


# Pick of Punch 1951

Various





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THE PICK OF 'PUNCH'

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THE  
PICK OF 'PUNCH'

*An Annual Selection*



1951  
Chatto and Windus  
LONDON



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TORONTO

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June, 1950

EGO ON TOAST

THE woman with strong ankles seized me by the shoulder and tried to prize me off the beach. When she saw my face she dropped me with a shriek that drowned the three nearby portable wirelesses, the crash of the waves, the snores of the man on my left and the disgruntled churning of the deck-chair man's boots. "Ow!" she said. "It's not you!"

"No," I said, "it isn't." Well, what would you have said? And I pretended to go back to sleep with my face in the little fox-hole I'd dug between two pretty shells and a small, tarred boulder. The sun beat down on my back as before; the snoring man and the radio comic vied again with the waves and the boots; the disciplinary slapping of illicitly submerged juvenile knickers rose once more on the summer afternoon. But for me the enchantment had gone. Things weren't the same.

When I am mistaken for somebody else, strong and complex emotions grip me. First, astonishment; hot on its heels, indignation. The idea that there is someone in the world with features so like mine that a stranger in a *démodé* bowler hat crosses the street to exclaim "Well, if it isn't Vernon! How's Gert and the girls?" is astonishing: a split second later it's maddening. I, after all, am me; and this pleasing actuality is largely contributed to by my face, especially the moustache, and a certain elusive quality of demeanour suggesting, I fancy, a stern social aloofness from characters called Gert. But when these twin passions are spent, and the man in the bowler has gone on his reckless way protesting that I am the spitting image of his good-looking friend, something else comes sneaking in. Curiosity. What manner of man is this, going through his undistinguished life with my face and moustache? The question is steeped in frustration; it is unlikely that it will ever be answered. The impostor probably lives in some remote spot like Walsall or Mornington Crescent, and even if we met I should never recognize him as me. . . .

But to-day, on the crammed, baking shingle, it was different. If the woman with strong ankles expected to find that Other Me stretched prostrate—lying, that is, on his face stripped to (and from) the waist, then the chances were that he wasn't far away. I could still hear her laughing in enjoyable embarrassment somewhere beyond the family party on my right.

"Went right up to him, I did—*touched* him!"

"You never!" exclaimed another feminine voice, pleasurably scandalized. "Still, he did say by the breakwater."

"I know," pounced the other. "I mean, that's what makes it so . . . I mean,



doesn't it? Honestly, though, I'd have took my dying oath it was Ernie."

Ernie.

I raised myself on an elbow, and under the pretence of studying the shingle-pattern on my chest threw the speakers a furtive glance. I had suffered a nasty shock, certainly, but things were not yet beyond remedying: as a guide to feminine beauty the ankles are not infallible, and a shrewd fate might have chosen this method of introducing me to a pair of nice brown English holiday-girls with well-cut bathing costumes, good teeth and a certain elusive quality of demeanour suggesting, however mis-

leadingly, a stern social aloofness from characters called Ernie.

So I threw them a furtive glance. The one with the strong ankles was strong all the way up, like a horse. The other was weaker, but went up farther—about six feet four, I should have said. The sunlight gleamed on her pince-nez. Their four sniggering eyes met mine, and with simulated sang-froid I turned away to tear a strand of pressed seaweed from my bosom and throw it on the trouser-leg of the snoring man; when I looked again they were carrying out a systematic survey of the beach, shading their eyes with sandwich bags.

To say that I shared their eagerness to see Ernie is putting it mildly. On previous occasions little more than my face and bearing had been challenged by the undiscoverable emulator; this time it was all of me, or very nearly—and, what's more, *from the back*; the copyright in my very shoulder-blades was in jeopardy; somewhere among these pink, painful thousands was a man with my calves, my backbone, my identical degree of muscular development. And this time the fellow must reveal himself in all his insolent duplicity.

I sat up suddenly. They were waving and shouting. They were waving their sandwich bags, their hankies, their—yes, I fear so—their bathing-costumes; and shouting "Coo-ee!" and "Er-nay, we're *here*, silly!" and "Yoo-hoo-oo!" Then I saw him, waving back and grinning.

I wouldn't have called him handsome, but then I don't pretend to be handsome myself. There was, even I could see, something of me about him as he picked his way over the sharp stones, deftly but with semi-humorous wincings. He had white trunks on; a bit flashy, perhaps, but his tea-brown torso dwindled into them neatly.

I wouldn't have called him tall, but then I'm not tall myself; you can be too tall, to my way of thinking, and you can have too much hair, too; he seemed to have about as much hair as I have, though it was rather more mouse than blond. Even so, I had to admit that the women—girls, I suppose would be a fairer word—could hardly be blamed for their little slip.

As he approached them I craned to see round the family group on my right. I wanted to get a look at his back, but I had no opportunity until he had passed the blest pair of sirens without a glance and greeted an eye-filling brunette who had, I now realized, been waving prettily from a pneumatic beach-bed. Then I let the opportunity go. My attention was fully claimed by the Thing which had been lurching along behind him, a pale shape with all the physical attributes of a balding pigeon in over-long khaki shorts.

"Er-nay!" squealed the women. "Goodness, where you *been*?"

I did not wait to hear.

### SENSATION AT A PRIZE-GIVING

My lords, ladies, and gentlemen, and boys of the school:

In addressing you by these outmoded and, in many cases, inappropriate titles—the head boy, for instance, with his incipient moustache and quotations from Proust, has biologically been a full man for at least two years—I am making my solitary concession to the conventions this afternoon.

I am not particularly glad to be present on this occasion. Had my new secretary possessed the nimble wit of her predecessor I should not have been here at all. Every moment wasted here could be nobly employed, as the poet Wordsworth said in one of his rare moments of comparative lucidity, "getting and spending."

This is indeed my old school, a fact which frequently puts me at a disadvantage when dealing with men from Eton, Harrow or Winchester. Here, so I am told, I spent the happiest days of my life. No doubt, in a childish way, one could be happy

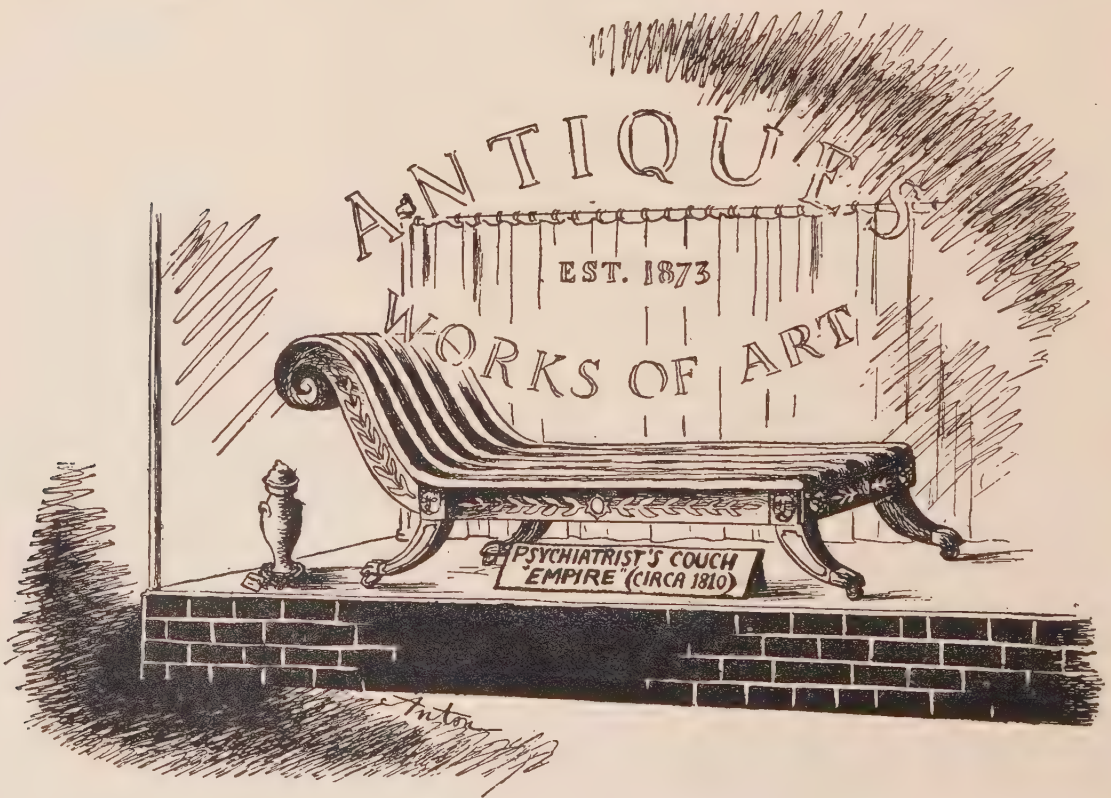


"PERSONALLY, I'VE NEVER FELT THE NEED OF A DISH-WASHING MACHINE."



at school; but the adult world, properly taken, is no vale of tears either. Here also, it would appear, I was indoctrinated with a code of behaviour which was to guide me through life, unspotted and unstained. There is a basis of truth in this. Taught to abhor a sneak, I have never been a witness for the Crown, save where my own interests demanded it. Instructed in the concealment of small contraband articles from the eye of authority, I have for years waged a successful war against the Customs House. The method of forgery which enabled the Lower Remove to do a hundred lines in the time normally taken to do ten has become the basis of my efficient office system. This afternoon it is my fate to present prizes. I have no time for those who do not win prizes. Life itself is nothing more than a succession of competitions for prizes. The losers are not really living. As a boy I won every prize open to me. While raking in the Form prize and the Essay prize I did not disdain such minor guerdons as the Weekly Good Conduct Card and the Smith-Pockett Badge for Neat Handwriting. Although these rewards have little intrinsic worth—the badge, I recall, had a pledge value of one mixed ice-cream—the effort of acquiring them created useful habits of industry and dissimulation.

I regret to learn that, despite the noble example set by our legislators, corporal punishment still exists in the school. Personally, I was never beaten; but I saw



enough of the results of flagellation to realize that here was an aspect of school life for which I could feel no enthusiasm.

It is customary for one in my position to allude gracefully to the virtues of the headmaster, whose speech was so full of complimentary references to myself. I remember him as a very new assistant master, with a smelly motor cycle, and a *tendre* for the daughter of his tobacconist. Whether in the course of years he has shed these youthful frailties I do not know; our correspondence has been strictly limited to demands for donations on his part and refusals to donate on mine. He looks older, but not much wiser, and I am glad that I finished my education while his influence in the school was infinitesimal.

Of the governors, who traditionally have the interests of the school so much at heart, I will only say that the chairman, whom I overtook on the road, needed the help of an A.A. scout and a road map to find his way here; and that the lunch-time conversation of the rest of the Board revolved ceaselessly about a recent speculation in zinc.

I will not dwell upon the agonies of boredom inflicted upon me (and, I hope, upon you) by the Latin play. The Greek play was made more endurable for me by a conviction, growing to a certainty, that the performers understood the purport of their lines as little as I did. To the master responsible for the English play I would say this: by the time you have cut a Restoration drama until it is fit for presentation at a school prize-giving you are, to all intents and purposes, without any play at all. Being tone-deaf I am unable to pass any strictures upon the activities of the choir. I will content myself with the observation that their white collars and gasping mouths reminded me irresistibly of the Fish Footman in Alice.

I should not leave you without a word of worldly advice. It is this. Stay out of Kaffirs.

Now, the prizes.

Hart-Roebuck—Lower Third—Mathematics.

Well, Hart-Roebuck, before handing you this gaudy tome, let me see if you are indeed what you claim to be. Here is a little everyday problem I would like you to solve in your head. Four days before Contango, you buy 500 Five Shilling Ordinary Debentures at a premium of  $\text{£}7\frac{5}{8}$  per cent, in anticipation of a rise . . .

## EPIC CONFERENCE

“All right. Now, after these native guides have legged it with the equipment the crocodile didn't eat, this guy Charters shows up——”

“With malaria?”

“Who? Oh, yah, yah, with malaria. And a dart sticking out of his neck. He whispers to the leader ‘Bad show, sir. The jolly old canoe just drifted away by itself.’ The leader just looks at him.”

"And the *cheep-cheep-cheep* of the insects?"

"Yah, if you like."

"And *bom-bom-bom* on the war-drums?"

"No, no, save that. You can overdo that *bom-bom-bom* stuff. Then Charters puts on a twisted smile——"

"Like this?"

"Yah, yah, like that. And he says 'We may as well tear up our return tickets, eh, sir?' Then he falls in a coma."

"Say anything before he shuts his eyes?"

"Just 'Sorry, sir.' The leader looks round at the men playing Snakes and Ladders. He peeps through the tent-flap at the leopard eating this Mr. Armitage. Then he closes his copy of *Alice Through the Whatsaname*, and says 'Look, chaps, can you spare a sec?'"

"Bit informal, isn't it?"

"Sure. Like I keep telling you, when it's a disaster you gotta watch out you keep the dialogue natural. Anyhow, this Cockney guy Parker looks up from his

jig-saw and says 'Cor, lumme, sir, I was just dreamin' I was on 'Amstead 'Eath with the missus, sir.' Human, see. Gets a laugh."

"And the coward's lip starts to quiver again?"

"No, no. He's *found* himself. Don't you remember? When he had to fight off the boa-constrictor by himself because the leader wanted to test him. No, he sees there's something the matter right away, so he says 'Everything under control, sir?' Quiet, you see. So's not to scare the men. So the leader sits at the table and says 'You may as well come into the office, chaps.'

"So they come up to the table all sheepish. Then the leader says 'Well, chaps, things don't look too cheery. As you will have guessed by now, there is only one bar of fruit-and-nut chocolate left.' The Cockney guy says 'Milk, sir?'—with a twisted smile, you know——"

"Like this?"



ARTHUR TILLY

"No, no. Like *this*. And the leader says 'Afraid not, Parker. Plain.' Wryly, see?"

"Who's Reilly?"

"*Wryly*. Then he says 'Also, my second in command has a poisoned dart in his throat, and isn't feeling too good.'"

"Then he goes on 'We've no map, no compass, the rains are due to-morrow, and old Mr. Armitage has been eaten by a ruddy leopard.'"

"Ruddy? Isn't that a bit strong?"

"Sure it's strong! But these guys are up against it, see? After all, they're grown men. Then the leader goes on 'All we have left,' he says, 'is our unconquerable spirits.' They all say 'Hear, hear, sir.' Not too loud—what we've got to avoid is mock-heroics, see? We've got to aim at—er——"

"Realism?"

"Yah, yah, something like that. 'Well,' says the leader, 'I propose that whoever wins the next game of Snakes and Ladders will set out with half the chocolate and try to reach the coast. The rest of us will wait here. If the leopards don't get us the hostile tribes will. Or we'll succumb to the testy-fly. Or die of hunger.' 'Or old age!' says Parker. Big laugh, see? Relieve the tension. 'Well,' says the leader, 'have any of you chaps anything to say before I shake the dice?' And what d'you think one of 'em says?"

"'Gawd, this is terrible?'"

"No, no. We got to keep it *natural*. He says 'Well, sir, this 'as bin quite a picnic, sir, 'asn't it, sir?'"

"Reilly?"

"Yah, yah, wryly. Gets a laugh, see? And *then* you can start your *bom-bom-bom*."

## CONVERSATIONS IN UPPER THAMES STREET

### FEELING A DRAUGHT

"But it should be 'feeling *the* draught,' " said Fred. "I ought to know, I've been feeling it for years."

"Feeling *a* draught," Thorn repeated, firmly. "'The' draught seems to imply only one, whereas all proper draught-feelers know that there are many, all potentially able to be felt. I never met anyone who could shut a railway carriage window with more emphasis—quiet like, too—than my Uncle Rupert, rest his soul. If you are feeling a mere one I shouldn't say draught at all. Say 'the shoe pinches.'"

"Chronic," Irma put in. "But they were only sixteen shillings and up in Oxford Street practically the same thing is thirty-seven-and-six. I'm going to the pictures to-night," she added in explanation, as she hobbled across to collect the dirty cups.

"The use of words," said the man with two books under his arm, "is always the

last thing about them that people consider. They think because they know what they mean so do other people. Take a word like 'catechumen.' Again, look how they say 'love' when they mean 'like,' or even 'enjoy,' and 'awful' when they mean 'bad.'"

"Well, go on," said Fred, fascinated as always by an appearance of learning.

"I always say 'awful bad,'" George contributed, "especially if it's me teeth. When the dentist came round to school once he did a drawing of my mouth on the blackboard. We had another chap come who said I had the finest hammer toes in a youth of thirteen he'd seen in thirty years' practice."

"Too many of these inspections and that," said a taxi-driver. "We used to go to school to be taught things, but now it's 'Drink your free milk,' and have your drawing on show in a window in Fleet Street, and get taken round museums, and psychology. Reading and writing was good enough for me, and now I've got my own cab. Had her painted last week."

"That chap was getting a couple of thousand a year for drawing George's teeth," Fred put in, looking admiringly at George.

"Laugh!" suddenly said one of the long-distance drivers. "We came down from Manchester last night and old Tom took the silencer off. 'Red Streak,' he called her, and made out it was a twenty-four-hours race. You never heard such a din."

"When I was much younger," Thorn said, "I took part in the famous race from New York to Paris, organized by an American newspaper. We were in a steam-car, perhaps the first steam-car ever seen in Outer Mongolia. One of the correspondents was eaten by wolves, you know."

"Who won?" asked Fred. "Bet it was a Napier."

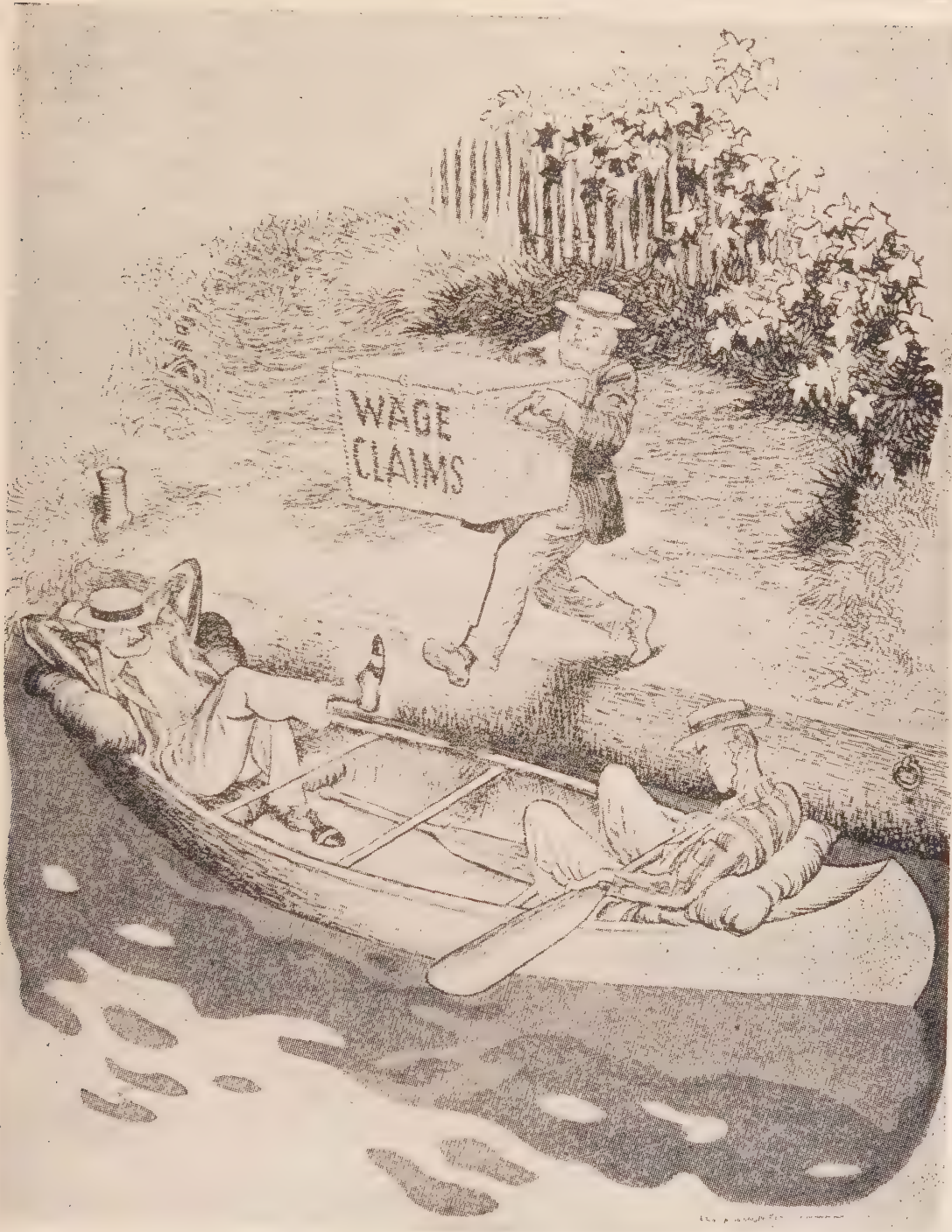
"Apart from its reluctance to move forward that steam-car was a marvel," Thorn went on. "You could pour snow in one end and get boiling shaving water out at the other."

"Pooh!" said George, "there's no need to go to Outer Mongolia for that. When I was with a mobile laundry we used to get hot water whenever we wanted—but not if you was below the rank of sergeant, of course. Ivor Novello came for a bath once and wrote his name in the book. That was at Bayeux."

"We were seven weeks—or it may have been seven months—getting to Paris. I know when we got there everyone had forgotten the race," Thorn confessed. "We might have been anyone with a steam-car, and not George Foss, Colonel Think and myself."

"Cases of mistaken identity like that are very common," said a chap in the corner. "I was stopped in Ilfracombe, of all places, once, by this girl and she said 'Well, fancy meeting you here,' so I said 'Ah!' as cryptic as I could. 'It's a small world,' she said, 'I was only saying to Gwennie last week.' 'Gets smaller, at that,' I replied, 'what with jet engines and coast erosion.' Then she said suddenly, 'You aren't Tommy Harris at all,' and began to giggle."

"They only does it for devilment," Irma said. "There's two girls in our street



THE PASSENGER

get their bus fares paid every night like that, and they come from the West End. It averages over four shillings a week. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't."

"That's what I say about these draught protectors," Thorn said. "The ones you nail to the inside of the door are worst. I did all my landlady's doors once when she went away for three days to her married sister's, and none of them would shut after that. I got 'extra heavy duty' thinking it meant that sort kept out more draughts than any other, but it didn't mean that at all. It was for tube train doors, an inch thick, and when I got it on, the house was like living in a colander."

"That's what they do in America," one of the van-girls said. "Them as doesn't squat on poles. My young man was there for two nights during the war. His ship was at Boston, or Baltimore or somewhere. You ought to have seen the nylons he brought me."

"It sounds to me like our Gwennie's friend Lily. She said she met a chap at Ilfracombe who said he was Tommy Harris and bought her an ice," said George, fixing his eyes on the man in the corner.

"Well, what if I did?" the man in the corner said, defensively.

"Well, it proves it is a small world," George said, "because you never thought to meet Lily's friend Gwennie's brother George here, did you, not when you told that anecdote?"

"Anecdote!" said the man with two books under his arm. "That's another: some people say 'antidote,' and are none the wiser."

"The world doesn't seem small when you are motoring across it in a steam-car," Thorn assured the company. "And if you really want to feel a draught try sticking a newly-shaven chin over the side when coasting through Outer Mongolia."

## THE CONFESSION

As I went into the club the other day I saw Wothers, one of our members, very busy at a writing table. Perhaps I should not have interrupted him, but I am glad, now, that I did, because I got by doing so a rather interesting sidelight on his methodical character.

"Going abroad, aren't you?" I had said to him.

For we had heard that he was going to the Balkans and to some countries to the north or the east of them.

"Yes," he said. "I'm busy."

"When are you starting?" I asked, not quite taking the hint.

"To-morrow," he said.

"But haven't you filled in all your forms and got your visas yet?" I asked. For I thought he was rather a meticulous man.

"Oh, yes," he said. "But this is my confession."

"Your confession?" I said. "What for?"

"In case of a train wreck," he answered. "They used to have them there

rather frequently. I don't know if they still do; but it's best to be ready. One shouldn't leave all that sort of thing to the last."

"But what are you going to confess?" I asked.

"That I wrecked the train," he said.

"But are you going to?" I inquired.

"Oh, no," he replied.

"Then why the confession?" I asked.

"I see that you have only studied Western law," he said. "But it is in the east of Europe that I am going to travel, and I can't take my own law with me. In the law-courts of Eastern Europe one confesses. And I see no sense in standing for eight hours a night with a glaring light in my face being questioned, when half an hour's careful attention now will obviate all that."

"What about the other passengers?" I asked.

"I've thought of that," he said. "The charge might be conspiracy, affecting the whole of them. But most likely I might be requested to confess, as being the only capitalist in the train."

"But are you a capitalist?" I inquired.

"I have a little money in the Post Office Savings Bank," he replied.

"But does that make you a capitalist?"

"Not according to you," he said. "And not according to me. But it's their country, and I can't take my definitions to it, or yours. I shall simply travel as a capitalist, as a blood-sucking bourgeois."

"And what are you writing?" I asked.

"I am confessing that I wrecked the train," he said, "instigated to this vile sabotage by the family of Rockefeller and all my fellow-capitalists. And, in case they ask for more details of the plot, I am giving them the names of both archbishops."

"And what reason are you giving," I asked, "for allowing yourself to be instigated by these people?"







"I FORGOT THE SALT."

they will have to do will be to put their hands in and pull it out, without doing anything unpleasant to me. And, of course, with slight modifications, it will do for any other crime I may be charged with. Is there anything you can think of that you would advise me to add?"

"Well," I said, "if you're taking that line you may as well say that you sorrowfully regret and repent of having lived as a loathsome capitalist, a verminous bourgeois, sucking the blood of the workers, sabotaging freedom and festering as a foul sore on the fair face of democracy."

"Excellent," said Wothers. "I will."

### TRIO AND FUGUE

"Hello . . . Oh yes, Mrs. Griffin. How are you?—It's Mrs. Griffin, dear."

"So I hear. Pass the scissors."

"Hello . . . Sunday evening? Well, I'm not sure—Are we doing anything in particular on Sunday, dear?"

"That depends. I'm blessed if I'll suffer that woman at bridge again. Did you find the scissors?"

"The beastliness of my mind," he said.

"I should advise you not to pull their legs," I warned him.

"Certainly not," he answered. "I am being very careful. Those words were used in an actual trial. It was several years ago; so that I hope they will have forgotten them, and will take it as the honest and original outburst of a repentant mind."

"But if you confess, you'll be found guilty," I said.

"Of course," said Wothers. "But that will happen in any case. And I shall escape the interrogation and all that goes with it. I hope there'll be no accident to the train; but if there is, and I survive, I don't want to be tortured. My confession will be in my pocket, and all

"Hello, Mrs. Griffin . . . Well, we hadn't quite decided . . . Oh yes? . . . I see—She wonders if we'd go along to tea, dear, to meet Mr. Mention."

"And who might *he* be? No, not those scissors. The long ones. Try that little drawer where the table-mats never seem to be."

"Hello . . . Did you say Mr. Mention? . . . Oh, *Benson*. I'm sorry—It's Mr. Benson, dear, the author."

"Tell her he bores me."

"Hello . . . Don't you think Mr. Benson might find us rather boring? After all, we're nothing out of the ordinary . . . Mm? . . . I see—Mrs. Griffin says he's interested in ordinary people too, dear."

"Oh, is he? That's big of him, I must say. Yes, those are they."

"I didn't quite catch that, Mrs. Griffin? . . . Oh, yes? . . . I see—She says he's dying to meet you again because of your sonnet in the parish magazine, dear."

"Did he now? He sounds rather fun. Ask her if that terrible sister of his will be there."

"Hello . . . By the way, how is Mr. Benson's sister keeping? . . .—She says which one, dear?"

"Great heavens—are there two? The decrepit one, like a scarecrow."

"Hello . . . The tall, slender lady, getting on in years . . . Yes . . . I see—She says there are three, all the same, except the deaf one."

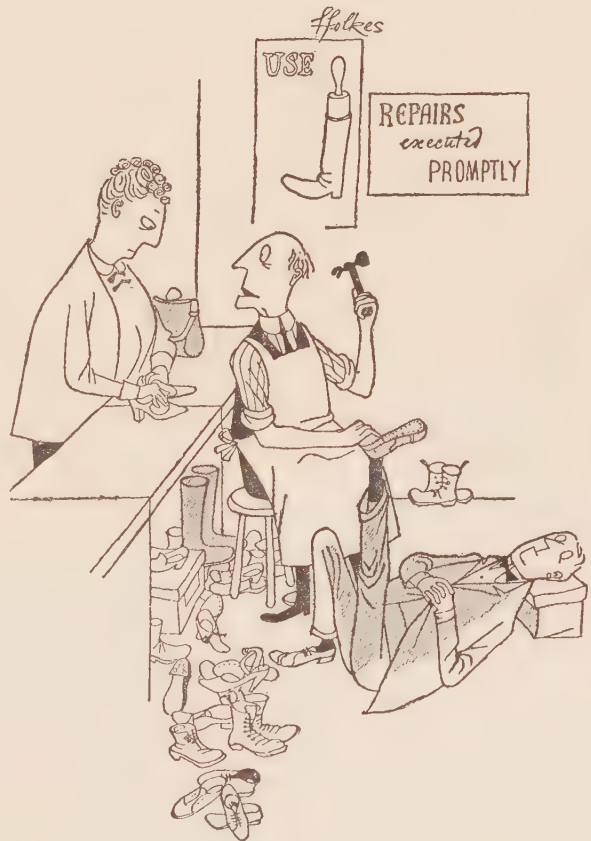
"Help! Well, find out if they're coming to tea. You really are infuriating when you're on the phone."

"Hello . . . Will Mr. Benson be bringing his sisters? . . . Yes . . . Er . . . Oh—She says no, dear, but if we're anxious to meet them she'll invite them. He's bringing his mother."

"For pity's sake, *I* don't want to meet the creatures. And it can't be his mother, I've seen a photo of her grave in Northumberland."

"Hello . . . Did you say his mother, Mrs. Griffin? . . . Oh, I see—It's his *zither*, dear."

"*What!*"



"HE'S IN A HURRY."

"Be careful, you're sewing it to your skirt. Do you want to go or not?"

"There's no need to be testy. I've told you what I want. Surely you can conduct a telephone conversation without getting on edge?"

"Hello. We'll come with pleasure."

"I didn't say that!"

"Or rather, Cora doesn't want to meet the sisters, because she has a cold."

"Ask her what time."

"Hello . . . Shall we pop in about four?—Yes, dear, she says about four."

"We can't possibly go at four. We'll have Wilfred for lunch. Is that the white cotton by your foot?"

"Hello . . . I'm afraid . . . I beg your pardon? . . . Oh—she says how is my neuritis?"



" . . . AND A RATHER NEAT ARRANGEMENT WITH THE COUNTY COUNCIL TAKES CARE OF THE EXPENSES OF MY WALKING TOUR."

"Well, *tell* her. No, not that foot—the *other* foot."

"Hello . . . Do you mean my rheumatism? . . . Oh, much better . . . Just a minute—She says how is your brood?"

"My *what*? No, this is the *beige* cotton."

"Hello . . . Did you say brood, Mrs. Griffin? . . . Oh, bruise."

"I have no bruise. Ask her if she's thinking of Eleanor."

"Hello . . . Are you thinking of Eleanor? . . . Yes, she's here—She wants to talk to you, dear."

"To me? Silly woman. I'm *far* too busy to waste time chattering on the telephone. Tell her I'm . . . Hello, Mrs. Griffin . . ."

July, 1950

MY DIARY

“ONE of her odd parties, in which the guests seem to be invited at hazard. There was a scrubby little man who turned out to be the King of Portugal.”

“Went down to the shore. Great many gulls about. Mended my lighter when I got back.”

I hope I shall not be considered presumptuous in venturing to couple a quotation from the *Diary of a Dean* with one from my own modest record. (Dean Inge's is the first passage.) The fact is that I have determined so to write my diary in future that when the time comes I shall have no difficulty in finding a publisher, and I quote the passages to draw attention to deficiencies in my work which I hope to remedy.

It is at once obvious that the Dean has managed to get a bite into his prose which is not found in mine. How is it done? Let us consider a few more extracts. (My readers may like to puzzle out for themselves from whose diary each is taken.)

“Thinking it might be dirt in the carburettor, I unscrewed a piece of the mechanism and blew down it, but it turned out to be the wrong part.”

“We lunched with the Asquiths; no one else there except Lord Hardinge of Penshurst. ‘Poincaré is clean-handed, but an unscrupulous liar and a bitter enemy of England.’ I said ‘Is Clemenceau clean-handed?’ He looked grim and made no answer.”

“Joe said you could always make money by backing the four top-weights, and I tried it but was badly down.”

“I asked him if Gordon could have been saved if Wolseley had taken the Suakin-Berber route, but he was deaf and did not hear.”

It will be noticed that two of these passages contain several famous names. These, as my readers will probably have guessed, are taken from the Dean's diary. As regards the subject-matter there is little to choose, and its interest will vary with the type of reader. The keen motorist, for example, once he has realized that the reference to Wolseley's route has nothing to do with some reliability trial or other will probably skip the passage altogether, whereas he is pretty sure to read every word about my carburettor. It is the names, then, that make the difference. Let us prove this by re-writing the extract from my diary quoted at the beginning of this article:

“Went down to the shore. Great many gulls about. When I got back I found that a talkative stranger had more or less forced his way into the house, introducing

himself as the Duke of Toboggan. 'Stalin could throw an army across the Black Sea as easily as you or I could throw a potato: but his hands are tied.' I said 'What about Molotov's hands?' He made no reply, but drew the end of his tie from his waistcoat, flipped it over his right shoulder and thrust out his hands, palms uppermost, smiling wryly. I nodded significantly, though I was not sure of his meaning. Later he mended my lighter."

One cannot deny that it makes a difference.

Now I will stick at nothing to get my diary published, and if famous names will do it then famous names I shall have. There are, I think, three courses open to me. First, I could set myself to scrape acquaintance with notabilities. The difficulty here is that nowhere but

in London are the famous concentrated in really great numbers. I live in the north and my days are fully occupied. There is a train, I believe, at about half-past five, but I should be lucky if I were at work much before ten, which would leave only a couple of hours before I had to drop everything and rush to Euston to catch the 12.30 a.m. home. However great my hardihood, many a night might well produce nothing but half a dozen rebuffs. Years might pass by, with hundreds of pounds going out in fares, sandwiches and cups of tea, and perhaps not enough coming in to fill a couple of pages.

Next, I could assume a familiarity which I did not in fact possess—in this way:

"At the Kremlin again. What a dear fellow Molotov is! I was with Stalin, who was in high spirits, insisting on balancing a couple of samovars on top of the half-open door in such a way that they would be certain to fall on the head of the next person to enter. The victim proved to be Molotov, and we all burst into a roar of laughter as with a tremendous crash and a deluge of hot water he was felled to the carpet. He was up in a minute, laughing as loudly as anyone."

It seems to me that this would make a good enough entry, but it is ten to one that some interfering busybody would be off to Stalin or Molotov like a shot, and an outright denial, even from behind the Iron Curtain, might well lead to a distressing exposure of the whole book.



Fingerman

"SWEN, SIR? RATS, DRADNATS? TODAY'S SEMIT? THIS WEEK'S HCNUP?"

The third course, and the one which I have decided to adopt, is to introduce my names by means of imaginary correspondence. I should quote from the letters of all sorts of celebrities, but the extracts would deal entirely with trivialities. The purpose of this will be made clear in a moment. A typical extract might run as follows:

"Tried to get some cream. Olivier wrote 'The Masked Viscount was surely the best exponent of the Eastern toe-hold ever seen in this country. For spinal friction I doubt if anyone was more feared than Alpo the Awful Accountant.' I question the second opinion. The Mad Mandarin brought a delicacy to his work which was fully as effective as Alpo's power."

The reason for the triviality of the subject-matter is now plain. It is a safeguard against exposure. We may be sure that Sir Laurence has to deal with an exceptionally heavy mail, and he would be hard put to it to deny outright that he had on *any* occasion entered into a correspondence about the finer points of all-in wrestling.

On this extract, then, I intend to model my diary. I should be the last to expect that it could in any way rival Dean Inge's, but I do think that in this form it should stand a good chance of publication.

## BACK ROOM JOYS

### QUOTING

Very agreeable sensations  
 Surround the employment of quotations—  
 The nice aptitude of the choice;  
 The inverted commas in our voice  
 (*A shade louder, slightly clearer enunciation*);  
 Our generous mispronunciation  
 Of French (*we were* such a fool  
 At our Public School!);  
 And the small but piquant doubt  
 As to whether he'll know what we're talking about—  
 Though, on the other hand, recognition  
 Of our erudition  
 Is not only gratifying but commends  
 One's choice of friends.  
 It is our sole opportunity—  
 Provided we use a deprecating tone  
 To disclaim it as our own—  
 Of uttering blush-making sentiments with impunity;  
 In fact, well-restrained, it's high among civilized graces,  
 Like remembering  $\pi$ —to the first five decimal places.



## PATTERN BOOK

### *From Literary Ghosts, Ltd. to the Executors of Lord Goll*

Dear Sir,—We acknowledge the receipt of the private papers of the late Lord Goll and appreciate your esteemed order to prepare an autobiography for posthumous publication. Owing to the absence on extended leave of our political specialist it will be necessary for the work to be done by another member of our staff. We therefore have pleasure in submitting specimen passages prepared by other operatives and should be gratified if you would select the manner of treatment which you prefer.

We remain, etc.

### I. EARLY CHILDHOOD

By the age of two-plus my nurse-fixation had been complicated by a pram complex, and as when separated from the object of my emotions I developed a violent agitation of my ears, I had to sit in it even at meals, and at night it stood by the side of my bed. My libido, which got first prize at my nursery school, was a rare



solace to me in these early years, and as soon as I was old enough to boast it was obvious that I had an inferiority complex from the way I dragged the libido into the conversation at every opportunity. My ego never recovered from having to take second place to it.

## 2. MY FIRST DAY OUT WITH THE QUORN

Mr. Reynard, who had been visiting, was much put about when he heard the tootle-ootle of the horn and the grerr! grerr! of the hounds. "I shall have to put my best foot foremost," he said.

All the huntsmen in their pretty jackets were riding as hard as they could across the meadow. "Old friend," I whispered into Mr. Horse's long ear, "let us be first across all the fences so that we can see what is going on."



"AS A MATTER OF FACT, I HAVEN'T RIDDEN SINCE I WAS A BOY."

"Leave it to me," said Mr. Horse, and with many a "View-halloo" and "Tally-ho" we chased after Mr. Reynard, hurrying along so quickly that soon not one of the other hunters was in sight.

Alas! when the high wall surrounding a gentleman's estate loomed before us, although Mr. Horse jumped manfully to the top he could not quite get across, so that while his front legs hung down inside the park his back legs hung down towards the road outside, and there I had to wait, blowing

my horn as I sat on the saddle, until help arrived.

Mr. Reynard certainly had a fortunate escape that afternoon.

## 3. MY MAIDEN SPEECH

The Whips was purty well rarin' to go and put a stop to the shindy by votin' while I wur windin' up my observations on the Gold (Equalization of Inequalities) Bill. Old man Asquith kep' alookin' at his timepiece and shakin' it as though he reckoned it had stopped. But there weren't nobuddy as were goin' to stop me from sayin' that of all tarnation kittle-kattle them Opposition fellers were the most ornery I iver saw. When I siz thet never since Aunt Maggie Parker lost her peepers in the mashtub had thar bin sich a storm in a tea-caddy, them pikers fair riz at me and the Speaker hissself had to slap them down and remember them they wasn't back home in the pool-room.

#### 4. THE FORMATION OF THE MINISTRY OF THE TALENTS

"Take the Woolsack, do," said the P.M. to Harworthy, his heavy lidded eyes appreciating the subtlety of the offer. A man to whom the Social Comedy was ever preferable to the Political Tragedy, he was his own most appreciative audience. Clankson, who wanted the Woolsack for himself, pressed forward with a plate of sandwiches, which the P.M. waved away, maliciously offering the Duchy of Lancaster in return. From her place beside the tea-table Lady Pax-Ravoli listened with sub-acid amusement to the negotiations between Oxpound and Lagtell over the Exchequer, which she knew had already been promised to Passpertine. I was hoping, as one does hope when one is in one's forties but is still thought of by the public as in one's thirties, for something without heavy departmental duties, where I could practise my debating without succumbing to an avalanche of detail. It was rather a shock to me when the P.M. thanked me for my assistance in Opposition and asked me as a special favour to him to accept the post of Second Church Estates Commissioner. "I hope you will make good there," he said with an inscrutable smile.

#### 5. THE OCCUPATIONS OF A RETIRED STATESMAN

Were the reader to peep between the mullions of my Snuggery one morning he might well espy a nobleman, no longer in his salad days, seated at ease and perusing a well-worn, and well-loved, volume. It would indeed be strange if it were neither the Odes of Horace nor the Iliad of Homer that was engaging his attention. Oft indeed has that solitary reader wished that the idle sports of boyhood had not distracted him from his studies and that he had acquired the power of translating other authors of the Ancient World. In the afternoon it is his custom to gain refreshment from his studies by a visit, not unaccompanied by members of the canine tribe, to the maze which occupies a portion of his demesne, there to indulge in the gentle sport of testing his wits against the cunning of the contriver. In the evening he is usually to be found once again in communion with the well-tried friends on his library shelves. *Dulce*, as Horace observed, *est*.

### DEPARTMENTAL SQUABBLE

Copson, of the Housing Department, looked in the other morning in a state of great distress.

"It's Education," he said, when he grew calm enough to reply to Pinmill's sympathetic query. "They're after my Chichester Street site. They want to put a Secondary Modern on it."

We understood at once how he felt. The Chichester Street site has belonged to Housing for so long that the memory of man runneth not to the contrary. Copson himself has grown up with it. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that he knows

every dock-leaf, every patch of thistle, every empty petrol-tin, every disused motor-car tyre in the site's tangled wilderness. With almost a mother's pride he has watched it triumph over the efforts of a whole generation of architects and surveyors who have planned its development. His desk is full of abortive lay-outs which have failed to satisfy the subtle and elusive needs of its curious contours. Unhurriedly over the years he continues with his process of elimination. Some day, he is rather sadly aware, he (or, if not he, his successors) will see dwellings rising on Chichester Street. Meanwhile it is the solace of his declining years, as it was formerly the inspiration of his youth. On most fine afternoons in the summer he is to be seen wandering over its rugged surface, while his winter hours are spent poring over his beloved lay-outs.

Naturally a site so desirable has not escaped envious eyes in other departments. Hitherto Copson has successfully repelled all attempted encroachments, but his tone suggested that the new threat from Education was easily the most serious yet.

"Just as you were ready to start building, I have no doubt," said Chopleigh, with friendly satire. Whenever one meets Copson he is always just about to lay the first brick.

"Exactly," said Copson, touchingly unconscious of the irony. "The new lay-out was going before the committee next Wednesday."

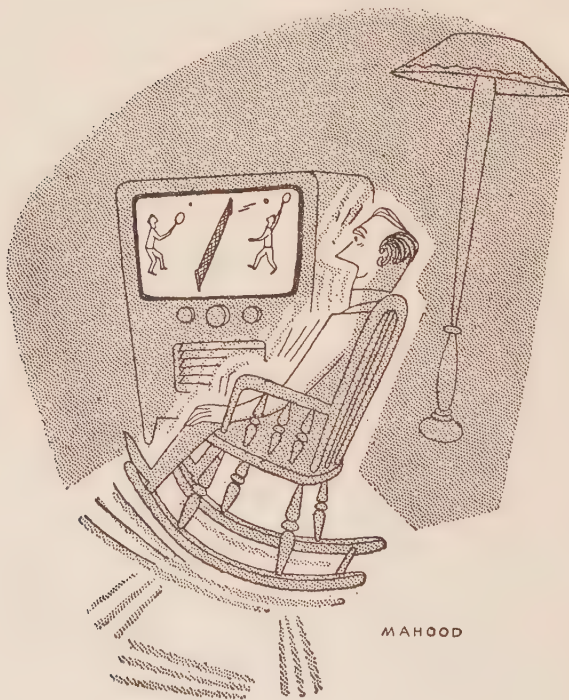
"The one with the seven-storey blocks?"

"No, we had to abandon that one. The subsoil wasn't equal to the load. The

present one—a beauty—provides for sixty-nine dwellings on four floors, with sixteen perambulator-sheds, a communal laundry, and a . . . but what's the use of talking about it now?" And Copson broke off, his face puckered frightfully with grief.

Miss Beamish brought him a chair, and after a bit he rallied. "Of course, I shall fight them," he said. "I'll fight them as I fought Parks when they wanted it for a recreation ground; as I fought Welfare when they tried to get it for their old people's hostel."

Dibdin coughed a tactful warning on behalf of us all. We used to be with Welfare ourselves and we have never quite forgotten how ruthlessly Copson steam-rolled our modest request for a part of the site



for our hostel. To this day there are men in Welfare who will not willingly sit down to lunch at the same table with an officer from Housing. We are not ourselves cast in so unforgiving a mould, but we do not relish reminders of the episode.

"A Secondary Modern on Chichester Street!" went on Copson, hoarsely. "Never! I'd rather let the private builder have it."

"Copson!" said Pinmill, sharply, "You go too far!"

Copson gave a strangled groan and rushed blindly out.

"He's distraught," said Dibdin. "He'd never have said that if he were normal."

"I should hope not," said Pinmill frigidly.

"I shall never forget his eyes," said Miss Beamish.

\* \* \* \* \*

By the next day it was apparent that this was a struggle in which there could be no neutrality. The Council was split into two warring factions. Ranged behind Housing were Public Health, Legal and Parliamentary, and Finance. Against them were most of the other departments, including Town Planning, who expressed the view, after much vacillation, that the creation of a balanced community, by the integration of the cultural needs of the neighbourhood unit in a functional synthesis with its industrial life, imperatively required the erection of a school on Chichester Street.

Once it was known that T.P. were against Copson it was generally felt that his cause was lost. Council history records no instance of a department emerging victorious from a struggle with the Planners. Copson himself clearly thought defeat was inevitable.

So it would have been had help not come from a most unlikely quarter. Yesterday a letter was received from the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs coolly indicating that they would like the site for one of their experimental research stations. After the initial shock of horror and indignation the Council leapt to arms as one man, all petty domestic differences forgotten. It was the Dunkirk spirit over again. The Chief Education Officer came into Copson's office, tore up the school plans before his eyes, and put himself entirely at his disposal in the spirit of a junior minister handing in his portfolio during a Cabinet reshuffle. The Finance Department have prepared a statement to show that the abortive expenditure, if the site is abandoned, will mean a sixpenny rate increase. Town Planning are at work upon a memorandum indicating that the creation of a balanced community by the integration of the residential development in a functional synthesis with the surrounding areas will be quite impossible unless the Chichester Street site is used for housing.

As for Copson, he has already been on the phone to Sir Tristram, the Third Assistant Secretary, to tell him that the Minister's unthinkable proposal comes at the very moment when he, Copson, is just about to lay the first brick.

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE THIRTY-FOUR

We intellectual women, we who take pride in dismissing as nonsense the literature addressed exclusively to our sex—there is nothing, nothing in the world we enjoy reading so much as women's magazines. Tough stuff is all right if we are in the mood; but there is not one of us huddled under a hairdresser's beehive who will not gladly drop her *Religio Medici* in favour of the offered pile of *Happy Homes*, *Cheery Chatter*, *Beautiful Woman*, *Charm*, *Housework* and the rest of them, from the handsome folio to the little frayed pamphlet with *A Demure Blouse in Crochet!!* headlined under the price.

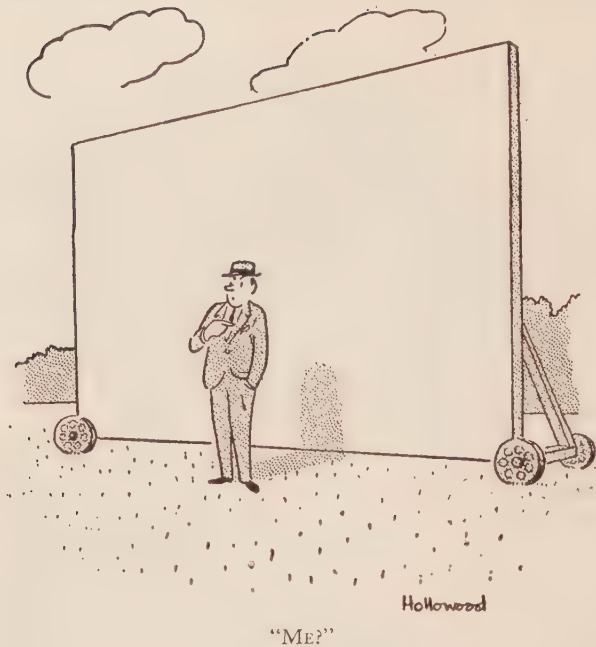
You can pay threepence for a woman's magazine, or you can pay two shillings, or you can be like us and read them free six months late; but high or low, great or small, shiny or blotting-paper, they all carry the same glad message: You, too, can be beautiful, well-dressed, married, efficient, even cultured! Well, not always cultured, not specifically. But there is a general idea, even among the tiny magazines which interpret dreams instead of reviewing the easier novels, that if their customers will only follow their instructions—if, for example, they will wear a gay overall for spring-cleaning, or run a curtain round the electric-light meters—then they will have time to enjoy the blessings of leisure. Leisure is typified by a drawing of two arm-chairs, one each side of a basking cat, and one arm-chair occupied by a newspaper and trouser-legs.

It would be a mistake to think that men do not feature in women's magazines. They do, like mad. They brood implicitly behind those pictures of old black suits brightened with *piqué* gardenias, or of eyebrows having bits painted on at each end; they get into the print above the title of an old-fashioned apple-pie recipe; they even appear in photographs, looking laughable in their snug two-colour pullovers. And whole articles are written about husbands: why they don't buy their wives flowers any more, how they can make an attractive corner-cupboard in twenty minutes, why they insist on behaving like the great big dear human old sillies they are.

It is in the illustrations to the stories, however, that Man gets his break; that he is shown as the magnificent creature he might be. Or, rather, as one or other of two magnificent creatures, because the illustrations in women's magazine stories are divided rather sharply into those that have obviously come from America and those that obviously haven't. The American-style hero is six feet eight inches tall, has shoulders five feet wide and wears a draped suit, a pork-pie hat, a little nose and an expression of extraordinary vivacity, as if he were about to burst into a college yell. He is apt to be sitting on the top of a step-ladder or dropping an armful of parcels, and he is usually done expensively in line and wash, perhaps even in two colours. The English hero, drawn in mere line and not very well, is not so much handsome as meant to be. Half his face is chin, and he is awfully tidy, and a sort of powerful goodness shines out of him as he stands by the five-barred gate talking to the pretty



PACIFIC PRIORITY



girl in the jumper suit. Not for him those fancy American names like Jake and Jeff. If he is not called Terry he will be next week.

But let us get back to the sterner side of women's magazines. The sternest is without doubt the knitting stuff. I should think that proof-reading the knitting instructions must be the worst part of life on a woman's magazine; the effects of a single error are barely imaginable. Life on a woman's magazine must be pretty exacting anyway because of the rule that only a third of a page of each article can be printed at a time. You try cutting this *Punch* into eighty-four pieces and putting them together to look like an average copy of *Happy Homes*.

You couldn't do it, could you? You'd get two bits of the same article on two consecutive pages, wouldn't you? Well, women's magazines would never do a thing like that. They'd rather shove the odd piece in a hideout among the advertisements at the end, a desperate measure they call *please turn to p. xii*.

Perhaps that is why these magazines print their shorter items as and when they can, so that it is no surprise to find, boxed in mid-page, a sudden piece of philosophy or an abrupt little verse about marigolds in a jug on a window-sill. It is said that women can't keep to the point or stick to a subject. They don't get a chance, not when they're brought up on this sort of thing. But look at what they do get. Look at the maps of embroidered doilies. Look at the puddings for hot weather and the boxed-in divans. If every woman who had ever read an article about boxing-in divans took her lesson to heart the number of divans fenced in with shelves and cupboards and newspaper racks would reach astronomical proportions, whatever that means. But they don't. The average divan is lucky to have a frill round it, let alone a crisp rickrack piping.

This brings me to the question of illustrations in general. We women in the hairdresser's do get a sort of idea that when it comes to interior-decoration illustrations as opposed to photographs (the photographs are throughout quite wonderful, if only because they cut off the white edges and where the light got in) women's magazines run a bit off the rails. It may be a let-up from so much infallible practicality, or it may just be the normal reaction of the artistic to real life. I should think both. I dare say if you or I were asked to illustrate a Pelmet of Bright Contrasting Material

we too would rule a couple of lines and smudge them along with yellow. We wouldn't *want* to draw the downward bend in the middle; let the customers do that for themselves, the way they will have to work out, when they get to the two-page spread, how a coat-collar may be turned insouciantly up without catching on your ears.

This is as it should be. If women's magazines ever start drawing things, especially women, as they really are, then they will be Culture, and little better as reading-matter than anything else.

### COMRADES IN CRIME

"Eh, *mon capitaine*," called out Restitude, giving me, as usual, a rank to which I had no right, "after to-morrow you will have a holiday. It is *le quatorze juillet*."

She slipped off her donkey, sat down beside me on my heap of stones, and offered me a freshly baked Corsican cake from her basket.

"One of the things the most agreeable about life, Restitude," I remarked, picking up a flint and leisurely cracking it with my hammer, "is how small ambitions suddenly fulfil themselves in a manner unawaited."

"Monsieur?" she inquired.

"As a little boy," I explained, "I had never envy to drive a locomotive or make a promenade in a balloon or assist at a motor-cycle con-course. But I had always very much envy to sit by the roadside breaking stones with a hammer on a sunny day. And here I am doing it."

"But, monsieur, it is wrong," said Restitude. "You have broken the law. This is punishment." She looked at the number and ticket which the *sergent de ville* had pinned on the pocket of my blouse.

"Yes and no," I hedged, not quite certain whether a Corsican would understand this idiom. "Last year I rent an apartment on your citadel over there. Your *mairie* posts to me a demand for rates with a one centime stamp on it. The *facteur*



"WHY, MRS. JOHNSON, I HOPED YOU WERE GOING TO BRING YOUR LITTLE BOY WITH YOU AGAIN."



walks up the citadel, stands in the square, and blows his whistle. I am shaving, so I cannot go out to see if I am one of the lucky ones with mail that day. He pushes my mail back in his satchel. The next day it happens again. Only it is raining. My rate demand is soaked. It dissolves itself."

Restitude opened her basket again and handed me a fig.

"After a month," I continued, "another demand is sent. This time I am not shaving. I go out into the square and get it from the *facteur*. It says that, if I shall not pay within a week, it is permitted that I do three days' work on the roads instead. This is what I have always desired. I tell them at the *mairie* I do not pay my rates. And so I break stones on the Route Nationale."

"You English," exclaimed Restitude. "You have no respect for law. How would it be if none of us paid our rates? But after to-morrow is *le quatorze juillet*. How do you keep it in England?"

"We don't keep it," I told her.

"You don't keep Armistice Day!" she said, shocked. In her excitement she dropped into Corsican, but seeing I did not understand, repeated her remark in French.

"It isn't Armistice Day," I objected.

"Then what is it?"

"*Le quatorze juillet* the people of Paris burned down the Bastille."

"What is the Bastille?" she inquired, now quite determined to get to the root of the matter.

"It was the big prison in Paris," I informed her.

A forester in a black corduroy suit and brilliant scarlet sash came down the road, followed by a small wild boar, which he had found in the mountains and was rearing.

"Eh, Napoléon," called Restitude. "Monsieur here says that *le quatorze juillet* we celebrate the burning of a prison by the people of Paris."

"*Mais certainement,*" agreed Napoléon, stopping and shaking us both by the hand. "Monsieur is right." He picked up his little boar, scratched it under its black bristly chin, patted Restitude's donkey, shook us both by the hand again, and proceeded on his way.

"It is not good to burn down prisons," said Restitude. "It is against the law."

"Exactly," I concurred, "so we in England do not celebrate the burning of the Bastille. You French, you have no respect for law."

Restitude looked troubled.

"Never mind," I comforted her. "A great English statesman, called Fox, *c'est à dire, Renard*, said of it, 'How much is this the greatest event that ever happened in the world and how much the best.'"

Restitude's face cleared. "Ah, *bon,*" she said. "Neither the English nor the French have any respect for law. *Nous sommes alliés.* After to-morrow you will dance with me at the fête?"

"*Plaisir, mademoiselle,*" I accepted.

## COUSIN CORLISS

"George," began Patsy, as she poured coffee.

"Yes?" said George.

"When you were a little boy did you want to be an artist?"

"No," said George.

"Oh." Patsy regarded him thoughtfully. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. Why?"

"I've had your handwriting analysed," said Patsy. "By Cousin Corliss of the magazine I take."

"Now, look here——" began George.

"Only for fun," said Patsy. "Of course, I don't believe a word of it. But she says that the way you do commas shows you have no eye for colour, which is the psychological result of your thwarted childhood desire to be an artist."

"I had no thwarted desire to be an artist," said George. "I do not want to be an artist. I once wanted to join the Foreign Legion but that has nothing to do with it. I fail to see how she makes her deduction from my commas."

"It's the way you do them," said Patsy.

"How do I do them?" demanded George.

"I can't remember," said Patsy. "It's just what Cousin Corliss says."

"Then she doesn't know her job," said George. "I have a very good eye for colour."

"I don't think you have," said Patsy.

"Yes, I have," said George. "I often see women wearing colours that I know are all wrong."

"What colours do you like then?"

"Well," said George, "I like different colours on different women."

"What colours do you like on other women that you don't like on me?" asked Patsy.

"I like all colours on you," said George hastily. "They all look the same on you."

"What do you mean, they all look the same on me?" asked Patsy.

"I mean they all look nice on you. All of them. All colours. They all look just as nice as each other. They all look as nice on you as on anyone else. They all——"

"Then," said Patsy, "Cousin Corliss is right. You have no eye for colour."

George opened his mouth. Then closed it. There was silence.

"But the way you do full stops," said Patsy presently, "shows you have an exceptionally strong sense of humour."

"Ah, well," said George. "Well, perhaps—as a matter of fact, people *have* sometimes said . . ." He paused.

"And you have high moral courage," said Patsy, "because you put little twiddles on the tails of your Ys."

"Really?" said George.

"Although, of course," continued Patsy, "as I said, I don't believe a word of it."

"Oh. No, of course not," said George. "Of course not."

"But you also put little twiddles on the tails of your Gs."

"What does that mean?" asked George suspiciously.

"Just like other men," said Patsy, "you enjoy being fussed over."

"We do not," said George heatedly. "We do not like being fussed over."



"THE MIDDLE ONE'S VEAL-AND-HAM PIE FOR THE PEOPLE WHO PREFER A SAVOURY."

"Yes, you do," said Patsy.

"We do not."

"Yes, you do."

"I know whether or not we like being fussed over," said George loudly.

"No, you don't," said Patsy. "Maybe you don't know you like it, but you do."

George gritted his teeth.

"We—do—not—like—being—fussed—over," he snarled.

"I know you do," said Patsy. "Look at the time you had that little pain in your elbow. I've never seen such a fuss."

"You made the fuss," said George furiously. "I didn't."

"That's what I mean," said Patsy. "You loved it."

"No, I didn't," roared George. "And it wasn't a little pain. It was searing agony."

"No it wasn't," said Patsy. "It was just a little pain."

George opened his mouth again. Closed it again. There was another silence. Then he said: "Have you had yours done?"

"No," said Patsy.

"Why not?"

"It's a waste of time," said Patsy. "I don't believe in it."

August, 1950

SCRAMBLED EGG

THE man in the kitchen smiled at Miss Twigg and held out an egg in each hand.

"Two eggs," he said, "will make enough scrambled egg to cover a piece of toast roughly the size of a slice of bread to a depth of one inch. Watch very carefully how I break the eggs."

He hit one smartly on the side of a basin, parted the shell and let the released egg fall golopshously within. He did this again with the second egg, and looked sideways at Miss Twigg for approval.

"Been doing that for years!" remarked that lady sourly, but the man's complacent smile remained.

"Now I take a fork, and beat the yolks and whites together."

He sloped the bowl towards Miss Twigg and agitated its contents.

"It's not really necessary to beat for any length of time. Many people prefer just a—what shall I say—a *fleck* of white here and there, to add interest to the dish."

He put down the bowl abruptly, wiped his hands on his apron and went over to an immaculate cooker.

"I have put half an ounce of fresh butter into this saucepan," he said—"fresh, because it is not so salt as the salt butter, and I find it better to add salt and pepper to my own requirements."

He sprinkled salt and pepper into the basin and stirred it round.

"This is called '*Seasoning*,'" he told Miss Twigg.

"You surprise me," she said.

"I shall now switch on the stove," said the man, ignoring the sarcasm, "and you will see that as the heat penetrates through the saucepan the butter will slowly melt. We call this melted butter oil."

"You don't say!" remarked Miss Twigg.

The man was peering into his saucepan and appeared not to hear.

"Now it has melted. The heat has done its work, the butter has turned into oil and we are now ready for the most exciting part of the operation."

His hands shook as he lifted the bowl.

"Notice that I have a *liquid* in my basin. A heavy, viscous liquid, consisting of the two eggs which I have beaten and seasoned. I shall now pour this liquid into the melted butter, which I have turned into oil by means of applied heat. Now watch carefully."

With a rapt air he tipped the egg into the saucepan. Miss Twigg noticed with some impatience that he left a good tablespoonful of the liquid in the basin.

"I shall now let the heat approach the egg and butter, moving the mixture constantly to prevent it burning. In a very short time you will see an amazing thing."

Miss Twigg shifted forward to the edge of her chair.

"The liquid will begin to thicken, until we find in the saucepan *not a liquid* of melted butter and beaten and seasoned egg but"—his voice quivered—"a *solid*."

Miss Twigg shifted back again.

"I am trying not to beat the egg too thoroughly," he said, still agitating the fork, "as many people think that the appearance of the dish is improved by just a—what shall I say——"

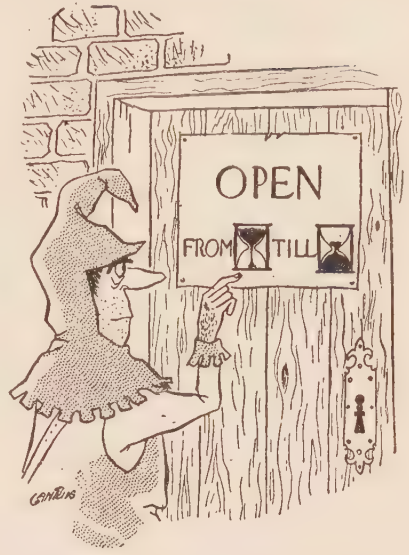
"Fleck?" suggested Miss Twigg.

"A *fleck*," agreed the man, "of white among the yellow mass."

He removed the pan from the stove, carried it lovingly towards Miss Twigg and tilted it for her inspection.

"Well," he said challengingly.

"Cooking for cretins," said Miss Twigg unkindly, snapping off the television switch.



## RECOVERY OF AN ARTIST

I doubt if you have ever met a child in this country or any other who has won a prize in a children's competition. You may cite those great names in the prize-lists, Betty Jones of London, W.9, John Yeo of Polbarwith, Cornwall, Ian MacFergus of Dumfries and the rest: but you have never actually met any of them, because they are all my brother-in-law Valentine.

My brother-in-law Valentine is a gentle, and indeed childlike, person, but his occupation of winning prizes in children's competitions is none the less exacting. He lives in a suburb and does all his work there, signing it with a whole card-index of names and sending it for forwarding to scores of accommodation addresses all over the country. He is particularly proud of an address in Nigeria, from which a hypothetical black boy fairly bombards the periodicals with competition entries, under a long name studded with apostrophes.



"AND WE, ALBERT SMITH, AN OFFICER OF HIS BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S CUSTOMS, ETC., ETC., ETC., SAY THIS ISN'T A LET OR HINDRANCE."

over the world that sometimes I wonder if he is not right to follow his own calling. He could certainly never earn his living at anything else. As it is, in a good week he can clear fifteen English pounds and about the same amount in foreign currency; including dollars, I may say.

The only sign that he is at all ashamed is his determination not to let my young niece Marian know her father's occupation. To her, he works at home for an advertising agency. Valentine is a very sensitive and proud father, so proud that he occasionally puts in a winning entry in his daughter's name and brags about it to his friends ("Better not mention it to her, or her head'll be turned"). This has led to various awkward situations and little deceits, such as a ban on her reading any children's periodicals and supplements ("They're just a lot of trash"). Marian is a serious, clever little girl, probably because she has been forced to read good literature.

A year or two ago one of the daily papers out for an increase in circulation announced a grand children's competition, a sort of Pentathlon in which all the old favourites were combined. There were Jumbled Wild Beasts, Scrambled Initial Letters, Hidden Names of Holiday Objects, a picture or two to paint and half a dozen coupons to cut out of successive issues: and the big prizes were of three guineas, two guineas and one guinea; then there were twenty prizes of ten shillings, fifty of five shillings, and one hundred paint boxes. This was just what Valentine liked, and he mobilized all his card-index of names, plus a few new ones, expecting to clean up about fifty per cent of the prizes.

He was all the more eager because for some time before this he had not been doing too well. A Winnie Rhys of Aberfyll had carried off several first prizes in the face of all his entries, and two brothers called Brian and Wilfred Malley of Manchester, 15, were badly reducing his smaller earnings. He was acquainted with the names of most of the regulars, but these were new to him.

You may protest at all this. My sister did at first, but when she saw what an artist the man was she resumed her normal contentment and left him alone. Of course, lots of adults enter for children's competitions, but only my brother-in-law is ever taken seriously. A successful entry has to strike a happy mean: it has to be good enough to beat the rest without being too good for the work of an under-fifteen (or whatever the limit is). Valentine has mastered the art of making the right mistakes, and has given so much pleasure to judges and children all

When the results of the big competition came out there was a special announcement in the daily paper concerned. "Two of the competitors," it said, "were outstanding, and so close in merit were their entries that the first and second prizes have been shared between them. Their names are Brian and Wilfred Malley of Manchester, 15. The third prize goes to Winnie Rhys of Aberfyll," and there followed a list of quite unfamiliar names. Not one of Valentine's card-index was among the prizewinners.

His first thought was that he had been found out: then he discovered a rather patronizing list of "Highly Commendeds" farther down the page that contained several of his names, and it became clear that he had been fairly defeated.

Poor Valentine was prostrated. During the dark days that followed I visited him frequently and gave him what comfort I could. There were three possible explanations for his failure. The first, that a new race of supremely intelligent children had arisen, seemed unlikely. So did the second, that another adult had discovered the secret of winning and had established an organization more efficient than my brother-in-law's.

Valentine inclined to this theory for a day or two, and nearly got into serious trouble for walking up to an unpleasant and nosey acquaintance and accusing him of being Winnie Rhys of Aberfyll. But the third explanation, that Valentine had suffered a failure of power of a sort common to great artists, seemed inescapable. That the failure was no temporary one was shown by the series of disasters that followed in all except the overseas competitions, which for some reason he could still win. But his income had been cut by half, and his whole way of life was threatened.

Then one day, quite suddenly, the defeats ceased. Winnie Rhys (who had moved to Llansoch), Brian and Wilfred Malley (now, it seemed, at Marketon, Staffs), and the others, still won prizes, but more and more rarely and unsuccessfully: half a crown here and a couple of boxes of crayons there, but nothing worth having. Once again Betty Jones, John Yeo, and Ian MacFergus, together with the indomitable negro from Nigeria, caught the judges' eye.

Valentine was all smiles and triumph, and airily dismissed the black days as "a spell of ill-health, old chap." He looked and looks twice the man he was; rather as Hercules must have looked when the Hydra was finally a thing of the past.

I wish I felt the same. This





business of working for children's competitions is a terrible strain, and I can't let Winnie and the horrible brothers disappear without a struggle. When I first discovered that Marian had been led by her father's ban on children's periodicals to buy them secretly and enter for competitions under assumed names from school friends' addresses I wondered whether to tell Valentine. But it would have put him in an awkward position. On the whole I'm glad I gave Marian a severe lecture on disobedience and dishonesty, told her never to look at a periodical again, and set about the task of retiring her creations. But if anybody wants a lot of boxes of crayons, let him write to me c/o Winnie Rhys of Llansoch.

### LEAF FROM A WEEK-END VISITORS' BOOK

Flint-heart was Jael, though her speech was silk:  
 You asked for water, and she gave you milk.  
 The Brownes lie open to a graver charge:  
 You take them butter, and they serve you marge.

### EWE LAMB

My mother said she was glad she had got me at home for a fortnight because she was going to feed me up. She knew that when I was away in London I lived on baked beans. She wasn't surprised my eyes were dull. She had warned me every time I came home but it was like talking to the Sphinx. She had always thought that if I insisted on starving myself to death I would just have to get on with it, but now she had changed her mind. Mrs. Plant's daughter was the picture of health and my mother wasn't going to have people making comparisons.

I said I don't live on baked beans.

My mother said yes, you do.

Now, eat your supper, my mother said. You've got to eat it all. I'm not going to *let* you die of starvation. I'm just not going to let you whether you like it or not.

There, she said when I had finished, you look better already. You don't look haunted.

On the following day we went to buy a tonic.

A tonic for putting on weight, my mother told the assistant. Do you prefer it in tablet or liquid form, madam, said the assistant. For my daughter, said my mother coldly.

Then we had me weighed. I was nine stone. See, my mother said.

And you've got to go to bed early, my mother said. I can't do anything about it if you will never go to bed before two in the morning when you are away. But I

can while you are home. I am helpless when you are in London and am forced to stand by and watch while you wear your nerves to trembling shreds. I'm only glad I can't see you. If you will tire yourself out like this the next thing will be you will lose your job, and you know you won't like that.

I said I don't stay up until two every morning.

My mother said yes, you do.

And another thing, my mother said. You are going to take things calmly and slowly while you are home. When you are in London you spend your time rushing like a mad thing from place to place without pausing for breath. Tearing about like that without breathing isn't good for you. You will have a gastric ulcer and *then* where will you be?

Aunt Ethel had one in her old house at Tunbridge Wells, my mother said. She was in hospital for weeks and when she came home her roses were thick with greenfly.

I said I don't rush about like a mad thing.

My mother said yes, you do.

Your whole attitude towards things is wrong, my mother said. Your money,



for instance. Your father is going to talk to you about that. I told him only last night he is going to. I shall leave it to him and not say a word myself. But what I want to say is that you simply must not carry it all about with you at once. And don't say you don't because you do.

I know I do, I said. Do you want me to leave half a crown under my mattress and carry a shilling round with me?

There's no need to be sarcastic, my mother said.

I'm not being sarcastic, I said.

You carry *pounds* in your handbag, my mother said.

No, I don't, I said.

Don't argue, my mother said. I remember, she went on, when Aunt Gertrude went to London in 1938 to see Aunt Dora and somebody stole her handbag. Aunt Gertrude has never forgotten it. Since then she has kept her money in a woolly bag tied round her waist under her clothes. It has never been stolen again. If you won't leave some of your money locked up in your room, my mother said, I will give you a woolly bag like Aunt Gertrude.

Now, eat your suet pudding and stop arguing, my mother said. I'm going to keep you alive if it kills me.

## FLOWER OF THE FIELD

Foxmaker's Piece is a small field lying at the side of the road, maybe a mile out of Pordle Wickerton. A grim-natured field, all flints and thistles. Farmer Granger tried oats at the last, and they came to nothing as usual.

"I give that there field up!" says he, along at "The Woolpack." "'Tis no good for grain, 'tis no good for roots, and when it was grazing the cows used to laugh at it. Darned if I know what to do with the beggar next," he says. "Never made a penny out of it, and not likely to, unless the fodder-merchants start buying thistles for donkeys."

"Turn it into a car-park," suggested the landlord. "That's what the farmers do with half their fields down in Devon and Cornwall, and fine crops they get."

He meant it in joke, of course, for Pordle Wickerton was an ugly village set in plain, bleak country, and we got nobody stopping. But Farmer Granger looked thoughtful.

"That's an idea," he says. "I'll give it a try, landlord."

Next day he runs the roller over Foxmaker's Piece, and sticks up a notice, "Car Park 6d." Then he opens the gate and stands one of his youngsters there with his school satchel.

Well, now, believe it or not, he made one-and-sixpence that very first day, from motorists who couldn't see what the devil it was a car-park *for*, but parked there just the same. Maybe they just went in automatically, or maybe they reckoned



HOLIDAY TASK

"WHAT COMES AFTER 'THE LETHAL RESULTS OF RADIO ACTIVITY?'"

that a lonely, grim bit of country like that wouldn't have a car-park unless it was worth stopping at. The next day he made three bob, and the day after that five-and-six.

Business got better and better as people got to hear about it. They'd drive miles just to park in Foxmaker's Piece. Mostly they'd just sit in their car and eat sandwiches and look at the view, which was better not looked at—not by those that don't care for flat, bare fields, anyway.

One day the farmer sees a chap getting out of his car holding a camera and looking around for something to snap. This chap had a longish look, and in the end the best he could find was an old cow-shed, with a loose, corrugated-iron roof, rusty and clanking in the wind, and walls mended with old tin petrol-advertisements.

By the end of the week Farmer Granger had the roof off that cow-shed and a nice bit of thatch up there instead. He ripped off the petrol-advertisements and patched up the holes with some planks, and after that the old cow-shed got its picture took regular.

Before summer was out that cow-shed was "Ye Olde Barne," and the farmer's missus was serving one-and-sixpenny teas there as fast as she could boil the kettle.

Well, things quieted down in the winter, and the next spring he didn't have matters his own way. Two other farmers started up car-parks on their own, placarding them "Park Here for Foxmaker's Piece, 6d. All Day." The fame of the place crept towards the village, where the cycle-repairer had *his* roof thatched, too, and turned all the bits of bicycle out of his shed and became "Ye Olde Smithy Tea-rooms." He went round looking for old horse-shoes, and kept them lying about, and people seemed to like that.

Then old Miss Whistle, who had a cottage down by the dirty little duck-stream, branched out as "Ye Olde Mille Guesthouse." The village stores got a chap down to take a lot of photographs of Foxmaker's Piece, and they sold postcards by the hundred. The landlord of "The Woolpack" clapped on a dark little



"ARE YOU SURE WE BROUGHT HIM?"

lean-to at one side and called it the Public Bar and pushed all us chaps out into it so that the old taproom could become the Saloon Bar & Cocktail Lounge. And old Mrs. Mockridge, who'd been the church-cleaner, made herself a print sunbonnet and stayed at home selling brass toasting-forks and door-knockers.

After that Pordle Wickerton never looked back. A brewery built a huge hotel and called it "The Foxmaker's Arms." All the Women's Institutes for fifty miles round used to vote solid for a trip to Pordle Wickerton and a walk out to Foxmaker's Piece every year for their outing. There were photographs of us in the Sunday papers, and chapters about us in every one of those books people are always writing about the English country-side. A couple of artists and a fellow who claimed he was a poet came and bought cottages. One chap came and lived in a cottage with two men-servants and a gardener for nearly ten weeks, and when he got back to London he wrote a fifteen-bob book called "I Chose Simplicity."

That's us to-day. And all on account of Farmer Granger and his bit of land, Foxmaker's Piece....

It isn't a car-park any more, by the way. There were letters in the London papers complaining it was ruination to a famous beauty-spot to have a car-park right slap in the middle. The Council agreed, and said it had to go. So go it went.

Farmer Granger's trying Foxmaker's Piece with oats again this year.

## CANDID COMMENTARY

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and good evening also to our overseas listeners, from the Silver City Stadium, whither you have been transferred by my colleague in the studio a quarter of an hour too early, as usual.

At the moment there is some sort of fracas going on in the ring between two boxers whose names would mean as little to you as they do to me. As neither of these gladiators possesses a knock-out punch, the fight will probably go the full distance.

The Stadium is full, a lot of people here to-night. The ringside is full of celebrities of stage, sport, and screen. Those of them who are not trying to catch my eye are climbing on chairs to get within range of the television camera. I can see Myrtle de Rescke, the child star, with her little son, who is just beginning his national service, and Lucas Carmody, the great lover—you'd never guess he was wearing a wig—and from the world of sport we have—let me see—oh, yes, Shorty George, who rode a very queer race at Kempton the other day—and there's A. J. Fruit—they say he can't play fast bowling. I don't know why they specify *fast* bowling.

Hullo! one of the men in the ring has fallen down. Did he fall down by himself, Harry? No, I wasn't watching either. Anyway, the body is being dragged

out, so I suppose the other chap, the one who didn't fall down, must have won, or something.

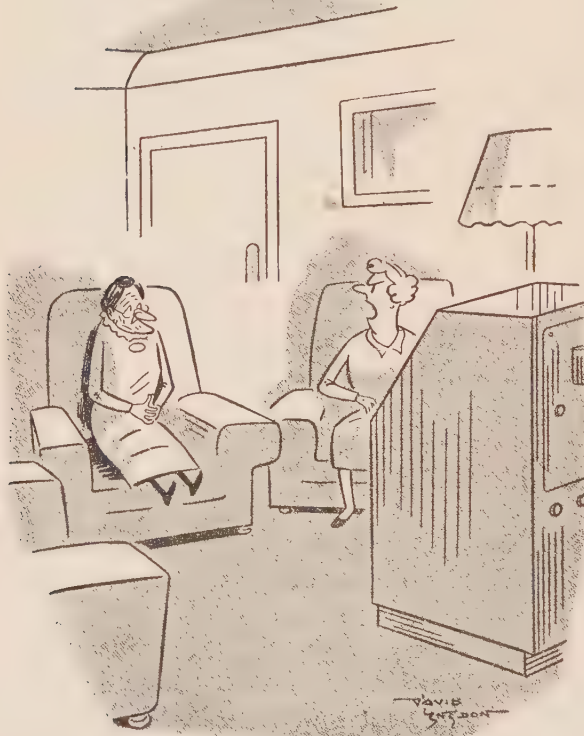
That fanfare of trumpets heralded the approach of the challenger, James J. Jones. He's climbing into the ring now. I've never seen Jones looking fitter, have you, Harry? No, I've never seen him before, either. I suppose that criminal-looking character in the appalling tie is his manager.

That second fanfare was for the champion, Bob Fitzbrown. Now he's in the ring too. Actually there are about thirty people in the ring at the moment. I don't know what all of them are doing, and I have a shrewd suspicion that they don't either.

I could give you a knot by knot description of the gloves being put on, but I prefer to work on the daring assumption that you know that the old bare-knuckle days are over.

I don't have to tell you how important this fight is to both participants. Apart from the title which is at stake, there is the money. When their managers, agents, seconds, trainers, handlers and other dependents have been paid, there is always the chance that some money will be left over for the boxers themselves. No doubt this exciting possibility will play its part in spurring the two men on to knock the living daylight out of each other.

Now the referee is talking to the two men. From their expres-



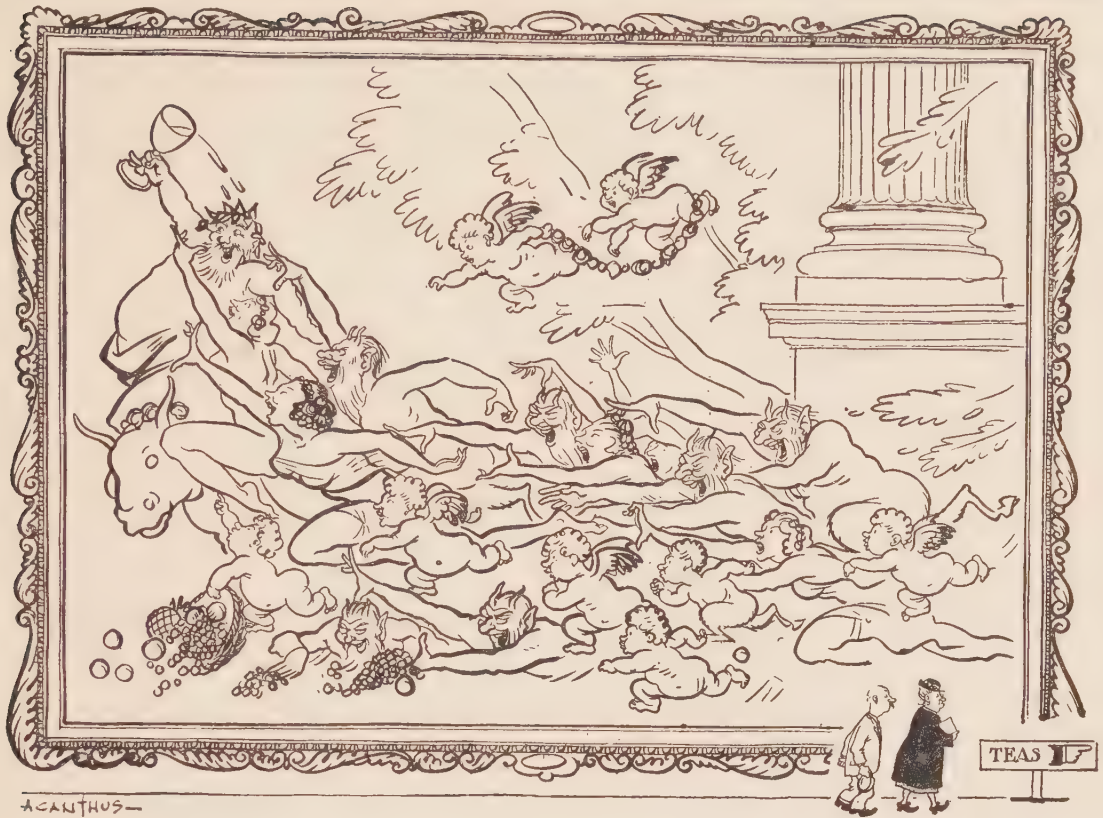
"OH, FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, GRANNY—YOU CAN'T EXPECT BOXING EVERY NIGHT."

sions of brutish indifference I shouldn't think he is getting across. They shake hands with marked insincerity. Everybody out of the ring—and there's the bell for round one.

Well, it's still round one. If anything worth reporting happens, I will tell you. One minute of round one still to go.

Jones moves forward, Fitzbrown moves back. If Jones were a leper, Fitzbrown could not avoid him more studiously.

There is the bell for the end of the first round. What do you think of that, Harry? I quite agree. If anything, Jones is a shade less flat-footed than Fitzbrown,



Round two coming up.

Jones's guard is so low you would think he was fighting the Seven Dwarfs and as for Fitzbrown, if he only——

Oh, dear. Oh, I say! Fitzbrown has struck Jones. Struck him with his famous left hook. This is the punch he said he would win with. Delivered with all the weight on the wrong foot, it travelled only a yard and a half before landing on top of the challenger's head. It had Jones worried for a moment. No grown man likes to be patted on the head in public.

That was definitely Jones's round. He showed remarkable restraint in refraining from taking advantage of the many openings left for him by the champion. I think he is fighting to instructions, Harry, don't you?

Here we come to round three, and both men mean business. Left-right from Jones, and another left, and another, and another, and a right from Jones, and another left. You wouldn't expect from that that Jones would now be leaning on the ropes with the senses beaten half out of him, but there you are—that's



commentating. I was so busy doing justice to Jones I didn't have time to tell you what Fitzbrown was doing.

Fitzbrown's round. The seconds have got Jones's remains in the corner, and they are working on them. In the opposite corner people are trying to explain to Fitzbrown that he has a wonderful chance now, but with only sixty seconds to do it in their task is obviously an impossible one.

This is round four, and Fitzbrown comes right out of his corner, and Jones goes straight into a clinch. Jones butts the champion, and Fitzbrown imprisons Jones's right arm. This is all illegal, and about twenty-five thousand people are pointing it out to the referee. As the referee tears them apart, Fitzbrown misses with his right. As a matter of fact Fitzbrown has been missing consistently with his right all evening, but I am here to comment on blows, not gesticulations.

Jones misses, and Fitzbrown misses.

Fitzbrown misses, and Jones misses.

They miss each other so much their hearts must be aching.

There's the bell for the end of the round. Well, Harry? Harry? Oh, dear, Harry seems to have disappeared.

Fitzbrown has a black eye. I don't know who gave it to him. Not Jones, certainly.

Up they come for round five.

Having only one serviceable eye seems to have improved the champion's aim—he has hit Jones, and while Jones stands bewildered at this departure from accepted practice, Fitzbrown hits him again, and Jones is DOWN!

I don't know why, because the punch would not have made a perceptible dent in a sheet of tissue paper, but down he is.

The referee is counting—five—six—Jones sits up—eight—Jones lies down again, and Fitzbrown is the winner! And now I am going to return you to the studio before he starts to sing.

You have suffered enough.

## EASIEST THING IN THE WORLD

I fingered the two corks in the pocket of my beach-wrap. Roger climbed up the face of the cliff, turned a somersault, and squatted between us, rubbing himself with a towel. Judy watched admiringly.

"I learnt an amusing trick this morning," I said.

"Aren't you brown!" said Judy.

"I go black," said Roger. "Jet black."

"With two corks," I said.

"What's that?" said Judy, turning to me.

"A little trick," I said, "with corks."

Roger expanded his chest three and a half inches, and slowly relaxed.

"Make 'em disappear?" he said.

"Well, no," I said. "You sort of pass one through the other." I rolled the corks about in my pocket.

Judy rubbed oil on her leg. "Mm," she said.

"D'you know how they saw a woman in half?" said Roger casually.

"Well," I said, "it's some sort of an illusion, produced by . . ."

"How?" said Judy, wide-eyed.

"Easiest thing in the world," said Roger, balancing the beach-ball on his forehead. "You have two girls. The extra one lies in the platform under the box and sticks her feet up through a hole and out one end of the box. The other curls up in the other end of the box and sticks her head out." He threw the ball in the air and caught it with his knees.

"How marvellous!" said Judy, with her mouth open.

It began to occur to me for the first time that she had what might be described as rather a weak mouth.

"Well, this trick with the corks," I said, "isn't very spectacular, but . . ."

"What I've often wondered," said Judy, "is how they do that one where they walk through a brick wall that's just been built on the stage."

"Easiest thing in the world," said Roger, aiming a pebble and throwing it down to the beach and hitting one of those wooden things that stick up out of the sand. "You have a carpet under the wall and a trap-door under the carpet, and you wriggle under, behind the screen."

Judy's eyes opened wider than ever.

"How *simple!*" she said, adoringly.

I took out my corks, and began to tap them together, clearing my throat.

"With this cork thing," I said, "you can hardly believe your eyes, the first time you see it."



"YOU SHOULD SEE THE RIDICULOUS HAT MY WIFE BOUGHT HERSELF YESTERDAY."

"Of course," said Roger, standing on his hands and showering me with sand, "they rehearse for hours with those stunts."

"Oh, they must," breathed Judy reverently, putting up a tentative hand ready to prevent him from falling down and breaking his neck.

"Matter of fact," I said, "I rehearsed this cork trick the whole morning, waiting for the rain to stop in that sun-lounge place at the end of the pier."

"Another damn good trick," said Roger, breaking an apple in two with his hands and giving half to Judy, "is putting a girl in a cannon and shooting her into a box hanging from the roof of the theatre."

Judy's eyes nearly popped out of her head. I reflected moodily that beauty and brains seldom go together. Pleased with the depth and brilliance of this discovery, I smiled to myself very cynically.

"And then," Roger was saying, with a superior expression like that of a man who has just opened a tin of sardines with a nail-file, "they push the box up through the stage inside the other one, and when they open it up, there she is. Simple."

"Of course," I said, holding one cork between finger and thumb, "even the smallest piece of sleight-of-hand requires——"

But Roger was already describing the method employed in making a grand piano disappear at the drop of a handkerchief, together with pianist and stool.

By the time he had finished, the tide had come in, and the admiration in Judy's eyes (set rather closer together than I had realized) was something to see.

It was at this point that she asked him how to do the Indian Rope Trick, and there was a pause.

"Er—what was that little thing you were going to show us, chum?" said Roger. I cleared my throat again.

"Well," I said, holding up my corks. "It's a simple little thing."

Judy looked at me as though I were a small boy about to recite "Daffodils," and a gust of wind blew the corks into the sea.

I was rather glad, in a way. The Indian Rope Trick made very good listening.

September, 1950

## I PASSED BY YOUR WINDOW

I THINK we were all relieved when they took the stuffed things away. Throughout the last years of the war we had been obliged to look at the slowly crumbling windowful.

Not only were there parties of progressively moth-eaten birds sitting under dim domes and clutching phoney scenery; there was a spiked fish like a haggis stuck full of needles; an appalling pair of boxing squirrels wearing little red shorts; and a nerve-racking wildcat with bright pink gums. Serving as a backdrop to all this ownerless splendour was an extensive raccoon-skin rug, sporting about five unnecessary but ornamental tails, the last of which fell off the day before they cleaned the place up.

As though the shop could not at first shake off its furry spirit its next occupant was a melancholy alien who exhibited coats, capes and neckpieces of dubious and anonymous skins.

"In a big shop," one of his hand-written showcards boasted, "you would pay £30 for such a coat. Here you pay only £29." He was with us six months.

Then it became obvious that something quite new was happening. The place turned green and many small tables and chairs arrived. They called it "The Kitchen Shelf," and food, not fur, was the order of the day. Tables, waitresses and manageress were covered in gingham, and there was some jollity in the form of comic felt dolls sprawling in the window. This was appropriate, because they gave you the dearest little doll-size helpings of lunch.

After that, without pausing to consider that the shop stood on a bleak and perpetually windy corner, the entirely new management brought a carefree Continental atmosphere to the neighbourhood. One or two embarrassed-looking business men, obviously wishing that they hadn't done it, would sit outside under the awning manipulating wind-flapped newspaper and unwilling salad while the corners of the bright table-cloths whipped merrily into the mayonnaise.

The next proprietor could not decide what era he belonged to: he had fluorescent lighting on the ceiling and smoky oil lamps on the tables. He introduced a short-lived, three-piece ladies' orchestra, with plenty of room for improvement but none for their elbows. His successor saw fit to name his restaurant The Gipsy's Caravan, for no reason that I could ever make out, except that it was here to-day, gone to-morrow and regarded with some suspicion by the natives.

This finished the food cycle, unless you count the brief sojourn of the tropical fish shop, whose green gloom and pouting population attracted more snub-nosed youth than serious trade.



SIGGS.

"I KEEP TELLING HER SHE MUSTN'T PICK THEM."

I left to go shopping he had achieved "Coo——" in three different colours. On my way back I saw that it had developed into "Cooper's Cu——" and by tea-time it was "Cooper's Curiosity Shop."

Next day a van drew up, and an energetic person unfastened the back of it and dived inside. I hung about inquisitively to see what he was going to bring out.

It was with a feeling of despondency that I noted his first burden: a glass case of stuffed squirrels. They were playing tennis.

## NARROW ESCAPE

The woman recounted the events of her day. "We went into Rottingdean for lunch," she disclosed. "You remember that frock of mine with the fawn stripes on a white ground?"

The man did his best to sound convincing. "Yes."

"I don't believe you do. With little velvet bows that tie at the neck and on the shoulders?"

"No."

"Well, you've tied them for me often enough. You honestly don't remember it?"

"No."

"With puff shoulders and a slightly flared skirt?"

"I don't think if I'd seen it I'd have forgotten it. What about it, though?"

"I thought I'd wear it to-day, that's all. But looking out of the window it seemed to me likely to be a bit chilly, so I thought I'd just wear it down to the green-grocer's first, to see whether it was suitable or not."

"And was it?"

"No."

"Well."

"Don't go away," the woman restrained him. "We haven't got to the point of the story yet. I took it off, and put this one on, and we went into Rottingdean for lunch, as I told you."

"I remember."

"What with the holiday-makers and everything it was awfully crowded as we might have expected and there were only two seats vacant in the café when we got there."

"There were?"

"Yes. The manageress showed us into these seats, and you can guess what happened."

"I haven't an idea."

"Sitting right bang opposite me, at the same table, staring me straight in the eyes, was another woman wearing my frock."

"You mean the frock you've got on?"

"No, the one I'd left off. The one with the fawn stripes on a white ground——"

"—and the little velvet bows that tie at the neck and on the shoulders."

"That's the one. You remember it after all, I see."

The man silently recorded the undeserved commendation on the credit side of his current account.



DAVID CATTON

"AND HERE'S ONE OF ANGELA—THAT'S MY ELDEST SON HENRY'S YOUNGEST—RIDING A DONKEY ON THE SANDS."

"Wasn't it extraordinary?" the woman continued. "And wasn't it a lucky thing I happened to have decided not to wear it?"

"Lucky? It wouldn't have mattered, would it?"

"Sitting there like two peas in a pod? I'd have been so ashamed I think I'd have died."

"I wouldn't have minded if it had been me. I'd have said to her 'I see you're wearing my frock.'"

"Well, I wouldn't. I should just have gone straight out again. As it was, I sat there thinking what an extraordinary thing it was that, with just that one table with seats in the whole place, there should be this woman sitting there wearing that particular frock."

"Did she look nice in it?" the man inquired.

The woman made a gesture of despair. "Well, I hope I don't look like that in it, that's all. She was twice as fat as I am, for one thing."

"She was?"

"You seem to think it's unlikely."

"I wasn't expressing any opinion. I was merely being conventionally interested."



"WHAT'S IT LIKE IN?"

"That wasn't what it sounded like. Well, anyway, I hope I don't look like that. If I thought I did I'd never wear the frock again."

The man turned the story over in his mind. "Why was it again," he asked eventually, "you said you decided not to wear it after all?"

The woman looked suspicious. "It was chilly," she explained to him. "Why?"

"Nothing. I was only thinking, what a thing it would have been, you and this woman sitting glaring at each other, and knowing that the frock you were both wearing wasn't suitable in the first place."

## CASE OF THE ELASTIC CLOCK

The other day I heard a business man say that nothing would persuade him to live in the country because of getting up early to catch trains.

Oddly enough, that is exactly what I used to think myself. But now that I know better I simply can't bear the idea of my fellow-men denying themselves the delights of rural life on the basis of such an absurd fallacy. Why, I get more sleep of a night now, with my car two minutes from the house, the house two miles from the station and the station forty miles from the office, than ever I did at Belsize Park. (Let us not count the first morning, when I got up at five-fifteen, caught the six forty-one, and sat on the office steps for seventy minutes waiting for someone to turn up and let me in. That was just nerves.)

I had been brought up to leisure in the mornings; allowing an hour to get up, twenty minutes for breakfast, a cautious ten minutes to get the car and fifteen minutes to get the train it now seemed to me that to rise at six would secure me a seat on the seven forty-five with ease. It did. For a whole week I adhered rigidly to this schedule, suffused with a glow of righteousness; indeed, it was only the glow that kept me awake after lunch; six hours' sleep was not enough, and after a week Nature took her toll: on the second Tuesday I awoke at five minutes past seven.

Hopping to the bathroom on alternate feet as I put shoes and socks on the airborne foot I neglected all conversation with my family. It was only when I was sitting in the train, breathing deep and fast, that a great truth shone upon me: I had had an extra hour in bed and still caught the seven forty-five.

From that morning I began to make two minutes grow where one had grown before. Certainly I was never again able to make one complete hour out of thin air like that; even William Willett only performed that trick once; but my imagination was stirred; I foresaw an exciting battle of wits with the tyrant Time. That night I gave directions for the alarm to be set for seven A.M.

At seven-thirty I was tapped on the nose with a warm teaspoon. My family was asking me what train I proposed to catch, and though the inquiry was partly obliterated by two door-slams, bedroom and bathroom, I had the stubborn courage



to reply, through a mouthful of shaving-cream, "The seven forty-five!" My family, through the bathroom door, said that Mr. Cox always caught the eight-two.

I caught the eight-two with ease. In omitting to study the tables at the back of the "A.B.C." I had overlooked the potentialities of the eight-two: it sailed through two stations at which the seven forty-five stopped and hung about. I walked into the office on the stroke of nine-thirty, and I imagine it was quite impossible to tell that I had not bathed.

One hour and a half saved. Roughly fourteen days a year. True, it was

possible to get breakfast on the eight-two, which added fifty pounds or so to my annual travelling bill. But the time will come to all of us, I suppose, when we shall be happy to buy time at fifty pounds a fortnight.

I stuck to the eight-two until the morning after Cox's party. It was a prolonged party, with singing, and as we were leaving, Cox mentioned that he would be going up on the eight twenty-eight the next day. "Me too," I said, and the idea must have become more firmly fixed in my mind than might have been expected, because I woke in the morning at eight-ten—just nice time—unaided by my family, which was still sleeping, its hairnet hanging by one ear.

Cox hadn't shaved either. We stood side by side in the corridor. "Trouble with the eight twenty-eight," he said, digging me rather painfully as he got his tie out of his pocket—"never get a seat on it."

I said I didn't mind that; what worried me was how we got to our offices—both in Kensington—by half-past nine. "We don't," said Cox, tucking in his shirt. "But we change at the Junction and get a fast, and we ought to be in by nine thirty-five. After all, what's five minutes?"

I had to agree. True, we had to stand in the fast as well, but we propped each other up on the arms-piling principle and slept a lot of the way. Besides, a man who isn't even *up* when his proper train's been gone a quarter of an hour, and still gets to the office with approximate punctuality—who is, in fact, making two hours a day clear





L. Dawson

TIME TO GET UP

profit, or three weeks a year, or, put it another way, adding about eighteen months to his life (even if he is asleep all the time)—can't complain if he misses his bath and breakfast, stands all the way to London in odd socks and has to pop out for a shave instead of coffee. You can't put more into life than you take out of it, it that's what I mean.

I must say this for Cox, he is a man of fixed habits. He sticks to that eight twenty-eight like a good 'un. I often see him standing in the corridor now as I come running up the steps for the eight-fifty. He usually waves a collar: I respond with a meat-sandwich (no refreshments on the eight-fifty; money in the bank, that). He envies me the fact, I think, that my office has now moved to within a minute of Victoria station; by leaving the garage doors open at home and training a young apprentice porter to take the wheel from me at the other end while the car is still in motion I make the eight-fifty with ease.

As for the office, I had to put it to them. Do they want a meticulously punctual man who can hardly crawl about the place for exhaustion, or a fresh, vital, go-ahead chap renewed with sleep and ready for anything, who is forced by circumstances outside his control to turn up a paltry twenty minutes late?

I think they saw my point. After all, they're business men. In fact it was one of them I heard say that nothing would persuade him to live in the country because of getting up early to catch trains. I heard him distinctly. We were alone together. He looked pale and irritable. It's chaps like that who need the delights of rural life more than anyone.

## OUTDOOR DRESS REHEARSAL

Scene Two; we'll start from there.

(This is Illyria, lady.)

Remember, Viola, project your voice—

It doesn't carry in the open air.

(Art thou good at these kickshawses, knight?)

Those cedar trees are perfect; dark and shady,

An ideal setting—yes, the Vicar's choice . . .

The colonnade? Just plywood, painted white . . .

Bring up your limes!—Lend me a Number Eight—

(Make me a willow cabin at your gate.)

Floodlight on leaves and grass . . .

(The spinsters and the knitters in the sun.)

Enter the courtiers! . . . Against black trees

Bright silhouettes and dancing shadows pass.

(Daylight and champain discovers not more.)

Into the spotlight—run, Maria, run!

Behind the bushes, murmurous as bees,  
 They wait their cues in darkness. Now, Scene Four—  
 Ambers and cypress; foolery and sadness . . .  
 (Why, this is very midsummer madness.)

Oh, dear, Sir Toby's beard has come unstuck.  
 (More matter for a May morning.)  
 No earthly use in looking at the script—  
 It's too late now for words; rely on luck!  
 (Now, as thou lovest me, let me see his letter.)  
 Electrics, kill that spot!—you've had the warning!  
 Remind me I must get that box-hedge clipped . . .  
 Let's hope to-morrow night it will go better . . .  
 I wonder what the weather forecasts say . . .  
 (The rain, sings Feste, raineth every day.)

### THE CHITTY

Dear Sir,—I thank you for your esteemed order and for the three shillings enclosed, and have pleasure in forwarding two prints of the photograph showing yourself, and your wife from the shoulders upwards, and the heads of some of your children. I regret that your several smaller tots were below the range of my camera. You will also note plainly the top of the Tivoli cinema, the end of Adam Street, and a great number of buildings on the other side of the Strand with, in the foreground, a particularly flourishing example of what is colloquially known as a "hole in the road."

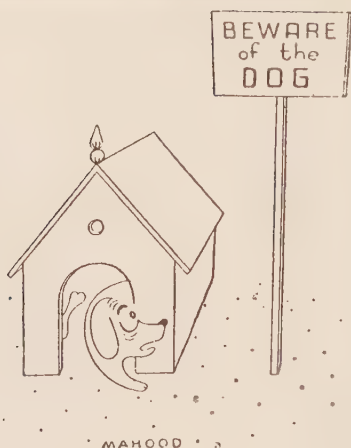
In defence of my photography I feel I must remind you of the circumstances in which your order was placed. I was winding my spool for the next "take" when you startled me by your approach.

"Where's the chitty?" you asked.

"Excuse me?" I faltered.

"The chitty. THE CHITTY!" you exclaimed petulantly, to the evident excitement of your family.

I confessed that I didn't know what you meant, and apologized. People who approach one in the Strand are usually wanting to be directed to the National Gallery, and since this was obviously not what you required I toyed momentarily with the notion that you might have said "Where's the City?" In this spirit and in no sense wishing you to any less convivial destination, I advised you to take a Number 96 bus going east. It was your wife, I believe, who brought the constable on the scene—pushing his way through the considerable crowd which by then supported the caucus of your children, who were staring hopefully up at me as if I was about to tie myself



up in chains and then set myself free again. Naturally, you will remember, the constable asked what the trouble was.

"He's taken our photographs and won't give us the chitty," you reported irritably.

Placing a hand on each hip, the policeman faced me squarely.

"Why not give the gentleman the chitty?" he pleaded, taking little from the monotony of proceedings.

If I had immediately explained my business instead of searching my pockets frenziedly as if half afraid they might contain just such a missive as everybody wanted, the episode might have

closed sooner. As it was, neither yourself, nor the constable, nor your wife, nor the crowd were satisfied with my performance.

"If you blokes are going to start trouble around here," said the constable, "we've got strict instructions to have the whole lot of you shifted out of the area."

Panic-stricken, I wrote you my name and address on the back of a cigarette carton, a gesture which seemed rewarding. The crowd followed me for some ten minutes in case I got into any further trouble. You no doubt continued to show your children the curiosities of London.

My parting comment is that I was trying to photograph my brother's flat which now has an electric sign in front of the windows, and it seemed to me that he might wish to see this as he is at present abroad. As I am an amateur photographer I return your money, less deductions for postage.

Yours sincerely,  
AMBROSE GARBODY

### THE L.P.T.B. TOURING TEAM

The news that four London buses are touring the Continent as advertisements for the Festival of Britain must have shocked all keen bus fanciers. By failing to afford the public any opportunity of advising the selection committee the selectors, unlike the more progressive M.C.C. selectors, have flouted one of the cardinal principles of modern democracy. We are left to guess the composition of the L.P.T.B. Touring Team.

I myself am an ardent No. 11 man. No team of buses should leave these shores without this invaluable all-rounder. First and foremost it is a courageous, if un-stylish, bus. Its ability to go from Liverpool Street to Hammersmith by way of

Walham Green is a first-class illustration of its unrivalled staying power. It is seldom brilliant, though it has its majestic moments in Whitehall and Parliament Square. But its flair for leadership is frequently displayed in the King's Road and, provided its private affairs are in order, there can be no doubt that No. 11 would make an inspiring skipper of the side.

It is really at this point that selection difficulties begin. Clearly, a well balanced Continental bus side should contain both stayers and sprinters. Only the best of both could hold their own on the long, poplar-flanked roads or in the murderous competition of the Parisian boulevards. Thoughts of Paris attract one at once to the claims of No. 9. This is surely the most elegant of all our buses, and its slender, rather feminine, lines and its easy, graceful action would not disgrace us in the Champs-Élysées. Piccadilly-trained and genteel though it may be, it would not fear the turbulence of the Place de la Concorde. Furthermore it has the great advantage of height over those squat, breathless, green contraptions upon which, rather surprisingly, the Parisians find themselves able to rely. On the other hand I never fancy a No. 9 in the Mansion House area or farther west than Derry and Toms. One recalls that it is often too timorous to venture beyond Aldwych. It is not, in my view, robust enough for the outlying districts and might prove untrustworthy south of the Seine.

In the circumstances I think that either No. 49 or No. 31 is a better bet. No. 49 has remarkable qualities in that it not only makes the river crossing to Streatham but it also achieves what no other bus is able to achieve, namely a successful passage through that difficult hinterland between Chelsea and Kensington High Street. Naturally it is a well rested bus and does not do this very often. No. 31 is a fine sprinter in formidable terrain, as anyone who has made the journey from World's End to the Earl's Court Road will know. Unhappily it is a little temperamental and does the reverse journey only at a crawl. On the whole my choice is No. 31, because it works with No. 11 for a longer stretch than No. 49.

Regent Street, Oxford Street and



"HOW'S THE SYMPHONY COMING ALONG?"

Baker Street supporters will now be clamouring for recognition. They have a number of gallant aspirants. To see No. 13 winging its way down the hill past Lord's and exuding the same jaunty confidence twenty minutes later as it swings from Aldwych into Fleet Street is a heartening prospect for British bussing. Unfortunately No. 13 has lost much rightful custom owing to the unsporting activities of No. 113, which sometimes follows on its tail. I hope they will be separated before another tour is envisaged so as to give No. 13 a fair chance of selection.

I have considered No. 74 and No. 2, which do so well on the Baker Street stretch. They both have initiative, No. 74 being particularly independent at the north end of Regent's Park. But a lot of its strength evaporates, perhaps understandably, in that gruelling struggle along the Cromwell Road. I always feel that No. 2 has never quite found itself, as the modern novelists would say. In its heart it wishes to be a Park Lane—Knightsbridge bus and that sudden descent from Hyde Park Corner to Victoria has given it an inferiority complex. No. 30, on the other hand, has no such inner weakness and always enters Park Lane with dignity, whatever dispiriting adventures it may have had in the Old Brompton Road.

One could not think of sending unhappy No. 18B any further from its route than Brixton. Yet one admires the unobtrusive manner in which No. 77A hits the Wandsworth trail. Likewise, No. 73 is occasionally impressive. No. 19 and No. 22 are competent performers, but seem to be fully at ease only in Sloane Street or, in the case of No. 19, in Battersea L.T. Garage. No. 1 is a mysterious creature which I remember having seen only in the vicinity of Marylebone Station. If it is connected with the latter it is obviously unfitted for the strain and hurly-burly of an overseas tour.

No, my firm third choice is No. 27A. Here we have a dogged trier of the Jack Holden class with just the personality which this foreign trip demands. Let it take you up the mountain that is Church Street, through the twisting gorges of Paddington on to the Marylebone Plain beyond and you will not fear for it or London's honour in the Appenines. Follow it along the broad reaches of the Hampstead Road to the smooth uplands of Highgate and you can easily imagine it cantering to victory on the sun-baked highways of southern Europe.

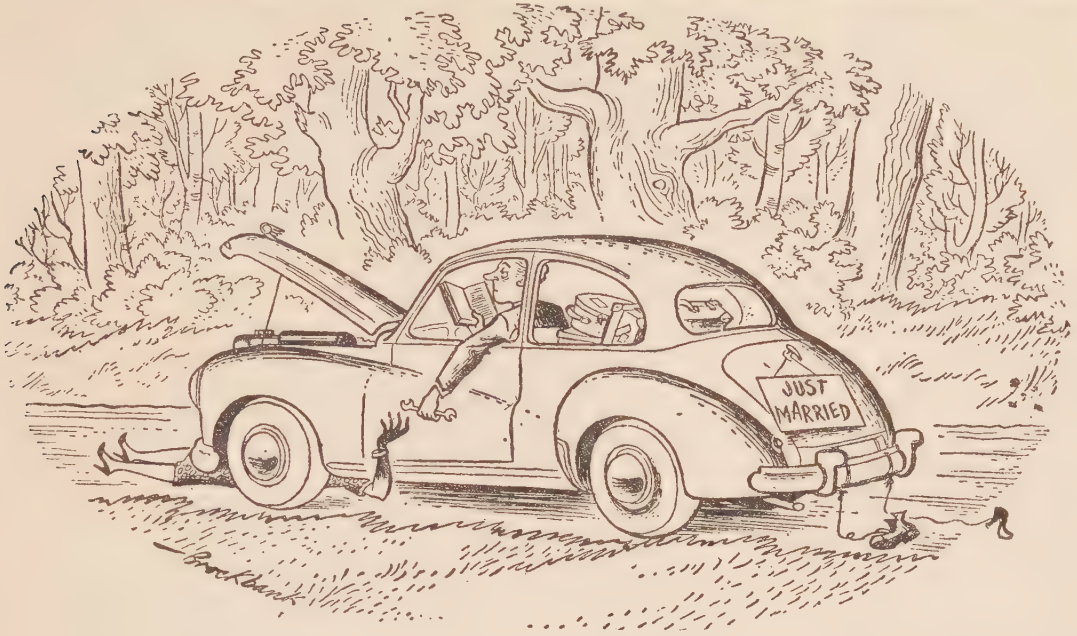
That leaves but one place to fill. All argument must cease. For no L.P.T.B. bus team should be without a taxi—and a roomy, old-fashioned one at that.

## SIXTH SENSE

"What's a sixth sense?" asked Michael.

"A sixth sense," I said, "is one over and above the other five. You know what *they* are, I suppose?"

"Yes," he said. "But . . . what does it do? How does it work?"



"People have them in books," I told him.

"Yes," he said. "But——"

"Question-time," I said, "is over. Bedtime."

I don't like fobbing him off like that, and later, in a fit of parental zeal, I took a good deal of trouble to find out exactly what a sixth sense is. In fact I went so far as to jot down a few notes for a report on the matter. I wish I hadn't now, because subsequent events have made rubbish of them.

In the first place, I declared, the only people who really have sixth senses, apart from headaches before thunderstorms, are the heroes of thrillers. Also, I said, their sixth senses are often not sixth senses at all but seventh or eighth senses. The hero of the book I was reading last week couldn't manage without nine.

Authors rightly feel, I continued, that it would be straining the reader's credulity too far to introduce the principal character straight away as a handsome, golden-haired man of six feet two with nine senses, and the first intimation that he is a man of unusual powers customarily appears on page thirty-four, when someone creeps up on him with a knife. "Some sixth sense," we read, "made Cedric turn round." Later, however, in another chapter, some sixth sense makes Cedric refuse the whisky. A little thought will show that this, if it can be called sense at all, is certainly not the same sense as before. It is in fact a seventh sense, and if authors would number each additional sense as it is brought into play it would help the reader to keep a sense of proportion in relation to real life.



In order to bring a little system into the chaos I classified sixth senses roughly under three main heads, viz.: (a) senses that warn the hero that he had better turn round, duck, climb a tree, hide under the mat when he answers the door, etc.; (b) senses that warn him against accepting friendly offers such as a drink, a lift, or bed and breakfast; and (c) senses that warn him when the heroine gets into difficulties in another chapter.

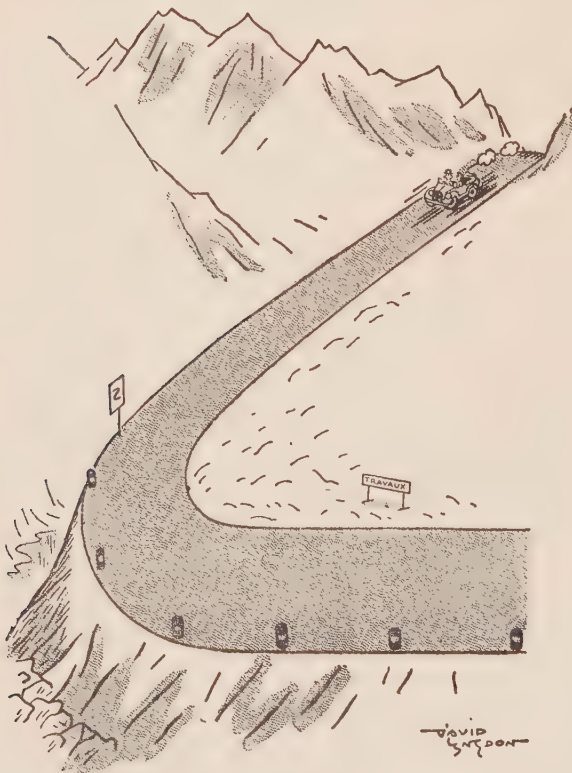
None of these senses, I said, would be of any great benefit in real life. Sense 6(a) I found to be quite common among heroes, and I recognized that it gives them a great advantage in the peculiar conditions under which they work, but I doubted if the average man could get much use out of it. It always works only just in time, which would be too late for the average man, and in any case people do not creep silently up behind the average man with knives. If they do it is unnecessary for him to know anything about it, because they will creep silently away again as soon as they get near enough to see who he is.

In sense 6(b) again, the one that made Cedric refuse the whisky, I found a faculty that, however unserviceable it might appear at first sight, seemed even more useless

if I looked at it for any length of time. It is true that after Cedric has refused the whisky the author sometimes makes somebody else come in and drink it and crash to the floor never to rise again, but the only reason I can put forward for such gross exaggeration is that no one has crashed to the floor so far in that chapter, or if they have they have risen again and things are getting slow. Anyway I have never seen it happen, although I have knocked about the world a bit and seen whisky refused.

The same thing applied, I said, to sense 6(c): frankly, the average man would not care to be bothered with it. Sense 6(c), in case you have forgotten, is the one that enables the hero to know when the heroine is in difficulties; how many men, I asked, find normal channels inadequate for this task?

All in all, I said, sixth senses seem to be more of a curse than a



"NOW WE'LL SEE WHAT THE PREMIER GARAGE, HIGH STREET, LITTLE PRIMLEY, MEANS BY 'CHECK AND ADJUST BRAKES, ONE POUND FIVE SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE'."

blessing, and even heroes might be excused for protesting that five are sometimes more than enough.

Well, that's the report. You see the mistake I made? I sneered; I treated the whole thing contemptuously, assuming that the sixth sense was purely fictional and not much use at that. Since then, however, I have been trying to put the report over to Michael. In other words I have been trying to corner for purposes of parental enlightenment a small boy who would rather be somewhere else playing cricket, and if ever anyone showed unmistakably that he has a premonition of impending disaster and an instinct for evasive action amounting to genius . . . well, it's Michael.

October, 1950

BAIT

“ON occasion of change in colour of British fourpenny stamp over-fifty seeks post as confidential clerk.’ There’s a *non sequitur* for you.” Chetwynd read the small advertisement aloud from the paper he was holding, threw himself back in his chair, and laughed at the folly of mankind.

“Nothing to laugh at,” I said. “*Non sequiturs* pay in advertising. Gardeners aren’t easy to come by in our part of the country; but when our gardener left us recently after unexpectedly inheriting £50,000 from a remote relative in Australia I had only to advertise for a ‘gardener to replace one who has unexpectedly inherited £50,000 from remote relative in Australia.’ Applicants fought for the post.”

“I don’t get it,” said Chetwynd. Chetwynd’s weak point is his logical mind.

“Then there was my Aunt Ethel,” I went on patiently. “For years she failed to get the price she was demanding for a pewter tea-service she wanted to sell. I advised her to try, ‘Gentlewoman, survivor of four reigns, willing part pewter tea-service good offer.’ The chosen purchaser no doubt felt the tea-service gave his wife a direct link with royalty and a guarantee of longevity.”

“Proceed,” said Chetwynd, waiting for me to overreach myself.

“My best bit of work was last summer,” I complied. “I had left arranging our holiday rather late and couldn’t get suitable rooms where I wanted to go. So I put an advertisement in the local paper, ‘Londoner, run down by paddle-steamer in infancy, requires holiday accommodation for self and wife.’”

“Any liar can make up a fantastic story like that,” objected Chetwynd.

“I didn’t make it up,” I said. “My advertising is always dead honest. I merely went over my past and picked out the most spectacular and appealing incident. Most people could find something. Anyway, golden-hearted landladies stormed my box number in their eagerness to make up to me for the rigours of my infancy. One, whose lodging space just wouldn’t stretch to us anyhow, sent me a pound for the Waifs and Strays Society.”

But I was getting nowhere; Chetwynd’s attention had wandered. Outside working hours his great interest is stamps. “I’ve been wondering,” he remarked. “That chap mentioned stamps, you know. Perhaps he’s a philatelist. I need a new clerk.”

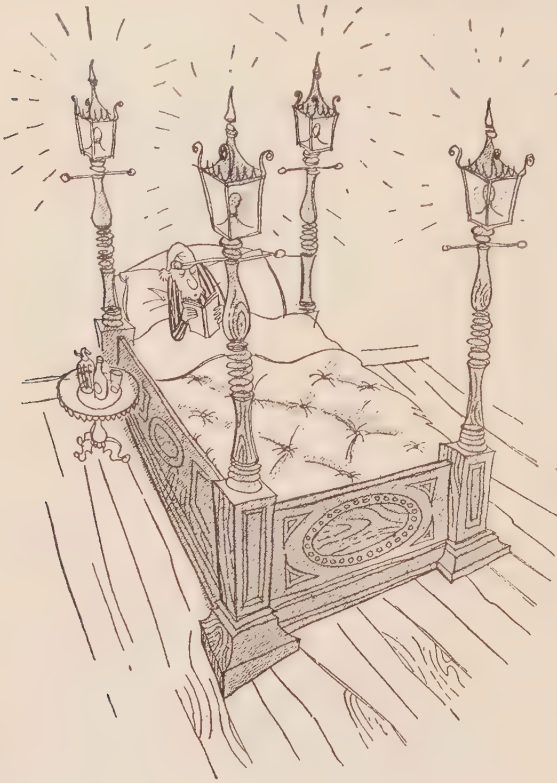
“No, *he’s* not a philatelist,” I said, “but I shouldn’t be surprised if his new employer is.”



"ORDERED A NEW CAR SIX YEARS AGO, AND IT'S JUST ARRIVED. NOT QUITE THE MODEL I SPECIFIED. . . ."

## AND THANK YOU VERY MUCH

There is a general idea that we women don't know how to tip. Nor do we. We understand that even for men tipping is one of life's problems, but we can't believe that they get the same wuzzy feeling about a porter who has carried  $x$  suitcases  $y$  yards after waiting  $z$  minutes at the barrier and is now loading them round the luggage rack as if we owned the compartment. A man would just give him a shilling, or maybe two. So do we; but the compressed algebra, the consciousness of a shaky grasp of industrial conditions, the purse with the latchkey in the front section jamming the money in the middle section, and the beautiful smile which is meant either to count as an extra sixpence or, if a shilling *is* an extra sixpence, knock



it off—all this is, I think, peculiar to women. Certainly the purse and the smile are. Men rattle their pockets and look very slightly feudal.

What I have said about porters goes, with obvious modifications, for taxi-drivers. One of the modifications is that, for all we know, men do not play for time by saying eagerly "What is it on the clock? Oh, yes, *I see*" or run for their lives after adding a threepenny-bit to the shilling. The recent increase in minimum taxi-fares has hit us women hard by bringing our intentions into the open. There is something horribly deliberate about a separate threepence, particularly if twopence of it is in halfpennies, and we wouldn't be surprised if men finished a hundred-yard journey by slapping a half-crown into the driver's hand. That's another thing

we never do, slap money into his hand; we pour it, and the sixpence rolls into the gear-box. Actually this is all part of the racket, giving us more chance of showing off that feckless charm which is the keynote of our dealings with taxis. We are not above opening the door after we've shut it and looking round for the gloves we are holding, though we couldn't tell you exactly what this has to do with not knowing what to add on to four-and-threepence.

With window-cleaners we come to a very different proposition. The tipping of window-cleaners is exclusively a woman's job, and the wonder is that they get paid, let alone tipped, because they always turn up when we least expect them: on the same day of every month. Hence the "Goodness? Is it already?" with which all window-cleaners working a representative cross-section of humanity must be familiar; hence, also, the chief reason why you can label a cocoa-tin "Telephone Money" and have nothing to show for it when the bill comes in. But these are mere circumstances. They don't affect the system we work on, which is that we convey by the way we hand the money over that the extra amount embedded in it is the outcome of our principles and anyway they must get less from some customers because it takes all sorts to make a world. I can't define quite *how* we convey all this, but I think when we have handed the money over we fold our arms and, if it is

not a very hot day, shiver briskly; and we always say "Well, I'll see you next month," to let him know that it is regular custom that matters.

By the way, we women believe that one economizes by using up coppers. "Sorry it looks like that" means the window-cleaner has in his handful twopence more than we would have given him if we had had another sixpence and used a threepenny bit instead. I'm not saying we don't know the value of money. We are perfectly aware that there is nothing to choose between two sixpences and one shilling, unless you have a slot-meter for gas.

I bet men don't go through what we do at the hairdresser's. *They* never spend so much on having their hair permanently waved that they have to write a cheque, and find that with the coffee and the special shampoo it works out at so nearly a round number of pounds that any crafty scheme for throwing in the odd nine bob as a tip must be abandoned. This is one of the worst moments of our tipping experience, hovering with our pen over the cheque-book waiting for guidance from heaven. For ordinary hairdressing tips we plank down the same as last time and make for the door so that we shan't see their faces. It's not that we haven't planked down enough, it's the idea of seeing the girl take the money from the girl we gave it to. I should say hairdressers do pretty well by us, because we never think they're getting enough unless they get what we think is too much.

When a man comes to the door with a van from which he lugs a piece of furniture wrapped in sacking women tippers realize that in ten minutes they must think fast. Of course if it's only a chair or a play-pen that he can dump inside the door with one hand payment is easy and nominal, merely something on the sixpence that you always owe on these transactions. But when two men lug a cupboard upstairs we get an awful feeling that no money can repay them for having got stuck at the bend and being nice to the baby while we make the tea. I expect they realize that the tea is meant to cover the margin of doubt, which would make it a shilling a head. Still, they do get cake and cigarettes thrown in, and a bit of television. With all this, and the



"CETTE SAUCE DE HAUTE QUALITÉ EST UN MÉLANGE DE FRUITS ORIENTAUX, D'ÉPICES ET DE VINAIGRE DE MALT PUR. ELLE EST ABSOLUMENT PURE ET NE CONTIENT AUCUNE MATIÈRE COLORANTE, NI . . ."

welcome they receive for having brought the furniture we didn't expect so soon, furniture-bringers should have no complaints; and I do hope they realize that the mutters from the sitting-room are us telling a visitor that we ought to pay them more than *that*.

I need say nothing about dainty tea-rooms, except that once there was an untippable class of waitress who by telepathy has died out.

### A DEFINITE SETBACK

In our flat there are three pairs of scissors. There is the big, coarse pair, useful for digging up potatoes and of course for taking stones out of horses' hooves. There is the small pair which, because of a rivet that behaves more like a fulcrum than a pivot, can be used only for prizing off the lids of tins and cutting fuse wire. Finally there is the pair which, if one screws up the screw every four or five clips, cuts human hair fairly efficiently.

In the kitchen is a nail specially erected for the scissors to hang on. The scissors for taking the stones out of horses' hooves and for cutting fuse wire are always there except on the rare occasions when a fuse needs mending or a horse with stones in its hooves wanders into the flat. The real trouble is the pair of scissors which cuts human hair fairly efficiently if one keeps on screwing up the screw in the middle every four or five clips. It is never there when I want to trim my moustache. It disappears for days at a time.

Last night it was not there again.

"Where," I asked, "are the scissors?"

"Hanging on the nail, I suppose," said Patricia.

"I do not want to cut fuse wires or take stones out of horses' hooves," I said.

"What do you want to do?"

"I want to trim my moustache."

"Why must you do it now?"

"It is interfering with my breathing."

"You are always trimming that moustache of yours."

"That would be impossible, as I can never find the scissors."

"Why don't you shave your moustache off?"

"You have not told me where the scissors are."

"Other men's moustaches grow downwards. Half of yours grows upwards."

"Perhaps other men have ready access to a pair of scissors. Where are the scissors?"

"How should I know?"

"They are never on the nail. You put them in a different place every time."

"I haven't put them anywhere. They may be in the drawer."

One of Patricia's most female habits is her method of giving directions.

"Which drawer?" I said, bowing my head and pinching the top of my nose between the thumb and forefinger in order to maintain that iron control so essential to married bliss.

"In the bedroom."

"My sweetheart, precious, pestilential woman, there are ten drawers in the bedroom."

"In the dressing-table."

"There are four drawers in the dressing-table, and my moustache is growing longer every minute."

"I think it may be in the bottom right-hand drawer."

I disappeared into the bedroom and started the search.

"Don't untidy my drawer," called out Patricia.

"If the scissors were on the nail I would not have to go scabbling round your drawer," I called back.

"Every time you go to my drawer you frivel up my clothes."

"Then why don't you put the scissors on the nail?" I shouted back; for I am not at my best when I am looking for things. I tend to throw other things up into the air and criticize modern civilization. Besides, I can't stand Patricia's using the word "frivel."

Although I have not got round to looking it up I'm practically certain it does not exist.

"They are not here," I screamed, thrusting my hands in all directions with as much restraint as I could muster.

"Well, where did you put them last?"

"Where did I put them last? You know very well I always hang . . ." My voice died away.

Patricia looked at me in an interested fashion.

"Yes?" she said.



"WELL, THIS HAT IS SO COMFORTABLE I JUST WOULDN'T KNOW I HAD IT ON."



I tried to look haughty.

"Well, just this once I may have put them somewhere else. I seem to remember thinking that as they always disappear from the nail I would try a fresh place."

With a sinking heart I went to my cigarette box. Inside were the scissors.

"Well, well, well," said Patricia.

The trouble is that women never forget an incident like that.

### FATTED CALF

"Well, now you've come you must have a cup of tea."

"No, thanks, mother. We've just had our tea."

"I was going to make a cup for myself."

"You do that. We'll just sit and watch you drink it."

"It isn't any trouble to make an extra cup for you."

"I know."

"Another spoonful in the pot."

"Yes."

"You won't, then?"

"No."

"But you could drink a cup of tea, surely, couldn't you?"

"Well, all right. If you'd like us to. Thanks."

"Good. I'll make it now. Perhaps you'd like to be cutting the bread."

"Of course. How many slices for you? One?"

"No, two. You'll have more than one yourself, won't you?"

"Well, really, we weren't thinking of having any. But if you'd like us to keep you company, just one."

"But you can eat more than one slice of bread, the two of you, can't you? It's butter, you know. What about Angela?"

"Two slices, please."

"That's better. Then you must make yourself some sandwiches."

"Sandwiches?"

"Cucumber sandwiches."

"No sandwiches, thanks."

"But cucumber was always such a favourite of yours."

"I know."

"Have you gone off it?"

"No."

"There's plenty of cucumber, you know. Or there are some tomatoes if you'd prefer them."

"No."



THE NEW HOUSE

"You'd rather have cucumber?"

"Are you going to have any?"

"No, cucumber gives me indigestion. But that's no reason why you shouldn't have some. There's a whole cucumber untouched. You can't say no. I've started cutting it now."

"Well, all right, if you've started cutting it. But nothing else."

"Not an egg?"

"No, honestly."

"What about Angela?"

"It seems she wants one."

"And not for you?"

"I'd really rather not."

"Well, it's rather a disappointing tea. I'd have liked to cook you an egg."

"I know."

"They're English new laid. They'd boil."

"I expect they would."

"I'm putting one in for Angela."

"She just had tea before we came. I don't know how she can do it. She'll get fat."

"It wouldn't be any extra trouble to put another one in for you."

"No, really."

"Well, it's too late now. It's in."

"Well, all right, if it's in. I wouldn't care to be responsible for Angela sitting down and eating two."

"Good. And I've just remembered. What do you think I've got in the refrigerator? Ham! I went round to the grocer's on Monday, and what do you think he had on the counter?"

"Ham."

"That's right. A whole big ham. 'It's quite like old times,' I said to him. 'It would be all right if your son were coming over,' he said. Well, I'm afraid I pretended I was expecting you. So he let me have a whole half pound. And here you are!"

"Yes, here I am."

"Quite a coincidence, wasn't it? I'm afraid I was very naughty, making him think I was expecting you. But you *might* have been coming."

"Yes, I might."

"Oh, and I know what else I've got. A haddock. I'll cook the haddock, and we can get the eggs out of the pan and poach them, and have them on top of the haddock like we used to. And the ham I'll put on the table just as it is. Then if we're still hungry after we've eaten the eggs and the haddock we'll be able to help ourselves to the ham. It'll be just like a real pre-war high tea."

"It sounds wonderful. Angela, I can see, can hardly wait."

“DEVON, GLORIOUS DEVON——”

*Lines written during a wet holiday*

The cider press is rotted through,  
The clotted cream exudes decay,  
The blight enshrouds the apple trees,  
No sun will ever shine this day.

The crops lie sodden in the fields,  
The writing on the wall is rude,  
The zany keeper and his dog  
Go barking both through Gallows Wood.

The yaffle shrills his mocking laugh,  
The owl kills sleep with mandrake cry,  
The stinking goats like Satyrs sport,  
The maid the viper bit will die.

The scarlet earth a vampire is,  
The tors like burial mounds arise,  
The farmhands play at pitch and toss  
With pennies from a dead man's eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Come drink the cider Borgia brewed,  
The cream as smooth as ancient bones;  
The hidden truth I'll disentomb,  
The Lie Direct to Baritones!

SOMNOLENT BIVALVES

Our attitude to the oyster, except during the split second of rhapsody when we swallow him, is one of an amused benignity not accorded to any other sea-food at all. We do not warm to the crab for instance, to the living lobster; we have no genial fondness for the skate, the mussel, the poulp, no whimsical benevolence whatsoever towards the snoek. Whether it is the oyster's "sympathetic unselfishness . . . more beautiful than any religion" which Saki remarks, or that eager childish innocence which the Walrus and the Carpenter basely exploited, or even the passion for peace and quiet in the creature so vividly impressed upon us by the folk-poem beginning



"What noise annoys . . ."—whether it is all or any of these that inclines us towards the 'valve is difficult to say. My own opinion is that its known partiality for spending practically all its time in bed is what convinces us basically of its *laissez-faire* nature and pacific intentions; that, and the thoughtless happy ingenuousness evoked by the word "native." My visit to Whitstable, the oyster dormitory-town *par excellence*, did nothing to change this view; and it was noticeable that those most concerned with putting them to bed, getting them up again and washing their faces before sending them off in the morning were markedly imbued with the affable affection that these self-effacing creatures so subtly evoke.

The oyster, however, for all his modest amiability, does not lack enemies. The immigrant American "tingle" bores through his shell and eats him, mussels and limpets pre-empt his supplies of diatoms, and "large fishes with special crushing

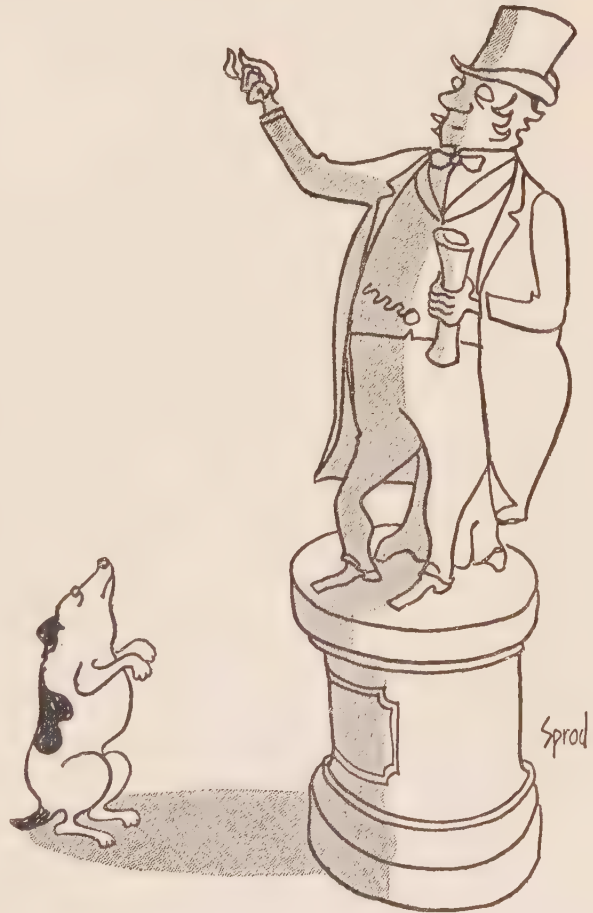
teeth" devour him whole. As to his young, his annual million-odd brood of beloved little "spat" . . . but let us begin.

The real reason for not eating oysters in the R-less months is that those correspond roughly with the breeding period of the animal. But such is the potency of the slogan that although the season opens officially on August 4, in practice SeptembeR must arrive before anyone dares buy or can sell them. During the spawning time lynx-eyed, devoted fellows are watching in the Essex creeks (where the breeding-grounds are) for the moment when the larvæ, each in its little shell, leave the parental home for their ten days of seeing the world before settling down to a steady, indeed a wholly sedentary, existence. Masses of oyster-shell have been cleaned and bleached ready to afford them something to be sedentary on; and at the precise moment of the "spatfall" this "cultch" is emptied into the sea to provide nice brand-new easy-chairs guaranteed to last for years. What could be better organized? Except that in about two out of three seasons the water temperature has been too low for successfu spawning or too low to keep the wandering larvæ alive; that incredible quantities have been eaten by ugly jelly-fish and beautiful starfish; that strong tides have carried innumerable others on to distant and barren sands and that some or many of the other quite unknown factors of food and environment have been

lethally adverse. Some grounds die out entirely and, though others may by chance or artifice be formed, the impression is that the English oyster population is diminished and diminishing—which accounts for the price.

When the oyster is about two inches across and three years old he is evicted from his Essex nursery and taken by smack to Whitstable in Kent to fatten up for two or three more years on the famous "beds." In practice this means that he is shovelled overboard in planned distribution into a piece of sea marked off by floating beacons and about six feet deep at low water and several acres big, and left there for a nice lie-down until he is called. These particular pieces of sea, or rather of sea-bottom, are to my astonishment—and I imagine yours—private property, either freehold or leased from the Crown. How it is possible to own a bit of the bottom of the sea defeats my citizen knowledge; but there you are, it is, and has been from King Stephen's time at the least. There are of course also public (if not nationalized) beds—"Common Ground"—both near Whitstable and in the deep North Sea; but over-fishing, or natural degeneration, or transport costs have made these hardly worth the culling.

Such, then, are the celebrated "beds"; with just that right mixture of sea-sand and London clay, just that degree of temperature (sometimes), just that salinity and chemical constituent of the water, just that amount of plankton and algæ—and just that "x," that *je-ne-sais-quoi*, that little something that research has been unable to assess which produces—I have Whitstable authority for saying so—the finest oyster in the world. My informant, who had been sixty years, boy and boy, in oyster "farming," said that there might, *might*, be an oyster nearly as good—the American Chesapeake; but of course he had never tasted that. I don't think it could be as good even if he had, or else Sallust, who in 50 B.C. acknowledged British supremacy in these matters, would have heard about it; or alternatively it would have shared the title of *O. Edulis*, which has so far not been extended to the more recent



Continent. The American oyster may be good, but it is not edible in Latin—a marked disadvantage at theatre supper-parties.

On September 1, and daily until April 30, the telephone from near Billingsgate rings and the harsh command "Five thousand!"—or whatever the public appetite exacts—echoes through the luminously clean oyster-cloisters of the "—— & —— Oyster Fishery Co., Ltd." at Whitstable. Immediately the smacks (motor-driven) set out and unerringly fight their way to the beds. At the signal "Ho!" five men, moving as one, swing out the dredges on their warps, and within minutes these dredges are scraping the oysters off the floor to be hauled up to captivity, to sorting (into four grades according to size), to ablution (for forty-eight hours in filtered sea-water), to packing (two hundred and fifty at a time, face upwards in clean little kegs), to dispatch and (within seven days, *please*) to dispatching.

Now for a few answers to correspondents:

(a) No, you will *not* find a pearl in your oyster, ever. The pearl oyster is inedible and vice versa.

(b) Oysters, if they miss the boat (see above), can live for as long as fifteen years. One fossil oyster's shell-rings prove that even twenty years have been attained; but that was in the good old Pilt-down days.



"HOW LONG WILL THEY KEEP HIM WAITING FOR HIS TEETH, GRAN?"

(c) Yes, they go on getting bigger and bigger. But after about seven years they get too big for the popular taste—or perhaps swallow.

(d) Of course there are other breeding and fattening grounds than Essex and Kent; notably Cornwall in England, and Brittany in France, and Holland and Portugal and elsewhere—especially Japan.

(e) Seventy or eighty years ago some three thousand men were engaged in the oyster fishery in the Thames Estuary alone and oysters were eight shillings a bushel (I make that about eight a penny and defy correction). To-day—at a wild guess—not more than one-tenth of those numbers may be concerned, oysters are few and their prices are what they are. More oysters should mean lower prices, might mean wider demand, but certainly would mean more capital—in an industry decimated by the mysterious massacre of the nineteen-twenties.

(f) Yes. Red pepper and lemon; or lemon and vinegar; or vinegar and red pepper; or all three; or none.

(g) *One* bite and one only.

(h) Chablis.



November, 1950

SECRETARIAT

“LET me introduce myself. I’m the Private Secretary to the Parliamentary Secretary.”

“Not the *Parliamentary* Private Secretary?”

“No. The Private Secretary.”

“To what Secretary did you say?”

“To the Parliamentary Secretary.”

“Has the Secretary got a Parliamentary Private Secretary?”

“No, only the Parliamentary Secretary. He’s in Parliament, you see.”

“The Parliamentary Private Secretary?”

“Him as well. But I meant the Parliamentary Secretary.”

“I see. But in addition to a Parliamentary Private Secretary he’s got a Private Secretary as well?”

“Yes. Me.”

“I understand. And an Under Secretary—is he under you?”

“No, he’s under the Secretary.”

“Is there anybody under you?”

“The Assistant Private Secretary.”

“To you?”

“That’s right.”

“Does the Parliamentary Private Secretary have a Private Secretary?”

“Yes, he has. Not an official Private Secretary. A Personal Private Secretary.”

“I see. Then the Assistant Secretaries—who are they? Are they attached to the Under Secretary?”

“Under Secretaries. There’s more than one of them, of course. No, they work for them, but they’re not personally attached to them. They have their own Personal Assistants.”

“The Under Secretaries?”

“The Assistant Secretaries as well.”

“What are their jobs?”

“The Assistant Secretaries?”

“No, the Personal Assistants.”

“They’re sort of secretaries.”

“*Private* Secretaries?”

“No, just secretaries.”

“But I thought there was only one of them.”

"Secretaries?"

"The Secretary."

"No, he's entirely different, of course. He's the Permanent Secretary."

"You mean the others are only temporary?"

"No, Permanent Secretary is just a title."

"You mean in point of fact he's temporary?"

"No, the others are permanent too is what I mean."

"I see."

"But they're not called permanent."

"Nor temporary either?"

"No."

"Complicated isn't it?"

"Not when you understand, of course, it isn't. Oh, here's my colleague, the one I was telling you about. The Personal Private Secretary to the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Parliamentary Secretary."

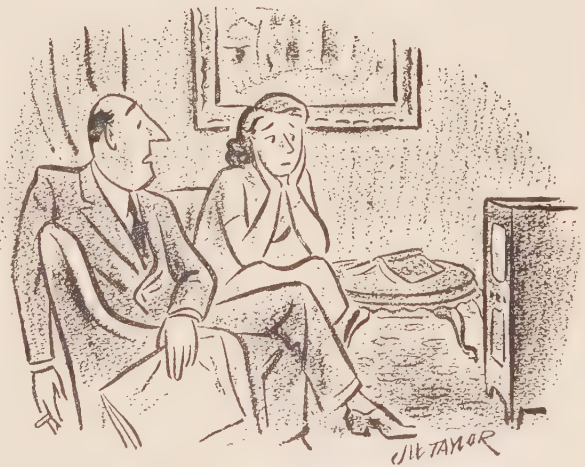
"How do you do?"

## PURLS BEFORE PLAIN

*To the Editor, "Knitcraft"*

Dear Sir,—While I was laid up with 'flu and my wife was queueing for fish I spent an instructive hour or two browsing through the last few weeks' numbers of your admirable magazine. I'm a specialist myself—all the poker-work in our home is my own—and have a soft spot for specialist journals. Some suggestions I made two years ago to the editor of *The Red Hot Poker* are beginning to bear fruit, and I understand that sales are increasing. It occurred to me that you might be grateful for one or two suggestions for improving the sales of your own publication.

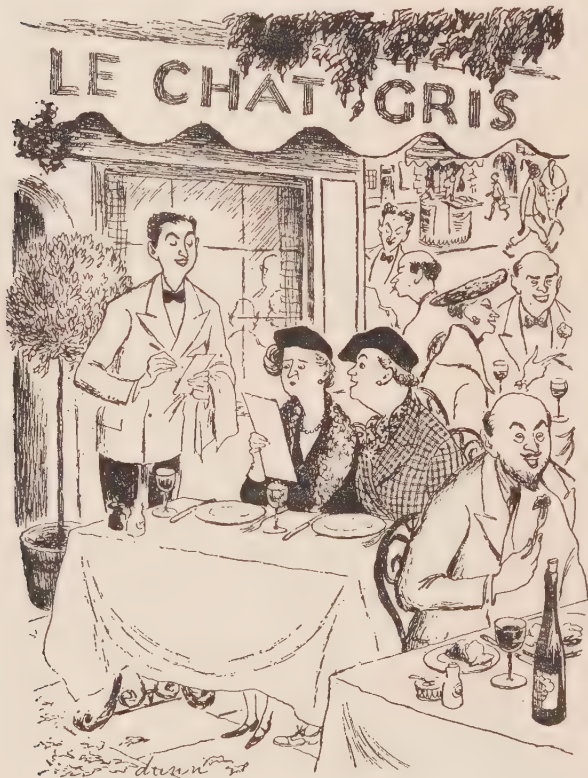
First of all, style. Your contributors are generally anonymous, an editorial policy which you share with a distinguished contemporary, but I feel that the expression of an author's personality is unduly cramped by your strict rules on using abbreviations. The author of the following telling phrase, for example, "25th row; p. 8, sl. 1, k.2 tog., p.s.s.o., p. 12, sl. 1, k.2



"I SHALL BE GLAD WHEN WE'VE HAD OUR MONEY'S WORTH."

tog." is an artist indeed; but why not let him put it this way: "25th row; purl eight, slip one and knit two together, pass the slipped stitch over then p. 12, slip 1 and k.2 tog." No one can fail to appreciate the carefree gaiety of that final "k.2 tog." after the sonorous opening, and there is a majestic rhythm in the whole piece which should uplift the hearts of all your readers.

My other criticism is of your use of pictures. Some are excellent, and I should be sorry to see the last of the young lady who models the twin sets. All the same, I



"ORDER TWO SANDWICHES, THEN IT DOESN'T MATTER WHETHER THEY'RE MASCULINE OR FEMININE."

hope I am not giving anything away when I say that at least one of your readers sometimes knits *straight from the picture!* Only last week I was counting how many stitches to the page my wife could do, and was amazed to see she never turned over. Later I checked up with the pattern and found she should have turned to p.\* 26 for several rows! As a result the Dainty Baby's Bonnet with Cosy Ear Flaps, although it looked exactly like your charming illustration, would not fit baby's head.

I do not mean this letter to be all criticism; I am out to help, so here are two suggestions which should, I feel, put *Knitcraft* in its rightful place—at the top of the market.

Why not try a serial? It is a sure way of increasing sales. My own serial, "A Gothick Fire Screen," is proving a goldmine to the *Poker*. Here is a suggestion, in outline only of course, for the first instalment:

"With No. 10 needles and blue wool, cast on 116 sts. and work in pattern as follows:

1st row: knit in BW. 2nd row as 1st, 3rd row: join in Pink,\*\* k.2 B., slip 1, p.2 tog.; repeat from \*\* to last 2 sts., K.2 P. 4th row\*\* p.2 P., slip 1, t.b.1.; repeat from \*\* to last 2sts., p. 2 P. These 4 rows form a delightful pattern.

Continue straight in pattern until back measures 6 inches, then . . ."

Here you should introduce suspense by an editorial note something like:

"Then . . . what? Will the heel be turned? Or is it a Jumper Suit? Order your next week's copy of 'Knitcraft' now and make sure."



LUDWIG WOLF

POPULAR MISCONCEPTIONS:  
KNOCKING-OFF TIME AT HANWELL

Obviously there should be no illustration or the suspense will be lost; it would be like doing a jig-saw puzzle with the picture in front of you.

Finally, what about verse? I have here a little thing I "cast off" the other day, which you may like to use:

"With Number 10s cast on your wool  
K.2, p. 1, and stocking stitch.  
Sl. 1, k.2, sl. 1, and pull,  
p.u.a.p. and drop a stitch.

4th row—begin: a star, k.2,  
p.2, sl. 1, k.2, repeat  
from star for 7 rows, p.2,  
cast off and make the endings neat."

Incidentally, this makes a charming egg cosy if the rhyming lines are done in the same colours and the second verse is worked on three needles.

Yours very sincerely,  
W. B. SMITH

*P.S.*—\*Of course I mean "page" here, not "purl."—W. B. S.

## NIGHT AND DAY

"This," I say, switching on the light, "is the sun."

The class looks at it with awe.

"And this," I say, twirling the globe neatly, with one finger on Alaska, "is the earth."

There is a respectful silence. It is one of those taut moments packed with psychological importance, child wonder and the impact of knowledge.

The spell is broken by Alan, who asks in a fruity Berkshire voice "But it don't keep on turning, does it?"

"Does," I correct automatically. "Yes, it does. It never stops. Day and night, week after week," I tell the children, "it turns round and round and round; and just here, is Great Britain where we live." The class stands up as one man and I wave it down again. It is not easy to show the British Isles to a mob of eager children. Apart from its minute nature this country's peculiar position on the upper slopes of the globe make it necessary to carry the whole contraption round the class in a pointing position with the brass knob to the front. Fellows of the Royal Geographical Society will have no difficulty in following my meaning.

Half the class say they can't see, while the other half tell the first half to sit down.

I put the globe back on the table and attempt to recapture dawning wonder. I point to the naked light-bulb.



"There is the sun shining up in the sky. All the people who live here," I stroke the class side of the globe seductively, "are saying 'What a lovely day!'"

I drop my voice about an octave.

"But who knows what the people on my side of the globe are saying?"

Silence.

"Well, will they be looking up at the sun?"

Silence becomes unhappy.

"Well, will they? Think! Will they be able to see the sun? John, tell me."

John, cornered, says he don't know what they says. If they doos say anything, he adds. But, in any case, he don't know.

I start all over again. The sun—heads tip up, the globe—heads tip forward, the seductive stroke—the people IN THE SUN!

We are poised again.

"But what about the people on this side of the globe? Can they see the sun?"

Brian don't see why not if they are looking. He is ignored.

Jane says reasonably that all them as is on her side of the globe is in the sun because the electric is switched on.



I agree. Now we are getting warmer.

"Well, then, if all the people facing the light are in the sun, what are the other people doing?"

Deadlock again.

I begin to go mad. I stick a pin into the Steppes of Russia and revolve the globe again with horrible deliberation.

"Here I am," I say with emphasis, touching the pin, "and I am just waking up. I can see the sun rising. Now it's the afternoon, now it's the evening. Are you WATCHING! It's beginning to get dark. Now it really is dark. Tell me, is it still the day time?"

"No!" a lusty Berkshire roar.

"Where am I now?"

"Round the back!"

Fair enough. Not what the

Royal Geographical Society would care to hear, probably, but we progress.

"What am I doing now then?"

They tell me I be in the dark, I be in bed, it be the night and the day be over.

We smile triumphantly at each other, glowing with effort rewarded and flushed with new knowledge.

I twirl the globe dizzily. The pin flies round and round, and we shout "DAY—NIGHT" and feel terrific.

"Now," I tell the class with conviction, "you really do know what causes the day and night."

"Yes," says Jane happily—"switching on the electric."

### ADVANCED BOOKING

"I want two for next Friday, please."

"Friday week, you mean?"

"Yes. A week this coming Friday."

"The nineteenth, you mean?"

"Is it? Let me see. Yesterday was John's birthday . . ."

"Next Friday's the nineteenth, madam. Stalls?"

"Oh. Well, what do you suggest?"

"Depends where you want to be, madam."

"Well, *I'm* not coming; it's my niece and her young man."

"I see."

"I would, but I can't. I'll be out. Of course, I could come on the Monday or Tuesday, but they won't be here by then, and Wednesday's the Odeon."

"Yes, madam. Two stalls, the nineteenth?"

"Of course, I could come on the Thursday, if John isn't tied down with his bowls."

"Really, madam? Two stalls?"

"Well, I don't know. If I'm too far forward in the stalls you can see all the make-up, and it doesn't seem the same somehow."

"No, madam."

"And if you're too far back you miss bits with the girls banging their trays. They ought to be put a stop to, because I mean, you pay your money, same as anyone else."

"Two circle, then, Friday the nineteenth?"

"Well, I don't know. At the *front* of the circle it's far too dear for what it is, because after all it's only a show, isn't it?"

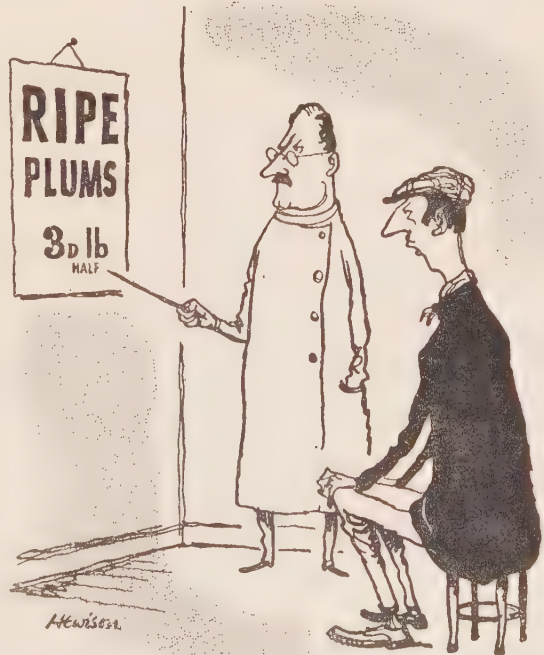
"Quite."

"And up at the *back* you're miles from anywhere, all hemmed in, and you can't get an ice until the curtain's nearly gone up again, and more often than not you never set eyes on your change. Besides they look more like a lot of midgets from up there. Nothing but specks. Every time you get your opera-glasses on them they've moved, and somebody else is doing something. And I always get a funny feeling in the back of the circle."

"Really?"

"Like as if I might be going to topple out of the seat any minute and roll down and fall over the edge. You could come a tidy cropper if it was to get a hold on you so you couldn't stop yourself. Like with Harold Lloyd, on all those girders. And people's knees keep on knocking the pins out of your bun."

"A nice box, madam?"





"I wouldn't give you thank-you for a box. All you can see is people looking at you at the side of the stage through a peephole. Besides, my niece can't do with being shut in anywhere. If she was to get in the cupboard under the stairs she'd let out such a yell, right up till she was practically left school. Well, it had better be stalls."

"Two stalls, madam. Yes."

"Not too far front, and not too far back. I'm always half afraid the circle's going to come crash down on top of you one of these times, with all the weight."

"About the middle, then?"

"Well, if there's nothing else, I suppose. What about here, by my thumb?"

"That's the stage, madam."

"Is it? Fancy having it there. Oh, well, whatever you like. Just look at all these people behind me."

"There you are, madam. Two stalls."

"That's right. Try and give me some shillings in my change. My meter *cats* them ever since I hit it with my shoe to shake a bent one down. There's no need to push into me with your great big elbow like that! Come along, young man, can't you see all these people want serving? They've been here as long as I have, you know. And I've got shopping to do yet, never mind stand in queues booking seats. Really, some of you people seem to think a person's got all day."

## SITUATION HALF FILLED

My mother wrote and said she was glad to hear of my new job. Was I looking forward to it? When did I begin? What time would I have to start? What time would I finish? How long would it take me to get there? What time would I have to get up? Was there anywhere near the office where I would be able to get a good hot lunch?

I wrote back and enclosed a time-table.

Then my mother wrote and said that eight o'clock wasn't early enough to get up. I must have a good breakfast every morning and allow myself ten minutes afterwards just to sit quietly. I couldn't hope to be healthy if I started the day half-starved like my cousin Amy. My mother had never known anyone like my cousin Amy who was always ill with something or other. The last time my mother saw her she was going to have a sore throat and the time before that she was bitten by a horsefly right in front of my mother's nose.

Were there any other girls in the office? Did I think I would like them? How old were they? Were they nice? Perhaps I would make a nice friend. What was the name of the man I would be working for?

I wrote back and said I could tell her more about the staff when I actually started. The man I would be working for was called Brown.

My mother wrote back and said what was Mr. Brown's first name? Where did he live? What did he look like? Was he nice? How tall was he? How old was he? Was he married?

I wrote back and said he was married.

My mother wrote and asked what holidays would I have? When would I get a rise? Was there a pension?

I wrote that I would have two weeks' holiday, I didn't know about a rise and I didn't think there would be a pension.

My mother wrote that I must insist on a pension. I couldn't live without a pension. The firm would respect me if I showed I had a high regard for my capabilities. I was far too ready to take the line of least resistance and she was alarmingly reminded of my father's cousin Alfred. She had never met Alfred, but he was the one who had a weak face in knickerbockers in the photograph that my father always tried to show people unless she headed him off. Alfred grew prize marrows and my





mother was sick to death of them. Plenty of people on her side of the family had done things to be proud of and she never wanted to meet Alfred as long as she lived. His eyes were too close together. I must make it quite clear before I started that I had to have a pension.

I wrote and said there was a pension.

My mother wrote and said there wasn't. She knew there wasn't. Had I forgotten that our house was on a fifty-nine year lease and that when it was up I would be seventy-four? What did I think I was going to do then? Answer her that if I could.

It wasn't as if my father were wealthy and could leave me thousands because he wasn't and he couldn't and he probably couldn't even if he could because if he could there'd be taxes and death duties and that would be that. Wouldn't it?

I wrote and said it would.

## A PROPHECY

The week after next an amateur will play a small part with our repertory company, and I know exactly what is going to happen. He is going to be asked to share my dressing-room.

My dressing-room is always used as a depository, because it is too handily situated at the top of the stairs. People wheel enormous baskets into it, full of moths, and never come back for them. In one corner there is a bass drum stencilled HARRY'S RHYTHM, which was used as a barrage in *Journey's End* before I joined the company. The window ledge is lined with whisky bottles, some containing a solution of gravy-browning and some containing spiders. A rolled Axminster carpet is propped against a wall, and periodically slumps to the floor like a body. There is also what I take to be an antiquated contrivance for making the sound of wind, and the inside of a grand piano.

In the midst of all this I crouch on the spindly chair, peering into my mirror, with all my wardrobe on two hooks, and my feet on the handle of the wind-machine. And a very glamorous picture I make, I shouldn't be surprised.

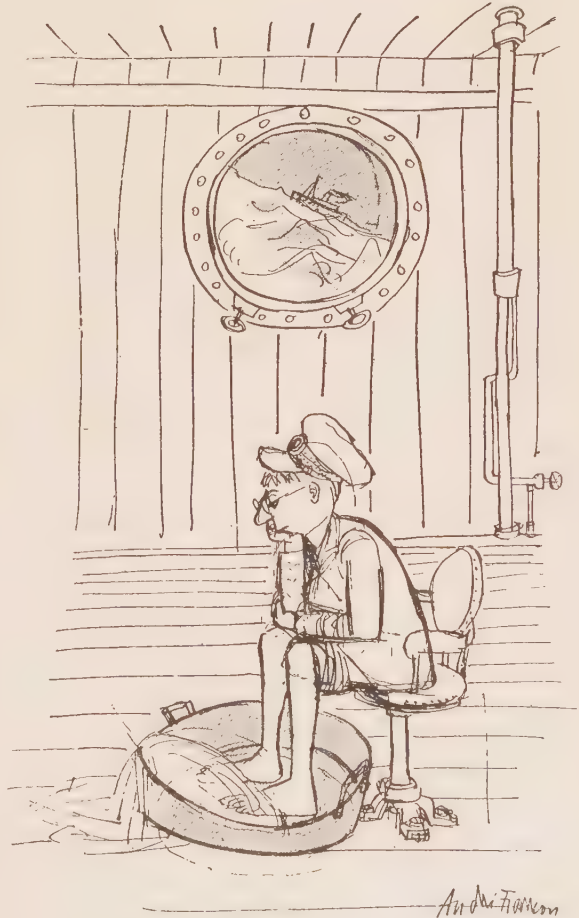
The function of this amateur will be to poke his head through the door down Left towards the end of the third act, looking like a chauffeur, say "All ready now, sir," and vanish. On the Monday night, an hour and a half before the curtain is due to rise, he is going to hurry through the stage-door, wearing a duffle-coat. Under one arm he will have the current *Stage*, and under the other he will have a make-up box of awe-inspiring proportions.

When I enter the dressing-room an hour later, still limp from dress rehearsal, I shall find him sitting on my chair. In my mirror I shall see his face, which will be painted the colour of raw liver. The rickety cigar-box containing my half-dozen grubby stumps of grease-paint will be stuck away in a corner, and his enormous shiny steel cabinet will stand before him, opened in all directions, with drawers, trays, ledges, cubby-holes, sections, trap-doors, divisions, lids, and a bit that comes up like a lift. In this complicated honeycomb I shall observe a dazzling range of gleaming grease-paints, each stick bedded comfortably in its allotted niche, in numerical order, a good ninety per cent of them in their original Cellophane.

While I arrange a seat for myself on the bass drum, and place my cigar-box humbly before my shaving-mirror, he will greet me heartily, and engage me in conversation about Strindberg.

Stumbling about in the confined space trying to get into my first-act clothes I shall mutter non-committal responses while he outlines the plot of a play he has written, describes a recent performance he gave as Macbeth and deplors the cultural decay of the West End theatre. I shall try to look through my lines, and he will gargle. I shall seek my monocle, and he will have ground it underfoot. I shall compose myself for a last few minutes' rest, and he will be seized by an attack of nervous hysteria.

I shall assure him that his make-up is perfect, his intonation impeccable, and his chances of missing his cue absolutely nil. I shall help him into his leggings (which won't be seen), and I shall send for a light ale to steady his nerves.



Then I shall shake his hand, and wish him luck, and leave him pacing the room with his speech in one hand and a damp powder-puff in the other, and seek the more restful turmoil of the wings.

I know it will be just like that: and yet I know that when he makes his trembling entrance I shall smile and cross my fingers for him. Because it will seem only yesterday that I did it all myself.

### LAMENT OF AN IDLE DEMON

It's quiet in Hell just now, it's very tame,  
The devils and the damned alike lie snoring.  
Just a faint smell of sulphur, not much flame;  
The human souls come here and find it boring.

Satan, the poor old Puritan, sits there  
Emitting mocking laughter once a minute;  
Idly he scans a page of Baudelaire  
And wonders how he once saw evil in it.

He sips his brimstone at the Demons' Club  
(His one amusement now he's superseded)  
And keeps complaining to Beelzebub  
That men make hotter hells than ever he did.

*December, 1950*

SIXTY YEARS TO GO

WHEN people ask me to what I attribute my longevity—which is seldom, as I was not born until 1910—I have to answer truthfully enough that I owe it to a good many different techniques, and that I am still seeking the best one. I have in my time sedulously followed most of the accepted ways of achieving old age, beginning with the one about early bed and rigid abstention from smoking and drinking.

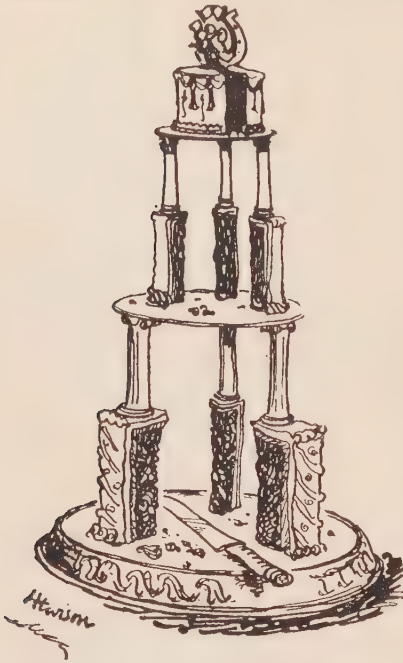
This discipline saw me through the difficult first seventeen years of my life, and I sometimes wonder if I ought to have continued with it. My father, however—an older and more experienced man than I—warmly advocated a change of policy. He assured me that the majority of centenarians gave the credit to a lifetime of hard work, and he considered it was time I tried that.

Hard work got me to twenty-five, at which age I was lucky enough to read an interview with a centenarian who claimed he owed it all to plenty of rump steak and beer. I could think of no pleasanter way of growing old than of doing it on rump steak and beer, and very soon I was thirty.

For myself I should have been happy to persevere with a regimen that was proving so successful. But my contemporaries will recall that with the 'forties beef-steak and beer began to be in very short supply. Beer required hunting for, and it was impossible to eat rump steak more than once a week, which was not sufficient for my purpose. A change of tactics was essential. I was at a loss what procedure to turn to, but by great good fortune the Government exercised an option they had taken on me, and for the ensuing six years I followed their own curriculum of early rising, plain food and plenty of exercise.

At the end of this period I was going so well that I was strongly tempted to accept a further offer from the Government and allow them to take responsibility for my well-being for another term of years. My gratuity, however, which was not far short of three figures, went to my head, and I haughtily refused. I then read of an old gentleman who had got to one hundred and three simply by not worrying.

For the next year nobody could have worked harder than I at not worrying. I have since come to the conclusion that this method of growing old should be followed only by those with private means. Left to myself I could have not worried, but I wasn't left not to worry in peace. Other people, who I suppose were not interested in growing old, worried for me. The Urban District Council Treasurer, for example, was a terrible worrier. When I did not worry about my rates he could not have worried more if he had been my landlord. There was, in fact, very little to chose between them when it came to worrying.



I found not worrying too worrying. It was taking years off my expectation of life—the very thing I was working to avoid. At the age of thirty-seven I thankfully started worrying again.

The next tip I read, passed on by a man of great experience born in 1847, was for fresh air, and for six months I made a point of surrounding myself with it. I took walks among it, I breathed it freely, and I allowed quantities of it to swirl around my bedroom at night. After I had had my cold for six months I fancied I must be on the wrong track, and I looked around for a less punishing way of ageing. My Sunday paper told me of a very successful case due to a cold bath every morning. My first treatment made me disinclined to live to extreme old age. I was just thirty-seven and a half at the time, and brief calculation showed me that on the morning of my hundredth birthday I should be entering my 22,827th cold bath.

It was an appalling thought. I resolved I would grow old differently or not at all.

Increasing age brings wisdom, and I did not leap headlong into the very next system I read. I waited until I had collected three systems, and combined the best points of all three. This selective formula advocated plenty of rest and entertainment, light reading, an occasional flutter on the races, and an absorbing hobby (I chose darts). Also, each recipe separately advised one pint of beer per diem, which added up to a total of three. By shedding the less agreeable recommendations—such as digging in the garden before breakfast and eating plenty of raw vegetables—in order to make room for the others I jogged happily along for another couple of years.

My restless spirit then revolted once more. I noticed—or, at least, my barber noticed for me—that I was getting thin on top. It was clear that my regimen was growing less effective. I was becoming immune to it. I turned to the newspapers again, and, after several weeks of anxious scrutiny, came upon an old lady of one hundred and seven who knitted without her glasses and enjoyed a joke.

At the present I am knitting without my glasses and enjoying a joke. The joke is on the back of a box of matches, which I carry about with me in my pocket. I take it out several times each day to enjoy it. But I don't know—I do not feel I am getting along as well as I should. The time is ripe for another change. I should be interested to hear from readers older than myself telling me to what they attribute their longevity.

## BASEMENT KITCHEN

How many women before me  
 Have stood at this quaint old sink,  
 With its rather original waste-pipe  
 Made in one continuous kink?

How many pieces of china  
 Have slithered, as mine have done,  
 From that absolute duck of a dresser  
 Designed like the Cresta Run?

How many shivering slavies  
 Have jettisoned trays of tea  
 On account of this loose-leaf lino  
 Which has just torpedoed me?

How many proud cook-generals  
 Have packed up their bags and gone—  
 And wouldn't I willingly follow  
 If Junior's milk wasn't on?

## ANYTHING THERE FOR ME?

This was a man, living alone in a flat in London, who went away for Christmas. He went away early, avoiding the rush, and leaving no forwarding address because he was coming back on the 26th and posts are unpredictable at Christmas. But on the 21st he began to feel uneasy. He thought he had remembered to send everybody Christmas cards, but suppose some arrived, while he was away, from people he had forgotten? On the 22nd he rang up the building in which his flat was and asked for the porter.

After a time the porter came on and said "Yes?"

"This is Mr. Mupp," said the man. "Look—is there anything there for me?"

There was a pause. Then the porter said "There's seven envelopes. Should I send them on? You never——"

"No—no, don't send them on. I just want to know who they're from."

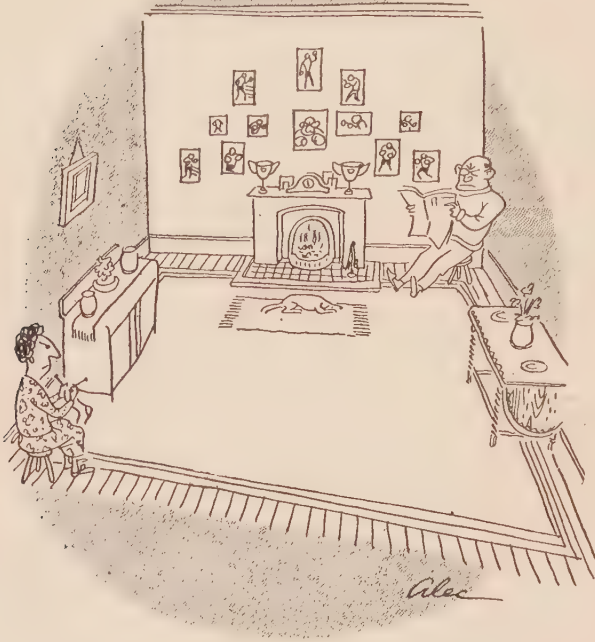
"From?" the porter repeated, as if upset by the idea of correspondence.

"Are any of them Christmas cards?"

"I wouldn't know without looking inside, would I?"

"Have they got penny stamps?"





"Ah, that's an idea," said the porter. "See, if they're penny stamps they might be Christmas cards, mightn't they? No."

"No?"

"Ah, I was just saying that to George, there's someone wants to pay his milk bill. No. No."

"Are you saying that to George or me?"

The porter preferred to pause for a few moments and then say "Five of them have penny stamps. No, six. But that one's got an ad for a book on it."

"A book?—no, never mind, never mind. Now listen. I want you to look in the other five and tell me who they're from."

"From?" said the porter again.

"Just take out the card and look inside. What does it say?"

A rustling was audible on the telephone. Then the porter's voice came through, reading with a mistrustful intonation the words "Though many a greeting may assail your ear, it would not——"

"Not the *printed* stuff," Mr. Mupp interrupted. "What's written underneath?"

"Nothing written underneath." The porter sounded pleased. "Nothing at all."

"Nothing? You mean it doesn't say who sent it?"

"Well, it says from Mr. and Mrs. J. Arbuthnot Crowninside-Anstruther, but that's——"

"You could have said that first, that's all I wanted."

"That's *printed* letters," said the porter sulkily. "You said——"

"Yes, but I meant—If the name *isn't* printed, it—Well, never mind. That's one. What's the second?"

Further rustling. "Well," came the porter's doubtful tones, "I'd say it's a sort of, well, like a bit of parchment folded half one way and then before it quite gets to where it would——"

"I mean who's it from?"

"From? . . . Oh. Well. It says A Merry Christmas and stuff and then it says From Joey and Slingback. In writing."

"Joey? Joey and *who*?"

"Slingback. 'S what it looks like. I thought to myself that's a queer name the minute I saw it, but you never can tell nowadays what people want to call themselves. I knew a chap used to call himself the Camille Desmoulins of the Mile End Road."

"Did he write that on his Christmas cards?—no, never mind. Can you see what the postmark is on that?"

"Looks like Doormat," said the porter dubiously. "Doormat, Essex. You ever hear of a place called Doormat?—no, I tell you what it is: Dovercourt. That's what it is. Nice little place."

"Doverc—— Oh, I know. *John and Elizabeth*," said Mr. Mupp, "not Joey and Slingback. Well, that's all right. What about——"

*Pip—pip—pip.*

"You want to go on? Should I hang up?"

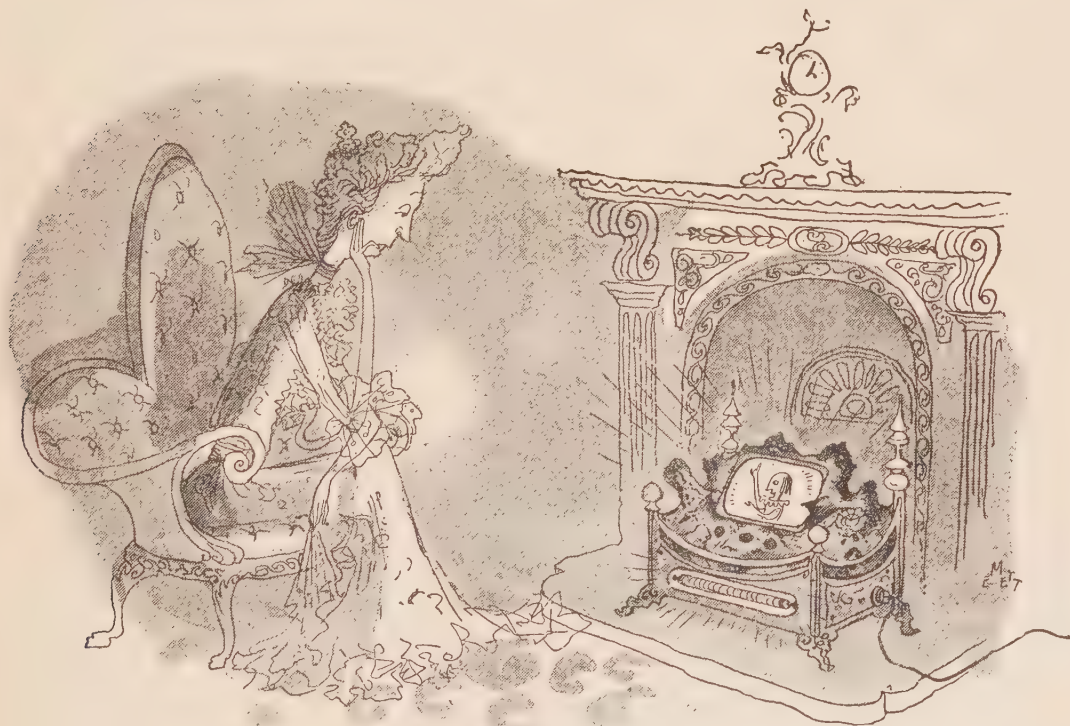
"I want to go on," said Mr. Mupp. "What about the third?"

"What third?"

"The third card."

"Oh. Well . . . *Oooooh*," said the porter, "this is a good one, this is. Handsome. All bits of red and gold round the edge. Must have cost something."

"Who's it fr—— Is there a name in it?"



"It says With seasonable greetings and compliments from the Association for the Advancement . . . No, wait a minute. This isn't for you at all, it got put in——"

"Ah. Are the other two mine?"

"Oh, *they're* yours all right. They're very small."

"That makes it certain. Well?"

Another pause filled with rustling. Then the porter said in a tone of pleased astonishment "Well, do you know what? They aren't cards. Receipts, that's what they are: receipts. The penny stamps put me wrong, see?"

"Might happen to anybody," said Mr. Mupp. "Well, good-bye. Thank you. Happy Christmas."

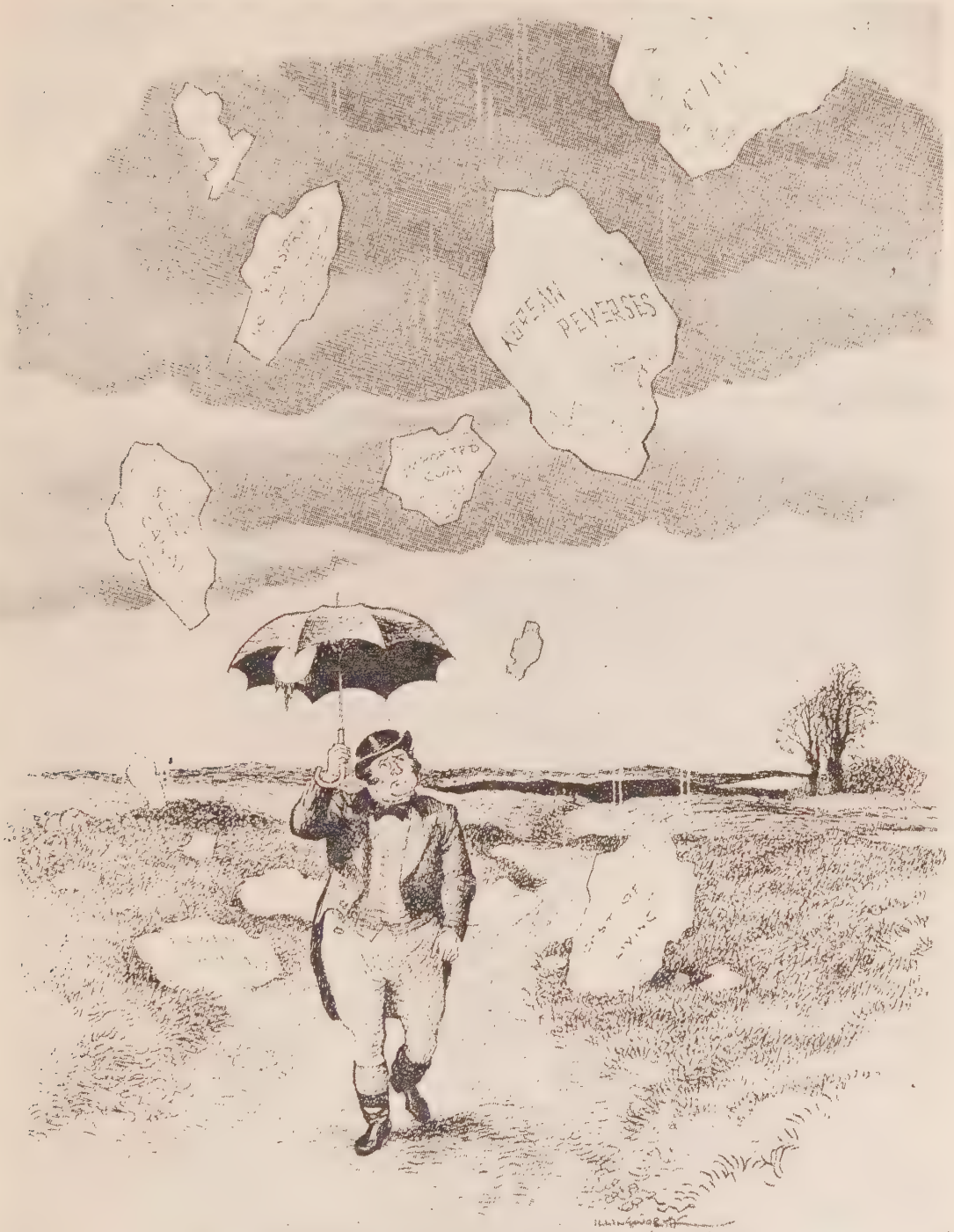
"The compliments of the season to *you*," said the porter.

## WHAT THE NEW PAY BRINGS BACK

The Chief Petty Officer Cook placed the potential Swiss roll, pale and flat on its baking tray, in the oven of his demonstration cooker and closed the door. Taking a spotless dish-cloth from his belt he tied it round the handle of the door. Sixteen out of seventeen young cooks leaned forward, puzzled by this last action. The seventeenth, older than the others, showed less interest.

"You millionaires," said the Chief Cook, "are clearly dumbfounded. Why, you ask yourselves, should I tie this cloth round the handle of the oven door?" He picked up a little flour and placed it on the handle of a saucepan of dehydrated carrots reconstituting themselves at the bubble on top of the stove. The sixteen cooks leaned forward again. "A dab of flour for the saucepan-handle," said the Chief Cook, rubbing his pink nose with enjoyment of the effect he was producing, "and a cloth for the oven door. Why do we do these things?" Looking round a silent class his eye met that of the older man at the back. A wary look came over his face. "A face I know," he said. "Scouse, isn't it?"—"That's me, Chief," said Scouse. "*Knifey* Scouse," said the Chief Cook, reminiscently. "You were in my galley in the old *Inexcusable*."—"That's it, Chief," said Scouse. "What the new pay brings back," said the Chief Cook. The class laughed. "It wasn't the new pay brought me back," said Scouse. "What was it, then?" asked the Chief Cook, making his first mistake for twelve years. "I missed you, Chief," said Scouse. The class laughed again.

"Reverting to the matter in hand," said the Chief Cook repressively, "the dab of flour means that the saucepan-handle is hot; and the cloth is a warning, to any ham-fisted son of mine such as yourself, Scouse, not to spoil my Swiss roll by opening the oven. It is a simple precaution but necessary in ships and such-like places where more than one cook is making light work. Those of you who are monogamous are unlikely to come across it in the home.



VISITATION

LARGE BLOCKS OF ICE HAVE UNACCOUNTABLY FALLEN ON THIS COUNTRY IN RECENT WEEKS.

"While our Swiss roll is in the oven," the Chief Cook continued, "I shall proceed to demonstrate the proper drill for the sharpening of a knife." He picked up knife and steel. "Grasp the knife in the right hand, thus. Hold the steel horizontally in front of you at a height level with your Adam's apple. Draw the knife across the steel diagonally, thus. Note that the blade of the knife traverses the full length of the steel and that, coincidentally, the steel traverses the full length of the knife-blade. If the makers of this steel"—he held it up—"had intended that only half of it should be used they would have left off the other half. Similarly, if the makers of this knife"—he held up the knife—"had not wanted people to cut with all of it they would have made a smaller knife. Stands to reason, doesn't it, even your reason, Scouse?"—"Yes, Chief," said Scouse, with restraint. "Our friend here," said the Chief Cook, "the one who didn't come back for the new pay, reminds me of the other main thing about knives. Remember what it is, Scouse?" A look of sheepish recollection appeared on Scouse's face. "Never point the way with a knife," he said. The class looked round at him.

"Never point the way with a knife," repeated the Chief Cook, with emphasis. "A certain cook, of whom Scouse and I are thinking and who shall be nameless, was standing knife in hand in the galley, mouth open and cap flat-aback, like a spare dinner. Up comes a seaman or stoker or similar unskilled manual worker and asks him where I am. This cook knows where I am and, without looking round, points behind him with the knife. What he doesn't know is that there, immediately behind him, is the Chief Boatswain's Mate. Shocked by the gleam of cold steel the Chief Boatswain's Mate falls backwards into a tank containing pea soup for seven hundred and seventy-five men. The Chief Boatswain's Mate was a large man, but the Chief Engineer's Artificer, who later arrived in the galley and showed the cook a plate of soup containing a photograph of the Chief Boatswain's Mate's three daughters, was larger." The class looked round at Scouse again; Scouse remained silent. "Keeping your knife to yourself is like sifting flour," said the Chief Cook. "It has *got* to be done. The ship's company does not like photographs in its soup and it does not like string, packets of cigarettes, razor-blades and pages from stories of the Wild West in its bread. Later in the month the Chief Baker will be letting you in on this question of bread." He paused, as though expecting Scouse to say something. Scouse said nothing. "In this case, however," said the Chief Cook tentatively, "all was well that ended well: the cook married one of the Chief Boatswain's Mate's daughters."—"I never did," said Scouse, stung to open confession. The class laughed and the Chief Cook smiled.

But Scouse was back in his element and sat firm, biding his time. "Did any of you notice when it was I put the roll in the oven?" asked the Chief Cook. No one spoke. "A cook, unlike others of the world's workers, if there are any others, should be a clock-watcher. I put the roll in half an hour ago and it's due to come out now." With these words he removed the roll, now golden, from the oven. Taking his correctly-sharpened knife he cut the crisp edges from two sides and rolled

it up in sugared paper and damp cloth. "There," he said, "that'll stick," and he set the finished object, in its cocoon, before the class. "All right?" he asked. "All right, *Knifey?*"

"Very nice," said Knifey Scouse. "Is your nose hot, Chief?"—"What's that?" exclaimed the Chief Cook. Scouse steeled himself. "I asked whether your nose was hot, Chief," he said gingerly. The Chief Cook, with admirable self-control, kept his hand away from his nose. "It feels all right from here," he said, menace in his voice. Scouse took a deep breath. "It's just that there's a dab of flour on it, Chief," he said.

The Chief Cook rubbed his nose and sighed. "Knifey Scouse," he said sternly, "I don't believe Clem'd have done it if he'd known it would land me with you again."

### THEY CAN BE MADDENING

The tables were separate, but only just. People were getting out of their seats constantly to let other people past, rather like having lunch in a news cinema. The tall man and his wife were so close to me at the next table that I had no alternative but to enjoy their argument.

"There you go again," she said, and something in the very way she poised her fork ought to have warned him.

"What do you mean—go again?" he said. He was a pale man, unsophisticated for a husband. All married men should know that a matrimonial crisis springs fully fledged from nowhere; one moment you're congratulating yourself on having said the right thing about the new colander, and the next they're half-way home to mother.

"Never mind," she said, and sighed shortly. "Pass the mustard."

He didn't pass it, and I didn't blame him. It's when they start something pulsing with mysterious innuendo and then snub you when you're all ears that they are at their most maddening.

"What do you mean—there I go again?" Obviously the poor chap didn't realize he'd gone anywhere.

"When I asked you how many t's in Arnold Bennett," said his wife, on a long outward breath—"and you said two t's and two n's."

"So what?" he said, plainly baffled. Then his face lit up. "Ah-ha I see. Clever, eh? You mean there are really three n's. But I——"

"All I asked——"

"But I thought you were only interested in the Bennett part. If you——"

"If I could be allowed to finish a sentence," she said, not finishing it.

He said he was sorry, and I awarded him a mark for that. A little well-simulated contrition at this stage sometimes appeases them.

"Thank you." She cut a sprout into four well-judged divisions and deliberately

arranged them round a sausage. "All I asked was how many t's. Nothing about n's. I didn't care a hoot about the n's. I knew about the n's, including the n in Arnold. All I wanted was the t's; but of course you have to fire off the whole family tree, hook, line and sinker. With footnotes."

"But, dear, I didn't——"

"When I want to know about n's I'll ask you."

"But, darling, it was——"

"Please, the mustard."

The man laid down his knife and fork with controlled movements, but he was flushed now. Husbands can appease for just so long. The time comes for sterner measures.

"Now listen." He dabbed his mouth-corners with a napkin, his eyes narrowing slightly. You said 'There you go again.' Anyone would think——"

"The first time it happened was on the train to Hastings," said his wife, shrewdly impaling a Webb's Improved. It was a clever move—I could see that by the man's involuntary softening of expression.

"But we haven't been on the train to Hastings since our honeymoon," he said. (They're utterly unscrupulous, they don't care how they catch you.)

"Nobody said we had. A man asked you if he was all right for East Croydon, remember?"

"No." (They have terrific memories.)

"I do. You said he was, and the next stop was Purley, then Horley, Gatwick Airport, Three Bridges and Balcombe, and if he changed at Haywards Heath he could——"

"But, dash it——!"

"And you made him get up and look out of the window at a train that was making the same journey but with a slight detour round Redhill. See what I mean?" she said.

"If I do," he answered with really admirable dignity, "it strikes me as rather unreasonable for you to say there I go again. Twelve years ago a bit of common politeness on the railway: to-night this trivial matter of the n's in Arnold Bennett."



"The t's in Arnold Bennett."

"I consider I've indulged the eccentricity with surprising moderation."

She said "What about the plumbers?" It was a masterly regrouping of her resources, and caught him entirely unprepared.

"Plumbers? We haven't had a plumber in the house for years."

"We had two on Monday night for coffee."

"Oh, the Plummers! I don't see what——"

"When she asked you about my kitchen boiler you told her where we got the electric iron, the garden incinerator and the new dust-bin, and disappeared into the attic for twenty minutes to dig up a pre-war price list of gas refrigerators. That's what I mean when I say 'There you go again.' Gracious! I daren't ask you the time in case I get the Newhaven tide-tables and a few rough sketches of the signs of the Zodiac thrown in." She paused for breath, and when it had arrived she said "And now that you've wheedled it all out of me perhaps I can have the mustard?"

He didn't say a word. He absently prized his sausage out of its bed of cooling fat, but he didn't say anything. He didn't pass the mustard, either. So I passed mine. I was just going, anyway, so I passed her the salt, pepper, mustard, pickles, chutney, tomato sauce, menu, beer mat and a small jar of mint jelly that shouldn't have been on my table at all. She shrivelled me to a crisp with a white-hot glare of furious indignation.

Strangely enough, so did he.

## CARNET DU BAL

I have turned up an old dance programme, midget pencil and bit of blue fluff still intact. As I glance down the entries a name hits me in the eye, a name in a neat but immature hand—Veronica Hornbill. It comes four times.

I can picture the set-up fairly clearly. I am somewhere between eight and twelve. My sister, whose hair is getting ready to go up, and myself have been driven to a young people's dance by Coddington, with the back of whose neck we have been connected by speaking tube. Carnations and gypsophila in a slender silver vase and a tasselled blind at the back conspire to make leaving the car even more harrowing than leaving home. Nothing has come of my suggestion that we should take a short cut through Black Devil Bog.

For the last furlong we have proceeded between fairy lights, and now we are ushered into a house that would just about stupefy the young people of to-day. In one direction our way is barred by great copses of chrysanthemums, in another by mountainous mousses. In the conservatory are provocative little palm-girt alcoves lit by Chinese lanterns. We are glared at through lorgnettes and half blinded by



tiaras. It is quite possible that one of us will get misled in the clock tower on the way back from the cloakroom.

An angel glittering with pins takes my regulation overcoat. I know that she is the last person I shall talk to for the next four hours without a sense of strain. We are late (the entries begin at number six), so with luck we shall not be announced, which will stave off the moment when I am paired off with one of the poor things whom nobody, after carefully sifting the evidence, has asked to dance.

In the hall I am handed a programme—this very one. With it I am supposed to buzz from girl to girl, many of them no doubt in the very act of laughing into the eyes of large men, and beg them for dances. But I am not on that sort of terms with any of the people here. My only proper friends outside the family are Nannie and a kindly old retired General. Besides, no one will have anything to offer now except the second extra. As for the little dusky-trusty-vidid-true types with coral necklaces, they seem to come with their programmes already filled up, so presumably if one wants to dance with one of them one communicates by post.



"IT'S A VERY NICE BLOCK OF FLATS, BUT THEY'VE TAKEN A LONG TIME TO BUILD IT."

When my sister shows up there is a onestep going on, so I drag her into the ballroom and push her round like a pram. I have given up trying to apply the principles learnt at Miss Congerhill's dancing class. Unless you keep completely clear of your partners you continually get implicated in what they have learnt at their dancing classes, and anyway it's all so different without Miss Congerhill's record of "Yes, we have no bananas."

While we are sitting out, Jumbo Carstairs, or one of that crowd, comes and whisks my sister away. Oh, roll on the day when I can say "Thankee" and have platinum studs and patent-leather hair like Jumbo Carstairs! This is one of the moments I have been dreading most. I cannot go on sitting out by myself. I haven't the gumption to settle down in the library with *Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour* like the Mullins boy or to go and hobnob with all the Coddingtons below stairs. The only alternatives are to hurry about craning my neck in search of an imaginary partner or to make a bolt for the grounds.

But it seems that I get no option. People are lying in wait for me, wanting to know if I have met Veronica Hornbill. Yes, I have met Veronica. I am usually introduced to her at about this point. She doesn't enjoy dances any more than I do. At home she probably jogs along as happily with her bull-terrier (we never speak but I sense a very old bull-terrier) as I do with my cigarette-cards and my secret potato plot. But here we both have Persecution Mania. We are enemies of society and of each other. It would be difficult to think up a more frightful fate for us than dressing us up, joining us together and driving us into the arena to dance the Black Bottom; unless perhaps it would be forcing us to sit out together in a palm-girt alcove without any prospect of being able to get away from each other.

On this occasion we stay together right through supper until number ten when V. Hornbill gives place to P. Ottingshed. Number eleven I have with my sister, and for number twelve, a polka, I engage with a Mrs. Waddilove. It is quite a common thing for me to have the polkas with large, warm women who propose



"OF COURSE WE REALLY ONLY BOTHER WITH CHRISTMAS FOR THE CHILD'S SAKE."



"HENRY'S TERRIBLY GOOD AT MAKING THINGS OUT OF OLD TELEVISION SETS."

themselves. They wear tortoise-shell combs in their hair that drop out during the dance and quantities of black net that I am given sheaves of to hold.

Number thirteen—V. Hornbill. Number fourteen—H. Othouse, followed by Sir Roger de Coverley which evidently causes most of my shyness to evaporate as I take part in all the last four dances without once having recourse to my sister. The names of my partners are J. Gaynor, C. Bow, B. Balfour and, for the gallop, M. Pickford.

Oddly enough, though, what I remember most vividly about those dances (apart from the potting sheds and the hot-houses) are the loose boxes, the apple rooms and, in one macabre instance, the Elizabethan maze during a deluge. Another interesting thing is that if, as sometimes happens even to-day, I am handed a programme at a dance, I start, stagger back, sag at the jaw and wobble at the knees exactly as though I am reviving the Charleston.

## NEVER LET THE FANCY ROAM

When I went up to the lumber-room the other day, to find something for a jumble-sale, I knew very well that I should be there for some time. It has happened before. Sure enough, the ten minutes that would have seen a better man on his way downstairs with a telescope, a solitaire board and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were just sufficient to find me comfortably seated on a pile of *Dictionaries of National Biography*, reading *The Swiss Family Robinson*.

I had first settled down to consider whether a pair of fishing waders, fifteen years old, twice refooted and leaking like sieves, would be held to flout the Law of the Jumble. A really resourceful purchaser, I reflected, would have them as good as new in next to no time, by simply dipping them into a cauldron of boiling rubber. He would need some sand and a good deal of clay, I learned from *The Swiss Family Robinson*, which I found after a long search, wrapped up, for some incomprehensible reason, in an old table-tennis net. I was foolish to dip into it, of course. Most of

us live rather sheltered lives nowadays, and for my part it has never come my way to rub the interior of a condor with pepper. My sun has long passed its meridian, and in the natural order of things I can now hardly expect that such an experience will be vouchsafed to me. The next best thing is to read about it, but I confess that I find it exceedingly difficult to leave the Robinson family sitting down to a couple of bear's paws, well soaked in brine, without ascertaining the outcome, if I may so put it. However, in half an hour or so I was back to the business in hand. Unfortunately, it is pretty well impossible to brood over a pair of waders for a moment without recalling the last occasion on which they were worn, particularly when that occasion has been marked by the loss of the only salmon one has ever hooked.

As I sat, living once more that memorable encounter, it occurred to me that few of my fishing experiences would, if thrown on to paper, read so prettily as most of the specimens of angling literature that have so far come my way. ("McCrumple was ready with the gaff, and without hesitation he lifted out a fine cock fish, bright as new silver, of some thirty pounds weight.") On this particular occasion, for instance, it cannot be denied that there were two highlights at any rate that would look pretty odd in print. These might be referred to as "The Keeper's Question" and "The Fall Among the Clergymen."

In most of my angling literature keepers, gillies and so on limit themselves to an occasional "Cannily, cannily, your Grace," or perhaps a "Haud up, General, or he'll be ower the fa'!" One at least has been known to exclaim, rather censoriously, "He *wouldna'* go!" I was fishing alone (I would dearly like to add "on this occasion," but truth will out—I always do) and it was quite by chance that the keeper arrived, some ten minutes after I had hooked my salmon. The following dialogue ensued:

*Myself.* "I'm into a salmon!"

*Keeper.* "Did you get that bag at Higginson's?"

One would have thought that the man might have had the sense to exclaim "Guid sakes, mon, haud up!" or something of the kind, but there it is.

A little later, when I should, I



"I'LL GIVE YOU A HAND. GET ME SOME MATCHES——"

suppose, have been coolly applying side-strain, or sliding rings of twist tobacco down my line, I found myself forcing my way backwards through some bushes as I retreated up the bank. My plan was to coax the fish towards the side, when the keeper might, I thought, flounder into the water and pull it out by the tail: silver or cupro-nickel, it mattered nothing to me, and anything over seven pounds would have been splendid. So great was my concentration that before I knew where I was I found myself in the middle of a party of clergymen who had been watching the struggle. Apologizing awkwardly (I had trodden on several toes, and my landing-net, the handle of which I was for some reason holding between my teeth at the time, had knocked off someone's hat), and keeping a tight line on my fish as best I could, I burst my way out of the group, only to trip and roll some way down the bank. "He's off!" I cried.

Now of course all this, except perhaps the last exclamation, would make a pitiful show in print. Did literary anglers, I wondered, never have such experiences? Lord Grey of course, in his fine book *Fly Fishing*, touched on something of the kind—"The salmon made a sudden recovery, and dashed down between my legs"—"In stretching down to get my net under the fish I fell flat in the water"—but such frankness is rare.

By the time I had finished with *Fly Fishing*—and perhaps I should make it quite clear that I did *not* find it in the lumber-room—it was growing dark. I switched on the light and looked about me once more. A few condensers, resistances and inductances wired clumsily to a dry battery, together with a pair of headphones, turned my thoughts to the war and to one of the blunders committed by the Government at the outset, hitherto unpublished—the attempt to make me into a wireless mechanic. At the time I was with the Government heart and soul. It seemed to me that although I had not been able to attain prominence in my chosen calling I might yet make my mark on the national life through the medium of wireless telegraphy. As in a dream I saw myself slapping Marconi on the back and correcting his wiring diagrams. "Where are your double-diode triodes, man?" I would chaff him. It was after I had completed the first part of my course that I bought these components. Like De Quincey, in his first experiment with opium, "what I took, I took under every disadvantage." Nevertheless, within an hour I was able to hear voices—faint, it is true, but unmistakable. Unfortunately, in this first great flash of brilliance it seemed that I had burned myself out. The next part of the course involved soldering. Where Marconi was no doubt upheld by a mystical faith in his destiny, however beadily his solder ran, I became discouraged. As Keats wilted beneath the attacks of his critics—not of course about soldering, as far as I know—so it was with me. I lost heart.

The wireless parts were resting on some piano music, and I had hardly turned over a selection from "Funny Face" before I found myself closeted with Sir Malcolm Sargent and Yehudi Menuhin. Sir Malcolm was weeping openly and Menuhin was shaking me by the hand, his face working. I had played something or other—the

first part of the "Moonlight" sonata, I should imagine. "I want you with me in Holst's 'Planets,' " Sir Malcolm was saying brokenly.

I suppose I was in the lumber-room for about three hours, with nothing to show for it but a broken coal-scuttle. I shall be firmer another time.

## January, 1951

### SECOND HALF OF THE CENTURY

**I** MAKE it a rule, at the beginning of every half-century, to practise divination. Readers like to know what is in store for them, within limits. But it's hard pounding nowadays. Crystals are up again, and it's too cold for astrology. One has to fall back, not without relief, on older methods.

No public statue has recently run blood. This is a good thing in its way, though inconclusive; and I state it on the authority of a policeman who tapped me on the shoulder in Trafalgar Square while I was marking out, with my wand, that part of the heavens within which I intended to make my observations of the flight of birds. It is important to get this part marked out accurately, and one should also, strictly speaking, pitch a tent before beginning to observe, but this, after some talk with the policeman, I forbore to do. In return he answered my question about the public statues with a civil enough negative, and then moved on.

I observed eleven thousand six hundred and nine birds to my right and rather more to my left, but drew no conclusions, since to the first-class augur only the eagle, crow, vulture, raven, owl and hen are significant. I also kept simultaneous watch for such portents as lightning, the appearance of shields in the sky or a fall of stones or milk, but saw nothing. This, again, was evidence of a purely negative kind, and meant only that business could be carried on as if nothing had happened—as, of course, augurally speaking, it had.

Haruspication I confess I set no great store by. After one quick inspection of the entrails of a goose, which left me soothless, I passed on to botanomancy.

All you have to do to be a botanomancer is to write words on fallen leaves and see what chance combinations the action of the wind makes of them. Experiment has shown me that the writing of words on leaves is, to some extent, a lost art; but eventually I got "War," "Peace" and "Russia" scratched out, or in, and let them loose down the Old Kent Road. Perhaps anyone who finds them will kindly send them to me with a note of time and place, their relative positions each to each, and any other significant details, e.g., any herons seen, whether it was raining blood at the time, etc., etc.? But please do not send unmarked leaves. I have plenty.

Despairing of seeing flames appearing at the points of spears, which would have given me a genuine lead, I spent several unprofitable days feeding pulse to chickens in the hope that some of the food would fall from their beaks. From the sound of the pulse as it strikes the earth it is possible for a man of my education to make reliable prognostications; but this lot of birds were the cleanest feeders I have

come across in fifty years. So I fell back on divination *ex diris*, which includes the interpretation of "such minor accidents as sneezing, stumbling, twinkling of the eyes and tinkling of the ears." I was stumbling along Piccadilly, sneezing and twinkling my eyes and tinkling (so far as I was able at short notice) my ears, when I felt a tap on my shoulder and heard a familiar voice ask "What's the meaning of this?"

"It means," I told this ædile, "that the second half of the twentieth century is likely to be ushered in with a thundering cold in the head; and whether it thunders on the left or the right is a matter of complete indifference to me."

This prediction has proved correct in all particulars.

## JACKET MESS

"On Thursday, when we last wore mess undress uniform," said Mooney, "we played skittles in the bowling alley of the Mess, recapturing our youth, all twelve of us. For this purpose we removed our mess jackets, arranging them in a neat heap on a bench in the alley."

"That is so," said Purbright.

"We were of the same rank and branch of the Navy, and our mess jackets bore the same lace and distinction cloth."

"Just so," said Purbright.

"In fact the only method of distinguishing between one mess jacket and another was by examination of miniature medal ribbons."

"No," said Purbright, keenly, his hand going to the inside pocket of his mess jacket. "There is the name inside."

"You are not quite right," said Mooney. "I have had occasion to give the matter thought. Officers' mess







"I'M SORRY, BUT HE'S AT LUNCH."

jackets are seldom marked with the names of their owners. Mine, for example, belonged to my wife's godfather and contains the name 'P. Smith,' and the date 'December 1912.'"

Purbright's hand came away again. "I see," he said.

"But the mess jacket that I'm wearing," said Mooney, "has the name 'L. T. Ripple' inside, and the date 'January 1940.' It has the feel of a mess jacket made in a hurry for a thin officer."

"That sounds like Cranmer. He was playing skittles on Thursday. He might have picked yours up."

"My name in vain?" asked a thin officer, peering down at Purbright and Mooney in their armchairs.

"Your mess jacket

seems a little loose on you this evening," said Purbright.

"Funny you should say that," said Cranmer. "It *has* changed in some way since last Thursday, or else I've shrunk."

"What makes you think you earned the Burma Star during the recent war?" asked Mooney.

"I didn't," said Cranmer. "Why do you ask?"

"You've got it on," said Mooney. Cranmer looked at his chest. "These aren't mine at all," he said. "Someone must have switched ribbon-brooches with me." He gazed lugubriously at Purbright. "Unpinned my brooch and pinned on another. A gun-room trick: almost a jape."

"What decorations *do* you own?" asked Mooney.

"1939-1945 Star; Atlantic, Africa and Pacific Stars; Defence and Victory Medals," said Cranmer, after a little thought. "I've travelled a good deal, you know; you should see the labels on my suitcase."

Mooney pointed to the brooch on the mess jacket he was wearing himself. "How would these do?" he asked.

Cranmer polished his spectacles, replaced them and looked. "That's a very

curious coincidence," he said. "We must have covered the same ground. We might discuss our exploits over a bottle one evening. Unfortunately this evening I——"

"You don't think," suggested Mooney, "that perhaps I'm wearing your mess jacket and ribbons?"

"Dear me, no," said Cranmer, "I know you too well, Mooney. You would not do a thing of that sort."

"You don't think," suggested Mooney, "that perhaps you are wearing my mess jacket and ribbons?"

Cranmer sat down in a third armchair. "That would be unlike me," he said. "I have a strong sense of *meum* and *tuum*."

"I did not mean that you would do it deliberately," said Mooney.

"You mean that I might have done it accidentally?"

"Yes," said Mooney.

"How?"

"In the skittle alley last Thursday."

"That was a guest night, was it not?"

"Yes," said Mooney.

"Well, then, old man, it's a probability," said Cranmer, who was at last allowing his mind to work. "This stirring collection of ribbon on my breast, could it be yours?"

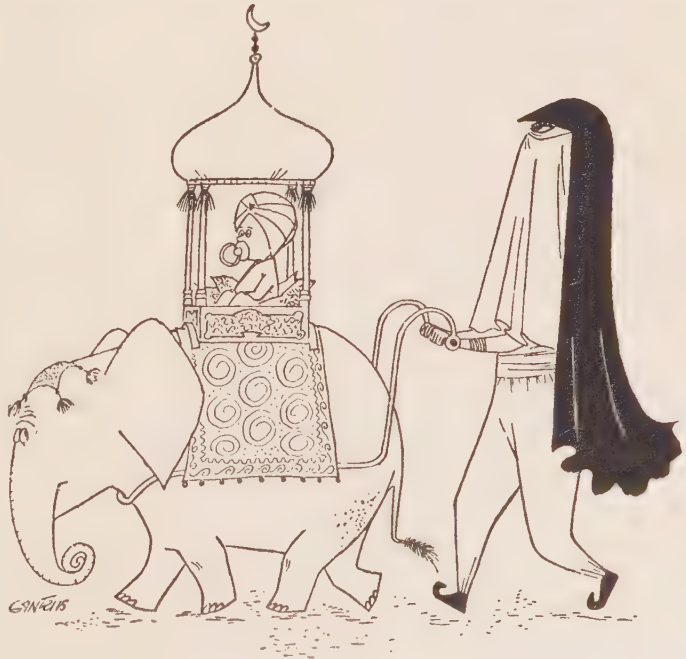
"It could, exactly," said Mooney.

"It could be mine too," said Purbright.

"Don't obscure the issue, Purbright," said Mooney. "Cranmer, what name should there be inside your mess jacket?"

Cranmer plunged deep into thought. "L. T. Ripple, January 1940," he said at last. "Not Pelmanism; just a knack I have," he added.

Mooney and Cranmer rose to their feet and began to take off their mess jackets. An admiral, passing through the ante-room, paused at Purbright's chair and leaned over him, his eyes alight. "Don't get up," he said softly. "But if either of them wants a second, let me know. Nothing I enjoy better than a good set-to."



"Aye, aye, sir," said Purbright. The admiral passed on

Cranmer, comfortably inside his own mess jacket, smiled at the other two. "Well, then, thank you very much," he said, and followed the admiral out of the room.

Purbright examined Mooney. "Your mess jacket is not a very good fit, if I may say so," he said.

"After all," replied Mooney, "it was made in 1912, only a century after the retreat from Moscow; you can't expect too much of it." He wriggled his shoulders, and doubt appeared on his face. "You really think it doesn't look right?"

"It's not quite you," said Purbright. "Why don't you have a look at the name-tab?" Mooney stared at him. His hand went to his inside pocket and he began to twist the name-tab outwards. He stopped suddenly. "Purbright," he said, "just now you said yourself that your ribbons were the same as mine."

Purbright protested. "I was only shoving my oar into troubled waters," he said.

"All the same," said Mooney, "you might have a look at your name-tab."

They both looked. Mooney spoke first. "'P. Purbright, September 1933,'" he said. "'P. Smith,'" said Purbright, "'December 1912.'" He blushed.

The two officers stood up and began to remove their mess jackets. The admiral, returning through the mess, caught sight of them and paused wistfully for a moment before passing on. "There seems," he was later heard to tell the commander, "to be a fine spirit amongst your officers."

## HOME LAUNDRY

The first thing my wife and I did when soap came off the ration was to go out and buy a huge stock of soap powder. I really don't know why; we had never taken up our full ration.

It was probably the possession of these vast stocks that led, a good deal later, to our second action, which was to buy a home laundry. It seemed a pity not to use the soap powder now we had it, and anyway we had been resenting the weekly laundry bill bitterly for years.

"The washing machine is only two pounds a month for a year, not counting the deposit," said my wife, "and the laundry bill comes to more than that."

This was perfectly true. I had gone into the matter of those bills with my wife frequently. Regularly once a week, in fact.

Naturally, we could hardly wait to start saving money, and the moment the washing machine was installed we went around the house collecting soiled linen to wash. The machine was very simple. You filled it with hot water up to the Plimsoll mark, added soap powder, put in the clothes, and switched on. A kind of little waterwheel at one side churned the water and revolved the clothes. The only

difficulty was in the weight of the wash. It seemed important, going by the instructions-card, to have three and a half pounds of laundry, and neither of us was much good at guessing the weight of clothes. We had to fetch the kitchen scales. We adjusted our maiden wash with the scrupulousness of a chemist making up a prescription, taking out an eight-ounce shirt and substituting a five-ounce one, and adding half-ounce handkerchieves one by one until the scales were balanced.

Three and a half pounds took four minutes, and my wife and I were both in a fever of anxiety in case we gave the wash too long and it was overdone. We didn't take our eyes off our watches until the four minutes were up, and then we bumped our heads jumping to switch off.

After we had put the stuff through the mangle attached (taking turns with the handle) we found our old laundry book and worked out how much we had saved. It came to 8s. 9d., with the authorized increase. It was the first time we had ever liked that authorized increase.



"ANNIVERSARY OR POWER CUT?"

"There you are!" said my wife. "That's very nearly the first week's cost of the machine paid for already."

"Let's pay for the first week altogether," I suggested, regarding the machine hungrily. It really was most fascinating.

So we put in the eight-ounce shirt after all, and found some more soiled linen—not quite so soiled—and brought our savings up to 15s. 4d.

"Only another 4s. 8d. to make up the pound!" murmured my wife.

We made it up to a guinea, and only stopped then because there wasn't anything left to wash. By that time I was stripped down to my vest.

The next day looked like being awfully dull without any washing to do. However, very fortunately, some of the washing we'd done the day before fell off the clothes airer on to the kitchen floor. It didn't get dirty, but we agreed we'd better wash it again, just to be on the safe side. This brought our total up to £1 5s. 8d., which was highly gratifying.

By the end of the first week we had run out of soap powder, and had saved £4 1s. 10½d. In other words, as I pointed out, we could be buying four home laundries instead of just one, and still be saving money. If there was a drawback, it was that I was having to spend a good deal of time in my dressing-gown, because I never seemed to have a dry shirt.

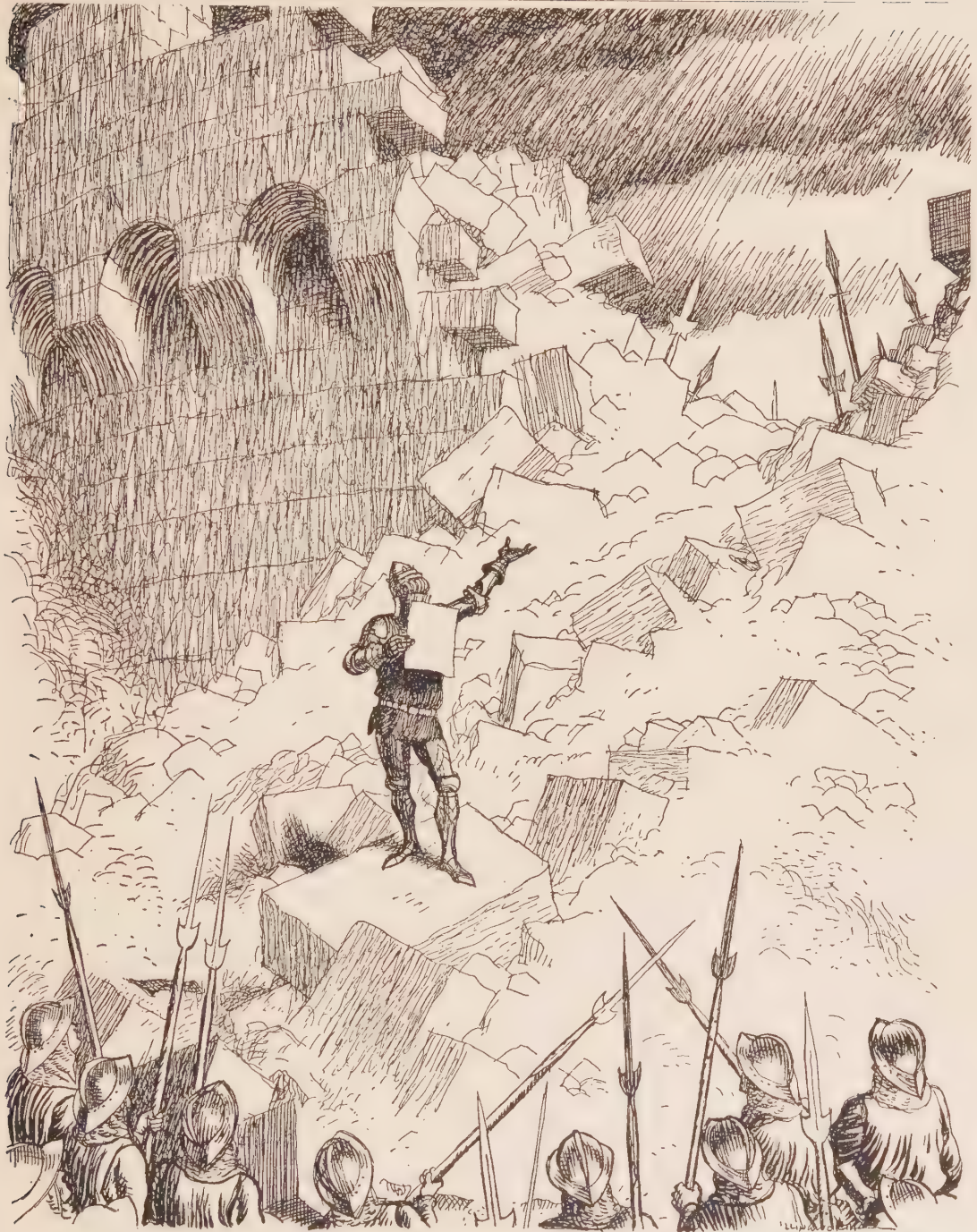
At the end of the second week (£7 2s. 4d.) the laundry sent a representative round to inquire plaintively what they had done to offend us? My wife triumphantly told him we had our own laundry now, and untruthfully added that we had already paid for it with what we had saved. She insisted on taking him out to the scullery to give him a demonstration. He went home with his pullover wrapped up in a damp paper parcel, and my wife and I had rather an argument about whether that was another shilling we had saved or not.

Our aim now, of course, is to cover the entire cost of the machine as quickly as possible, so that we can settle down to making an actual profit. . . .

## CONVERSATION WITH A BUTCHER'S CASHIER

Lady in the glass gazebo,  
Overalled in sober green,  
What departed glories haunt you  
On this modern, meatless scene?

*Sometimes on a winter's evening  
When the power is ebbing low  
Phantom porkers, pale and portly,  
Dance before me, row on row.*



LEADERSHIP.

"I AM AFRAID I SHALL HAVE TO ASK YOU, SUBJECT TO THE USUAL SAFEGUARDS, AND RETAINING, OF COURSE, OUR NORMAL STANDARDS OF LIVING, TO STEP ONCE MORE, HOWEVER GINGERLY, INTO THE BREACH."

*Legs of lamb are seen suspended  
Where the alien rabbit hangs;  
Sides of beef crowd in upon me  
In phantasmagoric gangs.*

*Ectoplasmic steaks and sirloins  
Fill the air, while on the phone  
Ghostly voices ask for "Something  
Nice for Sunday—not much bone."*

*Briskets bloom in plump profusion,  
Kidneys overflow their bowls:  
Spectral chauffeurs shuffle past me,  
Caring cutlets to the Rolls.*

Lady in the glass gazebo,  
Come, I pray you, back to earth;  
Give me change and let me hurry  
Home with my tenpennyworth.

## SWEET ARE THE USES OF ADVERTISEMENT . . .

Few who meet Oswald Prawle to-day would believe that he was once a failure. "Publicity Prawle" they call him in Fleet Street, and he is a popular figure in the City and in Whitehall. But it was not always so.

I have been his neighbour for twenty years and remember when he was trying to carve out a career for himself with the Manchester Sundial Company. It was his first attempt at publicity and cut little ice. A year or so later he was advertising the Samson Steamhammer; his material did not lack punch, but it made little impact on the man in the street. Then he launched Toffco, a patent beverage that combined the qualities of tea, coffee and cocoa, but, apart from some limited success with the railways, that too fell flat. His friends thought he was getting somewhere when he became publicity chief to Magnopulent Cinemas, but even that colossus could not survive his slogan "A Magnopulent show is a family show," and was in liquidation inside two years.

When war came Prawle did some obscure Government information job—on visual displays, I think. And then after four or five years his opportunity came, with the new negative advertising that he has made so much his own. No one had failed to sell so many things. No one knew better how not to sell the goods the manufacturers could not supply. For two or three years he never rested. He



"THANK GOODNESS—GRANNY'S SLEEPING LIKE A CHILD!"

handled big campaigns for a score of great firms simultaneously in a manner that soothed the public, flattered the manufacturers and brought him handsome returns.

You will remember the campaign for Kumfytred Carpets: "No, you can't buy a Kumfytred yet, but in two years there will be a pile to choose from . . ." There was his imaginative series for Wee Angus Whisky: "Say when! This year, next year, some time . . ." His work on lawn mowers was typical: "You won't let the grass grow under your feet when you have a Quickcut Mower (delivery three years) . . ."

In the halcyon days of 1945 and 1946 everything went Prawle's way. He advertised toffees, biscuits, tinned fruits, all with appetizing illustrations and nostalgic patter: "One day rationing will be over and you will be able to buy these delicious things. Do you remember their luscious flavours? How the kiddies loved them!"

Of course, it couldn't last. When supplies improved, things looked black for Prawle. He seemed to be slipping back into obscurity. Six months ago all he had on hand was his contract with the Vixen motor people ("The long years of waiting are years of pleasurable anticipation if it's a Vixen . . .") and some odd jobs for the meat trade. Life was getting tough again.





"HE WON'T GIVE YOU ANY MORE UNTIL YOU TELL HIM  
IT'S DELICIOUS."

seen his crisp, bright reminders in the "Think of Zinc" series.

Yes, rearmament is going to owe a lot to Oswald Prawle—and he is going to owe a lot to rearmament, unless I am much mistaken. I am told his overdraft has been paid off, and my wife, who notices these things, says that a washing machine, three dust-bins and five galvanized buckets have been delivered at his house this week.

## THE MATERNAL TOUCH

My mother wrote and said that whenever any of my friends were travelling near my home she would love to see them, so when Harry Jones had to spend a few days up north on business I gave him my address and he stayed with my mother and father.

My mother wrote on the last day of his visit. Harry was *such* a nice young man. So easy to entertain and very intelligent. My mother was pleased that I knew such a nice young man.

And now everything has suddenly changed and Prawle is back on top of the world. I have seen some of the stuff on which he is hard at work. We shall all be reading it before long.

"Don't let them pull the wool over your eyes. Stocks are shrinking. That suit will last you another year."

"See things clearly. A man of vision puts the nation's radar before his own television."

"Ease up on leather. Shoes are getting tight. Try some wooden 'Cloggies.' Quite like old times."

For the moment his most urgent task is the non-ferrous metals economy drive. I dare say you have read his dignified pieces in the dailies and admired their urgent patriotic note. "A copper shortage would imperil the peace and lay our hearths and homes open to the intruder . . ." And on the posters you will have

She showed him our photographs and he loved the one of me when I was four, paddling at the seaside with my dress tucked inside my knickers. He said she's changed, hasn't she? And my mother said yes, isn't it a pity? And he said oh, do you think so? And my mother said yes, I think they are so much more interesting at that age. And he said oh.

Another picture he liked showed me at seven dressed for a fancy dress party as a daisy with two front teeth missing. My mother wouldn't forget that party as long as she lived. Did I remember how I came home with only half my petals and another tooth missing? And it was still no good my trying to say that Mavis Harper started it because my mother knew Mrs. Harper and she was a very nice woman. Mrs. Harper had given my mother a jar of home-made jam only the very morning before the party.

Then Harry said it was strange how well you could know people and have no idea what they were like as children. And my mother said well, possibly, but she didn't think people changed as much as all that. She knew I hadn't, anyway. And Harry said hasn't she? And my mother said no, she hasn't. And Harry said in what way hasn't she changed? And my mother said oh, all sorts of silly things she used to do she still does. And Harry said what things? So my mother told him about some of the things I used to do. She wasn't going to go into details in this letter, though, because she was sure I could guess what she told him. (I can.)

Then she asked him if his mother worried about him, living by himself in London. He said he didn't know. So my mother said of course she did. All mothers did. Gambling, for one thing. And wool, for another. Did his mother worry about wool, like she did? Harry *ought* to wear wool. He would remember it when he was an old man and had to have a nurse because he had been silly when he was a young man and hadn't listened to his mother when she wanted him to be sensible about his underwear.

Then Harry said he thought he would go to bed early because he had a busy day ahead. Wasn't that sensible?



"YOU WERE TOP IN FRENCH, SHIRLEY. LET'S HEAR YOU ASK HIM WHETHER HE'S ALL RIGHT."

The following evening she wanted to show Harry some of the things I made at school, but couldn't find them. Where were they? *What had I done with them?* There were several pieces of needlework, my mother remembered—she knew she had used only the most impossible things as dusters. Where was the needlecase on which I had embroidered "for your nee"? However, she had found some of my paintings and Harry had been most impressed. He said that what he admired most was my feeling for colour and design. He said they showed courage and a splendid disregard for bourgeois convention. He said they reminded him of my hats. Wasn't that nice?

Altogether Harry's visit had been very pleasant. He was leaving that afternoon and she would be sorry to see him go. She had given him a bottle of tonic and a woolly scarf for the snow. She thought he would be getting in touch with me when he got back to town.

And I expect he will.

## URBAN ADVENTURE

I was churning the butter-milk when Ephraim came in from the byre. I took one look at my lord and master and asked what was going on behind that marble brow. When he told me I just leaned against the separator and gasped. If you please, we were going to give up farming and live miles away from everything in town! We Padgetts knew as much about city life as a brindled foal knows about phosphates; every single name in the family Bible, a first edition, has been good country stock. Why should I lay myself open to every silly mistake I could? Then Ephraim just smiled that deep, slow smile of his and I knew why.

We had several replies to our advertisement in *The Fat Stock Breeder*, but as soon as we saw "Ventnor," Prospect Road, Lambeth, we knew this was it. It was the middle villa of a terrace, and I vowed that before I had finished it would be perfect. Mr. Parr, a dealer in the district, was almost as enthusiastic about our plans as we were. He found us some linoleum that was just the right age to go with the stained glass in the fanlight and a deal hat-stand that had once, he said, been in the villa next door. For curtains I used cheese-muslin, looped and ruched so that it looked just like the real thing. Some of the farm furniture only needed a coat of varnish before it was right. Ephraim made window-boxes out of an old feeding-trough and planted a thin row of wallflowers and geraniums round the foot of the bay window. At the back was a paved yard, with some bits of corrugated iron and coke in it. How we laughed when I innocently remarked "Poor grazing!" We got the carrier to bring up an old hip-bath from the farm and half-filled it with broken breeze blocks; then we trailed a clematis over it, and Mr. Parr sold us a bent bicycle frame and a couple of tyres. I arranged them together and soon, with a

couple of halters stretched out to make clothes-lines, we had the back of the villa looking as good as the front.

I don't mind admitting that my eyes were moistish when we moved, as Ephraim gee-upped the horses and Prodd's Acre receded among the trees. However, when we got to Lambeth there was so much to do I had no time for moping. The bees had decided to come with us and Ephraim had to turn to and knock them up a hive. I had never used a gas-cooker before and supper was *very* late that night. We certainly slept soundly, and as a slight fog made the dawn dark it was half-past five before we thought of stirring and I sent my lord and master out to get the milk. Unfortunately there was not very much, as the move had upset Marigold, who greatly resented the change from her cosy byre to the poky little bicycle-shed that was all we could offer her. When Ephraim drove her off to the Common to pasture she took pretty surly.

I knew I must hurry to get forward with the baking or the neighbours would arrive before I was ready. Down home they would come as far as ten or fifteen miles the day after a farm changed hands. I set out trestle tables in the front and back of the villa as well as using all the space inside. A housewife never gets over a reputation for being niggardly. Ephraim put on his town clothes, a frock-coat we had got from Mr. Parr and a



choker Gaffer Furth lent us that his grandfather had bought for a visit to Salisbury Assizes. I wore my flowery hat, my salmon satin and a gold locket with a twist of Fairy Bell's hair taken the year she won the silver medal at the show.

Back at home one of the first arrivals would have been Gaffer with his serpent to give us a tune. Of course we did have a piano—we knew enough about town life for that—but neither of us could play. We should just have to rely on the neighbours. We learned the words of "Knocked 'em in the Old Kent Road" and hoped for the best. Not a single neighbour came! One of the local children stood on the pavement opposite and called across that his Ma said we were letting the district down by setting up a stall, and that was all! We seemed to make no social progress. Whenever we passed a neighbour in the street we'd call out "What cheer, cock" or "Not 'arf," but all we got were cold looks.

To cheer Ephraim up I got a pin-table, and once we had mastered it we spent

hours playing this towniest of games. Suddenly I had an idea. We'd have a pin-table party and get some of the gang up from the village. We aimed to have it between haying and goosing, so that we'd have something to talk about through the winter. While we were fixing up the invitations, every week brought some new improvement to the villa—an aspidistra, a set of texts, a canary. Ephraim was all taken up with putting aërials on the roof and turning the cellar into a dive, so the time passed quite quickly, until at half-past six on the great morning the sound of Gaffer's serpent made us rush out into the road. There they all were, wains of them. We had to stand a good deal of chaff on our towny ways as they unloaded. Shepherd Thorple went off to the Common to leave his flock until he was ready to go back and the women piled up their contributions to the feast. Saul Oakes took the front railings down to give us more room for dancing and the Gyrth boys larked about everywhere.

What a day it was! As Granny Farthingale said, "Twelve hour o' eatin' and twelve hour o' merrymakin' dü be a fine vacation arter harvest." Several times neighbours looked by to pull long faces over our rumbustiousness; but the Gyrth boys drove them away with their hazing. When a Mrs. Hawkins complained that we were blocking up the street with the wains Ædward Gyrth said she reminded him of the old brown cow that got her nose in the pig-trough and Ælfred Gyrth pretended to think she was up for auction and cracked some jokes that made Granny Farthingale laugh so hard that she choked, though she wouldn't explain them to us young ones. It was a great moment when we produced the pin-table. It took a lot of time to teach them how it worked; but Gaffer nodded approvingly that it was real city-like and soon we were all hard at playing.

We felt sad when the visitors had to return home for milking and I rather wished I was going with them. One day, I knew, I should be going back to Prodd's Acre; but I was not done with town life yet awhile. I have lots more to tell about life at "Ventnor" and until I have got several books out of it I expect we shall be hanging on here. Crazy paving, the lodger, the donkey-barrow, oh, there's lots more material yet.

February, 1951

TURNING POINT FOR LUCY

'YOU'LL never guess!' said Mrs. Venner, sailing into the flatlet with an armful of groceries: "Lucy's downstairs again!"

I closed my eyes, and a tin of pineapple chunks rolled under the sideboard.

"That Rep at Gaunt-on-Sea," said Mrs. Venner, bending for the chunks and pouring rice in the fireplace, "gave her the pip in the finish, and no wonder. Know what they did?"

"No," I said.

"Put on *Macbeth*!" said Mrs. Venner.

I pouted sympathetically.

"And what d'you think?" she went on. "Half the costumes never turned up, and Lucy had to be Second Witch in an old frock of her Auntie Maud's. *Macbeth* wore chenille curtains with the rings still on, and his wife said she'd a good mind to accept an offer to tour *A Royal Divorce* in Australia, so they gave her her notice, and she screamed the place down. Banquo got in a huff because he only had one boot, and nobody cared, so he hid the cauldron for spite, and the witches had to use a coal-scuttle."

"The tomato sauce is under that chair," I said.

"Only eighty in on the Monday," said Mrs. Venner, retrieving the sauce and dropping a bag of sugar, "not counting the paper. They were up against Gregory Peck at the Odeon, and a hypnotist at the Pier Pavilion that made you stick pins in yourself without noticing. Thirty walked out and had it hi-ding-dong with the old lady in the box-office, because nobody knew their lines and their hats kept falling off. The old lady said it was an act of God, and kept the two-and-nines as calm as you like. Is that your tin of milk or mine?"

"Mine," I said.

"Then the local paper said it was a travesty, and the manager cancelled the adverts, and no one knew what was on. It's not good enough, is it?"

"No," I said. "Not really."

"I mean, you don't want to see *Macbeth* at all unless you're at your wits' end, but you do expect to see it proper, don't you?"

"Yes," I said.

"Anyhow, so many people left the company that they had to put on *Private Lives* without the maid. That was the last straw for Lucy, because she knows the maid backwards, French and all, so she in with her notice and left as well. And

if they don't send her basket on she's going to sue them, because it's got her cameo brooch in and a signed photo of Tyrone Power. Well, wouldn't you?"

"Yes," I said, "I suppose I would."

"Mind you," said Mrs. Venner, "she's not really worried. There was a bit in the paper where a big star said you shouldn't stay no longer than three years in Rep, because it'll do you no good after that. Get out then, she says, and go on in the West End. Good idea, isn't it?"

"Splendid," I said.

"Well, that's what Lucy's going to do. She didn't really want to, because she'll miss all her friends, and seeing the country and all. But if she must," said Mrs. Venner, opening the door with her elbow and backing out, "I suppose she'll have to. Cheerio."

"Cheerio," I said. And as I picked two lumps of sugar out of my turn-up a blithe voice carolled in the flat below that there is no business like show business.

### OCHRE

No colour I dislike as much as ochre,  
Dislike it even more, I think, than mauve.  
Once, I remember, when we lived at Hove,  
Our temporary handy-cook, Jim Coker  
(Used to be in the Merchant Navy—stoker),  
Left some concoction on the kitchen stove . . .  
It was, I think, a slice of slithy tove  
Boiled up with rancid butter, stirred with poker,

And thickened with some compound used for cleaning;  
The smell of it, remembered, makes me wince.  
Jim Coker said, against the mantel leaning,  
He'd thought up something out of last week's mince . . .  
Anyway, it was ochre, that's my meaning,  
And I've disliked the colour ever since.

### CONVERSATION AT THE MINISTRY

"Congratulations! I saw that little piece of yours in the *Evening Chronicle* yesterday. Jolly good."

"Oh, I'm glad you liked it."

"First rate. That must be the third of your things to appear in the papers in the last few weeks, isn't it?"

"Four actually, if you count the weeklies."



"I'LL STAY IN HERE TILL YOU COME, DEAR. THERE'S A MAN OUTSIDE WHO FRIGHTENS ME."

"Is it really? Excellent going. But the last one was the best, you know. You're obviously gaining in stature, old boy."

"Thank you."

"Yes, yes, brilliant. You don't happen to have a copy of it about you, do you? I'd like to read it again."

"As a matter of fact, I know it by heart. I spent a good deal of time on it, you know."

"Yes, I suppose you must have done. Let's hear it, then."

"If a ram under these Regulations appears to the person by whom the inspection is carried out to be suitable for the purpose of breeding from the flocks from time to time on designated land in any area specified in the first column of the schedule hereto, it may be marked by him on the hindquarters with the letter "A" not less than six inches in height in a suitable indelible green colouring matter."

"Delightful!"

"Of course the illustration helped a good deal. The P.R.O. usually sends one out with anything like that if he can."

"Quite. Still, it makes a stately recitation. I shall have to try and remember it for my little boy's birthday party. Were the rest of the regulations as good as that passage?"

"Well, my next paragraph, about unsuitable rams being marked with an 'R' in red——"





"I SUPPOSE THEY THINK THAT'S FUNNY."

"Well, old Tingling, in our department, naturally. He feels ousted, old boy. After all, he's been the Ministry specialist on this sort of thing for years. Not quite the same line as yours, of course. The legal angle."

"Tying the judges in knots, you mean? But don't you think that approach is just a little out of date? In the new conception of public service——"

"Old Tingling doesn't think so. He's pretty sarcastic about all this new-fangled newspaper work. And you've got to remember his splendid record. When you think that he did most of the best stuff in the Administration (Direction of Control) Regulations, the Control (Regulation of Administration) Directions, the Regulation (Control of Direction)——"

"And he doesn't like my stuff, eh?"

"His criticisms are pretty severe. He says you haven't begun to learn the job yet, not even mastered the use of the basic tools like 'shall have effect as if' and 'so, however, that.' And he detests your use of 'no account shall be taken of whether or not' so early in your paragraphs. Says it spoils the suspense."

"I see. And what does he think I should do about it?"

"Well, he's giving a series of lectures, you know, on fairly fundamental points like 'Hereinbefore and the Double Negative' and 'Deeming for the Purposes of.' He says——"

"Oh, lord, I know what those courses do to you. 'Prescribed percentage' means in relation to something or other the percentage which bears to the appropriate percentage specified in column two of the fourth schedule the same ratio as the aggregate of (a) something else and (b) something else bears to the aggregate of the wholesale cost of two more things during the bi-monthly accounting period immediately preceding——"

"Indelible?"

"Indelible, of course."

"And in the same place?"

"In the same place."

"And the papers didn't quote it?"

"Lack of space, I suppose. The P.R.O. was rather annoyed about it."

"Still, four in a row! I don't think we've had such a run of success for a long time. The Ministry's proud of you, old boy."

"Oh, well——"

"Of course, you know whose nose is out of joint, don't you?"

"No?"

"I say, that's not bad!"

"But that sort of stuff's finished, old boy. It's the *popular* appeal that counts now. Something lively, with a touch of fun, is what they want. Half a column in the evening paper is worth fifty baffled law lords these days."

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"Morale must be boosted, as the P.R.O. says."

"Oh, quite."

"Well, back to the public service. Got to pep up the old rearmament drive with a snappy reg. or two about zinc for Monday morning's papers."

"Lucky old public, eh?"

### THE POTTER CRITIC

"I'm doing very well," said Donald. "I'm a literary critic." Even after so many years he looked offensively prosperous.

"But I thought literary critics were people who couldn't find any more lucrative employment," I said, puzzled.

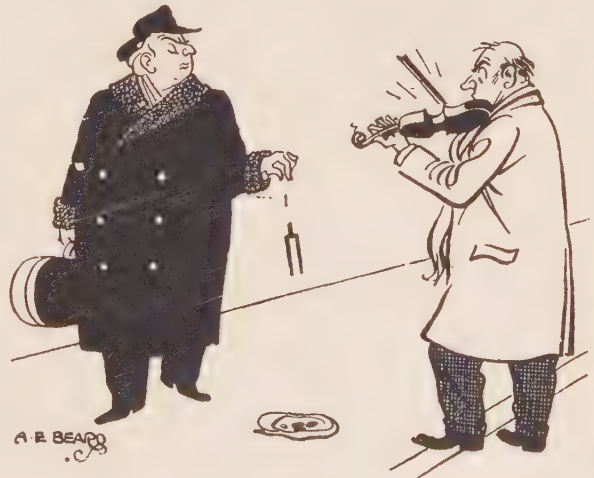
"We have our less successful brethren," Donald admitted. "But I've been fashionable."

"How do you become fashionable?"

"You grasp two elementary principles. First of all, you must break new ground. Secondly, Mr. Silas Nobody is not likely to make his name ring across the world by writing about Peasegood Nonesuch, a minor Caroline dramatist. Your activities must centre on some author millions of people have read.

"When I first grasped these principles my obvious choice was Lewis Carroll. I had made notes for an essay or two when I discovered that a modern critic had already

exposed *Alice in Wonderland* as a serious consideration of the Theory of Evolution. I could scarcely hope to compete with him, so I changed a few details in the notes I had made on *Alice*, and, under the name of Toastman Shiver, produced my book *Satire in Beatrix Potter*. In this work I established beyond reasonable doubt that certain characters in the Beatrix Potter books, hitherto accepted as innocuous, in fact represented political and ecclesiastical personages. This, being the only critical work on Beatrix Potter,



became standard, and the vast bevy of English reference libraries were forced to purchase one or more copies each. A surprising number of people, attracted by the dust-cover, gave it to their friends for Christmas.

"This was very pleasant, but clearly could not last. I therefore aimed at the world of scholarship with my next book, which contained various essays. 'The Universe of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle' was one, I remember. Then there was 'The Characterization and Motivation of the Foxy Gentleman.' These went down well



"JUST SITS THERE TOYING WITH HER FOOD."

*Pigling Bland—A Preliminary Study*, in which I first detected a note of despair in some of the Potter books.

"This was an immense success. The scholastic world seized upon certain undeveloped hints in it, of the existence of which I was not myself aware, and a fever of activity spread even to Australia. Perhaps the best item in the library of critical works that resulted was Harold Flash's *The Authorship of Peter Rabbit*, by which mankind was nearly convinced that Beatrix Potter could not be said to have written any but an inconsiderable few of the books that bear her name.

at the universities, and there was talk of setting a question on Beatrix Potter in one of the examinations for the B.A. (Honours) Degree. Sales died away, until the publication of an article in the quarterly *Literature*, by someone who called himself Thersites, which launched a vicious attack on my ideas under the title 'Johnny Town Mouse and Classical Legend.' This did not worry me, as I wrote it myself; but a piece of genuine opposition at the same time, Greencalf's *Who was Potter?* (University of Texas Press, \$2.05), made me realize how unnecessarily positive I had been up to that time. It is the tentative that has most fascination for the modern scholar. Nothing could have been more tentative than my next work, *The Approach to*

Last of them all came Gründel's painstaking *Über Den Wortschat der Potterschen Bücher.*"

"Marvellous!" I said. "Marvellous! And your sales continue?"

Donald looked less sure of himself. "As a matter of fact," he admitted, "they're falling off badly. And I can't find any new ideas."

"Never mind," I said. "Something will turn up."

It was about a year before I met Donald again. He was still prosperous, but not so offensive about it.

"My goodness!" he exclaimed. "You look well!"

"Oh, I'm not so bad," I said. "How are the sales going?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "My new book's selling fairly comfortably. But the old ones are out of date. It's all textual disintegration these days."

"Textual disintegration?"

"Yes. Some fellow called Pemrose Gravel found a line in *Timmy Tiptoes* that scanned. 'The little bird did not expect an answer,' or something similar. There were one or two sentences of the same sort in the other books: it all went to show that Beatrix Potter originally wrote her stuff in blank verse, then rewrote it in prose at some unknown date. I did fairly well, because I saw which way the wind was blowing and produced a book on the subject. But this fellow Gravel must have made a fortune." He paused suspiciously. "That's funny. His name's not unlike yours."

I regarded my finger-nails in silence.

Donald exploded. "You're mad!" he shouted. "Blank verse! She didn't write them in blank verse! Oh, heavens, some people will swallow anything! It's a good job there are still some honest literary critics about to make up for you sharks."

And off, for some strange reason, he stumped.

## IDEAS MAN

It was ten o'clock in the morning, and the dress circle bar was empty except for Mr. Brewitt. He was drooped thoughtfully over a model scene for *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which made a splash of colour on the dusty bar. When he heard Joe Doom's breathing ascending the stairs he sighed, but turned a bland face to the door.

"Mr. Brewitt," gasped the fat man, "it's the stunt of a lifetime. Came to me in the bath." He hung his hat on a beer-engine handle and closed in, panting. "What about something in writing, Mr. Brewitt?"

The other smiled affectionately. "Joe, dear boy," he said, "if it's as good as all that we shan't quarrel over the stipend, you know that."

Joe took several deep and rustling breaths, drew his finger along the counter non-committally and wiped it on his overcoat.

"Be a riot," he said.

"Good," said the other patiently; then, with a quick upward glint—"Not animals again?"

"Animals!" Joe's lip curled. "Why should you——?"

"I was thinking of that donkey ballet. When we opened at Wolverhampton——"

"We all make mistakes," said Joe. "But this is different."

"All right," said Mr. Brewitt, snapping his fingers in semi-humorous urgency. "Give, Joe, give. I've got to see twenty-four girls on the stage in five minutes."

"Okay," said the fat man. He took a soiled cigarette from an upper waistcoat pocket and lit it with deliberation. When the echoes of his coughing had died away among the decorated mirrors and dingy gilded nymphs, though the chandelier of



"I'VE WRITTEN 'CRAPAUD DANS LE TROU'—BUT IT DOESN'T LOOK QUITE RIGHT.

suspended glass strips still tinkled with a faint music, he crossed to the bar and hit it with his fist.

"Shakespeare on ice," he said.

He did not look to see the effect, but instead began to walk jerkily round the long room, examining, as if for the first time, the heavily framed photographs and their dedications in dashing but immature hands, "Yours to a cinder, The Three Quarantinis"; "All love, Toni"; "In all sincerity, Carstairs Dane." But he had never been capable of a sustained performance. He whirled round.

"Mr. Brewitt," he rasped, dashing a speck of foam from his mouth corner—"Mister Brewitt. It's got to come. Why not from Brewitt Productions? I've given you good wheezes in the past, ain't I? No, no, listen. Look at the pantos. On the go since the year dot, always a sure draw until now. And what's done 'em in the eye this year, eh? I'll tell you—pantos on *ice*! Public can't resist. Go flockin'. Ask Len Hogglemore about his take for the skating Whittington. Or Freddie Bloomer's Beanstalk. Twice nightly and three mat'nees, house-full boards every time. Just try and——"

"Joe," said Mr. Brewitt, who was studying the chandelier, "it's a——"

"Just try and see it, Mr. Brewitt, that's all. Don't go closing your mind to progress. You're a bigger man than that. I'm telling you, I been reading 'em in the liberry. Take the one where the comics hide in the 'edge while Malvonero glides up and down in his garters—or where they knock off Julius Cæsar, all swoop-at 'im on skates . . . No, no, listen. You know why the public stays away from Shakespeare? All talk and no action, that's why. Here's your answer. Take Hamlet. Try and picture it, Mr. Brewitt. Liven it up no end. Make all the difference. Get all the skatin' clubs in London there on block bookings. 'Ave a go on the stage in the intervals. Serve hot drinks, sixpence and ninepence. Be a goldmine. Take Roneo and Julia—now there's a subject. Roneo cutting figure-eights under the flipping casement, Julia with 'er——"

"No, Joe."

Mr. Brewitt had had to raise his voice, something he tried to avoid except on a dress-rehearsal night. The fat man, his mouth still being conveniently open, emptied his lungs in a long, scratchy exhalation, reserving just enough breath to echo hoarsely "No?"

"No, dear boy." Mr. Brewitt smiled a smile which could only have been described as doting. "Think of something else, eh?"

"Okay," rasped Joe. It was a whisper. He took up his hat and punched it thoughtfully as he went slowly to the door. There he turned and said "You'll not go using it, Mr. Brewitt, and not cut me in?"

"Don't worry. If you ever see the Bard on ice in one of my theatres you can sue me for all I've got."

"Okay," whispered the fat man. "I'll do that."

He pushed past a severe, middle-aged woman in black who was entering the

bar with a notebook, and the tumult of his breathing faded slowly down the stairs. The woman stood at the attention position, yet seemed poised as if on tip-toe.

"The girls are on the stage, Mr. Brewitt," she said.

Mr. Brewitt was once more drooping over the bright cardboard model. "When you do the costing for *The Importance*," he said evenly, "I want an estimate for mounting the production on skates."

"Ice or roller?" There was no hesitation, and her pencil moved as she spoke.

"Both," said Mr. Brewitt. "Thank you, Miss Twill. I'm just coming."

He ran the first and second fingers of his right hand glidingly about the miniature drawing-room, whistling softly between his teeth.

### JOLLY INTERESTING AND SCIENTIFIC

Well, yes, uncle, there *is* a bit of a mess. Actually, I'm stuffing an *Esox lucius*. A pike, you know. Stuffing him to look at in a glass case, I mean, not to eat.

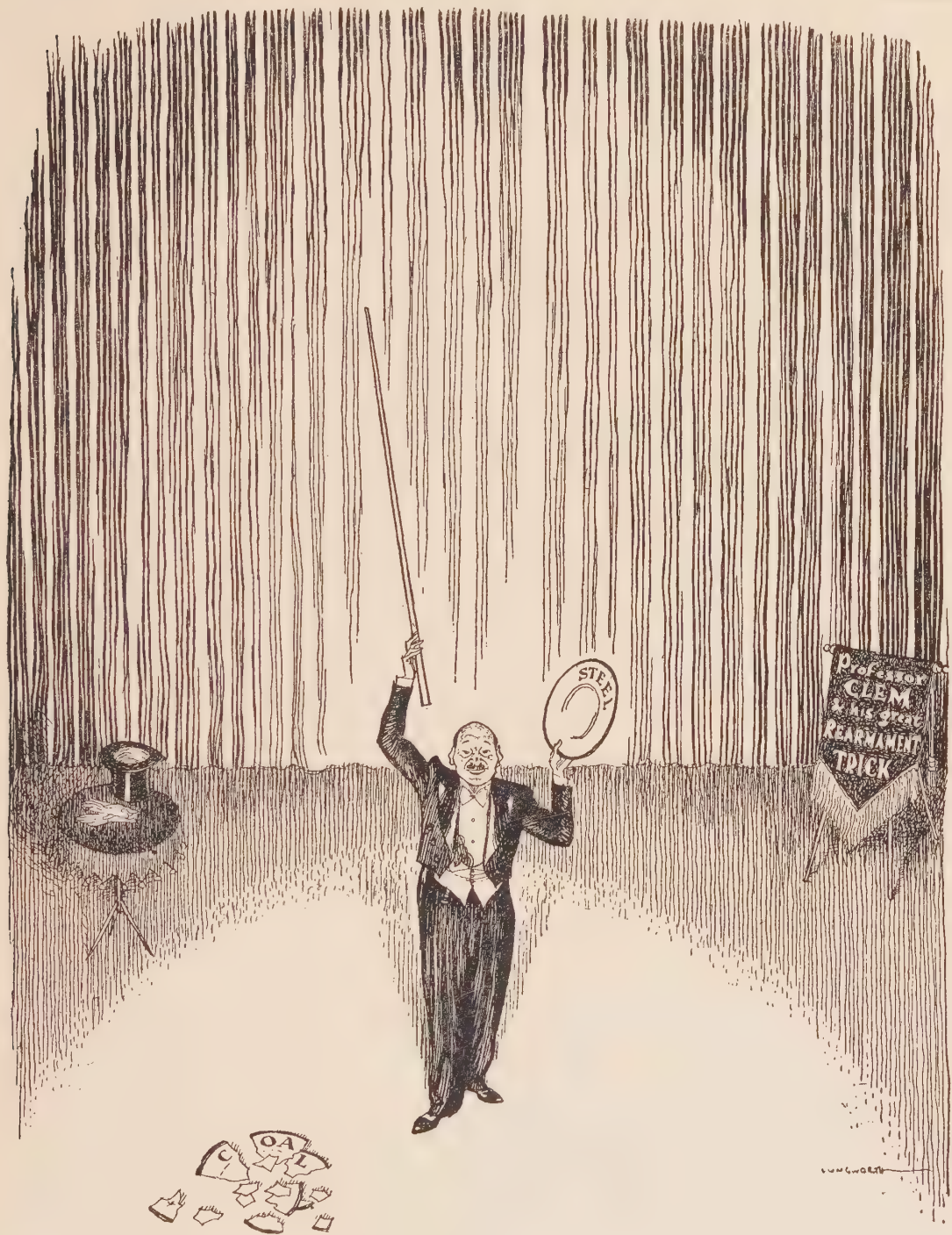
Jeremy and me caught him in the Upper Lake about a fortnight ago; at least, I caught him—Jeremy was only holding the rod when the float went under.

I'll show him to you in a minute, when I've got this paper chewed up. He's in the linen-cupboard, drying. He doesn't niff much, considering. He's just a hollow void, really, because we took all his works out with a grapefruit-knife. That's the first thing you have to do.

Well no, this paper doesn't taste *very* nice. But you have to get it really well chewed to make a papier mâché. Actually, a chap in a book I once read said you have to stuff fish with plaster of paris. But I haven't got the book now, and all I could remember was that it was something French. So I could only think of papier mâché. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* says it's "mashed or pulped paper." I tried doing it with a pistol and mortar, but that didn't seem to mash it awfully well. Then I remembered how wasps make their nests, so I started chewing it. Yes, the phone directory. I've eaten right through to page forty-seven, down to Air Transport Licensing Authority, so it would be an awful waste not to use it now. Besides, I don't know where to buy plaster of paris.

Of course, you have to preserve the old *Esox*, otherwise the moths and things get in and chew him up. I'm going to use formalin. Here, have a sniff . . .

Well, yes, I suppose it *does*, just a bit. You see, mummy said formalin was frightfully expensive, so I thought I'd make my own. The *Encyclopædia Britannica* says it's made of methyl alcohol under the action of hot copper. Methyl alcohol must be just methylated spirits and alcohol, otherwise it wouldn't be called that, would it? So we borrowed a little of daddy's gin—it was only the last inch or so in the bottle, and people never drink wine to the dregs, do they, because of the sentiment? We mixed it with meth. and then dropped in red-hot pennies. Gosh, it didn't half fizz!



"NOW, FOR MY NEXT ACT . . ."





"THIS WEATHER, I DAREN'T LEAVE IT OFF."

Doctor Grey saw us doing it in the garage and said it looked like a Japanning operation, or something. He's *bats*.

Oh, yes, there's the glass case, of course. Now that's going to need a bit of tact. Look, uncle, do you think you could sort of suggest to mummy that that old Van Whatsit cornfield picture in the garden room would look much better cut down a bit and put in a smaller frame? Then we could have the big frame, and the glass, for the front of my case. The rest's easy—just a hat-box. *Esax, Esax*, swimming in a hatbox.

I don't know about the weeds and things, though. I thought perhaps some iris leaves stuck in at the back would look pretty much like reeds. Perhaps I could starch them to stop them sort of wilting. Then I could varnish them with nail-varnish or something.

So you see, uncle, it's jolly interesting and scientific, really. Jeremy says that chaps who stuff animals for a profession make simply *pots* of money. I mean, in the end you kind of work your way up to lions and tigers . . .

What? Oh, with plaster of paris, I suppose. No, definitely not papier mâché.

Gosh, uncle, I think I feel a bit sick.

Well, I think that's about all there is to it. I mean, the actual *stuffing* will be child's play. We thought at first that the eyes were going to be a bit of a problem, though. You see, a fish's real eyes would go sort of fishy after a time, so the book I was telling you about says you have to use artificial ones. I shall only need one, because the other won't show. Well, I had a super idea. Young Jennifer's got a big doll she doesn't use much, so I swopped her a jolly fine grass snake for it, I mean for just the one eye. Of course, young Jeremy had to be awkward—started talking some rot about pike not having blue eyes. So I said Well, so much the better, that makes this one a very rare and valuable specimen.

It was an awful sweat getting the eye out, though—we had to drill a hole through the back of the doll's head with a brace-and-bit. Old

## ASK ME ANOTHER

It is well known that the questions of children are frequently baffling, and few adults are equipped with a stock of suitable answers, ranging over the entire field of human knowledge. I am.

I did not make them up out of my head. I learnt them by heart from John Jos. Stockdale's *Encyclopædia for Youth* (1807, price half a guinea), which is conveniently compiled in the form of question and answer: and the very next time a little girl in pigtails nudges me in the bus and says "Does the jerboa drink frequently?" I shall stare straight back at her and reply "Scarcely ever. The light also appears to incommode it." Then I shall open my newspaper at the quiz, and leave her with her mouth open.

Not only, you observe, did Mr. Stockdale know all the answers: he knew exactly how children are likely to frame the questions.

I admit that I have concerned myself principally with Quadrupeds and Winged Mammiferae, because the questions and answers in these sections are more lively and dramatic than, for instance, in those on Physics, Stenography, or Worms. Moreover, I believe a child is far more likely to inquire "Where does the lynx harbour?" than "What became of Spain during the minority of Louis the Thirteenth?"

Mind you, I have several rather neat answers from the section on Gymnastics. Only the other day a small boy stopped me in the street and asked "What is meant by jumping?"

"Jumping," I said, "properly so-called, consists in springing over a barrier, more or less high."

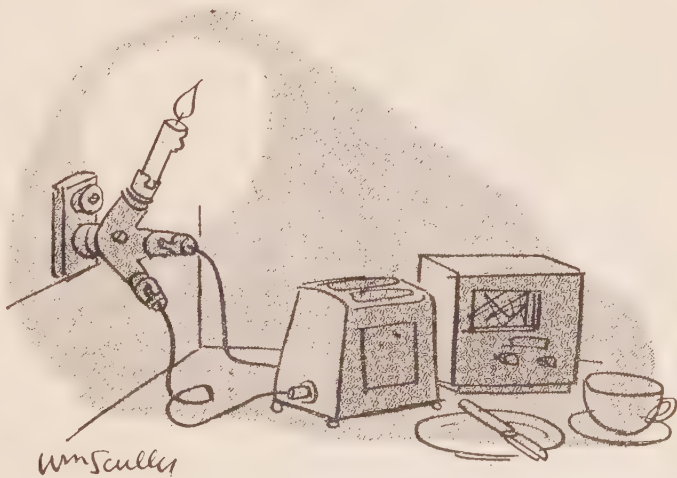
"What is wrestling?" pursued the boy.

"There are several kinds of wrestling," I said, subtly evading the issue. "Persons of irascible dispositions should not be allowed to contend, as it is in that case very liable to promote quarrels."

It started to rain at this point, and we stepped into a shop door-way, engrossed in our discussion.

"Are there no other games," the boy asked next, picking up his cue promptly, "which tend to agility?"

"Many," I replied. "The principal are: walking



on the edge of a plank, and walking upright on a round beam; walking on stilts; skating; and rope-dancing."

Since he seemed to have run out of questions for the moment I went on, smoothly and gratuitously, to inform him that a race of sledges is a very salutary exercise on safe ice, and that puss-in-the-corner, blind-man's buff, etc., are well-known games, which make the house comfortable to young people during bad weather, and prevent self-weariness, fashionably termed ennui, than which a more dangerous enemy cannot be guarded against. The rain having ceased, I then bade him a brisk "Good day!" and left him to his thoughts.

For my greatest triumph, however, I must revert to Natural History. I was raising a spoonful of egg to my mouth one day when my nephew Henry pulled at my sleeve and lisped "Which are the animals that, by their conformation, seem to hold a middle place between oviparous quadrupeds and serpents?"

I could tell by his expression that he thought he had me cornered. But I didn't even blink. "The biped reptiles," I rapped out smartly, "of which there are two kinds: the taper biped and the stheltopusik, which are very little known."

Henry began to back away in awe, but I pulled him back by the tie. "The former," I continued, "has two feet before, if you *must* know, and the latter two feet behind." And I popped the egg into my mouth before he could produce so much as a low whistle.

Henry and I had many spirited conversations after that, and his essay on the kinkajou (which clammers up trees, and thence throws itself upon the elks) put the matriculation examiners into confusion.

"What singularity," he would ask casually, looking up from some childish book, "is there in the coati?"

"Why," I would respond, with a benevolent smile, "that it will eat its own tail."

"And does the fox merit the reputation it has acquired for cunning?"

"It makes use of great address, Henry, in surprising poultry and birds, and has a very strong odour peculiar to itself."

"What is the nature of the stag?"

"It is a mild and quiet animal of elegant form. The young are named fawns, and can clear a hedge six feet high; they become excessively familiar."

"Thank you, uncle."

\* \* \* \* \*

"It would be ridiculous in a work such as the present," wrote Mr. Stockdale in his Preface, "to lay claim to novelty."

Possibly, Mr. Stockdale, possibly. But I'd certainly have risked it.

## March, 1951

### OH DEAR, WHAT ONOMATOPŒIA

PERHAPS you have omitted to shudder at the title? You might have brought your shudder into play earlier if I had added the second line of the song, after the irrelevant manner of music publishers, in brackets underneath—

(Johnny's so long at the fair)

—except that, as adapted above, it isn't a song, and the second line has nothing at all to do with what I propose to write about. That would worry you, possibly? Well, come now, make up your mind. Would you rather worry *and* shudder?

I was reminded the other day that Browning wrote "*Bang-whang, whang* goes the drum, *tootle-te-tootle* the fife"—a fairly undistinguished observation which I added without much enthusiasm to a little collection I have made over the years. There is a certain subtlety about the rhythm, to be sure, but the echoic words themselves might have occurred to anybody. Besides, *bang* as a word-of-all-work existed already—ever since the early eighteenth century, I think it was, when the great and (you will agree) eminently justifiable decision was made that when a cannon went off it did not go *bounce*. (Dekker, for instance, said it went *bounce*.) The French have made the best job of drums: *rataplan*, pronounced in French, is pretty good. It should not be pronounced in English except in conversation with a rodent officer.

Telephone-girls (if anyone cares) make the best job of fifes.

The gems of my collection are real onomatopœic words, honest efforts to reproduce sounds in print; but I don't want to rule out words merely because they exist already. The word *acatallactic* means "opposed to political economy," but, as I have suggested in these pages before, I have yet to see a better representation of the sound made by somebody shutting the gates of a lift. Again, when a violin string snaps in the middle of a quiet passage it goes *zinc*, purchase tax or no purchase tax. As for a motor-boat puttering along a distant river on a warm summer afternoon, one can follow that for miles with *accumulate-accumulator-ventilator-ventilate-accumulate-accumulator-ventilator-ventilate . . .*

The dictionary itself is full of onomatopœic or echoic words far more closely connected with the actual things they mean. The word *cow*, for example, is one; the fact that it now suggests the sound made by a cow rather less forcibly than *bow-wow* suggests that made by a dog may be put down to the decadence of cows or of pronunciation, or the progress of dogs—any writer will tell you it's as much as one's life is worth to say a word against dogs.

Frogs are a matter of less deep concern. In Aristophanes' time, I believe, they said something like *brekekekex koax koax*, and I imagine their Greek would be rather



more intelligible to a modern revolutionary than Aristophanes' would; but when it comes to transliteration and translation the subject gets tricky, or trickier. I wouldn't like to bank on the supposition that a war-horse when surrounded by trumpets said *Ha, ha*, even in 1611. Might be worth trying, but these days you can't get the trumpets.

The imitative words in the dictionary are not a very lifelike lot on the whole; *sniff* may be one of the best. In *Juan in America* Mr. Linklater gets closer by dropping the first consonant: *'nff*. This means tears as well. Mr. Eliot in *The Waste Land* gets still closer with nothing at all, as pointed out somewhere by

Robert Graves: there is a "realistic sniff" lurking behind the lines—

Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyante,  
Had a bad cold, nevertheless  
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe . . .

*Honk* was in the dictionary as the cry of the wild goose some little time before it came to be accepted as the cry of the exacerbated motor-car. *Cough*, which looks so much more like one than it sounds, seems to me typical of the way you get disappointed by the dictionary.

Musical instruments, once you leave the rhythm section (Robbie Browning and his Toast-masters), are not at all easy; but the bagpipes—"but" to be taken north of the border as con-, south as dis-junctive—were effectively dealt with by John Dos Passos in *Manhattan Transfer*. Somebody heard them going past the window, and they went *Wangnaan nainainai*. Most of the bagpipes I have heard go like that, and anybody that disagrees is a drone, if not indeed a chanter.

One of the richest fields I have struck in the last few years is the work of Ludwig Bemelmans. The game of table tennis, still called *ping-pong* by many people who haven't listened to it lately, is recognized by Mr. Bemelmans to be a dreary repetition of *gack-gack*; and I imagine many sportsmen will agree with him that the sound of snipe is either *quorr, quorr*, or *puitz, puitz, puitz*. These are from *The Snow Mountain*, as is also the observation that the noise made by somebody munching cherries dipped in chocolate is something like *uomguakum*.

But I could do with a few more purely mechanical noises. I have the machine in the newspaper chapter of *Ulysses*, which "jogged forward its flyboard" with a batch of quire-folded papers to the tune of *sllt*, and I have the gas-burner in a poem of Mr. Auden's, which when lit went *pffwungg*. I'm sure I had others; but they escape me (*fsss, fsss*).

## DEAR LIFE

## PURCHASE MONEY

To Messrs. Hum and Haw, Solicitors

DEAR SIRS,—I should be obliged if you would arrange a loan of £2,000 on my Reversionary Interest, which, as you know, is unencumbered, as I intend buying a house in the country.

Yours faithfully,

The meaning of the phrase "Reversionary Interest," which we so lightly lobbed into their court, had, as it happens, only recently been explained to us by Messrs. Hum and Haw. It was, they said, money left to us in a will which we could not touch (O Tantalus!) until the present beneficiary of the will, now enjoying the income from it, hopped the twig.

Replying to our letter Messrs. Hum and Haw, using more phrases of that sort, said in effect that they would be delighted to put the kettle on to boil, and we assumed that it would take not longer than a month and cost no more than fifty pounds. We budgeted accordingly and went ahead.

We then heard nothing more from Hum and Haw and thought they must have died the death. So we wrote again, to receive the reply that they were busy gouging particulars out of the Trustees' solicitors, Messrs. Thrust and Parry, and would be communicating further with us at an early date. The Trustees, they explained, forestalling us this time, simply sat on the money to prevent the present beneficiary (hereinafter



"I SHAN'T SLEEP TILL HE DROPS THE OTHER ONE."

referred to as the "Life Tenant") from blueing it, or anyone from grabbing it when the Life Tenant wasn't looking.

The move was obviously a formality. We let the budget stand.

About a month later they wrote again, making no mention of Thrust and Parry but informing us that Messrs. Fiddle, Faddle and Fuddle, solicitors to the company making the loan, would want £34 10s. 0d. for ensuring that we got it. Moreover, Fiddle, Faddle and Fuddle, taking no chances, required us to sign an undertaking to pay them for doing all over again what Hum and Haw had done already. Reading between the lines we saw that Hum and Haw resented this.

While we were corresponding with Hum and Haw on this point Thrust and Parry, who had lain low for two months, suddenly came to life and clamoured for information about death duties—having been put up to it, we learned later, by Fiddle and Co., who for £34 10s. 0d. obviously thought it advisable to crack the whip a bit.

Up to this moment the Trustees—fully aware that whoever footed the bill it wouldn't be they—had been sitting rather smugly on the outside looking in. Much to their annoyance they now found themselves right in the thick of things, faced by Fiddle and Co. with bared teeth demanding to know the age of the Life Tenant.

As one of the Trustees happened to *be* the Life Tenant the whole affair took an embarrassingly personal turn, but eventually the Life Tenant confessed to being eighty-five. Fiddle and Co. then asked for a confirmatory birth certificate, which showed that the Life Tenant was, in fact, owing to her hazy recollection of the past, eighty-six.

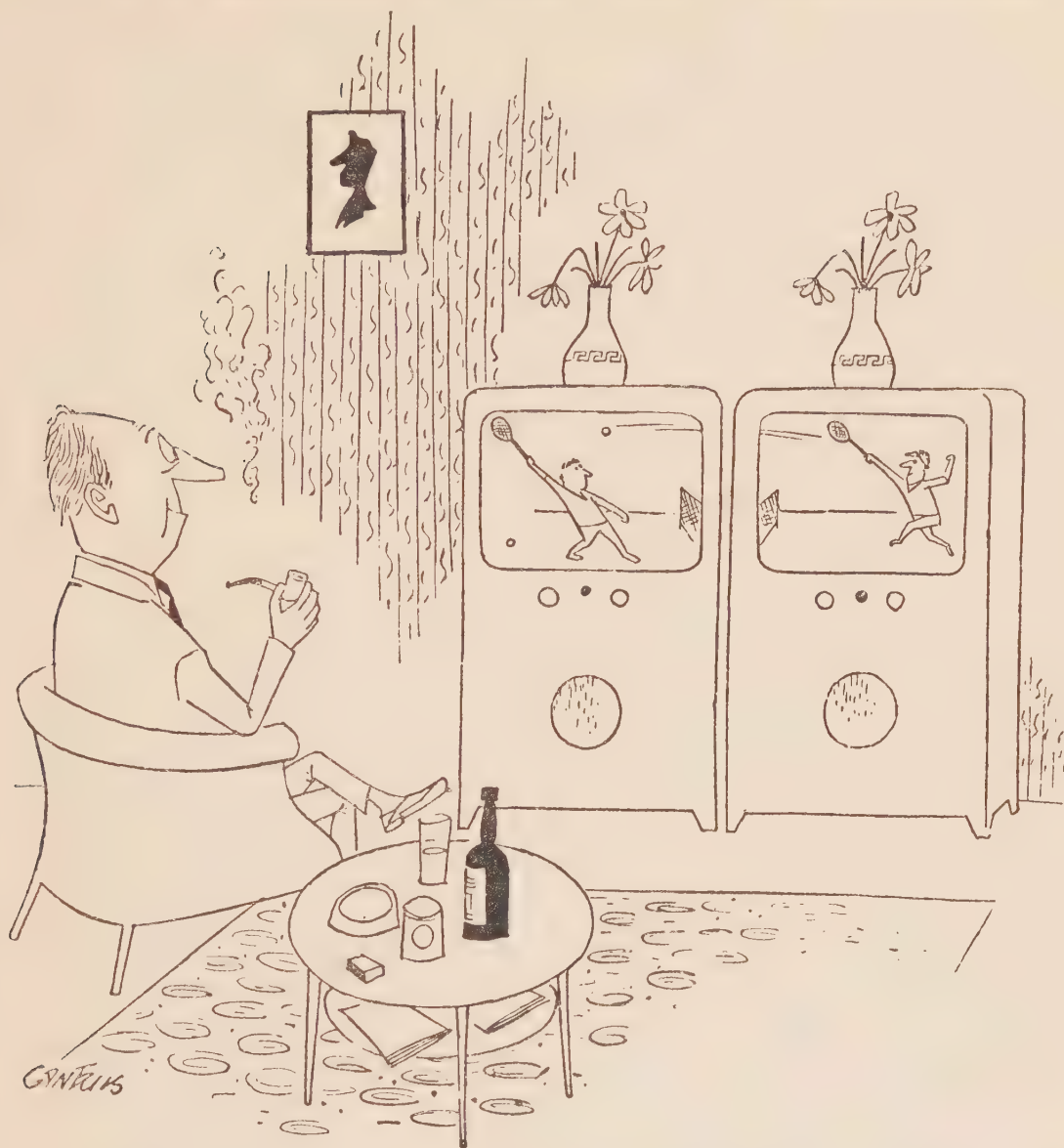
This was acceptable to Fiddle and Co., but unacceptable to the Life Tenant, who promptly altered her age on the certificate from eighty-six to eighty-five and posted it off to the wrong solicitors with a terse note about official carelessness.

At this stage all parties except Fiddle and Co. (who had suddenly become very suspicious) considered it impolitic to discuss the Life Tenant's age with her any more, so another certificate was circumspectly verified by Thrust and Parry—whose correspondence charges had now reached double figures—leaving the Life Tenant ruffled but happy in the conviction that she *was* eighty-five and would stand no nonsense from anyone.

Fiddle and Co., seeing they were on to a good thing, next lashed out at the second Trustee and demanded *his* age, whereupon the second Trustee had to be calmed down with a bottle of brandy before matters could proceed any farther.

By this time we had modified our original budget three times and were wondering how much longer we could last without the money. But little did Fiddle and Co. care. They retired into a defensive and brooding silence which neither Hum and Haw nor Thrust and Parry could penetrate—a silence which held down their correspondence charges for a period and therefore much embittered them against Fiddle and Co.

At last Fiddle and Co. came out of their corner with a flurry of Mortgage



Engrossments and Statutory Declarations needing signature before Commissioners for Oaths and full of references to something called "distringas." This further embittered Hum and Haw, who so far had beaten them to every word in the legal dictionary.

However, Hum and Haw found solace in sending us the charges incurred by Fiddle and Co., plus stamp duties and all the rest of it; the charges incurred by



Thrust and Parry, who had spent most of the five months, it seems, perusing—no, sorry—Perusing and Making Fair Copies of Everything sent to them in connection with the whole sordid business; and of course the charges incurred by Hum and Haw themselves, who—obviously feeling guilty about the way in which everything had got so out of hand—tried to mollify us by saying that the Trustees' solicitors had been put to considerable trouble over the matter and had really been most helpful.

Rather significantly they said nothing at all about Messrs. Fiddle, Faddle and Fuddle, whom we shall probably have to approach again, before long, for a second loan to cover the charges on the first one.

### ADVERTISING

"How much do I spend on advertising?" demanded the earnestly inquiring pair of spectacles at the back of the village hall.

"As the members of the Brains Trust are not familiar with the questioner's business or identity . . ." began the chairman.

"I can tell you my identity," said the spectacles. "I'm a taxpayer. Just a simple taxpayer, that's all. A chap who pays butchers so that they can afford not to sell me meat. A chap who owns a railway and waits an hour on the platform before I find I've taken the train off. A chap who subsidizes ground-nuts and sun-flowers in West Africa, chicken-farms in Gambia, aeroplanes in Bristol——"

"No doubt the questioner has many financial interests," said the chairman. "The question, please?"

"I want to know how much I'm spending on Government newspaper advertisements to myself telling me things I either don't want to know or know already."

There was a hum of approval in the little hall, and the chairman, flinching, surveyed his panel of experts hopelessly. Not for the first time, he regretted the local M.P.'s firm and invariable inability to be one of them.

"You are inquiring the approximate cost of Government publicity?" he said. "Mr. Bates?"

"Here, why always *me*?" said Mr. Bates.

"You're Current Affairs, aren't you?" said the chairman.

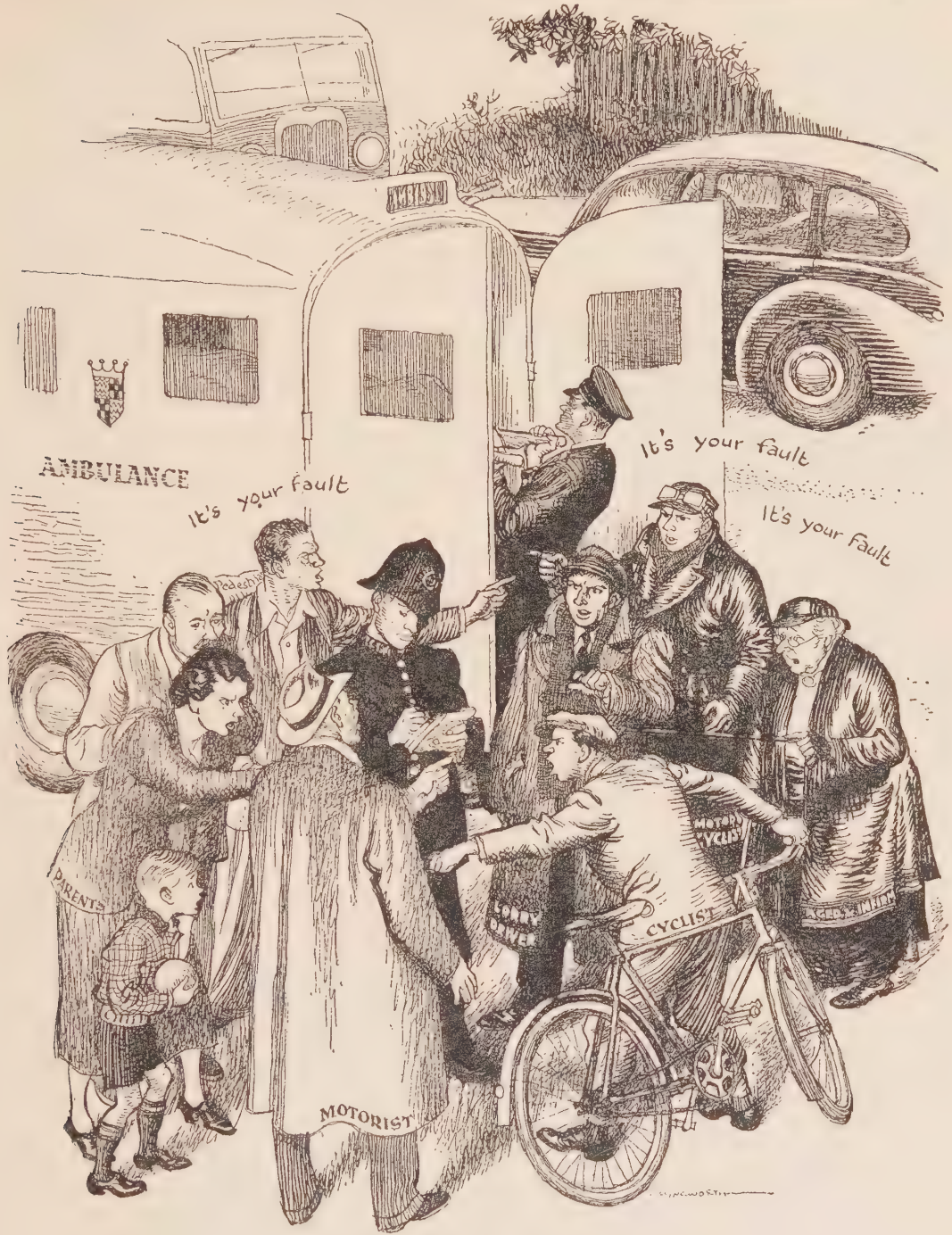
"It is obviously an impossible question to answer without notice," said Mr. Bates. "Or *with* notice," he added fairly.

"Have a shot at it, though," urged a hand-painted American tie.

"There is less Government advertising than there used to be," said Mr. Bates evasively.

"There's less newsprint than there used to be," pointed out an interested briar pipe.

"Only half-pages in every newspaper begging us all to save money to lend to



“COULD IT BE *MY* FAULT?”

(MORE THAN FIVE THOUSAND PEOPLE WERE KILLED ON THE ROADS LAST YEAR)



"SAYS A BOB ON THE OLD CLOCK, SO 'OW MUCH IS IT?"

"You must regard the Government as a vast business concern," explained Mr. Bates. "You cannot possibly run such a business concern without advertising. How else are you to reach your—ah—customers?"

"The income-tax people reach 'em all right without advertising," said the walrus moustache. "They don't ask you to pay for half-pages reminding you it's nine bob in the pound and they want it now."

"Let us take the long view," said Miss Gorton, speaking for the first time. She liked to slide imperceptibly into a discussion, after Mr. Bates and Mr. Hammond had established themselves as the main targets. "A savings campaign obviously needs publicity. The publicity may cost money, but it is a sprat to catch a mackerel."

"More like a mackerel to catch a sprat," said the briar pipe.

"They used to advertise sprats," remembered an embittered milk-bottle-top shopping-bag. "When they couldn't think of anything else for us to eat they used to advertise fish as though nobody had ever heard of it before."

"It was the cookery hints I found hard to forgive," said a sympathetic pair of jet earrings. "The way they talked to you! As though you didn't know how to boil a kettle without looking it up in the cookery-book."

the Government, that's all," said the spectacles. "Half-pages, at the hundreds of pounds they cost! Fine example to us that is!"

"With the bill for advertising they've got to meet, it's no wonder they've got to keep on borrowing money from us," said an acid walrus moustache. "Every time they're hard-up they have to advertise for our money, and then they have to advertise for a bit more to pay for the first advertisement."

"Vicious spiral," said the American tie. "Very vicious."

"I think we may rest assured," said Mr. Hammond, foolishly butting in, "that Government advertising is in the hands of qualified experts who can be trusted to watch that expenditure does not exceed resulting benefits."

"And how much a year am I paying those qualified experts, I wonder?" said the spectacles.

"And *such* nasty little recipes!" agreed Miss Gorton with interest. "A delicious and satisfying dinner for six, they'd call it, and, really, it wouldn't have kept a mouse ali——"

"Er—*Miss Gorton!*" said the chairman.

Miss Gorton jumped and said she was sorry.

"How I hated that foul and priggish family who were always going around in unironed shirts, switching things off and gloating over the power-stations of the future!" said the briar pipe reminiscently.

"They wanted sloshing," said the spectacles. "Pretty penny *they* must have cost me too."

"I really think we must get on to the next question," said the chairman.

"Let's get on to the answer to this one first," suggested the spectacles.

"It was all carrots, at one time," the milk-bottle-top shopping-bag called to the jet earrings. "When carrots was a drug on the market, why, it was marvellous what they did for you. Built you up, made you see in the black-out . . ."

"And a lovely hot potato when there wasn't any bread," the jet earrings called back. "*So* much tastier, and Donald Duck drawings of it, and everything."

"Report to Britain!" suddenly exclaimed the walrus moustache. "That's what I've been trying to remember. The chap who wrote 'em ought to have been reported himself."

"Productivity!" concurred the spectacles mincingly. "Spending my money like water to teach me how to lick stamps, if you remember. How many thousands of pounds did I have to produce for them to tell me about productivity?" he demanded, glaring at the platform.

"I have already told you," said Mr. Bates sharply, "it is quite impossible to compute the expense involved."

"You'd think," said the American tie, "they'd try it on the papers as news first. What they wouldn't publish as news, then perhaps they might make an advertisement or two of the rest."

"Their mock-thises and their



Wm Sculler

"THAT CONFOUNDED PAPER-BOY HAS DONE OUR CROSSWORD AGAIN."

mock-thats!" said the shopping-bag crossly. "Not to mention splitting their herrings the wrong way round, as anybody who's ever studied a kipper could tell 'em."

The chairman rapped sharply.

"That's for you," the spectacles told Mr. Bates smugly.

"If you insist on an answer to an unanswerable question," said Mr. Bates wearily, "I can only hazard the guess that the—ah—overall figure embracing all Government departments must run into probably millions of pounds."

"All out of my pocket!" hissed the spectacles. "Why don't they just simply nationalize advertising, and save money?"

"S'sh!" said the briar pipe nervously.

## I WISH YOU COULD ALL BE HERE

That applause was for Colin MacAbraham, the leader of the orchestra, who has just come in. He's sitting down now—and here is Sir Adrian Sargent, you can hear the applause, I expect, he's going up to the rostrum now, and he holds up his right hand with the baton in it and the applause dies down.

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, something seems to have gone slightly wrong here, I don't quite know what it is, we can't hear what's going on here although the orchestra seem to be playing all right, but it doesn't seem to be getting through, so I'll hand you over to Peter Tummitt who is down in the stalls. Over to you, Peter.

Well, I couldn't quite see what went wrong myself, the orchestra came in all right, they all came in together, it was a terrific sight, I wish you could have seen it. Then the first violins went out on top, it's most exciting, they're still there, setting a terrific pace, *allegro con spirito* at least, I should say, and they're still there, right up at about top E, I should think, and holding it magnificently, and *here come the brass!* . . .

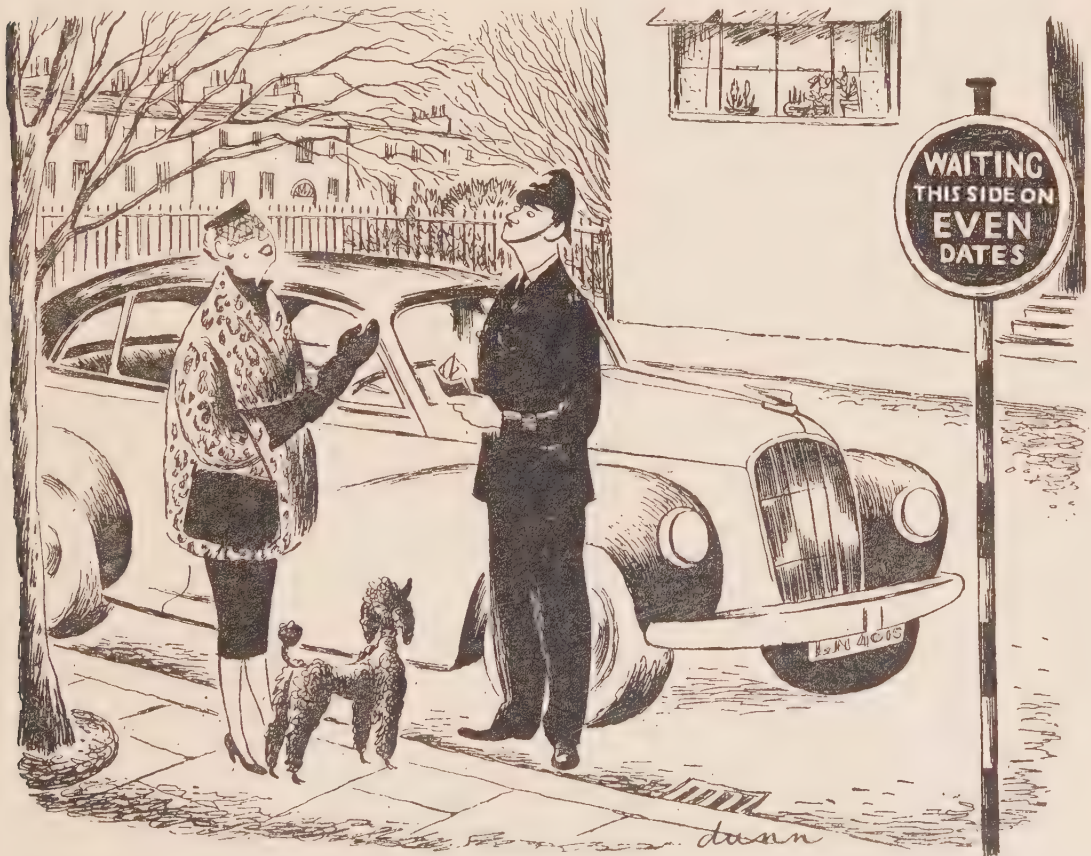
That was absolutely tremendous, the brass came in in the most exciting way, three of them, three trumpets, that is, and there are the trombones over there beyond them, and they're playing in B flat, it's the most remarkable thing you ever heard, I wish you could all be here to-night and hear it. And *here they are again*—no, no, no it isn't, it's the woodwind, it's Harry Martingale, I think, on his clarinet with the special boosted reed, and he swept up then—and here come the first violins again with that opening theme, they're holding on to it very well, and I think they're—yes, they are, they're going to modulate. . . .

That was the most extraordinary thing, they came in above the clarinet and did the most terrific modulation, from B flat right into E minor, and now they seem to have dropped back a bit, and here come the 'cellos, we haven't seen much of them this evening so far, but here they are, they're looking frightfully fit, very fit

indeed these 'cellos, and they come in with a tune in dotted minims, it's really very fine, though they're not setting such a hot pace as some of the others have been, about *andante con moto* I make it. I'll hand you over again to Brian Broom in the circle. Over to you, Brian.

Well, here we are in the circle, and the first movement is nearly over. It's been the most extraordinary movement, the first violins went ahead right from the beginning, and they're still there up at the top, no one is likely to catch them now, unless—yes, by Jove, I think they're going to—yes, it a fugue! . . .

By gosh, that really was something worth hearing, I wish you could all have heard it. The violins were way out on top, and the double-basses were doing a sort of ground-bass, I suppose you'd call it a ground-bass, and then the woodwind nipped in and took the tune away from them and started a fugue with it. It's still going on over in the far corner of the orchestra, and some of the strings have joined in, the violas it sounds like, and, oh, I say, that's terrific, the tuba is playing the



"BUT IT WAS AN EVEN DATE WHEN I LEFT IT."

theme in augmentation in the sub-dominant. I must say that's the prettiest bit of tuba-playing I've heard. And now back to Peter Tummitt in the stalls.

Well, here we are in the stalls, and there seems to be the devil of a fugue going on, but I think we're coming to the coda now, yes, the bassoons have got there, they've started the coda, they've got right back to B flat, very pretty to listen to, and now they're slowing down a bit, I think, yes, they're slowing down, and that's the end of the movement.

The engineers have just rung through to say that there was a slight technical hitch, but it's been corrected now, so for the rest of the concert I'll have to let the music speak for itself.

## RACONTEUR

"While we're waiting," Cora said, "tell them that amusing little story you heard the other day."

"Just pull that chair round to the fire *there*," said Irma, "and then the sofa can . . . That's better."

"A woman heard peculiar noises in the middle of the night," I said, "and woke her husband."

"Excuse me," said Rodney, "aren't you sitting on the nut-crackers?"

I gave him the nut-crackers, and a pack of cards, and two little pencils with tassels, and Mr. and Mrs. Whimper came in.

"Ah!" said Rodney. "I think you know everyone."

"You're just in time to hear a funny story," said Irma. "Don't sit there, Mrs. Whimper, you'll hardly see the fire."

"A lady heard a noise in the night, wasn't it?" said Rodney.

"Well, yes," I said. "She heard this peculiar noise, you see, and woke her husband."

Mrs. Whimper laughed reminiscently, and told Rodney she would prefer just plain chocolate, as she had gone off nuts somehow.

"That fire could do with poking," said old Mr. Rimmer, and went to sleep again.

"So she said to her husband 'Harry, there are burglars in the house!'" I said.

"I thought his name was Albert when you told it to me," said Cora.

"Ah!" said Rodney, standing up and giving me the nut-crackers and the pack of cards and the two little pencils with tassels. "Here's Mrs. Harvey! Is Johnny with you?"

"Finding a hook for his duffle-coat," said Mrs. Harvey. "Now I don't want to be *too* near the fire, so please none of you disturb yourselves."

She sat on the nut-crackers, and knocked the cards on to the floor.

"We were just hearing a story," said Mrs. Whimper, arranging Whimper's pocket handkerchief.

"A lady," I said, bending to pick up the cards, "heard noises in the night, and woke her husband. She told him she thought there were burglars in the house."

"There's the three of spades, by old Mr. Rimmer's foot," said Cora. "Go on."

"The husband," I said, "was a nervous type of man, and he rushed downstairs to the telephone in the hall."

"Can't you *picture* him," said Mrs. Whimper: "in his dressing-gown!"

"Well, well, well!" said Johnny, striding in and banging the door and slapping Rodney on the back. "Is everybody happy?"

"Can you find a chair?" said Irma. "Rodney—drinks."

"Bless my soul," said old Mr. Rimmer, opening one eye and kicking over the fire-irons, "there's the devil of a draught coming from *somewhere*."

"You *must* hear this story," said Mrs. Whimper.

"Ha! Story, eh?" said Johnny.

"Awakened by his wife who had heard a burglar," I said, very slowly and distinctly, "a man rushed to the telephone in the middle of the night, and dialled nine-nine-nine."

"Just plain gin for you?" said Rodney.

I nodded, and he handed me a whisky and ginger-ale.

"I *thought* I was sitting on something," said Mrs. Harvey, and handed me the nut-crackers. I put my drink on the arm of Cora's chair, handed the cards to Irma, stuffed the nut-crackers in my waistcoat pocket, refused a home-made date-surprise, and swallowed Mr. Whimper's rum and lemon at a gulp.

At this point Humblestone arrived, shaking with laughter, and Irma began to wrestle with card-tables.

"Before you do anything," said Humblestone, standing right in front of the fire and wiping his eyes, "have any of you heard about the bloke who dialled six-six-six instead of nine-nine-nine, and when he opened the door there were three policemen standing on their heads?"

They *all* had—even old Mr. Rimmer—and I chuckled to myself for the rest of the evening.





## BALLADE OF DEAD GENTLEMEN

Where, in what bubbly land, below  
 What rosy horizon dwells to-day  
 That worthy man Monsieur Cliquot  
 Whose widow has made the world so gay?  
 Where now is Mr. Tanqueray?  
 Where might the King of Sheba be  
 (Whose wife stopped dreadfully long away)?  
*Mais où sont messieurs les maris?*

Say where did Mr. Beeton go  
 With rubicund nose and whiskers grey  
 To dream of dumplings long ago,  
 Of syllabubs, soups, and *entremets*?  
 In what dim isle did Twankey lay  
 His aching head? what murmuring sea  
 Lulls him after the life-long fray?  
*Mais où sont messieurs les maris?*

How Mr. Grundy's cheeks may glow  
 By a bathing-pool where lovelies play,  
 I guess, but shall I ever know?  
 Where—if it comes to that, *who*, pray—  
 Is Mr. Masham? Sévigné  
 And Mr. Siddons and Zebedee  
 And Gamp and Hemans, where are they?  
*Mais où sont messieurs les maris?*

Princesses all beneath your sway  
 In this grave world they bowed the knee;  
 Libertine airs in Elysium say  
*Mais où sont messieurs les maris?*

## CURTAIN

“What I like,” said Mrs. Venner, bringing a lecture on Repertory to a reluctant conclusion, “is when they all stand in a row at the end, and someone pulls the curtain up and down, and you have to clap. You know what I do first?”

“No,” I said, tossing a copy of *Peer Gynt* hopelessly on to the table.

"I count them," said Mrs. Venner, "and then I count the names on the programme. You know why? Sometimes they slip off home, and think you won't notice. That's no way, is it?"

"No," I said.

"I mean, you want to have a look at them all, don't you?—so you can see who hasn't got a wig on. They have to stand there until you've finished clapping, you see, and they all bow each time the curtain goes up. The one in the middle bends down first, and all the others look along at him so as they can keep in time. I mean, it would look silly if one chap on the end kept down while all the others were standing up and looking at you, wouldn't it, or if they all kept bobbing up and down on their own?"

"I suppose it would," I said.

"The one in the middle," went on Mrs. Venner, "bends down further than the others, and keeps on throwing his hair back. D'you know what they do then?"

"No," I said, looking at the clock.

"One of them walks out and bows by himself. You have to guess who it's going to be, because it's different every week. It makes it more exciting. Sometimes it's the one in the middle, and he gets hold of another one's hand and pulls her out as well, and she has to pretend to be surprised, and then they both bend down together. Then they bow to each other, and then they bow to everyone else, and then she walks backwards to where she came



"I HOPE MY FOOLISH CHATTER DOESN'T PUT YOU OFF, MR. HODSON."

from, and treads on someone's foot. Well, after all," said Mrs. Venner, "they're only human, aren't they?"

"I suppose they are," I said. I picked up the clock and began to set the alarm.

"But sometimes," said Mrs. Venner, "it's someone from the end of the line, and then you have to laugh, because he's only been a butler or the man next door. Then he has to make a speech. He says how he thanks you, like, for being a nice audience, and then he has to tell you what's on next week. It tells you on the programme, and on bits of paper stuck in the bar, and on a neasel when you go in and on the screen where they show the toothpaste adverts while they're altering the scenery, but you like to hear them talking, don't you?"

"I suppose you must," I said.

"Because sometimes they forget what's going to be on, and someone has to tell them in the audience, and you have a good laugh. Then they tell you it's going to be very good, and you can tell what it's like by what they say. If they say it's a charming comedy, it's about some bits of kids larking about with tennis rackets. If they say it's a strong drama, it's about this chap that goes off with some flighty piece in a fur coat that it tells you on the programme who it's borrowed off. If they say it's domestic, it's all about some chap in striped trousers with a barmy family who don't know which one to marry. If they say it's a new play, it'll go on and on until you miss your bus, and you can't tell one from the other. But the best I ever heard," said Mrs. Venner, popping my last biscuit in her mouth and making for the door, "was when one chap said next week it was going to be *Ghosts*, and couldn't remember who it was by. Know what happened?"

"No," I said.

"He kept on saying 'By—er—By—er—' and then the chap next to him whispered in his ear. So we had a good laugh, and then he told us."

"And who was it?" I said.

"Henry Gibson," said Mrs. Venner, opening the door, "but I never went to see it. Them haunted house things is usually a frost. Cheerio!"

"Cheerio," I said, and reached for *Peer Gynt*.

April, 1951

SITTING ROOM VACANT

I WASN'T such an optimistic ass as to put my hat and coat on, but I had brought them into the drawing-room ready for a quick getaway. Outside in the hall the voice I loved so well had assumed its false, telephone brightness.

"Auntie Baggy? Hello, Auntie Baggy, this is—but how clever of you to guess! My husband and I were wondering if you could possibly . . ."

Separating two half-crowns from my small change I planted them in a prominent position on the mantelpiece; undoubtedly one of the worst features of the baby-sitting age is the coy handing over of the fee. Mrs. Bagford would find it all right—if it was to be Mrs. Bagford to-night; I hoped not, in a way: it seems rather grasping to me to leave your husband to sit with your own children while you go and sit with other people's. But we always try her first, because she washes up the high-tea things, whereas some village aunts would let the house burn down rather than exceed their minimum obligations. However, it now sounded rather as if we'd had Auntie Baggy . . .

". . . But of *course* not, Auntie Baggy; I mean, if your husband's away you can't possibly . . . Yes, I believe it's a very good picture; we didn't want to miss—What? Oh, no, I *quite* understand. Er—how are the children? . . . Oh, I'm so sorry . . . yes . . . yes . . . No! Really? . . . yes . . . yes . . . yes . . ."

There seemed no point in wasting time. I might as well get on with washing up the high-tea things. In the kitchen, through the plop and gurgle of water and the crash of capsized sink-tidies, I could hear the clash of new engagements in the hall. Auntie Caggy (ex-Nurse Cagthorpe) seemed to be in bed, though I couldn't gather with what, in spite of what appeared to be long medical details from her sister Mrs. Gorringe; Mrs. Gorringe has never been elevated to the auntage; she declines to undertake sitting assignments "in case a man comes to the door."

There was no reply from Pinthorne 2, which no doubt meant that Miss Catskill (Auntie Pussy) was sitting for the Grittlestones, who had told us that afternoon that they were dying to see *The Man with Blue Teeth*, wouldn't miss it for worlds. That would bring us to Miss Gimbell (Auntie Gimmy) . . .

". . . you *must* be proud of her, Auntie Gimmy—and such a stiff exam. too! Let's see, that's your niece's little girl, isn't it—Hilda . . . Yes, Gilda . . . Oh, it's the *other* one. Well, you *will* all be basking in reflected glory . . . Oh, you're so right, Auntie Gimmy, we *do* need something to cheer us up these days. As a matter of fact, that brings me to why I'm ringing you up . . . Oh, but how clever of you to guess, ha-ha-ha! I'm afraid it's terribly short notice, but my husband and I



"IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS THE SKY WAS COMPLETELY OBSCURED BY FILTHY BLACK SMOKE."

Frogmore. "You did? . . . you didn't! Oh, what a shame, I'm so sorry . . . Yes, it *is* painful, I know. Last winter when my husband was painting the— Oh, dear, both ankles? . . . Right into the bucket, did you . . .? Yes . . . yes . . . yes . . . really? . . . Yes . . ."

I hung on for a minute, reluctant to give up all hope, but when the conversation wandered to the Old People's Outing, and the whereabouts of a two-shilling subscription which the tall Miss Whibley claimed to have handed to Mrs. Homily before she was succeeded in the Treasureship by Auntie Froggy, I gathered up my hat and coat and made for the hall.

The voice I love so well hung up the receiver and sat on the bottom stair. When the telephone went again almost immediately I answered it.

"Oh, hello, Auntie—er—Baggy," I said. "No, I'm afraid we didn't manage to get anybody . . . no, I'm afraid we shan't be able to see it after all . . . Oh, very

thought of slipping out to the pictures and we— Oh. Oh, I see . . . But, of *course*, I understand . . . Yes . . . Only I thought it was Thursdays you went to the Digbury children . . . Oh, well, that explains it . . . No, I don't think you did tell me what little Melanie said in the bathroom . . . Oh, yes, *please* do . . ."

As I glanced at the racing kitchen clock and re-signedly wrote off the supporting picture as a dead loss I heard a familiar bleat from the top of the house. Taking a glass of water I slowly ascended the stairs on my errand of stern mercy. When I came down again I could hear that we had our backs to the wall; the voice was high and brittle now.

". . . and very nice to hear *your* voice, too, Auntie Froggy; how are you?" A fatal question with Miss

good indeed, so I'm told . . . oh, well, we shall just have an evening at home, you know; after all, we—what's that? . . . would one of us *what?* . . ."

Her logic was unassailable, of course, as I tried to explain to the voice I (sometimes) love so well, getting into my hat and coat. I only hoped that Mrs. Bagford would plant the two half-crowns in a prominent position on the mantelpiece; undoubtedly one of the worst features of the baby-sitting age is the coy handing over of the fee.

## WASHING UP

My husband said that he couldn't let me struggle through the washing up by myself.

I said I could manage.

He protested that I mustn't be so noble. It was his duty to help in the house and share my every burden. He was going to insist on coming to my rescue.

I said nothing.

He suggested that if I would just tell him where the tea-cloth was he'd have the draining board cleared in no time.

I said it was over the gas stove.

He thought I must be mistaken. The only thing over the gas stove was a germ-laden, moth-eaten piece of old rag.

I said that was the tea-cloth.

He asked me whether I was trying to poison him by pollution.

I said I was trying to cut down the laundry bill by using the same cloth twice.

He said that while he appreciated my efforts, he would rather I economized in other ways. Health must



"DID YOU LOCK IT?"

come first. He hoped he would never see me using such a filthy cloth again. Now if I would tell him where to find a clean one he would say no more about it.

I said they were in the drawer.

He thought I might find washing up easier if I used hot water.

I said it had been hot once.

He rather doubted that, as the things were practically cold by the time they reached him. He attributed his own modest success as a washer-up to his insistence on boiling water. And shouldn't I be doing the knives and forks first? His mother had always said "Cutlery before crockery."

I said I preferred my own methods.

He asked me whether I had really deemed it necessary to use every dish, bowl and saucepan in the house. He was sure that if *he* were head cook and bottle-washer the number of dirty utensils would be down to a minimum.

I said I could imagine.

He wondered whether I was trying out a new method of washing up. It was probably quite obvious, but for the moment the merit of leaving egg encrusted between the prongs of the fork was escaping him.

I said I must have missed it.

He apologized for having dropped my best plate on to the floor, but it definitely hadn't been his fault. In fact it was a wonder that he'd only smashed *one* plate in view of the treacherous amount of soap-suds I left around everything.

I said I'd be more careful in future.

He asked me if that was the lot.

I said yes.

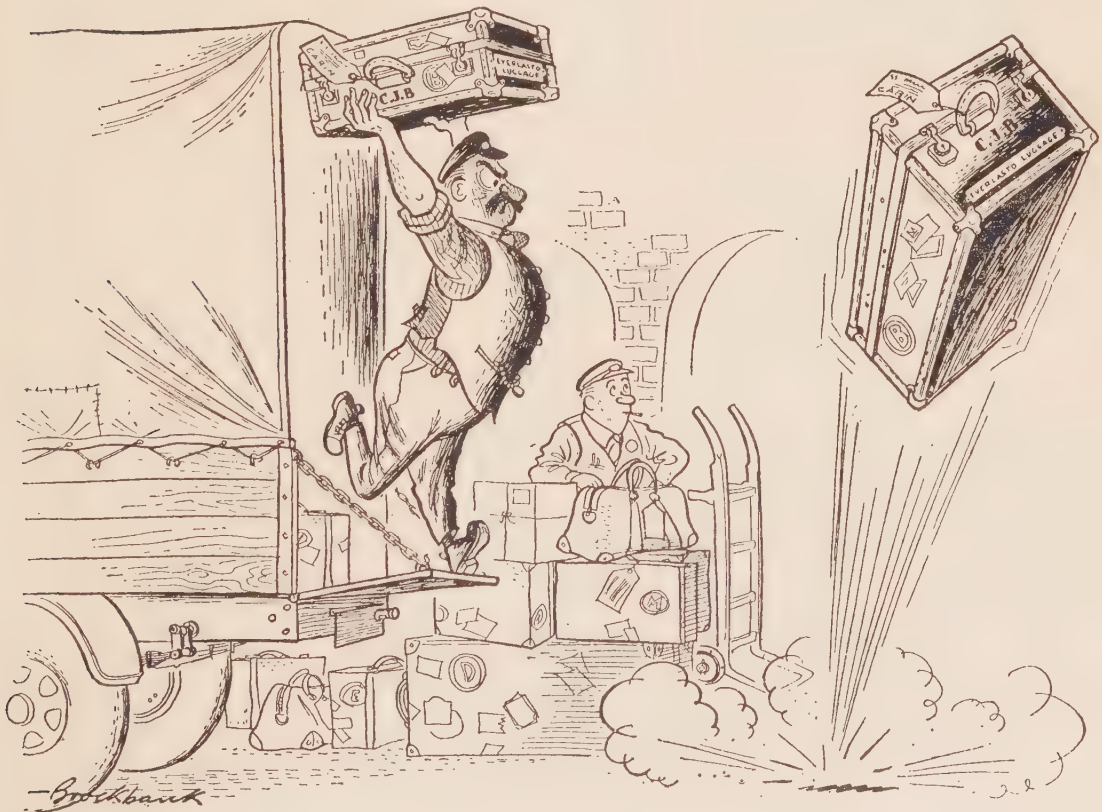
He said it was amazing what a difference another pair of hands made.

I said it was.

## VERNAL VENOM

Unashamed,  
 I am a poet who declines  
 To sing Hey ding a ding a ding  
 In spring;  
 Or to be named  
 With those whose lines  
 Go  
 Nonny, nonny, nonny, no.  
 Frankly,  
 I find the more bucolic  
 Type of frolic  
 Dankly

Emetic  
Rather than poetic—  
And my only reason  
For appearing  
In this overcrowded,  
Overclouded,  
Over-mouthéd  
Season  
Is to state  
That, tho' for spring I am past caring  
Two hoots,  
I hate  
To see so many delightful  
Nymphs still wearing  
Those frightful  
Fur-lined boots.





## CLEGG AND COAL

"This talk of slate in the coal," said Clegg, clasping his tankard as a heavy man squeezed past to the coat rack, "riles me. Not only have we no slate at home but no coal to find it in."

"Good gracious!" I said consolingly.

"Not a lump," said Clegg, "for four days. Last Tuesday my wife drew my attention to fuel saving competitions in the paper."

"H'm," said the man, who was now standing looming over us at our corner table. He did not seem particularly to want to squeeze past again.

Clegg ignored him.

"I drew *her* attention," he went on, "to the letters to the editor. A woman said she had resolved to go to bed thirty minutes earlier and *keep the resolution*. Her italics."

"Sounds feasible," I said, tentatively.

"I said," Clegg continued, "that it would be much more congenial to get up thirty minutes later instead."

"And she wasn't having any," said the looming man, nodding.

"Preferably," said Clegg a little more loudly, "later still: after the morning peak hours, which I understand end at ten-thirty."

"Hff," said the man to himself, contemptuously. His heavy brown overcoat was edging our ash tray about slightly.

Clegg looked up to make some remark, but found that the extreme angle would detract from its dignity, and reconsidered it.

"I suppose you rang up for more coal?" I asked.

"I get home too late," said Clegg, "but my wife was keener on the economizing than on getting more, so it got overlooked."

"Fatal," I said, sympathetically.

The looming man suddenly blew sharply twice down a pipe stem to clear it, and Clegg started.

"Another thing I suggested," said Clegg after a brief pause to regain composure, "was my giving up lighting the fire. It starts roaring, and as I kneel there reading some interesting bit on the newspaper I'm holding there, the paper catches fire and the fire goes out and I start again with fresh coal."

"Lighting fires," said the man with a wink, nudging me archly. "Easy to see who wears the trousers, eh? H'm?"

I edged slightly to the left, with a compromising smile.

"Well, one of these fuel notions," said Clegg patiently, "was burning logs instead. No one could deliver in under a fortnight."

The man nudged me again, despite my move. He had definitely ranged himself with me.

"So he had to go and cut some," he said, breathing joyously. "Wait for it. This is rich."

"So we tried a mixture," said Clegg firmly. "Coal and vegetable boxes broken up. It made the coal burn twice as fast."

"Hoo!" said the man, nudging vigorously. "Ah! No. Ah! Course it would."

Clegg gave up trying to ignore him. His glance now took us both in.

"Then we came to the end of it," he went on coldly, "and I had to resort to the attic."

"Ullo!" said the man, beaming. "She was at you for it, then."

"I resorted to the attic," said Clegg, addressing him directly, "if you insist, to reconnoitre for combustible material."

"How much?" said the man, slightly at a loss.

I thought it was about time to say something. The last thing I had said was "Fatal." Unfortunately I didn't seem able to shake off the funereal atmosphere: the only sympathetic thing I could think of was "Deadly." Perhaps it was my uncongenial ally.

"It was," said Clegg, emphatically, "cold as a morgue. But you know how it is when you find pre-war newspapers. You see headlines like 'Judge Says Nonsense,' or 'Found Himself At Sea,' and you get engrossed in some piffing report of a Mr. Wensley of Croydon who woke up on his pneumatic float half a mile out from the beach at Ramsgate."

"You ought to make provision," said the man complacently. "We're all right with making provision."

"I wonder you can drag yourself away from your roaring hearth," said Clegg, meaningly.



"SORRY TO INTERRUPT YOUR BRIDGE, MA'AM, BUT IS IT TRUE THE KIDS WAIT UP FOR THE WEATHER CHARTS AND THE TEN O'CLOCK NEWS?"

"Don't you mind me," said the man paternally. "Just you carry on with your talking."

"Well," said Clegg, "the only thing to do was call in on people. We've done that for the last three or four evenings, with moderate success."

"No," said the man, with finality. "I can't stand for that. Butting in on people's privacy."

## A MODEL HOUSEWIFE

The way in which the housewife has come on by leaps and bounds since the war as a public symbol, in large measure ousting such old popular favourites in this field as the average man, the common man, the man in the street and even that more modern (but still evidently male) figure the consumer, in no way prepared us, I think, for the latest and highest honour which has been heaped upon her. Perhaps even she herself is surprised to find that she has been selected to join that romantic band of adventurers—soldiers, firemen, railway porters, milkmen and a few others—to whom the purest and most hopeful among us look for their inspiration. I refer, of course, to the fact that little lead models of her are now being made for children to play with.

I saw her the other day in a toy shop, this new recruit to the hearthrug army, and she already had an assured air of belonging there, as if it were as common to give a child a box of housewives for his birthday as a box of soldiers. She was dressed quietly in blue, and her field-service equipment—bandanna, bootees and shopping bag—had a neat and efficient look. Indeed, she was in action, for she stood facing a counter behind which towered a large and formidable lead butcher. Model butchers are not, perhaps, such a new departure in the plaything world as model housewives, but I cannot believe that many of them have been made so far; the manufacturers do not appear to have acquired the knack of it yet. Not only was this butcher's right eye considerably higher than his left, but his brows were drawn together at an insane angle and his mouth was twisted into a far-fetched expression of malevolence, giving him the aspect of a butcher who is about to run amok with the cleaver rather than one intent on cutting off ten-pennyworth of little lead chops,

The housewife stood her ground however; she must have been a more than ordinarily desperate member of her buccaneering profession. The expression that had been given to her attractive features was, whether by accident or design, a somewhat haughty one, and as I gazed at it I found myself hoping that the housewife—the real-life one—will not feel that the shine is taken off the honour of having lead models made of her by the fact that she has to share the distinction not only with her old adversary the butcher but also with a great many farm animals and beasts of the jungle, from hens to hippopotamuses. It is no easy thing, I would remind her, to appear as attractive as a hippopotamus in the eyes of a child, and she, the



“... AND JUST AS IT COMES TO THE BOIL YOU ADD A TEASPOONFUL OF SALT.”

housewife, starts under a great disadvantage. The typical lead model, the Red Indian, milkman or of course hippopotamus, is a remote and wonderful figure *in the flesh*; he looms, as it were, larger than life through the mists of unfamiliarity. But who could be more familiar to a child than a housewife? To be considered a romantic heroine by one's own family is surely as great a feat as being a hero to one's valet.

But perhaps the aspect of the matter that will please the housewife most is that she is surely one of the first *women* to have lead models made of her. Until a year or so ago, when she began to replace a row of males in the public symbol business, she had, understandably, seemed to lag behind in the great drive for the emancipation of women. But has anyone made lead models of the women doctors, lawyers, aircraft pilots and other leaders in the race whom the housewife sometimes, perhaps, envied? No. It has been left to her alone to invade a field that belonged, apart from a few cowed traditional milkmaids, exclusively to men and the lower orders, and no doubt her gracious influence will soon begin to have its effect in a general dusting off and tidying up among the other personnel on the nursery floor.

Already the three housewives that I bought for Kenneth take a very active part in his games, even though I omitted to provide any butchers. Yesterday they were

pressed into service to help in defending a fort, in which there is a chronic shortage of manpower, from an attack by a number of Scots Guards, Gurkhas, garage attendants and sea-lions, and they acquitted themselves well—I almost said “like men.” My wife seemed to think that they should be removed to some place of safety, along with the wounded and the giraffes, when the firing started, but Kenneth and I both felt that they would be quite at home on the ramparts. There is nothing the housewife cannot do, it seems to us, from now on.

### DRAMATIC INTERLUDE

Mr. Chubb, who had been silent for a good half-hour, stirred in the big arm-chair and cleared his throat.

“Ah, Rose!” he said, looking across at Mrs. Chubb. “It seems only yesterday that we walked hand in hand through Sefton Park and sat awhile to listen to the band.”



“YOU DO THAT AGAIN AND I’LL HAVE YOU CHILD-GUIDED!”

“And now, here we are,” Mr. Chubb went on, with a broad gesture. “And I am forty-six and you are forty-three.”

Mrs. Chubb looked up from one of Mr. Chubb’s socks, and frowned suspiciously.

Mrs. Chubb broke off a length of darning wool.

“I remember your white jabot,” said Mr. Chubb, “and the poppies on your hat. And now, as you know, our son Harry is twenty, and already shows promise as a violinist.”

Mrs. Chubb regarded him curiously for a moment, and then held the darning needle up to the light.

“He is upstairs at the moment,” proceeded Mr. Chubb, “shaving. His friend Hugh Symington is calling for him, is he not, and they have tickets for a music-hall?”

Mrs. Chubb deliberately put down the sock, and the wool, and the needle. Then she sat back in her chair, folding her arms, and watched him, fascinated.

“What a pity we have no great opinion of Hugh!” said Mr. Chubb. “Do you remember, Rose, at breakfast this morning, how you tried to persuade Harry that Hugh is not a desirable companion? I remember it well.”

“Do you really?” said Mrs. Chubb, nodding.



THE RECKONING

"I SHALL BE LEAVING YOU NOW, SIR."

"AH! GOING TO THE COUNTRY, PERHAPS?"

"Then there is our daughter, Myrtle," said Mr. Chubb. "She is just turned sixteen, is she not?"

Mrs. Chubb did not reply. She was tapping her foot lightly on the fender, and looking straight at him. He blushed slightly, and avoided her gaze.

"Just imagine," he went on. "She has been with that firm of lamp-shade manufacturers for three whole months now! I, of course, am the chief clerk in a shipping office, am I not?"

"Well," said Mrs. Chubb, "that's what you *tell* me. Just before we go any further, though, could you give me some idea of what this is all about?"

Mr. Chubb cleared his throat again, rather nervously.

"It occurs to me," he said, "that a play about us and our family and friends could be very interesting. The heart-aches, the triumphs: the laughter and the tears."



"SING UP, THERE!"

There was a short silence. Mrs. Chubb picked up the needle and threaded it coldly and efficiently.

"Would you please pass me the scissors?" said Mrs. Chubb.

"What I'm doing," said Mr. Chubb, getting down on his knees to peer under the sofa, "is working out the dialogue for the opening of the first act. Of course, it would be better if we had a maid. But, failing that, I must talk to you."

"I see," said Mrs. Chubb.

He handed her the scissors. "You have to let the audience know at the very start just what's what," he said, "in an easy, natural way."

"Do you, now?" said Mrs. Chubb.

"A man ought to have some constructive hobby," said Mr. Chubb, defensively.

"Ah, Rose!" he went on, "I wonder if your sister, Helen, will call this evening? Her husband, Percy, as you know, had a fine war record and is now doing well as a green-grocer. Didn't you tell me that their daughter Jane is taking ballet lessons? And for some weeks now our own daughter, Myrtle, has been hinting that she would like to do the same. Things will come to a head this evening, you mark my words. Ah! Is that the door bell I hear?"

Mrs. Chubb rolled the sock into a ball and stuck the needle into the arm of the chair. "The coal," she said, rising decisively, "is kept in the cellar, is it not?" She placed one hand on her chest. "Ah, Bruce!" she said. "Do you remember the lovely talk we had at tea, when I reminded you that unless you filled the scuttle there and then you would be sorry?"

Mr. Chubb sighed, and bent down for the coal scuttle, and the door bell rang again.

"And if I may be permitted an exit line," said Mrs. Chubb, pausing at the door, "our son Harry is nineteen. And I am *not* forty-three."

### NOISELESS TENOUR

It takes all sorts to make a world, and one of the sorts is us. We are the people nothing happens to, and we are here to make the other people even more interesting. We do this partly by contrast and partly by sitting up with them until two in the morning, knitting, folding toffee-papers, throwing coal-shavings on the dying fire and every now and then coming out with a "Good gracious!" or "How entirely fantastic!" We take some care over our epithets, and if a *mot juste* can add anything to these tales of fire, flood, earthquake and persecution by the neighbours, we add it. And with all our years of listening we've never been bored. Not only is the stuff as good as a novel without the trouble of turning the pages, it is a proof that things can happen in the world without us knowing at the time. "That would have been when I was living in Earl's Court," we muse, and if we fall to wondering whether the bus-stop outside the flat was a Request, and so miss a vital bit of the story, well, we're only human.

At least we believe we are. But when we compare our own lives with more spectacular affairs, we suspect that a certain strain of fecklessness has been denied us, as well as a fairy godmother hanging round with a bag of gold and a sledge-hammer. But whatever we lack is hereditary. Our parents saw to it that *we* weren't born in Alaska or Tahiti. England was good enough for them and for us, and that excludes fancy places like Truro or Carlisle. Our grandparents in their youth neither visited the Russian Imperial Court nor fell under the influence of Ruskin. As a matter of fact they never had a youth. They were institutions who grew begonias and didn't mind us playing croquet with the hoop-banger. As for our uncles and aunts, middle-aged pillars of society even in the days when they called in on our nurseries to leave



their half-crowns, they never dashed into our nice front halls, hung with engravings and clothes-brushes, shouting "The police are after me!" The only odd thing about them was that they were not only people, they were uncles and aunts, the way some fruit-drops are lime. And that hardly makes a story, not in the competition we have to face.

Then there is the matter of buying and selling. Our friends buy fur coats as we buy vests, and when enmeshed in financial difficulties—the sort that make ours look like chicken-feed—they do not stay there long. "Well," they say, "so we sold the refrigerator." And next minute the story has moved to Paris, with them having a wonderful time, so either they didn't pay the creditor with the revolver or they needn't have sold the refrigerator, at least that's how we work it out as we sit there tearing the corners off an old postcard. But what gets us is the ease and apparent profit of their transactions. We couldn't sell our refrigerator if we tried. For one thing we need it to keep food cold in and, for another, by working out the second-hand price for that year, and the likelihood of anyone taking a model with no guarantee



"I HOPE YOU'LL EXCUSE THE PLACE BEING IN SUCH A MESS."

and, as we'd be bound to tell the prospective purchaser, the thermostat about to go again at any minute—well you see what we mean. Our own answer to financial crises is to lose the flints we bought to get the lighter working to save matches in the kitchen.

Our friends have friends to suit them. Up at the top of their houses they have lodgers, inexplicable characters who lurk on the stairs with other inexplicable characters. At least in our own homes, where a visiting beard must be explained beforehand to the children, they'd be inexplicable. But to our friends they are the ingredients of life. "He used to be a lion tamer or something," they say, "and now he's in films only he never is, and he's inventing an invention, that's why he's always boiling things on the cooker, and that man you saw, he brings that sack and they can never get it upstairs." It is no surprise to hear that, while these lodgers don't pay rent, they have become a part of the household and keep it in caviar.

In their day our friends too have been lodgers, and then it is the surroundings the landlady and the bailiff and the jazz drummers who are the eccentrics. The roof may fall in, and sometimes does in the story, but our friends are shown as maintaining their calm, their sweet reason, their amazing capacity for being in the right. That, we think as we sympathize, was our mistake in *our* lodgings. We never convinced even ourselves that the table was broken before we stood on it. Another thing our friends maintain is dogs. They sail through life with a homicidal Cairn and three Great Danes all hating each other, while we can just about manage a sofa-shaped spaniel whose only feature is an addiction to cheese-rind. They have a piano too that someone in America will call for at any moment, and a huge cactus that drinks beer. I need not say much about our friends' parties, except that they are made of people who got in by mistake, and the whole assembly would be going on somewhere cheerful if we hadn't told it the time.

To give both sides of the picture I should admit that we in our turn have friends to whom we seem a little mad. Yes, we do, really. They're the people who call when we're doing some small painting job and happen to be wearing our best clothes and a funny hat we've just found. That on such occasions long-lost relations turn up, telephones ring, the tea-cups are full of distemper flakes and extraordinary parcels arrive for someone else makes it all the more falsifying, and I don't really see why I began this paragraph.

### THE NEW MAN

When I got into the chief's office he said "I've been talking to Mr. Bender here. I think he's just the man for us."

I looked at Mr. Bender. He was tall and thin. Hair like a carpet. Great horn-rimmed spectacles. Wild about the eyes.

"Have a talk to him yourself," the chief said. "Take him along to your department. If you're satisfied fix him up at a design board."

So I talked to Mr. Bender. I asked him some technical questions. I thought they were rather clever. Mr. Bender looked at me. He had very queer eyes. He just smiled slightly. I took him to a design board.

The next day, Mr. Bender came to me with some calculations. He said "We're not right here. I've always taken the co-efficient of equipotential flow as the basis of the abatic sequence. After all, Felspar's pirigram is only a modulation of the arc of occocycles expressed in iotas. And apart from that, there is the frictional slip."

He kept staring at me. I had to say something. I said "Of course."

He said "I'll run out the frictional slip as a polynomial graph, to show the roatic points exponentially."

"Yes," I said, "you do that." He wasn't going to beat me, I thought. But when he brought his figures I thought again. I didn't give anything away, though. I went to the chief.

"This new man, Bender, says we should consider frictional slip," I said.

The chief looked at me.

"He's run it out as a polynomial graph, to show the roatic points exponentially," I went on.

The chief began to polish his spectacles.

"He says he's always taken the co-efficient of equipotential flow as the basis of the abatic sequence. Felspar's pirigram, of course, is only a modulation of the arc of occocycles expressed in iotas."

The chief blew his nose, took out his pocket diary, wrote down "Call for bread on way home," and then looked at me.

"Seems to be a pretty good man," he said. "I thought so when I first spoke to him. Give him plenty of scope. We've got to stop this frictional slip. These polynomial graphs have proved that. Tell Bender to be careful with his roatic points. We must keep production costs down."

They were ahead of me, these two, I thought. I'd better watch my step. When I got back I told Bender to go ahead. He nodded. I hoped he had no talent for leadership. I had to be careful.

Very soon Bender came back. He said "The helical bisector of equipotential flow isn't coming out central with the gravital line on the second roatic-point cycle."

I remained outwardly calm. I had to. I said "Have you checked your calculation?"

He stared at me. He began to smile. I said "Don't worry, I'll let the chief know."

There was nothing for him to worry about, I thought. That was my privilege. They had me between them. But maybe I'd be able to get another job.

I told the chief. I said "According to Bender, the helical bisector of equipotential flow isn't central with the gravital line on the second roatic-point cycle." I had a good memory, anyway.

The chief stared at me. In a blank space on his desk jotter he wrote. "Call for bread on way home." Finally he said "It is Tuesday today, isn't it?"

He's testing me, I thought. I glanced at his calendar and agreed it was Tuesday. Then in walked Bender with a notebook and a slide rule. The chief was surprised. So was I. But only one of us looked worried—at first.

Bender said "Why isn't your P.W./frequency ratio a constant, even when the Clarke-Anderson reaction has been negated by synectomy?"

The chief looked at me. Then he said "Didn't you know about this?" Now *he* looked worried.

I just stared at the floor. I knew I was finished. I walked out and left them to it whilst I collected my stuff. In my own office I rang Clangers. Their managing director didn't seem impressed with me. So I said, "I've been working on equi-potential flow in relation to frictional slip. The occocyclic arc, you know. This roatic point business, principally."

There was a pause. Then the managing director said "When you finish there, come round and see me. I think you're the type we need."

As I went out I passed the chief's door and heard Bender still talking. But I didn't care. I sketched a couple of quick polynomial polynomials on the back of an envelope and hurried off to Clangers.

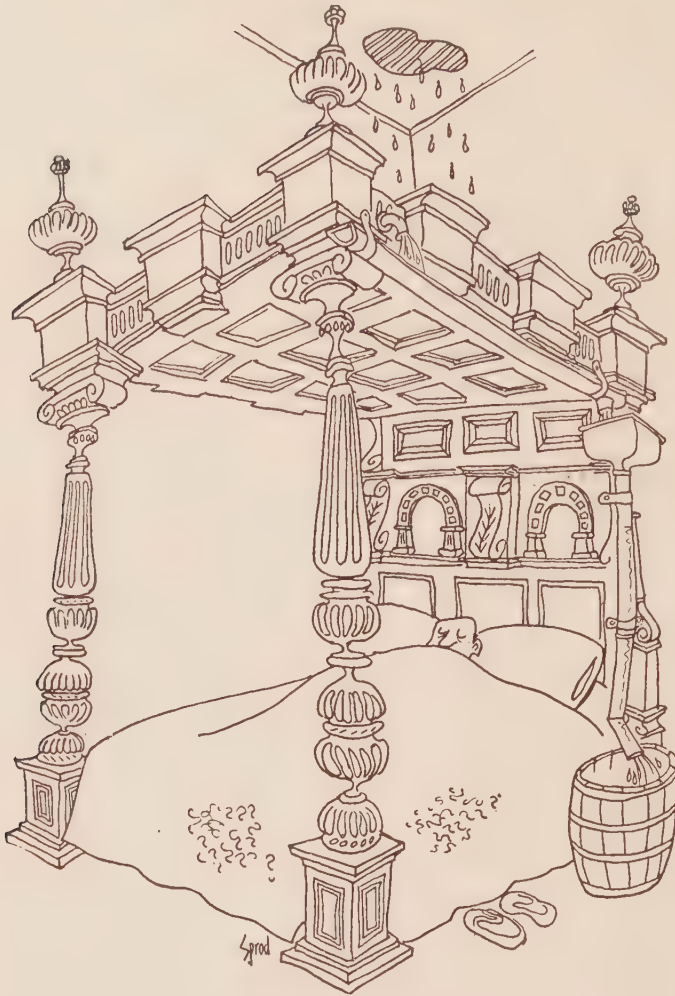


"GARÇON, LA MULTIPLICATION, S'IL VOUS PLAÎT."

## STATISTICS

Mr. Chubb looked up from the notebook with which he had been occupied for the best part of the evening, and screwed the cap on his fountain-pen with a satisfied sigh.

"Not counting those I only nod to, and people like the man in the next office who mends your watch when you drop it in the bath," he said, "I know two hundred and seventeen people."



Mrs. Chubb lowered *A Rage to Live* gradually on to her lap, keeping her finger on the line she had reached, and fixed him with an expressionless stare.

"Of that number," said Mr. Chubb, referring to his notes, "thirty are my relatives and eight are yours. I've counted Mrs. Matthews as a relative as well."

"As well as what?" said Mrs. Chubb, at last.

"As well. Then there are sixty-one business acquaintances, five school friends, twenty at the club, and—er—let me see—ninety-three miscellaneous."

Mrs. Chubb picked up her novel very slowly, and began to look at a page without reading.

Mr. Chubb bent back the cover of his notebook several times to make it stay open, and ran his palm down the middle, flattening it.

"You wouldn't think that, would you?" he said.

Mrs. Chubb raised her eyebrows, and then lowered them.

"Now," Mr. Chubb went on, "from that two hundred and seventeen I can deduct one hundred and thirty-three. They are the people I can't really call friends in the strict sense."

Mrs. Chubb closed *A Rage to Live*, and reached for a bar of chocolate. Not taking her eyes off Mr. Chubb for an instant, she removed the wrapping, snapped off an inch, and pushed it thoughtfully into her mouth.

"That," said Mr. Chubb, "leaves exactly eighty-four." He turned over several pages. "Now on the other hand," he said, "according to my calculations you know three hundred and twelve people."

Mrs. Chubb munched her chocolate steadily.

"They are made up," continued Mr. Chubb, "of one hundred and eighteen whom we have entertained from time to time: twenty-one——"

"Bruce," said Mrs. Chubb, very quietly and calmly, "just what are you doing, please?"

"Ah," said Mr. Chubb triumphantly, "I'm coming to that. Twenty-one members of your choral society, and a hundred and three miscellaneous. When we deduct forty friends you don't really like you are left with two hundred and seventy-two."

He looked up brightly, and then turned another page.

"Now Harry," he said, "seems to know seventy-one people, if we are to include that girl June. Of course, there may be more. Let's say there are twenty-nine more that we don't know of. That gives him a round hundred."

"Bruce," said Mrs. Chubb, in a dangerously controlled voice.

"Well," said Mr. Chubb, quickly closing his notebook and putting it in his pocket, "on the twenty-sixth of July it will be our silver wedding anniversary. And on the same day Harry will be twenty-one." He leaned back in his chair, and put his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat. "I make the grand total four hundred and fifty-six," he said.

After a long pause Mrs. Chubb reopened *A Rage to Live* and settled back in a corner of the sofa.

"Of course," said Mr. Chubb, looking around the room dreamily, "some of them may have previous engagements."

## FESTIVAL FOR FORTY

"Hands up all the children who can read this word."

"Feet!"

"Fence!"

"Don't call out, John, tell me."

"Thursday!"

"You're simply guessing. Some of you must have been very lazy at sound-building in your last class if you can't build up this simple word. . . . It is 'Festival.' Say it . . . There is no need to bellow. Gentle, clear voices are what we like to hear."

"I knew it was that, but you never asked me."

"So did I"

"It's a kind of party, isn't it?"

"Quite right, Patrick. You've all heard about the Festival of Britain, haven't you? Well, now—when John Todd has stopped crossing his eyes in that unpleasant manner—I am going to tell you what part this class is going to play in the Festival."

"My mum says it will be a crying shame if us school kids don't do nothing."

"Pamela, I have just said that we *are* going to do something. Attend! All the schools near here, that's nearly twenty altogether, are going to take part in a Grand Display of Work. It will be called 'Britain's Happy Children,' and it will show your parents and other visitors what lovely times you have in school these days, and give them some idea of modern education. Mr. Jones' big boys will do some drill, the girls are acting *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the babies will have their percussion band."

"Can we have that too?"

"No. We're going to do some of our lovely rhythmic work!"

"What, like we have to do every Tuesday in the hall?"

"Yes, only we shall really be acting some little plays without words. It is called miming. I shall play the piano for the dancing parts."

"You mean skipping about in a beautiful garden?"

"Rather like that."

"Like we did last week when you smacked Kenneth for not looking happy in the beautiful garden?"

"Very much better than that, I hope."

"I don't like rhythmic work!"

"Nor me!"

"Why can't we have the band?"

"Children! This is called 'Britain's Happy Children'—we can't have long faces. We'll talk about our miming later. There is something else we are taking part in. All the schools are going to form the word 'FESTIVAL' when we meet together in the park where we hold the display. All the children will run close together and make the word with their bodies."

"Lying down?"

"Of course not, you would be trampled to death. Just by standing in formation."

"How will the people know we are making 'FESTIVAL'?"

"They'll have eyes in their heads, I should hope, and at a given signal you will all squat down so that the word will be below their eye-level."

"Suppose we fall over?"

"How shall we know where to run to?"

"Do we *have* to do it?"

"You will practise, naturally. Don't make difficulties. I can assure you that it is no idea of mine!"

"When we've made 'FESTIVAL' can we go home?"

"After that we have our plays, and then, right at the end, the local education committee have thought of something else lovely for you to do. You will all have a paper hat hidden in your pockets."

"I haven't got no pockets!"

"In your belts then!"

"I haven't got no belt!"

"Well, down your sock, up your sleeve, ANYWHERE! The fuss you make about a little thing like hiding a paper hat! I'm sure the committee would be very disappointed at this despairing attitude. Cheer up, do!"

"What do we do with the hats?"

"Some are red, some white, and some blue. When the whistle blows you will all run, cheering, to your places, putting on your hats as you run, and then form the Union Jack."

"Squatting down again?"

"I expect so. Now, I refuse to answer a lot of questions about the flag and the word 'FESTIVAL.' Miss Judd is in charge, and I know she wants you to spend all your P.T. lessons and games periods practising, so that the display will have a spontaneous air about it on the day."

"Is all this to show the people what we do in school every day?"

"Yes, dear. We shall all go together from school in a bus. Won't that be lovely?"

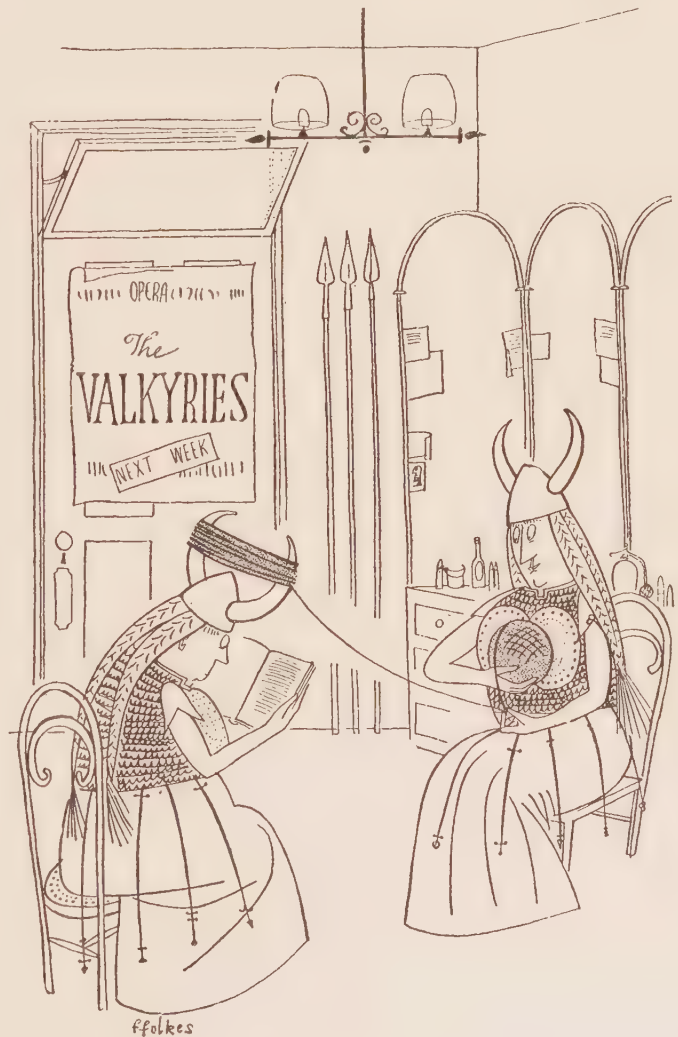
"I'm always sick in a bus."

"So am I."

"I don't get sick so much as black in the eyes. My mum thinks maybe——"

"Can my auntie's lodger come to see us?"

"Of course. Everyone can come. I expect there will be visitors from other countries French people and Americans, and if you do your play really well they





will go back and tell their own children how happy little British children are in school."

"Perhaps some of the Americans will take us back with them to act in the films?"

"Not if your hands are that colour, they won't! Tell your mothers that you are all going to take part in this lovely display of school work, and I am sure they will all be in the park to see you."

"If it's on a Wednesday my mum won't come. It's her day for the pictures."

"That's quite enough about the pictures. A little more attention to our own work, please. We shall have to rehearse for weeks to get you all looking happy and natural. I shall be looking out for some steady little people who can do as they are told. One of the mimes needs two sensible, trustworthy rabbits, and the other wants quite a large number of really intelligent frogs. Now, that's the sort of class I like to see—a credit to any Festival!"

May, 1951

TOOTHsome DAINTIES

THIS Belle Lettre deals with Pleasures of the Palate and is altogether a very hedonistic and unimproving piece of writing. No one will be a better man for reading it. So much for sales-talk.

The pretty ways of our ancestors included a preference for the visual to the edible in their menus. They liked their food to resemble State Barges, Swans, Chariots and Scenes from Ovid, whereas we prefer it nourishing and even criticize the candles on birthday cakes as inedible. They also liked their food complicated, with lots of different flavours getting in one another's way. Nowadays some purists object even to finding things inside chocolates, though this is carrying things too far. Provided that the filling is not itself a compound I am all for it, especially when there is an abstruse code telling you what filling to expect; there is a curious flavour produced by biting into a peppermint cream expecting it to be coffee which should be experienced at least once in every lifetime.

To be Toothsome a Dainty need not be sweet. Little things on bits of toast or biscuit are usually savoury, yet by increasing the appetite for alcohol they add much to life. An olive is a good example of savoury Toothsomeness. One has only to imagine one covered in chocolate icing to appreciate that there must be limits to the spread of sweetness about the world. I have often wondered how beef is stuffed with olives, seeing that olives are themselves stuffed with stones. If you remove the stones, you remove some of the peculiarly olive-like quality to which the eater has looked forward. If you don't, the beef has to be unstuffed and then the olive unstuffed and the parts reassembled, an operation so fiddling as to be destructive of appetite.

Many Dainties not otherwise Toothsome can be raised a class by covering with white of egg, using for this purpose a pastry-brush. Eggs are not always easy to come by and varnish will do as well, unless the host is intending to participate. Pastry-brushes have handles the colour of natural wood well scrubbed and a little wire ring sticking out of the end. I have never personally managed to make pastry with a brush and am at some small loss to account for the name. Perhaps the brushes are used to give a wind-swept coiffure to pastry cases. By the way, when choosing an egg-cup to insert into a veal and ham pie, make sure that the mark which will be revealed on the upturned base is one conferring distinction upon the home and not just something like "6d. reduced to 1½d."

It is usually said that for children the test of Toothsomeness is the amount of sugar worked into the Dainty, and such remarks as "Sweets to the Sweet" are



sometimes made when the young are feeding. This is a vulgar error. The real test is pinkness. However unattractive a cake, jelly or lump of rock may be in flavour and consistency, if it be roseate in hue all will be well. Hence the importance in infant cookery of cochineal. Even the most savoury of dishes can be got down tiny throats by its aid—even cod.

I have often wondered to see people in advertisements displaying uninhibited delight in their food. I was taught, when undergoing my upbringing, that one just ate unobtrusively while making light conversation on neutral topics. Yet the eaters in advertisements roll their

eyes, lick their lips and beam, and commit similar gross breaches of good manners when faced with a mash made out of the parts of corn not usable for bread.

Heigh-ho! What pleasures assail my senses when I let my memory rove back over the Dainties I have known. As so often happens when my memory gets off the leash, it brings me in touch with many experiences I have never actually known at first hand. I can easily remember frumenty, syllabubs and marchpane. To you, galingale may be just a word you have met in Chaucer and vaguely associate with galliards and farthingales. To me it is a small, square Dainty with a penetrating flavour of cloves—which is odd, as the glossary calls it preserved ginger.

As a boy, I was old before my time and never managed to show convincing enthusiasm for ginger-pop, strawberry ices, muffins, and cigarettes made of brown paper. I liked nothing so much as toast melba and three-cornered scones tasting of baking-powder. The school tuckshop refused to stock my favourites and I had to get them by post. When I edged out into the world I became more human, and the older I grew the younger I became. Now, when I go to a children's party I am publicly held back from the trifle and jellies and attempts are made to distract me by promises of an extra cracker.

Everyone has at least one recipe that they like to pass on. My recipe is

designed purely for conversational purposes and is called Capritta Salfordaise. The first word sounds Italian and isn't; the second gives the impression that I have paid a gastronomic visit to Salford, a town rarely visited except for industrial purposes. Having established myself as one who eschews the beaten track, I reveal the basis of my recipe, which is chopping things up small and forcing them into a pastry case. I rarely get the chance of mentioning more than three ingredients, though once, on a long-distance tram, I got up to fifteen before I was stopped. The poor are most impressed by affluent ingredients, like *foie gras* and caviar, the rich by such homely fare as tripe and curly kale. I end by saying "Of course, one serves it on unglazed earthenware with a sprig of cypress."

No consideration of this subject is complete without a passing reference to Brillat-Savarin. Well, we have now passed it.

### RETURN OF THE THING

"Is that settled then, Ted?" asked the man on the stool on my left. "About that business?"

"Weeerl," said the man on the stool on my right, "it is and it isn't style. I called in Thursday, though, to see about it."

I eased back a little to facilitate the flow.

"Go on," said the man on my left, resting a great hand between me and my coffee, "did you?"

"Being as it was Thursday, though," said the man on the right, "they was shut of course."

"Naturally, Thursday," said the man, nodding.

"I thought of knocking round the back," said Ted, "but then I thought No. Having anything?"

The left-hand man looked regretfully at the pork pies, with their air of success and arrival, briefly surveyed the barren selection of cakes, and declined.

"Not now I'm on to this cheese," he said, "if it's all the same. You get them to take it back?"

"I only saw the woman," said Ted. "He was out. That was Wensday."

"Jack!" called the left-hand man suddenly, swivelling, and presenting me with a close-up of a raincoated elbow. "You hear about Ted's bother with that thing he got?"

Jack (of Jax Snax) bent a sympathetic ear from the far end.

"What's that, then?" he asked. "Some trouble with it? Half a jiff."

"Three times I had a go at returning it in all," called Ted. "Saturday I went latish—shut. Wensday it was only the woman. Thursday, half-day."

"What'd the woman have to say then?" asked the man on my left, switching

round again. "Sorry, guv. That my hat? I'll take it off out of your way." He put it on the counter.

"Here," I said," said Ted, launching at once into the report, "'what's this, then?' I said. 'Look at it, after using it once. Clogged. And look at that round the bottom edge,' I said. 'You'll have to see Mr. Fletcher,' she said, 'being as I don't know about them really.'"

"Go on," said the left-hand man. "You'd think they'd have a bit of training."

Ted stabbed a forefinger at the other man.

"No," he said. "Ah! Not just in the shop. 'Well,' I told her, 'your Mr. Fletcher ought to be taken in charge,' I said. 'Member of the Chamber of Trade,' I said, 'or so it says on the door.' I told her. 'What if I was to come with this like this to their next meeting and complain?' Didn't bat an eyelid. 'Most likely as not,' she says, 'you'd find they'd give you a rude answer probably,' she says, 'coming in here. It's only some mechanical defect,' she kept saying. Couldn't think of nothing else."

"What about you, though," asked the man on the left, "having to manage? *She* didn't care."

Ted nodded disgustedly.

"Once they've sold it," he said. "You finished that cheese?"

"That's my lot," said the other man, piling my coffee cup on to his plate and grinding his cigarette in the saucer.

"What's the damages, Jack?"

"None apiece, guv," called Jack. "In a tick."

"D'you th——?" I asked suddenly, but they were carrying the pile of crockery to the far end.

"No," Ted was saying. "And then there was the handle. It was that brassed me off finally."

The left-hand man nodded.

"It would," he agreed, "that."

"Well," said Ted, from the far end, "I'm wheeling it round to old Fletcher's now."

"All the best, then," called Jack.

"Could you bring me another coffee?" I asked Jack. "With sugar, and without any men to take it away again?"



"In a mo," nodded Jack, supervising the filling of a teapot with gusts of steam-charged water.

I followed the reflections of Ted and the left-hand man in the mirror as far as the door. Then I could not restrain myself from peering out of the window. I suddenly wanted desperately to know whether Ted really had meant *wheeling*.

Infuriatingly, the glass was frosted.

## GOING TO THE PICTURES

When me and my friend Mrs. C. goes out to the pictures,  
There's Ireen and Marleen and Shirley has got to come too.  
It's a bit of a bother, but then, if we goes to the pictures,  
We can't leave them young kids at home (though I knows some as do).

And if you must have it, I likes a good cry at the pictures,  
But Ireen and Marleen and Shirl only *looks* when it's Mickey;  
We buys 'em choc-ices and lollies and *we* sees the pictures  
While they plays about on the floor and gets ever so sticky.

My two eldest girls is called Claudette and Ingrid (both pictures),  
And my friend Mrs. C. is expecting another in June;  
So far her two girls has got names that she took from the pictures,  
And if *this* one's a boy, she has got to make up her mind soon.

Her old man isn't what you'd call struck on these film stars in pictures,  
And she can't call it Bing 'cos their surname *is* Crosby, you see,  
And Mr. C. says that they'd take it to Court at the pictures,  
But she *thinks* "Victor Errol," and, if it's a girl, after me.

My Mum chose *our* names out of Royalty not out of pictures  
(My name's Alexandra Edwina Victoria Mary),  
But after the first war and having more money for pictures,  
She called my young brother George Rudolph Haig Jellicoe Gary.

It's all very well, but when you gets home from the pictures  
And you're getting the tea, with your head in a bit of a whirl,  
Seems silly to christen 'em Ireen and Marleen and Shirley  
When all they gets called as a rule is just Reen, Marl and Shirl.

## FOOD FOR TALK

"It's all very nice to have 'em an inch longer," said an acid pair of spectacles, standing up at the back of the Village Hall, "but why don't they put the price on them?"

"Is that supposed to be a question?" asked the chairman of the Brains Trust, looking fogged.

"He's talking about lobsters," explained a pair of jet earrings. "You're quite right, young man. I thought there was some sort of law whereby all fish on the slab had to have the price clearly marked?"

"Mr. Hammond?" said the chairman.

"More a question for Miss Gorton, I think," said Mr. Hammond.

"You're supposed to be Law, aren't you?" said the chairman.

"I am," admitted Mr. Hammond, reluctantly, "but fish is Household and Domestic, and that's Miss Gorton."

"Oh, all right, all right," said the chairman. "Miss Gorton?"

Miss Gorton flashed a reproachful glance at Mr. Hammond, and took a sip of water to help her think. It is her usual policy to keep in the background until the gentlemen of the team have given her a pointer on how to answer.

"The standard size of lobsters," said Miss Gorton, rising, "has been increased by one—er—overall inch in order to make them larger."

There was an astounded silence. Miss Gorton went the colour of the subject under discussion and sat down.

"What I'm asking," said the spectacles patiently, "is why they don't stick the price on fish—any fish—in fishmongers'. Lobsters was merely an illustration."

"Jolly good illustration, too," endorsed an interested briar-pipe. "I'm very fond of a lobster myself, but I'm dashed if I'm going to go into the shop to find out how much they are."

"You won't often find a man who will," agreed the jet earrings. "They hate having to come out again when it's too much."

"They *don't* come out again," said an embittered milk-bottle-top shopping-bag. "They just whistle, airy-like, and fork out."

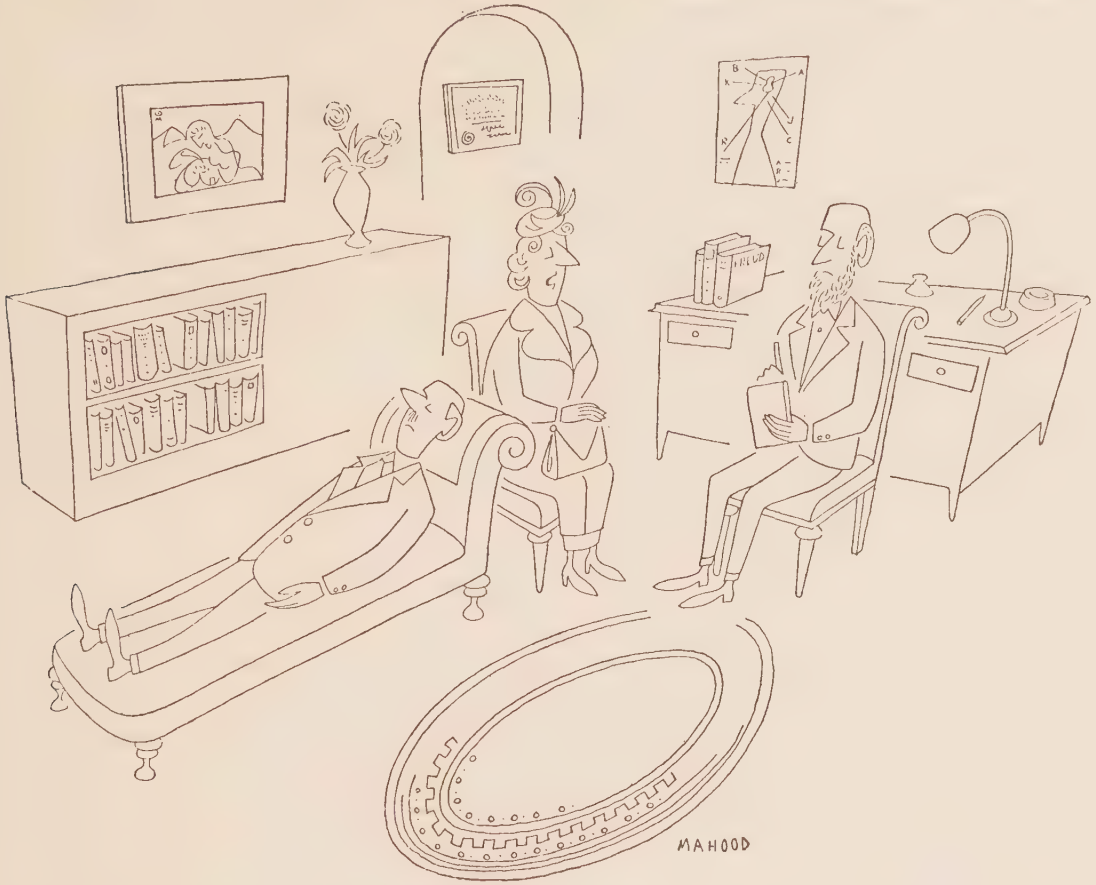
"Maybe we do," said the briar-pipe, "but we don't go *there* again."

"If you ask me, fishmongers don't ticket their fish because they're too ashamed of the price of everything," said a disillusioned fox-fur.

"Nonsense!" said the shopping-bag sharply. "Fishmongers are strangers to shame, the prices they charge."

"You're perfectly right, ma'am," the jet earrings shouted across to her. "You'd never believe what I was called on to pay for four miserable little fillets of plaice last week."

"Everybody knows plaice is a national disgrace," said the fox-fur. "I bought



just a little one last Wednesday—or would it be Thursday?—and when I asked how much it was . . .”

“That’s what I’m getting at,” interrupted the spectacles. “You oughtn’t to *have* to ask how much it is. You ought to be able to look at it on the slab, and go inside or pass it by, as the case may be.”

“Don’t suppose they’d ever sell anything, if they warned you what they meant to soak you,” said a hand-painted American tie. “Same with fruit-shops. They put so-much a pound on carrots and spuds, and so on, but when it comes to pine-apples and melons and mushrooms . . .”

“The only really expensive thing they put the price on is ham,” said the jet earrings. “They seem to just glory in sticking eleven shillings a pound on that. They don’t even bother to call it two-and-nine a quarter to make it sound cheaper.”

“But at least they’re frank and open about ham,” argued the spectacles. “Now, a thing I’m very partial to is a nice Dover sole . . .”



"Grilled and served slit up the middle with a walnut of butter on the backbone?" asked the fox-fur anxiously.

"A thing I've always wondered," said the shopping-bag, "is why there isn't a fishmonger in the land will skin more than one side for you."

"If I *knew* it was going to set me back, say half a crown," said the spectacles, "why, I'd treat myself to one, now and again. It's the uncertainty puts you off."

"Quite true," said the briar-pipe. "I like Dover sole, but I'd rather get sausages because they're easier to buy."

A hiss of derision from all the ladies present whistled through the hall.

"I mean sausages are at least marked," explained the briar-pipe.

"Marked 'Registered Customers Only,'" said the fox-fur. "But never at the shop *you're* registered with."

"Will somebody kindly inform me," the shopping-bag inquired of the Brains Trust with elaborate courtesy, "why we had to send a team of sausage-experts all the way to America to learn how to make sausages we've apparently stopped making?"

"The original question . . ." began the chairman, and paused. On the whole, he thought, they were well out of the original question. "Mr. Bates?" he said encouragingly.

"My opinion," said Mr. Bates, basely deserting to the enemy, "is that they went over there just to have a jolly good blow-out at the tax-payer's expense."

"The object," said Mr. Hammond, frowning reprovingly at his colleague, "was to discover what Americans like in their sausages."

"And apparently they discovered that Americans like milk-powder in 'em," said the briar-pipe.

"Milk-powder makes a sausage very nutritious," said Mr. Hammond stiffly.

"To blazes with nutritious food!" said the shopping-bag vehemently. "What I want is food I like the taste of."

She coloured.

"I beg pardon, all the company," she added.

Mr. Bates and the briar-pipe led the applause.

"I wish I knew," said the chairman plaintively, "why our sessions invariably degenerate into a discussion on food."

"It's the same everywhere," the briar-pipe told him consolingly. "Go into a pub and start discussing anything you please—the latest Einstein Theory, 'Tales of Hoffmann,' the England Test team—and I'll guarantee within a couple of minutes you'll find you're talking about how you used to like your rump-steak done."

"Grilled *quickly*," said the jet earrings. "Rich brown outside and all red and runny inside."

"Cooked with butter," said the fox-fur. "A smear of butter drawn over it the moment it begins to get warm . . ."

"Cut thick, mind you," said the shopping-bag, "with a curve of yellow fat . . ."

"Have a plate getting hot underneath," said the spectacles. "Lift the steak off the grill on to the plate the instant it's done . . ."

"Don't prick it with the fork!" shouted the briar-pipe. "For heaven's sake, don't prick it as you lift it off!"

"Put a little pat of butter on top . . ." said the jet earrings dreamily.

"And then—and then," said Miss Gorton in a hushed voice, "take up the grill-pan and pour the fat and the lovely, red juice all over it."

In the rapt silence that filled the hall, the sound of the chair-man swallowing painfully was clearly heard.

"I could tell you where all the rump-steaks have got to!" said the spectacles, darkly.

"Will you come up on to the platform, please?" said the chair-man earnestly.



AAGAARD.

## BIOGRAPHY

"I don't know whether you've ever read Gibbon," said the man at the bar.

"I don't see how you could," I said. "There has been no public announcement."

He was not deterred.

"It's very much tied up," he went on, "with the story of my life. I was a shy, nervous lad, neither given to athletic exercise nor to study. I used to mope and dream. But that was before my parents found out that my Uncle Jeremy intended to make me his heir. He was a man of vast self-confidence, was my Uncle Jeremy, and nothing attracted him so much as danger. If my Uncle Jeremy wanted to cross the road, he crossed it, and the traffic just had to go round. If there was a notice up anywhere to say that bathing was forbidden, it was there that my Uncle Jeremy chose to bathe. A difficult bit of climbing was a delight to him. If there was a single pole stretched over a raging torrent, my Uncle Jeremy would want to cross by it. Every school holiday I had I used to spend with my Uncle Jeremy. My parents made me do it.

"Let's see if we can jump this, or climb that," he was always saying. And up or over he would go, and I had to follow him, with fear gripping my heart and death staring me in the face, as you might say. How I got to hate that man! If only he would tumble, or drown, and leave me his money! But at forty-six or so he was as

strong and active as a lion, and whatever he did I had to follow him. You can see for yourself the temptation that came to me. One push at the right moment, one challenge to swim a bit further out, and happiness would be mine.

"And then one day a terrible idea presented itself to me. Suppose my Uncle Jeremy did have an accident while I was with him. What were the police going to say? How could I prove that it was an accident? The darkest suspicions would be raised. So now there were two terrors assailing me at every turn. Whether I fell down a precipice, or was swept away by a current, or the same thing happened to my Uncle Jeremy, either way I was doomed. My life became a misery.

"And then one day he said he had seen the opening of a cave half-way down a cliff, and was going to scramble down and have a look at it.

"'Come along, my boy,' he said.

"'You go first Uncle,' I cried.

"And down he went. He slipped. . . Chalk and stones clattered round him. 'That's done it,' I thought. But no. He caught some kind of a tree sticking out of the cliff face, and hung on to it with his hands. There he was, half-way down the cliff, kicking and shouting, his legs waving in the air, trying to get a foothold.

I ran for help. What a run that was! Nearly two miles, I should say, across the downs, to find someone with a rope to pull him up by, and all the time feeling that the rope was round my own neck, if he fell off before I got back again. Well, we hauled him up. It took a long time, for he was a big-built man, and you can imagine the anguish I felt while we were doing it. They kept asking me how he got there, and I don't think anyone believed he would have been such a fool as to climb down there of his own accord. I was shaking with fright."

He took a long drink, and put his mug down.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I don't really see what this has got to do with Gibbon."

"You wouldn't," he said. "No, I don't suppose you would. Point is, that the tumble broke his nerve. Broke his health too. He



became a complete invalid. Took to his bed, and hardly stirred from the house. And what do you think he made me do? Said he'd never given enough of his life to literature, and so I had to go round and read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* by his bedside. Day after day in my holidays I had to waste, reading all that dreary rubbish aloud to him.

"'Read that bit about Commodus over again,' he would say.

"The worse the emperors were, the more he liked them, and whenever I said to my parents I couldn't do it any longer, they would say 'Remember the money, my lad,' and off I would go like a lamb.

"But his health was failing badly. It was a hard race at first between Gibbon and him, but Gibbon was the stayer. He had my uncle's measure all the time. We'd got as far as Justinian before my uncle died. I can remember it as if it was yesterday. End of chapter forty-three it was :

"'And his reign is disgraced by a visible decrease of the human species, which has never been repaired in some of the fairest countries of the globe.' I remember wondering how much of the human species had been like my Uncle Jeremy, as I closed the book that autumn day. Twenty thousand he left me, and can you wonder if I ran through it all in five years? Extravagant, I dare say. I'll not excuse myself. A bit of the Roman emperors must have got into my blood. Anyhow, that's how it was, and that's why I was going to ask you——"

"I see," I said, rather sadly. "Well, I'll buy your Uncle Jeremy from you, if that's what you mean."

He took what I gave him, and crammed it into his pocket.

"By the way," I said, as an afterthought. "Have you told many people about your Uncle Jeremy before?"

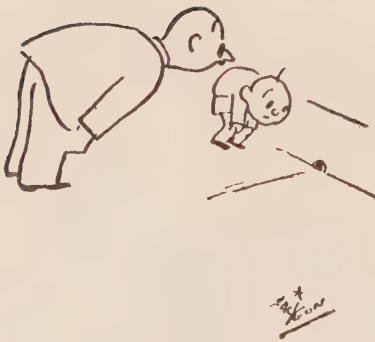
"I have my honour," he said, "and I hope I have my pride. I never even thought of him until I saw you come in. I never had an Uncle Jeremy at all. Now, my Uncle George——"

But only the swinging door was left to listen to what his Uncle George had done.

## SELF-EXPRESSION FOR THE SEDENTARY

The sedentary worker needs something manual and creative to do at week-ends to prevent him from becoming neurotic. Fuses, curtain rails and a little painting keep him going for a time, but one day he wants to be a real carpenter, and buys a book on it. Too often he gets no farther. I don't blame him; the carpenter's bench he is expected to make before he starts is enough to put anyone off. It is massive, beautifully planed and fits together in a frighteningly difficult way. It is full of concealed stops and vices and contains as much timber as a post-war house. But of course he doesn't need one. Any old table will do, or even a new one with

newspaper on top. And he needn't bother to read the rest of the book either. The more he works out of his head the more channels his creative urge will have to flow along. Given a few essentials and enough dash in his approach, he will find he can decide what to make and how to do it while actually engaged on the job.



But first he must find somewhere to work. The book would suggest an empty, well-lighted room or a large shed with ample storage space. The sedentary carpenter has no empty room and his shed contains deck-chairs and tables, jam jars, apples, prams and push-chairs, ladders, toy motor cars, lawn mowers and, except in the winter, coal. If he can get inside he will find that it has no window and the roof leaks. The adaptation of this to a work place is too large a problem for his tender creative urge and he should not face it. The proper place for sedentary carpentry is the sitting-room. Here are light and warmth, both essentials; a comfortable chair for rest when the creative urge is temporarily at a loss, or the thumb temporarily sore. Here also criticism, necessary at times during creative work, will be immediately at hand.

Having decided on the place, and determined also to keep the idea to himself for the time being, the sedentary carpenter has the problem of materials—that is, of wood. He isn't allowed to buy soft wood and it is unfair to ask a beginner to start on hard wood. But he needn't worry, there are plenty of ways round this one. For instance, I buy my wood from a wine merchant. I find one some distance away, choose from time to time bottles of coloured liquid (which incidentally is itself quite good for the creative urge), and get him to send them by train. They turn up a month later in a lovely wooden case, which is perfect for carpentry. Not only are the component pieces square at the edges and of uniform thickness (there are two chapters in the carpentry book on how to get wood into this state) but there are nails as well. Finding

nails otherwise is difficult; the natural source of supply in the walls of the house soon dries up and buying them is not to be thought of. They come from iron-mongers, and a visit to this sort of shop is the surest way to repress the creative urge and substitute an inferiority complex.

Even if the sedentary carpenter's thirst cannot keep pace with his creative urge, there is plenty of wood right under his nose. Backs of bookcases often yield to pressure; unwanted pictures may be dropped and provide, besides the frame, thin bendy stuff from the back which is otherwise difficult to get. It is surprising, until they are approached in a creative mood, how many things are made of wood and how many bits of them are removable without showing from the front.

Tools should be few and simple. A hammer, with a thing on the back for demolition, saw, tube of glue, penknife and sandpaper. A plane should never be used for smoothing wood—it usually does the opposite and will probably lead in any case to expulsion from the chosen place of work. Outdoor tools, such as choppers and mauls, should be avoided as not being inherently creative.

When he has got as far as this the sedentary carpenter should choose a Saturday afternoon when his wife has taken the children for a walk, and START. Any further suggestion on my part would interfere with the essential creative flame itself, and this I shall not dare to do.

## WELL OFF THE MAP

What is England's most repulsive town? This question must have occurred to the Organizers of the Festival of Britain; but so far they have not given any answer. We can only wait for a leakage. My own choice is Colburgh St. Simeon's. The county in which it lies keeps it so dark that the conspiracy of silence must be a heavy burden on the county rate. However, it does not take this exclusion from the comity of towns lying down and has produced a small guidebook, which is now a bibliographical rarity as most of the copies have been bought up for pulping by patriotic citizens of the surrounding countryside. Extracts from this brochure will show that my claim deserves serious consideration.

### Colburgh St. Simeon's

Civic Motto: *Progress Thru Planning.*

*Pop.* 12,353. Optimum population adjusted to projected site-use 12,417. Statistical breakdown of population figures: Group A, 6,432. Group B, 9. Group C, 4,333. Group D, not yet calculated. Groupings based on Sterthem and Maxie's "Demography for Demos."

*Market Day.* Monday, Agricultural produce. Tuesday, Ancillary agricultural trades. Wednesday, Clothing and textiles. Thursday, Heavy industry and conspicuous consumption goods. Friday, Light industry and domestic industry. Saturday, Unallocated.

*Licensing Hours.* Adjusted to reverse-peak demand: 9 A.M.—12 A.M., 3—4.30 P.M., 11.30—11.45 P.M.

*The Bentham Arms.* Dormitory accommodation units: 24. Food intake accommodation units: 1. Alcoholic intake accommodation units: 3. Costs: 15/6 plus 1/3 minus  $\frac{1}{4}$ , or 12/4, whichever shall be the lesser per dormitory unit and fraction of food intake unit per 17 hours or fraction thereof.

*Edith Summerschool Guest House.* Week-end conferences catered for. Individual bookings accepted. Brains Trust lunches. Minimum fee, 24/-. Price-ceiling by arrangement.

*Civic Refectory.* Dietary balanced to the nearest calorie. Vitaminized beverages. No waiting.

**HISTORY.** Colburgh St. Simeon's is first mentioned in the Census of 1911, Beginning as an overflow settlement from the Industrial Dormitory area of Spudgely. It gained civic self-consciousness rapidly. On the establishment of the Pilot Survey of 1927 the area was scheduled as a Socio-Economic entity and named on the advice of the English Place-Name Society.

With the coming into general use of Precision Planning, a Development Corporation was established to co-ordinate the activities of other bodies; by mutual arrangement its own activities were in turn co-ordinated by them.

**HEALTH.** Vital statistics continue to show a slight excess of health over unhealth. Psychological maladjustment remains the commonest cause of under-occupation. Complete daily records of health are kept by all tenants as a condition of tenancy.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT.** Opinion polls are taken fortnightly and the Council Public Relations programme adjusted accordingly. The Principal Zoning Officer is At Home to Ratepayers on the afternoon of the first Thursday in the month.

**ARCHITECTURE.** In the areas of primary settlement the style adopted was Neo-Functional, in areas of secondary settlement Post-Neo-Functional. In accordance with the Third Interim Report of the Advisory Committee on the Therapeutic Use of Colour, all wall-surfaces, external and internal, are painted in alternate squares of ultra-violet and beige.

**EDUCATION.** Complete multilaterality not having yet been attained in Educational Organization, partial multilaterality has been accepted by the Authority as a temporary goal. On confirmation by the Corporation, this will become a target. The Intelligence, Temperament and Personality testing of all local children at birth has provided sufficient statistical material for the construction of a blueprint of future educational development in the area. The School Record Filing Block is now in process of construction. The installation of a microfilm television circuit will render it possible for the Headmaster to obtain factual data on the psychological and educational history of any child in  $\frac{2}{5}$  minute. It is hoped eventually to reduce this time-lag by  $\frac{1}{8}$ .

**INDUSTRIES.** A site in sub-Zone 3 has tentatively been earmarked for the forthcoming developments in plastics.



"CURTAIN'S JUST GOING UP, MISS."



GROUP ACTIVITIES. Social integration into neighbourhood units is promoted by cultural activities selected on the careful testing of home-occupying personnel. Rhythmic basket-weaving, mass golf and non-competitive drama festivals have proved psychologically advantageous.

AMUSEMENTS. See Group Activities.

AMENITIES. It is hoped to proceed with the introduction of these as and when the supply of clerical labour permits.

EDITORIAL NOTE. Nothing in this Guide shall be deemed to commit the Editorial Board to any endorsement of statements contained herein nor is such endorsement to be inferred by reading between the lines or other unauthorized procedures. No cause for action may be based upon any error or omission in the Guide without permission of the Editorial Board.

### AUTHOR'S CORRECTION

I began to butter a piece of toast to keep my hands from trembling. Then I read the last paragraph of my daughter's letter again. It said: "*Miss Whitticombe has confiscated that new adventure story of yours. I think it's the best book you've ever written, and so do all the other girls, but Miss Whitticombe says it's not suitable reading for young ladies. She says I can have it back at the end of term, but not the catterpillars she found under my pillow . . .*"

I took a quick gulp of coffee. The red mist was disappearing from in front of my eyes and I could once more see my wife at the other side of the breakfast-table. I tried to make my voice sound casual.

"You remember *Sandra Smith, Girl Detective*, darling, don't you?"

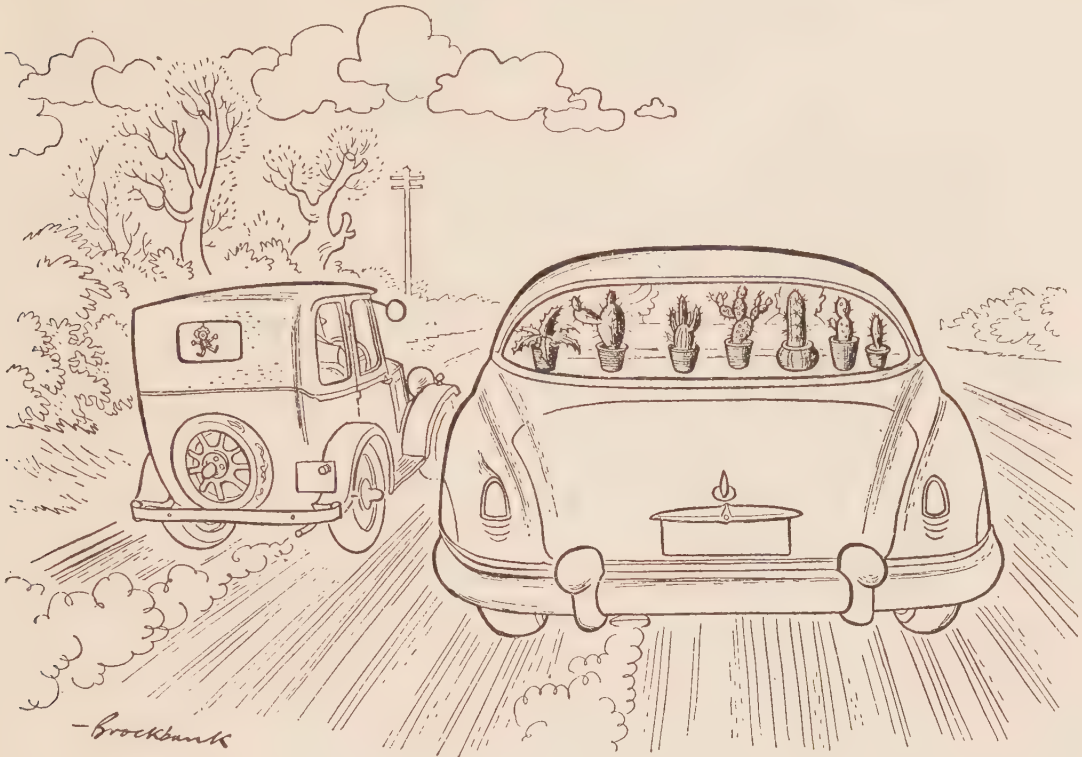
"Remember her?" My wife gave a short laugh. "I lived with the little horror for six months. What of it?"

"Oh, nothing much. It's just that Miss Whitticombe has confiscated the copy I sent Jill. Miss Whitticombe says—and I quote—'it is not suitable reading for young ladies.' Did you ever hear anything so preposterous? Why, the moral tone of the book is absolutely sky-high!"

"It certainly got a rave notice in the parish magazine."

"And here's this Whitticombe woman daring to suggest that it's not fit for my own daughter!" I stormed out into the lounge and unearthed a copy of *Sandra Smith, Girl Detective*. The cover showed Sandra secured by her school scarf to the mast of a sinking dinghy; in the background a lifeboat was hurrying to her rescue with the headmistress in a sou'-wester peering anxiously ahead through the spray. I took the book back to the breakfast-room, thumbing through the pages as I went. It was irreproachable stuff. Clean as a whistle from cover to cover.

"Perhaps it was the midnight feast in the dorm that Miss Whitticombe didn't like," suggested my wife.



I turned to the chapter headed "Sandra in Disgrace!" and found the description of the feast.

"Nothing wrong with it at all," I said hotly. "Sardines, cheese, blackberry jam, and a Madras curry whipped up in the chemistry lab by that Indian girl in the Lower Fifth."

"And how do they eat it? Fingers?"

"Certainly not! Sandra herself smuggles a tablespoon up from the dining-hall. Any other author would have made them use shoehorns."

"To a hygiene-hound like Miss Whitticombe, individual shoe-horns might be more acceptable than a communal tablespoon."

"Nonsense." I leafed through the book, savouring my own sinewy prose.

My wife said: "Perhaps it's the bit where Penelope is arrested by M.I.5 during a nature ramble."

"Penelope?"

"You know—the mysterious new girl who keeps a carrier-pigeon in her music-case."

"Oh, yes." I found the description of Penelope's arrest and read it carefully.



"Nothing wrong there," I said. "She's given time to pop a few things into a sponge-bag before they take her away."

"Well, then, is there any similarity between the headmistress in your book and Miss Whitticombe?"

I laughed harshly. "Listen . . . 'Penelope flung herself at the headmistress's feet and sobbed as though her heart would break. Miss Trelawney's kindly face grew grave as she listened to her pupil's confession . . . ' Would you describe Miss Whitticombe's face as kindly? Would you, however heartbroken, fling yourself at her feet? Except perhaps in a flying tackle?"

"No."

"Exactly." I tossed the book aside and picked up Jill's letter again. On the back was a postscript I hadn't seen before. It said: "*Miss Whitticombe says I'm to have a new dressing-gown—the old one had some jam spilt on it.*"

Blackberry jam, if I know anything about it.

## SOFT AND HARD BOILED

"Well may you weep!" I said severely to the youngest of the three malefactors. She stood about a yard high and felt dismally in her knicker leg for her handkerchief. Tears coursed down her face in fat drops.

Mr. Henry, the farmer, on whose behalf I was doing justice, began to weave unhappily about the schoolroom.

He stands six feet four in his gum-boots, played full back for the county for years, halts mad bulls with one hand and has a heart as soft as a marshmallow. I could see I should have trouble with him if I didn't hurry up the proceedings.

He was gazing miserably at a case of cocoa from POD TO DESSERT CHOCOLATE.

"Look," he said desperately, approaching my desk, "let them off this time."

He spoke in what he thought was a whisper, but half a dozen tracings of South America were blown to the floor. He winced at the sight of the three children standing in front of the assembled school (all twenty-five of them).

The second child, seeing his harrowed face, now began to pipe her eye with some energy.

"Sorry I ever brought it up," he muttered. "Poor little things! So small——" His voice broke.

"Nonsense!" I said firmly. "Not so small that they don't know right from wrong."

I walked deliberately to the cupboard at the end of the class-room. There was a respectful hush. Tradition had it that there was a cane in that cupboard—never used, but much venerated. This was an Occasion.

I felt among the enormous wooden cones, cubes, hexagons and other massive shapes that these children's grand-parents used to use for some mysterious bygone lesson.

Where was that dratted cane, I fumed to myself, with my head among the raffia.

"It's by them maps, miss," murmured the head boy, who should go far when he leaves school. He intends, he tells me, to work up the Atomic. I retrieved the cane from between the Holy Land and Muscles of the Human Body.

Mr. Henry was nearly in tears himself when I put it on my desk.

"I shan't use it, silly," I hissed at him with my back to the class, but I raised it solemnly and pointed it at the biggest sinner. He was of gipsy stock and wore long black corduroy trousers, five jerseys, two waistcoats and a spotted neckerchief. His round black eyes met mine boldly.

"Abraham, you knew it was wrong to take Mr. Henry's eggs?"

"Yes, miss."

"And you knew too, Anne?"

"Yes," she sniffed remorsefully.

"And Carol?"

The smallest one nodded dumbly. Her knicker leg had failed to yield a handkerchief.

Mr. Henry, I was glad to see, had pulled himself together and managed a creditably reproving shake of the head.



"LOOK OUT FOR SOMEONE WEARING A RED CARNATION WHEN I COME OUT."

"If this happens again," I told the children, "I shall use this cane, not just show it to you."

The school looked approving. Right's right after all.

"How many eggs did you take, Carol?"

"One."

"Then you will have one tap with this cane if you steal again."

I turned to Anne.

"I took free," she said.

"Then you know how many taps you would get."

I could feel the atmosphere relaxing nicely. The end was in sight. Mr. Henry had seen justice done, the cane would return to its dusty habitat, and the Occasion was rounding off nicely.

I pointed the cane at Abraham.

"I took a 'ole 'atful," he said.

Mr. Henry snorted, and began to blow his nose fussily.

"But I never went to the 'en 'ouse, miss," pleaded Abraham, a heart-breaking gipsy whine creeping into his voice. "They was all together, miss—honest, miss—atween the 'edge and the tractor shed."

Mr. Henry wheeled round delightedly.

"Well, what do you make of that?" he exclaimed, rummaging energetically in his breeches pocket. "That's a real sharp lad! We've been scouring the place for weeks for that pullet's nest!"

## MR. JUDD

I am greatly disappointed in Mr. Judd.

When a job cropped up which my wife decided was beyond me (as when the best part of the coal-house blew away last winter), we always turned to Mr. Judd, and he never let us down. If we had felt inclined we could have turned to Messrs. Greyston and Murgatroyd, Contractors, who are very go-ahead, and wear overalls. But it was precisely because he was *not* go-ahead that we pinned our faith on Mr. Judd.

On the one occasion when we did telephone Messrs. Greyston and Murgatroyd, to hint that our greenhouse seemed to be falling to pieces, they came along efficiently and backed their lorry into the outhouse, and before we knew what was happening they were swarming all over the place. They fitted a new water-spout, they put their feet through the roof, and they stuck a complete set of new panes in the greenhouse. Moreover, when they left, the greenhouse *still* seemed to be falling to pieces, and so did the outhouse.

Mr. Judd was different. He did not call himself a contractor: his handcart was inscribed simply *B. Judd*. He had no telephone: his customers pushed bits of paper through his letter-box advising him of a burst pipe or a leaking gutter.

He did not surround himself with a gang of white-coated assistants, as do Messrs. Greyston and Murgatroyd, to ride away on bicycles for lunch at noon: he brought a dented billy-can and some cheese sandwiches, and asked for a drop of boiling water for a brew from time to time. If you asked him to put up a fence, he put one up: no more, and no less. He only appeared to have one ladder, and frequently he had left it somewhere else. He did not tramp in and out of the house with wet cement on his boots. He got on with the job wearing an old trilby hat with a dinge at the front, and he hummed to himself. I thought he hummed "The Bells of St. Mary's." My wife thought he hummed "I Passed by Your Window." We never asked him what *he* thought he hummed. Whatever it was, it was certainly more dignified than the interminable close-harmony of Messrs. Greyston and Murgatroyd.

Mr. Judd is at work on our premises just now, as it happens. He is painting the outside window-frames. When he has finished that (in about a fortnight, he reckons) he will do the inside frames as well. We didn't want him to, but he said it wouldn't do them any harm.

I was a bit surprised when he said that. It smacked rather of Greyston and Murgatroyd: it was almost go-ahead. I was even more surprised on the fourth day, when he brought along a person called Ned to hold the ladder steady. Ned didn't actually *look* go-ahead—he wears a long, threadbare overcoat and a mournful moustache: he smokes his pipe upside down, and he smells of putty—but I didn't like the way things were going.

It was Ned, I believe, who suggested to my wife that one wall of the house could do with a bit of pointing to stop it falling down. It was certainly Ned who broke the door disapprovingly off the garage to show me where it was rotten.



Yesterday morning they brought a lot of bright new bricks and dumped them gloomily on the edge of the lawn. I will say this for Mr. Judd: he and his staff do not go about their work with the infuriating briskness of Messrs. Greyston and Murgatroyd. They shuffle around, muttering pessimistically. All the same, I had forebodings.

I can't imagine what they plan to do with the bricks. For one thing they are yellow, and they don't seem to match anything.

I never speak to Mr. Judd, because he is stone-deaf, and very testy, and when I approached Ned about the bricks, and about a two-handed saw which has been propped suspiciously against the dust-bin for three days now, he only winked.

This morning my wife told me about the hole. All day yesterday, while Mr. Judd was putting a first coat on the back door (which I painted myself only last month), Ned was busy digging a deep hole in the front garden, just by the gate.

"We didn't ask for a hole there, did we?" said my wife.

"We did not," I said, and I went out sternly to survey it. Mr. Judd and Ned had disappeared. In the hole was a gibbet, seven feet high.

This afternoon they returned, with a large, freshly-painted signboard, which is even now swinging gravely on the gibbet. It says *Decorations by B. Judd, 12 High Street.*

The rot has set in. Progress has overtaken Mr. Judd. He and Ned are at this very moment standing on the roof of the outhouse, shading their eyes and pointing things out to each other. And I'll swear the tune they're humming is "Mood Indigo."

## THE STAGE LOUNGE

Time was when stage comedy was conducted exclusively in the drawing-room, for it concerned people who were never seen in any other room in the house. Nowadays stage comedy is normally conducted in a large room, elsewhere unknown to English architecture, called the lounge. Through a small recess at the centre back, the front door of the house opens directly into the room, and on either side of it two large windows admit the sunlight all day long and allow a glimpse of a well-kept garden. On the right hand a staircase leads to a gallery in which two doors stand immediately above the lounge windows—but these are only the stage architect's little joke. To open them would be to experience instant deportation into the garden. The family sleep in other rooms farther along the corridor.

Near the foot of the stairs is a door which leads to the drawing-room. It is evident from the sunshine which floods the lounge that the drawing-room has been built on the north side of the house. Such was not the way with stage architects fifty years ago: then it was the drawing-room which was flooded with sunshine.

Not that it matters; the drawing-room is rarely used to-day; all the goings-on and all the best remarks blossom in the lounge.

At the back of the staircase a passage leads to the study, from which the owner of the stage lounge emerges from time to time to look for the newspaper, which he is always losing in the most amusing manner. He is a great smoker and his daughter can twist him round her little finger.

On the opposite side is a door down-stage which leads to the dining-room, and one up-stage, leading to the kitchen, which has been placed by the stage architect on the sunny side of the house to enable the entertaining old servant to make the most of her entrances. Martha has been with the family for years. She is the only servant, for the owners of the elegantly appointed stage lounge are notoriously impecunious.

With three doors, a front door, a staircase, a passage, and two windows, the stage lounge might be expected to be cold and draughty, even with the large open fireplace which the stage architect has cleverly inserted between the kitchen and the dining-room doors: but evidently it is not—for the impecunious owners spend all their time in it, and it is always as neat as a pin and exquisitely decorated with flowers at all times of the year. It is the entertaining old servant who keeps the place so well, and the good old soul does nearly all her work at night; she is never seen doing anything but a little desultory dusting by day. "What we should do without Martha I cannot think," says the lady who lives in the stage lounge—and rightly, for one of the things her husband has always loved in her is the fact that she is incapable of doing anything at all except arrange the flowers. She does these beautifully and brings them in in basketfuls from the garden, which the impecunious owners manage to keep so trim outside the sunlit windows.

If walls could talk, what stories could not the stage lounge tell! Everything happens here. If Martha has to interview the butcher it will be at the stage lounge door. It is in here that the son of the house announces that he is going to be a Communist and marry a fellow worker in Camden Town, and in here that his mother persuades the girl to renounce him, while she arranges a bowl of orchids which she has just picked in the front garden. It is in this room that the father of the house always finds the newspaper, and here that his adorable tomboy of a daughter conducts her love-affair with the vicar's son and is never seen by a soul except dear Old Martha, who comes in from time to time to see if anything wants dusting.

Much laughter, too, has been heard within these three walls, for the mother, who thinks caviar is a kind of fish paste, never *can* manage the housekeeping books, and the father is always finding funny bits in the paper, and Old Martha can be relied on for a pungent comment on everything. But bills can't be paid with laughter, and it is quite possible that there would have been an auction in the stage lounge (which is a dreadful thought) if the vicar's son, who is interested in art, had not discovered that for many years the mother had been using a genuine Rubens for a fire-screen. And so, after all, the bills are paid, and the son joins the



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Conservative party and marries a nice girl who has loved him all along, and the daughter marries the vicar's son. But even with the family fortunes restored the owners of the stage lounge are unable to abandon the old way of life. Now that the children are gone it is so much more cosy, they say, in the room with the four doors, and the passage, and the staircase. Besides, dear Old Martha would seem all wrong in the drawing-room.

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