leading Doctor C downstairs, where both Doctor A and Doctor B were politely waiting for him to move his car and let them go.

I climbed upstairs again, fanning myself with prescriptions. I went to my husband first.

"Darling," I said anxiously, "are you convalescent? Because I feel shivery already."

"You registered with that woman doctor, didn't you?" he asked me.

It was then I clung to the hope that I was merely being excessively average.

## BALLADE OF UTTER INDIFFERENCE

The Press proclaims its dismal tale  
 Of darkness and catastrophe,  
 Uniting in concerted wail  
 Of universal misery.  
 Here they and I part company;  
 And so I should, perhaps, explain  
 My individual policy—  
 I'm going back to bed again.

Let others seek their Holy Grail,  
 Let others bang their tympani,  
 At any rate I shall not fail  
 To play my part consistently.  
 From pride and vain ambition free,  
 Remote from worldly stress and strain,  
 A credit to my pedigree,  
 I'm going back to bed again.

Well-meaning friends cannot avail;  
 My ears are deaf to every plea;  
 I don't care if I end in gaol;  
 I don't care if the T.U.C.

Denounce me as an Absentee . . .  
 They've taken off the counterpane,  
 My pipe is drawing pleasantly;  
 I'm going back to bed again.

*Envoi*

Prince, have you made that cup of tea?  
 What? *Woman Levitates In Train?*  
 Such incidents are not for me . . .  
 I'm going back to bed again.

NO PERFORMANCE ON CHRISTMAS DAY

It is in a sense the Child's Christmas Party. Uncle Henry, Aunt Joyce, Uncle Rupert and Aunt Caroline—it is because of the child that they have all been invited. What hunting and searching there has been in the stores for weeks beforehand! "It's so difficult to find anything that he isn't sure to have already."  
 But in the end it has somehow been done.

Uncle Henry has found the very thing—a bulldozer, a real true-to-life bulldozer, which works. It worked in the shop and it worked when he tried it out one evening in his dressing-room, on an evening when Aunt Joyce was out playing bridge.

Uncle Rupert has found the very thing too—a dredging-machine, which really dredges. He had always wanted to know how a dredging-machine worked and now the kind shopman has shown him. He, too, has tried it out one night at home, just to make sure. It made rather a mess on the carpet.

And here they all are, arriving on Christmas Eve. What winking and shuffling and tip-toeing upstairs! Upstairs, what moving of chairs and climbing on to them, to hide the presents on top of wardrobes!

Risky, if you are the size of Uncle Rupert.

But you can't be too careful. The child might get into a bedroom and find its present before Christmas morning. Which would be disaster indeed.

And here after tea on Christmas Eve is the child itself.

Uncle Henry asks the critical question:

"Had a lot of Christmas presents, old boy?"

What tension, as the child's answer is anticipated!

The child says "I got a pocket in my trousers."

It evidently does not understand. So the question is asked again.

Again the child says with pride, "I got a pocket in my trousers."

It demonstrates the fact, extracting from it seven chestnuts. It holds them up with pride and satisfaction.

"Cheshunts," it says.

"Chestnuts," Uncle Rupert corrects it. Uncle Rupert is a pedagogue and very good at correcting young people.

"Cheshunts," the child says firmly.

"How many?" Uncle Henry asks. He is a banker, and figures interest him.

The child says "Five."

Uncle Henry is shocked.

He takes one chestnut and asks "How many?"

The child says "Five."

Uncle Henry very firmly says "One."

"One," the child repeats with interest.

Uncle Henry takes a second chestnut and now holds two in his hand. He asks "How many?"

"Five," the child says with assurance.

Uncle Henry sighs, and decides to start again. He holds out one chestnut and says "How many?"

The child very firmly says "Five."

Its mother decides that it is the child's bedtime.

\* \* \*

And now it is Christmas morning and the presents are piled on the breakfast table. The child's is naturally the biggest pile of all.

The child is elated. It starts, very slowly, to undo the knot of the first parcel.

The suspense is unendurable.

Uncle Henry, whose nerves break down first, says "Let Uncle Henry cut it with a knife, old boy."

The child protests at the idea; it is very near to tears.

Its mother explains that it has a passion for string.

It is all too clear, as time goes on, that the child is far more interested in untying the parcels than in finding what is inside them.

Uncle Henry and Uncle Rupert do their best to hide their dis-



"MIND YOU, THE DUCK WAS EXCELLENT!"

appointment. It looks as if they are not going to have a chance of playing with their toys, no chance at all.

\* \* \* \* \*

The mother knows all too well that her child is a spoilt child and hopes that nobody notices at lunch that there is not quite as much chestnut stuffing in the turkey as there would be if she dared remove from the child the seven chestnuts which it took on the previous afternoon from the kitchen table.

\* \* \* \* \*

Christmas Day, after tea. The child's father, under instruction from the child, has spent the afternoon boring holes in the chestnuts. The child has divided its string neatly into seven equal pieces and has tied a piece of string to each of the seven chestnuts.

It is Father Christmas, and the seven chestnuts are reindeer.

After which it is fishing, and the seven chestnuts are fish.

And then they become people. A fat one, bursting at the seams, is Uncle Rupert. A scraggy one is Uncle Henry. Another is Aunt Joyce, another Aunt Caroline. Two are Mummy and Daddy. And the seventh is the child itself.

The chestnut which is Uncle Rupert is a hundred and fifty years old.

The mother shivers with apprehension. There are still ten minutes to go before the child's bed-time.

If only it could be interested in bulldozing or dredging.

It can't. It hasn't the imagination. Or it has far too much.

In vain does Uncle Henry demonstrate the working of the bulldozer.

In vain does Uncle Rupert demonstrate the working of the dredger.

The child is now using the chestnut which is itself to chastize the chestnut which is Uncle Rupert. "Silly Uncle Rupert," it exclaims gleefully, with each blow.

The mother sighs.

Uncle Rupert, after all, is very rich, and has no children.

Uncle Henry is very rich, too; and he has no children either.

\* \* \* \* \*

After breakfast on Boxing Day the guests leave; Uncle Rupert and Aunt Caroline in one car, Uncle Henry and Aunt Joyce in another.

Uncle Rupert is still feeling very sore about being denied the chance of playing with the dredger. It is the fault of the child's parents, he says bitterly. If they don't give it toys and teach it how to play with them, how can it learn anything?

At the same time Uncle Henry in another car is remembering sadly how much he had to pay for the bulldozer.

With the keen business sense of a skilful banker he asks "How much do chestnuts cost?"

Aunt Joyce tells him.

"I suppose one can always get them?" he asks. . . .

And the child?

It has forgotten about the chestnuts, forty-eight hours being, in its view, a long enough time for remembering anything. And now, free from interfering uncles and aunts, master at last of its own fate, it is alone in its nursery, happily dredging and bulldozing. And its mother, who has sighed a lot in the previous forty-eight hours, sighs again and sighs heavily. She will write at once to Uncle Rupert and to Uncle Henry to tell them of the child's delight in its Christmas presents. But she knows already it will be no use. They will never believe her.

### THE OLD STORY

It was an ancient wife, as black as pitch,  
 Wrinkled like bog-oak, wandering of eye;  
 She sat at morning in a reedy ditch  
 And told me stories while the world rolled by.

And I was weary of her dismal tales,  
 But sheer politeness kept me rooted there;  
 The people are so courteous in Wales,  
 I could not move; I did not even swear.

Over my boots the liquid mud went squelch,  
 Upon my head perched little forest birds;  
 If she had spoken other tongue but Welsh  
 I might perhaps have understood her words.

It was, maybe, some tale of Caradoc  
 Or of some battle fought in ancient days;  
 Or did she tell me how to knit a sock,  
 Or cook a trout a dozen different ways?

Or was it of the Saxon that she spoke,  
 Grim tale of conquest and of tyrant rule?  
 Or was she just describing how she broke  
 A copper warming-pan, or tamed a mule?

I weep for sorrow that I do not know  
 The Cymric tongue, that sounds so strange to me.  
 It was a story told me long ago;  
 Long was the tale; and I was late for tea.





## THE TRAGIC MUSE

"And what part are *you* playing, Joan dear?"

But at that the free flow of information would cease abruptly; there was a shake of the head and a cryptic smile, and no other answer to be had. It must, we realized, be a pretty considerable part; Joan's conversation had for weeks been of nothing but the school production of *Macbeth*, and it was clear that she associated herself closely with the play's fortunes. Yet we couldn't easily see her as either a Dead Butcher or a Fiend-like Queen; nor was she a noticeably Weird Sister type, or even one of Nature's Drunken Porters. Ah, well, time would show.

Time did show in the end with an unexpected suddenness. She had just said "Good night," and was about to leave us in the normal way, when it apparently struck her that that was rather a tame exit line for an actress of her quality—or it may be that she felt an overwhelming impulse to give us a foretaste of the glories to come. Anyway, as she reached the door she turned, thrust her right hand

magnificently in front of her, and in a ringing soprano, "Our duties," she cried, "and the pledge!"

"'Our duties,'" I murmured, reflectively, as the last echoes of the door died away, "'and the pledge.' You know, I don't feel that comes in one of Macbeth's own big speeches."

"And I can't say I remember it in the sleep-walking scene," said Rachel.

"The porter? Could it be the porter?"

"I don't think the porter says much about the pledge, dear," said Rachel.

"I've an awful idea," I said after a short silence. "'Our duties, and the pledge.' Doesn't it strike you that that's just the sort of remark that might have been made by Ross?"

"Unless it was Lennox."

"Or Caithness, even?"

"Or Angus."

There was another silence.

"I think it's worse than that," I said. "I don't like that 'our'—there's a sinister plurality to it. Doesn't that sound to you like *All*?"

"There's nothing for it," said Rachel. "You must look it up."

I got the Works from the shelf, and ten minutes later I grunted.

"Well?" she asked. "Is it *All*?"

"Pretty near it. It's Lords."

"Lords." Rachel sighed.

"Ah, well, I expect they'll dress the dear child very nicely."

Our deduction was confirmed the next day by Joan herself, who realized apparently that she had given away more than she intended and that the time for unqualified candour had come. It was a delicate moment, but we assured her (*a*) that schools were notorious for giving the best actors the worst parts, and (*b*) that the best actors were usually the most objectionable people anyway; and when I admitted to having been *A Citizen*



"HULLO! THERE'S BUTTERWICK."

in *Julius Cæsar* and Rachel recalled an utterly mythical Fourth Gentlewoman from *King Henry the Sixth*, Part III, her happiness was restored completely. From then onwards all the behind-the-scenes secrets were ours, from Macbeth's prowess at inside-left to the conceit and universal unpopularity of Caithness.

We felt a little wistful none the less on the night, as scene after scene went by without a chirrup from the one actress we had come to see. We thought that at least she might have been given the Old Man ("After all, dear, she has you to study," said Rachel, with what I considered unnecessary loudness), and why the frankly loathsome Caithness had ever been preferred to her we simply couldn't imagine. But we agreed that anyway she was far and away the sweetest chieftain in Forres, and when Act III, Scene 4 came, the parents of Banquo's Ghost herself could not have felt a keener anticipatory pride. Then at last, after an almost intolerable tension, the great moment arrived.

"Would he were here!" cried Macbeth. "To all, and him, we thirst, and all to all!" she somewhat mysteriously added.

Together the martial nobles sprang to their feet, the brimming goblets clashed, and in sonorous unison the splendid line rang out:

*"Our duties, and the pledge!"*

The effect was tremendous; the whole audience thrilled to the sound. But there had been something wrong.

"That was lovely, dear," we said as Joan met us afterwards outside her cloak-room. "There was only one thing I didn't understand," I went on. "Why didn't you join in when they said that bit about the pledge?"

A very red face looked up at me.

"Oh, did you *notice*? Well, I did all through the rehearsals, but yesterday Miss Stevens told me I had to keep my mouth shut, because she said—she said I *shouted* too much."

The corners of her mouth suddenly dropped; and breaking away from us the stern Gaelic chieftain tore madly ahead up the dark road homewards.

*January, 1949*

THE SLAUGHTER OF AN INNOCENT

I MUST admit that he said he did not want a policy, even a fine policy such as the one I offered him. He said, quite clearly, that he did not want a policy; but I, schooled in all the arts of salesmanship, said that he did not know his own mind.

"Very well," he said, "you may start filling up the form."

I was stunned. I had had more trouble persuading myself to take out a policy. Nor did I notice anything sinister in the wording of his capitulation.

He gave me a chair at the table while he himself relaxed into an arm-chair, lit his pipe, and seemed to settle himself in for the evening. His wife sat in the other arm-chair and took up her knitting. She had finished about six inches of a scarf.

"What," I asked briskly, "is your full name?"

"Well," he said slowly—he spoke very slowly the whole time—"that's rather difficult. It so happens that my Christian names are rather muddled. I have two Christian names on my birth certificate and three Christian names on my baptismal certificate. The extra name on my baptismal certificate is Charles, and actually everybody calls me Charlie, so that's the name I'm known by more than any other. My wife always calls me Charlie, don't you, dear?"

"Yes, Charlie," she said.

"What is the name you usually use on legal documents?" I asked.

"Well, I've never really bothered much," he said, as though communing with himself. "Sometimes I put the Charlie in and sometimes I leave it out. But in this case I want to get it right. With an insurance policy one can't be too careful. If I die I don't want them to say it was somebody else who died, do I, dear?"

"No, Charlie," she said. The scarf was already appreciably longer.

It was some time before I could quieten his fears on this score. Even then he could not make up his mind. First I put in the Charles, then he asked me to leave it out, and then he told me to include it after all. Finally, with a light laugh which had just the hint of a rattle in it I tore up the form and brought out a new one. I filled in his name and address, reading out the latter as I wrote it.

"Oh, dear," he said, when I had finished. "Did you write down this address?"

"Yes," I said.

"That's a pity," he said, "isn't it, dear?"

"Yes, Charlie," she said. The scarf was now as long as it was wide.

"Why," I asked, "is that a pity?"

"Well, we are going to move to Pretoria next month and I want everything to be addressed to our new place. Would you mind altering it?"

"Not at all," I said with a laugh that sounded like a dry cough.

I tore the form up and brought out a third. When I had reached the address I looked at him expectantly. Huge corrugations had appeared between his eyes. I could see that he was thinking deeply.

"Yes?" I said.

"Now, isn't that silly of me?" he mused. "I've completely forgotten the number of our new house. Can you remember the number, dear?"

"No, Charlie," she said.

"Well," he continued, still apparently ransacking his brains, "I suppose you had better use this address for the time being. We can always change it later."

I wrote down the same address for the second time. I did not laugh in any way any more.

"And now," I said, fear clutching at my heart, "how old are you?"

He looked enigmatic. "I am in my thirty-ninth year."

I wrote down thirty-nine and then paused.

"Does that mean," I swallowed, "that you are thirty-eight?"

"Naturally," he said, as if surprised at my ignorance.

"Would you mind initialing the alteration?" I said, holding out the proposal form with a trembling hand.

"Wouldn't it be better to start a new form?" he said.

"I have only one more form."

"Only one more? That's not many, is it?"

"What is your occupation?" I continued.

"I'm a teacher."

I hesitated

"You teach at a school?"

I asked. I was determined not to be caught this time.



"HE SAYS HE FOUND IT IN THE ATTIC."

"Yes."

"At an ordinary school for ordinary boys?"

"Oh, yes."

I did not see how there could be any ambiguity here. Resolutely I wrote down his occupation.

"You didn't call me a teacher, did you?" he asked suddenly, when I had finished.

"Yes, I did," I said, without moving my lips.

"I hate being called a teacher. Couldn't you alter it to schoolmaster? A teacher is so often a figure of fun, whereas a schoolmaster has some status, hasn't he, dear?"

"Yes, Charlie," she said. The scarf was now longer than it was wide.

"It doesn't really matter on a form like this," I said.

"Well, it may seem a small point to you, but I'd be much obliged if you altered it."

I altered it.

"How do you want to pay your premiums?" I asked.

"Oh, monthly," he said, immediately. "It's so much more convenient."

I pretended to write it down: he could not see the form from where he sat.

"Wait a bit, though," he said, when he thought I had finished. "Isn't it much cheaper if one pays annually?"

"Yes, one does save quite a bit," I said with some equanimity.

"Well, I'll pay annually then, if you don't mind. I'm sorry you have to make another alteration. Perhaps you had better start a new form."

"No, it's all right," I said. "I have not written in anything yet."

For the first time since we had sat down our eyes met, but his were expressionless.

"Now," I said, feeling slightly better, "what was your last illness?"

"Well, we don't rightly know what it was. It was only the other night. I suddenly got the shivers, like an ague or fever. I lost all control of my limbs. I lay there twitching and jerking. I must have been a horrible sight. We still don't know what it was, do we, dear?"

"No, Charlie," she said. The scarf was now big enough to gag her with.

"I remember my wife saying to me, 'I wonder what it is, Charlie?'"

"What did the doctor say about it?" I asked with my eyes on the carpet.

"Oh, we didn't have a doctor. I don't believe in doctors unless I am very ill. That wasn't much, probably just a slight chill."

"Not a fever?"

"Well, a kind of feverish chill, if you know what I mean."

"No, I don't know what you mean."

"Well, if you had seen me you would understand. It's very difficult to explain."

"So I gather," I said, for quite rightly I no longer felt like a salesman.

"Tell me," I resumed, "what was the last illness for which you saw a doctor?"

"Heart failure."



“ . . . AND IF YOU REALLY WANT TO HEAR IT SWEAR, JUST PUT THE COVER OVER IT.”

“Heart failure?”

“Yes, not proper heart failure; it just fluttered. I’ve got a systolic murmur of the heart,” he added with relish.

“You have?”

“Yes, if you keep quiet for a moment you will hear it.”

Silence fell. I craned forward and listened intently.

“I can’t hear anything,” I said.

“You would if you were used to it like we are. Did you hear it, dear?”

“Yes, Charlie,” she said. The scarf was now big enough to strangle her with.

“If you have heart trouble it will be difficult to insure you.”

“Oh, don’t say that. I’m beginning to feel really good about this policy.”

“What doctor attended you for your heart trouble?”

“Dr. Plaistowe.”

Thrown off my guard by all the clinical details, I wrote it down. He began to make wet noises with his tongue.

“I’ve given you the wrong name. Dr. Plaistowe treated me for my lungs and kidneys. Dr. Turner is my heart man.”

"Have you a stomach man?" I inquired, screwing on the top of my pen.

"No, my stomach has not troubled me for some time. You see, I seldom eat anything, do I, dear?"

"No, Dick—I mean, Charlie," she said.

I rose with what dignity I had left and tore the form to pieces.

"Thank you for the nice evening," said the *tricoteuse*, as I went.

## TRULY MURAL

Hazlitt, like a later distinguished writer, thought highly of painting. He found it soothing, among other things. "No angry passions rise," he said, "to disturb the silent progress of the work, to shake the hand, to dim the brow: no irritable humours are set afloat." But his two essays on the subject make no mention of painting on walls from a child's paint-box, leaning steeply on the arm of an easy-chair. It was left to me to try this.

The moon is easy; the stars more difficult, especially when the body or nub, upon which the delicate, toast-like triangles are based, is of the irregular shape produced when a lump of plastic wood, worm-fashioned, has been rammed into a hole in the plaster and its tail splodged flat. It is because of the plastic wood that I am painting the moon and stars this morning—or, rather, because of the holes in the wall; or, at any rate, because of the curtain that was to have gone up on the wire intended to be stretched between the screw-eyes that should have been where the holes in the wall now are . . . or, to give you the position at a glance, I should perhaps blame the builder, who, despite many earnest promises, has not yet come to knock the wall down. If he had, there would naturally be no wall for me to paint the moon and stars on; and if he had only said outright that he never would, then we should have had a door put in the wall—there is a doorway already: you know these quaint old houses—instead of merely hanging a curtain to keep the draught out until he *did* come. To go right to the root of it—if I'd never bought the house . . .

However.

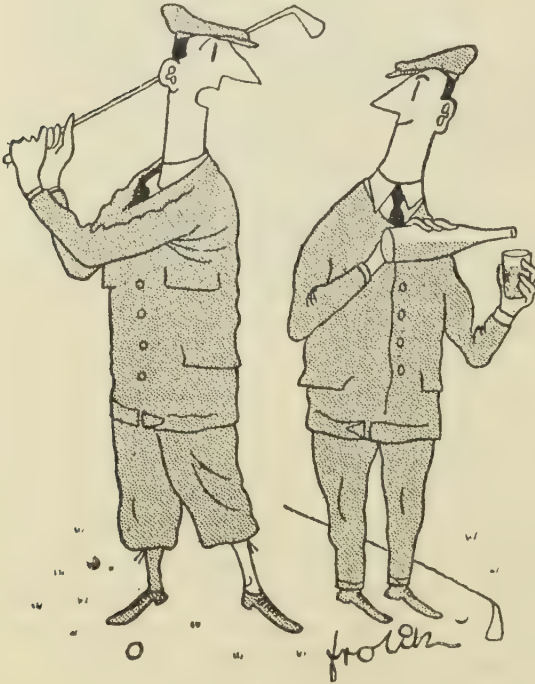
There has been some discussion lately on whether this is the best wall to knock down in order to enlarge our sitting-room. Knowledgeable friends have assured us that this one is holding the house up, and that the wall at right-angles to it would serve our purpose better. I quite see that it would be unwise to knock down the wall that is holding the house up, at any rate in one drastic operation. This morning I have just been knocking it down a little at a time.

I do not want you to think that we have been living all this time in a house with a (large, oblong) hole in the wall; the curtain has already been up, and only came down this week-end, and then only at one end. I was asleep at the time, but awoke when I heard the sharp report and sustained whirring; the curtain top had shut itself up tight, like a closed concertina, and a plaster-caked screw-eye vibrated giddily



against the ceiling. I did nothing at the time beyond brushing a little powdered dis-temper from my coat. This morning I am painting the moon and stars on the wall.

The motif came to me out of the blue. Earlier this morning I drove a number of holes in the plaster and pushed an equal number of wooden plugs through into the mysterious hollows beyond. They vanished, yet I did not hear them fall. Eerie. Then I stood back, wondering how the appearance of the wall could be improved; at that time it suggested an area of the Yukon goldfields after a series of rich strikes. An ordinary man would have filled the craters with plaster; but then an ordinary man would have had some plaster. I had to makeshift with plastic wood. I used a tin



"NO, THANKS—I'M DRIVING!"

of the stuff, rolling lumps into thin worms and popping them into the holes. They disappeared. I had not enough plastic wood to silt up the whole of the hollow right down to the floor, and fortunately, when I was nearing the bottom of the tin, I hit on the idea of making the worms fatter; they then wedged satisfactorily, and I splodged out their tails into those shapes so difficult to convert, under paint, into really persuasive stars. The biggest splodge was the easiest; it was roughly the shape of a moon, and it is within the bounds of possibility that this is how I got the idea of painting a moon over it; after that the stars came naturally. I was pleased with the idea. Art, it seemed to me, would conceal art. Our guests, confronted not with dark irregular splodges as if a tin of tomato soup had exploded near by, but with a section

of the firmament, would think it "sweet," would ask about it. "Well," I should say modestly, "as the builder was so long in coming to knock the wall down . . ."

I went to find the paints.

The six lozenges of pigment seemed at first to be all muddy red, but I scratched the lozenge labelled Chrome Yellow and found enough for several moons. That was an hour or two ago, and there is very little chrome yellow left now. Some of it is on my coat, some down my throat, some glistens and trickles down the wall. The moon and the stars do not look right, they hold no mirror up to Nature. The moon is not quite moon-shaped, owing to an irregularity in the ink-bottle round whose base I drew my first careful circle—as I thought; nor are the stars quite star-shaped: their

of the stuff, rolling lumps into thin worms and popping them into the holes. They disappeared. I had not enough plastic wood to silt up the whole of the hollow right down to the floor, and fortunately, when I was nearing the bottom of the tin, I hit on the idea of making the worms fatter; they then wedged satisfactorily, and I splodged out their tails into those shapes so difficult to convert, under paint, into really persuasive stars. The biggest splodge was the easiest; it was roughly the shape of a moon, and it is within the bounds of possibility that this is how I got the idea of painting a moon over it; after that the stars came naturally. I was pleased with the idea. Art, it seemed to me, would conceal art. Our guests, confronted not with dark irregular splodges as if a tin of tomato soup had exploded near by, but with a section



THE TROUBLES OF TITO

"I AM THE EVIL DEMON RUSSIA;  
I MEAN TO HOLDYER AND TO CRUSHYER."

"I AM THE SPIRIT OF THE WEST;  
MY FAIRY WAND WILL MAKE YOU BLEST."

pointed bits are squat, and chrome yellow runs from their tips in uneven streamers; nor is their colour convincing: plastic wood seems a poor foundation for inferior water-colour, so some are mud-coloured in the middle, while the middles of others are quite black and yawning, because in my anxiety to impose a thick layer of paint I have shoved the plastic worms, splodged tails and all, through into the mysterious hollows beyond.

Stepping down from the chair-arm I survey the effect judicially. It is hellish. My angry passions rise. My hand shakes. My brow dims. Irritable humours are set afloat. I seize the hanging, lopsided concertina of curtain and wrench it savagely. A divot of plaster falls on my head.

One thing is settled—this, after all, is the wall that will have to come down. And if such a pile of bread-crumbs is indeed holding up the house, and that comes down too, then (in my present mood) that will suit me perfectly.

### SITUATIONS VACANT

At East Finchley I had just finished reading the headlines of the *Daily Express* on my right and the *Financial Times* in the opposite corner, when a man in brown corduroys and a duffle coat got in and sat beside me.

"Remember me?" he said.

I said yes, but only vaguely.

"Must have been in the pre-Tribunal days," he said. "By the way, I was mixed up in a queer business last week. Did you notice my picture in the papers?"

I said no, I didn't think so.

"Of course, if you really want to study human nature," he said, "you should get a job in a cigarette-kiosk. Wheedling, threatening, cajoling, pleading, promises of turkeys and whisky for Christmas. Good racket, that 'under-the-counter-for-favourite-customers' business if you don't overdo it. Pity I overdid it."

"What about the queer business you were mixed up in?" I said.

"Don't talk to me," he said, "about Art for the People. When I was working in a public library my heart used to bleed for all authors. They pour out their souls and torture themselves in order to write books. Eventually the books reach the libraries; and then what happens? In comes the public and wanders around the shelves. 'That one's a bit too heavy to carry': 'What, no pictures?': 'Something that will fit into my shopping basket': 'What lovely red covers!' Public taste? I wouldn't wish it on a dog. Well, on behalf of the authors, I decided to meet the Philistines on their own level. Worked out my own private system of library fines for overdue books. Not much in it, of course, so I found a market for some of the stuff in the Reference Section. Nobody ever read it. Sold three sets of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* before I was rumbled. 'Disappointed,' they said. 'Promising young man—position of trust, etc., etc.' They were old editions, anyway."

By this time, I thought, playing with my propelling pencil, I have usually completed the easier anagrams in my crossword.

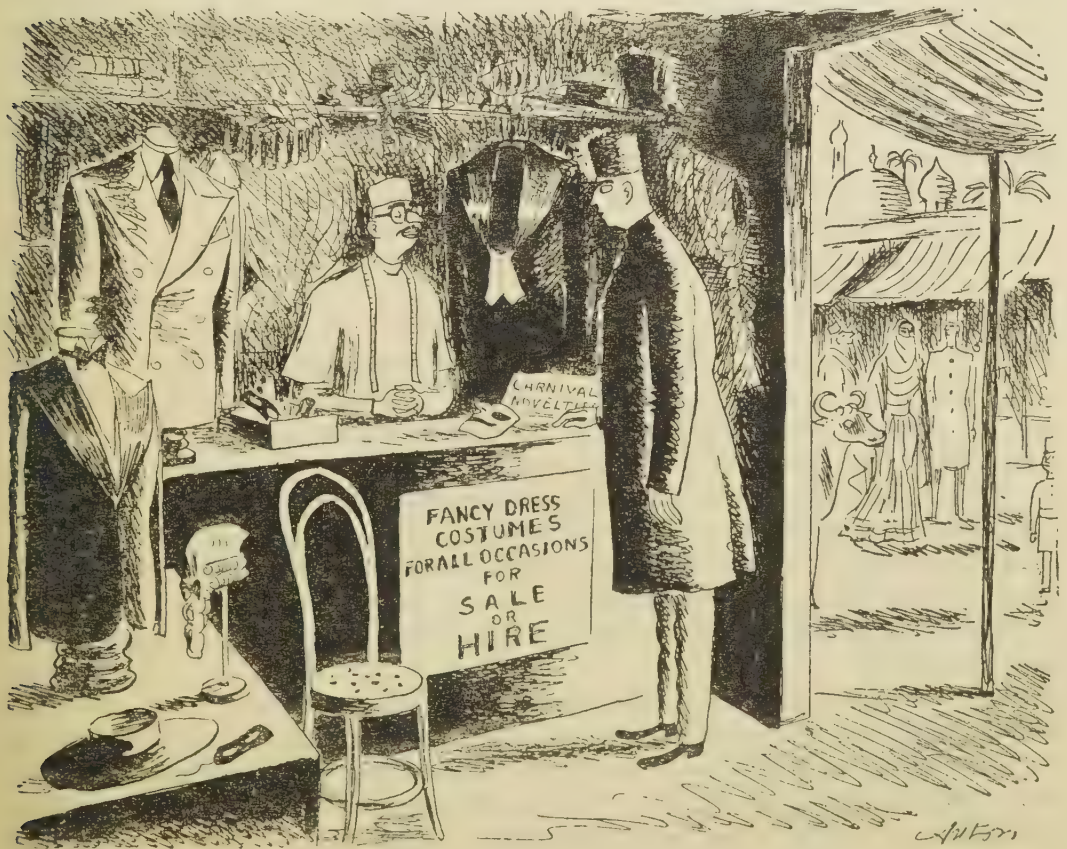
"As a matter of interest," he said, "did you know that there are more motor-car showrooms in Great Portland Street than in any other street in London? I did quite well there for a time. Used to sell expensive cars (less purchase tax) to rich foreigners. One adamant Greek insisted on immediate delivery. I took him round the corner and sold him a brand-new Studebaker on the spot, cash down. Told me I'd confirmed his faith in British business ability, got in and drove away. Trouble was, the car didn't belong to my firm. Some chap had parked it there while he was having a cup of tea. Talk about confusion!"

"Cigarette?" I said.

"Thanks," he said. "I never refuse. What was I talking about?"

"You were telling me how you overdid it in the cigarette-kiosk."

"Please, old chap. Now you've interrupted a perfectly good train of thought."



It occurred to me to point out that his train had been derailed long ago.

"Yes, of course," he said. "Just after leaving that amusement arcade."

"What amusement arcade?" I said.

"Didn't I explain about the amusement arcade?"

"No."

"My uncle," he said, "had a barber's shop in Torquay. It was only a short step from there to clipping and trimming pet dogs. All you need is a pair of clippers (my uncle didn't miss them), a notice which says, 'Poodles a Speciality. Six-hour service,' and an address. That's where my two pedigree bitches came in handy. Kept them in the back room and waited for the customers. Did a bit of breeding on the quiet. Some people will pay anything for a pedigree pup."

I replaced my propelling pencil and folded my paper so that I could no longer see the crossword.

"I don't quite see the connection with the amusement arcade," I said.

"I thought it was fairly obvious," he said. "Look at America. The land of salesmanship. 'How to buy and sell your grandmother in six easy lessons.' But, believe me, that's one thing you can carry too far. I worked on commission when I was an assistant in a men's wear shop, so it was up to me to sell all I could. One day I thought I'd experiment on a customer. Tried out the 'your-friends-will-laugh-if-they-see-you-dressed-like-that' approach. Told him quietly that I could fix him up with a new suit, as no self-respecting person would be seen dead in the clothes he was wearing. He was only the Head Office manager."

"I get out at Warren Street," I said. "What about you?"

He said: "After auctioneering ex-Government surplus in Petticoat Lane I tried a job as clapper-boy in a film studio, but I told you about that, didn't I?"

"Not a word," I said.

"You would have liked my grand-dad," he said. "A proper card. He used to say, Try anything once. So there I was just after the Olympic Games, acting as guide to three Swedes, two Italians and a Persian. 'Show us the underworld,' they said. I knew just what they wanted. Something low enough to be exciting, but not too low to be objectionable. Fair enough.

"Took them to the doss-house under Hungerford Arches, a negro café near Old Compton Street and a couple of pubs in Wapping. They had a whip-round for me when it was all over and recommended me to all their friends. Wish we had the Olympics every year. Paying game."

"What exactly *is* it like being a clapper-boy in a film studio?" I said, taking out my season ticket.

He said, "Never believe the stories you hear about beggars dying with two thousand quid sewn into their coat-linings. The reason beggars are despised is that they don't make a good living. If they earned fifteen pounds a week, begging would become an honourable profession. Now busking is worth while, but you've got to be original. Alongside theatre-queues I used to play the mouth-organ, recite 'All

the world's a stage,' sing 'Any Old Iron' *and* do a soft-shoe shuffle. My old grand-dad always said, Blind 'em with science before you send the cap round. It works wonders."

"Euston," I said. "I get out next stop."

"This is my station," he said. "Remember me telling you about the time I was an attendant in a Turkish Baths?"

"Yes, of course," I said, finally getting the idea.

"Well, I met a chap there who promised to fix me up with a job in the Ministry of Food. Can't keep at the same job year in, year out, can you? So anytime you're short of a few ration books, come and look me up."

"Certainly," I said, "I'll do that."

"Amazing what I learn from people," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"If there's one thing I enjoy," he said, "it's listening to other people's experiences."

"Cheerio," I said, collecting the torn shreds of my season ticket.



"BETTER VOWELS THAN THE LAST ONE, SO WE'RE HEADING WEST ALL RIGHT."

## A SPORTING COUNTY

At this season our love for cricket is to be indulged by pleasant reverie before the fire. And when the curtains are drawn, and the lamps are lighted, and the rain that has so often stopped play beats against the windows, I lie back in my arm-chair and muse on my favourite of all the counties—Loamshire.

I do not know who invented Loamshire, but it has for many years now been the mythical eighteenth county in the championship. It has figured in cricket fiction of every kind. What kind of a county *is* Loamshire?

It is not easy to tell, for *Wisden* knows it not. But I have my own ideas. It is certainly one of the older county clubs, a club against which the young W. G. Grace, still Mr. and not yet Dr., loved to play. In the absence of statistics I should place its formation in the early 1870's, but the Gentlemen of Loamshire must have been playing a great many years earlier. Even to-day, I am sure, Loamshire fields more

amateurs than any other county. Its professionals are of the old school—burly, thick-moustached men of forty who take a quart of ale with their lunch, and who address the amateurs as “Zurr”—probably with a tug of the forelock. There is nobody very outstanding among the professionals; there never has been. Loamshire has never produced a Hammond or a Compton. But they are all good, reliable men, men who, season after season, finish with a batting-average of twenty-eight or thirty, or who take their fifty wickets for a shade over twenty-eight runs apiece. Not one has ever gained Test status.

The amateurs, for which Loamshire has always been famous, are a different matter. There are two kinds—the brilliant and the sound. Among the latter I am quite sure we may number Mr. Treherne, Barrie’s “athletic, pleasant-faced young clergyman” of *The Admirable Crichton*. Loamshire surely plays a sporting parson, and Treherne, the Earl of Loam’s son-in-law, cannot have missed his place. He has the Loamshire approach to cricket. Listen:

*Lord Brocklehurst.* I hear you have got a living, Treherne. Congratulations.  
*Treherne.* Thanks.

*Lord Brocklehurst.* Is it a good one?

*Treherne.* So-so. They are rather weak in bowling, but it’s a good bit of turf.

Most of the Loamshire amateurs are rather more dashing than Treherne, who, one feels, can make a stolid twenty or thirty when it is most wanted, and turn a pretty analogy on it in the pulpit at the week-end. At one time Loamshire never took the

field without at least one phenomenal schoolboy of fifteen. I am now going back some twenty-five years. For all I know, Loamshire may still be continuing this policy of encouraging young talent, but the journals that chronicled those matches have passed from my reading. Usually these schoolboys knocked up a magnificent century in their very first match, to snatch the game out of the fire. Afterwards the Loamshire skipper clapped them on the back and said “Well played, young ’un! You’ll go to Australia this winter.”

The Loamshire skipper! Always a rather shadowy figure; one cannot quite get hold of him. Wealthy, though, and county—in the other sense—through and through. I should say he hunts in the winter



DAVID  
LINDSAY

probably with the pack of which his elder brother is Master. He has thought of standing for Parliament, but is modestly aware he "hasn't got the brains of these political johnnies." Undoubtedly he holds notable Cricket Weeks at his country house. He it is who cheerily calls out to the mysterious stranger leaning wistfully over the railings: "Care for a game, sir? Our star batsman's let us down." The mysterious stranger then proceeds to—however, his performance does not strictly belong to the annals of Loamshire cricket.

How has Loamshire fared in the county championship? I cannot see them ever heading the table, or even appearing in the Big Six. Half-way down, or a little lower—that is the best I place them. Of course there have been occasions when they have trounced Y-kshire and L-nc-shire—if ever they had five or six of their schoolboy prodigies playing in the same match they would be capable of trouncing the Australians of 1921 or 1948—but I feel they are at their happiest playing the Western Counties.

Which leads us to ask where, geographically, Loamshire may be? Careful study of the map inclines me to locate it between Berkshire and Wiltshire, extending into Gloucestershire on the north-west and Hampshire on the south-east. There is no big city in Loamshire. Their home matches are played on country grounds, and the gates are small, but Loamshire would not have it otherwise. There is one fair-sized county town, which, ignoring topographical limitations, I assert to be Shrewsbury.

Loamshire is the friendliest team in cricket, and the most sporting. They drop points without a thought over a sporting declaration. They have never heard of playing for a draw, and are not interested in heavy-roller tactics. They are spiritually of the last century. They play far into the dusk to give their opponents a chance to knock off the runs, and it is in the dusk I see them now, lit by the glow from my fire. I see them taking the field in their tiny cricket-caps, the green, sunny field a-sparkle with early dew, the "professors" rolling along like amiable bears, the school-boys eagerly eyeing the immemorial elms over which they will presently loft the mightiest six ever seen on the ground, the stalwart, ruddy-faced skipper grinning with delight as yet another game starts. His thousandth? His two thousandth? No matter. Loamshire cricket goes on for ever. Loamshire is my favourite team.

## FINIS

"I have good reason to remember this part of the line, I can assure you," said the man in the corner, huddled in his great-coat, collar about his ears, hands sunk up to his elbows in deep pockets. He moved his head reminiscently towards the railway-carriage window through which only fog was visible.

"Last time it was snow," he murmured pensively, "deep, deep snow. All white. It stayed around for six weeks."

With eyes screwed up he tried to peer out and to recognize some old familiar scene.



"Yes, we have stopped again, you see. This is the place. We have just passed Bathurst; it is Lambridge next. This is where the line forks. It isn't a station of course, but the driver waits here for a baton or some such nonsense, and the signalman reaches out and gives it to him like a relay race conducted at the halt. As soon as we drew out of Victoria on the occasion to which I am referring this woman started asking if she was right for Lambridge; she was certainly difficult to convince. We told her repeatedly that she was perfectly correct, and could relax; we set the example by sinking down on our shoulder-blades behind our papers; or trying to go to sleep, which some prevented by stamping their feet. One fellow kept looking at the children as if they had trodden on his corns. They were busy eating cake. Every time the train stopped this woman opened the window, let in the driving snow, and said in a silly sort of nasal way: '*Lambridge?*' and somebody always said: 'All right for Lambridge!'

"'Do you know how much farther it *is* to Lambridge?' she would ask as we drew out of each station, and we kept assuring her that she would be a long time yet. At last we got to Bathurst, and we *could* tell her Lambridge was next, so she began to count her parcels and fuss her children's faces about by licking her handkerchief. As soon as we stopped, the nearest fellow opened the door; and we all helped her to get out quick because of the cold, and once she was gone we passed out the children after her, shut the door and sat there with expressions of relief until it suddenly began to dawn on each of us in turn that there had been no sound from outside—no porter shouting; no luggage marked '*fragile*' being chucked about; in fact we had not even heard the woman plodding along the snowy platform asking if this was Lambridge. It was such an uncanny silence that one of us lowered the window and looked out; then he slowly studied the expressions on our faces in exactly the same way we were studying his, and said simply 'This is not a station.' '*No?*' we said. 'No. It is the edge of a precipice.'

"I was one of those who moved across the carriage and peered out beside him. The train was on the edge of an embankment—a razor edge—the slope ran sheer down to a valley far beneath. Everywhere was deep snow. All white. Stepping out that side the woman could only have experienced falling down a newly-painted lift-shaft. It occurred to each of us, I think, that she had taken every possible precaution; we had dismissed them all in our cocksureness. Now we had pitched her to the bottom of a hill.

"The train moved slowly on, and at once we all tugged at the communication-cord together. While we waited in gathering alarm for the guard, we cupped our hands to blue-lipped ears, and we could just hear in the distance this woman asking to be directed to Disraeli Villas. When the guard came he insisted that he could not hold the train—it was our responsibility to get out and look for the woman; he must proceed; but he agreed to send a porter back along the line with a lamp to look for us later.

"Well, we got out to ease our consciences if nothing else, and we scrambled

down that perpendicular drop holding hands in a human life-line. Our breath froze as it left our nostrils; and at the bottom was the woman holding children who looked like little snowmen sitting down. 'Do you know,' she said apologetically, 'I *quite* thought you said this was it.'

"Eventually a porter did come blundering along with a lamp and we had to follow him to safety in single file. I shall not easily forget that night. This is the first time I have been along here since.

"Well," he said, gathering his papers and his brief-case as the train stopped, and giving us a friendly nod as he opened the door, "Lambridge at last! I leave you here. Good night!"

He stepped out into the fog and there was a painful silence.

The door stayed open only because he was no longer there to shut it. The nearest passenger stiffened and stared. Nobody—to our credit—made the obvious remark. Somebody stealthily shut the door. Then the train began to creep on through the fog again as we sat hunched within coat-collars, but *nobody* pulled the cord this time.

"As a matter of fact," said the man beside me, "it improves the story."

## GREAT PITY

*(The use of elephants in state processions in India is reported to be dying out.)*

Mine is to-day no light and facile story.

I sing the elephant, but lately shrunk  
From his high state of ceremonial glory  
Now to be classified as costly junk.

Through the long history of teeming India  
He has bulked large with men of loftiest rank;  
Akbar and Holkar, not to mention Scindia,  
Owed much to him for their majestic swank.

Never procession was complete without him;  
How calm he was, his aspect how serene;  
There was a castled dignity about him  
That shed a lustre on the bravest scene.

Painted and panoplied, superbly got up,  
Noble by nature and adorned by man,  
As for mere horses, he'd have sold the lot up,  
The grandest coach was but a shandrydan.

Small wonder if a creature so spectacular,  
 One, we might say, of such colossal fig,  
 Should make crowds bellow in their own vernacular  
 "What *otium* is here; observe, what *dig*."

Yet in a trice the East has lost its colour.  
 Democracy has reared its sobering head.  
 Void of processions things grow dull and duller,  
 The splendour of the elephant has fled.

No pomp, no painted sides and no adornment,  
 Nothing to do but idly stand and brood,  
 Hathi, to-day you have nor use nor orn'ment,  
 And now they're grumbling at your cost in food.

#### FATHER

My father made me "take" boxing at my prep-school. I would discover its use, he said, in after-life, when I grew up. A man should know how to defend himself if he were ever set upon by a gang of roughs.

My father was also without any doubts as to the value and use of athletics in general and in detail. Skill in high-jumping and long-jumping, he said, might well be useful to me for getting over hedges and crossing streams. I am sure that in his mind's eye, as he said it, he had me escaping from the Boers, *Strand Magazine* style, jumping laagers and kopjes, and finally arriving with the "message" to Lord Kitchener or Roberts or whoever.

Long-distance running, he said, might also come in useful. "You never know . . ." This, in my father's case, meant that he couldn't think up a reason at the moment. The sprints, though—the 100 yards, 220 yards and hurdles—were well worth practising as a boy, as "in after-life" what a fool I'd look if I saw a "rough" steal a lady's purse and run off with it . . . and I couldn't catch him! And if the rough ran round packing-cases and bicycles and so on (my father's idea was, I think, that roughs generally took ladies' purses on railway stations) then I'd be able easily to overhaul him by jumping *over* these things.

Dear father! He did not seem to be troubled with doubts on the subject of what heaven would be like. If he was right, then he has been constantly "looking down" on me and anybody else he loved (or suspected of being up to something). So he should realize that I have, during the thirty years of my orphanage, never been set upon by a gang of roughs. And that if I were, my sprinting ability (if any) would be the one of my attainments which my instinct, easily overpowering my reason,



"BIT OF A TEASER THIS MORNING, WASN'T IT?"

would call into use. I have never seen a lady lose a purse, nor had to give chase in a railway station, hurdling over bicycles and packing-cases. Very few of father's prognostications have indeed come true for me. I suppose I've led a pretty hum-drum life.

There was almost always a utilitarian end suggested for any activity father encouraged me to take up. I learnt to play the piano because it would, he said, be a great inducement to hostesses in my after-life to ask me to accept their hospitality for the sake of the music I would play to them and their guests. He tried to get me to learn to sing for the same vague end. He taught me all the lore and law of the shooting-field so that when in after-life I was asked to shoot the archduke's partridges I should know the etiquette and do well enough to be asked again. I believe that, to this day, if I were asked to shoot with a pair of guns and a loader, and if I could borrow the former and hire the latter, I would be able to acquit myself strictly according to Cocker, father and the Badminton Library Book on Shooting. I have, in fact, never even possessed two guns, let alone been asked to that kind of shooting.

I know far more about the rules of riding than I do about what goes on under the bonnet of a car. But I haven't ridden for years. My father, though he omitted to leave me the fortune which would be required to allow me to shoot, hunt, go to gilt-chair musicales and be worth the while of roughs to set upon, nevertheless was

a strict tutor. I had to learn to ride properly so that I would be able to hunt with credit on my own horses, if ever. Or I would be worthy to be mounted if I were asked to spend week-ends at hunting homes. And hunting itself, my father held, offered a utilitarian end apart from its passing pleasures. It gave you a "good eye for country." Here again I think father was back in the Boer War, *Strand-Magazine*-illustration type of mental scenery, and his son, with topee and spy-glass, was surveying the veldt preparatory to leading a troop out of some sort of *impasse* by a brilliant assessment of hillocks, boundaries, streams and heaven-knows-what-else. Considering that father was not a soldier, he had a wonderful lot of half-baked ideas of the sorts of peril a real Kiplingesque man ought to be able to get out of with the proper parental training. Although I learnt to ride as a boy, I never hunted. And even if I had thus acquired an "eye for country" I can't think of any crisis of my "after-life" during which this eye, plus perhaps a horse, would have made anything easier for anybody.

Father used occasionally to take me to the theatre, and even this was not primarily because it was fun. I was to be able to say that I'd seen Arthur Bourchier, Ellen Terry, Martin Harvey and others. I was much keener on the early cinema in those days when father was trying to educate me to talk, in after-life, about the (dead) theatre. Father hated the idea of the cinema, never having seen one. It

was two-dimensional, emotional in the worst sense, and cinemas were generally fire-traps, he understood. I wish I could remember the name of the film to which I did finally induce father to come with me—for his first view of this new-fangled entertainment (I can still almost hear him saying "Tchal" after the word "entertainment"). It was something in the early Gish period, and had a scene showing a large number of bronzed Americans building the Pyramids. Probably a Cecil B. de Mille. We sat through it twice because father was sure he had seen one of the Ancient Egyptian slaves wearing a wrist-watch. He may have been right. Or it may have been a passing shadow in the pitiless and flickering sun. Father swore it was a wrist-watch and he never saw another film to the end of his life. And he



"DEAR SIRS . . . A SQUIGGLY BIT WITH A CIRCLE, FOLLOWED BY A COUPLE OF DOTS, A THING LIKE A WORM, THEN A SORT OF HAIR-PIN ON ITS SIDE . . ."

never stopped talking about the Ancient Egyptian wrist-watch when anybody brought up the subject of the cinema.

Most of the things I did, thought, and read as a boy come back to me now as reminders of father's hopes belied. When I complained about having to do Latin Elegiacs at my prep-school (I could often scarcely understand the English verse that was set for translation), father bade me be of good heart. He, at the same prep-school, had won some kudos by publishing in the school magazine a sixty-line account of Sports Day in Latin Hexameters reminiscent (the headmaster had said) of Virgil's Sixth *Æneid*. I might do the same if I persevered. And if I got *very* good at Latin verse, I might figure among the *Westminster Gazette* Competition winners from time to time in "after-life." My father never went in for these himself, having decently forgotten his Latin prosody. But he chuckled with appreciation at the versions of Dames-Longworth, Kennedy, Inge, Godley and others.

Father taught me to play bridge. It was Auction in those days. He said it was a useful game to know, if not played for money, on board ship; and he made me learn it in French for that reason. I have never had to play bridge in French except with father, but the fog over my brain when playing it even now is spissated with ridiculous French terms half-remembered. It's worth about a hundred a game to my opponents.

Dear father! I fell to thinking of this and that while sitting back in an arm-chair holding a handkerchief to my nose. Ever since I "took" boxing at father's instigation as a boy at prep-school my nose has bled freely in moments of crisis, cold and complete calm. That's about the only legacy father did leave me.

*February, 1949*

PLASTICINE FOR FORTY

NOW I wonder who is going to give out the plasticine this afternoon? Someone with a straight back of course, who is not fidgeting. There's a beautiful quiet class—yes, John and Anna.

All ready? Now watch me. Break your plasticine into two pieces and put one piece at the side of your board. Turn round, Michael, it doesn't matter if his plasticine is bigger than yours.

Run along, Reggie.

We're going to rub this piece into a long, long worm. Carefully now, if you go so fast, Julia, it will break. There now.

Very gently, keep it smooth, no nasty bumps on this worm. Lovely, dear, yes, lovely, and yours, lovely, yours too, dear. ALL lovely.

Turn round, Michael. Michael, have you changed plasticine with John? You NEVER? What do you mean—you NEVER? Change back.

Hold up worms. There's no need to drop them if you are careful. No, don't come out to show me. I can see them all from here.

Now very carefully watch what I am going to do. Round and round I twist my worm, nice and flat. Now I am going to make the sides. Up we go. Who can guess what it is? That's right, Paul. A basket. We'll put a handle over the top and it's finished.

There, who can make a dear little basket like that?

Off you go then, and I shall sit down and watch you being busy.

Lovely, dear, yes, dear, and yours too.

What, AGAIN, Reggie?

Hold up baskets. Don't start walking out to show me. Great big children of five and a half walking about the classroom! I've never heard of such a thing. That's what the little children in the nursery class do. We all sit nicely in our desks here.

What beautiful baskets! That's a very good one, Anna, yes, dear, and yours, and yours too, ALL very good.

Now I wonder what we're going to make with the other piece of plasticine? Yes, something to go in the basket. Shall we make some vegetables? Who can think of some vegetables to make?

Carrots, yes, onions, yes, marrow, yes, potatoes, yes, chips, yes—no, NOT chips, what a silly thing to say, Michael. Don't laugh at him, children. Yes, dear, turnips, carrots we've said, dear, brussels sprouts, yes, we've had carrots, dear, parsnips, yes.

Very well. All quiet now. HUSH!

Hands on heads. Up. On heads. Up again, as high as you can. See if you can touch the ceiling. Hands away. Let me see if I can hear my watch ticking.

There's a lovely quiet class.

Off you go, then, making vegetables. Not too big or they won't go in. That's a nice carrot, Jane. Parsnip then.

Lovely, dear, and yours, yes, dear, yours too. ALL lovely.

Only a few more minutes and then we must stop. I can see some lovely baskets. Put the vegetables in now and I'll come round and see which I think is the best. Never mind if you haven't finished, it's nearly playtime.

Beautiful! ALL very good indeed. No lazy people this afternoon!

Now we must roll up our plasticine. Yes, it does seem a pity, Peggy, but we'll have it again tomorrow. Perhaps we will make a little tea-set next time, shall we? With tiny little spoons and a bowl with lumps of sugar in it? Who would like that? All of you? Right, I'll remember.

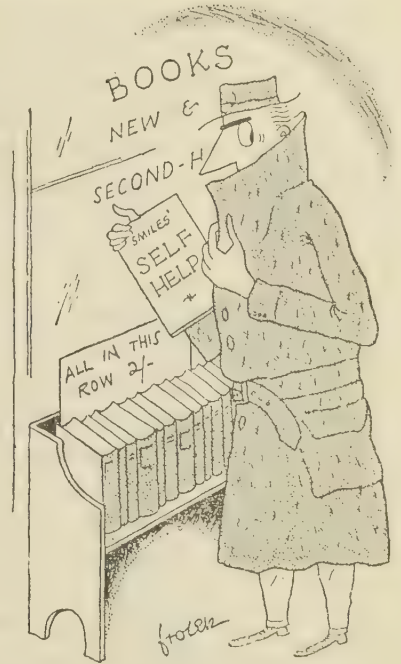
Nice round balls. No cracks anywhere.

I wonder who is going to collect the plasticine for me? Not anyone with a crooked back. Nor anyone who turns round, Michael. Don't hold your breath, Jimmy, you can sit up straight without that.

What a nice quiet class.

Jimmy, your side; Elizabeth, your side.

Oh, REGGIE . . .



## CHORUS OF THE STUDIO AUDIENCE

Hear that? The man mentioned a name!

A name in the papers! A name we have read!  
That gives the performer some kind of a claim—

Let's show him we heard what he said.

It isn't remotely amusing, but still

We ought to clap hands, it's all part of the drill—

We must show *we* saw it, or nobody will—

Clap hands, or the crack will fall dead!



It was only in yesterday's news—  
 That means it was written in *less than a day!*  
 What incredible skill! What a punctual Muse!  
 How soon to find something to say!  
 It doesn't seem funny, we freely admit,  
 But it's newspaper stuff, so it's certainly wit;  
 Any name from the news is a palpable hit—  
 Clap hands! Do a bit of display!

We like to encourage a chap;  
 You may, if you must, call us easy to please—  
 That's not the main reason we greet with a clap  
 Any point any one of us sees.  
 You ought not to mind our uncritical fuss,  
 It's not so much *him* we're applauding as *us*;  
 The joke wasn't good, but it might have been wuss—  
 Clap hands! Help the man earn his fees!

They say we distend every show,  
 They call us annoyingly brawlsh and loud—  
 They fail to allow for the satisfied glow  
 That suffuses a non-paying crowd.  
 To-day we consider ourselves the élite  
 And to-morrow will give us still more of a treat  
 When we switch on to hear the recorded repeat—  
 Clap hands! Aren't we going to feel proud!

## GUINEA-PIGS

Guinea-pigs do not, I know, sound a very interesting subject. I would not have mentioned them if it had not been brought home to me to-day exactly what a guinea-pig does with its food. Quite a number of you, I expect, have seen a guinea-pig in the course of your lives, but very few, I dare say, have seen one at its meals. When it comes to food the guinea-pig is about the most uncivilized animal there is.

One does not of course expect very much from a guinea-pig. One does not expect impeccable table manners or anything of daintiness with food. But one does expect something. The exhibition I have just seen would have put Henry VIII to shame.

I am not saying that the food was the most appetizing one could imagine. Boiled tea-leaves and dry porridge oats would say nothing to me personally, and the thought of hashed-up dog-biscuits as well might even put me off my meals for a bit.

But guinea-pigs, after all, are brought up on this kind of thing. They do not expect the delicacies which mean so much to the human palate.

The more disgusting, then, the performance of Ranji and Duleep, my young son's two pet guinea-pigs.

It happened at the evening meal. I say evening meal because it is evidently the case that guinea-pigs have four meals a day. This may seem slightly excessive to some for the size of the animal, but let me hasten to point out that two of the meals are off dandelion-leaves, and these are quite plentiful in my garden at most times of the year.

The evening meal takes place at six-thirty. At six-twenty, then, the teapot was duly turned out, the dust-bin raked for old cabbage-leaves, and myself put in charge of hashing the dog-biscuits. Hashing dog-biscuits is about as productive as hashing cement, but I buckled down to it, and after a short time with the hammer the biscuits looked as well hashed as any I have seen. Christopher then threw in the cabbage-leaves, mixed the whole lot up with a spoon so that the tea-leaves should appear, tempting, on top, and we proceeded in ceremony to the guinea-pig hutch.

The guinea-pigs were sulking; I could see that as soon as we arrived. One of them was staring owlishly at the water-bowl which had somehow got filled with dirt, and the other was wiping its feet moodily on the dandelions it had had for tea.

When we were in position Christopher opened the living-room door cautiously and peered inside. Both guinea-pigs froze in their tracks.

After about a minute's restful inactivity Christopher reached his hand in and started to pull out some of the mangled heap of old dandelion-leaves that one of the guinea-pigs was sitting



"MEN CAN BE VERY TRYING AT TIMES."

on. This is a routine that takes place every other meal, and you would think that after six months they would be used to it. Both guinea-pigs, however, fled instantly into the bedroom, nearly killing themselves in the intervening doorway, where there was only room for one. Nothing moved.

After another short silence in case they decided to come out again, Christopher took out the rest of the vegetation and prepared to insert the dinner.

"Now," he said, "this'll bring them out. You watch."

I watched. After five minutes I suggested that the guinea-pigs had decided to go to bed without any dinner. Christopher said perhaps they had forgotten about it, and opened up the bedroom to the full light of day to see. Both guinea-pigs were inside looking peevish.

"Come out and eat your dinner," said Christopher, and gave one of them a prod to encourage it. Neither of them stirred.

"Come on," said Christopher, giving it a poke in the ribs. "Come out."

Both guinea-pigs vanished suddenly into the back of the bedroom where it was too dark to see, and parked themselves there, evidently for the night. I began to wonder whether tea-leaves was the right diet.

Christopher opened both doors and brought one guinea-pig right out of the hutch. "I shan't give you any dinner in future, if you don't eat it," he remarked with some asperity, and put it back again, slamming both the doors. Silence.

Suddenly a black nose stuck itself out of the bedroom door.

"Ah," said Christopher, "they've smelt it now."

The black nose squirmed in evident disapproval and withdrew.

Christopher lost patience.

"Oh, very well," he said. "If you won't *come* out, I'll have to *get* you out."

He raised his fist in the air and landed one squarely on the ceiling of the bedroom. One of the guinea-pigs shot smartly out into the living-room and looked round viciously.

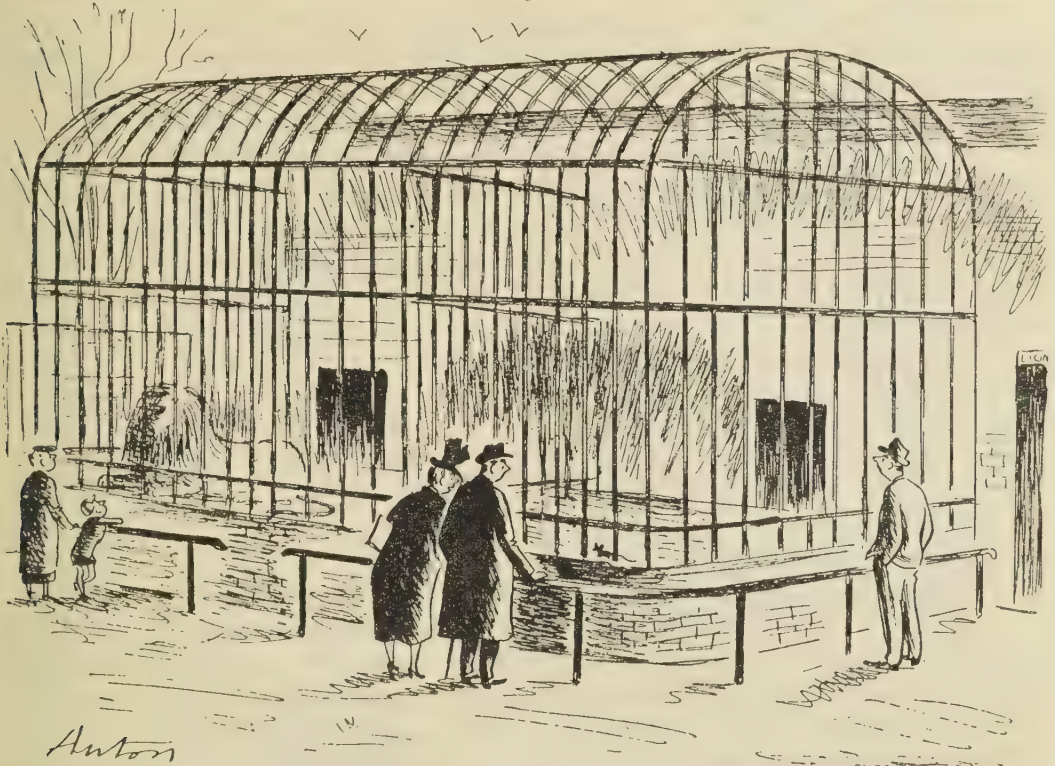
"Now," said Christopher.

Things began to happen. The guinea-pig in the living-room, fairly quivering with rage, turned and made a bee-line back to the bedroom. The other guinea-pig, thinking no doubt that its last hour had come, emerged precipitately from the bedroom and came into violent collision. There was a blasphemous silence.

Then they saw it. A nice green bowl with an attractive sprinkling of tea-leaves against a background of pale fawn dog-biscuit inside it. With but a moment's hesitation the first guinea-pig took a well-aimed running jump and landed slap in the middle of the tea-leaves.

Dinner began.

The animal in the bowl started things off by taking a wild swipe at the food with its hind feet and making contact with both claws. A large part of my carefully hashed dog-biscuit went for six. The other creature, not to be outdone, advanced upon the meal with a determined air and started rooting for buried treasure with its



"SURELY THEY OUGHT TO FIT THIS CAGE WITH SMALLER MESH."

nose. Finding only a moth-eaten cabbage-leaf, it seized hold of this in its teeth, dragged it out on to the floor with a fair modicum of tea-leaves, and promptly went to sleep on it. The first guinea-pig signified approval of this move by extracting another cabbage-leaf from the bottom of the bowl and casting it on top of the second guinea-pig.

The first guinea-pig then continued its excavations. Tea-leaves and hashed dog-biscuit came out in a fine spray, covering everything. Gradually the second guinea-pig became immersed under a small heap, the cabbage-leaf acting as a blanket. When the first guinea-pig had reached bedrock and covered all of its partner but the tail end, it climbed stickily out of the bowl and looked round.

Most of the meal was now on the floor. Some of it admittedly had got on to the walls, and a few tea-leaves had even found their way on to the ceiling, but most of it was on the floor on and around the second guinea-pig. The first guinea-pig proceeded to do an evening constitutional round the box at top speed by way of spreading it out a little.

At the fourth lap the other guinea-pig woke up. It seemed surprised. Nothing daunted, however, it rose unsteadily to its feet, festooned with cabbage-leaf, joined in behind the first guinea-pig, and continued round the box in the same direction until all the food was either trampled into the floorboards or sticking to their feet.

After that they called it a day. The first guinea-pig peered dolefully round the room and went to bed in evident disgust, and the second guinea-pig wandered round aimlessly, looking depressed. Finally, just to make quite sure that any food which by some mischance still remained in the bowl was rendered totally unfit for consumption, the second guinea-pig clambered exhaustedly into it, curled round twice, and went to sleep.

No, give me proper pigs, any day.

### THE COW HAS CORNERS?

"Ken you sye . . ."

"Can you say?"

"Yez, yez, I sink so. Ken you sye, pleez, 'Dze cow has corners?'"

My little class in their tight-fitting purple suits face me anxiously. As a Displaced Teacher or Government Part-Time Instructor in Languages, English (Cat. III), to European Voluntary Workers, I realize that upon the correctness of my reply to this leading question depends a certain amount of national prestige.

This morning we have been revising, and national prestige has been in short supply. There has been, for instance, that trouble with the Irregular Verbs which Jakob started when, suddenly inspired after weeks of silence, he produced, glibly:

"Think—thank—thunk."

His example inspired several others, right at the back of the Nissen hut, who had been similarly tongue-tied. The madness spread rapidly.

"Feed—foot—feet."

"Choose—cheese—cheesed."

Their cheerful confidence was quite unnerving, and as Kazimierz lumbered to his feet I felt more than usually like Mr. Parkhill confronted with Hyman Kaplan.

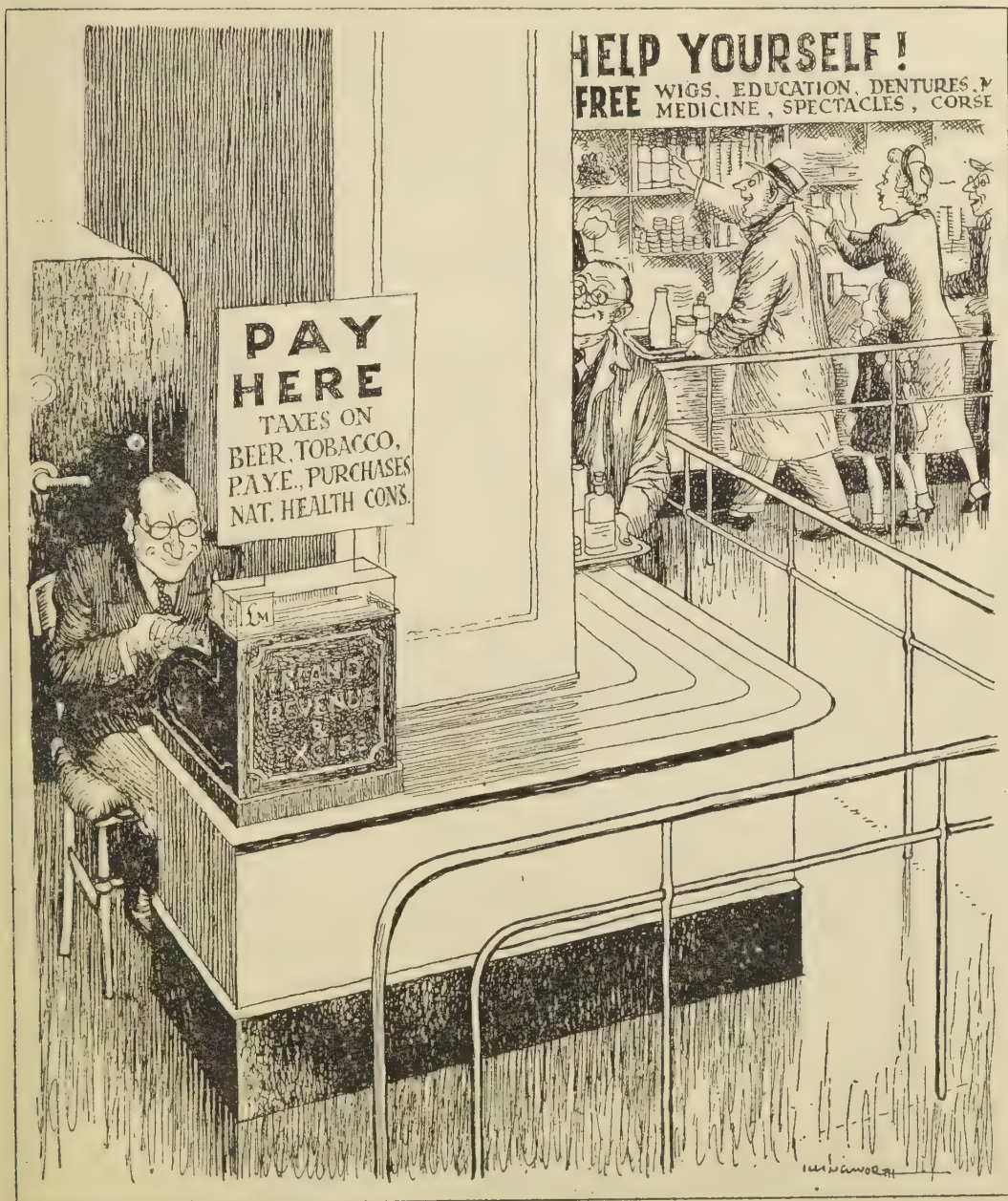
"Ken you told me, pleez, how is different, *Love* and *Smell*?"

Between Kazimierz and me there is a special bond dating from that day when, in a wild confusion of Personal Pronouns, he delivered the message "Ludwig say very sorry no here: gone to London wiz yourr wife."

Faced with this exercise in Comparison I find it necessary to play for time. I throw my piece of chalk nonchalantly into the air and miss it. It rolls a short way down the centre aisle. Feliks retrieves it and presents it with a formal bow that would not be out of place at Palast Bookeenam.

"The difference between—not 'how is different'——"

"Yes, yes, yes, I sink so."



ROUND THE CORNER

"... Love and smell? Eh?"

"Yes, yes."

"Oh, well. Er—look..." I fall back feebly on examples. "I could say, for instance, I *love* the flowers because they *smell* so nice."

"Not, I love at dzeese flowerrrs?"

"No, no! Love takes the Direct Object. I love the girl. She loves me." I warm to my subject. "I love her. We love you. They love it. Love me. Love my dog."

"Owokay! Thensks!"

But I can see from the look in his eyes that Kazimierz is not satisfied.

"Right. Any other questions?"

He is on his feet again.

"Ken I sye, dzen, I smell at you?"

I am horribly embarrassed.

"I don't think..."

Kazimierz bares his teeth in a frightening grimace.

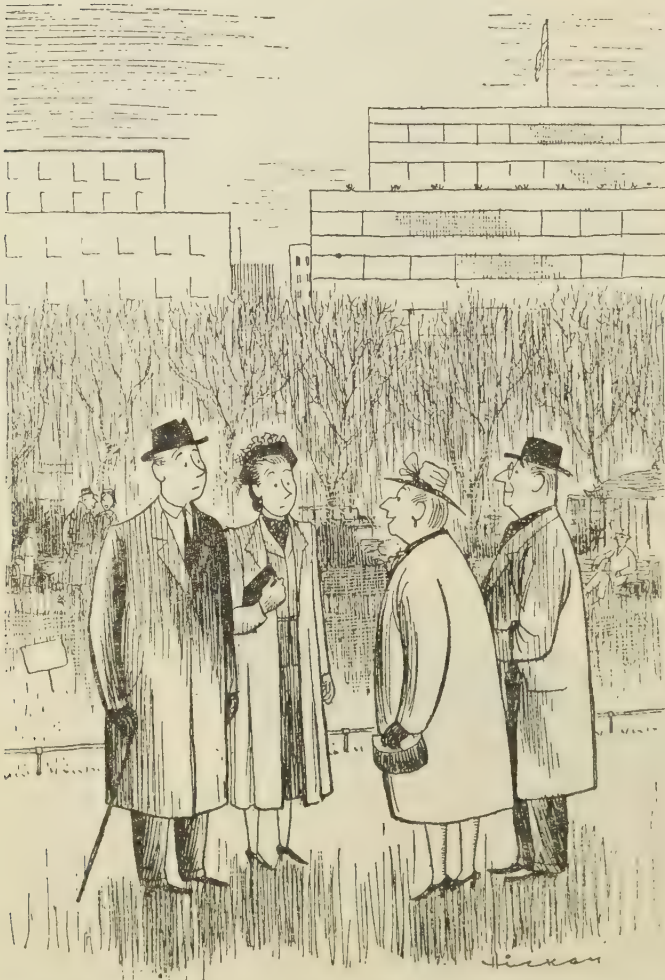
He points to them.

"See!" he says, "I love at you. I smell at you... Hwot is different, pleez?"

So, at last, I am able to tell him the difference between laugh and smile.

Any satisfaction that I may have at this solution is quickly shattered by Adam. Adam is the owner of a curiously old-fashioned dictionary and can be relied upon to produce the sort of words that are extant only in *The Times* Crossword Puzzles—words such as spondulicks or fuzee-vesta, phrases such as "Deuce take it!"

"Bug!" says Adam sombrely.



"SO WE'LL EXPECT YOU BOTH ON FRIDAY—UNLESS YOU CAN THINK OF A BETTER EXCUSE BEFORE THEN."

I am prepared to play.

"Bug!" I reply encouragingly, and I draw one, as I think rather skilfully, on the blackboard. I give it a fine pair of antennæ, six legs and a rather fierce expression. I am delighted to see Adam's face light up with recognition.

"Yais! Is orl correct. Bug! Hand-bug! Same, I suppose, reticule?"

I hastily rub out my graffito.

"Reticule is old-fashioned," I say coldly.

By now Adam is used to this complaint.

"Old-feshiont, eh, what?" he crosses it out of his notebook resignedly. Then his eyes sparkle triumphantly behind their thick pebble glasses. "But not old-feshiont, I sink, to say in poobleek barr '*Here izz mud in yourr eye!*' New fangled, I am sinking."

At this daring example of idiomatic usage pandemonium breaks out. Everyone is on his feet in emulation.

"In poobleek barr how much muz I teeping white-woman?"

"See! I am staying on foot-fingers."

"How you call dzis dog sitting oll day looking at ships?"

"A beard dog!"

"In meatmongers I am seeing hanged many ducks and duchesses."

"Quiet, please, gentlemen. One at a time, please."

"Yais! We now! Imperative Moot! So also 'Shurrup, Siddown, Narrkit!'"

A sudden silence falls across the hut.

"Now, then," I say. "Who was first? You, Zygmunt?"

"Senks! Ken you sye . . ."

"Can you say?"

"Yez, yez, I sink so. Ken you sye, pleez, 'Dze cow has corners?'"

This is it! I have a sudden vision of the angular backsides that get driven daily up and down our lane at milking-time. "Well . . ." I begin. But then I pause. After all, this is a matter of national prestige. Perhaps if I tell them the whole truth my Governmental colleagues the Ministers of Food and of Agriculture and Fisheries will be displeased. Besides, one has got to think of the effect on world opinion. On the United States. On the Argentine. Already I can read the sneers in *Pravda* about our capitalist bloodstock. So perhaps someone will tell me—Ken I sye dze cow has corners?

## FACING THE MUSIC

It is my own fault that I am sitting here. We are nearly through the last movement now, and then I shall be able to leave the platform and kick myself. For the present, however, I must stay where I am and continue to justify myself with the audience.

I mentioned to Herr Korkzieher, when I found out that he was the conductor





"DON'T TROUBLE. I'VE FOUND IT."

of the orchestra and not a professor of something at London University, as the barmaid had told me, that he must look quite different to the orchestra from the way he looks to the audience. It was a pointless remark, designed to keep the conversation on his own ground but away from musical technicalities. Herr Korkzieher—we were in a small bar quite close to the Albert Hall—reacted by inviting me to sit with the orchestra at the concert which was due to begin in a few minutes' time and see the difference. Idly I said I would be glad to do so. And here I am.

Difficulties began from the start. The conductor led me to the edge of the platform where, among the scores of music-stands and

bentwood chairs, old double-basses, timpani and other large instruments lay like whales stranded on the beach; said briefly "Zit zommvere at de pack," and disappeared. I took a couple of paces forward and suddenly realized that the curtain was up and the house was full. You would not believe the Albert Hall could hold so many people.

There was no one else on the platform except a man who was distributing sheets of music. There was no chance that the audience might not have noticed me; I must carry the thing off with such panache as I could summon. I sauntered over to the man with the music and asked "Isn't your name Bultitude?"

He shook his head and dropped a viola part of the Jupiter Symphony. "Smith," he said, "Smith."

"Sorry," I said, and went off the stage the way I had come. That had been easy. The audience, no doubt, imagined that I had said "Do you need any extra second violins?" and that he had replied "No thanks." I should of course have left the hall then but I thought of Herr Korkzieher scanning the rear ranks of his musi-

cians for me, possibly omitting to give somebody his entry in his anxiety to know what had become of me, and I felt I had to go back.

While I thought of all this, fortunately, a great number of musicians had arrived, led by a charming young woman who was now tuning a harp, and had gone chattering and nonchalant on to the platform I had just left. When about sixty of them had passed me I decided I could safely return and hide among them. I held back for a moment while there was a round of applause for something which I failed to see, then dodged on to the stage.

Somewhat to my surprise there was a round of applause for me too, though it petered out quickly and rather shamefacedly. It was explained to me by the third bassoon between two items that as a rule nobody comes on after the leader of the orchestra except the conductor; and as I had nothing in my hands, one or two people who had not seen him before took me for Herr Korkzieher. As soon as they realized that I was wearing a tweed jacket and bottle-green corduroy trousers they knew they must have made a mistake. But so had I—I had drawn attention to myself, and for the rest of the evening I felt there would be curious people in that audience saying to one another "I wonder what the chap does who is sitting up there at the back behind the oboes?" From that moment I knew I had to justify my presence.

Herr Korkzieher came on, and I shuffled into a place at the back of the orchestra, between the bass trombone player and the tuba player. Both of them were a bit surprised to see me; I half expected the trombonist to offer me the loan of his trombone if I was sure I hadn't got one. They were both very experienced orchestral musicians, and had never seen anyone sit in that particular area of an orchestra without playing some very large brass instrument. On the other hand, I have since formed the impression that



they were a little awed as well; I had, they must have felt, brought the art of cutting rehearsals to a point seldom attained.

When Herr Korkzieher arrived he looked for me almost immediately and gave me a friendly nod, so I was glad I had not given way to my panic instinct to leave when I met with my first reverse. Then he raised both his arms like Dracula about to turn into a bat and everyone except myself began to play some kind of music.

During the whole of the overture I sat quite still, even when the tuba and the bass trombone together burst into what must have been the loudest music ever composed. I was terrified that if I moved I should draw attention to myself, and people would be indignant with me for not doing my fair share. For a time I toyed with the idea of singing something, but on reflection it occurred to me that the audience would know there was no baritone soloist in that piece; and in any case I did not know what to sing.

When the overture was finished I took the tuba into my confidence. He was rather inclined to scoff at my troubles. "In lots of music," he told me, "there are parts which only come in for about two bars in the whole of four movements. You want to look as though you were going to play the musical glasses or the boatswain's whistle or something at any moment. Nobody will really watch you so carefully that they will know if you ever actually do play anything."

I said I was a little anxious also about not wearing a dinner-jacket like everybody else.

"My dear chap!" said the tuba. "Have you ever seen the citizen who plays the cimbalom in 'Hari Janos'? He always turns up dressed in the red uniform of the gipsy orchestra at the Goulash Restaurant. Actually he's the only cimbalom player in London and has to hop over quick from the Goulash while the rest of the band go for their supper; but I assure you most people think you can't play a cimbalom without wearing a red gipsy uniform."

"I can't play a cimbalom at all," I pointed out.

"Nobody knows what it is you're going to play. What you're wearing might be the appropriate dress for almost anything; except this lot." He indicated the entire orchestra with a sweep of his hand. "They wear dinner-jackets, of course."

Herr Korkzieher collected us for the next piece, and I could not go on talking to the tuba player after that. All the same, he had given me an idea. For the rest of the concert, up till now, I have sat gazing at the tuba part as if at any moment I should be expected to join in. Three or four times—this is the artistic part—I have raised both hands to my mouth, when I thought the band was playing so loud that nothing I did could make any difference, as if I was playing some very small instrument. Between whiles I have ostentatiously counted the bars on my fingers. It has restored my self-confidence a lot, and now, although I cannot say that I would rather be here than in the audience, or even in the bar, I no longer have that uncomfortable feeling that the whole house has its eyes fixed on me with the unspoken accusation that I am an interloper.

Herr Korkzieher, it is true, does not seem to take a very good view of my behaviour, and even seems to think that I am trying to get a cheap laugh. Well at any rate I have made the most of my opportunity to see how he looks from the orchestra's point of view. The trouble is that I am still not able to answer my original query, as I have never seen him from the audience.

## HALF-OPEN LETTER

(*exposing Half-veiled Threat*)

The Third Programme, I always thought,  
 Was intended to teach us What we Ought  
 To Like, and How to Like It,  
 Its *motif* educational  
 Rather than recreational . . .  
 Well, wasn't it?  
 That premiss granted, it has occurred to me  
 That it is going to be  
 Very awkward for the B.B.C.  
 And its backroom boys  
 When  
 We men  
 Of marsh, wold and fen  
 Become so accustomed to its background noise  
 That we *begin to like it that way* . . .  
 It is going to be, I say,  
 Extremely awkward some day  
 When we come to the Albert Hall  
 To hear, say, Mendelssohn's *St. Paul*,  
 And discover that there are no  
 Waterlogged harps twanging under the floor,  
 Cossack choirs zipping it in the corridor  
 Nor  
 Atlantic breakers crashing against the door . . .  
 In that day  
 I think we shall say  
 "This is not what we heard before . . ."  
 They have tampered with the score . . ."  
 And I am afraid we shall add  
 "*We demand our money back or . . .*"

## TWO-HEADED HORSE

Mummy! Mummy, have you got a large sort of bowl I could borrow to make you a surprise in? No, not a *washing-up* bowl, I mean the sort you *put things* in, like you might put bulbs, or something to look nice. This one would do if I could empty out the snap-cards and Christopher's glove and all these safety-pins and things. Mummy, here's my screw-up pencil—well, you know, my screw-up pencil that I lost, my screw-up pencil that you said last time you saw it was out of the window on the path—well, it must have been the last time but once. Mummy, you haven't got any *horses with two heads*, have you? Well, horses with two heads, Mummy, you know *horses*—well, with *two heads*. One at each end. Each end of the *horse*.

Well, Mummy, it's what Mrs. Nottingham's got—you know, Mrs. Nottingham, the conker lady. Mummy, her house is *full* of interesting things, like all those daggers in a case on the wall, and horses with two heads. I buried one. One of the horses. Well, Mummy, it was in a garden. No, not her outside garden. Mummy, did you know there's a man digs her garden, I mean her proper outside one, and his name's Mr. Tribe, and he says this weather it always has to be the paths because of the damp? He has pains. Well, he was sitting on the end of a wheelbarrow smoking a pipe, thinking about his pains and the damp, and Mrs. Nottingham was just coming home with her shopping and looked over the fence just before she got to her gate and said to me "*How much an hour?*" and I said I didn't know and she asked me if I'd like an apple.

Mummy, do you know what she's got? Inside. It's a garden—a garden on the table: it's called a *table garden*. It isn't really a garden at all, it's only what it's called. It's got a Japanese bridge, and a lady on top of the bridge with a parasol, only a bit's broken off the parasol, and a piece of glass for a lake, and a little boat on the lake, and a well with a lady—or it might be a man—looking down it, only one of her arms is gone, and a lot of sort of red broken up bits of brick and things, and a piece of dead moss. She said if she'd watered the moss it wouldn't be dead. Mummy, she had it for Christmas; and she said anyone could make one if they tried, only not with Japanese figures because there weren't any more, but other things.

So she lent me a bowl and I went out and smashed up a flower-pot: Mr. Tribe said I couldn't have it, but he didn't say it till after I'd smashed it. So when I'd hammered a long time it made a lot of red chips, and I scraped up a lot of moss, and Mummy, do you know what I saw? Do you? It was the horse with two heads. Mummy, I told you, *both ends*—no, I told you, it didn't have a tail. How could it have a tail if it had a head both ends? It had short legs and a long middle and two legs for each head: four legs and two heads it had, and *no tail*. It was on the side-board. So I put it along with the chips and put moss all round as well, and only its two heads coming out, and it was two horses in an underground stable. Mummy, wasn't it wiz—two horses in an underground stable? And I had my chess horse in

my pocket—well, you know, my chess horse that I found on the common, that's called a knight, but it looks like a horse: Mummy, I put it in too and it was looking at the two horses in the underground stable and it was all stretched up and sort of *surprised-looking*. Mummy, why are chess horses always so surprised-looking?

Mummy, it couldn't stop because she had to have the horse for dinner—well, Mrs. Nottingham: the horse with two heads. Because it was for putting carving knives on and someone brought it from Holland and she dug it up very gently with a pickle-fork, not to break it. Mummy, *why* do people put carving-knives on a horse with two heads? Why? Well, it seems a funny sort of thing to me: *we* haven't got a horse with two heads for our carving-knife.

So my garden was really spoilt, but I brought away the chess horse; and Mr. Tribe put his head through the window to say he was going now, and when he saw the moss he said it wasn't moss it was alpine something and it wasn't safe to take your eyes off, and Mrs. Nottingham said all people with any sort of gardens were *sensitive*, Mummy, and I'd better come, it was probably dinner-time. Mummy, why are people with gardens *sensitive*?



"BUT THIS IS AN ODD DAY TO ME!"

Mummy, have you got an old pot or something I could smash up for some chips? Mummy, do you know where that little Christmas tree is that I had from the cake? May I borrow Christopher's Father Christmas that he had from Grannie's cake? May I? Mummy, *why* must I ask him?—you know he won't let me. Mummy, why haven't we got any *interesting* things in our house, like Japanese wells or horses with two heads or anything: how can I make you a surprise if we haven't got anything to make it with, Mummy, how can I?

## TCO

I will read you Marmelee's letter.

Please don't, they said.

I have nothing else to do and it will be a pleasure.

*Chacun à son goût*, they replied in their best French.

My dear old Hilda it is a long time since you heard from me but I often think of you and of the dear old umberances . . . ambulances. As you see I have travelled a long way since then. TCO seems paradise compared to London fogs. I came out by air, had a marvellous trip, stopped at Aug<sup>a</sup>, B., and K'ki. *Wonderful* gunder-past, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I suppose you know I have married again? My hubby works for the P.C.I. here in TCO, he is a very good type. We have a dear little Bun<sup>o</sup> in the F.L.T. and no worries, really, I am getting bored with nothing to do, what a change from the past! Theo is flying home to-morrow, wish I could go too but can't afford it. Write soon and tell me all your news. Yours afftly Marmelee.

Very touching, they said. Why does she call you Hilda?

I do not know. I suppose she forgot my name was Molly.

And who on earth is this Marmelee woman?

I do not know that either, I have never in my life known anyone called Marmelee.

Their interest was roused and they said it was a bit peculiar.

But it is true I was an ambulance-driver, and the ambulances, although not so very dear to me, were certainly old.

Let us look, they said, golly, what frightful handwriting, she could be Margery or perhaps Mammy Leg. Think again.

The only Margery I know lives next door, and Mammy Leg sounds highly improbable.

Well, where is TCO?

I have never heard of it.

We suppose it is a contraction, they said brightly, she seems rather addicted to them. Let us see what we can find out about TCO. You can get there by air, stopping at Aug<sup>a</sup>, B., and K'ki. Um.

Well that bit is not very helpful, but what about this? A place full of wonderful gunderpast must surely have more than local fame.

That word is not in the dictionary, they said after research, but it certainly looks like gunderpast, it is the best-written word in the letter. Anyway it will not help you to identify TCO because it was only an incident on the journey.

Or perhaps it is TCOese for tiffin, chota hazri or whatever the airline provided.

Ignore gunderpast, they said, concentrate on hubby. His name is Theo, he is a good type, and he works for the P.C.I.

You are quite wrong, it is the P.C.I. who is the good type, not hubby, and moreover it is not established that hubby's name is Theo. Theo is simply a character who is flying home tomorrow, and I suppose he brought this letter with him as I see it was posted in W.C.1.

P.C.I., they said, what could that be? Principal Customs Inquisitor . . . Port Catamaran Inspector? It has a tang of the sea. Let us assume that TCO has a coastline, and that in the hinterland is the F.L.T. where the dear little Bun<sup>o</sup> is located.

I am sure the Bun<sup>o</sup> must be Marmelee's baby. In other words, her bambino or *très cher enfant*.

If it is so *cher* why does she keep it in the F.L.T.? That does not sound a motherly action to us. No, no, they said loudly, we see it all. Bun<sup>o</sup> is obviously a bungalow, it fits in with the catamarans and the gunderpast. TCO is a tropic isle, surrounded by surf, dotted with bungalows, and benevolently ruled by the P.C.I., and his staff. Probably it is a crown colony. You must write to Marmelee and ask for more details. Perhaps she will send us a food parcel.

I cannot write to Marmelee. She has forgotten to put her address.

Too bad, they said, losing interest. Please pass us the crossword.





*March, 1949*

HE UNDERSTANDS THESE THINGS

IT was a horrible house-coat, anyway. Looking on the bright side of things, that is what I had said to him from the first; and that was probably my first mistake. By saying that, I made him think I considered its reconversion just as he did, as an ordinary matter of economy, making something new out of something old.

Well, I didn't consider it like that. You see, I was fond of the thing. We were deeply attached. It would have been eight years old next month if it had lived.

Mother bought the stuff for it during the war, yards and yards of furnishing satin in wide stripes of green and white. It was all she could get off coupons. But mother's "little woman"—or perhaps it was a "little man," for mother is surrounded by "little people" of both sexes who "do" things—found even that weighty bale too little for a proper job. She cut the skirt in one piece so that, though the stripes hung down beautifully and with elegance at the front, my back was striped across as if I'd just got up off a wet park bench.

It was quite horrible, but I was very fond of it. This was partly because of its warmth, partly because—though he would never remember such a thing—I had been wearing it the first time he called before our marriage, and partly because it is the only house-coat I have ever had.

But then we had not been married long when the New Look burst in upon our savings. Of course I wanted new things—just a few: a frock, a coat, a skirt—but it wasn't I who started it. He started it. I had a long-term plot afoot to put the money by out of "housekeeping." But not he. "Darling," he said, "you must smarten up a bit, you know. You're looking terribly old-fashioned these days." I said it would cost money to put that right. He said, "Well, we've got it, haven't we?" and I said Yes, but that was for furniture, wasn't it?

Just the same, I wanted those clothes; and if he wanted them too I could still operate my plot by paying money back into the bank after I'd spent it instead of waiting till I had it. This was his idea—not a fault of mine. After all, I love the man. I wanted to please him.

So all right. I bought the things. And then it really was his fault because he wouldn't have me wear anything else but the new length. I bought velvet ribbon and check taffeta and tacked it to the bottom of everything, but all he said was "Darling, you look so horribly 'arranged' with all that tat round the skirt. Why don't you wear something else?"—meaning, if only he would remember, my one frock and my one skirt. I started letting pieces in at the waist; and then he said

"Darling, what have you done to your stomach?" I gave it up. I hated being told I looked "arranged." It sounded like something to do with the cat.

Then we hit Christmas. We spent too much on presents. We always do. I often wonder if the sentence should not read "Then Christmas hit us." At any rate, in amongst the shopping he decided I hadn't got anything "decent" enough to wear at mother's on Christmas Day, so we bought another frock at considerable expense for the occasion.

When we came out at the other end of that into the hard light of our own home there were no savings left and my skirt had worn out. I went back to wearing "the arrangements." The day we discovered about the savings I was wearing one of the better ones. He said immediately: "It's not only that it's difficult to keep this home together and get some money for the future. On top of that you have to go around looking like something from the spring sales. Haven't you got anything big enough to make a new dress from without all these, these..." I stopped him saying it.

That is when he discovered immense possibilities in the house-coat. He became positively rhapsodic. "But, darling," he said. "Darling, it's so striking, so bold." He meant the stripes when I took the thing off and laid it on the floor. I explained about cutting on the cross and broadening in the beam; but his imagination was on fire. I hadn't the devices to douse it.

We took the zipper out and unpicked the bodice. The rest of it laid on the floor looked like an overripe camembert with a slice out. It hadn't been cleaned in ages. He still thought it was wonderful, and he had an awful glint in his eye I hadn't seen before.

"Now, what's the difficulty, eh?" He was smiling all over, patronizing. I knew then beyond any doubt that he was going to Show Me How; and, worse, that nothing could be done about it. I explained about the stripes across my lower half. It seemed simpler than talking about cut on the cross. "Well," he said, when I'd finished, "well, I think I've got that. We'd better



"THERE IT GOES AGAIN."

work it out on paper, eh?" He rubbed his hands and smiled happily. I think I smiled back.

He drew a small camembert on a half-used page of his diary. Then he drew a large camembert on his cheque-book. "I think we'd better have sheets of paper," he said. I got them. At the end of an hour he said, "The solution, darling, is in panels. We shall have to cut it up like a cheese." So it has struck him too, I thought. I said "Why?"

"Because if you can't wear it in one piece with the lines going straight round, you'll have to wear it zig-zag with the lines going up and down." The notion of this seemed to please him. "It will be very bold that way," he said.

I asked how many sections. He said sixteen. I said why not four, two zigs and two zags? He said because that way would produce the same line across at



"... AND WILL IT BURN EVERY KIND OF SALVAGE?"

back, front or either side, whichever I preferred; and didn't I have faith in his calculations? I told a lie.

"Well, let's cut it up, then," he said. I said "No. For heaven's sake, no. Let me work it out slowly." He helped me. Nothing on earth would stop him helping me. He helped me with cheeses of paper marked with the stripes and numbered one to sixteen. He said "It's all right, darling. This all helps. It's making it even clearer to me. Don't think it's a trouble." We shuffled the cheeses until, by jettisoning one, we had zig-zags all the way round. They were not very regular. None of the stripes seemed quite to meet. "Oh, that's all right," he said. "We can move them up or down when we've cut the cloth, and then you can make adjustments at the waist and hem." It was terrifying, but we cut the cloth.

That was two months ago. I have been making adjustments. The couple from next door looked in occasionally and said how striking it was going to be, but then we said the same to them during their last evening dress. He just sat around, beaming.

I finished yesterday, and he rang up from the office while I was finishing. "Can you bunch it more at the front?" he said. "I've been reading the papers. They say in Paris that the line is going to be swept forward this year." I said I couldn't sweep it forward, it was already bunched all over, my fingers were sore, my eyes were sore, my head was sore. He must have got my point, for he said "Darling, I'm sure it's wonderful," and rang off.

We went to mother's last night, me in it—looking bold, he said.

Mother is shortsighted. She took one look at me on the sofa and said "Oh, dear, I've had a little woman in to do the rugs. She must have left her things." She stood up and came across the room. "I'd better put them in the hall," she said. She made a grab at my skirt and tried to walk out of the room with it. I could have cried, but didn't. I was past demonstrating. Mother was very good about it afterwards. She called it a "most interesting arrangement." And he was very flattered by that of course.

## THE ENFRANCHISEMENT—TO CORINNA

Those satins, that uncoupon'd dress  
 (Which hides thy sweeter loveliness),  
 The kerchief at thine iv'ry throat,  
 And still tempestuous petticoat,  
 And those brave nylons, neatly trim,  
 That soft enclose each gracefull limb—  
 All these (thy other selfe) put on  
 To mark thine absolution.  
 But chief, Corinna, with thee bring  
 Thy booke, for thankfull offering;

No longer now the checker'd page  
 Controles thy lenten foliage,  
 Or with a sullen word denies  
 The wishfull longing of thine eyes;  
 So on this dusty altar lay  
 The token of a sadder day,  
 Which here shall unlamented lie,  
 The salvage of thy liberty.

### BRAVE NEW WORLD

Don't lock the yard door, dear; it isn't as if we should be out for long, and the Bread hasn't been yet. We don't want him to leave it outside as it only advertises the fact that there's no one in. I've put the money for the window-cleaner on the sill. I should think it would be all right. He generally comes before the Bread. Perhaps you'd better turn the key of the coal-house, though; you hear of such things happening.

Oh, and George, there's a pudding in the oven which I want to tell you about as you'll be in before me, because I shall have to call in at the Robinsons' on the way home as Mrs. Robinson said she might be able to get a rabbit for me from her butcher this week as I got some suet for her from mine last week. All you've got to do is to turn this knob off as soon as you get in. Just turn it round until it says "off." No, it'll be all right; it stays warm for ages. I've put a tin of meat loaf and the opener all ready here, but be *sure* and don't open it until I come back in case I bring in a rabbit. No, of course I'm not going to cook it to-night, but if there's a rabbit for to-morrow we can have eggs to-night and we needn't open a tin, but if there isn't a rabbit we can open the tin and it'll do for twice.

There's some soup on the gas ring, so all you've got to do is to put a light under it, and I've put the plates in front of the sitting-room fire so you'll only have to put a match to it, and I've filled the electric kettle so you can just switch that on. And if Mrs. Green calls before I get back she's bringing a fowl. Her sister's sending one from the country and they're going away for the week-end so I said we'd put it in our fridge for them until they come back. She may bring us their corned beef. She did last time they went away. If so, we could have it to-night instead of the eggs if I bring in a rabbit and it would save opening a tin if I don't bring one, if you see what I mean.

Do you remember if we told Jane we were going out this evening? You don't? Then I'd better put my key under the mat as she mayn't have taken hers and she may catch an early train; but remind me to take it in this evening if she does come in after us as that's how the next door people say they got their house burgled.

Oh, and George, if Mrs. Green does bring us their corned beef, be sure and

give her that piece of fish that was left over from lunch for their cat; but if she doesn't I'll let Mrs. Smith have it for theirs. If the phone rings just after six it'll probably be Mrs. Smith to say their sitter-in can't go after all. I told her if she couldn't one of us would go over later. Yes, I know, dear, but I thought we ought to offer; they haven't been out together for ages and it isn't as if they could just turn the key and leave the house without any trouble like we can.

Have you got six-and-fivepence-ha'penny on you? It's for the Milk, dear. You might just put it beside the bottles behind the door; and perhaps I'd better leave a note for Jane in case she comes in before we do. She might open the tin, which would be a pity if Mrs. Green should bring us their corned beef or if I bring in a rabbit, as we could have eggs to-night.

I'll just run up and switch the water-heater on so that it'll be hot for washing-up when we come in, and then there's only the oven to turn on and we shall be all ready. Whatever we should do without all these labour-saving devices I don't know; in fact, how people used to manage at all in the old days I can't imagine!



"I'VE BOUGHT ONE EVERY CRISIS SINCE PEACE CAME."

### SALE THIS DAY

It was a dull sale at the big grey house on the hill. I'd only dropped in for half an hour on my way back from the downs, to find they'd got as far as "Lot 507, garden-roller by reliable maker, slightly defective." And then my heart stopped. For, looking over someone's shoulder, I read: "Lot 510, wickerwork bathchair with tiller steering, good as new."

I don't see that I need make any apology for having always felt, deep below the surface but never satisfactorily banked down, a great flame of longing to possess a bathchair. When you consider there are men of authority in the world who collect match-boxes, a desire to own this most delightful and innocent of all vehicles requires no defence. There are, of course, many pleasant things one can do with it, high among them being, I think, to smoke a cigar in the *tonneau* while someone younger



than oneself is pushing the machine up a hill, but what I personally had always had in mind was to fit it up with a sail. A sort of spinnaker, I sometimes thought.

I got a fright from a bull-necked man in the front row with a dangerously indolent look in his eye, but he threw in the sponge at seven-and-six, and half an hour later I was out in the street with the most beautiful bath-chair you ever saw, the kind that old gentlemen looking like small dromedaries in

bowler-hats used to tow gloomily along the South Coast. Having some miles to go I set off down the hill at a smart pace, when it occurred to me that here was one of those rare opportunities to get my own back on gravity. The road was well metalled, the gradient reasonable, and I found that by pressing my old gloves on the tyres I could brake comfortably. The sensation of freedom was glorious, and I wished that some competent poet were with me to nail it in words.

I was still going nicely when a startled cry from the pavement drew my attention to a man named Evans to whom I had once given a cat. I waved heartily in return, and the consequent release of pressure on the right-hand wheel shot me across the road like an arrow towards the only other vehicle in sight, a milk-cart. The milkman had evidently been an athlete in his youth, and his horse was by no means without presence of mind. What might have been a very gruelling pint-to-pint became no more than a stirring memory, once I was out of earshot of the milkman and again sailing down the middle of the road.

The hill growing a good deal steeper, I braked harder with my gloved hands, and at that the smoking palms gave way. From this unhappy moment the curve of acceleration rose so sharply that big decisions became inevitable. I could either jump overboard, at heavy cost to the National Health Service, or I could go on, entering the ancient borough in the valley below, if all went well, in about two minutes at something approaching the speed of sound. Seeing a massive pair of gateposts on the port side, however, a third course suggested itself, and leaning right out of the basket as if it were a racing dinghy going into the wind I swung the tiller hard over. "Four Beeches," the house was called, I don't know why. There was a short drive leading up to it, and this I took like a rocket. Two alternatives then came up for consideration rather quickly. One was to try conclusions with some brick steps and

become involved in a Richard Hearne act through tall french windows, the other was to swerve to the right along a sandy path that led round the house. I chose the latter, once more employing a technique common enough in Fireflies and such craft but less often applied to racing bathchairs; and a moment later I repeated the manoeuvre, at the corner of the house.

A childish fancy that my troubles were over was soon dashed. The path now widened into a small square, and across it sat the owners, arranged as if for a family group except that they were all asleep, basking in the early sun. I was still going far too fast to avoid everybody; and it was purely in a spirit of gallantry, which I hoped he would understand, that I picked out the master of the house and drove straight at him, skilfully avoiding the women and children. On the whole I came out of it better than he did, for I remained seated. He was a large man with a very red face, and as he lay in a rose-bed with his eyes still shut he clapped his hands loudly and shouted hoarsely for his bearer. Wondering if it was quite wise to do so, I helped him to his feet. It took him a little time to assess the situation, starting from cold, as it were, but when he did no shade of welcome crossed his rugged features. His womenfolk observed us breathlessly. I laid unheard-of apologies at his feet, I laid them in rows before his family, but still his jaw bulged powerfully. I told him of the sale, of Evans and his cat, of the long-jumping milkman and his thoughtful horse, of the many terrible decisions which had been forced upon me. His ham-like fists were white at the knuckles as at last he found words.

"Why the devil did you buy the infernal thing?" he roared.

I took a deep breath.

"It has long been my ambition," I said, in a simple, manly way, "to rig a bathchair with a sail. Even, perhaps, with a spinaker."

Never could I have imagined such a change in such a man. Instantly he became a mountain of geniality, seizing me by the hand and letting out vast guffaws of pleasure.

"Now you're talking!" he shouted.





"Now you're not!" whispered his family, as they crept into the house.

"Of course your spinnaker notion is stuff and nonsense," he rumbled, "but I don't see why she shouldn't carry plain Bermuda if we put plenty of lead in her keel . . ."

It was surprising, to say the least of it, to be sitting in my bathchair beside this remarkable man, while he began eagerly to draw in the sand.

## NOTHING TO DO WITH LITERATURE

The expression on the face of Mr. Igor Agar, screen-writer, would have alarmed me a good deal more if I had not been sent to him by the omnipotent Mr. Zooniman. I introduced the magic name into my opening sentence.

"Oh," said Mr. Agar, and scowled maniacally into the shaving-mirror on his desk. He mouthed silently, with exaggerated lip movements.

"I believe we are to collaborate," I said, taking the liberty of sitting, "on 'Hearts at Bay.'" He waved a soiled hand at me and flickered his tongue a dozen times like an agitated chameleon. Then he said, articulating hugely: "And you call yourself a democrat!"

"Oh, I don't know." I have known enough film personalities to meet their moods adroitly. "Nowadays there's so much Right to the Left of one, and so much Left——"

"Say it," commanded Mr. Agar.

"Say what?"

"'And you call yourself a democrat.'" "

"All right. And I call myself——"

He put up both hands and pulled his hair down over his eyes. "Word for word, man. And e-nun-ci-ate!"

"'And you call yourself,'" I said, enunciating, "'a democrat.'" "

He had watched me closely. Now he pushed his hair back into place and turned the shaving-mirror face down on the desk. When he spoke there was enough passionate rancour in his voice to pierce the hide of a rhinoceros.

"The American market!"

"Ah," I said. "So that's it. But Mr. Zooniman told me you had finished 'The Salvaged Soul.' I thought——?"

He thrust his hands deep in his pockets and shot out his legs, pushing back his chair until it hit the wall. He lay back, addressing the ceiling.

"Mr. Whatever-your-name is," he said pontifically—"there is much talk to-day about the Art of the Film. But a work of art is the product of genius, and genius is the product of one man. Now, *this*——!" He suddenly leant forward and snatched up a loosely-bound Final Shooting Script, flinging it savagely into the air. It fluttered down all over the room in enormous snowflakes. "See what I mean?"



GRASP ALL, LOSE ALL

"Well, I——"

But the question was rhetorical. Mr. Agar threw up a clawing hand to the ceiling. "If you get a decent story, the actors murder it—provided the front office doesn't throw it out because they won't like it in Lancashire. If the actors don't murder it, the director misconstrues it; if he doesn't, the cameraman lights it like a Petticoat Lane junk-stall; even if none of that happens, the editor scythes out all the



"THIS PEN HASN'T ANY SENSATIONAL FEATURES—IT JUST WRITES."

good stuff and cuts in a lot of tripe—and what they do to the sound-track is nobody's business." He paused, breathing deeply. "In fact, I sometimes think it's a pity they don't ruin *all* the negatives in the laboratory, instead of about seventy per cent. of them." He snorted. "And to top it all," he said gratingly, pulling his hair down again with the claw-like hand—"there's the American market!" He pursed his lips and spoke mincingly. "We *must* remember the American market. Dollars, old chap."

"I'm sorry," I said.

"And you call yourself a democrat!" he said, picking up the mirror again. His facial convulsions were frightening. "You can't do it!"

"Can't do what?"

"The Salvaged Soul'  
—end of sequence 'E.'

There's a close-up of Illana Wabash filling the screen with teeth and saying 'And you call yourself a democrat.' I polished that sequence until it glittered. That line was the pay-off. It was cathartic, a flash of inspiration, it illuminated the whole picture. Now, if you please, because a democrat in America is something with a special meaning, they want to dub another line into the sound-track, so that although Wabash is really saying 'And you call yourself a democrat,' the audience hears something different!"

"Quite," I said. "But what?"

He raised a hand to strike me. Instead he struck the prone shaving-mirror. It crunched, and he gathered its splinters with trembling fingers and hurled them into his waste-paper basket. He gave me a smouldering look. "But what, he says. But what." Then his control snapped and he ranted, waving his arms. "There she is, in a close-up, with a mouth the size of an earthquake fissure and every tooth like a milk-churn, spread all over the screen! It couldn't be a long shot, oh, no! She couldn't have her back to the camera, not a bit of it!"

"I suppose not," I said.

He said to the mantelshelf, "He supposes not," and then drooped forward, his head on his arms. With a finger he flicked a foolscap sheet towards me. "There," he said. "Three days' work."

The paper was lavishly decorated with small drawings, mostly trees. There were also several highly-stylized pictures of men in cloth caps, wearing outmoded moustaches and smoking inverted clay pipes. In the centre was some writing, heavily lined in. I studied it sympathetically.

And you call yourself a  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{dumb cluck} \\ \text{demi-tasse} \\ \text{democrat} \\ \text{tame cat} \\ \text{damp towel} \\ \text{(wet blnkt.?)} \end{array} \right.$

And you warmed yourself  
 And you thought you said  
 Had you warmed yourself a doormat?  
 And you taught yourself  
 Have you caught a selfish damozel?  
 And you

I handed the sheet back, nodding. "It's not easy."

"Not easy, he says." His voice, muffled in his coat-sleeve, was broken and hoarse. "Not easy." He sat up very straight. "You might as well ask Shakespeare to find a substitute for 'That last infirmity of noble mind.'"

We sat in silence for a minute. Considerately, I gave no expression to a conviction that Shakespeare would never have dubbed into Milton's sound-track. Suddenly he snapped his fingers. "Andrew called to sell a dummy cat!" he declared.

"No," I said, gently.

He dwindled into his jacket. "No," he agreed. "Phonetically perfect, but the sense isn't right."

We sat in silence again until the telephone rang.

"Yes, yes, it is indeed," said Agar into the receiver. "Who? Oh, yes, Mr. Zooniman. You've what?" He stood up abruptly, and opened the centre drawer

of his desk, rummaging with his free hand. "I see, Mr. Zooniman. Oh, certainly, Mr. Zooniman. Not at all. Good-bye, Mr. Zooniman."

He sat down. He had a small bottle of gin in his hand, and unscrewed the cap slowly.

"That was Mr. Zooniman."

"Oh, yes?"

"Yes. They've decided to cut the whole of Sequence 'E.'"

It seemed unfair to look at him; great suffering should be a private affair. But I caught sight of the raised bottle out of my eye-corner.

"You don't mind?" he said dully. "Medicinal."

## NEW AND DREADFUL

It was during Housewives' Choice that the voice intruded. "We got none 'ere," it said hoarsely. A pause followed, presumably while the other half of the dialogue replied. Then the voice came on again. Its irritation was evident. "I tell you we ain't got none," it said. "We . . ."

There was a crackle and it was gone. Meanwhile the music continued.

This was my opportunity. I at once telephoned the B.B.C. A woman answered.

"B.B.C.," she said.

"Good morning," I said politely. "I am a listener. A voice has intruded . . ."

"I'll put you through to Inquiries."

"Thank you."

Someone started firing a machine-gun into the telephone. The noise was deafening. My ears sang. Then came a sudden *click* and a new voice said "B.B.C. Inquiries."

Again it was a woman, but this time the tones were deep and mellow and infinitely soothing.

"B.B.C. Inquiries. Can I help you?"

"Yes," I said. "I wish to inquire about a voice which intruded five minutes ago into Housewives' Choice. It was most disturbing."

The answer came out pat. "It was due to a technical fault at the transmitter. We have since apologized to listeners."

"Thank you," I said. There was a pause.

"Would there be anything further?" the voice cooed.

"No, thank you," I said. "Except—er—that is, have you had many similar complaints?"

"Some fifteen to twenty listeners have telephoned so far."

"And do you expect many more?"

"They will continue on and off during the next half-hour."



NOELMAN MANSLER/DGA

"I TELL YOU I CAN ONLY GET HELP ON TUESDAY MORNINGS."

"And the Press?"

"The Press have also telephoned."

"Thank you very much," I said. And rang off.

It was the work of a moment to dial the number of the *Daily Gazette*. They answered promptly.

"*Gazette* here," they said.

"Good morning," I said pleasantly. "I am a reader. I have just been listening to Housewives' Choice and . . ."

"One moment, please," they said. "We will put you through to Reader Research."

Two seconds later a deep, mellow and infinitely soothing voice said "Reader Research."

"I am a reader," I began.

"Oh, yes."

"Ten minutes ago I was listening to Housewives' Choice and . . ."

"You mean the interruption?" the voice asked sweetly.

"Yes," I said.

"We have *already* telephoned the B.B.C."—the voice was throbbing now with quiet pride—"and they tell us that it was due to a technical fault at the transmitter. They have since apologized to listeners."

"Thank you very much," I said. "Er—tell me," I went on. "Have you had many similar inquiries from your readers?"

"They are coming in steadily. Yours is precisely"—she paused—"precisely the thirty-fourth."

"I expect quite a number always get in touch with you when this sort of thing happens?" I asked.

"Oh, yes," she answered. "A very large number. Always."

"Thank you," I said. And rang off.

The next morning I was waiting for the boy when he delivered my *Gazette*.

There it was on the front page. Hundreds of listeners had telephoned the B.B.C. and the *Gazette's* offices to find out what was the matter. *Hundreds of listeners . . .*

Until yesterday I had never really believed that such people existed. But there they were. It seemed scarcely credible.

I had indeed entered a new and dreadful world.

## BALLADE OF CULTURAL AMBITION

No more thus mute and passive will I lie,  
 By others' brilliance cowardly deterred.  
 I want to be the baker, not the pie,  
 I want to be the stirrer, not the stirred;  
 My spirit faints with hope too long deferred  
 To be men's Guide to Learning's Holy Source,  
 Their Newer Statesman, their Renowned Last Word.  
 I want to be an *Intellectual Force*.

"What, you a force?" my rude acquaintance cry.  
 "A force? What, you?" my ruder children gird.  
 "Not oft your humour wings a flight so high;  
 Your mouth was full, or 'twas our ears that erred.  
 Nay, sooner ask a potter from the sherd,  
 Bid gluttons fast, or bishops seek divorce."  
 All right, all right; what if I *am* absurd?  
 I *want* to be an Intellectual Force.

On every theme that grows beneath the sky  
 Men lecture me, nor once have I demurred—  
 From Neo-Gothic to the Tsetse Fly,  
 From the Worms Diet to the early Byrd.

Have *I* no views, albeit somewhat blurred?  
 No quirks, no fancies, though they be but coarse?  
 And shall my tongue, mine only, rest unheard?  
*I* want to be an Intellectual Force.

*Envoi*

Prince, lo, behold me, booted, breeched and spurred;  
 I have acquired the cutest hobby-horse.  
 Fetch then a mike, and cry me on the Third;  
*I* want to be an Intellectual Force.

## JUST TICK THEM OFF ON YOUR FINGERS

I was asked a little while ago by a small girl to name the Continents, and did so. More, I pointed them out unhesitatingly on the map. She then asked me to name the Oceans.

"Well," I said. "Just as there are five Continents, so there are five Oceans—Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, Arctic and—er—Antarctic."

She said she had never heard of the Antarctic Ocean.

This made me slightly uneasy. This small girl attaches considerable weight to any information I give her; I have heard her pass on to her companions miscellaneous items I have let fall about the size of the moon or the reason owls hunt in the dark as though they had all the freshness and validity of pieces seen in the paper. So I had another look at the map to make sure.

If you look at Mercator's excellent Projection you will find "ARCTIC OCEAN" written twice, once in a patch of blue above Alaska and those parts, and again on the right-hand side along the top of Siberia. I count this as one ocean and an obvious instance of the sort of difficulty that besets a man who tries to spread a globe out on a single sheet of paper. Lower down, between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn and reading from left to right, appear the Pacific, Atlantic and Indian Oceans, with (on my map) a rather fiddling reappearance of the Pacific on the extreme right where the Philippines come round again. Southward of all this lies an almost unbroken stretch of light blue, running right across the bottom of the page, with only three indeterminate excrescences (labelled, respectively, "Wilkes Land," "Graham Ld" and "Wilkes Land") to vary the monotony. There is ample room to write "ANTARCTIC OCEAN" six times over in these desolate regions, but one looks in vain for hide or hair of it.

I admitted all this frankly enough to the small girl, who had indeed been leaning heavily on the back of my neck during these researches, and she advised me,



with a child's intuitive apprehension of the next thing to be done, to turn over. I did so, abandoning "World—Political" for "World—Physical Features," and at once observed a surprising thing. The Arctic continued to make its dual appearance, the Pacific and Indian Oceans were unchanged, but the Atlantic had come in half. It was now featured as "NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN" and (in its lower reaches, between the Cape of Good Hope and, say, Rio de Janeiro) "SOUTH ATLANTIC OCEAN."

"One, two, three, four, *five* oceans," said the child, triumphantly.

I could not accept this, and drew a swift analogy to bolster my morale. "Just as there is a North America and a South America, yet only one *continent* of America, so, no doubt," I said, "there is one Atlantic Ocean, divided into North and South Atlantics."

"Then there's only four," said the child.

I could not accept that either. Ever since the first governess darkened the doors of my own childhood there have been five continents and five oceans, and I see no

reason to make a change at my time of life. "Wait a minute," I said, and turned to the extreme end of the Atlas, where one is shown the North and South Polar Regions as viewed from a balloon. There is much good reading on these two maps, with all sorts of geo-political inferences waiting to be drawn, but as a means of settling an argument about the names of the oceans I cannot recommend them. Around the South Pole, for instance, are said to lie the Indian Ocean, this confounded South Atlantic Ocean of theirs, and a South *Pacific* Ocean of all unheard-of things.

"That makes six," said the child.

"No," I said.

There was worse to follow; for inside this ring of new-fangled oceans and in a



André Franconi

direction that, but for the absurdity of directions in the polar regions, would be to the north-west of the South Pole is a clearly-marked "Antarctic Sea."

"You said it was an ocean," complained the child.

I thought it best to turn over, or rather, since we were already at the extreme limit of the book, to turn back. This was a mistake. It brought us face to face with Australasia, and almost the first peculiarity one notices about the map of Australasia are the words "SOUTHERN OCEAN," boldly inscribed off the tip of Tasmania.

"Southern Ocean, Southern Ocean, Southern Ocean," cried the child, skipping about the room and cracking her fingers together in an unpleasant way.

"You'll hurt yourself," I said, not very hopefully, "if you go on like that. That's not its real name, anyway. It's only what they call it in those parts, I expect."

"What they call what?"

"Well——" I began, but not having an answer immediately ready threw the Atlas away and hauled out the relevant volume of the Encyclopædia.

"MALT-PEAR," said the child. "How super!"

Chambers, bless them, make no bones at all about the oceans. "The separate oceans" (they say categorically) "are the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Indian, the Arctic and the Antarctic." They say more than this, but that is enough to show that they were properly brought up. Very likely they had governesses when they were small. "You see?" I said to the child.

"It's a pretty *old* book," she said (as indeed it is).

"Oceans don't go changing about from day to day," I said with some warmth. "They stay put." But all the same, to clinch the matter, I went and got my 1948 *Almanack*. Whitaker is just as definite as Chambers.

"The following table gives the areas of the principal oceans and seas" (he remarks), "with the greatest known depth of each:

<i>Oceans</i>		
Name	Area of Basin (sq. miles)	Greatest Depth (feet)
Pacific	63,986,000	Off Mindanao, 35,410
Atlantic	31,530,000	Porto Rico Trench, 30,143
Indian	28,350,000	Sunda Trench, 22,968
Arctic	5,541,600	17,850
<i>Seas</i>		
Malay	etc., etc."	

We had, as Henry James would say, a pause.

"It's jolly deep, I must say," said the child at last. "Off Mindanao, I mean."

I said nothing. It did not occur to me at the time that the Antarctic, though a perfectly good ocean in every way, might very well be omitted from a table of *principal* oceans. Could we now perhaps reach a form of agreement along those lines?

April, 1949

SPRING COLLECTION

IT seems only the other day that we were reading about the first post-war fashion shows in Paris, about the amazing ingenuity of *couturiers* with such household names as Schumpfenfelt, Deglourmette, Ys and Strudelheim who were doing their level (or rather asymmetrical) best to hide the ravages of war and malnutrition. The new fashions, if you remember, were designed to camouflage emaciated wrists and ankles, pinched cheeks and every variety of deficiency disease. At the time I found myself distrusting the new modes instinctively. Later I decided that any woman with enough francs or husbands to afford such expensive garments would also be able to afford a body-building venture into the notorious black market of the period. I decided, too, that the "new look" cast an unmistakable slur on my sex: there was nothing whatever new in the way of camouflage in men's clothes and the inference was that we had done ourselves pretty well at women's expense throughout the war.

These thoughts and many, many more flashed through my mind as I made my way the other afternoon to a famous "Spring Collection" in Mayfair. It is not easy for a plain man to gain admittance to these halls of high *couture*, but with a bit of plasticine I somehow contrived to make my umbrella handle look as though it concealed a miniature camera, and so deceived the receptionist and won through to a comfortable seat in the dressy circle. When I had summoned up enough courage to raise my flushed head from my chest I discovered that my neighbours were two middle-aged women of distinguished mien, one of whom gave off the provocative fragrance of "Parfum Drame," and the other a tantalizing hint of "Toujours L'Audace." It is to these ladies that I am chiefly indebted for the following fashion notes.

"Oh," said "Parfum Drame," as the first gown appeared, "isn't it gloriously ready-to-wear for immediate blooming and shaped into follow-me lines?"

"That ruffled collar caught in almost-real roses!" said "Toujours L'Audace."

The mannequin raised her skirt to show the edge of a sort of petticoat.

"This, surely," said "Parfum Drame," "is the way to approach a romantic and fashionable spring! Lines and graces and ease-of-manner all so typically just-so. Glimmers of pure silk-satin, drifts of dark and fragile lace . . . ahhh!"

"Ahhh," echoed "Toujours L'Audace," "they just couldn't wait to show us this out-of-the-world creation which is as feminine as the vapours."

The gown pirouetted, flounced four paces, turned on its heel as easily as a locomotive turn-table and strutted up the steps to an ornamental arch flanked by

pieces of sculpture, which might have been attributed to Henry Moore but for the fact that all the holes were in the wrong places. Immediately a new creation appeared, "Parfum Drame" gasped and held her breath easily, as though she had been doing it for years.

"Oh, do look at that spectacular, trim little, slim little go-anywhere costume," she said, "so sharply etched in fine worsted. It fits right into my blueprint for spring!"

"Only look at that white piqué yoke that copycats a penguin's dress shirt!" said "Toujours L'Audace." "And the little intimate cape, to hold close about you, in softest wool suède cloth with contrasting rayon lining. Beige and black, kelly with navy, navy and . . . Oh, doesn't it know all about *persons*!"

"There's precious all-combed yarn there," said "Parfum Drame," "in a firm close weave for extra strength in every lustrous inch."

"It meets with instant acceptance," said "Toujours L'Audace."

The costume minced back up the steps to be replaced by an evening gown of incredible skimpiness. This time the critics held their breath for so long that I feared for their red corpuscles.

"Oh," exploded "Toujours L'Audace," "now *that's* what I call a real across-the-table delight for during-dinner compliments, and in such a light-hearted dancing mood. The neckline a beautiful scoop, scoop of the evening, beautiful scoop."

"Any girl in *that* dress," said "Parfum Drame," "knows where to eat, what to read, what plays to see. And does she know clothes! Her



"ARMEN ONLY SALUTE YOU IF YOU'RE COMMISSIONED, OTHERWISE ALL YOU'RE ENTITLED TO IS THE USUAL LONG, LOW WHISTLE."

favourite for summer? Why, this celestial, luminous dinner-and-on dress in stiff ribbed-silk which travels in to dinner with a swish of know-how . . ."

There were upwards of fifty offerings in the show and I stayed for the lot, enthralled by the comments of my fellow-travellers on the wing of prose. And when it was all over and I had pretended to slip the completed roll of film into my mouth, I went out into the work-a-day streets, found a just-for-you tavern and had a large, man-sized, devil-take-the-tax, come-hither glass of beer.

A little man in a faded black hat stood next to me at the bar. I noticed that he wore a frayed Gladstone-type collar to hide his pinched cheeks, threadbare striped trousers to mask his emaciated ankles, and a shabby blue coat with long sleeves to hide his drum-stick wrists. His face was flushed from many gins-and-bitters to hide the tell-tale marks of innumerable deficiency diseases. But the thing that impressed me most about his appearance was a fine strapless multicoloured tie.

"That's a fine tie you got there, brother," I said.

"Glad you like it," he said. "Homage to spring, you know."

### UNDER THE HAMMER

When I was in the B.B.C.  
 Department of Variety  
 They sent me to an auction sale  
 Down on a farm in Wensleydale.  
 I had a simple job to do—  
 It was, to buy a B-flat moo,  
 A stave or two of sparrows' tweets  
 With half a dozen baas of bleats.  
 When I arrived upon the scene  
 I found the competition keen . . .  
 A girl in jodhpurs, wearing stirrups,  
 Was snapping up the chickens' chirrups,  
 Impressionists were stuffing sacks  
 With whinnies, nickers, clucks and quacks,  
 And Dr. Ludwig Koch had bought  
 A most exclusive swinish snort  
 Which has, I understand, since been  
 Much heard in "Country Magazine".  
 As I stood in the failing light  
 Reflecting on this striking sight  
 It suddenly occurred to me  
 That scenes like this, you know, must be  
 Much commoner than one suspects  
 When farmers auction their Effects.



"HURRY, DARLING, I'M TERRIFIED OF COWS."

### SHE WAS FORGET IT

Immediately the head of the family mentioned the word "shopping" I did my best to look (like the bouman in *Kidnapped* when Alan Breck wanted him to carry a message to James of the Glens) both shifty and dull. One would not object so much to coming back from the office laden like a Tibetan porter if there were no shops in the village where we live. The bouman in question was a ragged, wild, bearded man, grossly disfigured with the small-pox, and being a bouman he lived by taking cattle from his landlord and sharing with him the increase. What he did if there was a decrease is not made clear by Stevenson, who was less concerned with such far-fetched hypotheses than with getting on with the story.

"I think a pound of coffee will be enough," said the head of the family, a far-away look in her eyes. "You might get some kippers at Dodgson's—there's nothing in the house for breakfast to-morrow; and you won't forget the elastic, will you? I'm afraid you'll have to call at Humboldt's for that curtain material; they forgot to send it yesterday. Two and a quarter yards of fifty-four-inch, and the little piece, about half a——"

"She was forget it," I said in a screaming voice. David Balfour, by the way, thought that the bouman had little good-will to serve them, and that what he had was the child of terror.



"QUITE FRANKLY, MRS. JOHNSON, YOUR ANXIETY NEUROSI  
HAS ME WORRIED."

The head of the family desisted from the task of shovelling food into her second-in-command long enough to write down the list on the back of an envelope, and I wiped the porridge off my fountain-pen with my handkerchief and left the house at a shambling trot which I knew I could sustain over moor and glen for hours on end. But when at Lime Street I came to take out my wallet the envelope, which I had carefully placed beside my season-ticket, had vanished.

"Her nainsel will loss it," I muttered, rolling my eyes strangely and feeling for the hairy purse that ought to have been hanging at my waist.

The ticket-collector, eyeing me with a rather curious expression, said that in that case I would have to pay the return fare. I produced the season-ticket, which he examined with minute suspicion and loped away towards the office.

There is a telephone in my office (we move with the times in Liverpool) but none in my home. However, by lunch-time I was fairly confident that I had managed to recall every item on the list, and after my simple repast I made a tour of the shopping quarter and on returning to the office got the boy to make up my purchases into a single neat brown-paper parcel, which I placed in a conspicuous position on my desk. I attacked the afternoon's work with zest, sending back to be retyped a letter I had dictated in the morning which contained a reference to fifty-four elastic kippers, and soon I was so deep in concentration that I became oblivious to my surroundings. It came as a shock to me when I looked at my watch and found that I had barely time to catch my train.

I reached Lime Street Station with three minutes to spare. The same ticket-collector was on duty and, as I passed through the barrier with a cheery "Good evening," he extended an ape-like arm across my path. "Ticket, please," he said.

After a rapid search of my wallet I appealed to his better nature, pointing out that he had inspected my season-ticket less than eight hours before. His face (it was a narrow, clay-coloured face, and I am confident that if he had lived a couple of centuries earlier it would have been grossly disfigured with the small-pox) did not change. "You'll have to pay the fare," he said.

He wrote out the ticket with maddening deliberation, but he had miscalculated the time remaining, and I was able to catch the train with some seconds to spare. As I walked down the platform the ticket-collector shouted something after me—

probably some jeering allusion to the Pretender's retreat from Derby—which I studiously ignored. Just as the train started a stoutish, middle-aged man who lives in the same village as myself panted up and scrambled into the last compartment.

On the whole I felt that I had done fairly well; and when in the train I discovered my season-ticket in my overcoat pocket I became positively light-hearted. I strode up the hill to my domicile with the light, springy step of the mountaineer, whistling (if I remember rightly) "Hey, Johnny Cope, are ye wauken yet?" I was conscious of having overcome, by sheer superiority of intellect, the powerful forces that had conspired during the day to bring about my ruin.

It was only as I laid my hand on the door-handle that I remembered the parcel on my desk, which I was certain I had brought with me; but I had not got it now. It was far too big a parcel to have been hidden in the neuk of my plaid, even if the Highland dress had not been outlawed by the Act of 1746; and I was reflecting bitterly on the total absence of any heather in which an unsatisfactory bouman might skulk for three or four days until the outcry against him had died down when a middle-aged, fattish man appeared at the garden gate. He was a good deal out of breath, and in his arms he carried a brown-paper parcel.

"I think this is yours," he said.

After I had wrung him by the hand and assured him that I and my family would be delighted at any time to take his cattle and share the increase with him on a very liberal basis, I asked him where he had found it.

"You left it at the barrier of Lime Street," he said. "The ticket-collector couldn't make you hear, so he asked me to give it to you."

He had a rather Whig-gish appearance; but I will always give both him and the ticket-collector the name of honest men.



"NO TELEVISION—HOW QUAIN!"



## AUNT TABITHA'S METHODS, IF ANY

Why my Aunt Tabitha should have decided that we were all in the last chapter of a detective story it is far too laborious for me to imagine; but there we all seemed to be, and of course she had cast herself for the rôle of the complacently explanatory investigator.

It emerged after a little that the guilty party had already been arrested, which relieved us somewhat.

"Do you realize who it was?" asked Aunt Tabitha, rummaging for her italics.

*"It was Yves Dropp. And that could only mean one thing. He was over here."*



Her thin uncle's lip curled. "Quite apart from the transparency of the manœuvre to introduce your pun, if such it may be called without loathsome flattery," he said, "I challenge your assertion that it could only mean one thing. Nothing can only mean one thing. If it means one thing to you, the odds are seven to four that it means something else to the average Bessarabian metallurgist."

One of Aunt Tabitha's great-grandfathers was heard to observe that the boy was trying too hard. "So painstakingly bizarre an example," he declared, sniffing, "indicates that the bottom of the barrel is being scraped

before the surface has even been scratched."

"Which takes some doing, mind you," said Aunt Tabitha's fat uncle, being fair.

"Meanwhile," Aunt Tabitha pressed on, unmoved, "what of Sybil Aviation? I took particular note of what the policeman said to her when he first appeared at the scene of the crime."

"If he didn't say 'This is a bad business' we aren't in a detective story," said her thin uncle.

Aunt Tabitha waved a hand (someone was going past). "No," she said, "I refer to his *greeting*. He said 'Hullo,' you see. *He didn't say 'Goodbye.'*"

"Bless my soul, that's a shrewd point," said another great-grandfather. "If he'd said 'Goodbye'——"

"Exactly," said Aunt Tabitha. "If he'd said 'Goodbye' he wouldn't have been coming."

"You mean——"

"Yes. He'd——"

"—have——"

"—been——"

"—going."

Both collapsed into chairs, breathing hard. Only the absence of a towel prevented me from fanning them with it. Involuntarily I cocked an ear for an inter-round summing-up by Mr. W. Barrington Dalby.

Aunt Tabitha's thin uncle stared for a moment at her prostrate form and then asked in a sinister tone "Does it strike you that there is something not quite natural about the way she is lying?"

"If I understand you wrongly, and I hope I do," said Aunt Tabitha warmly, "don't give us any of that first-chapter stuff here. This is the explanation, the dénouement, as last a chapter as there ever was." She rose, with a slight cracking of joints, and tapped her thin uncle on the chest. "If you have any sense of what is fitting you will slink away. We shall catch a glimpse of your eyes, and there will be no mistaking the expression in them. *Fear.*"

All her thin uncle said to this was "Pooh!" but her great-great-aunt Maud was moved to observe that it was *always* possible to mistake an expression. "I well remember," she piped, "Mr. Pitt's telling me once how he was misled by the look in Mr. Fox's eyes into concluding that Mr. Fox was about to heap an encomium. What was his confusion a few moments later, when the encomium was heaped not by Mr. Fox but by Mr. Burke!"

Aunt Tabitha resumed her narrative stance and her exposition, staring most hopefully at those of us who had not hitherto managed to interrupt. Her thin uncle sank into a chair, biding his time (or whatever that thing is).

Aunt Tabitha said "Remember that the policeman asked Sybil Aviation what she was looking at, and she replied 'Sky.' Now—*why sky?*"

"Why sky, huh?" said her fat uncle out of the side of his mouth, looking with menace at our American cousin. But he, as usual, was absorbed in the magazines sent to him from home, and refused to look up from the advertisements full of lovely food and lovely women.

"It was obvious," Aunt Tabitha proceeded complacently, "that she was keeping something back. And I very soon realized what that something was. The body was not that of Joe Metaphor at all. *It was that of Joe Badinage.*"

"This was growing interesting," said one of the other cousins, pat to his cue. Her thin uncle challenged his choice of adjective, and they went off into a corner to argue. We heard them hissing at intervals, like people watching a film of the Grand National.

"The more he thought," said Aunt Tabitha, referring apparently to the police-

man, "the more dissatisfied he grew. But suddenly—bang! How could we have been so stupid? The whole thing became clear. The rest," she concluded modestly, "you know."

The pause seemed to be meant for congratulation, but few of us did anything but cough.

"From then on," Aunt Tabitha said, "that policeman never looked back. I took him under my wing."

Her thin uncle said "Wasn't it *dark!*"

### THE DARK STRANGER

I do not know you, stranger in the night,  
Your silent feet  
Do not disturb me, nor do they affright  
My heart's quiet beat.

I do not hear you come, nor is my sleep  
Broken with sighs,  
Hushed are the little toes on which you creep,  
Like butterflies.

No dire presentiments confuse my dreams,  
As, phantom mouse,  
You mutely stroll, scheming your cursèd schemes,  
About my house.

Drugging and dark, the traitor night condones  
Your fiendish plots  
To tie the cords of all my telephones  
In hopeless knots.

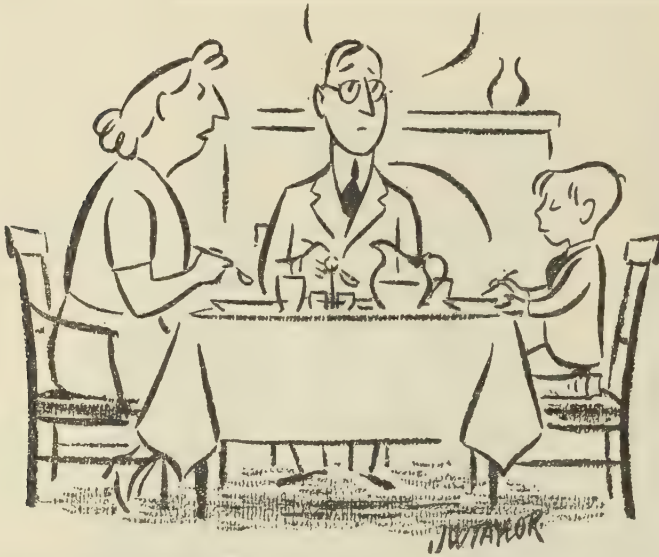
### THIS LANDLORD

This morning when I came down to breakfast I found my landlord's legs sticking through the ceiling. All that was visible of him was a pair of seedy carpet slippers and two lengths of rather distasteful trousering. This is a new method of annoying the tenants, and I do not think I like it. This morning we had mostly plaster for breakfast and that is one reason why I am looking for some new digs. The way this landlord is carrying on, the house is not fit to live in.

The first time I noticed anything peculiar about the man was the day the hot



OFF THE RATION?



"AND DON'T SAY 'OH, WHAT A NOBLE MIND IS HERE O'ERTHROWN' EVERY TIME YOUR FATHER OPENS HIS MOUTH, OR I'LL STOP YOU GOING TO THE PICTURES ALTOGETHER."

the landlord, surrounded by dense clouds of steam and giving every appearance of being in a nasty frame of mind. At first sight I thought he was producing the steam himself, but then I saw that the source of the trouble was two live jets proceeding from underneath the bathroom door, the whole giving the impression of one of the minor eruptions from Mount Etna. Now I am not one to stand around and gape, and thinking that the landlord had a sick fancy to play about with some steam (he does some funny things) I turned round and started back to my room to wait till he had finished. I did not get very far. Taking the intervening stairs in one bound, the landlord alighted beside me and demanded whether I knew the price of geysers. I have never pretended to know the price of geysers and the question came as something of a surprise. Fortunately I was not permitted to answer. Descending the stairs crabwise, the landlord began to explain that he had not had a new geyser put in for nothing, a statement which I was prepared to accept. Without waiting for me to comment he went on to describe the setting up and installation of a geyser until, by the time we reached the ground floor, I could if necessary have installed one myself. Happily my room is on the ground floor, so I side-stepped into it as we passed and locked the door. After a threatening silence the landlord went back to the bathroom to brood.

That was the beginning. After that our relations grew worse. The landlord took to lying in wait for me as I went out and jumping the question of when I was going to pay the rent. After three weeks I found that the furniture in my room was slowly disappearing. I let one or two pieces go just to make sure and then branded the rest by boring two small holes into each on the underside of the wood. The

water geyser exploded. I had gone upstairs that day, as I usually do, to have a bath. I had already asked the landlord if I could have a bath because he does not like people having baths and has to be told about them first, and I was not anticipating any trouble provided that I kept the bath-water from overflowing on to the washing. As soon as I reached the top landing, however, I saw that I was not going to have a bath. Standing outside the bathroom door, instead of the usual five people waiting to get in, was

other tenants got pretty sick of me in the next few days going up to their rooms and inverting all their furniture, but I beat the landlord and ended up with more furniture than I had to start with. I even reclaimed some of the landlord's own, which made him so mad that he set the dog on me, an ugly animal with protruding front teeth, but fortunately it did not bite. For a fortnight I lived in comparative security.

The climax came when the landlord discovered that my electric meter had been shorted out of circuit. I had gaily been using the electric fire for two months without realizing that the thing had been running on air, and I came in one day to find the landlord crouched in deep contemplation beside the meter. Thinking at first he was looking for mice I went down on all fours to see if I could help. I soon saw I was mistaken. Thrusting a long piece of flex under my nose as if it was Exhibit "A" at a murder trial, the landlord demanded whether I knew the penalties for defrauding



"STILL ANNOYED WITH ME, SWEETHEART?"

the electricity company. I have always disliked people who open the conversation by asking cryptic questions, and I replied somewhat briskly that I did not. "Very well," said the landlord. "The police do, then." He seemed to expect a reply to this remark, so I waited for a moment and then suggested that the man upstairs might know as he was a lawyer. "In that case," said the landlord nastily, "you ought to get to know him better." At this point the meter, which had been simmering quietly for some minutes, blew up. There was an impressive white flash and tongues of flame began to edge round the carpet. The landlord, trying to give the impression of being an air-raid veteran (he spent the war in Vancouver), plunged headlong to the carpet and began threshing about like a salmon. It was some seconds before I realized that the reason for this odd behaviour was his trousers, which were burning nicely. I extinguished the flames with my shoe and retired to a distance to watch events. The landlord was not looking particularly pleased. Wisps of smoke were beginning to curl up from the carpet and the meter looked as though it had had a direct hit. Slowly the landlord rose to his feet, smouldering. "I've had enough of this," he remarked, clutching hold of the lamp standard. "Enough of what?" I inquired, edging behind the sofa. "You'll see," snapped the landlord, and flung out of the room. The next day I received a short note. "You are required to leave," it said. "Your room has been let to another tenant." I transferred this to my next-door neighbour, who left without a murmur the same night, and the situation now is that the landlord and I are not speaking to each other. How it will all end I do not know. A few more of these stunts and I shall start losing my temper.

## WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR OLD RAZORBILLS

Some notes published in this paper about a month ago on the comparative value of specimens at the Zoological Gardens may have given rise to a suspicion that enormous sums have to be disbursed annually by the Zoo authorities to keep up their stock. If so, the *Report of the Council and Auditors of the Zoological Society of London for the Year 1948* comes as a useful corrective, for it shows that by far the largest part of the Garden's intake arrives in the form of gifts. From far and near, from rich and poor, by every post a bewildering assortment of birds and beasts pours in upon the delighted curators.

The report lists six methods by which new creatures are acquired. Apart from the multitudinous gifts, the stock is augmented by deposit, by births, by exchange, by special collection and (a thin last) by purchase. "Deposit" I take to mean some form of extended or indefinite loan rather than the simple act of depositing anonymously in a receptacle set aside for the purpose. A man compelled for business reasons to move from the country into a London flat may well find that his tiger is more trouble than it is worth. Some such consideration may have led, I think, to the deposit during the past year of four Senegal Bush Babies and perhaps also of the

twelve polecats which form, numerically, the largest bulk deposit in the mammalian section. There is a tendency to deposit poisonous snakes. One Indian Cobra, four Horned Cerastes Vipers, one Fer de Lance (better known to novel-readers as "the deadly Fer de Lance"), and two Cascabel Rattlesnakes were handed over during 1948. The report does not state when their owners propose to call for them again.

Among births one notes the arrival of sixty-eight Guinea-pigs, seventeen Common Goats, one hundred and thirty Budgerigars, forty-one Gaboon Vipers and (at Whipsnade) fifty-four Bennetts Wallabies. Lovers of Gaboon Vipers will be sorry to hear that none of these youngsters survived, but their loss is to some extent counter-balanced by the very low mortality rate (only three) among the Wallabies.

The Report does not tell us what animals were sent away in exchange, listing only those received under this heading. Nevertheless, it is not hard to guess that at the great Zoological Mart, attended by representatives from every zoo and menagerie in Europe, a fine batch of young Wallabies in prime condition must have been among the most hotly contested items:

"Lot 9. Fifty marsupials. Every one a genuine Bennett, gentlemen. Did you ever see such pouches? Will anyone start me with three Striped Hyænas—thank you.

"Three Striped Hyænas I am bid—and an Orang Utan? Thank you, sir.

"Any advance on three Striped Hyænas, one Orang Utan, two Slow Lemurs, two Fishing Cats, and a Slender-tailed Cloud Rat? Come, gentlemen, be serious. Fifty first-class—thank you. Two Ruddy Elephant Shrews I am bid in addition by the gentleman with the Desert Skink sticking out of his breast pocket. (*Interruption.*) I beg your pardon, I should have said Audouin's Sand Skink, but without my glasses—thank you.

"No, sir. We are not accepting guinea-pigs or



"ONE MISSES A LOT—BEING BROUGHT UP TO APPRECIATE IT."



budgerigars to-day. Going for a mere half-dozen Golden-Fronted Fruitsuckers, one Louisiana Skunk, three Striped Hyænas . . ."

In the end, on the evidence of the Report, I should guess that a final bid of thirty-one Rhesus Monkeys brought the hammer down.

In the "special collections" section, high praise must go to Mr. G. S. Cansdale, F.Z.S., who came over from the Gold Coast to take up an appointment with the Society and brought with him as a present no less than one hundred and six animals, birds and reptiles, including the Swamp Palm Bulbul, a species new to the Gardens. One sees him reporting for duty at the Secretary's office. There is a brief discussion about spheres of responsibility, animal foodstuffs, the shortage of Bulbuls, etc., and at the end of the interview Mr. Cansdale, lifting the lid of an enormous trunk, asks shyly, "I suppose six Bosman's Pottos, two Forest Genets, one Barbary Striped Mouse, one Rusty-nosed Rat and a couple of Crimson-Chested Superb Sunbirds wouldn't be any use to you?"

"But, surely," cries the Secretary, rising excitedly and peering into the trunk, "do my eyes deceive me, or are there six Broad-Fronted Crocodiles, one Spotted Leaf Snake and half a dozen Tropical Xenopus in there as well—and yes, by Jove, it *is* a Swamp Palm Bulbul!"

"Oh, well," says Mr. Cansdale.

He does seem to me to have made a most satisfactory start in his new job.

The gifts! It is difficult to know whether to marvel more at the boundless generosity of the donors or the limitless hospitality of the Zoological Gardens. If the authorities have ever felt disposed to refuse an offer, there is no hint of such an attitude here. One Jackdaw, two Common Goats, twenty Guinea-pigs, a Perch, eleven Hedgehogs, three Blackbirds, two Common Starlings, three Robins, a Slow-worm, a Gull (immature), a Grass Snake, a Vole, fourteen Mediterranean Winkles, a Magpie, a Rabbit, ten White Mice, one Sacred Baboon and a Weasel—they have taken them all in. A little owl gets the same welcome as a Broad-snouted Cayman (rather warmer, if anything, for thirty-eight of the latter arrived in 1948). In fact, if it breathes, they take it.

Among the purchases I am excited only by three Fat Mice, one White-whiskered Spider Monkey, and an original signed drawing from *Punch* by Harry Furniss, showing a meeting of the Society, 1885-6. It seems to me high time that somebody drew the Society again—preferably in the act of accepting a gift from the Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill, P.C., O.M., F.R.S., of 1 Grey Squirrel (Albino).

May, 1949

MAN'S CROWNING GLORY

THE gossip-writer of a London evening newspaper recently interviewed three representative barbers on the question whether it was really true that men were becoming as particular about their haircuts as women; and their answers made instructive reading.

One said that sometimes men would ask for the same kind of haircut as was worn by their favourite film-star, but that they usually had to be told that this wasn't possible. (In cases where the actor's hair-do involved the use of a toupée, presumably they were told that it wasn't advisable, or possibly even that it might be actionable.) This barber added kindly that the request generally originated from the customer's wife or girl-friend, not from the customer himself.

Another, the barber at the Guards' Club, said that he never went in for anything fantastic, but aimed at producing a gentlemanly appearance, which was a very proper answer to come from the Guards' Club. Officers with fantastic haircuts all over the parade would make the Trooping of the Colour look very strange. Incidentally, it would be interesting to know what answers would have been produced at some other clubs—the Arts Club, for instance, or the Savage.

But the third barber said the most interesting thing. In effect, he said that no matter what the customer asks for, the barber gives him the haircut he thinks he ought to have. Now everyone knows this to be true, but it is only seldom that a barber can be found to admit it; the rest dissemble their tyranny. In the case of the out-right dictators, a haircut begins with a conversation on these lines—this barber claimed, by the way, that he worked "without unnecessary conversation," but mark that word "unnecessary":

*Barber.* Short back and sides, sir?

*Customer.* Well, no; what I actually want you to do is leave it fairly long here, and then sort of taper it off, if you see what I mean, and just use the clipper things the teeniest bit up here.

*Barber.* I see, sir. Short back and sides.

If your barber is in the dissembling class, there is a very slight variation in the gambit:

*Barber.* Short back and sides, sir?

*Customer.* No, leave the sides altogether, and just unplait the longest bits on the back of my neck and even them off with a pair of shears.

*Barber.* Very good, sir.

The hair is then cut short at the back and sides, thinned a little at the top, combed forward in the fashion of the late Herr Hitler so that half an inch maybe removed from the forelock, drenched in pomade, and brushed in such a manner that the customer, seeing his face in a mirror, imagines it to be a barrow-boy in the street outside.

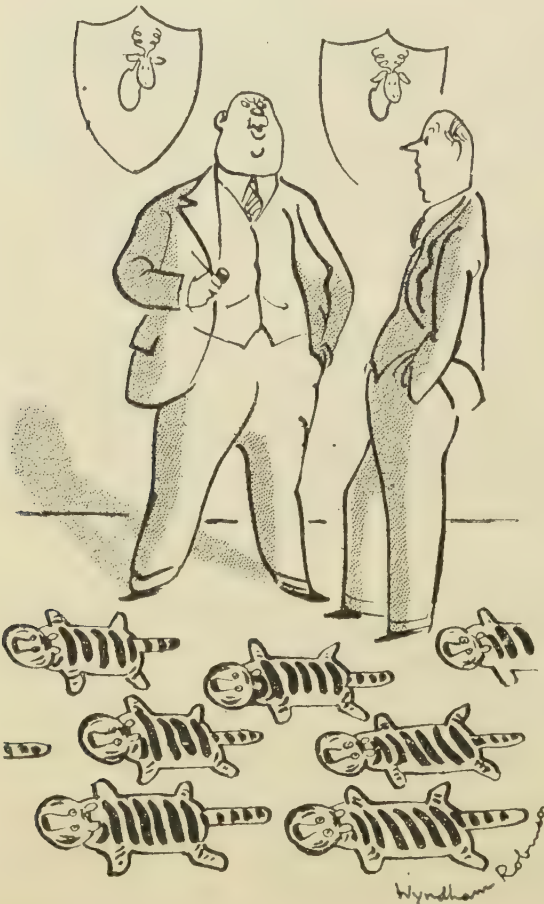
This is by far the more common procedure.

There are two good reasons why it is unlikely that men will ever have the same say in their tonsorial destinies as women have. One is the diffidence that afflicts almost all men in the barber's chair, and the other is the reluctance of barbers to try anything new.

The diffidence arises because so many men really know so much more about how their hair ought to look than barbers do. The ideal, as I once used to explain

to a barber—but in a bar, not a barber's shop—is that the customer should go out with his hair as nearly as possible as it was when he came in, only tidy. A man who has lived with his hair for say, forty years obviously knows how this can be achieved, whereas a barber, who may well be seeing the man for the first time in his life, knows only how to produce a gentlemanly appearance. Yet I defy any man in England to put over the detailed instructions necessary with any hope at all of success. Before he is a quarter of the way through there will be a breathless hush in the shop, the obvious bookmaker who is having his bi-weekly shave in the corner chair will say "Cor, wants a lot, this geezer, don't 'e?" the barber will snigger, and the ominous word "Sissy" will tremble on the air. So there will be nothing else for the poor customer to do but lie back in his chair with a sigh of resignation and murmur "All right. Short back and sides."

I once knew a man who thought he could explain everything if he drew a diagram of it on a piece of paper,



"OF COURSE, ANY ROTTEN SHOT CAN HIT THE BIG ONES."

but then the difficulties began even sooner. To start with, he never had a piece of paper in his pocket, and by the time it had been provided for him the whole shop was looking at him expectantly, as if he were Picasso about to dash off a woman in a fish hat. So, coward that he was, he used to pretend that he wanted to make a note of some likely horses for the afternoon, and the rest of the haircut was on normal lines.

As for the conservatism of barbers, it must be due to the difficulty of finding suitable subjects for experiment. My friend M. is talking of having his hair dyed green this summer; but for every one as brave as he there are a million who are just as wary as the Guards' Club barber of anything fantastic. I once went to a barber who said that the back of my neck came up lovely and asked if I could be available when he entered for some kind of Barbers' Championship; but that was only a straight short-back-and-sides job. If I needed a haircut and had the time to spare I should not mind being used as a barber's model for that; but I should think twice if he were going to create a new coiffure for me as women's hairdressers do, and give me a transverse parting or a mass of tight curls.

Indeed, how, and on whom, barbers learn their trade is a mystery that few of the general public ever learn. Do they graduate upwards from mops? Do they practise on hospital patients and experiment on schoolchildren? Perhaps it is because they have so little opportunity of broadening their scope that they hold so austere to their standard of the gentlemanly appearance. If it be true that men are going to demand the same individual approach and artistic originality as women, it looks as though a new career may be created for the hirsute. The danger is that those of us who really like our hair short back and sides may find ourselves left out in the cold.

### SHELF-EXAMINATION

If the reviewer had said:

*This is a book which deserves to be read,*

I should have concurred;

But what he did, in fact, write—

Namely: *This book will form a welcome addition to your book-shelf—*

Was quite

Absurd,

And only goes to show

How little he can know

About my book-shelf.

For example, an attempt to find a home

For the confounded tome

Here, next to the wall,  
 Will immediately result  
 In Gibbon's decline and fall;  
 Moreover, to request my august assembly  
 Of Metaphysical Poets  
 To move up and make room for one  
 Quite obviously cannot be Donne;  
 Nor would it be seemly, I feel,  
 To beg Borrow, or Steele,  
 To do likewise;  
 And any attempt to prise  
 Open a place on the shelf  
 Where Johnson (*Works*) and Jonson (*Plays*)  
 Pass their tranquil days  
 Is as useless as trying  
 To find a space between *Holy Living and Holy Dying*.  
 In short, as I see the position,  
 The book will simply have to form one more  
 Unwelcome addition  
 To my floor.

### CALORIES AND CARS

Much has been said about a popular discrepancy in the use of the word "calorie." A friend of mine insists, and I agree with him, that according to Mr. "Ohm-Sweet-Ohm" Watt, under whom he and I studied such things, a calorie is a measure of heat. It was a ludicrously small measure, I think, and I forget how one gauged it or why, but the point is that that was how it was regarded. My dictionary supports this view, quoting the Latin word "calor," meaning heat.

But as we grew older we found that once again the schoolmasters had deceived us. It now appeared that a calorie was food. So many calories a week is good for a miner, so many for a lance-corporal, so many for a herbalist, and so on. One collects, therefore, that a calorie is not warmth at all. Hot food contains no more of them than cold. (At least, I don't think so. The last thing I want to do is to put into anyone's head the idea that we should be healthier and happier if we lived on curried horseradish and tea, with plenty of mustard and chili sauce.) One supposes then that Mr. Watt and others of his persuasion have long since retired into an ignominious obscurity, for surely no science master can hope to deceive all the boys for ever. Such, at any rate, is the burden of my friend's remarks, but I confess to a small doubt.

It was six years ago, when I was travelling abroad for the Government, that my

food was first described to me in terms of calories. I learned, to my alarm, that I could look forward to a regimen of (if I have the figures right) five thousand calories a day. We were practising for a military fixture in North Central Burma at the time and the prospect was revolting, until it was explained to me that my rations had been so cunningly devised that I was getting very little to eat but enough nourishment for a horse. (I dare say this has a familiar ring to you, but it was new to us then.) We discovered later that these allegedly huge rations were not thought capable of keeping the human frame working efficiently for more than two and a half months—an estimate that was not refuted by experience.

Since then I have heard that a bottle and a half of gin contains as many calories and therefore food as an ordinary day's rations, but I find that accurate research into this is prohibited by cost.

We who sat at his feet in those far-off days have always looked on Mr. Watt with a certain affection and would not like him to be discredited. It was he who showed us how to squash a paraffin tin for salvage by roasting it over a gas-ring and then sousing it with cold water; though it is true, if sad, that very early in the succeeding holidays I discovered that the tins used for this amusing trick were dummies, being made specially thin. I regret to say that this type of hoax

was characteristic of the whole system of Stinks, though I prefer to think that O.-S.-O. Watt was a reluctant party to it.

He was a man of iron, or perhaps porcelain. Once we saw him keep his fingers on a pair of electric power terminals for some seconds before announcing calmly that the current was turned on. We were young and had not seen this kind of thing before, and I think a certain scepticism was justifiable in us. The shriek that rang through the room a moment later made Mr. Watt spin round as suddenly as though he had caught his fingers in a lightning conductor. He recovered his poise quickly, however, when he saw that it was only the Dram of Drambuie, D.S.O. ("Quickie" Dram, as we knew him then). Mr. Watt took his scream to be one of concurrence and thanked him gravely.

Mr. Watt taught us all about other strange things, such as the Weston Differ-



"THE INVITATION DOES SAY 'EVENING DRESS OPTIONAL', BUT AS A MATTER OF FACT NEARLY EVERYBODY WILL BE IN DINNER JACKETS."

ential Gear, an affair of endless chains with which, at the cost of an almost unbelievable amount of exercise, it was found possible to raise the manager of Golightly Limited's Rangoon office up to the level of his own stool. What subject was this: Hydrostatics—Electricity—Geography? It can hardly have been Chemistry or Warmth and was in the wrong room for Biology.

He is perhaps chiefly remembered, however, for his originality as a motorist. It was his practice to immobilize his elaborately equipped motor-car by plucking the gear lever out by the roots and taking it away with him. Very few intending car thieves, he argued, carry a skeleton gear lever.

It happened that one evening we were engaged in a particularly intricate piece of research. By means of a heavy and expensive piece of machinery, designed apparently for the purpose, we had snapped utterly in two a little cast-iron rod about the size of a pencil. I forget whether this evolution was intended to test the rod or the machine, or to illustrate some point in a lecture on Light or Sound, but the point is unimportant. It was hardly over when we were interrupted by a breathless messenger who summoned our instructor to the telephone. On his return he told us, pleasantly apologetic, that he must leave us and would we please disperse in a quiet and orderly manner?

It seemed that in the morning he had been in London and, through a fault in the switchboard, his motor-car had broken down in St. James's Square. The garage to which he had entrusted the gear lever now reported that when they switched on the engine the only result was a continuous blast from the horn and would he kindly tell them how to stop it?

"It is the Watt alarm device," he explained, "which I forgot to tell them about. The actuating switch can be worked only by a specially adapted tooth-brush handle that I carry in my pocket. If I leave for London immediately it should be possible to get there before the battery is completely run down."

This, my first introduction to original thought in applied science, inspired in me, for one, a loyalty that has persisted. This loyalty now insists that Ohm-Sweet-Ohm Watt was right. As far as I am concerned a calorie is, and will remain, a unit of the slightest possible warmth.

## MID-MORNING TRAIN

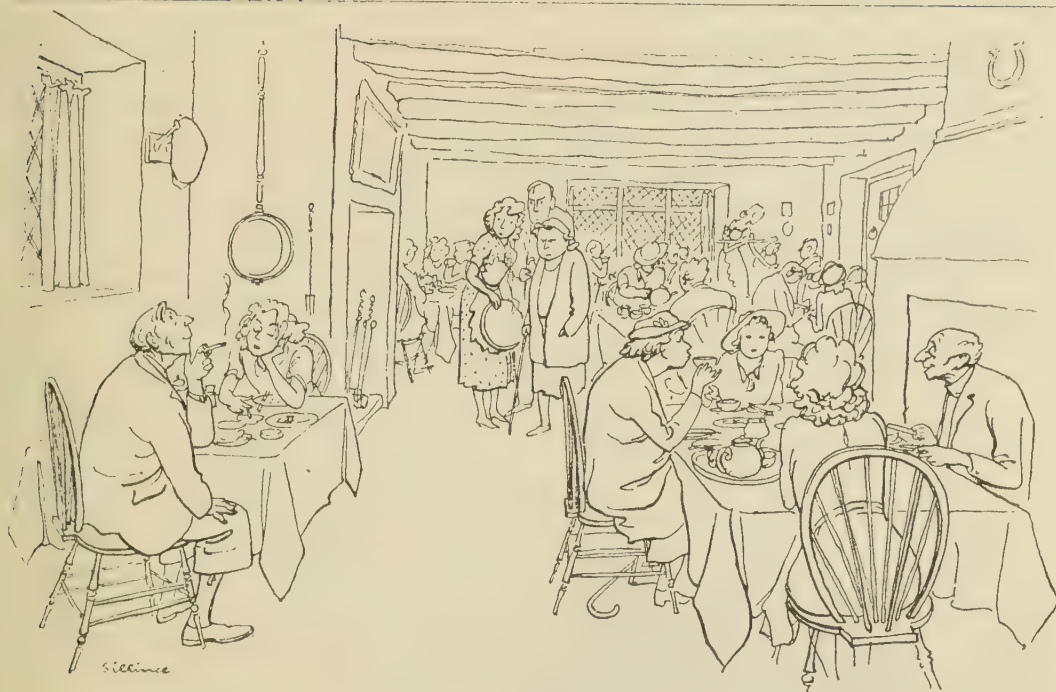
"Nora. *Nora*. This one's empty."

"No, it isn't, there's a——"

"Only one, and he's reading the paper. Oo, these doors are stiff! Nora, can you—Oh, thank you *so* much!"

"Terribly kind. So sorry, I'm afraid that was your foot . . . Back or facing, Betty?"

"Facing, because I had that fish for breakfast. Ring the bell, dear; I'm dying for coffee."



"THERE'S A TABLE YOU CAN HAVE IF YOU DON'T MIND SCOWLING FOR A FEW MINUTES."

"I shall have tea, I think."

"I wonder if they have any biscuits."

"They have them sometimes."

"I shall have some if they have. Now then, where was I?"

"Before you begin, dear—shouldn't we put the bags on the rack?"

"I'm not budging. There's only one stop before——"

"I think we should. We don't want—Oh, that's terribly sweet of you, really!"

"Thanks *most* awfully! There. Now we can spr-r-read out . . . Lovely. Well, Nora dear. I'm the last person to—well, you know *me*. But when a woman like that——"

"What did Dorothy think?"

"Oh, well—Dorothy. I mean, Dorothy was the one who—Oh, yes, steward, thank you. I shall have a pot of coffee."

"Tea, please. What? Oh, a pot, of course. And have you any biscuits? Oh, good. Biscuits, then."

"Me, too. Thank you . . . After all, if Dorothy was going to—Oh, steward. *Steward!* I meant to ask, are they just plain biscuits? Dry things?"

"*You* know, steward. Just *round* ones. They are? Oh."



"Oh. Just coffee, then."

"And just tea."

"Oh, I'll have tea, I think, if there aren't any biscuits . . . Well, now, on the Sunday morning—What's the matter, Nora?"

"Steward! I just thought—Oh, was that your foot, I'm terribly sorry—I just thought we might as well— Oh, Steward, we may as well have one pot for two, not two pots. Thank you."

"Nora dear, I think you've shut the gentleman's paper in the door."

"Oh, I *do* apologize. Let me— Oh, you've done it . . . so sorry! Go on, dear."

"Yes. Well, you know what she's always said about a certain person? Well, now, on the *Sunday* morning—"

"Interrupting you a minute—do you think the bags are jutting rather?"

"Oh, they always jut on those silly racks. You mustn't be nervy, dear."

"No, but just to be on the safe side. We could put them back on the—Oh, would you *really*? That's really terribly kind!"

"Terribly grateful. So sweet!"

"There! Go on, Betty."

"Yes, I *must* tell you, because it was *quite* incredible. She came rushing into the morning-room like a mad thing, shouting for Edgar to—Oh, look, here's the tray. Lovely."

"Lovely, I'll take it."

"No, I'm nearest. If you could move the—Oh, that's *frightfully* kind of you; if you could, that



"AND THEN IN CAME THE FAIRY PRINCESS, 'OTLY PURSUED BY PRINCE CHARMIN', WITH SUNSPOT II A LENGTH AND A 'ARF BE'IND."

would be simply—Oh, Nora, look! He's found us some sweet biscuits after all. That's lovely!"

"Lovely!"

"Now we can really—Oh, steward. *Steward!* . . . Oh, steward, I think as you've found these lovely biscuits I'll have coffee after all, if that wouldn't be a terrible nuisance? So that will be a pot of coffee for one, and a pot of tea for one; so you'd better take this tray back and bring two more. He can leave the biscuits, can't he, then he'll only——"

"Yes, leave the biscuits, steward. That will save you—can you reach the tray, or should I——? Oh, how *truly* kind of you! Thank you *so* much! *Very* kind!"

"Most! I'm afraid we——"

"Oh, please don't bother—the steward will take it along the corridor——"

"You really mustn't trouble to——"

"Oh, well—if you're going in any case. It's *terribly* sweet!"

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye, and thank you *so* much."

"What a nice man! Is he taking the tray all the way? Can you see?"

"No, the steward's gone off with it . . . He's just standing in the corridor. I think he's tearing up his newspaper."

"How peculiar . . . Well, now, I was telling you about—shut the door, dear—I was telling you about . . ."

## WAILING WOMAN

"It isn't everyone would think of this," we said rather proudly, coming out of the room backwards on our hands and knees.

They said no, they should think not, adding that those people who held that women ought not to wear dungarees "had" something.

We said we meant it wasn't everyone who would remember to stain the part of the floor by the door *last*, coming out of the room as they did so. Some people, we explained, had no more sense than to stain a floor the other way on, so that they were imprisoned for days on a small bare patch in the middle where the carpet was meant to come.

They merely said it was remarkable how carpets never fitted; if we moved many more times and went on as we were now going, we should end with a sort of small praying-mat in the middle of an acre or so of board.

"It isn't as though we were always getting bigger rooms," we said, puzzled, "or by this time we should be dwelling in marble halls."

They said well, that would save floor stain anyhow, they couldn't think how a modest fourth-floor flat could consume so many tins of it; and then suddenly squealed

with delight as something fell through the letter-box. "Someone has written *here*," they said, "and we haven't even moved in."

"The trouble is," we said, looking back over our mottled tracks, "that everyone else's carpets didn't fit too, and they *all* put the stain on top of the one before."

"It's from Elizabeth," they said.

"If the first one had taken off the old stain, it might have been all right," we said, "but how can you start taking off five or six different layers all different widths?"

"She wants us to go to Carthage."

"The lease would have run out before you'd done even one side . . . Who's gone to where?"

"No one's gone anywhere. Elizabeth wants us to go to Carthage."

"*Carthage?* It's in ruins. Where the last one's carpet came will be a different

colour from where it didn't come, much lighter. If it was the same all round it would look like a new idea. But it isn't: nothing like. Not if you measured properly where ours is going to come. Do you think you did?"

"In August. Charles says it won't be too hot."

"What won't be too hot?"

"Carthage in August."

"Carthage in August would be boiling hot," we said. "Ancient hot ruins with women in long robes wailing 'Woe!'"

"Aren't you thinking of Troy?"

they suggested. "And anyway it wouldn't still be: not now. I mean there are other things besides the ruins; and Charles says the heat is like the cold in Switzerland—you don't feel it the same way."

"How does Charles know? It was Burma he went to. Do you think this floor will *do*?" we asked, standing up painfully. "It makes you very stiff—and hungry—staining floors. Shall we go out and get a meal?"

"Not with you looking like something by Picasso in his blue period," they said.

"These dungarees," we said, "are historic. In them we fought the blitz . . . Well, in them we stood by in case we ever had to. We know," we said, "that they must in the first place have been designed for a very large-sized stevedore; but we are sensitive about these dungarees."

"You may well be," they said.

"And we are too exhausted for levity."

"You *would* come miles on a bus and try to stain everything in one go," they



"ANYTHING ELSE, SIR—SUIT, OVERCOAT?"



IN THE WORDS OF SIR ALFRED . . .

said unsympathetically. "Hurry up and put on the clothes you came in. What about Carthage?"

"It isn't everyone gets the chance to do it before the furniture arrives," we said smugly. "And you haven't said if it *will* do; you won't see all those funny marks when it's got something more on it than a rather disreputable pair of steps."

"Very nice," they said. "Perhaps you could even *bathe* on the beach Dido wailed all up and down."

We didn't reply at once. Then—"We can't go *anywhere*," we said, "for some time."

We understood them to mutter something about a rut, even if it was going to be on a fourth floor; but we weren't listening very attentively. We were looking at the pair of steps on their little oasis of dry board, and at our rightful garments slung carelessly across them.

## HOME OF LOST CYCLES

Our older universities seem to be getting completely out of hand.

At Oxford lawlessness has reached a point where even a Prime Minister's hat is not safe from interference. In my day, policemen's helmets were occasionally trifled with by the wilder elements, but a Ramsay MacDonald or a Baldwin could leave his hat with confidence almost anywhere within the City boundaries. I do not say that either of these Premiers was careless with his hats—the practice of leaving valuables on the back seats of cars was not so widespread in those days—but I do say that they could have hung them up daily on the railings round the Sheldonian and none of my contemporaries would have dreamed of sticking tendentious notices in the hatband. Apart from anything else we were never very certain which of the two, at any particular moment, was Prime Minister. As for the tyres of their motor-cars . . .

Cambridge on the other hand is over-run with bicycles. A report in the *Daily Telegraph* of May 12th draws a picture, the more telling because of its restraint, that suggests a state bordering on anarchy:

"A police official said: 'There are far too many bicycles.' That he was not exaggerating I could see for myself. As I tried to cross the street an undergraduate cyclist wobbled unsteadily towards me, one hand clutching books, the other endeavouring to deal with his wind-blown academic gown.

"He was steering with his knees . . ."

This disgraceful incident was by no means isolated. Cyclists were seen by the reporter carrying cricket-bags, tennis rackets, parcels, clothing and a baby. He does

not say where they were going, but that all or most of them were on their way to lectures seems, on the face of it, improbable; there is a suggestion here of a misuse not only of bicycles but of that more precious commodity, time. Nor, we are explicitly told, is this hideous traffic confined to men. "Those" (adds the writer, in a sentence which will repay reading over and over again) "who rode without holding the handlebars were well represented by both sexes. One girl even posted a letter without stopping, by leaning over at a precarious angle."

Madcap pranks of this kind would be bad enough in a town with a normal complement of traffic. But in Cambridge it is not only the behaviour and the ill-considered luggage of cyclists but their numbers that excite comment; we have the laconic evidence of the police official for that. Every street is lined with parked bicycles. Every wall, fence and kerb is deep in them. The "Found Bicycle" store at the police station is choked with machines (1,544 were handed in last year). And the roadways are a bedlam of uncontrolled cyclists. Hundreds of undergraduates, hurrying to deliver to the police station the bicycles they have found abandoned, pedal desperately against the returning stream of those riding reclaimed machines, while above the heads of the combatants, cricket-bags, babies and even clothing are furiously waved. Scholars, steering with their insteps, make at breakneck speed for the nearest pillar-box. The *Telegraph* reporter gives a vivid impression of the scene:

"One of the few venturesome car-drivers in Cambridge pulled up with a screech of brakes. Five cyclists ran into the back of the car . . ."

You can see for yourself that he is not exaggerating.

It is good to hear that the police and the University authorities are belatedly



considering action. For the former the task will be relatively simple. Bigger sheds at headquarters and more constables on duty there to ensure a smooth and efficient turn-round of lost and found bicycles—these are matters of routine. But the University authorities, whose business it will be to frame regulations for the conduct of undergraduate cyclists, may find themselves in some difficulty—assuming, as one hopes, that disciplinary ordinances have still to be incorporated in the Statutes in the traditional tongue. It is not of the fact that verbs of prohibition have to be followed by *quominus* or *quin* that one is thinking here; there are ways of overcoming that difficulty. But how exactly does one put into Latin:

Persons *in statu pupillari*, whether represented by one or both sexes, must not post letters at a precarious angle while carrying babies on bicycles?

Or again—

Wind-blown academic gowns . . . ?

*Togæ viriles?* No, no. Let us get back to Oxford, where misbehaviour is kept at least within translatable bounds. *Ne pileum consulis adnotationibus ornaveris, neve absente amiga vehiculi rotas*—um—*ventos*—no, sorry. We are up against that wind-blown difficulty again.

## TWOPENCE COLOURED

I never really discovered how Jimmy Porter got into the professor's laboratory. I mean, what earthly business had a fresh-faced lad of twelve among all that monstrous spark-spitting machinery?

On this point the narrative in the pink-papered magazine was not at all clear.

Nor did it explain the peculiar intimacy between them. The professor treated the boy with grave respect; and the boy, in turn, addressed the professor with an easy familiarity that was as remarkable as it was reprehensible.

But these are niggling criticisms. After all, I had only paid twopence for the publication in the early 'twenties—and the violet and yellow cover was alone worth a quarter of that sum. Not to mention the more recent pleasure caused by its chance discovery at the bottom of a pile of junk in the attic.

They certainly gave you value for money in those days.

Look, for example, at Jimmy's present situation—for the professor, in spite of his saintly exterior, was plainly mad. In the first place his name was Schloss; and, as if this were not bad enough, he would from time to time allow a strange wild gleam to light up his eyes when he thought no one was looking.

But the spark-spitting machinery was highly polished and Jimmy, clever lad, had seen all as if in a mirror. Quickly he realized that something more than usually horrible was afoot.

What, he had asked himself, was the real purpose behind the professor's experiments? There had been strange stories. The local villagers were afraid, uncom-

municative. Sheep had disappeared from the pastures. The innkeeper's white-haired old father . . .

Somehow or other the professor must be persuaded to talk.

"'You were speaking just now, Dr. Schloss, of Brekoff's Theory of Corpuscular Reaction, and you referred to the later experiments of Werlitz and Plagsk. Would you now amplify that point?'"

"The professor paused before replying. Then he spoke softly . . . quietly . . . without emotion . . .

"'Thanks to them I shall become master of the world.'"

This was a surprise, but Jimmy took the news calmly. There was still so much



"NOW COULD I JUST TRY THAT REDDISH-BROWN ONE AGAIN?"



he wanted to know. Unfortunately the professor failed to keep a grip on himself and started shouting.

"'It is I, Julius von Schloss, who have carried on their work and brought it to its final and logical conclusion!'" he screamed. "'Soon . . . soon the world will be at my feet. It means power . . . wealth hitherto undreamed of . . .'"

Everything, the professor explained, depended on air pressure. This, as Jimmy knew, was fifteen pounds to the square inch. *Now suppose that pressure could be immeasurably increased . . .*

"'I could become master of the world!'" shrieked the professor, who had, perhaps, a tendency to repeat himself. "'I and I alone could hold the final power of life and death. *I could crush every living thing out of existence!*'"

"Jimmy gasped."

Obviously there was not a moment to lose. It was much too late to persuade the professor to enter some sort of home. Indeed, such a solution does not seem to have crossed the lad's mind. The fact is, he was frankly determined on violence.

This occurred some three thousand words later. The scene was still in the neighbourhood of the spark-spitting machinery where the professor, whose strange wild gleam had now become permanent, was demonstrating his invention. Infra-epsilon rays to increase the air-pressure were to be pumped through a hose-pipe on an unsuspecting world.

Suddenly he switched on the engine . . .

"'I will show you!' he cried. '*Now . . . now . . . NOW! . . .*'"

Grasping the hose-pipe he rushed towards the window of the laboratory. But Jimmy was ready for him. "As the maddened scientist plunged forward the boy stuck out his leg. The other tripped and fell . . ."

What followed was indescribably horrible. In stumbling the professor had accidentally loosened the safety-catch in the nozzle of the hose-pipe. The deadly rays gushed forth—on to the professor's writhing body . . .

"It was," stated the narrative, "as though he had never been."

And it was but a matter of seconds before Jimmy had picked up the hose-pipe and turned it towards the spark-spitting machinery . . .

Yes, they certainly gave you value for money in those days. I hope I remembered to buy the next issue. The publishers deserved my custom if only for having helped to teach me that nothing good ever came out of Science.

At least the Classics weren't *dangerous* . . .

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