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For My Son

MICHAEL BURTON SPRING

IN THE MEANTIME

By the same Author

Autobiography

HEAVEN LIES ABOUT US

New Statesman and Nation: "A very short and moving account of the author's boyhood in a Cardiff slum."

GEOFFREY WEST (*Time and Tide*): "*Heaven Lies About Us* shines with a clear light which not even dark blinds and black curtains can obscure. I'll swear one could read this book in an an raid and still feel that it mattered in its own small way as conveying not the triviality of the particular life but something of the quality of certain phases of life itself."

Criticism

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Novels

SHABBY TIGER

RACHEL ROSING

MY SON, MY SON!

FAME IS THE SPUR

For Children

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SAMPSON'S CIRCUS

TUMBLEDOWN DICK



THE AUTHOR

with the Paymaster-Commander on board H.M.S. Prince of Wales during the Churchill-Roosevelt meeting, August, 1941.

A photograph by II. V. Morton.

IN THE MEANTIME

THIS has been, so far, a dreary year. The house stands on the water's edge, looking north-east up the two miles of the Carrick Roads. The railway company calls our region the Cornish Riviera, but this year there has been precious little Riviera about it. For ten weeks on end, in the early spring, the wind blew: now dead from the north, now from the north-east. Nothing prevents the flowers from coming put. It seems to be a matter of habit with them. Whatever the weather may be, they punctually appear. Our acre of garden is rich in primroses. There are still some stragglers lingering on into this June day, and we have had them since January. There is no end to the colour of them: red and white, blue and yellow, cream and brown and gold. Above the lawn there is a grassy bank rising to the terrace on which the house stands, and here they grow in profusion. It is really a wonderful sight, but this year it has missed the sun. The flowers have appeared as early and as gloriously as ever; but the wind has roared down our two miles of water with a day-in-day-out persistence that I have not known here before. High up in the air the barrage balloons that float over Falmouth have been suspended like huge silver sharks nosing into a grey sea. They are our weather-vanes. The snouts have pointed with wearying steadiness into the coldest quarter of the sky.

When the wind has stopped, the rain has come: there has been day after day of it, and often enough wind and rain have come together. They have combined happily together from time to time to produce gales. The lawn runs down to the sea-shore. There is a drop of seven or eight feet to the beach, and along this little cliff tall elm trees grow. They grow in their own stubborn and idio-

syncratic way. The roots shoot into and under the lawn, sending up small growths twenty and thirty yards away from the main trunks. These trunks look as though their first intention had been to put to sea. They grow outwards over the beach for a few feet, then change their minds and shoot up into the air. Under each of the crooked knees thus formed a concrete footstool has been built, lest the great weight of the trees should pull them out of the bank. And the whole bank is reinforced with a dry wall of big grey granite blocks to guard against erosion. They don't often do any work, except in the time of high spring tides, but in this present unkindly year they have had a test. A gale beat upon them, smashing the water into salt spray that came in grey clouds over the lawn. It was a fearful night. Boats were sunk and smashed, and the granite blocks were washed out of the wall, and tons of earth were scooped out where the blocks had been, exposing the roots of the elms.

A very bad year altogether, one way and another, and even at the beginning of June the leaves on the elms were so backward that the complete skeletons of the trees were visible within an exiguous clothing. The *Manchester Guardian* has been printing letters on the old topic whether "Cast no clout till May is out" refers to the month of May or the blossom of the hawthorn. The question has been merely academic. The blossom is faded and the month is gone, but there has been no warmth to tempt anyone to cast clouts. I am still wearing the clothes I have worn since last November. For a time we were all pleased that last year's droughty beginning was not being repeated. In the vegetable garden everything was green and flourishing, and the fruit was setting well on the trees. But I suppose perfect weather for field and garden was never yet known. My neighbours have begun to shake their heads and declare that this year there's too much rain. "Everything is growing to tops."

But on this Wednesday, the eighteenth day of June, 1941, summer is with us. I have let the young pigeons out for the first time, and they have made acquaintance with a world that, in weather at any rate, could not be bettered. The sky is of cloudless blue. There is no wind. From the lawn one looks up two miles of silky sapphire water to the great house of Trelissick, dreaming in the heat behind its classic columns, magnificently planted on a noble swell of land.

These pigeons have been a problem. To accept the custody of any living things complicates life, unless you have servants to take care of them. You cannot go away for a day without having to make all sorts of arrangements. Who will look after the dogs, the cats, the poultry? In this respect, dogs are the worst animals to own. They are so grovellingly dependent, so lacking in ironic detachment. I am very fond of dogs up to a point; and the point is reached when I am asked to possess one. Many years ago I had an Irish terrier, and he made my life hell. And my neighbours' lives, too. It might not have been so bad if at the same time the children's nurse had not been an Irishwoman. She was utterly incapable of doing anything in a quick forthright fashion, and this was particularly trying when she was to take the children out for a walk. The dog always went with them. First, the maid would release the dog into our pocket-handkerchief of front garden. Never have I known a creature so full of the joy of life, so incapable of expressing this joy save by frenzied uproar. As soon as he was outside the front door he would begin, rousing the whole neighbourhood with frantic barking. Had the nurse been ready to move away at once, this frenetic rejoicing would have tailed away, strung itself out in a fading *diminuendo*. But she never was ready. The perambulator would be in the garden, and the dog, attached by his lead to the railings, would be in the garden, too, and she would be looking for a handkerchief, never knowing

where to find it. And when she had found it, with all the pride of an explorer who has found a continent, she would go into the garden, where the dog would hail her coming with an access of noise that one would have thought impossible. Then she would remember that an umbrella had better be taken, and she would scurry back into the house, happily insensitive to the public nuisance that she and the dog between them were creating. When she had found and set *off* triumphantly with the umbrella, there would be half a dozen other things that she remembered and returned for one by one: a book to read to the children in the park, a shopping basket, and what not. It was a fortunate day when the first alarm of departure was not separated by a half-hour's pandemonium from the final iron slam of the gate and the gradual descent of blessed quiet.

This dog performed one of those homing feats that are so common and yet so strange. We were to go into North Wales for a holiday, and I decided to take the dog to the dogs' home at Harpurhey. At that time we were living in Didsbury, a suburb five miles from the heart of Manchester. I sat in the sidecar of a friend's motor-bike, with the dog tucked under my feet into the nose of the small contraption. He could see nothing and had never before been out of our suburb. We covered those five stony miles and a few more miles on the other side of the city, and left Pat in that home whose walls were as high and apparently unscalable as a prison's or lunatic asylum's. When I had been in Wales for a few days I received a letter from a neighbour to say that the dog had appeared outside my front door and roused the neighbourhood with his too familiar joy.

In distance it was not much of a journey, but there was that forbidding wall, and there were, not country lanes, but eight or nine miles of city streets with their midsummer boil of hot scents, roasting pavements, petrol reek, and

the coming and going of tens of thousands of busy men and women. A successful enough exploit, I thought, for sheer instinct to achieve.

That dog was a partner in a strange animal friendship. Near our house was a field where a sleek pet donkey spent his days in happy freedom from labour. Whenever the dog approached the field, he would run gaily ahead, his normal clamour rising to a frenzy of barking. The donkey would answer with a raucous bray and come ambling to the railings. They would bark and bray at one another with mutual delight for a time, and then the dog would leap upon the donkey's back, and the donkey would trot round the field. Possibly the donkey was Hibernian, too. But about the dog, at least, there was something excessive and frantic, inimical to reason and tranquillity, which has gone a long way to develop my love of cats. Aloof, ironical and silent, bestowing rare caresses with a sense of their worth, many lovely cats have been a part of my life, and I hope will always be. Not that I expect ever again to find the match of Moses, the tabby Persian whose beautiful and unobtrusive friendship was woven with my London days. He was a cat whose habits were as punctual and well-regulated as my own were then. Always at half-past eight at night I sat down to work at a table which had a window to the right of it. Always at nine o'clock, though the curtains were drawn whether I worked in summer or winter, Moses would leap upon the window-sill and demand admission with a soft rasping against the glass. Being let in, he would curl up on my shoulder and watch the progress of pen upon paper. He would grant this attention for no more than a few minutes. Then he would leap lightly upon the table, walk over the manuscript, and go down on to the hearthrug, where he would remain till I had finished work. Nothing would induce him to prolong his sojourn on my shoulder. He gave me what he thought a sufficient ration of demonstrated affection,

and then retired into the subtle contemplation of his own affairs. His nightly collaboration is in all my books, up to the end of *My Son, My Son!* Now his place is filled, as best they may fill it, by Bidger and Chuffy, who are here on this day of June to watch with some suspicion the white fantail pigeons fluttering on uncertain wings into their first day of freedom.

Most people are pleased with themselves if they have control over animals or birds, or even fishes. I have known many a person say with pride, "My fishes know me," kneeling down on the edge of the pond and gently stirring the water with a finger to attract the fish. Sure enough, the fish come and will even nibble at a finger's end as the owner looks up with a fatuous smile of achievement. But the fish will come and nibble any finger once they have associated someone bending over the pool with the idea of food. And as for dogs, who has not seen and heard the masterful owner snapping out: "Here, sir! There, sir! Heel, sir!" And though the dog nine times in ten continues to do as he pleases, usually to the disturbance of the public weal, nevertheless a sense of power and possession is fed by this simple device.

I must confess that I have always admired the creatures known as birdmen. You see them in the streets and parks of London, scarecrow fellows often enough, calculated to repel rather than attract the flocks of birds that, as soon as they hold out their hands, settle upon them, encrusting them from head to foot like barnacles upon a derelict hulk. They are a sort of St. Francis of the gutter, but rather exhibitionist, for they do not perform unless there is a crowd about; and I imagine that the birds are attracted, like the goldfish, by their knowledge that this seedy perambulating perch is good for a feed.

When I watched a neighbour holding up his hands and

the white fantail pigeons floating through the air to alight upon him, I thought it a pretty sight, and when he said that in the cote was a pair of young pigeons that he would give me, I accepted them gladly. It would be very pleasant to walk in the garden with such ethereal creatures fluttering round like familiar spirits.

They were too young, I think, to be taken away from their parents. They could not fly, and they could not or would not eat. They were put on the lawn with a box over them, and a hole was cut into the side of the box. Through this they could emerge into a run of wire netting which we had used for rearing chicks. When they had eaten nothing for twenty-four hours, I held their beaks open and warm milky pap was forced upon them. In a day or two they learned what food was, and then they were avid enough. Instead of retiring into the box when approached, they began to associate approach with food, and there was nothing ethereal about them then. Food there was in plenty, but they would battle with one another as though for the last crumb in a starving world. Raising their snowy wings till they met over their bodies, they would thrust at one another with their shoulders as belligerently as rugby footballers in a scrum, and as often as not the consequence of their struggle was that half the food was pushed out of the run and wasted. They were almost human.

Thus they grew up, and we had to consider what to do with them when they should have outgrown their run. A hole was cut high up in the garage wall, and behind this, inside the garage, was fixed the cote which we hoped they would make their permanent home. Here they were mewed a few nights ago, with wire netting stretched before the exit, so that they should for a while become accustomed to this place, learn to regard it as their home, before being given their freedom.

On this lovely morning of mid-June I climbed a ladder and removed the barrier, then waited below as anxiously

as a proconsul watching the deportment of a people from whom imperial tutelage is at last withdrawn. *Now you are free. What any you going to do about it?*

Well, I suppose they will be all right in time, but this first day's performance has not been impressive. The birds soon walked out on to the perch in front of their door, and for a time blinked at the sunny air and contemplated the abyss below them. Then, one after the other, they launched themselves, fluttering rather heavily down to the ground. A low white wall surrounds the garden, and soon they flew up and alighted upon it. With all the world to fly in, they remained there throughout the day. In the afternoon I went into Falmouth to see the film of Mr. Shaw's *Major Barbara*. I hoped that by the time I returned the birds would have shown some enterprise. But they were still perched on the wall, their shoulders sloped dejectedly, unable to appreciate and use their liberty. I had scattered some food on the ground below the wall, but they would not descend even to eat. And now such confidence as they had had in me when they were in the chicks' run was gone. They had become used to crowding upon the wire when I approached with food, but now when I came with a saucer and tried to hold it under their beaks they sidled away with cries of alarm and would eat nothing.

There was still light at eleven o'clock: light drained of heat and emphasis, in which the sea stretched away without a murmur or a ripple and the flowers in the borders had a withdrawn and almost spiritual tranquillity. Two little white unhappy ghosts were still perched moveless on the wall, with the night striding over the sea towards them, and Bidger, flattened out on the grass, watching them with intent feline absorption. I managed to get hold of one of them easily enough and put him in the cote. The door was left open, but he did not come out. The other fluttered on to the garage roof, and there I had to leave him, with the dark masses of the fir branches throwing up his white-

ness and the skeletons of the eucalyptus trees raking into the sky like masts with all their sails unbent.

These eucalyptus trees have suffered much in the last few winters. They were a show feature of this district: tall and elegant, with their branches, clothed in long grey-green odorous leaves, drooping about them like wings. They were an ingredient of a lotus-land. Mimosa flourished, too, and on a winter's day when in other parts of the country, you knew, snow was on the ground and blizzards raged, you would walk under clouds of feathery yellow mimosa and see the ground blue with early violets. Camellias of red and white bloomed in the earliest months of the year, as well as all sorts of flowering shrubs that will not grow elsewhere. Nowhere[^] perhaps, in the British Isles will you see such rhododendrons and magnolias and groves of graceful bamboo. Too many Cornish gardens are the victims of this careless abundance, for spring-flowering shrubs do so well that you will find garden after garden filled with nothing else, and once May is over a flat green prevails.

Over this early uprush of subtropical abundance the eucalyptus trees lorded it in their beauty. But now for three successive winters the nature of the climate has changed. I was warned when I came to live here that I would find the winters relaxing, and a relaxing atmosphere was, indeed, something I did not want, accustomed as I had been to the vigorous winters of Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Lancashire. But there has been nothing relaxing about it. This study window looks out upon the water, and day after day, week after week, I have worked here with the grey rollers coming in before the continuous wind; and when I have gone out for my daily walk it has often been with a Balaclava helmet on a head that bored resolutely into a north-easter.

I have liked it. If one thing more than another would drive me out of a country it would be years without winters. But the eucalyptus trees have not liked it. In the first of the three harsh winters they shrivelled and lost their greenery, and, when spring came, their majesty had been changed for a scarecrow shabbiness. We thought they were done for; but as the weather got warmer small grey-green nodules began to appear, not on the branches but on the main trunks; and these developed into new shoots, in time bearing leaves. But they never succeeded in hiding the disfigurement of the trees. The old bare branches raked against the blue summer sky, and it was clear that, if the trees survived, they would not for many years regain their shapeliness.

Then came the second bitter frosty winter; and these young tentative shoots were blackened and killed. In the spring the miracle of rebirth happened again. New shoots came from the old trunks, but this time they were fewer and not so vigorous. In some gardens the trees were cut down altogether. They were dead beyond hope of resurrection; but many survived, though it was a timorous and shivering survival, to try conclusions with a third winter. Again the black battalions came upon this land; and the eucalyptus trees, as we had known them till a few years ago, seem to me to be doomed. In the early months of this year I assisted in sawing down some giants, and many more have come down all about me. A few skeletons that will never be clothed again stand here and there, snapping their brittle limbs when the wind rises; and those that are left with leaves upon them are a poor and beggarly sort of descendants from the glorious trees we knew.

Looking, in that still hour hard on our artificial midnight—for really it was but ten o'clock—at the wrecks of the great trees scrawled derisively upon the sky, I thought of

the complacency of good people. Optimism without action is a philosophy for fools. "It will all come right in the end" is nonsense that needs to be amended to this: "We'll make all come right in the end." Co-operation with processes of goodness often shows us how weak those processes are; and thus it happens that some of the most actively good men I know are the least emphatic about all coming right in the end.

Down here, everybody was certain that these trees had nothing to fear. They were smitten. Very well. Such an accident as frost in a Cornish winter could not happen again. "Why! We haven't seen frost for thirty years!" And when, with the coming of spring, the trees put forth their leaves again no one seemed to doubt that the trees would live for ever. But the second blow and the third blow fell, and now the trees are either prone, sawn up to make our fires odorous, or they stand naked to adversity.

So it is with the fight between good and evil. I do not believe those who say that good must, in the long run, necessarily conquer. Looking down the backward vistas of time, one sees now good triumphant, now evil. But this, of course, is speaking roughly, for in the best of times there are ills, and in the worst of times there are gleams of hope. But there have been ages which in the main were good, and ages which in the main were bad. I see nothing to lead me to suppose that good will finally and for ever overcome evil. The battle will always be there, and the forces ranged on the side of goodness need to be much more active than they are if, in our own time, the swing of conflict is not to be in evil's favour.

I am persuaded that much harm is done by a placid confidence that God's in His heaven and all's well, therefore, with the world. If God's in His heaven, the Devil's in his hell, and able, if we are to believe the evidence of our senses, to work pretty effectively therefrom. Too many of the poets offer us nothing but a boisterous and temporary

tonic, like this hearty shout of Browning's Pippa, or a sticky anodyne, like many of the suave lines of J. R. Lowell. It is easy to draw from some of Lowell's verse a comfort that the rude winds of reality will prove to be spurious.

- *Truth for ever on the scaffold, Wrong for ever on the throne—
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above His own.*

Well, if Truth is *for ever* on the scaffold, if Wrong is *for ever* on the throne, it is difficult to see how the scaffold can sway the future, for the future is surely a part of *for ever*. Here Lowell's very words, as well as his thoughts, have no relation to the experience of life as we common folk know it. His lines are just another bleat of the complacency of goodness, and they are untrue in this: that Truth does have its turn on the throne. The question is, will either Truth or Wrong finally occupy the throne, and, if we believe that one of them will do so, what reason, in experience, is there to suppose that it will be Truth rather than Wrong?

Lowell is convinced, or writes as though he were convinced, that inevitable processes, eternal necessity, are on the side of Truth.

*Evil springs up, and flowers, and bears no seed,
And feeds the green earth with its swift decay,
Leaving it richer for the growth of truth;
But Good, once put in action, or in thought,
Like a strong oak doth from its boughs shed down
The ripe germs of a forest.*

Such a passage is a falsification of what daily experience teaches us. Evil bears no seed? Why, the world we walk to-day is rank with the black weeds of evil, sprung up almost overnight from beastly seed, and threatening to choke to death many a fair flower of good that careless, optimistic gardeners thought established for ever. And good must necessarily triumph, growing like a great forest? Alas! good in this world, in the individual heart, in associations

of men, is a little struggling plant that finds it hard to push its shoot through strangling evil up to the sustaining light. Shakespeare, who, for all his lovely words, never let words run away with meaning, is nearer the facts:

*The evil that men do lives after them;
The good is oft interred with their bones.* .

"Peace at any price" is an old expression; but you can't have peace at any price. You can have peace only at the price of peace, and the price of peace is high: so high that, thus far, no nation, and assuredly not that pathetic collection of nations at Geneva, has ever been willing to pay it. And as with peace, so with Truth, Goodness, what you will. These will not come on the wings of rosy rhymes; they will not come to those who picture eternal scales loaded inevitably in Truth's favour. They will come to those who know that the Devil is strong and that every inch must be wrested from him, and, once wrested, retained by vigilance, work and sacrifice.

Cats and pigeons, eucalyptus trees and the powers of evil. This book is being what I intended it to be: a bag into which I shall drop a jumble of random thoughts and happenings. I began to write it in consequence of a press-cutting that reached me the other day. I do not myself subscribe to a press-cutting agency. In that matter I followed what I imagine must be a usual course. When my first book was published, I could not have too many press-cuttings. They poured in, attached to their little headings of green paper, and all were delightful. Even the disrespectful ones were welcomed, for to an author's vanity it is more consoling to be written about with austere reservation, or even jeeringly, than not to be written about at all. They were read, those cuttings, and re-read, and mounted on fine foolscap sheets, and these sheets were

bound into a folder, so that even unto the third and fourth generation the record might be preserved. My wife's mother was a professional singer, and my wife had often said: "I wish Mother's cutting-books had been preserved." Well, my sons would not have to utter that wish about Father's cutting-books. All that was said for and against the first novel and the second novel was carefully pasted up and preserved.

The third novel was very successful. Now the cuttings began to pour in not only from England but also from America, Germany, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Holland, Brazil and many other countries. It was a terrifying spate, and, though the book was long, more, far more, was written about it than I had written in it. Imperceptibly, unconsciously almost, I gave up reading the cuttings. A glance at one here and there was all it came to; and then even that ceased and the whole mountain of them one day went into several waste-paper baskets instead of into a nicely bound volume.

But I preserved some of the things that were said, for I had learned that the sayings of book-reviewers, balanced one against another, make amusing reading. They amount to a complete cancelling-out. My work was compared with the work of the most improbable collection of "influences." A Swedish paper saw the inspiration of Thomas Hardy, but this was counterbalanced by an American writer who plumped for Charles Garvice. Among others to whom I owed my style or my attitude to life, or both, were Dickens (and he the most frequent), Thackeray, Arnold Bennett, William Faulkner, A. P. Herbert, Rabelais, Marie Corelli, Jeffery Farnol and Somerset Maugham.

This was all amusing enough; but so odd a collection of literary godfathers, whose books, in some cases, I had never opened, was not all. There was almost literally nothing that a reviewer could say without some other reviewer saying just the opposite. "There is a deeply

moving flow of actions and consequences that makes one think of Greek tragedy," one reviewer would write; and then came the antidote: "Not that this piling up of fortuitous circumstances produces that sense of awe which emanates from tragedy as the Greeks knew it." "A style of great beauty/" No. 1 would pipe; and then No. 2 would say: "Whatever else may be said for the book, at least it cannot be said that it has what one understands by style. It is vilely written."

So it went on. Not one point was made about the way the book was written or the thought behind the book without an exactly opposite point of view coming along to cancel it out.

This was diverting for a time, but the moment was reached when it became too nonsensical to be amusing, and I think I can say, hand on heart, that, while I am grateful for nice things if reviewers care to say them, and occasionally a little hurt if they say things that are unfeeling, I have reached a condition pretty near anaesthesia where reviews are concerned.

I take some credit for this, for I have not been writing books for long: I began rather late in life: and I am again and again surprised to find how many authors, even when they have spent a lifetime in the sunshine of success, have no philosophy in the matter at all. One word of dispraise, and they wince like galled jades. Sir Hugh Walpole was as sensitive about reviewers as a schoolgirl about her hockey-form. When he wrote *John Cornelius* I was reviewing for the *Evening Standard*, but it happened that when this book was published I was on holiday. I did not read it, and I have not read it since, so that I am unable to say whether Sir Hugh's feelings were justified or not. Someone else reviewed the book in the *Evening Standard*, but Sir Hugh did not notice this, and writing some time later in a public sheet he said that he felt very hurt to find the novels of two other writers given some prominence, while his own

was tucked away in a few lines. For this, he added, he would like "to give Mr. Howard Spring a kick in the pants."

This seemed to me very peevish and childish and bad-mannered, and it hurt me to think of one who at that time was filling with a rotund dignity the position of Archbishop of English letters, degrading his gaitered calf by raising it against so poor and withal so innocent an opponent. I wrote and told Sir Hugh, who was then Mr. Walpole, that, so far from having been unkind to his book, I had not even read it. He replied in a longish letter all about his hurt feelings and ended: "Well—see what a fool one can be! I do most heartily apologise."

This was handsome in its private way, but the insult had been public and I expected that Mr. Walpole, being now in possession of the facts, would make his apology in the sheet wherein he had promulgated his offence. But this did not happen. I am afraid that less and less is the good habit, the good manners, observed of apologising in the public press. Even when it is clearly shown that a mistake has been made, a newspaper does not like to apologise unless there is a writ for libel in question. I had the good fortune to spend the greater part of my life as a journalist on the staff of the *Manchester Guardian*, where to withhold an apology from the paper's columns was as unthinkable as to withhold one from a friend whom you discovered you had wronged or offended.

"See what a fool one can be!" Indeed yes. But the philosophic attitude to reviewers is hard to cultivate. When I had spoken well of a book by a very distinguished woman novelist, who, goodness knows, could have got on without praise of mine, she wrote: "I was feeling an awfully overworked discouraged poor ass this morning, but now I feel that this poor ass can work twice as hard and for as long as may be needed"; and a young man, after he had attained some success, confided to me that my review of his first book nearly drove him to the Embankment.

No reviewer has yet made me feel either suicidal or unduly elated, nor, though I have received hundreds of letters from writers enraged by my opinions, have I ever written to complain that I have myself been unfairly judged. I have been writing books now for ten years, and only twice in that time have I protested to newspapers about reviews. In each case, what was in question was a matter not of opinion but of fact. After my discovery of the beautiful way in which every statement in a review can be nullified by a statement in another review, the reviews hardly seemed worth reading and I cancelled my subscription to the cutting-agency. But from time to time my American publisher encloses a batch in a letter, and one that came recently set me off on the writing of this book. It was a few lines of personal chat, ending with the information that I had now abandoned book-reviewing in order to devote my time wholly to what the writer called "creative work."

Coming when it did, this snippet of paper depressed me; or, rather, it deepened a depression that had already set in. I had indeed resolved to resign my job as a journalist in order to write books, but I was not writing books. So far from having widened the extent of what this writer was pleased to call "creative work," I was doing no work at all, and, after a life of very great busyness, this was wearing me out in body and mind.

Six months before the war broke out I bought this house with the intention of soon leaving London for good. I was then writing a novel called *Fame Is The Spur*, and when the war came I left London in order to finish it here in peace. There was emotional impetus enough to carry me on, and the work was ended by January 1940.

Now, I thought, I could get on with something new. I had in my mind three themes for long novels and a theme for

a tale that would need only a couple of hundred pages in the telling. I would rest now, I said to myself, for a few months after the long labour of *Fame Is The Spur*. Then in the summer months I would easily knock out the little tale: it would be a sort of holiday task: and with the coming of the next winter I would take another long novel in hand. Nearly eighteen months have passed since then, months loaded with destiny, heavy with hopes and fears, with few triumphs and many disasters: months that have conjured up words which will never die out of hearts now living: old words with new dramatic outlines: Norway, Dunkirk, Libya, Greece, Crete, Vichy, Coventry, London, Plymouth. And as these old names, crusted with terrible contemporary significance, rose up week by week and month by month, there seemed no end to the possibility of their extension; there was no peep vouchsafed round the corner of the future; and, for me at all events, everything that had made work possible faded and shrivelled till I was faced with the inescapable fact that, so long as these clouds lowered over us, I was done for as a writer.

I have never agreed with the saying—was it Stevenson's?—that easy writing makes hard reading. It is too dogmatic, too much of a generalisation. There are writers who write easily and there are writers who write with blood and tears, and, confronted by a page of each, you wouldn't know which had done which, for both the pages would be good finished work. And, similarly, two men writing, one with ease and one with labour, will each produce a result as dead as mutton. A writer writes as he writes, and that is all there is to it; and many a writer will tell you that his best work has been done with a blithely flowing pen.

Certainly in my own case, for what the result is worth, the work has been easy. I could sit down to my daily piece of writing with the knowledge that it would be done.

There was no fluttering invocation of the goddess of fiction, whoever she may be. I liked the look of a clean sheet of paper; I liked the actual physical business of taking up a pen. In a word, I enjoyed my job. And, since this book is not about one thing more than another, I may as well say something about the job here.

Not long ago I received a letter from an American who, of all things, was a priest of the Jesuit order. Americans write to authors far more often than English people do, and their letters, as a rule, are more naive than English letters. This correspondent said he had been reading *My Son, My Son!* and he went on: "I am anxious to write a best-selling novel myself and would be very grateful for any advice you could offer me."

I could not answer this, because when I was writing *My Son, My Son!* I did not know I was writing a best-selling novel: I knew only that I was writing a novel.

There are as many ways of writing a novel as there are of doing most other things that are not merely mechanical. All that need be asked is: "Does it come off?" If the final result is satisfactory, it does not matter how it is arrived at. I have known novelists who needed a complete outline before they could begin work. When at last they sat down to the actual business of writing the book, they were furnished with a synopsis of every chapter, and even with pieces of conversation. For myself, I could never do this. I rely very much on what Mr. Somerset Maugham has called "the amiable and useful little imp that dwells in your fountain-pen and does for you all your best writing." There is sense in Mr. Maugham's conclusion: "The prudent writer gives him his head, and if the little fellow has a mind to write something quite different from what he intended, knows that it is only common sense to yield. After all, it is to this wily sprite that is due whatever merit the ignorant ascribe to the unimportant instrument who holds the pen."

I must confess that the "wily sprite" has been my own best friend. Usually, when I begin a novel, I know where I want to go to, but I have no particular knowledge of how I am to get there. All roads—or at any rate many roads—lead to the Rome in view; and which ones shall be followed are never apparent till they are made so by the inescapable fact of my feet being upon them. Many and many a night I have taken up my pen with no faintest answer in my mind to the question: "Where do we go to now?" but by the evening's end we are proceeding satisfactorily.

Never have I cast myself more completely upon the winds of chance than I did in my first novel, *Shabby Tiger*. Here, for a long time, I did not know where I was going to, much less how I was going to get there. I had for years been promising myself that I would write a novel, but no grand theme, no imposing canvas, presented itself to my imagination. And I was very lazy. I was working on the staff of the most easy-going newspaper in the world. I did not appear in the office till half an hour after noon. Well, one didn't work in the mornings. One read the newspapers and did this and that, and time slipped pleasantly by. At one o'clock one knew what the day's work was to be; and then there was lunch to be eaten and a tranquil pipe to be smoked over a game of dominoes. It was not often that one returned to the office much before three, and then there was always someone waiting there for a game of shove-ha'penny on the excellent board which had recently been brought into the office. The public-houses shut at three; there was just time to take the board to one in order to polish it before the game began. No self-respecting shove-ha'penny board is polished in any other way than by allowing beer to flow over it and then rubbing it dry. It was necessary, of course, to keep the board company, and one returned to the office in a benevolent if unworkmanlike frame of mind, to find, when the

shove-ha'penny game was over, that it was high time for tea and muffins. Another game of dominoes was now a matter of course, and if, between this and seven o'clock, one's daily offering of prose fit for the eye of the world's most exacting editor—was made—why, one was then prepared to call it a day. It was, anyway, seven o'clock: time for the nightly *consortium* in a near-by bar, where leader-writers coming on duty and reporters going off could fittingly begin or end their respective endeavours. Then, at eight or half-past, dinner at home in that physical and mental state called mellow, averse from vigour, inimical to effort, admirable for smoking a pipe as one perambulated the suburb in summer or read a book in winter.

So the weeks went by, and the months and the years, filled with good company, admirable conversation, a creeping paralysis of the will. There are times when, if a man is to be saved, he must be taken by the scruff of the neck, hustled out of his greenhouse, and dropped into cold water. This salutary miracle was performed on my behalf.

I do not think I have a penn'orth of superstition in my make-up. I am a pragmatic sort of person who takes things as he finds them and tries to judge them as they are, I have met many people who have seen ghosts, heard voices, been visited by intimations from outside sense; and I have never believed a word that they have told me. What happens to us, I think, is explicable within the confines of reason, if only we could get hold of the facts. Two things completely inexplicable have happened to me but they do not alter my rational outlook.

When I was a child of five, my family moved from one small house in Cardiff to another. There was not much to move, and my father, with a hired hand-cart, did the job in a number of journeys. On one of these, towards the end of that winter day, he took me and my brother, a little

older than I. We trotted to the new house alongside the hand-cart, and my father left us there when he went back for more things. He sat us side by side on an arm-chair in the kitchen. On our right was the lighted fire. Facing us was a window, uncurtained, looking out upon the back-yard which we could not see, for darkness was now come. There we sat, and I at least was scared to the very marrow of my bones. The strange house, the blackness beyond the window that might conceal—what? the creaking of the stairs, and then, suddenly, the banging of a drum and a great shout, "The blood! The blood!"—all this left me trembling with fright. The drum and the shout, I learned later, belonged to the Salvation Army, but at the time there was no knowledge to comfort me.

It was, no doubt, in consequence of this that during the years when we lived in that house I was visited again and again by nightmare. Always it was the same. I would be sitting in the chair, with everything as it had been: the firelight, the darkness beyond the window. It was a small window of four panes, and in my nightmare I gazed, with the hair rising in horror on my head, at the bottom left-hand pane, because I *knew* that something would materialise there out of the darkness. Presently the top of a head would appear, and I was aware of someone kneeling on the ground, his fingers clutching the window-sill, raising himself with infinite slowness to gaze into the room. Bit by bit, the face appeared, till it was all there, fixed and unmoving, a horrible face, white, with staring bloodshot eyes. After a while, it would begin to disappear as slowly as it had come. On the right of anyone kneeling as this apparition was kneeling there was a door leading into the scullery, and this scullery opened into the kitchen where I sat. In my nightmare, I knew that now this ghastly visitor was passing through the scullery door, that it was only a matter of time before the door between the scullery and the kitchen would open, and he and I would be face to face. Now



" WE TROTTED TO THE NEW HOUSE"

The door on the left of the picture, with the windows up and down to the right, belong to the house in Cardiff in which the author's childhood was spent.

Photograph by courtesy of The Western Mail.

my eyes turned to this door through which he must come, and my heart was wrung with an apprehension more deep and fearful than any I have since known, asleep or awake. The latch would silently lift, and a hand would come into the room: a long white cruel hand that I was destined never to see attached to a body. For at this point, sweating with horror, I always woke to hear my heart pounding in the darkness and to feel the comfort of my brother's body in the bed beside me.

It is many a year since this nightmare last troubled my sleep, and, looking back on it now, it is easy to explain the whole matter by referring it back to that first night when a small nervous child shivered in darkness, in an unknown house. But here is the point of the matter which I cannot explain. I told no one of this recurrent horror till many years later. We had left the house; my brother and I were young men whose lives were filled with multifarious activities. One day we were speaking of our childhood, of that strange frightening first night in the new house, and I began to tell him of the nightmare that had been its consequence. I had only opened the story when he took me up. "And then this happened. And then that." And with perfect accuracy of detail he described the experience from beginning to end. "I, too," he said, "had that nightmare again and again while we lived in that house."

A nightmare of vague terror, arising from an experience shared, I could understand coming to him as to me; but I cannot understand this duality of incident in those points which were not comprised in the experience itself: the horrible face, the slowly rising latch, the strangler's white fearful hand. So I must leave it at that: a record without comment.

The second inexplicable thing that came to me came now while I was enjoying that lotus-life in Manchester, watching the years slip by, watching my sons grow up, careless,

happy-go-lucky, with old ambitions slowly stifling like flames beneath a bonfire too thickly piled with pleasant-smelling leaves. Round the corner from us in our suburb of Didsbury there lived a woman who was often to be found telling fortunes at local church bazaars and such-like functions. She did it "for fun." She was not taken very seriously, and I do not know whether she took herself seriously. Towards the end of the summer of 1931—just ten years ago from this time when I write—this woman met my wife in the street. "Oh, Mrs. Spring," she said, "I have a message for you. Your husband's career is about to have a great change. He'll stay in journalism, but there'll be a great change—a great change."

We had a hearty laugh over that. We were contented where we were. Life was pleasant, moderately prosperous, and, as for change, at least I was not *seeking* it. I had been asked more than once why I didn't try my luck in Fleet Street, and always I made the same answer: "I'll go when Fleet Street asks me to go." Within a couple of months Fleet Street had asked me, and after a lifetime spent in provincial journalism I found myself in London. I was forty-two years old.

Much might be written on the part that chance plays in the average life. We like to think ourselves creatures of boundless free will, carving our careers with vigour and foresight, but the little accidents of life have more to do with our direction than we care to admit. I suppose few things in a man's life are more significant than whether he marries this woman or that. I had made my choice when sheer chance changed it for me. A man fell ill in London. I was sent from Manchester to do his work; I met a woman; within three days I had made up my mind to marry her rather than the other. And I did.

So fate juggles with our lives, greatly to the profit of

novelist and dramatist. The whole direction of life may be changed for a man because he walks to town one day on this side of the street rather than on that.

Few men, I should imagine, have left their lives to luck more completely than I have. Indeed, if you are born poor, it is necessary to do so. The rich and the comfortably-off can take a hand to some extent in shaping affairs, though even here fortune, with its twisted smile, may intervene where least expected. But they can, at all events, say: "Jack shall be trained for the law." "George shall stay at home and look after the estate." "Bill might as well go in for the Diplomatic. His Uncle Henry at the P.O. will see him right."

The poor can do none of these things. They cannot choose one particular school out of a variety of schools with competing attractions. The Council School—or the Board School as it was called in my day—is there, and to the Board School the poor boy must go. He may win a scholarship which would take him on to some other sort of school, and thence to the university; for, in theory, career is open to talents and every man has his chance. But in far too many cases—as I saw it happen in my own home—the boy cannot take up the scholarship he wins. His wages are needed. He must begin to work at once. Then he throws himself on to the world and is borne on the tricky winds of chance.

I sometimes speculate on what my line of life would have been if I had not been unlucky when, as a boy, I applied for a rise in wages. I had just left school and had spent a year as office boy to an accountant at Cardiff docks. At the end of the year I asked for more money and didn't get it. Another shilling a week would have been another link riveted on my chain. Half a crown a week a year later might easily have been the end of me. For ever and for ever up and down to Cardiff docks, ending like old Hadley the senior clerk, with his thin shoulders and grey head

bent eternally over a ledger, reckoning up other people's profits and losses.

But I did not get the shilling I was hoping for; I looked round for another job, and, by luck, found one as messenger-boy in a newspaper office. I worked pretty hard while I was there—that is to say for the next nine years; but I was never troubled by ambition. Whatever I did in the way of study, in the way of trying to write stories, was done because I liked doing it. I intended to go on doing it as long as I was permitted to do so; and if a slow and dogged rather than a fierce possessive intention is a mark of ambition, then you can even call me ambitious. But I am not conscious of having ever done anything with what is called "an end in view." Never did man feel less the stings of envy or the spurs of fame. I was easily deflected by comfort. Whenever I have been shifted a stage along the road, someone has had to shift me. I left the *South Wales News* because someone brought along to me one day a copy of the *Daily News* which contained an advertisement for a reporter. "Why don't you have a shot at this?" I was asked. I mumbled and demurred; but I was prevailed upon to apply for the job; and I got it.

The job was in Bradford, on the *Yorkshire Observer*. After nine years' service, the *South Wales News* was paying me thirty shillings a week, and it was a week, for there was not only the *South Wales News* to report for, but also its evening companion, the *Echo*. I have since worked for more than one morning-paper and for an evening paper. That was the only place I have had experience of where prosperous employers demanded that one reporting staff should serve two papers. We had to fight hard for any sort of time off; and to the end my annual holiday was one week. However, we had the satisfaction of seeing our employers roll up to the office from their seaside suburb

in carriages and pairs, and that gave to our days a dignity they might otherwise have lacked.

I still find in ill-informed novels references to newspaper reporters that are derisive and out of date* Even in those far-off times it was my good fortune to know many excellent men on reporting staffs, men to whom I owe (as I now see if I did not see it then) many of those imponderable debts that the longest life cannot discharge. With the slightest effort of the imagination I can call up the twinkling eyes and curly hair of good James Brown, with his real passion for English, and the boyish irrepressible vitality of J. R. Stephens, and I thank their ghosts more sincerely than I need thank the ghosts of those who employed me. Writers who portrayed the newspaper reporter as a comic or repulsive figure, slightly maudlin with drink, intrusive, too eager to dip his fingers into the cigar-box at a public dinner, had in those days enough to justify their strictures. I have known plenty of reporters like that—and, after all, why should you expect more than a cheap hireling for cheap pay? Throughout the whole "profession," as it was magnificently called, the wages were scandalous till Lord Northcliffe and Lord Beaverbrook by their example, and the National Union of Journalists by its organisation, forced better manners upon skinflint employers. Now, the old strictures, I say, are out of date. I have spent a lifetime in the company of newspaper reporters, and though you will find among them as many fools and rogues as among the men in law and medicine, the church or the schools, yet, taking them by and large, I would rather, both for my amusement and my profit, spend my time with newspaper reporters than with any other class of men. They are the backbone of any newspaper. If reporters are reporting accurately, then the rest doesn't matter much. I should like to see a newspaper started in this country which contained good reporting and nothing else. Our sheets are too full of flim-flam and comment which is, to

me, worthless because anonymous. I am not impressed when someone whispers portentously: "The *Times* says—" The *Times* says nothing. There is no such thing as the *Times*. There are Tom, Dick and Harry writing in rooms in Printing House Square, and *they* say whatever is said. We could better judge what their saying is worth if they signed what they wrote. Give us the news, and we can form our own opinion upon it.

When I worked for the *Manchester Guardian* there was a reporter on the staff, a pompous old boy of the antique school, whose persistent boast was that he had often reported Gladstone *verbatim* at Hawarden. He shared, perhaps too deeply, the view I have here expressed of the relative importance of news and comment. On one occasion some "copy" which he had handed in was used as the basis of a leading article, and the leader-writer, misunderstanding what he had read, made a false statement in the *Guardian's* sacred leader columns. C. P. Scott called in the reporter and asked for an explanation, which the ancient was able to supply, convincing the editor that his "copy" was without fault and that the leader-writer had blundered. This must have been no easy task, for Scott liked his leader-writers to be Oxford or Cambridge men, and this prepossessed his mind in their favour as against a reporter who had not been to a university. This was one of the points in which Scott, in some matters an admirable man, was a complete snob. But on this occasion the reporter triumphed, and all would have been well if he had not said, flushed with his victory: "It is lucky, Mr. Scott, that the mistake was not in the news columns, but in the leader columns, which few people read."

This has always seemed to me the perfect example of putting down your bottom to be kicked at the very moment when you are entitled to carry it with a derisive farewell waggle through the door.

The thirty shillings I had been receiving from the *South Wales News* was increased by the *Yorkshire Observer* to fifty shillings, and this made life seem to me very good. This was advancement; this was prosperity; this was the way a man got on in his profession. I was twenty-two years old. I had bought a shiny black portmanteau, which I have still, and a youth who lodged at my home and worked as a painter in a neighbouring carriage-builder's had obligingly painted "R. H. S." in green paint on the lid. And now, with my portmanteau, I was going North.

It was autumn, and my native Cardiff, when I left it, was in a likeable mood. Hardly yet had a leaf turned colour; white municipal buildings shone under a blue sky. The familiar chatter and bustle of the only streets I had known were still in my ears as the train pulled out; and as it gathered speed and the fields spun by, the oppression of an irrevocable act overcame me. I have never had an adventurous spirit; I have never taken new steps without misgiving; and what journey, of all the journeys we make in life, can equal in its profound searching impression the one that bears us away from the maternal city, from the dear and familiar? But now there was no holding back; I had left mother, brother, sisters, friends, and, wearing my inexperience like the shabbiest of cloaks, I was going North, I was going to Bradford.

"Bradford is famous for its wool." How long ago it seemed since I had sat in a class of sixty boys with one harassed master drilling into our heads such pellets of knowledge as these! "Scarborough is the Queen of Watering Places." "Cardiff is famous for its coal." That Bradford should be famous for its wool was now a most important fact to me; and I was haunted by strange barbaric terms that I had learned in "reading up" this industry that made my new town famous: tops and noils and slivers. They were as meaningless to me as slithey toves, and gave me the feeling of going to a far outlandish

place. The thought that most oppressed me was that I should be far from the sea. Ships and seafarers had been the companions of my boyhood and youth, and now I was to be plunged into England's black heart where it would not be possible, however homesick one became, to climb a hill and see the distant shining of a sail.

Monmouthshire was gone; we hurtled through the autumn serenity of Herefordshire. The South was still in the woods and hedges, the flashing streams, the fat red cattle. I did not feel that I was anywhere near the North till Crewe was reached: and at Crewe what can the impressionable traveller do but abandon himself to the worst forebodings? I shall not soon forget my first sight of those interminable tracks and sidings, those blasted withered skeletons that once were trees, or the chill mist which chanced that day to lie upon the landscape.

Once Crewe was left behind, there was no doubt at all that the border-line was crossed. This was the North. The leaves were sere; the familiar hedges of the South were gone. Instead, running everywhere upon the hillsides, dividing them into hard-bitten fields, were black unmortared walls. It was when I changed trains at Huddersfield that I knew I was among a new race, the race whose daily speech was tops and noils. There for the first time I heard in its native environment the tongue of the North: the clipped consonants, the broad vowels; and the porter who took me in charge and saw my solitary portmanteau transferred to the local train was as welcome as an unexpected guide in Bokhara.

The afternoon was far advanced. The journey henceforth was a succession of plunges into the blackness of tunnels and out again into the grey half-life through which the train ran on, pressed in on either side by factories whose lights were already aflame. And the compartment was full of the conversation of hard men talking tops and noils.

It was close upon sundown when I stepped out on to the bleak dark station of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway, little guessing how those two words—Lancashire and Yorkshire—would come to mean so much that was magical in my life. I had arrived North. I recall the sharp bite of the northern air and hear the rattle of lorries, piled high with bales of Bradford goods, over the stone setts of streets whose narrowness seemed incongruous to a city of Bradford's renown. Black buildings were crowded upon one another so closely that one could get no idea of their proportions.

I had come without preparation to this city. I had made no arrangement about rooms, and I had not yet reached the pitch of luxurious living when I could think of spending a night in an hotel. I cast myself in my usual fashion into the lap of chance, bought an evening paper, and travelled on a tram to Manningham Park. Sitting on a seat just within the gates, with the autumn leaves falling in what was left of the light, I read the advertisements of rooms to let. As luck would have it, there was one that I could reach in half a minute from where I sat, and this room I took, and I was happy in it from the first. It was in the house of a Roman Catholic woman who, years before, had been dresser to a variety stage favourite; and that explains why the place was full of silver crucifixes and photographs of Miss V. S. F. in costumes which suggested that the dresser's principal duty must have been to undress.

• To-day the language of tops and noils has so softened a sound that my heart leaps up if ever I hear it in the South. One day, soon after my arrival, I took a penny tram-ride out of Bradford, walked a few miles, and then climbed a rocky lane near a grey inn, standing where three roads meet. The lane threw me out among the boulders on the edge of the moor. One little track wound through the evening across the face of the land. It began in purple at my feet and was folded in the distance within a cloak of

shadow. I sat on a boulder patterned with lichens, and the shadows thickened, and far off the lights of the city came out upon the hills. It was then that "the North" ceased to be foreign and inimical and began the inroads upon my heart that the years have deepened in their passing.

I have just been reading a review of *In The Mill*, Mr. John Masefield's chapter of autobiography. The reviewer says: "He practised a curious method of chain-reading. Buying Du Maurier's *Trilby*, he found references in it to *The Three Musketeers*, the *Sentimental Journey*, the *Origin of Species*, and the comedies of Moliere, so he bought them. Through *Peter Ibbetson* he found De Musset and François Villon."

There is nothing "curious" in this. It is a usual procedure when the appetite of a vivacious reader is once aroused, especially if he have no one to guide him. It was my own fashion of proceeding from author to author in those Bradford days, and I was helped at any rate by the guidance of good conversation. I lived in Bradford for three and a half years—about the normal span of an undergraduate's stay at a university, and I always think of those years as my university career.

A lot of stuff and nonsense has been written about Oxford—"What is her secret?" and so on; and the secret is that we all remember our youth, and the loveliest years to any of us are those in which we first know liberation from trammels, are reckoned to be men, live in our own quarters, and rub our minds against the inquiring, arguing, lively minds of men in like case with ours.

*I wept as I remembered how often you and I
Had tired the sun with talking and sent him down the sky.*

You can do that as well in Bradford rooms as in rooms under "dreaming spires." How we talked in those days! We talked the sun down the sky, and the moon, too, settling

everything on earth: John Patterson and Eric Cave, Cyril Walton and Arnold Day, and so many others who soon, in the twinkling of an eye, were to have all settled for them, all problems resolved, once they had put on a khaki coat.

They were good years, those last few years before the earth opened and swallowed so much. We worked hard and played hard and talked unceasingly: in the smoke-dimmed rooms of the Beanstalk cafe where Bradford merchants solaced with chess and coffee the tedium of their mornings, in the streets, in one another's rooms.

The *Yorkshire Observer* was a good paper to work for. Its editor through the few years of its glory was A. M. Drysdale, who had been trained on the *Manchester Guardian*, had gone thence to that brilliant meteoric failure, the *Tribune*, and from there to the *Times*. "Don't think of this paper," he said to me when I joined the staff. "Think of the *Manchester Guardian*. Imagine that you are writing for the *Manchester Guardian*, and then you may do something good enough for us."

The paper had but recently been the *Bradford Observer*, belonging to a family named Byles, one of whom remained as musical critic now that it was owned by three wool-merchants, all reputed to be millionaires. We hugged to ourselves the comfortable assurance that there was money to burn, that the editor had a free hand to do as he pleased; and, whether this was so or not, he made a grand newspaper and gathered about him a good staff. I recall nine of my colleagues of those days who went to posts of distinction on the *Times* or the *Manchester Guardian*, and I think there were more.

But then we were not thinking of the future, except with the vague thoughts of young men who are sure that "some day" they will write good novels and box-office plays. We were all young; we wanted nothing more than to live, to talk, to smoke, and, some of them, to drink. Every night

there was a gathering in someone's rooms; one night, I recall, at the house of a young man studying for the bar, who had attached himself to our circle. His father was an ardst who was never seen about the Bradford streets without a flower in his buttonhole. It was understood that he would pay a sum of money to anyone who caught him without this customary decoration. He was away that night: hence his son's invitation to the party. I remember little of it except the appearance of a housekeeper in the early hours of the morning, threatening to report disorderly proceedings on the father's return, and the young barrister buying her off with promise of an electric suction-cleaner which she had long desired and the old man had refused to buy. When I woke up, I was puzzled by the presence of a tall silk hat on the hat-stand in my rooms. I had never possessed one before, and have not possessed one since.

A very pleasing custom was observed on that paper. Last thing at night, the chief reporter would "mark the book" for the coming clay, apportioning each man's work, a happy-go-lucky system which contrasts strangely with modern method whereunder men are constantly at hand to be "rushed" hither and thither. But it worked. I don't remember that we missed anything through our refusal to be over-anxious. When the book was marked, the reporter on late duty would write a postcard to each member of the reporting staff, letting him know what he had to do on the morrow, and if one's work was nothing but an evening engagement, one was saved the tedium of trudging to the office in order to find that out. As soon as the postcard arrived with the morning tea, one's day could be arranged; and, as we were all golfers, the man who had sent out the cards would not fail to inscribe on them any combination of players made possible by the day's arrangement of the diary. It was all very charming and considerate, and permitted me many a day on the windy moorland links of Baildon or on the Shipley course which was said to be

"good for goats," all the holes lying along the sides of hills, where you played with one leg up and one down.

Occasionally, in the summer months, when sub-editors were on holiday, I was put into the sub-editors' room. I should think I have not passed, all told, more than six months of my life as a sub-editor, and I have hated every moment of it. I was thirteen years old when I first walked over the doorstep of a newspaper office and fifty when I walked out. In all those years I never wanted to do anything but write for the paper. The trimming and window-dressing had no appeal for me, and I have been fortunate to escape with so little of it. To sit for hour after hour through the night under the electric glare, reading other people's copy, writing headlines, correcting and cutting proofs: all this I would gladly have done without, though it taught me that a reporter is all the better at his job for knowing at first-hand the sub-editor's point of view.

Piccadilly, Bradford, is not like Piccadilly, London. It is—or was when I knew it—a shabby narrow canon of warehouses, running downhill, with not a light burning in it after sunset but a street lamp or two and the lamp in the wall on which was painted *Yorkshire Observer*. Under that lamp we would come out in the warm summer dawns after a night of sub-editing, and occasionally some of us would decide to walk forthwith to Dick Hudson's for breakfast. The long level stretch of Manningham Lane lay asleep in the gathering light. At Frizinghall you could hear the singing of larks rising into the sky from the hills of Idle. Then, passing through Shipley, we took the long road that climbed up and up to Baildon, with a grey stone wall on the left and pasture beyond it. A strange amalgam, those West Riding landscapes, of the pastoral and industrial. The sheep would be cropping the grass, with the earliest light turning them to gold, and look where you would you

saw the mill-stacks rising, smoking eternally, for those were the happy days when Bradford could turn out its wool by day and by night and still not make all the wool that was needed.

So we came to Baildon, and Baildon thirty years ago was a grey and solid village, with one mill, a fine old inn called the Malt Shovel, the felons' stocks still standing in the streets, and a pole on which an oil-lamp perched. As I knew Baildon then, so it must have stood unchanged for centuries; but already, before I left Bradford, the little red houses began to appear among the old grey ones, and now buses climb the hill, and a cinema flares, and all that the little red houses bring in their train has overwhelmed the ancient peace.

But then indeed there was peace to be had. You walked through the short street and were straightway on the moor. It was six o'clock or thereabouts, and in those days six o'clock meant neither five nor four. The sun would be up, falling upon that elemental scene of heath and bracken and grey outcropping stone. The larks were in full song, and never have I heard larks sing as they sang on Baildon Moor. Away to the right was Hawksworth, the charming hamlet embowered in trees that W. Riley was about to immortalise with his sentimental classic *Windyridge*. Oh the Windyridges that were soon to spring up in Bradford! Every other one of the little red houses that, like a weeping eczema, were to oust all that Windyridge meant, was anxious to call itself Windyridge.

It was something of a romance, the way that *Windyridge* made its author famous overnight. Riley was a grave middle-aged man whom one knew about Bradford as a lay-preacher in Wesleyan chapels. He had a sick friend, and wrote his book to cheer the invalid's loneliness, taking it along to read chapter by chapter. He had no thought of publication; but when the book was finished he was prevailed on to send it to Herbert Jenkins. "I am a business

man accidentally turned novelist," he diffidently wrote; and Jenkins had the sense to reply with gusto: "You are a novelist who accidentally took to business." The publisher was right. *Windyridge*, with all Mrs. Gaskell's Cranfordian lavender-bags and antimacassars brought out and brushed up anew, was a success from the first, as it deserved to be, for, in its class, it "had everything," as they say.

Well, there under the sun of the awakening summer morning was Windyridge, and once we had passed through it the walk to Dick Hudson's was not long. Dick's was a solid roadside inn, built of stone, standing under a clump of trees, and off the road a pathway climbed to the breezy reaches of Ilkley Moor. This was Bronte country. I do not think anyone will understand *Wuthering Heights* who has not known the sad, mad Irish people, and looked into the pale blue eyes of the aboriginal Cornish, and lived in summer heats and winter rigours on the moors of Yorkshire. All these elements are compounded into the ecstasies and hallucinations of the only novel in English that has no *genre*, that is unique and lonely, like the unapproachable and inconsolable spirit of Emily Bronte.

There at Dick Hudson's we would breakfast on fat browned rashers and golden eggs and tea, and what was there to do thereafter but walk through the strengthening morning back to the Baildon golf club, where we would be on the first tee by nine o'clock? Indefatigable and incomparable days, with the summer of 1914 wearing to its close—wearing towards the day when, at my sub-editor's desk, I was handling the prose of Mr. Philip Gibbs: *Rattle of the Orchards*. Well, the fruit was falling. The orchards would soon be gone and tattered forests replace them in our consciousness. I remember Drysdale's grave face on the night when war was declared. "We're in it, and we'll have to go through with it." Twenty-seven years ago! We're in it still. We're still going through with it.

I was very young and innocent when I went to Bradford. In many ways I was perhaps the youngest twenty-two in England at that time. It was apparent in my mind and in my face. One of my colleagues once rated me as "an emasculate curate," and I see no reason to quarrel with the description. Indeed, "I was a pale young curate then." It was due, I think, to my having been for so long a "swotter"—an unfortunate but in my case a necessary condition. Those are lucky who can give the main part of their days to study and yet leave time for the development of other sides of their being. I had never been able to do this. From the time I was twelve I had been doing a day's wage-earning every day, and study had to fill in the small ration of spare time. Study meant staying at home, and that meant a complete lack of social contacts and of all that breeds *savoir-faire* and social ease. This lasted all the time I was in Cardiff. When I went to Bradford I was awkward, sensitive and touchy. Physically, I looked very ill, thin and spiritless. I remember that when Drysdalc engaged me he asked anxiously: "What about your health?" I was able to assure him that I was never ill. My wraithlike aspect was deceptive. I should never have done as a weight-lifter, but I had an inexhaustible fund of energy. During the forty years I spent on newspaper staffs I was not absent for a single day through any illness worse than a common cold or a touch of influenza.

My Bradford colleagues were kind and considerate to the ghostly presence that appeared among them in the autumn of 1911. Even the full-blooded and plethoric young man who stigmatised me as an emasculate curate suffered me gladly enough. He was a notable beer-drinker. Every night between ten-thirty and eleven there was a session at the George in Market Street, where Branwell Bronte had swigged himself by many a pint nearer to damnation. None of these hearty guzzlers objected to the intrusion

at that sacred hour of a pale presence keeping pace as best it might in ginger ale.

The day came when half a pint of bitter was tried, and before long I had become what I remained for many years—a "moderate drinker" who occasionally toppled over into the immoderate, as the most moderate drinker will. Only thrice, so far as I now remember, did drinking prevent me from doing my work. Once was on the occasion of Earl Haig's funeral. I had travelled from Manchester to Lancaster overnight and was to go on thence to Scotland the next day. But I met a few friends in Lancaster, and the next morning I was incapable of going on to Scotland or anywhere else. I lay in bed and groaned. A colleague who, by the greatest good fortune, was in Lancaster on some other business, first procured me a doctor and then went on to bury Earl Haig.

Always there has been a colleague to help me out of these unfortunate moments. The second time was when I was to report a speech by H. A. L. Fisher one afternoon in Manchester. It happened that a genial and ancient member of our staff, who had drunk his way scathless through more than fifty summers, was leaving us, and had invited a party to drink farewell in the cool cellars of the Bodega. Port was the drink, and if experience could have taught me anything it would have taught me that port and poison meant the same thing to my liver. I went to report Mr. Fisher, and my notebook, when I was in a condition to examine it, bore one word, scrawled in immense longhand across a whole page: "Vauvenargues," which suggests that this address, of whose content and theme I am ignorant, was at least embellished with Mr. Fisher's customary scholarship. A colleague, who had had no reason to accompany me beyond the greatness of his heart and his perception of my inadequacy, was able to fill in this insufficient record of the occasion.

My third fall was at a public dinner when not to fall

would almost have been graceless: a dinner of the Manchester Consular Association. Of all the dinners annually held in Manchester this was the most glittering. There were all the consuls in their splendid and varied uniforms, wearing their medals and decorations, encrusted with gold and silver braid, hung like Christmas trees with gilt and filigree. There were their full-fig guests, dressed likewise with all the splendour that could be hooked or pinned or sewn on to the severe black of their evening coats. And there were the drinks. It was the custom to provide the characteristic liquor of every country whose consul was present, and the whole scene came vividly back to my mind the other day when I saw a young man, in the film of *Major Barbara*, choke and splutter on a glass of vodka. At that dinner I tasted vodka for the only time: it was like red-hot methylated spirit. Happily, before the final shades descended on me, I had made a good many shorthand notes, and more happily still, my shorthand is clear enough for anyone to read who understands the Pitman system. I was able to return to the office, hand my notebook to a colleague on late duty, and leave the rest with confidence to him.

This question of alcoholic drink is to be settled by each one of us for himself. So far as my work goes, drink never did me any good; but it would be both false and foolish to deny that I have found alcohol a great eraser of life's rough edges; its luminous glow is the perfect medium for the passing of a friendly hour; but to spend all one's hours within that glow, with the need to take more and more alcohol to induce it, would seem to me to be a dangerous and deplorable condition. Although I can recall only three occasions when drink prevented my doing work that I should have done, I was long aware, with a too easy-going awareness, that it was preventing my doing work I *might*

have done. As soon as the office was done with, I would join the group which nightly assembled in a Manchester bar, and from half an hour to an hour would pleasantly pass—so pleasantly that the pleasure extends in memory even to this day. Falstaff, in praise of Sherris sack, claimed that it made his brain "apprehensive, quick," but the consequence of my own dalliance was to remove the fine edge of my apprehension. My mind, by ever so little exalted, was also by ever so little unsure. I never felt a desire to smash the table or throw a boot at the electric light. I just wanted to do nothing at all, mentally or physically. Work seemed a bore that might well be postponed to a later season, and it was so postponed—all that work (outside the daily work of earning my bread) which I intended to do "some day." Taking it by and large, drinking, even my moderate sort of drinking, was an effective brake on endeavour; and I never cease to marvel at supermen like Mr. Peter Cheyney's detectives, who preface all serious endeavour with "a shot of bourbon" or "two fingers of rye."

But I have known men like that. Some of the most brilliant journalists I have come across have been heavy and consistent drinkers, who have done their best work after potations that would have laid me under the table. I was once sent by the *Manchester Guardian* to Ireland in company with a senior colleague whose capacity for drink was as deep and wide as his work was excellent. I remember passing with him a day of monumental drinking. It was in a Southern Irish town. We began by calling on all his friends, and every one of them produced a whiskey bottle. We passed the whole morning in that way, and at one o'clock were invited to take lunch in a club. We took no lunch at all. We went on drinking, but I was a long way behind the others, knowing my feeble capacity and consuming not more than one glass to their three. Late in the afternoon it was announced that there was no more

liquor in the club, and for a moment this news produced a consternation such as might have fallen on Captain Bligh with a thousand miles between him and Timor and the last drop gone from the water-butt. But a young man with a motor-bicycle was somehow produced, and he was despatched to a potheen-still in the hills. On his return, the party continued. At about seven o'clock my colleague and I returned to our hotel. I was just able to walk and act with a fair semblance of sanity, but he, as soon as he reached his bedroom, sank into a chair, unable to stand. "It is now time," he announced gravely, "to give the British public a fair and considered view of the Irish situation. Bring me telegraph forms." He thereupon wrote without hesitation a brilliant analytical column that filled me with envy and admiration for a great journalist. When he had done, he was incapable of walking with it to the post-office. I took it for him, and was only too glad, then, to go to bed. As soon as I was between the sheets there was a fumbling at my door and the light was switched on. My colleague, wearing nothing but a shirt, stood swaying in the doorway. "Spring, my boy," he said thickly, "I've been thinking it over. We're both mistaken—profoundly mistaken." Then he switched out the light and went. What we were mistaken about I never discovered. It was not the sort of question one bothered to raise on the morning after such a night.

Soon after I went to London I dined at a friend's house and got very drunk indeed. I resolved then that I would never drink again—not what is called drinking. Now I go for six months on end without taking so much as half a pint of beer. This has prevented the recurrence of some rosy illusions, but it has been good for my work. In this matter, each man must consult his own conscience and his own liver. I gave alcohol a fair trial for twenty years, so that I know what I am talking about when I say that for me, even taken moderately, its friendship is as dubious as

a friendship, signed and sealed with all the circumstance of diplomacy, between two nations.

Tobacco is another matter. I have just returned from Falmouth, where I had been to buy tomatoes and tobacco. There was a queue outside the greengrocer's and a queue outside the tobacconist's. So I did not bother about the tomatoes. The tomato plants are ripening in my own garden. I shall soon have a superabundance of them; and even if there were none at all I would not stand in a queue for the last tomato on earth. Nor, I suspect, would all these people who stand here now. They are in the queue only because so much has been written in the papers of late about tomatoes and tomato prices. Normally, I imagine, they don't eat a tomato from one year's end to another.

But I stood in the tobacco queue, because I find it harder to give up indulgence in tobacco than any other indulgence on earth. As I did not drink, so I did not smoke when I went to Bradford. But one day, passing a tobacconist's shop in Manningham Lane, I ventured timidly in and bought a Petersen pipe and an ounce of a tobacco called Bishop's Move. It is fitting that I should remember so precisely these details: the shop, the name of the pipe, the satisfyingly ecclesiastical brand of the tobacco. For this was one of life's great moments: this was the beginning of a friendship that has brought nothing but good. There was no graduation, no toying with cigarettes, no repulsion and queasiness of the stomach such as I had been given to understand accompanied the first adventures with a pipe. In an alarmingly short space of time I was smoking my ounce a day, and have continued to do so from that day to this. I calculate that I have turned 685 lbs. of pipe tobacco into smoke, and not one grey graceful curl of it do I regret. In those days a good pipe tobacco cost fivepence an ounce,

but an old friend of mine would never pay this price. "Why, before the Boer War ..".!" I think he had then paid threepence, and he could not get over the iniquity of Chancellors. He would rather do without tobacco, he said; but I cannot emulate this spartan abstention, even now when an ounce of tobacco costs $1/7\frac{1}{2}$ d. In those days which seemed so happy to me, so exorbitantly burdened to my friend, I could do a week's heavy smoking for less than the cost of two days' smoking now.

But Chancellors are sly dogs. Theirs, after all, is an easy job. It has never seemed to me to require much genius to tell people that they must pay more for this and that when you have all the country's resources behind you to make them pay whether they want to or not. And this exalted office, in modern days, has little other function; just as so many Cabinet jobs consist of hardly more than commanding us all to loiter less and work more: admirable advice which would come with better grace if politicians had shown themselves, when there was so much need for it, apt to follow it themselves. I shall not forget the nonsense that was talked when Neville Chamberlain flew to Germany. Wonderful! At his age! And this, mark you, with a world at stake. It's a pity some of them did not fly a bit sooner and a bit farther.

The sly Chancellor knows well that there are one or two luxuries whose prices can be forced up and up, because people will have them at any price, and tobacco is among them. Its hold on the devotee is so severe that even those who esteem indulgence a sin are not often able to cast off the shackles. Spenser may speak of "divine tobacco" and William Lilly of "our holy herb," but I have seen an honest soul overwhelmed with doubt and prepared to believe that tobacco, so far from being holy, was one of the devil's snares. He was a man of extreme religious views, and, once he had convinced himself that to smoke was to fall from grace, a great fight opened between him and nicotine.

He buried his pipe and tobacco in the back garden, but had the sense to put them first into a tin box. He spent a week of agony brooding on that treasure buried in a field. One night he rushed out, dug up the box, and, gnawed by a fearful sense of wickedness, smoked in a darkened room. Then he burned all that was left of the tobacco and buried the pipe again without the box. He dug it up not long afterwards, cleaned it painfully, and sucked the miserable empty thing in a sweat of contrition at his weakness. He soon bought more tobacco. He never conquered the habit, though convinced that it was a sin against God. He died soon afterwards of a consumption. Perhaps it was because such morbid apprehension went with his tobacco that he did not benefit from it as Pepys's friend Mr. Chetwind did, who "by chewing tobacco is become very fat and sallow, whereas he was consumptive." Mr. Chetwind was not an irreligious man. "In our discourse he fell commending Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, as the best book and the only one that made him a Christian, which puts me upon the buying of it, which I will do shortly."

Happy are they who, as they smoke, see, not clouds of demons about them, but the incense of beatitude. For myself, I could not give up smoking if I would, and would not if I could. True, when I was young I joined the Anti-Cigarette League, but I account that no offence against our holy herb, especially since, in my years of maturity, I have learned that to join any league whatever is a matter merely of expediency, a gesture to be conveniently repudiated. I joined the league because I was young and desirous, as all boys will be, of wearing badges in my button-hole, and to add to their number I would have undertaken an eternity of chastity, or any other thing whatever. Howbeit, I kept that oath, which involved abstinence till the age of twenty-one, and would gladly have kept it till eighty-one, for that matter, for I do not call a smoker of

cigarettes an initiate of the inner circle. There is a Latin flightiness about a cigarette, just as about a cigar there hangs for ever a flavour of ostentation. I feel that a man who offers me a cigarette is being polite, a man who offers me a cigar is being ceremonious, and a man who offers me his tobacco-pouch is being friendly.

And, say what you will about it, the magic of tobacco is in the bond of friendship which it weaves. It gives us a charitable view of our fellows and helps us to keep the peace. The pipe of peace is more than a figure of speech, and he is a wise man who, meeting his adversary in the gate, holds his tobacco-pouch extended in his hand. Ruskin was offended when Carlyle befouled the sweet air of the morning with pipe-belchings; but he should have considered how much worse a thing might have befallen, with what dark humours the morning air might have been besmirched, had Carlyle accidentally left his pipe at home. Those who wish to score off us may do so here, and welcome they are to what they can get out of it. They may call us "addicts" and say what miserable worms we are when denied our solace. I admit this freely. I remember that out of house-keeping money small enough my mother contrived always to put by a copper against the evil day when my father's pouch should be empty. When the too clear signs were manifest, and from settled gloom he passed to lively irritation, I would be hastily despatched for half an ounce of thick twist "if Myra is serving"—for Myra was ever generous when others were merely just—and an ounce if cold truth were being weighed out by her father.

But we are all "addicts" of something, which is no more than to say that in this direction or that we have carefully cultivated our tastes; and of all these tastes I hold the taste for tobacco to be the one which it is hardest sensibly to disparage, for it reduces so many angles and corners of intercourse to a social smoothness in which we give and take like reasonable beings. Think of the awful danger

of disruption—nay, of chaos—that arose when Carlyle and Emerson met! What might they not have said to one another had they not, under the kindly inspiration of tobacco, said nothing at all. And how much further might many causes get if debate upon them could be reduced to these reasonable proportions.

Only one thing could ever shake my allegiance to tobacco, and that is the way the high priests grow fat and batten on us humble devotees. The wills of tobacco magnates now and then give me moments of doubt, and I am not alone. I remember how that loquacious prophet A.E. once handed me his pouch in Dublin and said: "What brand d'you think that is?" It seemed to me a dubious brand indeed and I could make no guess. "Coltsfoot," he declared with satisfaction. "Why should I fatten excise authorities and millionaires when God grows all I want on the railway embankments?"

I tried it myself, gathering harvests of coltsfoot, watching with anxiety as the crop "cured," spread out in the sun on the balcony of my hotel, snipping the leaves with a scissors into thin shreds. But it was not satisfactory. Coltsfoot is not tobacco. Even for the joy of bilking excise authorities and millionaires, I would not be guilty of the treason of calling this stuff a holy herb.

We are all "addicts," if only to the profoundly fascinating habit of disapproving of the addictions of others. It is a pity the word addict—though a horrible word it is—has come to mean something wholly bad, so that the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary gives as its sole definition of the word, "One who is addicted to the habitual and excessive use of a drug or the like." The verb "to addict," which we do not use nowadays, used to mean "to devote." The Shorter Oxford gives the example, "The day he addicts to study." I prefer still to regard an addict as a devotee,

and I refuse to confine the word's meaning to devotees of evil things. Why, after all, should we accept a dictionary's definition? People say to me, as though it settled everything: "But the dictionary says—" Well, let it say, so long as it says what is reasonable; but a dictionary, like any other book, is compiled by fallible man.

A man, they say with some truth, is known by the company he keeps, and certainly he is known by the *things* whose company he keeps—the things of which he is an addict. Apart from a lifelong mania for reading and writing, I am an addict of two things: pots and painting. I use the word painting to include drawing.

For a long time I had to satisfy myself, where painting is concerned, with reproductions. There was a series of little brown monochromes in dark oak frames, sold in Boots branches all over the country, and I fell a ready victim to their easy challenge. I remember Greuze's "Girl with Bird" and many rather vapid pictures of yearning goitrous women and godlike youths by the Pre-Raphaelites. I blush sometimes when I think of my earliest adventures in picture-buying, but I refuse to blush deeply, because the steps from banality to excellence are easy to the persistent seeker. This is so with books. Do not reprove the reader of "twopenny trash," but rather encourage him. From *The Magnet* it is no great step to G. A. Henty, and from that hearty friend of so much British youth, from Henty, I say, and from Ballantyne, Kingston and the rest, the passage to *Treasure Island* and *Robinson Crusoe* is not difficult. I know. The boy who has read *Treasure Island* and been tempted thereby to sample *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* is ripe for Scott and Dumas, and thence there is nothing less than the infinite to step into.

So it is with pictures. The time comes when you want to buy an original work, and, once you have done that, once you have seen yourself in the capacity of a patron of

living artists, you are on the dangerous rocks and slides of the art addict. Everything conspires now to bind the chains upon you. That first picture has been bought at a small gallery in a side street. Thereafter, not an exhibition is held at that gallery without your receiving an invitation to attend. You will find these invitations flattering, and you will attend. You will discover, too, that there seems to be in existence a system by which one gallery places at the disposal of others the names of its own patrons, and invitations will begin to flow in on you from galleries of the most august reputation. Needless to say, you will now spend time at the National Gallery and the Tate and the Wallace Collection, if you are in London; and if you live in the provinces you will haunt the local galleries. What the art critics have to say in the newspapers will become a matter of moment. In short, you will soon be steeped to the ears in "addiction" and inclined to look with contempt on that fellow you once knew who bought monochrome reproductions. But do not look upon him with too much loathing. There is a lot to be said about this matter of reproductions, especially when we are dealing with the splendid colour reproductions of recent years. Mr. Arnold Haskell, in a good little book called *Black on White*, has some harsh things to say about them. He finds that they have "a very, very close analogy with the made-up tie"; and adds: "Far, far better to hang one's niece's efforts at water-colour, to look at them, and at least to have an opportunity of seeing how bad they are (or, quite exceptionally, how good), and why, than to have something which is the alleged work of a master, and that is usually taken for granted for that very reason, and ignored, as most admitted masterpieces are ignored." I see very well what Mr. Haskell is worrying about, and up to a point I am with him. But, all the same, I would rather hear Backhaus playing the pianoforte part of the Emperor Concerto on an H.M.V. record than hear my niece play

it in person on a grand piano in the drawing-room—though she would play it well enough. Mr. Haskell would have the reproductions "disappear into the portfolio, which is their proper home." But why? If a thing is fit to be looked at in a portfolio, it is fit to be looked at anywhere. You must either abolish the reproduction or keep it, and if you keep it, you may keep it where you please.

Do not let us too harshly discourage the good reproduction, especially when it appears in such shape as the Phaidon Press, through the energy of Allen and Unwin, is now giving to it. These books of reproductions of great paintings, with their critical introductions, are the noblest contribution to the study of art made in our day. That they are maintained in *such* a day is a tribute to an enthusiasm beyond all praise on the publishers' part.

A reproduction of a great picture is likely to give a finer impression of the original than a translation of a great poem. And let us not forget that it was not on first looking into Homer, but on first looking into *Chapman's* Homer, that Keats was moved to produce himself words that will live for ever. Thus the reproduction, the recording, the translation, falling on the sensitised eye or ear, may achieve the everlasting miracle of art, which is to quicken a mind and bring forth something in its own image.

All of these considerations do not diminish the thrill of making one's own decisions, spotting the original pictures that one likes, and buying them. The first original picture I bought was by a man named Ripszam, who held an exhibition at a small gallery in Manchester. Ripszam was a lean young man, a Hungarian, with many of a child's engaging habits. I asked him to dinner at my house in Didsbury, and the occasion remains the deeper in my mind because an hour before dinner was to be served the dining-room window was accidentally broken. I see Ripszam still, dining with his head haloed by brown paper pasted across the hole. He was able to reproduce ventriloquially

that cheerful inane twitter that day-old chicks keep up, and all through the meal the other guests were disturbed by this sound running hither and thither about the floor.

During some years of the last war Ripszam had been a prisoner in Siberia. Most of the pictures he showed then were water-colours and pastels that he had done during his captivity. I bought two of them: a Siberian street scene in pastel, as primitive and childlike a picture as I have ever seen, with a rugged pony drawing a rough cart in which sits a boy wearing a plum-coloured coat and a black fur hat. An old peasant, with a grey beard and a yellow blouse, leads the pony, and in the distance are a man and woman in gay colours, the man carrying under his arm a round flat loaf, as yellow as a full moon.

The other picture is a swift brush drawing of the head of one of the artist's fellow-prisoners. He was the son, Ripszam told me, of a famous Hungarian poet. I forget his name. It is a Christlike and rather terrifying face, with blood-red lips. I always think of it as the Man of Sorrows.

I met Ripszam, some years after that, painting in an Oxford college quadrangle, and then I lost touch with him altogether. Whether he became naturalised I do not know. If not, I suppose, through neglect of a formality, he is an enemy alien again.

I shall come back to painting, but in this book I shall be as garrulous and discursive as I please; and the two words "formality" and "naturalised" have set my mind off on a new tack.

I think there is something tremendously important in pretending. When Jacques Lebrun or Johann Braun becomes by deed poll John Brown, and, by taking out naturalisation papers, becomes an Englishman, it is clear that, in the deep meaning of the word, he is no more an Englishman on Tuesday when his papers come through

than he was on Monday while still waiting for them. His heart is full of old nostalgias, yearnings for a remembered village in some Bavarian forest, for an inn he knew on a hill in Picardy. But he has taken a step. He is pretending to be an Englishman, and if he goes on pretending long enough he will become as English as the invading Danes and Saxons and Normans. It may take more than the lifetime of the first John Brown to do this, but he has dedicated himself to the proposition that he is an Englishman, and there will come a time when his pretence bears its fruit and the Browns become what their ancestor pretended to be. Consider the recently published history of the Sassoon family. Not many generations ago they came from the East; yet, when Mr. Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* were anonymously published, who that read them would not have said that here, in this author, was an Englishman to the core, here in this book was the most English of reactions to life?

This, I imagine, was what St. Paul had in mind when he wrote to the Romans: "Reckon yourselves dead unto sin, but alive unto God." Not that you *are* anything of the sort, but *reckon* yourselves to be so: make an assumption and see how it works.

And here, if I may call in Lowell to help my point when I have disparaged him with his point against me, consider the lines in his poem "Longing" (and forgive the abominable rhymes):

*The thing we long for, that we are
For one transcendent moment,
before the Present, poor and bare,
Can make its sneering comment.*

If human life, after this war, is to make progress, there will have to be many of these large assumptions, these hopeful pretences. We cannot live by them. We live best and make the longest strides by cherishing each small approved decency as it appears among us. That is the

day-to-day tactics of human advancement. But behind the tactics there must be a moral strategy; and if men are to be asked, as assuredly they must, to renounce selfish and self-centred ambitions, to coalesce into large free associations in which "mine" and "thine" are merged in the wide validity of "ours," then there will have to be a lot of "reckoning" of ourselves as dead to old desires and alive to a more general good. It may work.

Mr. John Palmer, in his biography of Ben Jonson, deals with the struggle between the humanists and the Puritan morality. "The new morality," he says, "was in essentials based on the assumption that men might be improved by consistently pretending to be better than they were." That must be changed, for improvement, if it come at all, will come not by pretending but by consistently *striving* to turn an initial pretence into a solid and achieved reality. "Possibly," Mr. Palmer goes on, "there is something to be said for the assumption that only by a resolute hypocrisy can men or nations ever hope to improve their hearts and minds. Unfortunately the theory is seldom honestly defended."

Well, let it be honestly defended, with this proviso: that "resolute hypocrisy" have not the canting meaning now current. Let it imply the resolute endeavour to change an old way of life for a new one, persisted in even when the pull to the old from time to time overcomes us. That was where the League of Nations failed. It was the old nigger in a new white shirt; and these adventures towards the light are possible only when the *impulse* springs from the heart, and remains in the heart and grows there to fruition.

Lincoln, I imagine, was animated by this fascinating desire to take a chance with humanity, to refuse to accept the old doom. "What nonsense," said a friend of mine the other day, "what nonsense Lincoln talked at Gettysburg when he said that all men were created equal." But Lincoln

said nothing of the sort. In that brief jewel of human utterance every word is considered and just, and the words here used are: "A new nation, conceived in liberty and *dedicated to the proposition* that all men are created equal."

That seems to me to be another matter, an improvement on Jefferson's first draft. Here, this great representative sorrowful man seems to be saying, is one of those turning-points in the human march, one of those chances which come, even with the best of luck, rarely enough. It's no use walking this new path with the old conceptions cluttering our minds, the old prejudices misting our vision. We've got to *try* something. It may work, or it may not; but it will have a better chance of working if we go beyond a formal and lukewarm consent and *dedicate* ourselves. We cannot, alas! dedicate ourselves to a certainty where anything so uncertain as the heart of man is in question; but at least we can conceive a grand proposition—that all men are created equal. Let's give it a chance; let's get down to it and see how that idea works out.

I see nothing in the history of the United States of America since Lincoln uttered these words to suggest that United States citizens have equality even of opportunity, much less that they are "born equal"; but that does not shake my belief that this, and such-like bold assumptions, must form the strategy behind our workaday tactics of improvement. At least there came out of the American Civil War that dedication to Union which was the solid tactical advance. It is inconceivable that ever again on the North American continent state will lift hand against state. And this should help us to view with a properly sceptical mind the sentimental nonsense that is talked—in Ireland as elsewhere—about "the rights of small nations." Much real passionate feeling has gone into creating the whips that scourge us. The profound irony of European history since the defeat of Napoleon is that qualities excellent in themselves have contributed to a diabolical outcome.

Never was the road to hell paved with such good intentions. Mazzini and Cavour, Kossuth and Gambetta, all strove to free men's minds and bodies; all were supported by splendid ideals: love of kind and country, refusal to be dominated by an alien power. Out of the very intensity of these feelings developed the evil of hostile nationalism, the touchiness for the prestige of the beloved, newly created thing.

I remember how once, in Ireland, I had to reply to an address of welcome, uttered by a person whom I had not realised to be a baronet. I addressed him as "Mister" So-and-so. When I discovered my mistake, I apologised to him privately. He smiled charmingly and said: "Fm not offended. It's a very old title."

The crux of the trouble in Europe was that so many of the titles were so new, and their holders were up in arms—literally—at the slightest breath of what they imagined to be discourtesy or disrespect. Out of the good intentions of the liberators developed a nest of stinging snakes; and that is what was in my mind when I caused a character in *My Son, My Son!* to say: "I've got a general idea that the world's salvation isn't going to come so much from splitting up as from joining on." It was Lincoln's dominant passion. Emancipation of the slaves — perhaps. But union — no perhaps about that. This was the thing he saw with eagle-clarity, pursued with unswerving resolve. In all the over-riding matters of life we must associate, not dissociate. We must come together, not fly apart. In a community with homicidal tendencies — and mankind's homicidal tendencies are as deep as ever—let men keep their beards if they are proud of them, but they must give up their razors and agree to the founding of a barber's shop.

Let me go back to my "addiction" to pictures. It is difficult to believe that twenty years have passed since I

bought a picture from George Russell (A.E.). "I hope," he wrote from 84 Merrion Square, Dublin, "that it will not prove too tiresome a possession."

Well, it hasn't done that, though I do not think so highly of it as I did twenty years ago. It is a picture of a group of girls, some swimming in the sea, some diving from the rocks, with a dawn-sky making a cool blue-grey background. It is, perhaps, a little sentimental, but I have never regretted buying it.

Russell sold his pictures literally by the yard. When I asked him how much this picture cost, he said: "Well, I can't say 'This picture is small but a masterpiece, and this one is big but not very good,' so I paint on three sizes of canvas, and charge accordingly."

He was a most prolific painter. The Dublin drawing-rooms were full of his work. He had two styles: one the presenting of things seen, like the picture I bought from him; the other the presenting of things imagined. These were a figuring in paint of the strange thoughts that crowd his book *The Candle of Vision*. Creatures all flame glowed on the canvas, and, in recollection, they seem to me to have been not without splendour. I wish I had one of them, to represent to me the other side of this dual man, so practical and so apocalyptic.

Russell's office, from which he conducted the business side of his life, was on the first floor of the house in Merrion Square. He had painted the walls—every inch of them—with the tumultuous creatures of his imagination, and in this *milieu* he would sit, his spectacles gleaming, his large foul pipe ejecting coltsfoot fumes from out of his large beard. One never, on calling upon him there, got the sense of intrusion. He was there to talk, and I imagine he would consider it a bad day if a disciple or two had not come and sat at his feet. But such a day he must have known rarely. He would sit in a big easy-chair in the midst of the untidy dishevelled room, himself untidy, kindly,

careless-looking, and the soft alluring Irish voice would run on and on. It is a pity some young Irishman did not constitute himself Russell's Boswell. He would not have lacked matter. One day, I remember, a young Indian, who had come to Europe to study agricultural methods, called while I was there to talk to Russell about his co-operative creameries. But the conversation—if conversation it could be called—did not stay with the creameries for long. Soon Russell was on the subject of Hindu scriptures, and discovered, to his delight, that his caller was not deeply versed in them. He proceeded to enlighten him. Exposition and quotation flowed out of him, ceaselessly, remorselessly. It was a remarkable moment to observe: as though some learned Indian sage, finding a young Englishman who did not know his Shakespeare, had taken up the task of education.

Russell once told me that he had given up reading and pondering on the Hindu scriptures because they had taken him into deeps which he felt to be dangerous. His was a strange life—"twixt the mount and multitude."

It is a long time since I last saw Merrion Square. I do not know whether it has survived in the charming form I knew, or whether Dublin has been as reckless with its things of beauty as London was. Certainly Merrion Square was a thing of beauty, and in later years, as I walked through the London squares with my ears deafened by the hammers of the housebreakers, as I watched Berkeley Square disintegrating and St. James's Square taking hard knocks, I used to think that perhaps in time to come pupils in architecture would go to Merrion Square in order that they might see with their own eyes what a Georgian square in London had looked like.

Now that German bombs have reduced to dust and ashes so much that was lovely in London, I hope we shall be

more inclined to treasure what may chance to be left. We raise a ready outcry about the aerial vandals who have spoiled or destroyed so much of our cultural heritage; but we were destroying it ourselves hand over fist. Let us hope this will make us call a halt. The old squares, during the ten years I lived near London, were savaged—there is no other word for it—with a ruthless disregard for amenity and propriety. Now that so much has gone in the flame of war, what would we not give to have Nash's regency crescent once more in Regent Street; and, as we look at the wreckage of the Wren churches, does a blush visit our cheeks when we recall that, not so long ago, a number of them were in the market? They were "superfluous." No regard was had to beauty then. Treated like so much brick and stone and mortar, standing on so many sites, they were there to be bought by any merchant who cared to rase them and build a concrete warehouse.

These metropolitan monuments were not all. In the twenty years between the two wars we ran riot, trampling and ruining the irreplaceable monuments of our past. Quiet village streets were smashed overnight by the march of arterial roads. A cinema had but to ask for the site of a manor, and there was no one whose business it was to say: "No. There are some things in England that money can't buy."

Money, in those days, could buy anything, destroy it in an hour, and cause to spring up, where some beauty of our race had been, the cheap and spurious simulacrum, common to cheap and spurious men everywhere. Our woods and forests were cut down, our choicest agricultural land was gashed with roads and smeared with houses whose ugliness was an offence to earth and heaven. "There's one good thing about all this bombing. It's clearing away rubbish that ought to have been cleared long ago."

True enough; but it's an expensive method of slum-clearance, and not a kindly one to the slum-dwellers; and

it makes a queer comment on our "vested interests" when something so cataclysmic as this is needed to do what should have been done without it. But most ironic of all to me is the thought that we have, for the last twenty years, been destroying the loveliest country in the world in order to cram upon it the sort of building which, in measurable time, will belong to this class which we now thank God for destroying by the scourge of war. If we had gone about it with brains in our heads, we might have devised a method of cleaning up Limehouse and Whit-chapel without destroying the Temple.

It is to be hoped that one consequence of the war will be to make us think more than twice when moneyed corporations come along—or, for that matter, rural and urban district councils—asking for permission on the one hand to destroy the remaining vestiges of the beauty we have, and, on the other, to add to the eczema of ugliness that has been allowed to spread in the name of housing. There are excellent men on rural and urban councils, but clearly they have not been able to override the men who are not excellent. It is disheartening to see the offences against beauty that are committed by the very people who are its custodians. I have known housing schemes promulgated that were so shocking to the proprieties of the district concerned that the opposition from individuals and societies has been tremendous. Nevertheless, the offence has been committed, and the owners of a couple of fields and a few local builders smile and congratulate one another over their pints. So it will go on—destruction of beauty on the one hand and the creation of loathsomeness on the other—after the war as before it, unless some national overriding authority put a brake on local vandals. That there should be a Society for the Preservation of Rural England, and for the preservation of this and that, is all to the good as things are; but the very necessity for the existence of these bodies shows that things are not as they should be. I

should imagine that there was no Folk Dance Society when folks danced; no Eugenic Society when the race was vigorously reproducing itself.

The last time I saw George Russell was on a January night in 1922: a fateful night in Ireland. For years Irishmen, united against the English, had waged the fight that opened on an Easter Day during the Great War. *The shame of the "Black and Tans"* had been loosed on the country. It was not so much warfare as a murder-campaign on both sides—vendetta, revenge. Men were surprised and shot in their beds. Masks and disguises played a greater part than uniforms. Arson, sudden death out of the night: this had gone on for years, engendering feelings more bitter than any that are created in the confrontations of warfare.

And now there were those who said it was time to make an end, to come to an accommodation with England. A treaty had been drawn up, and on this January night Dail Eireann, the Irish Parliament, was to decide whether or not to ratify it. It was the last day of many days of bitter wrangling and debate, there in a great hall of the new Irish University buildings. I watched them throughout, these men who had fought so sturdily together and who soon, unsated with warfare, were to turn their arms upon one another. Not many of them were notable to the eye. Beyond a certain bluff emphasis of character in Michael Collins, who had the masterly physique that boys love—a big burly body, a massive head adorned with plentiful black hair—and a subtle blend of loving-kindness and relentlessness in Eamon De Valera's face, there was nothing to raise any one of them to the distinction that calls for a second look.

Charles Burgess, who had been De Valera's War Minister, was the most implacable and un pitying figure there. Unlike

Collins and De Valera, he had no gift of speech. His words were halting, and pitched on a single unsonorous note. He was a small man with a face which became impressive from its lack of expression. You looked at him the first time, and your glance wandered on to find something more interesting. But watch him, as I did, through a morning and an afternoon, and again through a morning and an afternoon, and there began to be something uncanny in the masky immobility of his features. They seemed to me to be like a portrait which you wouldn't mind seeing occasionally in the house of a friend, but which would make you scream if you had to live with it. The face was extraordinarily dry and empty of emotion. The skin was dry; the very hair had the dry sapless look of a wig.

Arthur Griffith was there, short, stocky, bull-doggy, his pince-nez gleaming as he defended the treaty-makers against incessant assault; and Erskine Childers, the Englishman who had given his life to Ireland, a thought-haunted grey wreck of a man, so physically weakened that, not long before this, I had seen him fall off a bicycle in Merrion Square.

There they were—these and so many others—in that big room that became, as the days wore on, so hot with the public breath, so foul and stale with tobacco smoke, all trying patriotically to speak in Rrse and finally breaking down into the plain uncompromising English in which they were at home. There they were, with doom and death hanging over so many of them once the final rupture had come, once the treaty was accepted, and those who would not accept it turned in a madness of civil strife upon those who did. In measurable time now this phlegmatic little Charles Burgess will fall, riddled with his old companions' bullets, as he runs from a blazing hotel; Collins will be shot mysteriously as his car makes its way through the Irish countryside; Childers, who gave so much to Ireland,

will face an Irish firing-squad which will relieve him of his remaining tenuous vestige of life; Arthur Griffith will die in harness.

But we do not see their doom that January night as we wait for the voting on the treaty. It was accepted by 64 votes to 57—too narrow, too narrow by far, for safety. I shall not forget the great hubbub that broke out when the figures were declared, or the sight of De Valera collapsed, his arms along the table, his head buried in his arms, or of Michael Collins standing dominant and erect, looking about him with flashing eyes: Collins who was soon to be so low, De Valera who was soon to be so high.

It was in that moment that I last saw A.E. We were jammed together in a great press of people passing out into the night. He was very deeply moved. "We have opened a door," he said. Yes, indeed; and it was opened upon strange things whose end is not yet seen. "I am sure you will be in Ireland again," A.E. wrote to me soon afterwards, "We are hardly the spiritless folk who make no history to interest our neighbours. But I hope the history that brings you will not be military history." Now A.E. has joined so many others who were "in" at that historic moment. What history will take Englishmen back to Ireland is not yet apparent. But, to a discerning eye, the outlines begin to clear.

George Russell has led me a long way from the interest in pictures with which I began. By a coincidence, that very morning when I began to write about pictures an exciting-looking flat parcel arrived from Manchester, and I knew before I opened it that these must be the drawings by L. S. Lowry that I had asked a Manchester friend to send on. I have a great affection for this friend, Kenneth Brady, not least because he once, unwittingly, helped me

in a most awkward moment of life. I had spent some time in a camp on a hill overlooking Harfleur: a most uncomfortable camp of tents. The winds up there were bitter; it was winter weather and there had been a good deal of snow. We had to currycomb and feed the transport mules, beasts that came into the stables at night splashed to the belly in snowy sludge. They were vindictive and horrible animals, only a trifle nearer to redemption than the corporal who had our bodies and souls in bondage. All Gaul, for us, was divided into three parts: mules, muck and the corporal, and the greatest of these was the corporal. He was a small vindictive man, a "regular," and he had set notions of how things should be done. We endlessly cut hay into chaff, and one of his notions was that this chaff, which had to be put into sacks, should be so put with our hands. It always seemed to me better and quicker to shovel it in, and more than once the corporal had reproved me for so doing; though it must be understood that I use the word "reproved" merely as a euphemism. When I was discovered for the third or fourth time committing this offence, the corporal lost even his residuary legacy of control. "'Aven't I told you a 'undred times to use your 'ands?" he inquired, embroidering this simple question with a rich tapestry of profanity. "Wasn't 'ands made before shovels?" "Yes, corporal," I answered, "and teeth were made before chaff-cutters. Let's bite up the hay to-morrow."

This was logical, but not conciliatory; and the consequence was that, as the statesmen would say, there was "a deterioration of relationships" between me and the corporal.

Every day, as the wind blew, and the snow fell, and the mules kicked, and the corporal sharpened his teeth upon us, and the tents were foul with inescapable mud, we comforted ourselves with the knowledge that this was but a place of sojourn from which we should soon be shifted. Every day

a "draft" was moved on. The names were read out at night; the next day, always at the same time, they assembled and were marched to the railway station.

Always at the same time. That was my undoing, for, the day when I moved on, the "draft" departed, without warning, an hour or so before the usual time. I had been advised that I was to go that day, and I had joined a few friends to whom I wished to say farewell in the canteen, when a messenger came breathless in. "The 'draft's' parading. They're all on parade except you. The corporal's giving you your character."

I could well imagine that he was. I ran with this friendly messenger to my tent. He held open my kit-bag and I piled things in. Then I snatched up my rifle, ran out of the tent, and—caught my foot on one of the guy-ropes. It was a perfect slithering fall into the thick snowy mud. The front of me, from toes to cap-peak, was a mask of filth; and in this condition I was obliged to present myself on parade. "Oh, so you've come?" the corporal demanded. "You've bloody well condescended to come! You always were a dirty-looking bastard, and look at you now!"

But there was no time for looking. We were marched away to where an officer was to inspect us before departure. To say that the corporal was gloating over the reception this officer would give me would be to understate his expectations. There he was, very spruce, debonair. We lined up before him. He looked at the list of the "draft" in his hand and demanded: "Where is the man named Spring?" The man so named stepped forward and saluted. Was there a flicker of surprise in the eye of that immaculate figure? Possibly. But he kept his emotions under control. "Your friend Kenneth Brady," he said, "who went up the line some time ago, heard you were in the camp. He asked me to give you his greetings." And then that astonishing man shook my hand. My heart rushed out in thanks to

God that He had induced my friend Brady to take a commission and thus, by the inscrutable workings of His will, frustrate the corporal at the very noon and zenith of his moment.

Well, so many years later, this same friend Brady was sending me a portfolio of Lowry's drawings. I had for a long time wanted some examples of L. S. Lowry's work, because they bring Manchester to my mind with a speed and completeness that nothing else can do. They are—at times almost *ternfymgly*—Manchester. I was asked about a month ago to go to Manchester to open an exhibition of the work of modern painters. At first, I said I would go, and I made up my mind to take that occasion to buy something by Lowry. Then it happened that I couldn't go after all; and so, as I couldn't go to Lowry, I arranged for Lowry to come to me.

I have long been fascinated by the work of this artist, and shall use this chance to pay him tribute. Manchester has produced greater artists. They leave the city and go away in quest of colour and clients. Lowry has chosen to stay in Lancashire, and if he is not Manchester's greatest artist, he is at any rate the one who can evoke the drab streets, the hard-beaten patches of earth called "crofts" on which the children play, the grey smoke-filled sky with the mill chimneys soaring against it, the street-corner pubs and the pale pathetic artisans, as no artist, to my knowledge, has done before. More than this: his pictures evoke for me the whole tragical sense of frustration that the Industrial Revolution clamped upon the land. All that men and women have been defrauded of, all that they are not, is here implicit in the stark statement of what they have and are.

I once, in a novel, tried to draw my own picture of the sort of Manchester landscape that Lowry excels in reproducing, and perhaps I may be pardoned for quoting it here: it helps you to see his work. "The sky was full of

proud stars, but the ground about her crept with too humble an acceptance of its desolate destiny. From the central road with its pinchbeck shops, garnished with scraps of dirty meat or wretched vegetables or soiled depressed-looking clothing, with its grim grey synagogues and houses into whose fabric acid soot had been eating for generations, there ran *off* street after street, mean, shoddy and decrepit, disreputable ribs of that deplorable spine. In all those streets little houses huddled together with their shoulders hunched and their heads bent, their eyes veiled save for a slit of grudging light here and there. . . . Rachel knew it, every nook and corner of it; and she knew that were it daylight instead of dark, there still would be no amelioration in sight; no tree or shrub or flower, no graceful form of a building, no sudden sight of a bough against the sky; nothing to catch away the eye from the stony hideousness that sprawled upon the hillside for mile after maddening mile."

There it is, whether you like it or not; there it is, the stricken field on which the fight for Britain's industrial supremacy was fought and won; and those who most often tell us they don't like it are those who benefit daily from its existence; as Karl Marx, building his vision of a new world, was helped to keep body and soul together by Friedrich Engels, toiling here amid the immediacy of Lancashire grit and grime.

These are the matters of Lowry's paintings and drawings. He crowds his pictures with small human figures after the fashion of Brueghel, but how different is the emotional impact of a picture by Brueghel and of a picture by this faithful delineator and interpreter of the contemporary industrial scene! A Brueghel picture always fills my heart with joy and hope at the infinite variety and colour of life. All those little people—skating, shooting, working in the fields, walking down their village streets—are distinct and individual. Each one had a quirk and a twist, a humour,

something to cheer and enlighten his brief days under the sun. But Lowry refrains from bestowing upon his people any vestige of individuality. They are, almost always, flat silhouettes, moving against their drear background with the automatism of mechanic men. I know that in Lancashire you will find as much individuality as can be come by anywhere on earth. It is a county that has thrown up more than its share of comedians and singers, artists and writers, to say nothing of many unknown men who are all compounded of wit and oddity. Was there not one Manchester business man who always proceeded from home to office on roller-skates, wearing a topper with the best of them? Nevertheless, Lowry is right in depicting anonymous men, men without faces, men crushed and obliterated; for thus he expresses with a sure instinct the general and inevitable drift of man under his acceptance of the machine as master. We have good reason to-day to know what the individual may hope for when matched against the machine.

I am but an amateur and dabbler where pictures are concerned, and I am prepared to be told by the learned that my notions are nonsense. Nothing has ever surprised me more than to be asked to open an exhibition in the Manchester City Gallery, where so often I have beguiled an hour with beauty. The reason was a rather strange one. The invitation came from a man who had read my first novel, which has a painter for its chief character. He convinced himself that this painter was based upon observation of a well-known Manchester artist, and he argued that a man interested enough in a painter to make him a character in a novel would be interested enough in painting to assemble the few platitudes necessary for "opening" an exhibition. From the painter in my book, he went on to deduce a whole gallery of Manchester identifications,

thereby making me tremble with apprehension of the laws of libel.

He was wrong. There is no one in that book, there is no one in any book I have written, who is "taken from life." What a widespread obsession there is that writers put their friends and acquaintances into their books! It goes back and back. It troubled Ben Jonson greatly. The charge was always being laid at his door, so that in the "Induction" to *Bartholomew Fair* he takes it up. "It is finally agreed by the foresaid hearers and spectators that they neither in themselves conceal, nor suffer by them to be concealed, any state-decipherer or politic picklock of the scene, so solemnly ridiculous as to search out who was meant by the gingerbread woman, who by the hobby-horse man, who by the costermonger."

There is, indeed, something "solemnly ridiculous" about these adventures in identification. I have heard people say to journalists: "How on earth do you fill the paper every day?" With all the world's doings to draw on! With that vast well of life there for ever, and the little bucket of a daily sheet for dipper! The everlasting struggle is not what to put in but what to leave out. Go into the sub-editors' room at the end of the night and consider the "spikes," madam; look upon the waste-paper baskets, sir.

So it is with the novelist and dramatist. A man with any eye for the human comedy cannot exist long in this world without being aware of fathomless resources of character and incident. There is an alphabet of passions and obsessions, fears and hopes, loves and hates, that can be endlessly combined, competently by most of us, and into startling new-minted form by the masters. True, there are those who lazily dip into their immediate shoals and eddies, with no refashioning, or too little; and these are they whom the voracious seize upon and wring through the mangle of the libel laws. But there is no need to do this. In

the abundance, the superabundance, of the deep sea of human comedy, we can steer clear of the personal imputation.

I have somehow reached this point from a sentence which confessed an "addiction" to painting and pots. Pots came into my life through a small Chinese gentleman whom I have now known for twenty years as Ho Pin. A Manchester dusk had come on early, and there was nothing much in my mind save tea and toast. As I hurried homeward the tail of my eye caught something which had the clean isolated look of perfection, and I turned instinctively towards the shop window. There, surrounded by miscellaneous junk, stood Ho Pin—suave, smiling aloofly, holding a little fan, and dressed in a robe that fell to his feet in delicious blue folds. He was about six inches high.

My wife was with me. "I wonder what he costs?" I said to her; and she replied practically: "Probably more than you can afford. Let's get home to tea."

We went on as though that were that; but it wasn't. The next day I saw, as I passed the shop on the tram, that Ho Pin was still there. The day after that I got off the tram to see him once more. He had the same smiling appearance of waiting for what he was sure would happen. He almost made me feel that he had marked me down.

So it went on for a week; and then, when I came in one night, my wife said: "There's someone in your room—someone you've been waiting to see for some time." I went upstairs, and there, on my writing-table, stood Ho Pin. His smile had more meaning than ever. "Well, here I am," it said. "What are you going to do with me?"

I might well have put that question to him. He has had his way pretty thoroughly. It would have seemed to

me at that time a charge to be eagerly refuted had anyone suggested that an ounce or two of clay and glaze and pigment would hold for me such fascination. I had almost a horror of installing "pieces" preciously behind glass; yet there Ho Pin stands to-day, among a various retinue, looking with his enigmatic Chinese smile through the crystal wall that shuts him off from the dust of this common world.

Of all the porcelain and stoneware I possess he is the only old piece; for, once an interest in these matters had been stirred in me, I soon came to the conclusion that, in our own time, pottery was being made as beautiful as any in the world. And yet it was this antique sample of the craft that stirred my responses; thus recapitulating in my own small instance the history of the potter's craft in England: where there was nothing but a native memory and desire till the discovery of Eastern perfections blew on these embers and set us on an excellent way.

I soon fell under the sway of pottery that was being made, so to speak, under my nose: Royal Lancastrian pottery, shimmering and iridescent with lustre, designed by artists like Joyce and Gordon Forsyth, thrown on the wheel by great craftsmen like Radford. But what sealed my doom and made me a "collector" for ever was the discovery of Royal Copenhagen pottery, with the immensity of its range, from the almost sentimental little blue-grey figurines in which Christian Thomsen embodied the personalities of Hans Andersen stories to the heroic stoneware figures of Biblical characters, by Jais Nielsen, having almost the magnificence of statuary.

From discovering these things to writing about them was a short step; and when my writing was regarded with so much acceptance by the Royal Copenhagen Pottery Company that they presented me with an excellent piece and invited me to visit the works—why, then I was a thrall for ever.

Whether I shall ever see these works whence Nelson, the conqueror of Copenhagen, sent gifts of porcelain to his Emma, I do not know, for other conquerors are in Copenhagen now. Incidentally, they are conquerors who owe me much money, for, just as this war broke out, one of my books was enjoying a great run in Germany. If they would clear out of Copenhagen and pay me what they owe me, what a time I could have among the perfections of Henning and Malinowski! Of all the artist-potters whose work I know, those two are dearest to me.

But there the conquerors are; and I shall allow them to bring my thoughts back for a moment from these recollections of the past to some concerns of the moment. They have got hold of Mr. P. G. Wodehouse, and what a fuss that is causing! Mr. Wodehouse, it appears, was in a concentration camp and was thence transported to the luxuries of the Adlon Hotel in Berlin, and from the Adlon he has been broadcasting, announcing an invincible feeling of non-belligerency. This has caused a grave scandal. My morning newspaper, day after day, has letters from authors and clergymen and what not, all denouncing Mr. Wodehouse, and some vowing never again to read his books.

The whole hullabaloo seems to me to be nonsensical and wrong-headed. Naturally, we would all prefer that Mr. Wodehouse should do nothing to help our enemies; but which of us can confidently declare what he would do with a revolver at his head or a knife at his neck? We might take the way of sacrifice; but don't let us too vociferously damn those who don't. And I should imagine that, if not physically, at least psychologically, this compulsion is behind the situation.

So much for that side of the matter. As to whether we should or should not read the books of one whose conduct

we dislike, where are we to draw the line? Will the canon who exclaims "Good-bye, Jeeves" renounce the Epistle of St. Peter because its author on a celebrated occasion was also guilty of a Denial? Will he forbid to be read in his church the Psalms of David because that king had a tough way with the husbands of beauties whom he wanted for his bed?

No; you can't intelligently stand by this doctrine of damning books because you don't like their authors. Where do we get to? Do we cut out Wordsworth and Dickens for their illegitimate children? Carlyle for his vile temper? Rousseau for what I suppose the Canon would call "flagrant immorality"? Pepys because he chucked chambermaids under the chin? Indeed no. If Jeeves was ever funny, he is as funny to-day as he ever was; and what an author is to be judged by is what appears between his covers, and nothing else.

If we are to pursue Mr. Wodehouse, do we go on to pursue that solid phalanx of British novelists who have taken care, by timely removal to the United States, that they shall not find themselves in his predicament? I used to think we should, and I have said so publicly. I don't like this great Recessional. Authors are in the habit—and they should be in the habit—of claiming some nobility for their calling. Very well then. *Noblesse oblige*. That was, and is, my feeling; but I am not prepared to make a case of it. Let them settle the matter with their own consciences. We do not know all the circumstances of those cases, any more than we know what, behind the deep veil of this war's mysteries, has happened in the case of Wodehouse.

I am not trying to make out a case for a friend. I do not know Mr. Wodehouse. I have met him only once, and then spent no more than an hour in his company. Nor do I write because of excessive admiration for his books. Much nonsense about them, it seems to me, has

been written by Hilaire Belloc and others; and if ever the University of Oxford made a fool of itself it did so when it conferred on Wodehouse the degree of Doctor of Letters. Wodehouse is a "funny man" rather than a humorist, and even as a "funny man" his range is narrow and shallow. But, I repeat, however funny he ever was, he is just that funny still; and I should find relief in one of his books from the condemnation of those who are so ready to stone him, those who, if they are without his alleged sin, are also, at the moment, without his danger and temptation.

Wodehouse the funny writer is one thing; Wodehouse the private individual is another; it is unreasonable to expect one's conception of the first to be realised in the second. The flaw in the thinking of those who now damn Wodehouse—as so many damned the King of the Belgians before he was vindicated—is that they seem to have expected the creator of Bertie Wooster to floor the Gestapo with a sally. But the author out of his study, away from his desk, off the job, is rarely the man who addresses us when we get within the covers of his books. Happy they who leave their commerce with authors at that; but few people are willing to do so. "I should love to meet the author of So-and-so!" they exclaim; and they are unaware that the author of So-and-so is a secret being not to be met, someone who does not often emerge into the light of day. It would, I think, be generally admitted by those who have met many authors that the experience has few compensations and many disillusiones. What child would not be thrilled at the notion of meeting Hans Andersen in the flesh? Yet I have read somewhere (though I cannot now for the life of me recall where) that young Miss Dickens, who had the privilege, lamented that Mr. Andersen stayed on and on; and Dickens himself, accord-

ing to Mr. Hugh Kingsmill, found his guest to be a cross between Mr. Pecksniff and the Ugly Duckling.

Yet, with an invincible determination to be thrilled, people will attend luncheons and dinners at which authors are to appear, and some are even to mumble a few words; and, undeterred by what they find, persevere with the persistence of Galahad pursuing the Grail. They will even hunt down authors in their homes; and, quite rightly, authors' wives turn into dragons and as often as not will not admit their visitors, knowing that it is when they are at home and at work that authors are authors.

I suppose I have met as many authors as most people, and I have found them to be divided roughly into two classes: the plain dumb who might as well be grocers, and those who seek to live up to their reputations and, in every word they utter, to twinkle twinkle like little stars. It is only a personal idiosyncrasy, but if there is one type of conversation I cannot stand it is that of the man who hopes he is minting the epigrams that Oscar Wilde forgot.

I have met only one great novelist who impressed me as being also a great personality, and that was Arnold Bennett. Here, indeed, was a man to whom I paid the sincere tribute of wishing I could know more of him. It was merely a business occasion. Bennett had come to Manchester for the production of one of his plays at the Rusholme Theatre. I was sent by the *Manchester Guardian* to interview him. Bennett always had a high opinion of the *Guardian*. In one of his earlier short stories—*The Death of Simon Fitge*, one of the best short stories in the language, as I think—he causes a character to say that the *Guardian* is not just a great newspaper: it is the greatest newspaper in the world. Perhaps it was this old feeling of affection for my paper that caused him to receive me so well at the Queen's Hotel. There I met him, waiting in the lounge, with those somewhat prominent front teeth, that wave of hair which then,

towards the close of his life, was nearly white. He was well-dressed, and there was something big, solid, and, above all, dignified in his appearance and bearing. I found him of an exquisite courtesy, treating a provincial reporter with a consideration that reporters do not always receive. We had tea together, and he talked of what he had been reading, of the plays and films he had been seeing; and he talked sensibly, with no great man assumptions, seeking my own opinions and receiving them as though they were worth listening to. After tea, he said he would like to walk about the town a little, and invited me to accompany him. We perambulated, he with a slow heavy dignity, for three-quarters of an hour. Then he said that he was tired, and I saw him back to the door of his hotel. Nothing momentous had been said on either side; but that brief contact remains curiously sharp in my memory. I have never before or since had so strongly the sense of being in the company of a man above the ruck of his fellows. How could either of us guess that afternoon that within a couple of years he would be dead and I would have succeeded him as the writer of the *Evening Standard* book page which he had made so famous?

I have mentioned Bennett's story, *The Death of Simon Fuge*, and that gives me occasion to throw a ray upon the character of Lord Beaverbrook. A man has only to be outstanding in Fleet Street to find his name crusted with legends of brusqueness, inconsiderateness, almost downright brutality. So it inevitably was with Beaverbrook. He took men up, it was said, and as casually he threw them down, hardly caring whether they lived or died. For myself, I never found this to be so. On the contrary, I had more than one occasion to discover that Lord Beaverbrook was more than usually sensitive to other people's feelings.

I once referred in the *Evening Standard* to this story, *The Death of Simon Fuge*, as one of the great stories of the English language. In the *Standard* the next day was a brief letter to the editor, signed "Beaverbrook," tersely contradicting this opinion. Well, a man has a right to hold and to express any view he pleases, but I was nevertheless surprised that the proprietor of the *Evening Standard* should so shortly and publicly throw over the judgment of one of his "experts." However, I did not mind: I had expressed my view; he had expressed his; and if, in order to judge between us, people were led to read the story, so much the better.

I went down to Epsom that night, to be ready to see the Derby the next day, and I was dining in my hotel when a telephone call came through from Lord Beaverbrook. I had not left my address with anybody: he must have gone to some trouble to run me down there. And he had done this because he thought his letter might have hurt my susceptibilities. He said he hoped I hadn't minded his letter; and to that I replied that I hadn't, and that I should mind it still less if I had the right of reply. "You certainly have," he said. "Say anything about me that you like." And so he gave me the last word, to the extent of considerably more than a column in the *Standard*. I found him again and again capable of these understanding flashes of feeling.

I met George Moore, as I met Arnold Bennett, only once, and in his case, too, it was towards the end of his life. Again, too, it was a question of a newspaper interview. I called at the house in Ebury Street, and a message was taken up to George Moore, who agreed to see me in an hour's time. When the moment came, I climbed the stairs, and there he was in a great chair, his hair white, his face round and as pink as a new-cut ham. I suppose he had devoted some part of the intervening hour to deciding

what to say, for I was hardly seated when he began: "A novel should be shaped like a vase."

"Why?" I asked.

He had evidently settled down to trot along what I suspect must have been a familiar track, and my question seemed both to annoy and jolt him. Evidently, I was there to listen, not to interrupt. He paused for a moment and repeated my question: "Why?"

"Yes," I said. "Why should a novel be shaped like a vase? Why shouldn't it be shaped like a cabbage or a kitchen table?"

After this, the interview did not go too well, but we talked desultorily of this and that. He seemed surprised to find that I had read his books. A newspaper reporter, I gathered, to come up to his expectations, should neither read books nor have opinions about how a book might be written. He should be a shorthand-writer, ready to make a verbatim record of wisdom bubbling from its spring. We parted with a mutual bristling of the fur.

No; on the whole, it is better to know an author from his books. That is the shareable conversable part of him. I have never gone out of my way to meet authors, for I have a horror of seeming to "run after" either people who are wealthy or those who are in any way distinguished. Perhaps I have carried this to excess. I remember declining one invitation simply because it was baited with the promise "H. G. Wells will be there." I can think of only one author I should like to have met, and that is Thomas Hardy. My feeling for his work is compounded of reverence as well as admiration. Perhaps if I had met him there might now be a cloud over the warmth of my appreciation, though I believe I have learned the importance of thinking of the book apart from the man. Yet, somehow, I imagine I would have found him sympathetic. Everything I hear

of him helps me to believe this. I don't know whether there is any truth in a story I once heard, but it sounds "in character," except that I cannot conceive Hardy at a modern literary party. The story is of such a party, full of gay unimportant chatterers, filling the air with news of that superabundant commodity, the great novels that are "going to be" written. In the corner was a quiet overlooked man, whom one of the party at last approached, demanding what *he* thought of the technique of novel-writing. He replied modestly that he had written a few novels, but really he didn't know much about the theory of the matter. When he was gone, the young man learned that this had been Thomas Hardy.

They say that he had a horror of calling attention to himself, and that when he travelled "Thomas Hardy" never appeared on his luggage, but only "T. Hardy."

What a difference that makes! If Mr. Wells were to dispense with one of his initials and use the full Christian name of the other, what little notice a book by "George Wells" would attract. A great name is magical only when it has been made magical. I had occasion once to point this out to an author of my acquaintance. Let us coin a name for him, and say he had written a number of books as James Holborn. They were not very successful, and he convinced himself that it was all the fault of his name. "James Holborn! Whoever would want to read books by James Holborn !" He decided that he must add something resounding to this name. I did my best to dissuade him. I asked him to try and clear his mind of all that the names had come to mean, and to say to himself, "Walter Scott" or "G. B. Shaw." Could any name, in itself, be more commonplace than either of those two? Yet, association had made them sonorous. The author must make the name, not the name the author. But it would not do; and by deed poll he became James Merrivale Holborn. "J. Merrivale Holborn" appeared on a book or two, but

reviewers would not take to it. They spoke of "Mr. J. M. Holborn," and now "J. M. Holborn" it is on all the books—good books, too, and, I am glad to say, successful enough.

How different a famous name sounds when slightly twisted I learned at a London "literary lunch." My neighbour was a woman novelist of formidable aspect, who arrived carrying a black despatch-case like a diplomat's and had an air of competent authority that I found daunting. In a voice which must have reached our fellow-lunchers on all hands, she began to cross-examine me on my literary knowledge, and presently boomed a request to know what I thought of Morgan Forster. I said that I had read nothing of his: I hadn't even heard his name; whereupon she trumpeted in scandalised tones: "Really, Mr. Spring ! You call yourself a literary critic, and have never read Morgan Forster!" I could only reply humbly that, alas I I had never read Morgan Forster and had never called myself a literary critic. It was not till I had left the lunch that I thought it possible she had been referring to the writer usually spoken of as E. M. Forster.

Certainly, "T. Hardy" would attract little enough attention to a not very distinguished-looking person, travelling probably third class. I once came upon a man who had met Hardy, and he told me a story, not at all important, but one that somehow made me see Hardy clearly. The man was a retired naval petty officer, whom I came on by chance tending the cabbages in his garden in Devonshire. During the war of 1914-18 he was captured by the Germans in East Africa, and remained a prisoner there for some years. He was one of a considerable party of Englishmen, and they were kept moving about in the forest, sick with malaria, unhappy and unwell. They had one book—Hardy's *Tess*. He did not know whence it had come, but there it was, and every man read it and re-read it; and, as year followed year, bits of paper frayed away, chunks of print were obliterated

by thumb-marks; pages, stuck together by food, wouldn't come apart without disaster. But, whenever a new prisoner turned up, and was given *the* book, someone could always help him over stiles, reciting the missing bits. "We all knew it almost by heart," said the petty officer.

After the war, he visited a relative in Dorchester, an inn-keeper, with whom he was walking one day, when they met Thomas Hardy. The inn-keeper introduced the petty officer to the novelist. "He was a very simple fellow," the man said to me. "He shook hands and said,^c 'You look very ill,' and then he went off."

Later in the day the petty officer was eating his dinner at a farmers' ordinary, and Hardy was sitting there, alone at a table, no one taking any notice of him, or he, apparently, of anyone.

"Did you tell him about *the* book?" I asked.

He had not done so; but I think the old man would have been pleased with that tale.

"I should like to have seen him," I said to the petty officer.

"Why?" he asked. "Was he important?"

I have called my three-and-a-half years in Bradford my university career. I was away from family restraints for the first time; I had my own rooms; I had taken up a game—a thing I had never done before; I had the constant companionship of lively minds; I was smoking a lot and drinking a little; I was reading regularly and intelligently. During most of that three-and-a-half years I devoted a month at a time to a chosen author. I began with Chaucer, came forward with Spenser, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Dryden, following the stream of poetry up to Wordsworth, Keats, Tennyson, Browning. And so with the novelists. I obtained a sense of the continuity, the development, of English letters. Not that I read nothing in a given month

save the chosen author of the month. There were many sidelines; but I found this system of reading with continuity very important after years of haphazard absorption. Blessings upon the Everyman's Library, and upon an age in which those volumes could be bought for a shilling each.

The work for the *Yorkshire Observer* was of wide variety. I was, in turn, reporter, sub-editor, and even, at times, editor. Editor, that is, of the weekly edition, during the editor's holidays; a not exacting job, consisting as it did of making a pie out of bits of the daily edition and adding a seasoning of short stories, serials and articles.

I learned a lot about newspaper work. I did theatre criticisms, and even, once or twice, music criticism, though I always protested that this was carrying hypocrisy too far, and at length I was, with gladness, relieved of all contact with an art which I can no more discuss than I can discuss religion.

I did much book-reviewing. The system was simple. Those who wanted to review books could do so, with the book for reward, and no other pay. I wanted to review books very much, and was enormously encouraged one day by a note from Drysdale, telling me that a review I had written "would have graced a great London journal." He allowed me much freedom so far as space was concerned. I have used a whole column of the *Yorkshire Observer*—a matter, in those days, of 1200 or 1500 words—to assess the merits of a single novel. One day I wrote a short review of Mr. T. H. S. Escott's biography of Trollope. I thought no more of it than of any other review, but it was one of those things that affect a man's whole future.

And now those years that had so much endeavour and gaiety—gaiety whether under the winter pall of fog in Bradford or summer's winy air on the moors and in the dales of the West Riding—drew to their ominous end. The crust crumbled under our feet; the war broke up that

goodly comradeship; and all too soon "the loveliest and the best" of them were gone for ever.

I did not remain in Bradford long after the war had begun. All sorts of queer activities broke out. I was not passed for the army, and found myself one of a group who imagined they were somehow helping our country by shooting on a miniature range. But, with so many friends so quickly gone, it was all very unhappy, very unsatisfactory, and I welcomed a chance to leave the city. I went, in the spring of 1915, to the *Manchester Guardian*;, remained there a few months, and then discovered an unheroic niche in the army after all.

This move to Manchester, like all the moves of my life, was not sought, and was for a time resisted. One day, in the stuffy precincts of the Bradford police court, a friend on the *Yorkshire Post* told me he had heard that the *Manchester Guardian* wanted a reporter. "You ought to apply for it," he said. "Just your line." I laughed at the thought of the *Guardian* being "my line," for the *Guardian* seemed then (and seems to me still) an august *nonpareil*. I did nothing. With this *Yorkshire Post* man I had a satisfactory arrangement concerning golf. If we were both marked to do the police court, one of us would clear off to the golf links, and later in the day ring up the other to know if there was "anything doing." Much has been written, said and filmed concerning the bitter rivalries of reporters on competing sheets; but I have been lucky enough not to encounter much of it. Perhaps it has been just my usual luck, but I have come across an accommodating lot of fellows, more anxious to guide my steps than to cut my throat.

A few days after this serviceable friend had first mentioned the matter, I rang him up from the Baildon links, and he asked: "What have you done about the M.G.?"

I had done nothing, and said so. He urged me very strongly to apply for the job. I did, and got it. If we include the three-and-a-half years when I was absent in France, I served the *Guardian* for fifteen years. These were the most momentous years of my life. I came to know and to love Manchester as I have known and loved no other city. When I began to write books, it was natural and inevitable that Manchester should be their focus. I was steeped in the place to the eyebrows. I am still touchy with anyone who runs it down or fails to understand its enormous significance in the life of Britain. I am often referred to—especially by American writers—as a "Manchester man." I do not deny it, for I am proud so to be in all that matters—love, and, I think I may claim, understanding. From all over the world I receive letters from exiled Mancunians, nostalgic homesick letters, thanking me for giving them the taste and smell of their native city.

Manchester is about as big a city as one can take to one's heart. I never, in London, had any sense of citizenship or of civic pride. I lived in a suburb which was neither rural nor urban. Ten years before, it must have been a lovely village, and vestiges of its loveliness remained. The High Street, happily, was not part of a main road, or, inevitably, one side of it would have been knocked down in order to let the growing traffic through. The High Street remained, pretty well unspoiled, but all the rest of the place, during the decade while I lived there, suffered enormously. Cinemas, chain stores and innumerable little houses broke out like a fever.

You couldn't take a place like that to your heart. I didn't know who was the chief of our local governing authority. I never saw our Member of Parliament, whoever he may have been, and I do not to this day know in what ecclesiastical diocese we were situated and who was our bishop. Most of the residents went up daily to their work in London; and all round London, making a circle of

ever-widening extent, there were similar places which once had been villages and now were God knows what. "Londoner," in short, was ceasing to have its old meaning. It was becoming increasingly difficult to find a Londoner, What were called Londoners were people who knew the way from some London underground station to the office, knew very little else about London, and hastened home at night to these new raw places which were almost devoid of culture and association. Hardly one of them had a theatre; many had not a church; but on the credit side it may be added that they caused to develop an enormous interest in gardening and a fair knowledge of horticulture. But essentially they were without soul or a focus for civic endeavour. The cinema was the highest point of public entertainment, and the golf club the centre of social life.

The same sort of thing was happening about Manchester, but the place had not reached the proportions which are amorphous and destructive of individuality. You could still be a Manchester man in the true sense that you lived in Manchester and knew, and were interested in, all that appertained to the city's well-being. I think there can hardly have been a citizen who did not know who was his Lord Mayor and who were the councillors and aldermen representing his civic ward. The Bishop was our bishop and the cathedral was our cathedral, still intimate and familiar enough to be called by many "t'owd church." We knew our members of Parliament, and watched their ways pretty closely, and expected them to be often among us to give an account of themselves. The *Guardian* was our own great local paper, which to us was something more distinguished than a "national organ." We knew our Town Clerk and our Chief Constable; and our university was ours indeed, scintillating with great and well-known names, held in local affection: Miers and Alexander, Tout and Herford. The theatres were ours, also, and even the music-halls had a domestic and indigenous flavour. In a

word, we were a community, keenly aware of the existence in our midst of those men and those institutions which represented our mundane and spiritual and cultural essence and well-being.

Such was the Manchester I went to in 1915; such, in the main, it is to-day; and even deeper such, learning wisdom from the lessons so thickly spread for our edification, may it long continue to be.

The Chief Reporter of the *Manchester Guardian*, when I joined the staff, was William Haslam Mills. Like the deputy-chief, George Leach, Mills was a barrister-at-law. He and Leach, after they had been "called," put up a joint brass plate on some obscure office door in Manchester, but neither made progress in the law. Leach, once, was junior in a case wherein Sir John Simon was leading counsel, and this was a fact of which he reminded one frequently. They had long since given up legal ambitions when I knew them. Mills had nothing of the lawyer-look about him; but George Leach had a commanding and immediately impressive personality that could easily have carried the dignity of "silk" or even of my lord's robes. These two men—and JVtills in particular—had a great influence upon me.

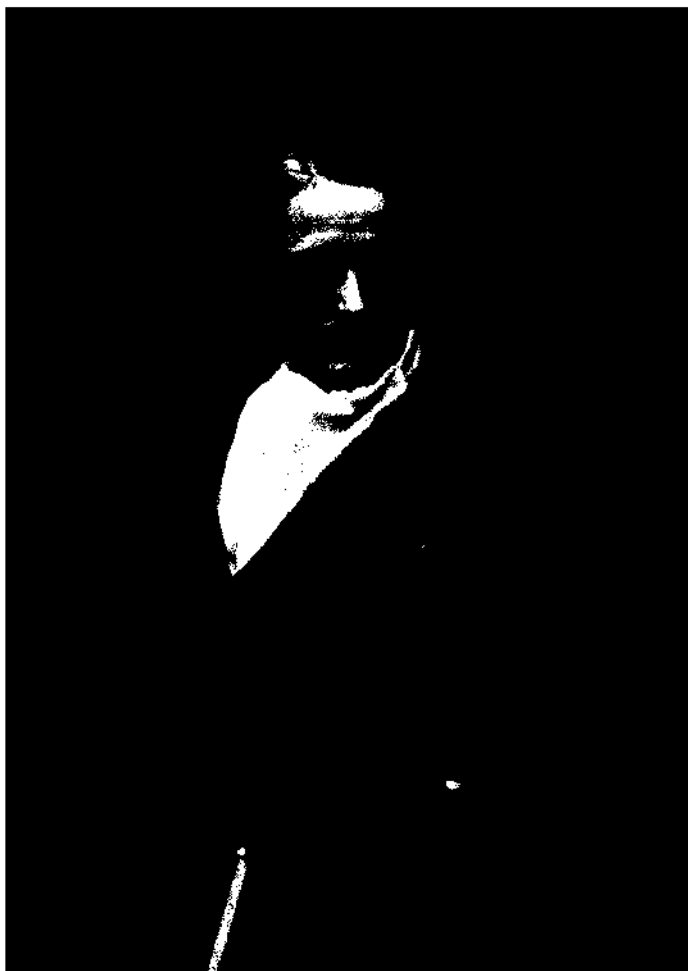
It was Mills who made the appointment, and it was characteristic of him that his decision was affected by two points which might not have appealed to other men. Necessarily, when applying for the job, I submitted examples of my work. I made them up on foolscap sheets into three folders labelled "Descriptive Reports," "Theatre Criticism," "Book Reviews." Mills told me afterwards that the neatness of the folders first attracted him, and that he was finally decided by a sentence or two in a review of T. H. S. Escort's book on Trollope.

This was characteristic of the man. He himself was the

very picture of neatness. Everything about him was neat. He wrote a beautiful firm neat hand, and so disliked the look of even one erasure that I have seen him more than once rewrite a whole page of copy because he had altered a word on the last line. His clothes were neat, though worn with an air. He always carried a malacca cane, always wore a bow tie or a stock, and, in winter, always had a muffler twisted about his neck with an effect both careless and considered. He was strikingly good-looking in a histrionic way. You could imagine that if he had taken to the stage—which his looks well fitted him to do—he would have rivalled Lewis Waller as a provider of postcards for the boudoirs of impressionable young women. The large gazelle-eyes, the wave of beautifully grey hair, the something of irreparable sadness behind all the good looks, the slenderness of the body that moved always with both grace and speed: these things would have made Mills any girl's choice, as they made him many a man's envy.

That a phrase in something I had written should have clinched the matter in Mills's mind was characteristic, too, for he was a lover of good phrases in others and a maker of them for himself. Slipshod writing was abhorrent to him and was never passed over without reproof. He called me into his little room, opening *off* the reporters' room, one night and handed me a sheet of "copy." "Look at that!" he said. "Look at that!" Someone had written "Owing to the fact that—" Mills carefully put his pen through it, and substituted "because." "Owing to the fact that!" he groaned. "Tut-tut! Like a mouthful of sand."

He loved to talk, and he talked as he wrote, and as he dressed, with a slightly theatrical affectation. It came off, because he knew how to do it; but he was a dangerous model to copy. The office was overrun wkh dangerous models. Any man who worked there long was in danger of his life as a writer. If you followed Mills, you were at the risk, not having his resources, of developing a style



WILLIAM HASLAM MILLS

Sometime Chief Reporter of
THE MANCHESTER GUARDIAN.

Photograph by F. W. Schmidt, Manchester.

which was all bloom and no peach. If you followed Allan Monkhouse, who had worked out a monkish style from which adjectives were banished as sins and adverbs as backslidings, the result might easily be all stone and no plum; and C. E. Montague was the most dangerous of all. Monkhouse once told me that Montague had said to him that a good writer should be aware of an improvement in his style every month, which goes a long way towards explaining why I, at any rate, can never read a Montague novel without being aware of the incessant clicking of the brain behind the pen. In my golfing days I used to play, most Monday mornings, with a parson who, on every tee, murmured half-aloud: "Eye on the ball. Don't press. Slow back—steady—swing!" so that I was constrained to cry in agony one day: "For God's sake stop studying golf *and play it!*" Not thus, I felt, did Braid and Vardon soar to the heights; and not, I feel now and ever shall feel, by style-obsession shall a writer enter into the kingdom. Preoccupation with the rules of the game there must be; but it should no more show when the game is in progress than bread and beef show in a muscular arm lifting a weight.

The *Guardian* was perhaps a little style-mad; and that, one may at least say, is better than the gay carefree sanity that produces "owing to the fact that" and avoids repetition of the word "potato" by writing "the aforesaid tuber"—another circumlocution which one day afflicted Haslam Mills to the soul.

Mills, more than any other man in the office, affected the direction of my own writing at that time. To "write like Mills" seemed to me to be the thing to aim at; and, at that time and in the circumstances, a very good thing, too. How excellently he himself could use his resources may be judged from a book called *Grey Pastures*, which he published through Chatto and Windus. It is a series of short studies of the people he knew, and the conditions in which they lived, during his boyhood in Ashton-under-Lyne, and it

reproduces the atmosphere of provincial Liberalism and Nonconformity with a tender and whimsical appreciation that I have not known equalled. It is *Thrums* without treacle.

Mills was still there as chief reporter when I came back from the war. C. P. Scott had declined to guarantee my job; but Mills had said: "If the paper's still here, and if I am still here, you shall come back." He was as good as his word.

When he left us, it was to take a post with a Ministry in London. On his last Sunday night in the office I happened to be reporter on late duty. On a weekday that was a dull job enough—hanging about for what might happen; but on a Sunday it was lugubrious and depressing to an inconceivable extent. Manchester yawned with blackness and emptiness. It was a moment, above all others, to stay in the office and talk, if Mills could be induced to talk. He sat in his little cabinet of a room; I in the big desolate reporters' room; and as he now and then passed through I could divine in him the excitement and melancholy of that farewell moment. He was no longer a young man; he had served the paper from his youth up; and now he was engaged in that saddest of tasks: sorting, burning, running through drawers and desks in which the years had accumulated their significant and reminding trifles. At last he came out into the room and announced: "I shall go in and say good-bye to Mr. Scott." Most of the men in the office would have said "the Old Man"; but Mills, in speech, preserved always an almost Arthurian punctiliousness.

This moment of going in to say good-bye to Mr. Scott must have been to him, to whom the paper was a religion and the editor its prophet, a high moment; and he was a man who instinctively dramatised even moments that were not particularly distinguished. I went on with my reading in that dreary reporters' room, with the uncurtained windows giving upon the black Manchester night, and

awaited his return. He was back sooner than I had expected him, and he looked stricken. He was without George Leach's scepticism, his ability to clothe a bad moment in a cynical disregard. His face always betrayed him. He came up to my desk and said: "He didn't even say, 'We're sorry to lose you, Mr. Mills.' He shook hands and said, 'I think you're making a wise decision.' " Mills then turned in his quick eager way and went back to his own little room, where he sat for a long time in silence and solitude. I think he felt it hard to take up his stick and hat and do all that now remained to be done—walk out of the office which he had served for so long with a rare devotion and distinction. A few words might have made it easier for him, but they were not spoken.

By the time I myself appeared in London, death had taken Mills off too early: a brilliant journalist; a character of great originality, if lacking a little in the qualities that we mean by force; to me, a friend and mentor whose memory has for ever a seat by my private hearth. On the title-page of a book he wrote about the *Manchester Guardian* he placed these words by Edmund Burke: "To bring the dispositions that are lovely in private life into the service and conduct of the commonwealth; so to be patriots as not to forget that we are gentlemen." That was Mills's conception not only of the patriot but also of the journalist.

George Leach, who succeeded Mills as the *Guardian's* chief reporter, was a stronger and less agreeable character. Taking the man in the round, I liked and admired him, and fortunately he liked me; but there was an ungentle streak in him that was at once apparent to anyone who considered his small mouth—the one feature which marred a face magnificently constructed. The abundant curling dark-brown hair, the broad brow, the fine intelligent eyes above the splendid nose, the general massiveness both of

the face and the figure, built up the outward manner of a notable personality that made its impression on the instant impact. Here, you felt, is a man of power and distinction; and anyone knowing Leach over so many years as I did could not but mourn for the tragedy of his life, which consisted simply in its frittering away. Nothing will ever change my conviction that if George Leach had applied himself to the bar, with full and constant use of all his great resources, he could have become a person of national distinction in the legal profession. But he applied himself to nothing. He was a robust Sydney Carton who never found apotheosis.

He was always my friend. Over a very long period Mills had marked me every Monday to write about the Palace Theatre show, and one day I was more than usually impatient with it. The theatre management "cut up rough," and threatened to withdraw advertisements—not a thing, be it said to the *Guardian's* honour, that could in any circumstances affect the paper's course. For whatever reason, on the following Monday Mills marked someone else to do the Palace. George Leach looked over the marking of the diary, stuck his monocle into his eye, and said in his cynical drawling fashion: "You're a fine captain, Mills, changing the bowler because he's got someone out middle stump." Mills looked a little startled, took out his pen-knife, scraped away the initials he had put opposite "The Palace Theatre," and substituted my own. That pen-knife was symptomatic of the man. He hated the slovenly look of something crossed out and written over. He would carefully scrape the surface of the paper and write anew. And where other men might casually scribble on the diary "Palace," he would give the full meticulous designation "The Palace Theatre."

That monocle of George Leach's was an integral part of his equipment. He did not regularly wear it in his eye, but put it in when about to say something that he intended

should be heard and marked. It gave him a very impressive look. He used it a great deal, too, for his *blagues*. He was very fond of impersonating people. He was once travelling by train when two naval A.Bs. entered the compartment. Their language was blasphemous and profane to a deep degree; and, though this can have meant nothing to Leach, it gave him the occasion to play one of his tricks. Putting the eyeglass into his eye and his most authoritative tones into his voice, he represented himself to be an admiral, told the unfortunate sailors what he thought of men who disgraced the service as they were doing, took their names down carefully in a little book, and then left them, save for an occasional contemptuous glance, to the silence of utter misery and stupor. This is an example of his habit of playing tricks that were by no means kindly. It betrayed the less admirable streak in him, and it would come out, also, when he had taken too much to drink. He was then inclined to be tiresome and quarrelsome and to say, unprovoked, cruel and bitter things to strangers. This happened in a public-house one night, when he fixed his glass in his eye and began to wade in upon an unoffending person standing at the bar. It was after Leach had lost one arm in a railway accident. The man stood the goading well enough for a time; and then turned suddenly with the remark: "I can see what you are—one arm, one eye and one arse." I do not know why this profoundly silly *riposte* should have sounded devastating, but it did. Even Leach was silenced.

His *blague* was endless. He was known, in a company of commercial travellers, to represent himself as one of the fraternity, freely exchanging anecdotes, spontaneously manufactured on his side, of the ardours and endurances of the game. In Ireland, during a prolonged visit, he consistently introduced me to all the people he met (save those who were likely to know better) as "one of the most distinguished of our younger poets"; and occasionally

he would take the licence of addressing me as "Spring-Rice," a name whose distinction did not fail of its effect.

He died in Belfast from pneumonia. A colleague who was with him had twitted him a few days previously about his monocle, and asked why he *really* wore it. "Well, for one thing," said Leach, "I always put it on when I'm about to face a new experience." His colleague called in to see him when he was on his death-bed. Leach said not a word, but, with one of his most devastating looks of pride and "be-damned-to-you," he raised the monocle and put it in his eye.

We do not, as a rule, know enough to say what lives are wasted and what lives are fruitful; but of George Leach, more than of most men I have known, I felt that rich endowments were treated by their owner as contemptuously as if they were a beggar's pittance.

When I was engaged by Haslam Mills to serve the *Manchester Guardian*^ he handed me over to George Leach, and as we were returning from the Thatched House inn too long afterwards, Leach remarked that there now remained nothing to be done save the laying on of hands. Thus he admirably crystallised the sacerdotal relationship in which C. P. Scott liked to stand to his staff.

It would be pleasant to be able to join my voice with many voices which have praised the virtues of this great editor, and, indeed, I can do so freely and with conviction in so far as it is of the editor I speak. But I never liked the man. "Scarcely," says St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, "scarcely for a righteous man will one die, but peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." Scott was righteousness incarnate, and this I say not as a sneer but as a simple statement of fact concerning the man as I knew him. Righteousness, in all conscience, is a quality so rare that only a fool would make its ascription

a sneer. But it has been my own lot in life, because that is how I am constructed, to be moved more readily by human feeling than by intellectual assent; and Scott lacked more completely than most men I have ever known the human touch that turns a partisan into a devotee. I cannot think of any man that I would die for; but, in any list of possibles, C. P. Scott's name would be near the bottom.

St. Paul is right in this analysis of the qualities which attach man to man. Even so dry and unemotional a spectator of the human scene as Mr. Somerset Maugham backs St. Paul's opinion. Having examined, and turned down as of little worth, most of what we prize in men and things, he pronounces in *The Summing Up* for "lovingkindness" as the quality that pre-eminently gives significance and beauty to human relationships.

I was once paying a half-term visit to my boys' school, and E. T. Scott, C. P. Scott's son, was there. The boys of the school came up and talked to us with the unrivalled freedom of modern youth, and E. T. Scott said to me: "I like that, you know. I like the way these youngsters talk to their elders nowadays. But, my word, I wouldn't have dared to talk to *my* father like that!"

This seemed to me a revealing moment. Grant, if you like, that what was in question was not the attitude of an individual but of a whole generation; but it was C. P. Scott's generation, and in him the authoritarian and autocratic qualities of the generation were hardened to an unusual degree.

He lacked the common touch—which makes a good or bad epitaph as you read it. When my second son was born, my wife was desperately ill, and when the boy was a few months old the two had to be parted. My wife was sent away into the country, and the child was put out to nurse in a Manchester institution, while I lived with the other child under the hospitable roof of my colleague B. Leech, to whom I say now that the kindness of himself and his

wife is never forgotten in this household. Before my child could be admitted to the institution, some guarantee was demanded as to the respectability and status of the parents. I asked C. P. Scott if he would provide me with this, and he did so readily. But thereafter, although I had occasion to see him almost daily, he never once inquired how my wife and child were progressing; he showed no apprehension whatever of the anxieties of a man passing through one of the darkest times of his life. Pardonably, perhaps, my mind automatically recalls the incident in assessing his human worth.

The *Times* "Literary Supplement" the other day reviewed *The World of Nations, a Study of the National Implications in the Work of Karl Marx*, by Solomon F. Bloom. This sentence was quoted from the book: "Although he (Marx) disliked many men—perhaps most of the men he met—all his work testifies to a deep-rooted and authentic love for mankind."

Alas! how many there are whose righteousness loves humanity in that way; and how skilfully Wordsworth set over against this picture the picture of another way of loving mankind when he wrote of

*That best portion of a good man's life,
His little nameless unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love.*

I knew a charwoman in Manchester who used to complain of the drudging driving days she passed when, once a week, her work took her to a certain house. She did not know, as I did, that the woman who employed her spent days and nights in passionate endeavour to better the conditions of that convenient anonymity Labour.

Scott was never guilty of spending money with vulgar ostentation. A relay of journalists of the most distinguished ability passed through the office in my time, all leaving in quest of better pay. There was a reason for Scott's attitude.

I have been told that when he inherited from his relative John Edward Taylor the paper which he had already edited for many years, the property was burdened with debt. In clearing off that load he made never one concession to the growing demand for a "popular" paper—that is to say, a paper that fell below his own magnificent conception of what a newspaper should be. I can admire that struggle and the resolute adherence to principle behind it all the more because his conception of what constitutes a great newspaper is mine also; and to this day the *Manchester Guardian* is the one paper I would not be without. It reaches me by post, sometimes a day, sometimes two days late, and I know no higher tribute that can be paid to a daily newspaper than this: that one can read it with pleasure and profit two days after publication. Scott's great work remains.

These facts should not be forgotten in assessing this side of Scott's character. It was a righteous struggle, and he won it; but it left him over-sensitive to petty cash.

The ambition of all proper young men on the *Manchester Guardian* was to write that first column on the last page known as "the back-pager." We were paid three guineas a time, and were glad enough to get it. On one occasion, returning from a prolonged stay in Ireland as the *Guardian's* representative, I wrote a back-pager on an Irish topic. When the cheque for it reached me, there was enclosed a note in C. P. Scott's firm handwriting, pointing out that the office had been paying my expenses during the time when I accumulated the experience which made the back-pager possible; "and this being so," the note proceeded, "I suggest that we go fifty-fifty." The cheque was for a guinea-and-a-half. No one could quarrel with the justice of such a decision, but it did not help me to love the man who made it, nor did it inspire in my heart a zeal to serve him well. Whatever I wrote for the paper so long as Haslam Mills was there I wrote in the hope

that it would please him, rather than that it would please Scott.

What may have been the fate of others I do not know, but, for myself, during the eleven years of my service to the paper I never knew whether my work pleased Scott or not. On no occasion did he either say or write a word of commendation or dispraise. For all the human appreciation there was, one might as well have been working for a marble statue. Month after month, and in the long run, year after year, I was in relationship with Scott the editor; but not once did he show even the flicker of an understanding of human need. I cannot recall a word—not so much as a comment on the weather, a topic which in Manchester provides ample opening—that was not concerned with the paper's routine.

The last work I did for the *Manchester Guardian* was in connection with that general election which destroyed the Labour Party and created the "National" Government. The articles I wrote then brought me letters of appreciation from journalists and private persons in many parts of England, in the United States, and on the Continent of Europe. The one region which was dumb was the editorial department of the *Manchester Guardian*. C. P. Scott had then, in theory, ceased to be editor, and had been succeeded by his son Edward. But the "Old Man" continued to attend the office, and there were few who believed that he was not editor still in all but name. Neither the *de facto* nor the *de jure* editor broke the silence.

I resigned, writing a brief note which contained no more than the intimation that I would cease to be a member of the *Manchester Guardian* staff in a month's time. I was told later that this caused some offence; and of course it was customary to express regret at going, pride at having been associated with a great editor and a great paper. But I make no concealment that I was in a hurt and bitter mood. I remembered Haslam Mills saying to me years before:

"He didn't even say 'We're sorry you're going, Mr. Mills.'" My pride at having served the *Guardian* for so long was, in fact, great, and will not diminish; but I should have been prouder of having worked for C. P. Scott if his prophetic soul had shown deeper symptoms of kinship with a human heart.

All these matters were in an unpredictable future that spring day in 1915 when I first became "an *M.G.* man." I lodged out at Withington with an old foreign woman bearing the historic name of Kruger. Not least among her virtues was that, if I were in my room in the evening, she would bring me a large jugful of milky white coffee. I am very "partial," as they say, to white coffee, and, if I had the courage to do so, I would imitate the trick which, I was once told, belonged to Samuel Alexander, O.M. That massive and patriarchal person, one of the main ornaments of Manchester's streets and university, and the subject of one of Epstein's loveliest busts, this great philosopher who was in his personal relationships so beautiful and endearing, had the habit, according to this story (which I was never able to verify), of taking a large china mug with him when he went out to play bridge, a game of which he was fond. When those little finicky cups appeared in which black coffee is served, he would produce his mug and ask that it be filled once for all with white coffee—"to save trouble."

I am glad to have so admirable a sponsor for my own preference. I do not know why it is that black coffee and snobbery are intimately related; but that they are is a fact. A good many years ago now, the late John Drinkwater got into trouble at Hampstead. He was addressing, at the Everyman Theatre, an audience which had been kind enough to call him before the curtain. He took occasion to say a few things about Hampstead, among them that a friend of his had been looking for a coffee service in

Hampstead shops. But all the cups offered him were too large, and the shopkeepers said: "They don't drink black coffee in Hampstead."

If Mr. Drinkwater had made an imputation concerning the civic spirit or religious stability of Hampstead, this would have been considered, no doubt, a joke within the confines of poetic licence. But to suggest that Hampstead folk took milk in their coffee, possibly large quantities of milk which permitted the beverage to be drunk rather than sipped—this was audacity, if not effrontery.

Many a time I have called on friends "on the hop" and found them sensibly enjoying cups filled from a steaming jug of white coffee; but if I go in response to a formal invitation I know that we shall drink black coffee out of thimbles.

There are some people who take an even firmer stand on their snobbery: they refuse to drink coffee at all in this country. "They know nothing at all about coffee in England—can't make it." And you are regaled with reminiscences of coffee drunk in Paris or Algiers, Cairo, Constantinople and God knows where. In all or any of these places, you are to understand, an intelligent man with a palate may drink coffee; but in England—no.

To confess to a taste for swigging white coffee is almost as damning, in some quarters, as to confess a liking for simple English food. I remember another poet—Heaven help them! what celestial minds our poets have!—finding a connection between our coarse eating and our depraved taste in the arts. He told us what pretty food the French eat; but, after all, they haven't produced anything better than a Shakespeare, a Thomas Hardy, or a Thomas Atkins, on it. We brumous islanders are naturally addicted to this sort of stuff and would do well to make no bones about it. When Harry Champion, the comedian, used to lay back his ears and bray his song in praise of boiled beef and carrots the audience would roar its delighted understanding, and

when music-halls were music-halls, they were the places I would go to if I wanted an accurate diagnosis of English opinion. But the "halls" are another matter now.

I did not enjoy Mrs. Kruger's hospitality for long. They were good days while they lasted. I had a pipe-rack containing churchwarden pipes with my friends' initials written on them, and there we would sit and smoke and talk, and dream of the celebrity of becoming "back-pager" writers on the *Guardian*. The war was young, and a good life still seemed not impossible, but unease was growing. One by one men were disappearing from the *Guardian* office as they had done from the *Yorkshire Observer*. Rupert Brooke died, and with his dying the spirit of his sonnets seemed to flame to brighter life. There was an exaltation abroad in the country whose absence from this present war has puzzled the thoughtless. Never were the British people more dour and determined than they are to-day; but no one who remembers the first year of the last war can fail to observe that the electric sense of adventure, the enthusiasm and *flân* of those days, have no part in the present temper of the nation. And yet there are some demanding that history should repeat itself in minute particulars. A leading article appeared recently in the *Western Mail* asking "Where are the Novelists?" and reproaching writers because they are not finding in this war matter for their pens. It is not true that no novels are coming out of the war. They are coming abundantly, but none has come that does more than tickle the surface and appearance of things. None has come that is significant, none that does more than the daily record of journalists can do as well. I have my opinion as to why this is, and I sent this letter to the editor of the *Western Mail*:

My attention has just been called to your interesting leading article "Where are the Novelists?" Too many of them are in the United States of America. Let us leave these aside and

consider the general question of the novelist's and poet's job in war-time.

The poet first. You quote some beautiful lines from Binyon and Rupert Brooke. These are concerned respectively with the consolations that survivors lay to their hearts and with the finer aspirations of the soldier-patriot: the aspirations that take men into battle.

But these were not the significant poems of the war. As the war went on the significant poetry began to flow from the pens of the men in the thick of it: Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, to name but two. To me, three words by Wilfred Owen are poetry's greatest contribution to all that concerns the last war: "Death's extreme decrepitude." All the ghastly landscapes of Passchendaele and the Somme are summed up there—in the silence of night when the fighting is over.

It was something new for English poets so liberally to express themselves instead of leaving their experience and emotions to be expressed in a more or less bogus fashion by laureates, and it was inevitable, as the war dragged on, that the enchantment of Rupert Brooke should dissolve into the disenchantment of Wilfred Owen. Poetry is like that. Wordsworth's definition of poetry, "emotion recollected in tranquillity," is true only of the broad reflective poetry that he himself so admirably produced. It is not true of the swift, stabbing lyric, which translates the passion of a moment into the keen, passionate line; and so, as the emotional content of the war changed and a great inescapable "Why?" hung over all thinking men's minds, there was no longer any room for the poetry of exultation.

We have had no poetry of exultation thus far in the present war, and that is because we have come upon it with that "Why?" still heavy in men's hearts. Any meaningful poetry that we get out of this war will come later, and I think it will have an even more bitter taste than Sassoon's and Owen's. We are, indeed, fighting in a great cause that would seem at first sight to call for great expression. But is not the fact this: that at the back of the poets' minds, as at the back of more prosaic men's, there is the question whether that cause during the last ten years could not have been and ought not to have been fought out on a political and less expensive field? Such a doubt atrophies at once the tendency to sing any but bitter songs.

Why, these very lines of Binyon's that you quote—"They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old"—have an

ironic ring to-day, for we who were left have not been allowed to grow so old as all that. We are hardly middle-aged before being presented with at least an equal chance of sharing with our sons the immortality that we failed to achieve with our brothers.

Now as to the novelists. You refer to *Sonia* and *Mr. Britling* as good examples of the last war's fiction—and they are good enough, though not, I think, notable or durable. The trouble is that Mr. Britling this time is not only seeing it through, he is also seeing through it, and in time he will give us the result of his seeing. Don't try to hurry the novelist. His is a longer and more reflective job than the lyric poet's. He has to digest both facts and the implications of facts. Before he is able to do anything effective he will have to be able to see a little further round the corner of time than is possible at present. Remember that the important novels (and plays) of the last war were written *after* the war. Remember that Tolstoy was in the Crimea in 1854 and began to write *War and Peace* in 1864.

You will get no good poetry or fiction by trying to hurry up the poets and novelists. I remember an amusing incident in the last war. A well-known artist had been given permission to come to the Somme front to paint pictures. He remained for a long time apparently doing nothing (though I can well imagine that his heart and mind were doing a great deal).

An impatience about this inactivity caused a general to break out vehemently one day. "Tell him to do *something*. Tell him to draw a horse."

It's no good telling the novelists to do *something*. If they don't want to waste their time drawing pretty pictures of horses, that's their affair. Believe me, their pictures will come, but I should be the last to expect them, when they come, to be pretty pictures.

I found a tame and unheroic niche in the army. Towards the end of the summer I learned that the Army Service Corps wanted clerks with a knowledge of shorthand and typewriting. My shorthand was all right, my typewriting problematical, so I joined a class to put this right. All I remember of it is that we were given one sentence to type over and over again—a sentence whose cunning arrangement of letters was supposed to cover all the complications

of manual dexterity needed by a typist. The sentence—which to my dying day will be as ineradicable in my mind as the sonnets of Keats—was: "Quickly we'll endeavour and send down Zenobia's Xmas cards." Typing again and again this movingly simple statement of a human intention was perhaps good discipline for a mind which had steeped itself of late in styles that were either ornate and complicated or smoothed out to that polished granite texture which becomes so displeasing when you have considered closely the varied beauty of unpolished granite: the styles of Meredith and Henry James, Conrad and George Moore. I had of late read little but these four, and Zenobia and her Christmas cards, earlier than any issued by Raphael Tuck, furnished a soothing descent upon vacuity, that condition of almost Nirvana, in which one did as one was told, was fed and clothed and housed, and let the mind rock gently to sleep. "Never mind what they're saying in Parliament. You're in the British army." Thus an officer one day, in response to something I had said. It was all very much like that.

If this were an autobiography, there would be much to say about the three-and-a-half years which followed, about the stately rise of a private to the rank of Warrant Officer 2nd Class, and about that teeming warren of activity, G.H.Q. France. I never saw the statue of Haig that they put up in Montreuil-sur-Mer, that sweet township of the Pas-de-Calais where G.H.Q. was situated behind its ramparts on the hill above the green swiftly flowing Canche. The Germans are there now, and perhaps they have done away with the statue, which, anyway, would look a reproachful object to the local French, who so often saw, as I did, the field-marshal ride out through the *octroi* barrier, one with his horse like a centaur, a posse of lancers behind him, with their pennons undulant and whickering in the winter air, towards his chateau outside the town.

Suchlike fugitive pictures streaming through the backward-looking reminiscent mind are all that I shall here recapture: Aldershot in the late lovely autumn of that year, with route-marches through days whose air was winy, over the heaths and through the bracken and silver birches of Hampshire; the departure through a winter night to Havre; our sojourn there, at the canvas camp on die hill overlooking Harfleur in bitter winter weather; Rouen, with every niche and cornice of the beautiful church of St. Ouen inlaid with snow; and so, by and by, to St. Omer, where G.H.Q. then was.

I was employed by the (a) department of Intelligence, which was then commanded by Brigadier-General John Charteris, a robust and bustling loud-shouting very human person. Our work was clerkly and mechanical, tedious and deadly boring: typing and filing all day long. Never was the King's uniform worn by less heroic persons.

There was something endearing about that grey old town in the plain: a plain criss-crossed with little canals that wound their way through market gardens; and every garden had its heavy clumsy punt for the bringing of stuff to market. We hired these punts—for the French lent nothing: each item of service had its price. I remember walking the streets of Rouen with a man who stopped to haggle with a whore; and at each phase of the bargain she nodded her head, exclaiming: "Oui—oui—mais ça monte." And everything "monted": nothing anywhere thrown in for luck.

So we forked out our francs for the punts on our times off, and meandered through the grey fenny country, finding here and there an island pub where hot red wine and bread and fried potatoes made the sort of repast that seems in retrospect to have been admirable. Then back to our typewriters; to the everlasting "Summary of Intelligence" and the filing of that vast conglomeration of reports that

poured in daily: from spies, from newspapers, from air observation, from prisoners' stories.

We shifted in 1916 to Montreuil-sur-Mer, a place of more beauty and colour; and there most of us stayed till the war ended. But a few—and I among them—only wintered there, moving on in the summer with advanced G.H.Q. to some pitch behind the battle: to Beauquesne for the Somme front in 1916; to Blendecques for the Flanders battles of 1917; and in 1918 we were a moving tail of clerks and green and red tabs, with Haig's train as the centre of our caravan, edging ever further westwards over the litter of the battlefields, and ending the whole pilgrimage in November at the shattered village of Iwuy.

All through this time, I was doing what I had been doing as a newspaper reporter: I was a detached observer of a life in which I had no essential participation. Dullness without danger; an occasional heightening of excitement at second hand. In a regular routine fashion, all of us clerks were "mentioned in despatches" and awarded the Meritorious Service Medal, just as the junior officers were awarded the M.C., and the seniors the D.S.O. It was routine. If it fooled anybody, I don't think it fooled us—neither the M.S.M.s nor the D.S.O.s. I have always thought that if medals are to be awarded for the sort of work we did—whether to the junior clerks, who are the privates and corporals, or to the departmental managers, who are colonels and brigadier-generals—they should not be the same decorations as those awarded for service in the field. The only time my own life was near danger was on November nth, 1918, when some Scottish troops blazed off a few *de joie*, and a bullet passed in at one wall and out at another of a small canvas hut which I lived in.

A few bright memories survive from those weary years, and most of them are of persons. Taking it all in all, we

were lucky in our officers, though there was a sprinkling of nameless swine. I remember John Buchan, a cavalier if ever there was one, always commanding our respect but never forgetting how to unbend. It is a mystery to me how he got through the days as he did. He was doing his work as an Intelligence officer; he was writing his history of the war; and he was somehow fitting in novels as well. For a little time, at Beauquesne, he was unwell, and a sergeant had to call on him in his billet. He found Buchan lying in bed, unable even then to rest, the pages of *Greenmantle* strewn the blankets. Buchan went home on leave towards the end of that year, and told the sergeant he would like to bring him back a Christmas present. I never knew another officer give an "other rank" a Christmas present, but this was typical of Buchan's warm human personality. The sergeant had the sense to say flatteringly that he would like an autographed copy of *Grewmantle*, a reply which suggests an aptitude for the diplomatic service rather than the Methodist ministry which I know he decorates, and I trust adorns.

John Charteris was succeeded by E. W. Cox as Brigadier-General Intelligence, and General Cox's life with us was brief and tragic. On him fell the heavy burden of those days early in 1918 when G.H.Q. was a gallery of tense strained faces and the Germans were hammering their way west, west, west. There is a tendency to belittle staff officers, to sneer at G.H.Q. as an aviary of strutting birds adorned in bright useless plumage. It is inevitable that the fighting man, the man whose life the staff must use in the stupendous marches and counter-marches of war, should feel thus about those who arrange and do not share his dangers and endurances. No one can blame the petulance, the occasional indignation, of the fighting man; but criticism of the staff is an easy, and sometimes as thoughtless, as staff work is difficult and harassing. Those who, apart from criticising particular blunders, dislike the general

staff as the general staff, must do away with war itself. And despite the optimism about the future which always goes as a bright companion hand-in-hand with the sorrow of those days when war is with us, I for one do not think that this will happen for a long time. Given war, you must have a war-directing body, and much criticism of the general staff overlooks even so simple a proposition as this. The staff, alas! cannot be infallible, much as every nation at war would like to possess so useful an instrument. No information on which an operation is based can be counted fool-proof, no operation-order itself can be guaranteed as having a hundred per cent, efficiency. A second lieutenant, making a bungle of a sortie, may lose the lives of half a dozen men and nothing be heard of it; but a staff blunder, with its direful consequences, immediately—and rightly—raises hell. But, do what you will about it, you will never have a staff of men who can make no mistakes; the only cure for war disasters is to have no wars to go wrong; and if our wars go right it means that other countries' staffs have gone wrong. Men, I repeat, are not infallible.

E. W. Cox, under the hammering blows of those bitter days in early 1918, worked like a man possessed. Chain-smoking cigarettes by day and night, allowing himself little time to eat and no time to rest, he wore his body to a shadow. The time came when the cloud lifted, the tension relaxed, the miracle of salvation intervened. General Cox said he would go for a bathe. His chauffeur drove him to Berck Plage, and the general went down to the sea alone. No one saw the manner of his end. The body was recovered from the sea some time later. I was one of the funeral party that stood round the grave at Etaples as the bugles blew the Last Post into the air among the sand dunes and pine trees.

A grand Viking figure of those days was R. A. Macaulay Stevenson, the artist. His lanky body, bony face, and drooping moustache, his execrable French and hospitable

home, will long be remembered by many of the men who sojourned at Montreuil. I do not know whether Macaulay Stevenson is still alive, whether he was still in Montreuil when the Germans entered. If he was, he would have greeted them with sardonic disrespect.

He had lived in the town for a long time before the war, finding in the *marais* that edged the swift waters of the Canche admirable subjects for his pictures which glowed with the luminosity of Corot. On to this most individual and idiosyncratic of men was clapped the semi-military extinguishing uniform of those who tended the Scottish Churches' huts. Stevenson promptly extinguished the uniform and the churches, as he extinguished all that was formal and taken for granted, and, installing a French maid, expanded an atmosphere that was cheerfully pagan, un-academic and non-ecclesiastical. He and his wife, who carried into age a beauty that must have been moving in youth, themselves looked to the needs of the men who thronged the hut on the ramparts. A particular few, taken to their hearts, were invited again and again to the beautiful old Stevenson house, where, under the inspiration of the vintages which he loved, and loved to discourse about, he would impart to the young the ripe wisdom of his age. "Women and wine," he would say, while the Scottish Churches' uniform bagged about him, "the two supreme experiences of life, my boy; but never mix 'em, never mix 'em."

We were not much bombed at Montreuil; but Macaulay Stevenson used to declare that, if the Boche came seriously over, we must adjourn to the cellar, and there finish off two or three especially beloved bottles. He could not bear to think of their being merely smashed by barbarians.

This is one attitude to life. Another was illustrated by a teetotal God-fearing woman whom my wife invited to a musical show in London when the last war's raids were at their height. "Certainly not. Certainly not. If I am to

meet my God, I don't want my last sight on earth to be Gaby Deslys's legs."

Stevenson left the hut at last. There was, I understand, some question with the Scottish Churches that was not satisfactorily resolved. There should be two monuments in Montreuil: not only the one to Haig, but, at the well-known spot on the ramparts, a simple stone bearing the words: "Here stood Stevo's hut. He was a good man and he did good things."

On Sundays the hut became the Kirk, and there Haig sat under his chaplain, the Rev. G. S. Duncan, who is now head of a college at St. Andrews University. I have met him only once since the war. He had come up to London, and I lunched with him and W. R. V. Isaac, a lieutenant at G.H.Q., who has since become a lieutenant-colonel at the War Office. About twenty years had passed, and much had happened to all three of us. But in appearance at least G. S. Duncan was not much changed from the young padre I knew at Montreuil. There was something raw and Highland-looking about him, but human, kindly, utterly to be depended on. Apart from one compulsory parade at Aldershot, I did not attend a religious service all through the war, and this makes me the more conscious of the obligation I stand under to G. S. Duncan. I was not one of his flock, but he made me one of his friends. He was concerned for my wraithy appearance, and haled me off one day willy-nilly to the medical hut, where I was told to drink cod-liver oil and eat eggs. The hut provided the loathsome oil—from which I had no hope of betterment, for in my time I had drunk, without effect, as much of that stuff as Falstaff had drunk of sack—and G. S. Duncan provided the eggs. Eggs and oil alike were thrown away on me, but I remember none the less the padre's interest in my physique as well as in my soul. At that time I was

writing much verse, and he was a great encourager. I was embarrassed when told that, at a Sunday morning service in the hut, with Haig present, he had quoted a whole sonnet of mine—"by a poet here in our midst."

*Sometimes', when all that has been seems to be
But dream-stuff, and this present only real;
When my numbed senses lose the large ideal
That you and I, dear dead ones, once did see;
When hate and death make up the daily round,
And War, red-handed robber of our best,
Goes still his bloody way and no arrest
Besets his path with some determinate bound;
When all we loved and talked of as we went
Our way together through the English fields
No longer to my broken spirit yields
The consolation of its sacrament:
Haply a wild rose on a wayside tree
Makes all this false and all that true to me.*

This had appeared in the *Sphere*, which C. K. Shorter was then editing. John Drinkwater had sent the poem to Shorter—"a queer old bird," he explained to me, "but he has a weakness for a good poem." The weakness in this case took an agreeable twist, for Shorter said he would pay a guinea for the sonnet, and when pay-day came he sent two: the only case I have known of an editor or a publisher exceeding his promise.

G. S. Duncan introduced me to Drinkwater, who had come out to read poetry to the troops. *Abraham Lincoln* had not then been written. Drinkwater was unknown save as a man connected with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre who had published a few thin volumes of lyrics. I remember that a high-up staff officer who would have to meet Drinkwater asked me who he was and what he had done. I had to write a brief account of the poet's achievements to date.

Drinkwater was born seven years before me, so that at that time he would be in his early thirties. What uniforms

there were in those days! There was Macaulay Stevenson's baggy khaki outfit, and a quasi-military rig clothing the war correspondents, and a different, almost soldierly dress for Y.M.C.A. workers. As for the artists who went to the front, they were given military status and dressed accordingly. I remember Drinkwater as a burly clean-shaven young man with thick abundant dark hair, very friendly and unassuming, dressed in a vaguely military khaki uniform. He was very pleased with the success of his mission, which was simply to read poetry wherever men would listen. They listened everywhere. I had plenty of evidence in Montreuil of the success of that astonishing experiment. Men filled the rooms where he read, and listened breathless—men of every rank, commissioned and non-commissioned, and of every sort, down even to those one would have considered hopeless "toughs." It was a remarkable demonstration of the appeal of pure poetry, and it confirmed my own belief that the way to commend poetry to those who think they do not like it, or who imagine even that there is something gutsless and effeminate in it, is simply to read it to them. Granted, that is, that the reader knows his job. Many years after this I was walking through a school library, and casually I took a volume of Spenser off the shelves. I said to the English master who was with me: "When did a boy last borrow this?" "Not in my time," he answered; and I gathered that not in his time had any boy shown much interest in English poetry. I asked him if he read poetry to the boys, and he said he didn't.

I am certain in my bones that poetry should never be "taught"; it should simply be read. A child hangs on the lips that tell a story in the nursery. I know grown people who can repeat word by word little tales they learned in that way, and whose receptivity ended when "literature" became a scholastic subject. What fools some teachers are! I remember a learned professor who could write D.Litt.

after his name, analysing Hamlet's soliloquy. "Or to take arms against a sea of trouble," he read; and proceeded: "Beware of that sort of writing. What nonsense it is! Arms against a sea! Canute wouldn't be such a fool,"

With pundits of this sort abroad, is it to be wondered at if poetry fails to hold the boy as it had held the infant? There are schools where every day good music is provided. Gramophone records are played, and that is that. Nothing is said; nothing is "explained." I have never heard of a school where, say for half an hour every day, a master who can read gives a poetry recital, without comment. For myself, I would have it done in every school.

To these strange audiences of his in France, Drinkwater made no concessions. He did not give them jolly Kipling, rollicking stuff, but the pure wine of English poetry, to take it or leave it. They took it. The places in which he read were always crowded, thick with tobacco smoke, quiet as death with the concentration of the listeners. He read short lyric poetry, There was no narrative to catch and hold interest with a story: the appeal was of beauty and nothing else; and it did not fail. What it came to was a dip through the *Golden Treasury*, with a few contemporary lyrics at the end. I should have said the odds were a hundred to one against the mass of British soldiers sitting absorbed in a reading of these lovely fragments; but I should have been wrong. I remember passing a staff officer crossing the square of the Ecole Militaire murmuring to himself lines from "Innisfree"; and when Drinkwater was gone men here and there banded themselves together into poetry-reading groups.

I often think of those occasions when I hear of "Garrison Theatre" and what it considers "the stuff to give the troops" to-day. What was in the air of those times? No very great poetry was being produced; but an enormous amount of it was appearing and being read. For myself, the impulse to write verse slowly faded out when the war

was over. I did not meet Drinkwater again for many years. He was then silver-haired and broad and episcopal, living stylishly in a big house at Highgate. He asked me how the poetry was getting along, and I told him I had written nothing for years. "Poetry is still for me," he said, "the most exciting thing in life."

That, I think, was the secret of his readings; that was what he communicated to us. For an hour or two we were lifted above boredom and the grey tedium of our days; the most exciting thing in his life flowed over and was communicated to ours.

The reception which Drinkwater had in France threw some light, in my mind, on the enthusiasm which once flowed between poets and their public: an enthusiasm which is seen no more because the poet is no longer a *representative* man, touching and ennobling common chords. No poetry is "successful" to-day except poetry which is successful with a *coterie*, and clearly writers of this poetry can never stand in such a relation to the public as that which used to bring marching processions of students to hail Hans Andersen and crowds of the devout to listen to Charles Dickens. It is impossible to imagine torches and banners going out above a host intent on honourably besieging the home of Mr. T. S. Eliot, or bunting and bands expressing a popular gala mood because Mr. W. H. Auden is in town. *Communication* has somehow failed between the poets and the people.

The blame for this must fall half on one side and half on the other. There is a very real sense in which this English people is worse educated than when it was illiterate. A person who is unable to read and write is not necessarily an uneducated person. "Little Latin and less Greek" did not make Shakespeare a worse dramatist than Ben Jonson who was steeped in both. Neither does little reading and less writing make a man less sensible and intelligent than one whose nose is always in a book and pen in an inkwell.

Indeed, he may be by far the better educated man of the two, having a whole range of accomplishments to his credit and useful crafts at his finger-tips. I don't imagine that the old masons who decorated the Gothic cathedrals would have been able to write very learnedly about what they were doing, or that the craftsmen who built great tithe barns and wrought beautiful things in wood and iron 'were skilful in words. Yet they were, in all that matters, better educated than antiquarians who do nothing but describe what others achieve.

"Education," unless it go through to its far and logical conclusions, which it so rarely does, tends to snip the cords which bind men to the practicalities of the crafts without creating those conduits which connect them with the tides of the spirit. To destroy a potential farmer or good dry-waller in order to create an office-boy is a poor achievement on which to expend money and energy; yet too much of what is called education has little other result. Unjust rural conditions, a determination on the part of farmers' wives that the son shall not endure the drudgery of the husband, help forward the evil effect; but this is not the moment to go into that.

Now we pride ourselves on there being no illiterates. We say that everyone can now read, and, in so far as to have the ability to con a sequence of words is to be able to read, the claim has some foundation. We say that everyone can now write, and that again is true if writing is forming letters with a pen. But the quality of what is read and written by the common run of people has declined in the last half-century. I think the truth is that when reading and writing were accomplishments not so easy to come by, they were for that reason the more highly prized and were exercised upon loftier subjects. A man who could read, read the best so far as he could lay hands upon it; and, reading the best, he was not likely in his writing to be satisfied with the worst. When reading became an accomplishment which

every man must have, whether he wanted it or not, there sprang up and multiplied enormously cheap and nasty means for the exercise of these new talents. The ability to read was exploited rather than nurtured and fostered and led along the most satisfying lines. It is not surprising that so readily accessible a mass of cheap and common food has caused the public palate to deteriorate, so that any dish whose flavours are not potent and apparent is regarded as insipid. The flavour of poetry, in particular, was too delicate and subtle for a taste gone astray, and poets came to be looked upon not as representative men with a communication to make that was vital to everybody, but as beings dedicated to a dalliance that was altogether outside of common life and unconnected with it. The aesthetes did nothing to correct this misconception.

The poets, on their side, drew apart with the haughty sensitiveness of those who are not wanted. They made a last attempt at a "come-back" in that school which was called (first, I think, by Edward Shanks) the week-end school of poets. Shanks and Drinkwater were typical members of the school, whose work is best studied in those books of *Georgian Poetry* which Edward Marsh edited and Harold Munro published in the decade from 1911 to 1922. Two straws show the way this wind blew. Harold Munro published a few of my poems in his *Chapbook*. He wrote objecting to the word "dim" in one of them. He said it was overdone in verse, and by Cockl—as Brazen-head the Great would say—it is. Drinkwater protested against my writing "thee" and "thou." He wanted "you." Both these objections were attempts to overcome the popular prejudice against "poetic diction"; and in the "week-end school" the attempt extended to doing away with "poetic subjects." Poetry must be made out of those things on which the common light of day falls; and so they went to work praising water-wagtails and pots and pans, window-boxes, ducks that say "Quack!", bull-dogs and carts that

are painted green. For a time it was well liked; but too much of this work had the bogus over-simplicity of pictures in a nursery frieze. Blake's "Little lamb, who made thee?" which is poetry, came down to "Mary had a little lamb," which isn't.

The "school" fizzled out, for the sad inevitable reason that the scholars grew up; and then came along the new boys who have been with us ever since. They would have no truck with this week-end pursuit of popular applause; but, since a poet must have applause from somewhere, they drew this sustenance from the cliques who alone were privileged to know what they were talking about. Their work is the counterpart of surrealism in art.

We with minds too old and unmalleable to wrap themselves understandingly about these strange new contours are told that this writing, whose most striking expression in our time is Joyce's *Ulysses*, is "experimental." This, to me, condemns rather than condones, for I do not see why, in painting and writing, any more than in science, experiment should be published with the *éclat* of achievement. A man of science experiments and experiments, but he does not publish till the experimental stage is over. All this contemporary "experimental" writing may be heading for a great final burst of illumination; but I don't think that that has come yet; too much of the work is foetid with harsh laboratory stinks in whose odour the divorce of public and poet is complete.

There are many men whom I have never seen but only "glimpsed." Passing along Oxford Street in Manchester on the top of a tramcar, I saw Einstein on the pavement below. I knew he was in the town, and this could only be he: the short figure, the cherubic face and aureole of iron-grey hair under the wide black sombrero. That was the day after Samuel Langford had made a famous pro-

nouncement. Langford was the musical critic of the *Manchester Guardian*. Einstein lectured in Manchester in German, and, as none of us reporters was competent to deal with a German speaker, Langford, who understood the language well, was asked to oblige with a report. This was Einstein's first appearance in Manchester after his theory of relativity had been propounded, and all the office pundits were agog to know what Langford made of it. He was almost leapt on when he returned to the office late at night. "Well, Langford, what d'you think of it all?"

"Platitude," Langford replied, "platitude." And no one who knew Langford would be surprised if all that Einstein had propounded had not in some vague fashion for years been familiar to the cogitations of his extraordinary mind.

Of all the men I have known, Samuel Langford—"Sammy" to the office—was the most profoundly original, the most deeply imbued with character and unique flavour. He had an amorphous rolling figure, short and tubby. He shambled rather than walked. His clothes were as shabby as a tramp's, his beard as unkempt. The small eyes, squeezed into the stout face, twinkled with humour and kindliness. In the daytime he was a florist, with a stall in the Manchester markets, and out at Withington he had a garden where he grew delphiniums for the market. Delphiniums and music were his great loves, and in the height of the flowers' beauty, when the whole of Langford's acre was a sheet of blue—every sort of blue from Longfellow's "fairy flax" to almost royal purple—you could imagine that to its owner it was a glorious visual sonata, praising whatever pagan god that strange original believed in.

Langford was rarely seen without a dozen books and musical scores protruding from his pockets and seeping under his arms, but never was there a man more ready to drop the printed page and precipitate the whole of his

personality into any human contact that came along. He loved life and men.

Nothing would induce him to wear evening clothes or to achieve an acquaintance with punctual habits. In the Free Trade Hall it was not unknown for all to be in readiness for an august Halle concert to begin: the audience settled, the orchestra taut, the conductor poised; but no Samuel Langford in his seat. And it was inconceivable to that initiated audience, which on the morrow would read in the *Guardian* the article over the initials "S. L." as keenly as it would enjoy this concert to-night; it was inconceivable to that orchestra and to that conductor that a Halle concert could open without the presence of Samuel Langford. He would at last be seen advancing up the hall through the hush of expectation, a shambling little figure loaded with books, sartorially disgraceful, his old shirt, as likely as not, unbuttoned to reveal a glimpse of a Gothic and hirsute chest: withal, the angelic innocence and radiance of a child about him. It would not have surprised those who knew him best if the audience had stood at that moment. He would sink into his seat. The baton would rap the rail. The concert might now begin.

Langford has led me away from the persons I have "glimpsed." I glimpsed Kipling one day in Edinburgh, where he was attending a public banquet. From a local newspaper office I "wangled" a reporter's ticket, and standing within a doorway for a few moments took my look at a master: the only writer England has produced whose prose reputation rests and will endure on short stories. There have been others whose reputation rested on the short story for a while, but they had not the Kipling touch. Aumonier had variety without much quality; W. W. Jacobs had quality without variety. Kipling alone in English made the short story a great instrument, capable

of the most diverse achievement. I was glad to have that chance to look at the flashing spectacles, the black jutting eyebrows, the bristling moustache, over the boiled shirt at the festive table.

I "glimpsed" Northcliffe and J. M. Barrie during the war. One day I had occasion to go into General Charteris's room. He was out, but, occupying a leather chair kept for visitors, was Northcliffe. No one could mistake that heavy, sulky, brooding face. He was doing nothing: just sitting there brooding—possibly upon his own greatness. The eyes unhooded themselves to look at me incuriously, then he relapsed into coma. He looked like a sick elephant.

Barrie I saw one day threading his way among the huts of Advanced G.H.Q.—a short, stocky, carelessly dressed little man. He was sucking at a pipe that wouldn't draw. He stooped down and plucked a long tough grass, unfastened the mouthpiece from the pipe, thrust the grass through, and tried again, after spying through the stem at the sky, with one eye screwed up. The pipe drew better now; but he did not look less disconsolate. I felt that I had caught him in an unguarded moment, surprised a spirit that was lonely and unhappy.

There was a moment during the war when it looked as though I should have a change from the two phases of life till then: Montreuil in the winter, Advanced G.H.Q. in the summer. At Evian-les-Bains, which lies opposite Lausanne, on the French side of the Lake of Geneva, *contre-espionnage* work had established itself. As the Germans pushed west, they had to deal with the French people in the villages they occupied. They were passed back into France through Switzerland, and the first point on French soil at which these *repatriés* disembarked was Evian. Hence the French and British activity in that charming little town

on the shores of the lake. It became a clearing-house: an unending stream of women, old men and children flowed through, the pathetic flotsam of the war, clutching their few possessions as they stood up to sing the Marseillaise in the great hall where they were received and fed.

It was a dangerous spot. For the Germans, to pass through spies masquerading as *repatriés* was an irresistible temptation; and the business of the French and British examining officers was to catch any queer fish who tried to wriggle through the mesh. Detectives of the French *Sûreté* abounded. All day long the sorting and grilling proceeded.

Towards the end of 1917 I was ordered to proceed to Evian. It is all so long ago that I can afford to tell how I stole a day from His Majesty's service.

A Saturday found me in Paris, with a pocket stuffed with all sorts of papers and permits, and they were needed, for the Red-caps, stationed like watchful dragons at the portals of the Gare de Lyon, took some convincing that this was not a new desertion stunt. A solitary corporal seeking out the train for Dijon !

It was midnight, and bitter winter-cold, when I reached Dijon. The station was alive with troops, some still wearing the old-fashioned red-trousered uniform, most in grey-blue. No one could tell me how, when or where I could get a train for Annemasse. One suggested I should go by Lyon, another suggested Pontarlier. All agreed on one point: if I were not travelling on a military train I should get nowhere. Civilian traffic was a *débaclé*. The railway officials were equally helpful. I ended the matter in the grey hours of the morning, by getting into a train that at any rate had its engine pointing approximately towards my destination.

I slept, and at 9.30 a.m. was jolted to consciousness. The train had stopped at a tiny village in the Jura, I could see its one picturesque street going straight as an arrow up

the hillside towards quarries that gleamed whitely under the blue sky. On the platform there was a wooden shanty calling itself a buffet, and it seemed to me that never had the idea of a cup of coffee and a mouthful of food been more delightful. I threw all my possessions on to the platform and walked towards the buffet.

There were three or four persons standing on the platform, and I was embarrassed by their stares of incredulity. Suddenly, one of them, an abrupt old gentleman with a grizzled beard, strode forward, seized me by the hand, and cried in a ringing voice: *Il faut soigner les Alliés!*

Before I realised what was happening, the train was puffing out, and the sheer force of this old gentleman's rude personality had swept me and my kit-bag inside the doors of the neighbouring Cafe de la Gare. There his concern to care for the *Alliés* manifested itself palpably in a steaming glass of coffee, briskly laced with rum, and a crisp roll of bread.

The door of the cafe opened, and the station factotum looked shyly in. Above his head another superimposed itself. Curiosity triumphed over politeness. They slipped in, ordered drinks, and edged words into the conversation. I began to realise what had happened to me. These people had not seen an English soldier before in their lives. In peace-time we do not manoeuvre in the Jura; in war-time nothing but a blundering accident could send a British uniform along that line. I was, to them, England—the Empire—in short, the *Alliés*, who must be cared for.

I was soon aware that much would be expected of me. The conversation was testing, both to my technical French and to my acquaintance with tactics and strategy. "But you must meet our notables," exclaimed my gruff gentleman, who had revealed himself as the village doctor, and my protestations were of no avail. I desired only that he would have the kindness to make clear beyond any doubt how I was to get to Annemasse. Only that. But he swept

it aside, trumpeting again his hospitable slogan: *Il faut soigner les Alliés*. Never might he have such a chance again.

So, when we had had more coffee and rum, and had decided in a rough and ready manner, with the help of pieces of bread and napkin rings, how the war might thenceforth be carried on, one of the others was sent round with the fiery cross to the notables, and the doctor insisted on taking me to see the sights of the village. They were the *mairie*, the police station and the church, all in a state of no uncertain decrepitude. I listened imperfectly to the doctor's disquisition on their architectural beauties. I was too conscious of surprised faces at windows, whisperers at doors; of children exclaiming awestruck: "*C'est un Boche!*" to be corrected by voices even more awestruck: "*Non. C'est un Anglais! Regardez le khaki!*" When we met the *curt* coming out of church, even his stately equanimity was a trifle jarred. He swept off his broad hat magnificently, but he did not speak more than a formal salutation, nor was he among the notables later. I suspect that the doctor was a sceptic.

The notables were gathered in a large lean-to shed, half-filled with roughly shaped stones from the quarries. Here a table, by some wizardry, had been spread, and an excellent meal was served. The mayor was there, and an *avocat*, and the doctor, and three other people of note in the village. We had soup and a boiled chicken, some unrecognisable sweet, Camembert cheese, coffee, and a good *vin ordinaire*. Who had prepared that meal, why it was served in a shed, I do not know. But I got the idea that these notables used the place for frequent gatherings—perhaps to be away from their wives. They were all great and vigorous talkers, and the outstanding subject of their talk that day was Mr. Lloyd George. They pumped me dry about Mr. Lloyd George. They knew things about his father and uncle that I had never heard of; but I drew level with my

pronunciation of Criccieth and Llanystumdwy. These words blazed out in my French like beacons above a flat land.

Then the mayor proposed *Les Allies*, and no Curzon or Hardinge has had his health more sincerely drunk. I had to reply; I had to be the Empire, and I tried to think what Cecil Rhodes might have said on such an occasion. So I said something about not sheathing the sword.

The notables broke up soon afterwards, but the good doctor insisted still on caring for the *Allies*. He took me aside and inquired whether I had observed the *demoiselle* at the station buffet. I had indeed observed her with some particularity. He said she desired the honour of an introduction. We went to the station, and the introduction was made, and the *demoiselle* desired the favour of showing me the village. So once more we inspected the *mairie* and the police station and the church.

At three o'clock I entered the train. The generous notables were on the platform, and a girl in the uniform of the French Red Cross had now added herself to them. They all solemnly shook my hand. The mayor handed me a packet of cigars and cigarettes. The girl from the buffet gave me sandwiches. The doctor fumbled in his pocket and produced something for me to read in the train. It was a copy of *Le Journal*, two days old. "*Adieu, monsieur, adieu!*" they cried, saluting gravely; and the doctor's great voice added: "*Vivent les Alliés!*"

Ah! If only this village Hampden had been Prime Minister of France in the summer of 1940!

At seven the next morning I picked my stiff bones up from the floor of the waiting-room at Annemasse, where I had slept for eight hours. One of the mayor's cigars solaced the short remainder of my journey to Evian. Alas! I did not stay long in that lakeside paradise. A few weeks later I was discovered, to my surprise, to be "indispensable" at G.H.Q.

Our good padre Duncan had given one of my poems to John Buchan, who sent it to the *Spectator*, where it was printed.

*I know where linnets make their nests,
And broomy heaths where rabbits burrow;
I know, before a blade is seen,
Where corn will greenly fledge the furrow.*

*I know old moles with bodies shiny
As any grocer's Sunday hat
And pools where ancient pike swim gravely
That may have swum round Ararat.*

*There's not a man in all the county
That hears a cuckoo call so soon,
Or sees, before I do, a swallow,
Or lives so lazily in June.*

*I can make Oxford chairs from osiers
That grow along the swampy flats;
Perhaps 'twas parson's life in Oxford
That made his eyes as blind as bats.*

*Parson says I'm an idle rascal,
Ripe for the place where bad 'uns go;
But to us bad 'uns sometimes happen
Things that the parsons never know.*

*Once, when the sky was blood and water,
A thrush between two showers called clear:
I felt in me as sharp as passion
The vinegar, the nail, the spear.*

In those days the old Saturday *Westminster*, sea-green incorruptible, was running literary competitions. "Give what you think the finest line of poetry written since the war began" was one of the posers. A misguided woman sent along one of my lines. When the prize was awarded the next week, the editor commented on the lines submitted. "Among examples of the already said," he wrote, "are the following . . ." and my line, only too justly, was included among the already said. It is bad enough to be

kicked when you ask for it, but to be presented for punishment by a stranger is galling.

What a good paper the old Saturday *Westminster* was! It and T. P.'s *Weekly* did a great deal for English literature among those who were too poor to go to more pretentious and more expensive sources. T. P.V, especially, was a great pennyworth. It would be easy, in reminiscence, to turn up one's nose at that old paper, which, let us admit, did no more than skim the surface of what it touched. But it was the surface of glorious matter. If, having touched the surface, you didn't plunge in, that was your own fault. I think, in its time, T. P.V must have led to many plunges here and there. It was all precis and snippet, but the scrag-ends were apt now and then to be of immortal meat which, once tasted, left the palate anxious for more. A great deal of the paper was made up of book-reviews. I should imagine that I am as competent as anybody to answer the question: "Do reviews sell books?" for, long before I was a reviewer myself, I was as great a reader of reviews as anyone in this country. I had access from childhood to all the newspapers that came into a newspaper office. The first paper I worked for, as a boy of thirteen, was the *South Wales Echo*, a paper profoundly dedicated to the preservation and improvement of British bloodstock. Opposite the office was the newspaper shop of Messrs. Gulliford, and I can see the very features of the Messrs. Gulliford in my mind's eye to this day, and also of their amiable mother who, too, served in the shop. It was my business to be there early each morning to procure a copy of every London paper and many provincial papers. Back in our office, I would cut out of these all the predictions of the racing tipsters, stick them on bits of paper, and take them out to the compositors. Thus, in our earliest edition, all our readers who shared the proprietors' passion for bloodstock would have some matter to go on in assessing the probable performances of the day. Our editor, who was a godly

Nonconformist, said to me: "Handle these things as you would handle dung—with a shovel. Don't get yourself dirty." Which is, as they say, all very well.

When I had done with the tipsters for the day, there were all those newspapers to be looked at. I got to know the days on which reviews appeared, the column where they appeared, and the writers of them. Seccombe in the *Daily Chronicle*, R. A. Scott James in the *Daily News*, W. L. Courtney in the *Daily Telegraph*, the anonymous writers in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and many others whose names I have forgotten if I ever knew them: I read them all, and, almost from infancy, was steeped to the eyebrows in information about books. Nothing that was to do with books seemed to me in those days to be unimportant. That the *Cardiff Times* was publishing as a serial story Mr. Max Pemberton's *Beatrice of Venice* presented itself as an event of importance; and I could have enumerated then, though my mind has since happily unburdened itself, the titles of works by such improbable authors as David Christie Murray, Mrs. Caffyn, and Maclaren Cobban. From these groundlings to the stars: Wells and Bennett, Henry James, Conrad and Hardy, scarcely a novel was published that I did not know from its reviews, scarcely a review was written that I did not cut out and file.

This went on right up to my twenties; so that I may claim to be, if ever there was one, a person whose book-buying would be influenced by reviews, if reviews influenced book-buying. In my case it did not. I cannot recall ever buying a book because of a book-review, just as I cannot recall ever buying anything because it had been, however clamorously or subtly, advertised. But what is true, I think, is this: if book-reviewing does not sell particular books, it creates and stimulates the conditions in which books are bought and sold. Few people can read continually *about* books without fetching up at last in the presence of books themselves. Bookshops began to have

the same inescapable attraction as the review columns, and I bought books in great numbers. The bookshops and libraries and the review columns are all part of one atmosphere, with inevitable, if not always apparent, interaction. It was a great pity, therefore, that in the last few years before this war, book-reviewing diminished in many papers. Newspapers, both in London and the country, which had been for years accustomed to print reviews every day, cut them down to two days a week, and from many papers reviews disappeared altogether. I do not think editors—or whoever it is that has the last word in a modern paper: not always the editor—are infallible judges of what the public wants. There was no sign of a declining interest in books. More books than ever were being published, bought or borrowed. In this matter we were in a happier position than the French. In France, Georges Duhamel told me not long ago, the interest in literature had fallen to a pitch so low that many authors of repute had to pay publishers to put their books on the market, and the market tended to be a sideline of newspaper kiosks and tobacconists' shops. Here, this was not so. New libraries and bookshops were opening everywhere; never were there so many "literary lunches," so brisk a demand for authors as talkers; and the annual book fair in London had come to be for books almost as important a matter as the Burlington House show for art. Which is not so important, after all, the cynical may interject; but, leaving that undiscussed, I point out that I am not at the moment writing of the importance or otherwise of our literary epoch but merely of the public interest in books. It was deep and growing; and it would have been interesting to see, if the war had not intervened, how it would have been affected by the newspapers' deepening aversion from book-reviewing. For myself, risking the sneers of the highbrows, I would welcome as a most beneficent instrument a weekly paper which did to-day what T. P.'s was doing in my youth.

These snippets of verse in the *Spectator*, the *Sphere* and elsewhere, with an occasional "back-pager" in the *Manchester Guardian*, were all I had to show in the way of writing for three-and-a-half years in the army; and once I was back in civilian life, the verse slowly petered to extinction. Even to its author, it became too obviously "already said." The last of it appeared in a little green-covered magazine called *Voices* which did everything rather preciously. Above its title it asserted: "Each voice speaks an individual and independent vision," and each slim number was dedicated to some celebrity in this fashion:

These pages—an offering to
MR. ARNOLD BENNETT
because of
THE OLD WIVES' TALE.

Most of the writers were very young and very full of themselves, and lest we should seem inclined to bow down to age and experience we were capable of attacking even those to whom we dedicated our numbers. I notice, for example, that in this issue dedicated to Mr. Bennett "because of" *The Old Wives' Tale* there is a sprightly attack on Mr. Bennett.

"I imagine," writes the assailant, "Mr. Arnold Bennett's ideal author a well-groomed gentleman sitting in a centrally heated, well ventilated and lighted study containing a great library of well-bound books carefully catalogued, and pigeon-holes filled and systematically labelled; I imagine him dictating words to a neatly attired secretary-typist, typing 120 words a minute on the latest machine, while the smart printer's messenger stands waiting at the door, cap in hand, for copy. And I have a vision of bookstalls."

Well, well; there was a time when one was young enough and green enough to think of Mr. Bennett like

that. Now I should say his "ideal author," if such a thing ever entered his head, was simply a man who got on with writing his books instead of bothering his friends with long explanations about why he was not at the moment getting on with the writing of the books which he was going to get on with.

Let us desert *Voices* for a moment, for I claim in this book the right to pursue any hare that crosses the path, and let us look a little further at the rancour which success rouses in so many souls. A man is all right so long as he is in rags, and borrows to buy bread, and writes books that never earn the money advanced by the publisher. But when the patches go off his elbows he becomes "a well-groomed gentleman," which you must understand is something disgraceful. When he can afford to buy himself a few books let him beware! He is then the possessor of a "great library of well-bound books carefully catalogued," and only a fool would doubt that to have one's books catalogued is a sure sign of a creeping leprosy in the soul. When our author is punctual in the discharge of his contracts, then "a smart printer's messenger stands waiting at his door"; though if you have ever seen a printer's messenger with any approach to "smartness" you have me at a disadvantage. However, not to quibble about words, let us call the urchin smart, and admit that a man who does not keep his editor waiting is on a lower spiritual level than one who remembers on Friday what he had promised to do on Monday.

Our author, reeling down the slopes of ignominy, wiping his nose on a clean linen handkerchief instead of a piece of oily cotton-waste, may finally reach the Gadarene sea-level and, with a porcine squeal, plunge into the waters which engulf the writers of "best-sellers." Now, indeed, he is sunk, gone, finished, his name mentioned with a blush

among the frayed tweed cuffs that mop the zinc of bohemian bars. He is good now only to be touched for a fiver. Mayfair is open to him, but the paradise of scurfy collars and dirty finger-nails is lost for ever. There was a time when he would have been called a success; nowadays he is called a best-seller; and among his old companions the word is mentioned under the breath, sorrowfully, as a punctilious father might admit with pain that his daughter has gone on the streets or his son into the City. The "best-seller," you are given to understand, ranks somewhere between a rattlesnake and a pariah-dog.

In fiction, nothing succeeds like success in making you the scorn of all those people who are *going to* write the world's greatest novel, and all those critics who find little worth reading save what few people bother to read.

In comment on this attitude, it is worth remembering that, with exceptions of great distinction in quality, but in quantity so few as to be negligible, all those novels which it is now agreed to call "classics" were in their day best-sellers. The outstanding exception to this generalisation is, of course, *Wuthering Heights*. But the generalisation is worth making. Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Trollope: pick where you will, you will find the novels which have survived were acclaimed, bought and read in their day. It is true also of "minor" classics: some of the books of Wilkie Collins, Reade's *Cloister and the Hearth*, Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, Blackmore's *Lorna Doom*, Mrs. Gaskell's *Cranford*. You can trace this fact operating right up to our own times. George Moore and Henry James, Conrad, Kipling and Hardy, all, to put it frankly, "did well" out of their books, all earned the plaudits and patronage of contemporary readers.

I do not know why this should be so with fiction, for it is not so with the other arts. The history of music and painting and poetry is strewn with the tragedies of genius neglected, fame too long deferred. But with fiction, for

whatever reason, the classic of to-day was the best-seller of yesterday.

This is not to say that every best-seller of to-day will be a classic of to-morrow. Only a fool would say that. But it is to say that from *among* the books that in our own day make an immediate appeal to the hearts and imaginations of readers the future will choose those that are to survive. For myself, I think that in the immortality stakes *Ulysses* hasn't a dog's chance with *Kipps*, or *Orlando* with *The Old Wives' Tale*. Although, from what some people write to-day, one might define a classic novel as an error of popular taste carried over from one generation to another.

Louis Golding was a busy contributor of back-pagers to the *Guardian*, of pieces to *Voices*; and he was a very ardent traveller. He had gone up to Oxford from the Manchester Grammar School, a foundation which is older than Harrow and has a great reputation for turning out scholarship boys. Being back from the war, with every intention of some day achieving fame, but with no immediate intention of doing anything about it, I used to think of Mr. Golding as the very embodiment of what I would wish to be. Here he was, younger than myself, acquainted from childhood with these Manchester streets in which once more I found myself, familiar with the glories of an Oxford career, and already while little more than a boy the author of a book of poems and a novel called *Forward from Babylon*. Jacob Kramer had drawn for *Voices* a picture of some patriarchal Jews as a suggested decoration for this novel. I thought Mr. Golding a great fellow, but, though we contributed to the same papers and belonged—he by birth and I by adoption—to the same city, we did not meet for many years. I felt that, if ever there was an author I ought to know, this was the one. One day John Drinkwater said to me: "I understand young Golding has done it at last."

He had seen an advance copy of *Magnolia Street*, with which Mr. Golding had indeed "done it at last." When we *did* meet, it was under the shadow of doom. Nothing was more certain at that time than that Europe was about to plunge into the abyss. It was a hot summer day in 1939, twenty years after we had been youngsters playing about with *Voices*. We ate lunch together in Mr. Golding's tall thin house in London: a house containing more gilded cherubs than I had supposed to exist in the world. They were hooked to walls; they hung from ceilings; they sported their golden rotund buttocks round candelabra. They had all been collected during Mr. Golding's travels towards the East. "I'm glad I travelled when I did," he said. "There's not much of the world open to me now." I reminded him that there was always America.

Magnolia Street was seven years old at that time, but its influence was still about him. He referred to it affectionately as "Maggie," a universal provider. "Maggie bought me this." "I wouldn't have had that without Maggie." It was Maggie who had made possible the gymnasium in the garden where he beat me at table-tennis. He had just had a magnolia planted in the garden. He hadn't done it before, because it would have looked self-conscious. We exchanged autographed books, and have not met since. His book to me was *The Miracle Boy*, which he thought the best thing he had written; but I suspect it didn't buy him a gymnasium, or even a golden cherub. Poor Maggie! How many women there are like you! You give us everything, and we give you everything except our hearts.

Authorship has its tricks of the trade like everything else; and it is not unknown for novelists to walk into bookshops where they hope they will not be recognised and demand to know whether their latest work is in stock. It creates a useful sense of public demand. During the *Magnolia Street*

boom, Louis Golding went into a country bookshop and asked if the bookseller had a copy of the novel. The man looked him hard in the eye and answered: "No—Mr. Golding."

In Golding's novels Manchester is called Doomington. No one, writing a novel, calls London Grandville or Metroburg or any fancy name like that; yet, for some reason which I can never understand, a provincial city is almost always disguised. Innumerable novels have been written about Manchester, and in some of them the streets are given their proper names, the features of the city are so clearly described that no inhabitant can fail to recognise them, yet the city itself is not called Manchester. (Mrs. Linnaeus Banks in *The Manchester Man* is an exception to this.) Mrs. Gaskell calls it Drumble, C. E. Montague calls it Halland, Walter Greenwood calls it the Two Cities (to include contiguous Salford) and J. L. Hodson also has a fancy name for it that I cannot recall. If people travel from Doomington to London, London is called London; but if they travel from Drumble to Stockport or Cleckheaton, then Stockport will probably be Blacktown and Cleckheaton Millham.

Why this strange literary convention? It goes back a long way, and at least furnishes interesting matter for guesswork and speculation. To chart out the geography of Trollope's Bassetshire is a fascinating game; but sometimes guesses go astray. I have an old edition of Dickens, and for the *Hard Times* volume Mr. Bernard Shaw wrote an introduction that is dated 1911. He says: "Coketown, which you can see to-day for yourself in all its grime in the Potteries (the real name of it is Hanley in Staffordshire on the London and North Western Railway) ..."

There is nothing in the book which suggests to me that Mr. Shaw's guess is right, and much that suggests that it is wrong. Stephen Blackpool is called "a good power-loom

weaver," and what would a weaver be doing in a town dedicated to pots and pans? A man walking in the streets of Coketown "appeared to have been taking a shower-bath of something fluffy, which I assume to be the raw material." This fluffy cotton-dust is assuredly not the raw material of Hanley's trade. Again, Stephen Blackpool, speaking that tortuous incredible language -which Dickens supposed to be Lancashire dialect, says: "See the numbers o' people as has been broughten into bein hccr, fur to weave, en to card. ..." Weaving and carding land us right away in Lancashire, not Staffordshire. Harthouse refers to "a wrestle with my friend Bounderby in the Lancashire manner"; and, if anything further is needed to allot Coketown to the tablecloth rather than to the breakfast-service upon it, we have it in the reference to "turning spindles, rattling looms and whirring wheels."

But why the mystification? Why couldn't Dickens say Oldham or Burnley or whatever it was he had in mind, and leave it at that?

When you are young you imagine that every acquaintance is a friend; but as you grow older you know that a man is lucky if two or three are with him who have survived the stress and trial of the journey. When I came back from France there were a great many people to whom I wrote for a while; then it came to sending them Christmas cards; and, save for one or two, it soon ceased to be even that. Of course we had all sworn that we would frequently meet, and recall old times, and crack a bottle and smoke a pipe together. Even among us who had never been soldiers, but only clerks in uniform, annual reunions were held; but by the time the first of these had come round I didn't feel like going. For men who lived in the provinces, the journey to London would be costly; and already many of them were finding that the splendid civilisation that was to

blossom "after the war" had somehow failed to arrive. They were living in a world in which a railway fare to London was a real and practical consideration. What with one thing and another, I attended only three reunions in the twenty years between the two wars. The last one was in the winter of 1938; and, even had the next war not come to intermit amusing reminiscences of the last one, I should not have attended another.

I shall never forget that last reunion in a London restaurant which was soon to be dust and rubble. Here were the men I had known twenty years before, and many of them were grey and careworn, on the wrong side of middle age; some having with them tall sons wearing their first dinner-jackets, and palpably destined, to anyone with an ear to the ground of Europe, for worse encounters with reality than any we ourselves had known. When we had talked of the meetings we would have, which of us had ever imagined a meeting like this, with destiny come full circle, and boys at our side who were like young ghosts of what we ourselves had been? Munich had come and gone; one who had been a boy in the German army when we were boys in the British army had filled the intervening years with the fruitful venom of his spirit. Now it was in green ear; soon the sickles must go in among the ripe grain. Our reunion was to celebrate the disastrous collapse of all that edifice of sham, bluff and downright dishonesty under which the Rhondda, which might have filled the land with coal reserves, had starved in body and become embittered in mind; Jarrow, which might have been building the ships so sorely to be needed, was a byword and a shame; and millions of men whose hearty and convinced adherence would be needed had become disillusioned cynics, laughing at the antics of the politicians who assured them to-night that the world would be damned if England went off the gold standard, and in the morning that nothing could save us if it didn't. A lot most of us knew or cared

about the gold standard; a lot it meant to us whether England was on it or off it. What we saw was too many people off the food standard, and the clothing standard, and the work standard; and nothing being done about it.

It was at this time that a village policeman had said to me: "I don't know anything about Czecho-slovaks except that if we're not mud to them we ought to be"; and I had said to Randolph Churchill, then a colleague of mine on the *Evening Standard*: "Why the hell isn't your father Prime Minister instead of that——?" but never mind the exact expression. It was not a nice one. I have never been among those who felt that monuments should go up to Mr. Neville Chamberlain. Randolph Churchill said: "Because there are not enough people who care whether he is or not"; and I suppose that was it. Even at that late hour, not enough people really cared—about that, or about anything.

I was very depressed that night. All these thoughts were bitterly in my heart as we ate and drank under the bright lights and the speakers told amusing tales, shot through here and there with apprehension of the plight we were in. What one might call the "official" speakers—the "big shots" with Orders as well as medals on their chests—interspersed the ribald anecdotes that were "the stuff to give the troops," and at which we dutifully laughed, with pleas for the Territorial Army, at which we looked gravely at these tall sons who had strayed from one generation into the reunion of another.

What most I remember was a speech which lashed out bitterly at the young men of Oxford who had recently passed a resolution saying that they would not fight for King and country. How does one serve King and country? I thought. Can it be done only by wearing a uniform and shooting with a gun? Is not digging coal, or building ships, or driving the plough through the land and the sickle through the grain, service to one's King and country? How

many millions there are who for years have been asking no more than an opportunity to render such service as that—service which, it appears, is soon going to be of some importance. And what have King and country done about that? Why should King and country deny a man the right to wear a coat upon his back unless it be a khaki coat?

Coming in an assembly of ex-army clerks, most of whom had fought the last war with typewriters in entrenchments of paper, this attack nauseated me, the more so because this self-righteous denunciator was so grossly unable to understand the spirit of youth. "Let war come," I thought, "let war be really here, and we'll soon see whom we must rely on: the boys of Oxford or your frothy-mouthed sort." Youth is full of revolt, brave in words of defiance; and God knows in England at that time a boy might well ask himself what there was to fight for. But none the less, it had always been the way of young men, young men of Oxford no less than young men elsewhere, once the enemy was in the gate, to be there to meet him. I thought of the memorial tablets in Oxford college chapels; I thought of how, not long since, I had stood before the list in King's College chapel, Cambridge, and suddenly, forgetting that he had been there, had come on the name "Rupert Brooke," and all the splendour and folly and waste of war had seemed summed up in a name I loved, so that there in the chapel I had to hide my face because I wept. And now to hear a fat and flatulent babbler befouling such youth as this because they talked the careless words of youth, this made me sick, for my own mind saw them too soon lying in the mud and falling out of the sky, bright stars extinguished. I knew them. I, too, had a boy at Oxford and knew the talk of boys; I, too, had a brother who had denounced war, said he would never fight, but had been early to go, and lay now near Arras in a cemetery so neat and orderly that the ghosts must be amazed at such belated consideration for

old bones which had been bruised and battered as long as a thread of life tied them together.

The lights of London were shining when I left that heated room and walked along Great Portland Street, and above the roofs the stars burned on. There was a presage in my heart of what was to come, of the going out of these human gleams, of the world in darkness once more beneath the remote and icy glitter of the heavens. I knew I had attended my last "reunion." The day's garbage rasped in the gutter, and this sere midnight crepitation was an omen and a prophecy:

*The ground-swirl of the perished leaves of hope,
The wind of death's imperishable wing.*

We shall have to reach a new conception of what service to King and country means. The Oxford Union resolution, which was largely the eager talk of boys, attracted much attention; but up and down the country, hidden in back ways and alleys, were many who had nothing to say about it, but who were resolved that their service should express itself in other ways than by the bearing of arms. Whether this resolve was right or wrong it is not my present purpose to inquire; but it is my present purpose to assert that what we are fighting for has little meaning if a man is not at liberty to hold by his opinions with no interference from the rest of us. This is the view of British law. In March 1941 Mr. Churchill said: "The rights which have been granted in this war and the last to conscientious objectors are well known and are a definite part of British policy. Anything in the nature of persecution, victimisation or man-hunting is odious to the British people."

This, unhappily, is not true. It states an aspiration rather than a fact. To too many people it is the conscientious objector, not his persecution, that is odious. The conscientious objector is being victimised daily under our very

noses, not only by individuals but by representative bodies of the most august nature. In a letter appearing in the *Manchester Guardian* on July 26th, 1941, a correspondent calls attention to the case of a member of the Society of Friends who has been removed from his position as a school headmaster by the Lancashire Education Committee, and this is but one of innumerable cases that could be cited. Seeing that the law has clearly laid down the rights of conscientious objectors, it would be an excellent thing if one of them should appeal to the law and bring a prosecution for illegal dismissal. Then the whole of this ignoble law-dodging scandal would come into the light.

And of what nature are these men who thus are denied in practice the protection which the law accords in theory? Well, like any other class, they are mixed, good and bad, honest men and downright shirkers, or something of both. But that among them, as freely as among others, qualities of nobility may be found is a matter of daily evidence. I will reprint here a paragraph which appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* on July 10th, 1941, and let it speak for itself.

C.O. KILLED ON SHIP

Judge Burgis's Tribute

A letter from the chief officer of a merchant ship describing how a young Bolton conscientious objector took the wheel while the ship was being heavily shelled, and was killed shortly afterwards, was publicly read yesterday by the Chairman of Manchester Tribunal for C.O.s (Judge E. C. Burgis), who described the youth's conduct as an example of sublime heroism. The youth was Arnold Baker, clerk, of Rosamond Street, Bolton, who was granted exemption by the tribunal on December 20, 1939, and then joined a merchant ship. The letter read:

"DEAR SIR—I am in receipt of your letter in which you ask me to tell you of Arnold Baker's closing part in life. This I am honoured to do, although he bore such a wonderful Christian character that my words will never express the feeling I have in

my heart for the youth who showed such wonderful courage and bravery in face of death, without a single thought for himself. I knew that this young man was given unconditional exemption.

"When our ship was attacked with unbelievable brutality Baker, who soon after leaving home had expressed his willingness to keep a look-out, was on the bridge with me but on the opposite side. Salvos and guns of heavy calibre were firing from very close range. The bridge was struck and Baker noticed that the wheel had been left unattended. He immediately informed me of the fact and said: 'I shall take it if you show me what to do.' I went into the wheel-house and explained to him and he stayed at the wheel until our steering-gear was wrecked. He then asked if there was anything else he could do. So I told him to make for his boat as the bridge was being shelled. At this point I was wounded, and I learned on inquiry that Baker was killed soon after he left the bridge. He certainly fulfilled his promise to pull his weight and died a wonderful example of courage and bravery."

"No words of mine," Judge Burgis ended, "are adequate to describe the grandeur of this young man's courage or the magnificence of his devotion to duty. One can only contemplate his conduct with silent reverence. His life and his death are the clearest justification of the privilege which Parliament has granted to conscience."

I do not claim that all conscientious objectors are of this breed; but men of this breed are being chivvied in this war as they were chivvied in the last; they are being now, as then, bilked of the "privilege which Parliament has granted to conscience." Verily, as Coleridge wrote long ago: "*The magic rod of fanaticism is preserved in the very adyta of human nature; and needs only the re-exciting warmth of a master hand to bud afresh and produce the old fruits.*"

War is a master hand that can always be relied on to achieve this effect.

It is, to me, particularly deplorable that education authorities should be the instruments of persecution for opinion's

sake. But, alas! how little an education authority may understand of the nature and purpose of education! Provided they can buy exercise-books in a cheap market and effect an occasional economy in the supply of steel nibs they doubtless feel that they are discharging the duties which the country calls upon them to perform. But the very essence of an educated man is tolerance. If we are to snarl and snap at one another because we are so made that we do not think alike, and if the stronger among us are to snatch the bones from the weak for daring to hold opinions at variance with the mass, then indeed we might as well be the dogs we resemble. Was it not Voltaire who said: "I hate your opinions, but I would die in defence of your right to hold them"? Not the ejected schoolmasters, but the authorities who eject them, are unfit to be entrusted with the education of the young, for by their deeds they are bolstering up intolerance and bigotry, the claim to dominate and dictate: in short, their contribution to the conduct of this war is an adhesion to the villainies against which the war is directed.

For myself, I differ from those who think that non-resistance to evil is a policy applicable in the present state of man's development. Physical force exists, and its use may be either beneficent or harmful. This seems to me as self-evident as that electricity may be used either for the good purposes of heating and lighting or for the purpose of destroying what it touches. Since this is so, and since those who wield physical force for evil ends threaten to overrun so many things that we believe to be desirable—and notably the life of tolerant free-thinking men—it behoves us to put into the hands of good people a greater measure of physical force than is in the hands of bad people. This is where the conscientious objectors differ from me. One of them, in a recent letter, pleaded for "the substituting of spiritual power for physical force," and she thinks that "this is not a theory for an ideal world." I do.

My own thinking in the matter begins with a complete rejection of what, for want of a better word, is called "inspiration" or "revelation." My correspondent claims that her view "is in harmony with Eternal purposes and method." In all humility, I think we know little if anything of eternal purposes and method, and that we shall best advance by cherishing each small decency as we achieve it. This humble task will keep humanity's hands full enough.

I look at the question from a purely pragmatic point of view, balancing so far as I am able the good and the bad that exists in all individuals and in all associations of individuals. I cannot overlook that the bad tends to get out of hand, and that, when it does this, its power of infection is tremendous. The rot spreads like the rot from one bad apple, putrefying a whole crate. In modern times, thanks to a number of inventions all controlled by "propaganda," the *speed* with which the rot spreads is terrifying. The most disturbing of all modern phenomena is the lightning rapidity with which corrupt political, social and philosophic ideas have run through the world.

Those ideas are now incorporated in the greatest military machine the world has ever known, and that machine is on the march, and as an immediate practical question we have to ask ourselves what means, if any, we can oppose to its progress.

My correspondent says "spiritual means." But spirit must be embodied. Without her body, my correspondent would be non-existent to indulge in spiritual reflection. Man does not live by bread alone, but he lives by bread. In what, then, are the "spiritual means to" be embodied in order that they may meet and overcome the embodiment of evil? Evil, like good, may be conceived as a disembodied force; but, in our present circumstances, it is not disembodied. Indeed it is not. It is embodied and embattled, and, to meet it, good must be so too. Man is not pure

spirit, and I see no use in pretending that he is. He is not pure metal, but at best an alloy. The exigencies of the world he occupies are such that even those who imagine themselves to be all flame are guarded by the endurances of others whose rub upon physical reality is harsh enough. The tranquil firelight, so conducive to reverie and disembodied reflection, may all too easily help us to forget the miner's thews and sinews black and sweating in the darkness. The conditions may well arise—and, as I believe, have arisen—in which a worthy shepherd of spiritual thought will physically exert himself rather than express his love for the lambs by leaving them to the wolves in the interests of eternal method and purpose.

But if I differ from the pacifist point of view, that is not to say that I have any sympathy with the persecutors of this minority. I believe the flame of hatred now directed from this country towards the Nazis is fed by nothing more fiercely and constantly than by the thought: "Why can't they leave people alone?" What we resent more than anything is the claim to dominate, to boss, to bounce, and to inflict punishment on those who resist this imposition. Thus the war is a war of ideas, as, in a sense, all wars are; but in this case the idea lies blatantly on the surface. And the idea is: "We don't want people like Hitler and these English education authorities telling others how they must live, how they must think, what they must believe." Nostalgically, we desire the greater variety of life that once was mankind's. Machines robbed us of much, stamping out their patterns that have flooded the world. The totalitarian state is the apotheosis of the machine. It applies the machine finally and irrevocably not only to the things of the body, but to the things of the heart and soul. Think alike, speak alike, act alike: thus run its inexorable demands; and the war is mankind's last desperate endeavour to snatch his soul from the monster that has already devoured his body. Thus it never was so important that

tolerance of diversity should exist; for fundamentally we fight for the beautiful variety of living and thinking.

Not long ago I was one of the signatories of a letter addressed by British authors "to the conscience of the world." An American "isolationist" wrote to me saying that the letter was all very well, but the fine sentiments were nothing but a cloak for another of Britain's imperialistic wars. I told him in reply that in my heart I believed that this was not so; that, so far as I was concerned, I did not care who ran the world: it could be run by Ainus and Hottentots if they would run it decently. "The fight this time," I said, "is concerned not with who shall run the world, but with how the world shall be run." And if our own bit of it, in the heat of the struggle, cannot be run with tolerance and understanding, then by that much the less do we convince such doubters as the American who wrote to me.

I have climbed along so many branches that it is difficult to see the way back to such main trunk of narrative as this book may have: that is, my own career. When the war ended, I went back to the *Manchester Guardian*. Soon thereafter, I married. I had become engaged to be married during a war-leave, and I saw no reason why that engagement should not be carried out. But reason had no hand in the matter. In the autumn of 1919 I was sent from Manchester to the *Guardian's* London office, to work for a few weeks there in place of a man who was ill. England was in an extraordinary condition of rush and bustle at that time. Every train from every station was packed to the doors. Three commercial travellers seemed to be going where one had gone before; and, if you had not booked a room in an hotel, you might walk a city's streets for hours trying to find a bed. I remember travelling at that time from Manchester to Glasgow by night, and finding not an inch of space in the compartments. With many others,

I put my overcoat down on the floor of the corridor and slept there.

When I arrived in London to take up my relief work, the difficulty of finding a room for me in an hotel had been acute. James Bone, the London editor, had put his secretary to the task of ringing up hotel after hotel, and when I arrived she was asked to see me and report what had been done. As soon as she entered the room, I knew that I should not marry the girl I was engaged to. That night in my hotel I took off, symbolically, a ring my *fiancee* had given me. It was as sudden and serious as that; and my wife tells me that she also, in that first second of confrontation, knew that, for better or worse, we were doomed to one another. Not a word had been spoken beyond some commonplaces about an hotel bedroom; but there it was. In three days, everything had been said. That was in October of 1919. We were married in March of the following year in St. Margaret's Church, Frizinghall, a suburb of Bradford, where, much later, I was to arrange the marriage of Hamer Shawcross and Ann Artingstall in the novel *Fame Is The Spur*. The vicar who married us committed suicide immediately thereafter, but, if this was an evil omen, its consequences have not yet begun to declare themselves.

We had no honeymoon. The marriage was on a Saturday, and we travelled back that night to two rooms in which we were to lodge at Heaton Moor, Manchester. On the Monday I was at work again.

Those were difficult days for setting up house. You could neither rent nor buy a house unless you were rolling in money. Every sort of exploitation was rampant. There was "key money," for example, which meant that, in addition to what you might pay for a house, you paid a sum—often hundreds of pounds—for the mere privilege of moving in and receiving the key. My wife and I spent hours and days reading the advertisements of houses to

let or sell, rushing about to see houses and agents, and always finding that someone had been there before us. I remember going one miserable Sunday morning to see a house in Stockport, and I recall the bitter pang with which we learned it could not be ours, even though it was a little black miserable house in a street no better than a slum. We would have given anything for a house of our own, that wet wretched summer of 1920, especially as there was a child on the way.

How wretched it was, and how it depressed my spirits, a small happening showed. To get to my work, I had to travel by tram along the road that led through Levenshulme and Ardwick. Even in Manchester, it is difficult to find anything more blackly, more stonily, disheartening than those two regions. The tram ran on and on between the little dingy houses and the little dingy shops, clanging over the points, swaying under the leaden and despairing sky, mile after mile. At one point it was necessary to change trams, and, arriving at this point one morning, I was suddenly overcome with nausea and disgust. I stood on the pavement, waiting for my second instalment of tram, and though physically I was fit and well, I *could* not face the rest of the journey. An irresistible compulsion made me leap on to a tram going in the wrong direction, and before I knew where I was I was back in our two rooms, shouting "I'm very ill, very ill," and I went upstairs and got into bed. My alarmed wife ran out of the house to bring my sister, who was a district nurse working thereabouts; and when this agitated pair got back I was sitting up in bed, shaking with laughter. "It was just the street," I explained; "I couldn't face the street." So my wife rang up the office to say that I was ill. Then I got out of bed and took a day off.

At last we found a little house in Didsbury. It was lit by gas; it was tall and narrow and inconvenient; to reach

the bathroom and w.c. you had to mount two-and-a-half flights of stairs. To fetch coal or reach the larder you had to descend into a cellar. The back garden was so small and so shut in with houses that nothing would grow in it, and the front garden was a few square yards of battered earth, with a laburnum tree growing by the gate. It was a glory in the spring, and for the rest of the year housed a plague of caterpillars that dropped like minute pythons upon our visitors. I borrowed the money to buy the house from my wife's father, and it cost me £300 more than the seller had given for it a few months before. But to us it was paradisaical, and on the very day in October when we moved in, the dreary summer turned to a lovely and serene autumn that seemed as though it would never give way to winter. I knocked down the wall between two small attics and made a study of some size and of interesting shape, and there, I said, I would at last work. We stayed in the thin house till I left for London eleven years later, but little enough work I did in it. One book for children—written for my own boys who were then growing up—was all the production that study saw; but it saw much conviviality and good company.

The adventures of this little book taught me not to despair too quickly of finding a publisher. I packed it off to London, and then went to Cornwall for a holiday. While I was there, a letter came saying that a large parcel had arrived for me, bearing the publisher's name on the wrapper. Should it be sent on? Indeed no, I decided. Who wants a holiday disturbed by a manuscript returned with contumely? So there the parcel stayed till I returned from my holiday, and when I opened it I found a letter saying flattering things, offering to publish the book, and merely suggesting a slight rearrangement of one chapter. The publisher proposed an outright sale for fifty guineas; and though I had sworn often enough that I would never sell a book save on a royalty basis, still, fifty pounds was

fifty pounds, we were then four in family, and, if ends met, there was no overlap. So for once—but never again—I parted with all rights in a book for a sum down. That was ten years ago, and I still occasionally see the little book in the shop windows.

And if one need not despair of publishers, neither need one despair of one's own work. Hold on to it. A day may come. Let me tell a cautionary tale to young writers who may feel disposed to throw their work away because again and again it is turned down.

If I was not, in that Manchester study, doing anything that might seriously be called work, I was now and then writing a short story. Sometimes I sold one, and I found that my market-value was fifteen pounds. But so few of the stories were sold that soon I did little enough even of that sort of work. Years later, when the novel *My Son, My Son!* was doing well in America, the editors of American magazines began to demand short stories. I turned over a lot of stuff in a drawer, and among it was a story that had made the rounds of English and American magazines in the Manchester days, and lay there now a tattered, dirty, dog-eared tribute to my lack of appeal to editors. I sent it away, with some others; but no sooner was it on the Atlantic than panic seized me. Surely editors knew their business? Surely a thing so scornfully rejected again and again must be contemptible to the core? I asked my agent to cable to America and have this story sent back. It came back. I read it again, and it seemed to me not such a bad story after all. Once again—and this was its third voyage—it crossed the Atlantic. It was accepted by the first editor who read it there, and I was paid £250 for it.

Here was a story which had been rejected again and again, which, had it been accepted when it was written, would have earned £15; and now I found that to write

one such story every three months would give me a comfortable year's income. This is a crazy system; but let young writers remember that it is the system which prevails at the moment; and let them never throw away the rejected matter of their unprosperous years.

I am often called a Manchester man, a Manchester novelist; but I am nothing of the sort. I was thirty years old when I went back to the city in 1919, and before that I had lived there for only a few months. After the war, I remained in the city for eleven years before leaving it for ever. If that makes me a Manchester man, I am one. I like the ascription. I should not mind if it were true. It certainly is true that Manchester entered more deeply into my blood and bones than any other place I have lived in. To Manchester I took my young wife; in Manchester my sons were born and were brought up till they went away to school; and in Manchester I found much happiness.

Southern people think I am joking when I say that I was happy in Manchester, that I enjoyed living there, and that I wouldn't mind living there again. But all this is true, even though my life there began in dreadful post-war economic conditions. I have no figures on record, but my wages were about six pounds a week. I remember paying twelve and sixpence for a kettle and twenty-eight pounds for a second-hand Underwood typewriter. It was a wonderful machine, and after more than twenty years of heavy use it looks like seeing me through a lifetime.

These difficulties were not Manchester's fault. Manchester was all right. More and more, as I came to know the place, I came to love it; but not till I had left it and begun to write novels about its scenes and people did even I realise how deeply it had bitten into my consciousness. To my dying day, live where I may, I shall be able to call

up the nostalgic loneliness of its commercial back streets and alleys on a hot Sunday, not a soul stirring, a few cats and pigeons the only living things; the coloured stir and tumult of its Whit Monday celebrations; the raw lamplit air, full of roaring incandescent trams, into which one emerged from the Palace or the Hippodrome on a winter's night; the backwash of centuries dead and gone round that small area known as the Shambles, now, alas 1 smitten to extinction by the efficiency of modern barbarism.

But I have left Manchester in fact; and I must leave it so far as this book is concerned, with a salute for its gallantry in difficult years when financial bloodsuckers played the devil with its men and machines; with thanks for a multitude of intangible gifts; with a sense of debts that cannot be repaid.

Ten years ago, in 1931, the country was up to the eyes in hell-broth. The complete collapse of a vast edifice of sham, pretence, humbug and hypocrisy could no longer be concealed even from a people who, throughout thirteen years of "peace," had shown little disposition to wake up to the facts of life. Mr. Ramsay MacDonald's Government "went to the country," taking Mr. Baldwin and Sir John Simon along hand-in-hand. They made their celebrated demand for a "doctor's mandate," which was, at long last, a recognition that the patient was in a pretty bad way. The patient, shaken to the soul, placed himself in their hands with a lack of reservation rarely witnessed in English political history; and he is now able to judge just what it cost him; for the doctor's bill came in in September 1939.

This stupendous upheaval of ten years ago threw me out of Manchester. I have told the strange story of how, in the summer of that year, a Didsbury soothsayer stopped my wife in the street and told her that I would soon be leaving Manchester. Her words were true prophecy: the only

true prophecy I can recall out of the English hubbub in that year.

The great figures of the political scene were stumping the country; and I recalled, listening to the verbal antics of the moment, a tenth-rate comedian whom I used to hear singing, to the great delight of my small sons, on Llanfairfechan beach:

*Liberal, Labour and Tory
Tell me the same old story.*

Even so it was. The formal distinctions had melted; the three old gangs were fused into one amalgam, one sort of man: just a politician.

The *Manchester Guardian* gave me a free hand to go about the country and write a series of sketches of these men in action on the hustings. One Saturday night, Lord Beaverbrook, whom I had not, till then, set eyes on, was to speak at Darwen, and I decided to go over and have a look at him.

It was a vile misty day in Didsbury; I had looked up my train and chosen one which would land me in the town a few moments before the meeting began. As the day wore on, the mist changed to a smothering fog, and it was clear that trains would not run, but crawl. The train I had chosen would inevitably be late, and I was half disposed to give up the idea of going to Darwen,

Suddenly I went into our narrow little passage, put on my hat and coat, and said to my wife: "I shall go at once, or I'll never get there."

Looking back at the moment—and I am always fascinated by the "cross-roads" moments of life—I see that my words had a double meaning. If I had not gone at once, I should never have got where that swift decision caused me to go. I was forty-two years old. I had done none of the things I intended to do. It was getting over-late for a move unless something drastic should happen to shake me out of a too-

comfortable routine. I was shaken out of it before the month was over.

That day, my train went heavily through the fog-belt around Manchester, but, sooner than I had expected, the fog was behind us, and I reached Darwen with an hour to spare. It was a Saturday night, and the weekly market was being held in the big square of the town. I lingered there, looking at the flaring naphtha lamps, the hucksters shouting their wares, the gay ephemeral traffic of the cheapjacks' lies and promises. Adjoining the fair-ground was the hall where Lord Beaverbrook was to speak; and I began to see his meeting and this chaffering tumult as all part of one thing: the pedlars of promises without, the pedlar of dreams within. Had I taken the train I had first fixed on, had a Manchester fog not intervened, I should never have had the moment for lingering, for formulating a possible method of attacking my subject. As it happened, that uncovenanted hour was among the decisive hours of my life.

After the meeting, I walked to the Darwen railway station, and found I had an hour to wait before a Manchester train came in. I wrote my article then and there. In the waiting-room, I tried to drag a bench up to the table and found it was screwed to the floor. I tried to drag the table to the bench, and found that that was fixed, too. So I sat on the bench and wrote with a pad on my knee. Before the train came in I had finished the article which caused Fleet Street at last to send for me.

At that time, my wife was working in the Manchester office of a London firm of advertising agents. Our second boy had just gone away to school. My salary was not big enough to keep the home together and have two boys away at school; so she solved the matter with an heroic decision. "I'll go back to work."

Percy Cudlipp, who was born in my own native city of Cardiff and had begun his work as a journalist on my own old sheet the *South Wales Echo*, was then assistant editor of the *Evening Standard*. Lord Beaverbrook sent him to Manchester to enlist me for the Beaverbrook press. Cudlipp was too cautious to walk into the *Guardian* office and ask to see me. He rang up my home and asked to speak to my wife. Perhaps he had an idea that Manchester journalists' wives would know something about the importance of London salaries and would be useful in making husbands amenable. Certainly, he had good cards to play, for he was there to offer nearly three times what the *Guardian* was paying me, and I did not want my wife to go on working. He was told where he would find her in the city, rang her up there, and she in turn rang me up. It was all very discreet and diplomatic. The three of us met at lunch-time in her little office whose walls I had decorated with Monet prints and where I had installed an electric kettle and a tea-set, hoping to make this return to work more tolerable. She and I handed in our resignations together. I saw that, so far as London went, it was now or never; and I accepted Lord Beaverbrook's offer without quibble.

The physical business of removing to London was easy. Both boys were away. We stored the furniture from the small thin house where we had spent eleven happy years, and off we went, encumbered by nothing more than two suitcases, to a small flat high up in a house on Parliament Hill. If you cared to stick your head through a skylight in the back room you could see Hampstead Heath; and, outside the front door, there it was at your feet, stretching away to Highgate: hawthorns, ponds, grey squirrels, and all the enchantment of an ancient name.

Physically easy; but emotionally very disturbing. When a man is forty-two it is a bit late for a change from a soft

routine. The fact is, I feared London intensely. For my first few weeks there I was miserable. The weather was not kind. Light fogs wound scarves in and out of the hawthorns on the heath; travelling to and fro on the Underground was a new and nerve-jarring experience; and I thought of all I had heard about the lack of mercy in Fleet Street: the street where you got on or got out. These emotional doubts had their swift effect: I was laid up within my first week. It was the old story of that tramcar in Manchester and the long dreary vista of the road at Levenshulme; but then I had been more resilient. Now I went down and was in bed for a few days.

The provincial conception of Fleet Street was doing me no good. Among men working on the old-established solid papers in the provinces there was a tendency to speak of Fleet Street as though it were the main street of Sodom and Gomorrah, peopled by men whose hustle was only equalled by their lack of any real distinction. It was, briefly, the attitude of intolerant snobs, and I had imbibed it pretty deeply. It was with a shock of surprise that I found myself, in the *Evening Standard* office, sharing a room with Edward Shanks, and discovered my colleagues to include Bruce Lockhart, Peter Fleming and George Slocombe. So I was all wrong about one side of Fleet Street life; but I still was haunted, subconsciously, by the thought that any day I might be kicked out into the street. A short leading article, headed "A New Star," had appeared in Beaverbrook's *Daily Express*, promising that Howard Spring of the *Evening Standard* was about to do the most brilliant things in the way of descriptive writing, but Howard Spring was none too sure of that.

My gloomy preoccupations were not relieved when I was sent one day to write one of these brilliant pieces about the Richmond horse-show. I met there an *Evening News* reporter whose name I never learned, and he never learned

mine. We walked about the show together, and presently he said to me: "What about this Howard Spring who's joined your staff?"

"Well, what about him?" I asked.

"D'you think he'll last? Most people in Fleet Street say he won't."

I said that, for myself, I hoped he would. I had always found him a decent fellow; and we left it at that. But I was not cheered.

I learned years afterwards, when it did not matter to me what Fleet Street said or did, that two prominent members of my own staff had been ready to bet on Fleet Street's opinion being correct: I wouldn't "last."

That is now ten years ago, and it is all an amusing and academic question; but I may as well record my own belief that I could not have lasted as a descriptive writer on the *Evening Standard*. I had always, till then, done my work for morning papers, and that gave just the few hours necessary for thinking things out and chewing them over. To have to go straight from an event to the telephone and send something worth reading: this was another matter. Even if I had pleased my employers I certainly would not have pleased myself, and my guess is that I would soon have transferred to a leisurely morning paper. But one day Lord Beaverbrook's reading of a book gave another twist to my career.

He read a book telling the story of D. G. Rossetti and Elizabeth Siddal, and he was deeply impressed. He rang up and asked me to call at his house in St. James's, and there he instructed me to read the book and to write an article about it for the next day's *Standard*. It was then late in the day, and this was a fat volume. It was two o'clock in the morning before I was through with it, and then I had twelve hundred words to write. And the "copy" had to be in the office at a very early hour. There was no sleep that night; but it was worth it, for the consequence

was that I ceased to be a "descriptive" reporter and became a book-reviewer.

This was another of fate's unpredictable tricks. I had not come to London to review books, and why had Lord Beaverbrook put me, rather than any one of half a dozen other people, on to the job? I don't know; but there it was. J. B. Priestley was then the paper's reviewer. He had succeeded Arnold Bennett, who made the *Standard* reviews something to look out for. Now it was decided that two pages of books should be done weekly, instead of one as heretofore. Priestley did one, and I the other. Soon afterwards Priestley resigned, and I was asked to take over the whole business of reviewing.

I should like to explode a few false notions about book-reviewers and book-reviewing. The most widely spread of these is that book-reviewers, so many of them being novelists, butter one another up in the hope that they will be buttered in turn. It was my experience that this was far from the truth. When I became the *Standard's* book-reviewer I had not written a novel, but I began to write novels soon afterwards, and so far from finding my fellow novelist-reviewers anxious to say kind things in the hope of favours to come, I found that they acted like honourable men. Two of them wrote to me saying that they would not review my first book because of the general notion that novelist-reviewers were too kind to one another. I understood their point of view, but I did not and do not share it. In similar cases, I have reviewed books honestly and fairly; and that is what most reviewers did with my own books. Novelists or not, they were frank and unbiassed; and, having looked at this matter for a good many years, I am persuaded that never was more nonsense talked than has been talked about venal reviewers. Incompetent ones perhaps; but dishonest ones, no. Not in my experience, at all events.

Yet so generally was this opinion held, that again and again the suggestion was made that matters would be greatly improved if all reviews were anonymous. But what use would that be? How can anyone with a mind and style of his own be anonymous? Mr. Charles Morgan does not sign his dramatic criticisms in the *Times*, but who is unaware that he writes them? And who would have been unaware that Arnold Bennett was writing book-reviews in the *Evening Standard*? Anonymity is fundamentally dishonest, for it permits false claims to be made. For example, I once worked for a newspaper which sent most of its novels away to be reviewed by an old lady living in the country. So far as I could ever see, she had not the first qualification for the job. Her opinions were ridiculous. She was paid nothing, and for doing the work her sole reward was the opportunity to glut her taste for reading novels. Yet her opinions were quoted by publishers, not as hers, but as the opinions of the paper that printed them. "The *Morning Sun* says ..." And the *Morning Sun* said nothing of the sort. What was said was said by a foolish old lady with no standards and no taste. To attribute those opinions to a newspaper fairly well known seems to me to amount to bluffing the public. Let us know who writes what we read, and then we shall be in a better position to know whether or not the opinion is worth listening to. And this is true not only of book-reviews but of all the medley of opinion expressed in the newspapers. "The *Times* says . . ."; "The *Manchester Guardian* says . . ."—the world is full of those phrases. They are fundamentally meaningless. They belong to the same order of bluffing as "The Government says," "The State decrees." Totalitarianism, to use that horrid modern word, would be impossible among a people who laughed whenever such dust-throwing expressions were used. The Government is a collection of erring souls like you and me: just Jones, Smith and Robinson. We shall not get far till we nail then! down to their in-

fly off in a hazy cloud of pretence, till we realise that each of them has a job which we have entrusted to him and for whose efficient discharge he is responsible to us. More persistence in demanding accounts, more ruthlessness in weeding out the slack, will have to come if we are not to find ourselves in deeper distress than we are in now. In a very tolerant newspaper I read the other day: "Let us inquire, not to find scapegoats—" Certainly not to find scapegoats. The scapegoat was sent into the wilderness with other men's sins on his head. But culprits: that is another matter; and even in the highest quarters these must be found and dealt with. A private soldier may sleep at his post for five minutes and be shot for endangering the lives of a dozen men. A Cabinet Minister may sleep at his post for five years, endangering the life of the nation, and be rewarded with a title and a pension. I see no reason in commonsense or equity why these rewards and punishments should not be reversed. In *Picture Post*, on June 22nd, 1941, Edward Hulton wrote: "A remorseless dismissal of failures, accompanied where necessary by prosecutions. ..." We shall have to come to it. We shall have to resort to the more frequent use of the old constitutional weapon of impeachment, if we are not to sink like the growing Continental hordes into complacent acceptance of every word that proceeds out of the mouth of Authority.

Why blame the politicians? Weren't we all to blame for the inertia, the sloth and the blindness that made contemptible the decades between the wars? Of course we were. We are awake now, and, looking back, most of us are amazed and ashamed, I think, at the condition into which we drifted. Lytton Strachey seems to me one of the significant figures of those twenty deadly years. Look at the celebrated portrait of him by Henry Lamb: the dry,

desiccated, juiceless, cynical man whose very contact is enough to freeze all generous emotion and immobilise all noble endeavour. And we took him to our hearts! He bowled over our idols, and we applauded him. He jeered at nobility, pretending it was humbug, and we said: "Yes, of course it is humbug." Florence Nightingale, Arnold of Rugby, anyone who had opposed endeavour to sluggishness, faith to despair, was an appropriate butt of his harsh, despairing and faithless creed. He raised the banner of negation, and we were all ready to enlist beneath it. A war had been won, or so we thought, and peace was here; and what was a man to do with peace save enjoy the plenty that proverbially accompanies it? What did it matter to us that this proverb was as cock-eyed as most? The Rhondda was a long way to the west and Jarrow a long way to the north. They need not disturb us. The great thing was that here, at last, was Peace, and this time we were going to keep it. Therefore, away with all talk of endeavour, ardour, endurance; away with eminent Victorian virtues. We forgot the wisdom of St. Peter: "He that would love life and see good days ... let him seek peace, and ensue it." Indeed we loved life and desired to see good days; but we forgot the conditions on which they may be ours. "Seek" . . . "ensue" . . . these are not easy words. They imply the girded loins and the ready sword.

Peace, to us then, was something that came once for all, a harvest gathered and to be enjoyed. But harvests are not like that. They do not come once for all: they must be toiled for again and again. "He that will not work, neither shall he eat," and we have learned in bitterness how true this is of the bread of peace. The harvest is no sooner in than the plough once more must be among the stubble. Peace is not an objective to be attained; it is, such is the heart of man, a precarious condition to be perpetually cherished and defended if it is not to be lost.

No good to cry in the Shakespearean phrase: "The day is ours, the bloody dog is dead!" It is always gratifying when a bloody dog is dead; but what we have now learned is that it can never again be a matter for complaisance, an excuse for a let-up of effort; because, whenever any particular bloody dog meets what always comes to him at last, there is a pretty constant residuum of bloody doggery lying about in the world, ready to rise up and ravish. We have learned that there is such a thing as virtue, a hardy and noble quality of the spirit, and that a nation which has not this may have all else and thereby but the quicker perish. Ease without virtue is a turtle vulnerable without a shell, and turtle soup is terribly appetising to bloody dogs.

We forgot these things, and so we were all to blame; but this does not finally absolve those who sought to be entrusted with the destiny of the nation, and were so entrusted. When all is said and done, the directors of a company are expected to know more of its concerns than the shareholders can ever know.

In this period between the wars, so lamentably lacking in statesmen and filled with the bickering of politicians, we were sheep without a shepherd, and we may reasonably complain that, as the air thickened and the mutterings of the coming storm drew nearer, the sheep seemed more aware than the shepherds of what was about to happen. While the Government conducted itself with an incredible complacency and fed us with delusions, and more than once with downright lies, book after book was published, voice after voice was upraised, announcing the collapse of the rosy shell which for so long had been our footing on a sea of doom.

Nothing effective was done, though throughout those years when even yet some defence might have been prepared the knowledge accumulating in Government archives must have been immense and frightening. Unlike us who could only guess, they were in a position to know. All

the resources of an Intelligence organisation were at their finger-tips; and in every European capital diplomats were observing the accelerated rush to the abyss. What was done about the diplomats' reports? In the House of Lords on July 2, 1941, the curtain was lifted a little. Diplomat after diplomat complained that his advice had been ignored. Lord Rennell of Rodd, a former Ambassador in Rome, said: "In my long experience, there have been few occasions on which the advice given by the head of a mission has not been right. The difficulty has been to get it acted upon. I could quote instances that would astound you of advice given by men on the spot which was entirely ignored at home, and of great difficulties and enormous expense consequently incurred."

The journalists, the diplomats, the public speakers were not alone in raising a warning cry. Mr. George Gibson, the President of the Trades Union Congress, speaking in Manchester on August 21, 1941, said: "As far back as 1934 we received through our own channels reports of the building of underground aerodromes in Germany. We passed the information on to the Government, but I am not sure that what we did was appreciated as it might have been. In 1935 Sir Walter Citrine, the secretary of the T.U.C., on behalf of the T.U.C. General Council, made a declaration deploring the lack of resistance to Hitler. In 1936 Mr. Ernest Bevin told the T.U.C. that Hitler was not going to be defeated by mere resolutions, and the T.U.C. then undertook to meet the Government and promise support for a rearmament programme. A year later the T.U.C. and the Labour Party jointly declared themselves ready to assist to raise and maintain any armed force that might be necessary to fulfil our obligations under the League of Nations Covenant."

Never, it would seem, was the reality of a situation dinned into ears more clearly or persistently than this situation was dinned into the ears of our Government for

ten years before the bolt was loosed; and all we got was complacency, evasion, lies. We all went wrong; but none more grievously than those whose business it was to keep us right. We are told that "this is not the time for inquests." Perhaps not; but there is no reason why a beginning should not be made with collecting the evidence; there is no reason why we should assume that a deferred inquest is an abandoned inquest.

These matters are burning in many minds. I find that in conversation people slip easily into them just as, in this conversational book, I have slipped into them almost unaware when I had set out to write about the somewhat different matter of anonymity in book-reviewing. We must get back.

My wife and I had now left the small flat in Hampstead, where I had never been happy or even comfortable. We had bought a house in Pinner, a village that must have been very lovely at one time—say when Poet Laureate Pye was writing his inanities there or when Shelley's Trelawny was finding in its green solitudes a brief intermission from his stormy life. Even when I went to live there the place was beautiful, but its doom was at hand. Almost in a night, it seemed, chain stores and cinemas were sprayed all over it.

But for the first time in our married lives we had a garden. Nothing but sterile acid earth had surrounded the small house in Manchester, and this was a trial to both of us, for gardening was in our blood. My father had been a jobbing gardener, and my memories of childhood were full of days spent with him in country expeditions for the cutting of turf or in pottering about gardens where he was earning a few precarious shillings. My wife was more badly afflicted than I was myself with the garden-itch, for while I was a potterer she was a scientist to whom

gardening was a matter of profound knowledge as well as of love.

So in Manchester we rented an allotment alongside the railway-line near our house, and we did not use it, as allotments are supposed to be used, for the growing of vegetables. We laid it out as a garden, and a gallant place it became, with a minute pond in which a water-tortoise lived, a swing and a tent where the boys amused themselves when they were at home, a flag-staff and a grand show of flowers. People would stand to stare at this unusual allotment, and I made a number of my Manchester friendships through meeting people in that way—as happy a way as I know. One year when we were holidaying in North Wales we overheard a discussion on allotments. One man said: "Well, the most remarkable allotment I've ever seen—" and went on to describe what was unquestionably ours. We were very proud, and it certainly was something to be proud of. When the railway cutting was made that ran alongside the allotment, great quantities of sand were thrown up. This was lying on our patch and we built it up into a three-sided stone-paved enclosure, with a long seat in it. The walls were fortified with vegetable growth and held together splendidly. The boys called this the dug-out, and had a brazier there, where we would boil water for tea and they would roast potatoes on days when we spent from morning to night working in our little patch and enjoying the shade of the great limes that made a grove at one side of it. A Manchester memory that will be always in my mind is of an autumn day when the boys, who now are tall sailors in the Navy, were very young, and we ourselves were not so old as all that, and the flag fluttered over the dug-out, and the morning had a faint astringency fortified by the wood-smoke from the brazier, and there was a cold dew on dahlias and chrysanthemums, and the air was sweet with the melancholy of a flute that was being played upon by someone in a near-by house.

That was our first garden, and we had great joy of it; but a garden ten minutes' walk away from the house is not completely satisfactory. And now in Pinner we had house and garden, and for nearly ten years were endlessly busy improving the one and making the other. There never seemed to be a month without gardeners and workmen about the place, for I have a mania for changing, and I hope improving, any place I live in. I was always ready to curse intrusion before a job was ended, but in no time at all the workmen would be back. Brown, the carpenter, was a man I never tired of having about the house. He was a craftsman whom it was a joy to watch at work, and his tools were ancient things, lovely to handle. He told me that he had bought them all, when a young man, from a carpenter in his native village who had himself used them all through a long life. There was a deep channel in the side of the jack-plane made by the impress of these two men's thumbs. Brown had some lovely sayings. If, for example, he had made some book-shelves and wished to see how they would fit their niche, he would say: "Now take hold of it that side, and I'll take hold of it this side, and let's *offer it up*" as though he were performing a sacrifice to his deep sense of rectitude in doing a job.

Hundreds of new houses went up in and about Pinner in my time, and many of the new-coming inhabitants were superior about our local annual fair. It was a disgrace, a rabble, and they would like The Authorities to stop it. I was very fond of the fair, and happily there was a charter that The Authorities could not get over by which it had a right to plant itself on us on Wednesday in Whit-week. It had done so for many centuries. It was a fair with a fine-weather tradition. I do not remember a wet fair-day all the time I lived in the village. On the Tuesday night the caravans with their rich painted scroll-work, big and

bulging as galleons, would begin to roll into the village, and by early on Wednesday morning the High Street would be a pandemonium. Stalls and roundabouts, coconut shies and shooting-booths, tents for boxing-bouts, tents for bearded ladies, tents for fortune-tellers, swing-boats that at night would be flying up under the stars, and electric floors on which motor-cars would crash and swerve: all this was arranging itself amid a trailing litter of electric cable which, before noon, would be a neat system for lighting the whole vagrant and transitory town. All these booths, stalls and tents were half-on and half-off the pavements. There was just room to push between the backs of them and the shop windows, and the fronts of them were so close together that by the time the crowds arrived in the evening it was all a solid jam, surging slowly about, wearing absurd hats, blowing on absurd whistles, throwing away money in absurd competitions as the round-about organ blared, and hooters shrieked, and a concentrated fierceness of electric light burned down on everything.

Yes; there was an absurdity about it all, a departure from the customary cold rationality of buying and selling, that I at least found refreshing. Far, indeed, this fair had travelled from the days when it had a purpose, when the chapmen came with things to sell that were necessary and could not be obtained elsewhere. Now it was just a riot of noisy amusement, vulgar and irrational, yet somehow stimulating, too, both for the continuity of its tradition and for its challenge to the view that there's little to do in life save go to the office on the 8.55 and return on the 5.6. It was stimulating just as the Whitsun "walks" were stimulating in Manchester: incredible occasions when, on two days in Whitsun week, all the business of that great commercial community was paralysed, and the city frankly shut up shop, because from time immemorial children in white, carrying flowers and banners, headed by bands, had paraded the streets, and insisted on parading them still.

I do not know whether Pinner has kept its fair going in these war years. I should think not. No connoisseur of such occasions went to the fair till night had come and the lights were up; and such a blaze of light as that was would be a strange phenomenon in these darkened days. The fair without its lights is unthinkable, and now, alas! the lights themselves are unthinkable, so I fear the fair is gone. May it be nothing more than suspended animation. May it blaze forth again when peace comes.

We hear a great deal about the new world which is to follow the eclipse of the old one, but I hope it's not going to be as new as all that. There's much that I would preserve, and notably any custom, any observance, that had maintained unbroken tradition. Not morris-dancing and mumming that a few "revivalists" are trying to resuscitate after a long and indubitable death, nor anything of that sort; but anything which has kept the breath of life, even though it be a raucous and alcoholic breath like that of Pinner fair. There are customs that have survived, not in this degraded form but with a singular grace and purity, and these in particular I hope to see survive. Such customs, I mean, as the well-dressing at Tissington in Derbyshire.

Outside Derbyshire, few people seem to know anything of this ancient and beautiful custom. Tissington is full of water. There is water in wells, there is water in ponds, there is water in streams that run down the sides of the roads. The very name Tissington sounds as though it were suggested by the sound of water lispings over pebbles. It may have been.

Tissington, with its strong grey stone cottages and its small ancient church and its "great house" built with that grave perfection of domestic architecture that only the English countryside seems able to achieve, is a place where a man can be quiet, and faith does not seem open to doubt, and a ceremony like well-dressing is in the nature of things. Who first observed it is not known; the beginnings go

back beyond record; and this may well be a custom that Christianity took over from pagan times. It is a simple thanksgiving for the good gift of water, which is said never to have failed in Tissington, even in torrid years when near-by villages were parched.

When last I attended the ceremony, which is always held on Ascension Day, the weather was beautiful. I stood in the green churchyard with many others, for the congregation had filled the little church and overflowed from it. The words of the service wavered out into the still air, and the cawing of rooks and the scent of wallflowers drifted into the church to mingle with the notes of the organ and the musty odour of the centuries. After the service, a procession was formed—if one may use so formal a word of the ragged straggling tail of folk who made the round of the five wells. First came three clergymen, then the church choir—not a surpliced choir, but a handful of men and women whose rustic voices seemed the fit expression of the rustic occasion—then a tatter of villagers and visitors. Before each of the wells a halt was made and a short service held.

A person who sees the dressed wells for the first time must marvel at the finish and beauty of the work. I went to the ceremony with the idea that well-dressing meant the haphazard and informal draping of flowers about the well precincts. The fact is far otherwise. Each of the wells is made the emplacement for a separate design, for a considered picture executed in a mosaic of petals, leaves and berries. The design and execution are the unaided work of the village people. One designs each of the pictures, and many of them combine to make it. First a frame of wood is made, and upon this wet clay is laid an inch deep. The petals, buds and leaves are impressed one by one upon the clay. The labour of making a design thus is incredible. Let him who feels like it work out the number of petals required to make a picture ten feet high

and six feet wide. The pictures placed over the wells when last I was there represented Rebecca at the Well, the Garden of Gethsemane, the Recording Angel, Jesus and the Woman of Samaria, and (curious touch!) the tower of Lambeth Palace.

Some inherited instinct and legendary skill must go to the making of these exquisite and ephemeral mosaics. With the wealth of the English countryside in spring to draw upon, one may imagine the glorious tones achieved: the brilliant greens painted in with larch buds, the daring scarlet of geraniums, the subtlety of green shot with burgundy that may be wrought with the early foliage of copper-beech, the pale blues and mauves of pansies, and the white of snow-on-the-mountain.

Before each of these lovely shrines the procession halted, a Psalm and hymn were sung, and then this blessing was pronounced: "May the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be upon this well and those who use it and care for it, now and for evermore. Amen."

To get back to books. Soon after I had taken over the *Evening Standard* book-reviewing it was suggested to me that I should choose each month one good book to be called "The *Evening Standard* Book of the Month." I agreed to do this, little thinking what an immense additional labour this would be. Already I was reading—and I mean reading—seven or eight books a week. I did not now go to town but did my work at home. I was at my desk by nine each morning. I read till one o'clock. Then I knocked off till three. I read again from three till dinner-time. One more book a month didn't seem much; but of course it didn't turn out like that. The Book of the Month scheme appealed at once to publishers. Scores of proof copies poured in: all were looked through and about

six were read. It meant a very busy life indeed, especially when, soon after this time, I decided to begin writing novels on my own account.

The first "*Evening Standard* Book of the Month" was Eric Linklater's *Magnus Merriman*, which was published by Jonathan Cape. I lunched with the capable young woman who was looking after Cape's publicity, and she asked: "How long do you reckon this stunt will last?"

I said I did not know. "I give it six months at the outside," she said.

The Book of the Month was still being chosen right up to the time when book-reviews disappeared from the *Standard* during the present war. I do not remember when the scheme started; but the six months became at least six years; possibly more.

It was altogether a very interesting business, and it gave me an incomparable opportunity of judging how much truth there was in the often-told stories about bribery and corruption existing between publishers and reviewers. I found very little evidence of it. One or two publishers at Christmas-time would send me small presents; but these were men who had become my friends, and it would have been fantastic to imagine any sinister intention. Once, a publisher sent me a Christmas gift that was more costly than the courtesies of the season seemed to warrant. To send it back would have been too gross a gesture of disapproval. There was only one thing for it: I sent him an even more costly gift.

Occasionally there was a little grumbling from publishers that they had not had a "choice" for a long time, or not at all; but it never came to much; and on the whole I look back to the Book of the Month adventure as one which improved rather than diminished my good relations with British publishers.

As for authors, they were very good and unobtrusive. Only once was a straight offer of a bribe made to me, but

that was as barefaced and direct as could be wished. It was a frank question: "How much will it cost to have my next novel chosen as the *Evening Standard* Book of the Month?" The author was a woman, married, as I happened to know, to a very wealthy business man. Certainly she had the money to pay if she could have found a taker. I did not answer the letter, but handed it to the editor of the *Evening Standard*, who, I know, sent the lady a reply which left her in no doubt about where she "got off."

It was always a disappointment to me to have to refuse invitations to lunch with authors. Again and again a man or woman whose book I had praised would quite naturally want to meet the reviewer. Occasionally there were reasons why it would have been churlish to refuse; but in nine cases out of ten I wrote explaining why I could not accept. Quite simply, this was because I found it difficult to write with complete dispassion about a book by someone I knew, however slightly. A reviewer should be concerned with nothing but what appears between the covers of the book he is reading. If he either likes or dislikes the author, his reaction at once becomes complicated by considerations that should never enter into his work.

I once received a note from an author which pleased me very much indeed. His novel had been the choice of the Book Society. It was widely praised, but I thought it was poor stuff and said so. Soon afterwards, I was lunching at the Cafe Royal when a waiter brought me a note. It was from the author. "Everybody but you," he said, "praised my book. I have now come to the conclusion that everybody was wrong and you were right." I wrote on the back of the note: "Come and drink to your enlightenment," and he did so. It was a brief contact. I have not seen him since.

I had always intended to write novels, but now, when I had entered into my forties, there was nothing to my credit

save *Darkie and Co.*, the book for children which I had sold outright for fifty pounds. It hardly seemed a book at all. It had been written for fun. The boys had been brought up on Kipling and Doolittle, Milne's *When We Were Very Young*, *The Wind in the Willows*, and all that sort of thing; all good, I thought, though the teasing poor Mr. Milne received for his Christopher Robin amounted almost to persecution. It was a completely nonsensical exhibition of spite and possibly of subconscious jealousy. To read some of the things that were written about the book, one would have imagined that, in the opinion of the writers, it was every author's business to cater for minds attuned to high philosophy and what is so absurdly called "new writing." New writing! In plain fact, it was Mr. Milne's business—and how magnificently he understood it!—to cater for small children; and as a parent whose small sons read every word that Mr. Milne wrote in that fashion I bear this testimony to his complete understanding, and thank him for giving my children many delightful hours.

But the time came—they were such devourers of books—when the problem of finding something new and good was difficult to solve; and they said: "Why don't you write us a book?" So I wrote *Darkie and Co.*, reading each chapter to them in bed as it was finished. They were the only critics who have ever caused me to alter something that I have written. They objected so strongly to a chapter in my next children's book, *Sampson's Circus*, that it was completely rewritten, to the book's gain.

When I went to London, *Darkie* was my only book. I had not been reviewing for long when I was impressed by the number of indifferent novels which earned for their authors if not celebrity at any rate a moderate reputation. It seemed to me that, if I did not succeed in writing something of real worth and quality, I could anyway produce a book as good as these. So one night I began to write *Shabby Tiger*.

My days were very full. I could not give more than a bit of the evening to novel-writing. I arranged that dinner henceforth should be at half-past six; and at eight o'clock I sat down to write till ten or eleven. It depended on how I got on. When I had written a thousand words I was finished for the night.

I have said earlier in this book that never more than in the writing of *Shabby Tiger* did I cast myself completely upon chance. When I first sat down to it, I had not one idea of what the book was to be about or what sort of people were to appear in it. I wrote an opening sentence that came out of nowhere: a sentence that seems to me now shamefully melodramatic and twopence-coloured: "The woman flamed along the road like a macaw."

How does one write a novel, with no more material than that to begin with? Well, here at any rate is a woman, and already we have begun to give her characteristics: she is a striking flamboyant creature. Moreover, she is on a road. Where does the road come from; which is to say, What is her past? I began at once to see her, to know something about her. I gave her a name in my mind, and that again somehow made her clearer. Being on a road, she will meet someone if she goes far enough; so that she has a future as well as a past. The thing to do now is to go along with her and see whom she meets. When they meet, the impact of the two will have something to do with shaping this future; and what the past of the woman has been, and the past of the man she is going to meet, will perhaps have even more to do with it. So, by the end of the first evening's writing, Anna Fitzgerald had met Nick Faunt; "and all you have to do," I said to myself, "is to follow these two wherever they choose to go, and when they come to the end of the journey you will have come to the end of the novel."

Following this fashion of complete improvisation, the novel was written, and I rarely knew from day to day where

the next night's work would lead me. One thing I quickly discovered: now that I was out of Manchester, I wanted to write about Manchester, that Manchester became irresistibly the background of the book, and that it meant more to me than any other city I had known. When Nick and Anna stand in Manchester's Piccadilly with the people rushing home from their work and the red trams tolling their bells as they crash along the steel rails, and Nick says: "By God, Anna, it's a grand town to come back to. I could poison anyone who runs Manchester down"—then Nick was speaking for me.

The book was successful enough to encourage me to go on. It is still occasionally reprinted. There was not so much improvisation about its successor, *Rachel Rosing*, because Rachel had appeared as a character in the first book. I knew her pretty well and had a clear idea of the dance she would lead any man who took up with her.

There was nothing about the reception of either of these books to lead me to suppose that the next one would be successful all over the world. When it was published in England it was called *O Absalom!* When the time came for publication in the United States, William Faulkner had just published a novel there called *Absalom, Absalom*, and my American publishers wished to avoid a clash with this tide. So they themselves, rejecting several suggestions of mine, chose the title *My Son, My Son!*, which is simply a continuation of the Bible phrase from which my title had been taken: "Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son." Under this new title, the book was so great a success in America that *My Son, My Son!* was used for all subsequent English editions, too. Most of the translations were of *My Son, My Son!*, though the Dutch stuck to *O Absalom!*, the Germans found something quite new, *Geliebte Sohne*, and the Norwegians combined the two titles and called the book *Absalom, My Son, My Son*. The French did not care for either title and were seeking

for something else when the war came. The book had been set, but never appeared in France. In several countries it ran as a serial story; and the films translated it into a farce. In short, I had what I can testify is the very queer experience of finding myself, in middle age, suddenly translated from the status of wage-earner to that of a more or less independent being. I had always said that I would not rely on novel-writing for my living until I had written a novel that sold a hundred thousand copies. When last I checked the figures *My Son, My Son!* had sold about three-quarters of a million, and it is selling still.

There was no improvisation about this book. There was something so queer about its genesis that I shall set down here just what happened. I had been to Cornwall for a holiday, and travelled home on the Cornish Riviera Express, one of the most punctual and reliable trains on the British railways. One does not expect the Riviera Express to stop except when it is advertised to stop; but that hot day of early autumn it drew slowly to a standstill at a tiny station in Somersetshire. I was reading Mr. Maurice Hindus's book *Under Moscow Skies*, which had been sent by Mr. Gollancz for review. Inside the cover was the customary publisher's slip of paper, naming the publication date.

When the train stopped I walked out into the corridor, to see where we were. The little station bore the name Keinton Mandeville, and I did not know then that this rustic hamlet was the improbable birthplace of Henry Irving. I still have the slip of publisher's paper that was inside *Under Moscow Skies*, and it is covered with notes, partly in longhand, partly in shorthand. One of them reads: "At Keinton Mandeville there is a——" (I cannot now transcribe my own shorthand word). "A lot of rusting iron beast-pens. A zinc water-trough on posts over all. Here he hid in the water."

On seeing that water-trough, the thought had come to my mind: "What a place for a murderer to hide in!" Why? I don't know; but towards the end of *My Son, My Son!* that is where the murderer, Oliver Essex, hides.

My thoughts, as I looked at the hazy autumn landscape, were mysteriously occupied with a problematical murderer. I see I have next noted on my piece of paper: "Absalom—boy in train—Rupert Brooke." There was a boy standing by me in the corridor, strikingly beautiful, reminding me of the portrait of Rupert Brooke that used to preface his poems. "Why should a murderer be physically repulsive?" I thought. "How much more poignant if he were beautiful—like Absalom." What would be the possible stages of his disintegration? Service in the war might begin it; service with the Black and Tans might complete it. "Black and Tans" is the next note on my piece of paper. Then I have written "Essex," and lower down "Fergus." Fergus was changed when the book was written to Dermot—Dermot O'Riorden, William Essex's friend. I suppose this Essex, the murderer's father, occupied my mind then, for I have written: "Married for money." A shorthand note follows which I cannot decipher; then: "Second wife young and beautiful; and Absalom." Well, there was no second wife; but there was Livia—and Absalom. The notes continue: "First wife only a little money. Small shopkeeper or something of that sort. Then the father writes best-seller or invents something." As it turned out, he did both. Those are all the notes, but, with my thoughts about them, they constitute the complete skeleton of a novel that had rushed into my mind from Heaven knows where. The train had stood in Keinton Mandeville station for about five minutes.

I began to write the book as soon as I got home, and, working only in my spare evening hours, completed it in fourteen months.

There are two mistakes of the first magnitude in *My Son, My Son!* Old Captain Judas, the crazy occupant of the hulk *Jezebel*, his mind bemused with the Scriptures, would hardly go wrong on a scriptural fact; yet he is made to do so. He refers to Andrew the son of Zebedee. Now we know that Andrew was Simon Peter's brother, and St. John speaks of "Simon the son of Jonah."

Earlier in the book there is a visit by Maeve and William Essex to a theatre in Manchester where they see *The Merchant of Venice*. Ellen Terry is made to speak the words

*Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But while this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.*

Ellen Terry could not have spoken these words because they are in an actor's part, not an actress's. I am always telling myself to verify quotations, but I am, to the extent that I rarely do so, a lazy writer.

I mention these two mistakes because they bear on the matter of readers' letters to authors. If you make a small slip, letters will promptly call your attention to it. In *Rachel Rosing* I made Rachel, coming from Blackpool to Manchester, alight at the Central Station, and literally scores of letters reached me pointing out that she couldn't have done anything of the sort. A Leeds schoolgirl wrote somewhat pompously: "Sir: In *Fame Is The Spur* you are guilty of gross historical inaccuracy," and I began to wonder what I had been up to this time. I had given the date of our present King's coronation one day out—the old fault of not checking my recollections; but it was hardly so gross as all that. But bad slips, like the two I have mentioned, go undetected for the most part. I believe that when calculating the number of a book's readers, publishers reckon that every copy is read by at least six persons. If this estimate is correct, four-and-a-half million people have read *My Son, My Son!* and only

one of them has written pointing out these two mistakes. They were both noticed by the same reader: a reader I salute respectfully.

Many of the books chosen as *Evening Standard* Books of the Month were first novels. The authors of two of them immediately gave up the work by which they had till then earned their living in order to become full-time writers. Was this a wise thing to do? I think not. I am all for hanging on to a life-line when venturing into this troubled sea. When you are a success as a man of letters, you can let the life-line go; but the acceptance of a first novel, even the sale of a first novel in very large numbers, does not mean that the author is going to succeed as a writer. Many a good start has been a bright meteor that shot into obscurity almost as soon as seen. I believe it is a fact—though what the explanation of this is I do not know—that a second novel does not often sell as well as a first one. Let a man have three or four steady sellers to his credit before he lets go.

I am speaking at the moment merely from the financial point of view. I have seen too many men gaily spending the thousand pounds or so they earned on a first novel, forgetting to provide for their income tax, happily certain that the next novel will do even better, and plunging into embarrassment when the next novel does nothing at all.

But the financial side is not the only one. There will always be dispute as to whether authorship, in itself, is a desirable calling to pursue. I have heard an author talk with disgust of "spinning my very guts into words," and A. G. Macdonell, who had been successful enough with *England, Their England*, explained when he wrote *Napoleon and His Marshals* that he had done so because he didn't want people to think him "just a damned novelist." Herein he was but feebly echoing Coleridge, who wrote of the

dangers of being "a mere author," whether novelist or anything else; and considered that the pursuit of letters should be a spare-time occupation of men engaged in some other work. He pictures his man coming home from the office or the shop, "to your family, with the very countenances of your wife and children brightened, and their voice of welcome made doubly welcome by the knowledge that, so far as *they* are concerned, you have satisfied the demands of the day by the labour of the day."

Then the business man turned author retires to his study where "three hours of leisure, unannoyed by any alien anxiety, and looked forward to with delight as a change and recreation, will suffice to realise in literature a larger product of what is truly genial than weeks of compulsion."

Indeed, there is no need to retire to a study, for "the undisturbing voices of a wife or sister will be like a restorative atmosphere, or soft music which moulds a dream without becoming its object."

Now this is all very well; but Coleridge is making some large assumptions. He is assuming that the labours of the day have been successful, leaving the mind calm and clear for its creative mood. But what if our writer bring home a black dog on his shoulder?—a failure to balance the accounts, the shadow of some impending business disaster, the thought of an arbitrary and inconsiderate employer who makes each day a thing of worry and despair? How few men there are who can so easily as this shed the hot preoccupations of the day and plunge into the cool of the evening like spirits unburdened of their bodies! True, if they were so built, great matters might be expected of them. And how are we to guarantee that the voice of wife and sister will have the dreamlike charm that Coleridge postulates? What if their voices buzz endlessly like blow-flies, recounting triumphs in the local tennis tournament or speculating what might have happened if they had had another heart or spade? No, no; our poor man may easily

be driven to seek solitude; and then is it not likely that his wife and sister will think him an unsocial boor, and say so? In urging the claims of a profession to run with the pursuit of literature, Coleridge says: "It is as natural for the man to be out of the circle of his household during the day as it is meritorious for the woman to remain for the most part within it." Having so remained, the woman, alas! is hardly to be blamed if she expects her husband to spare his evening hours for the entertainment of the Joneses or a visit to the Smiths.

Domestic felicity may in some rare cases lie along the lines Coleridge indicates, and there are innumerable instances of authorship successfully pursued as a spare-time job. Trollope and Lamb are cases in point; and, of these two, Trollope at any rate might have been a more polished writer, though he could hardly have been a better novelist, if he had not dashed off so much of his work in railway trains. Coleridge instances the large output of Hans Sachs, the Nuremberg cobbler-poet, whose boast it was that, for all his verse, "he never made a shoe the less, but had virtuously reared a large family by the labour of his hands."

Consider two phrases out of all that Coleridge has to say on this matter. "He virtuously reared a large family by the labour of his hands." And, speaking of the wife and children: "As far as *they* are concerned, you have satisfied the demands of the day by the labour of the day." From these two phrases, and from the general tenor of what he has to say, I feel that Coleridge, for all his protestations to the contrary, was thinking of the financial side of authorship. He hated the idea of a man so self-indulgent as to do nothing but coquette with letters if the consequence of this was to be hardship for those whose well-being should be his main concern. And in this he was quite right.

To illustrate this, let me tell of a most strange and moving thing that happened to me when I was a book-

reviewer. A girl in her early twenties called at my house one night; and it took her a long time to come to the point. Something was on her mind that she hardly knew how to bring into the open. She wanted me to do her a favour, she explained at length. Her father was an author. His books never sold. He had been writing for years, hardly, I gathered, clearing the small advances that his publishers made him. She didn't want me to crack up his books, merely to promise to read the next, and say a word for it if I thought it deserved one. And please on no account let her father know that she had called. She was working in an office, and she had said, to explain her lateness in getting home, that she would be calling on a friend.

What a picture, what a long-drawn drama of frustration, this little episode suggested to my mind! Surely this was the sort of thing Coleridge had in his thoughts: "As far as they are concerned, you have satisfied the demands of the day."

But supposing the author is able by his pen to satisfy these demands? "Money and immediate reputation form only an arbitrary and accidental end of literary labour." Again, true enough; though even some of the greatest of our writers have worked and overworked for cash. But what if "money and immediate reputation" should come? Is it necessary or desirable then to persevere as a lawyer or a doctor, a clerk, actor, or what not?

To me, the answer depends on the use the author makes of the large amount of leisure that is released. If he is going to cut himself off from the preoccupations of common people, if his life henceforth is to be a mere frequenting of salons and literary lunches and publishers' cocktail-parties, with appearances at the right moment on the Riviera and at Ascot, then, indeed, it would be better for him to stay where he is and keep the touch of a man concerned with other men in common humanity's affairs. Especially is this so if the author is young. To saunter

out into idleness before one has done sucking milk is a poor preparation for work which depends, above all other work, on a knowledge of all sorts and conditions of men in all sorts and conditions of circumstances. The very basis and bedrock of an author's being is thus destroyed. But there is plenty to be done—or was till but yesterday—in this varied and fascinating world. Travel and observation may well open to the young novelist's regard vistas that are not available at his office in Mincing Lane or Manchester. But let him at least be sure that he is going to be a continuing financial success. Let him wait till he has written a few books that have all been on the up-grade before taking his plunge. It is not necessary to apologise for this insistence on the financial side. It is the root of the matter. If he has thrown up his job, and his little burst of prosperity peters out, then he is indeed in deplorable case, writing desperately whether he wants to or not, whether he has anything to write or not, the easy prey of the providers of hack-work. He may be reduced to the sad state of people I have known who have put their names to contracts requiring them to produce three novels a year: a desperate unending drudgery with nothing to show at the end of it but work that might as well never have been done. I would urge a young author never to sign a contract requiring the delivery of work within a specified time. Only when he is financially secure, either through his books or because he has other occupation, can he realise an essential condition of good work: the liberty to write, or not to write, whenever he pleases.

But success has its dangers, and one of them is that it may drive a man to do the very things poverty makes him do. Just as the lack of money may turn an author into a hack, so may plentiful money, for few men are content to subsist in ease: they strive for luxury. A few successful novels, giving them rich rewards, tempt them to write and write; and the glamour of their established names makes

what they write seem meritorious to the many, when to the discerning few it is clear that they are doing nothing but fill unnecessary money-bags. The happy author, to me, is the one who refuses to write a line more than his spirit urges him to write, and who is able, on that output, to live beyond the reach of cares other than those incident to all human life. This output will vary as between one man and another, and the same man, in differing phases of his life, will want to write much or little; but one fundamental need for a successful literary life is that the author shall choose for himself the little or the much.

In point of time, little indeed will keep body and soul together, if that little is in public demand. Coleridge speaks of the author sitting down in the evening to his three hours of leisure. Three hours' work a day is enough, and may be more than enough, if the work is selling for a good price. The popular notion of the author toiling far into the night, "burning the midnight oil," is all nonsense. Not long ago a London newspaper published an article on a popular novelist. It pictured his home and the wide acres surrounding it, and the poor novelist himself, there at the heart of all that beauty, condemned to toil, it seemed, like a slave chained to his oar. He was writing "all through the day, and sometimes all through the night as well."

What on earth became of all he wrote—unless the poor man was afflicted with an inability to scrawl more than a word a minute? After all, to find out what an author writes is a simple matter of arithmetic. This hard-driven creature had written five novels in seven years. I don't suppose any one of them contained more than 150,000 words. That is to say, his seven years' work totalled 750,000 words, or about 107,000 words a year. If you divide 107,000 by 365 you have a daily average output of just under three hundred words. Does a man require to sweat day and night to produce this? Perhaps one rare perfectionist in a generation may do so; but the average

man, accustomed to the trade of writing, can do his thousand words with ease in two or three hours. I should say that the novels of the author in question cost him a few hours a day, that he wrote on no more than five days a week, and that he could afford to take three months' holiday a year. A man can easily produce a longish novel a year on these terms; and that is somewhat more than the public requires of most of us.

But, I repeat, an author can live on these easy terms only if his books sell freely. If they do not, then he must either become one of those unfortunates who endlessly spin their webs of words, or have the wisdom to follow Coleridge's advice and earn his bread and butter by some other means than the pen.

The trouble is that vanity comes into it. A little authorship seems to make men vainer than solid work and reputation as doctors, lawyers, clergymen or grocers, although any one of these callings may do more good in the world than a few bad novels. But there it is. No schoolgirl asks the village doctor for his autograph, even though he has just saved her mother's life; but she will be delighted to have the scrawled signature of the author of *Love's Elixir* or *Death Lies Doggo*. Authors should reflect that, as providers of autographs, they are in the same class as politicians or professional cricketers; and that a really impassioned autograph-hunter would swop six best-sellers against one Dillinger or Capone, and perhaps three against one Neville Chamberlain. This should keep authors humble.

A man more eaten up with the vanity of authorship, more lacking in its equipment, than any other I have known, came into my life a few years ago. He was prosperous "in the City," and a mutual friend induced me to promise to read and comment upon a novel he had written.

I had always set my face against doing anything of the sort, for once you start on that path you can go on for ever. It is surprising how many people there are with a novel packed away in a drawer. "Just read it. That's all I ask. If you don't like it, say so. I shan't be offended." But of course they *are* offended; their vanity promptly tells them that jealousy or incompetence or sheer stupidity prevents you from seeing the beauty of their work. So it was my habit to say to would-be authors who approached me thus: "The only opinion worth having is a publisher's. Send your book to them. They live on authors, and if they can live on you they'll do it."

But in the case of my Qty man I was weak-minded enough to read the book, though strong-minded enough to say exactly what I thought of it; and this was that I would not waste time in commenting on it at all, because not only was there no worth in this present production but the man capable of writing it would clearly *never* write anything worth reading.

But he was not to be fobbed off thus. He insisted on a meeting, and a most charming person I found him. I got to like him, and we lunched together again and again. If only he had given up writing we might have been friends to this day. But the fangs of the vanity of authorship were meeting in his flesh. I could say what I liked: he knew he had the stuff in him, and it was only a matter of perseverance before it came out in a form which all would recognise as excellent. He was wealthy enough to pamper his inclinations. He gave himself a writing-room at the bottom of his garden; but he did not write in it. He spouted. He bought one of those things that Edgar Wallace used to talk into; and into it he would pour his twenty or thirty thousand words during a week-end. Then he would ring me up at my home, usually late at night when with nothing more complicated than a relief nib and an inkpot I was trying to do a bit of writing of my

own. "Well, how's it going?" he would ask, as one author to another, and on my grunting some non-committal answer he would crow: "Twenty thousand words, my boy, this week-end!"

Nothing came of all that vanity, enthusiasm "and machinery. He belonged to the class predestined to be victimised by those dubious publishers who publish at the author's expense. It hadn't quite come to that when I last heard of him. The war came, and I hope that meant enough liveliness in the City to take his mind off the room at the bottom of the garden or to induce him to turn it into an apple-store. His immediately available contribution of paper for re-pulping must have been considerable. It is an entrancing thought that thus a masterpiece may yet be printed on his pages.

There is a widespread but false belief that novelists, taking them by and large, do very well financially. The truth is that nine novelists in ten are lucky if their income is as high as a greengrocer's. When a novelist appears as a character in a novel, he usually drives to his appointments in a Rolls Royce, Bentley or Hispano Suiza; and if you ring him up you speak to his butler, who switches you through to his secretary. I remember reading a novel in which the hero, a youth determined to be a novelist, at last has a book accepted by a publisher. At once he rings up his sweetheart to tell her that all is now well, and together they set out and buy an estate in the country. The joke is that the author of this nonsense had himself already written a novel or two, and must have known as well as I know myself what the average profits of a novel are,

But, quite rightly undeterred by such considerations as these, many people set out to write novels, and many write **to** me asking what to do with the novel when it is finished.

Let me here put down some elementary facts' about the matter.

There is no need to deal with the actual writing of the novel. Some people write with their legs twined like ivy round the legs of their chairs; some stand up to it and write at a sort of lecturer's stand. Some make many notes; some write with no such help. One novelist I know works from 6 a.m. till noon; another from 10 p.m. till two in the morning. There's no advice to be given about any of these things. Let us begin with the assumption that the novel is written, that it is of some intelligent length, and that it has been nicely typed. What then? But already we must go back. Have *three* copies typed: one for an English publisher; one for an American publisher; and one to keep by you.

What now? Shall you send the work out yourself or shall you employ an agent? That is the first question you will ask yourself; and my advice is that you send it out yourself. There is nothing that an agent can do for you in the early stages of your career—though there is much drudgery that he can save you if your career is successful—that the Society of Authors cannot do equally well. The subscription to the Society of Authors is negligible: an agent will deduct ten per cent, from your earnings. Join the Society as soon as you decide to "turn author."

Send out your book with stamps for its return, and don't believe anyone who tells you it won't be read. Everything submitted to a publisher is given the most careful consideration. I have myself been asked to make a final decision about a book that already had been combed through by four people. If the publishers don't like your book and send it back, don't be discouraged. The history of publishing is full of stories of publishers gnashing their teeth over to-day's best-seller which they turned down yesterday. Publishers are as fallible as the rest of us.

You must study very carefully the kind of books pub-

lished by this publisher and that. Novels differ from one another as chalk from cheese, and it is waste of time to send to the publisher who would like George Meredith a novel based on the method of Edgar Wallace.

If and when the happy day comes and you face a publisher standing there beaming with a contract in his hand, don't lose control and kiss him on both cheeks. Rather, say in a businesslike voice that you would like to take the contract home and study it. Stick to this. You know nothing about contracts. This is where an agent would have come in. But you haven't an agent; so send the contract to the Society of Authors and ask if it is fair and square. If they say it is, then sign it.

It would be agreeable now to write of all the exciting things that will happen from this moment, such as the coming of those long snakes of printed matter called galley-proofs, which you will learn to loathe when you are really grown-up; and after that the page-proofs which are so much more agreeable, being really the complete book save that it is bound only in paper. Then there is the fun of seeing the dust-jacket for the first time, and later of looking with a broken heart into shop windows for a sight of your book, which appears to be sunk without trace, and in the newspapers for reviews which either don't appear or scandalously underestimate the book's importance.

But instead of doing this, let us look at the sort of contract you are likely to have. You have never written a novel before, and you think that seven-and-six, the price of a novel, is a nice comfortable sum. But a probable sort of contract will give you only ninepence on every copy sold up to 2000. It is cold comfort, but it is also the truth, that not many "first" novels sell 2000 copies. If yours does, you will still have made only £75, of which you will probably have received £20 or £30 "on account of royalties" when the contract is signed. For the rest, publishers settle their bills with authors twice a year.

Probably the contract will provide that on every copy between 2000 and 5000 you receive 12½ per cent., that is, 11¼ d per copy. So that if you perform what is a remarkable feat for a "first" novelist, and reach the 5000 mark, you get something like another £140. It is difficult to make a young novelist believe it, but to take the matter beyond this figure is almost to enter the realm of fantasy. But let us do it. The next step in this contract—and I am looking at an actual contract—gives 15 per cent, between 5000 and 20,000 copies.

Now if with a first novel—or with any novel—you reach the 20,000 mark, you have done something sensational. You are a very lucky writer. All the same, you will have earned little more than £1000. If you have an agent, you have earned only £900, and there's another thing to help this apparent £1000 to be not £1000 after all. It is not likely that all these copies have been sold in England. Thousands of them will have been sold in Canada, Australia and elsewhere, and you will find in your contract a clause which allows you only 10 per cent, (ninepence) on all copies—even if they number countless thousands—sold "overseas." This is because publishers sell colonial editions at a much larger discount than is allowed on books sold in the home market.

A novelist with a reputation, of whom it was *known* that he would sell 20,000 copies, would not have a contract like yours. He would begin at a higher figure and accelerate more steeply. There are demigods who *begin* at the highest known percentage. You are not one of them. Your first novel, we are assuming, made this lucky break; but it is ten to one that you will find your contract binds you to offer your next two novels to your publisher on the same terms as the first. It is my opinion that in every contract there should be a clause providing that, where a first novel has done unusually well, the royalties on the second should begin at a higher point than would

otherwise be the case. Fight that out with your publisher if you wish. My object is simply to point out that the writing of novels is not, save for a lucky few, a road to fortune.

At the present moment the situation is even less encouraging than these facts suggest, for publishers' difficulties have been greatly increased by the war. Paper is a precious commodity and they are not likely to waste it in speculation. They naturally want books by writers who are *known* to have an appeal to the public. The new writer, who may not "come off," has a proportionately slender chance of acceptance.

So much for the situation in England. There is also America; and the writer who succeeds with the American public is, financially, as lucky as any author can be. That public is so immense that, once a writer has its ear and its heart, his sales may well run into hundreds of thousands. The royalties paid by American publishers are not, as a rule, so high as those paid in England, but books cost rather more, so your percentage is of a higher figure. There is the disadvantage that you have to pay your income tax twice over. Consider the fate of a hundred pounds earned in America by an English writer employing an agent. The American tax is 16£ per cent., and there is every indication that this will rise. The author's hundred pounds has shrunk to £83, 10S. before it reaches this country. The agent's ten per cent, reduces it to £73, 10s., and of this about a half will go in various English taxation. Thus of a hundred pounds earned in the United States £36, 15s. is the author's to spend. Perhaps this helps to explain the rush of popular English novelists to an American domicile.

Here we are now in early September; and this morning you could see hardly a dozen yards in front of you. The corn stooks were standing in the stubble, waiting for the arrival of the threshing machine, and they faded away into

a ghostly camp of little brown tents, as though the very harvest-fields were embattled—as, indeed, they are. Despite the silvery mist, the air was close, and one of my neighbours said to me: "We used to say this weather meant warm days and pilchards."

What catches of pilchards there used to be! Some of them have passed into legend, like the miraculous draught on Gennesaret where "the nets were breaking/" The old men will tell you of days like that; and in the cottages you will find on the walls photographs of crews standing in their boats literally up to the knees in the sparkling fish. My wife, who has known these parts longer than I have, can remember the days when watchers would stand on the hills and look out to sea for a sight of the shoal in commotion. When it appeared, they would rush to the quayside and all the boats would set off, to come in brimming with fish. The villagers, my neighbour told me this morning, could buy in those days a meal of fish at the quay for a penny, and they would lay down a hundredweight or so in salt for winter use. Pilchards and potatoes made the customary winter evening meal. But see how we have improved on all this! The pilchards are coming in plentifully on these Cornish coasts this week, and if you want to buy them you must go to our neighbouring town and pay sevenpence-ha'penny a pound. The villagers can't lay up a hundredweight in salt at that price, and so great quantities of the fish are being thrown back into the sea.

My neighbour who was with me this morning has a long memory. He is the only man I know who remembers the "crying of the nek"—that ancient custom, now long since dead, in which the last sheaf of the harvest was venerated. My neighbour remembers the oldest man among the harvesters sitting on a wain, holding the sheaf aloft as the men all cried: "What 'ave 'ee? What 'ave 'ee?

What 'ave 'ee?" and he would shrilly pipe: "The nek! The nek! The nek!" And then all the field would take up the cry: "The nek!"

As a seaman, this neighbour of mine has travelled a good deal in his time, but most of our travellers come back here to their native parts; and there are many in our small community of whom it is literally true to say:

*For from his cottage door in peace or strife
He ne'er went fifty miles in all his life;*

and, indeed, fifty miles is a wildly improbable aberration for some of them. Such a one was old T. R., who has just died here. For more than seventy years he had confined his life within a few miles of land, and when they laid him down to stay put for ever, his own son dug the grave and threw in the sods. The old man had dug many a grave in his time and tolled many a funeral bell, but no one sounded a bell for him. In the little tower where the bell ropes hang, with their pulling ends swatched in red, white and blue cotton, one of them is hitched up over a hook: the sign that that is the bell to be sounded should an enemy land. Because of this, old T. R. passed out in silence, save for the parson's voice rising and falling in the windy weather, and the everlasting restless murmur of the sea which sweeps up almost to the churchyard wall.

We shall miss him. He was such a "rustic moralist" as Gray's *Elegy* might have been written especially to celebrate. His sign manual is upon his native earth and will remain there for many a day. Hardly a well in this district that old T. R. did not sink at his standard charge of one pound a foot; hardly a wall that he did not build, standing back and looking with his bright blue eye from time to time to see whether it came up to his standard. "That'll see you out," or "That'll be there in a hundred years' time." Those were two of his favourite expressions, and he had no use for a job that wouldn't last.

A few years ago, when I was leaving here to go back to Town, I called him in and asked him to build a stone seat at the top of the garden, where I could sit and look over the sea. There wasn't much time for specific orders; I left it all to him. When I returned months later I was dumbfounded. It looked as though Land's End had been transplanted to my garden. The seat was of great blocks of grey granite, a wide semi-circle in which twenty people might sit, with the granite back rising like a Cornish cliff above them. Bombardment could hardly blast it out of the landscape, and it is a simple, sober fact that the slow processes of time will not disintegrate it in a thousand years.

I think old T. R. dwelt more closely than most of us within the knowledge that "a thousand ages in Thy sight are but an evening gone." He loved to work in granite, but he was a great hand, too, at felling trees. He made a clean job of it. The ash trees, incredibly old, that stood on the windy corner called Devil's Roost, all died, and I watched him clearing them away in his slow, sure, everlasting fashion. "The Devil'll have nowhere to perch now," he said when he had finished, and that was true. Building or pulling down, he wrought well.

Watching over our trees, digging our wells, building our walls, hanging our gates, burying our dead, old T. R. enjoyed the affection and respect of a great servant of the community. With death in his body, he worked long after he should have been resting, but I don't think he knew the meaning of "rest" as softer folk understand it. He understood the meaning of the rest he has now found. He was long familiar with it, and not afraid of it. I don't see his sort growing up about us to-day, but on the continuance of his sort depend the health and character of the English village, which is to say, in the long run, the health and character of the English people. If we are to survive, our villages must somehow recover their attractiveness for men like him: men of rich and varied idio-

syncrasy, finding in the village the natural, inevitable and satisfying stage for their characters.

The success of *My Son, My Son!* made it clear that I could now, if I wished, fulfil an old intention and cease to live in a great city. I was born in a city of considerable size, and all my removals had been to cities increasingly great: from Cardiff to Bradford, from Bradford to Manchester, from Manchester to London. Now I could be done with them all. When I was a child growing up in Cardiff, it was not so big a place but that you could escape quickly into the country. Half an hour's walk would bring you among fields and sparkling streams, and there were the great woods of St. Pagans, carpeted with blue-bells and anemones in the spring, threaded by a rivulet where the kingcups opened their flowers like golden dishes. Fairwater was easily to be got at, too, and in those days it was as lovely as its name. There were no tarred roads, either in town or country; one of the poignant never-to-be-forgotten smells of my childhood is a smell not often encountered now: the smell of water-drops falling on dust: drops coming out of the sky in the country, and out of the water-carts in the town. It was remarkable, on a torrid day, to be enveloped by the cool grey smell of the air that rose up with the passing of the water-cart, and delightful to see the dark drops trembling in the thick white dust, each complete and rounded and errant like a drop of quicksilver, till here and there collisions and coalescences reduced all that quivering and individual life to the condition of a mere puddle.

Along those old dusty roads out of Cardiff I walked into the country whenever I could; and I can hardly remember a time when I did not know of a country house or cottage which was "just the sort" of house I would live in some day. These desirable residences of the imagination exist

for me in Glamorgan and Devonshire, in the lovely moorland country behind Sleights and Whitby, in the Thames valley, the Lake district, in Cheshire, the Jura Mountains and Hildesheim. Even now, when I have a house on a spot which takes away the breath of visitors, I still see something from time to time which makes me want to move. In Newfoundland I was sure I had fallen into the ideal environment; and travelling recently from Wick to Perth I saw innumerable lonely houses that seemed to me all that heart could desire.

But the time came when vagrant wishes had to be tamed and corralled within a particular spot; and there were reasons why the spot should be in the Falmouth district. So I wrote to a Falmouth firm of estate agents, asking them to let me know of likely houses on their list, and laying down the necessary conditions: a good garden, direct access from the garden to the sea, and a deep-water mooring off the garden. And the property must be freehold.

You see, nothing was said about the house itself. Give me the site, I thought, and if the house that is on it does not please me, I can improve it or even have it knocked down and another built to my own design. If it came to building a house to my own design, or to anyone else's, I had no intention of handing over the results of my work to someone who had done nothing but have the luck to be born a landlord. It did not matter to me whether the lease was for ninety-nine or nine hundred and ninety-nine years; on principle I would have nothing to do with it. If for ninety-nine, I should be dead and gone, and probably my children, too; but I and my children would have nursed and improved a piece of land, spent our thought and substance in putting buildings upon it, and in due season all that would fall like a ripe plum into the hands of a family which had done nothing but sit down and watch this and other plums ripening. This seemed to me nothing but bare-faced if legalised robbery. I'll be no man's milch-cow.

I knew a man who, soon after the war started, wanted to buy a derelict acre that adjoined his own, so that it might go into cultivation. He called on the owner's agent and found there was "nothing doing." Not a foot of the owner's sacred land was ever sold: it was only leased. Well, then, he said, what about a short lease for the duration of the war? No; that couldn't be done either. "It wouldn't be good estate management, would it," the agent asked blandly, "to let that go on an agricultural lease?" The idea was that after the war someone would like to build on that acre—"a good house costing, say, £1,750." All very nice and well-thought-out, you see; and in course of time the landlord's successors would be handed back the land, plus £1,750, plus all the labour and thought of those who had been graciously permitted to squat for a number of years.

The agent no doubt was right. This would not be good estate management as he understood it; but then my friend, too, had an estate to manage, and it didn't seem to him that it would be good estate management to pour it all down another man's gullet.

I shall welcome the time when this view is universal, when a piece of land, like a pound of cake, is either sold or kept. No one has yet shown me the shadow of a moral justification for the present system of eating cake and having it, enriched with someone else's hard-earned plums.

On a March day in 1939 I travelled from London to Falmouth to see three houses which the agents recommended. They wanted to put me in a taxicab and whisk me off at once on the tour of inspection; but I asked: "What time is low tide?" If ever you want to buy a house on the sea, look at it at low tide. Then you will know the worst. At high tide you see only the best. The first house we inspected was on a tidal creek, and very lovely I know

it is there when the wooded hills slope down to sparkling water. But at low tide I found them sloping down to a mudflat with a trickle of water threading the middle of it; and that would be the prospect for a great many hours every day. So we passed on to the second, which I didn't look at seriously, for all the beauty of its five secluded acres, because it wasn't on the water at all.

As soon as I saw the third house I knew I should buy it. As a house, it was nothing at all. It was much too small even for my modest needs, and had many disadvantages apart from its littleness. It was just what I had feared I should find: a house on which much money must be spent, but on an irresistible site. Well, I thought airily, disregarding the cracklings of doom that even then were in the air, I can clear it all away and have the fun of doing what I have often promised myself: planning my own dwelling. Had I done that at once, all would have been well; but, like more exalted persons faced with graver exigencies, I wasted the six months which were all that fate permitted. So here we are now in a makeshift house, and if ever the changes are made they will be made in a different and costlier world.

But we have never regretted the decision. Even on that March afternoon, with a thin rain falling and the last of the day's light draining out of the sky, I knew that this was the place I was looking for. Northward from Falmouth the great sweep of the Carrick Roads runs for four miles, with an average width of a mile and a half. Midway up this splendid reach of water, and on its westward side, Mylor creek runs inland for a mile. At the mouth of the creek the little square-towered church stands among its ancient granite stones and dark columnar yews. My acre adjoins this churchyard, looking eastward to St. Just-in-Roseland, northward to the open water of the roads where the prospect ends in rising land adorned with a great house. Westward, the prospect is along the creek, and behind the

house, that is to the south, the land rises sharply. Eucalyptus, sycamores and tall conifers crown this rise. They on one side, a sunken lane on another, the sea in front and a tall hedge to the west, shut us into a perfect seclusion. Off the garden, at all states of the tide, there is water deep enough to moor my cutter, which draws six feet. And in the garden there is abundance of those semi-tropical shrubs that thrive in what is, a little mistakenly, called the Cornish Riviera. There is an unending whisper and rustle in dense thickets of bamboo. Mimosa is shooting up; rhododendrons and camellias flourish; and hedges of pittosporum perpetually furnish an enchanting green.

Here was a place where I hoped I should find some peace. Let me, I thought, but finish the book on which I am now working, and then I'll take a holiday while this house is changed to what it should be. After that, what books I shall be able to write here! And I finished the book on which I was working—finished it in the early months of 1940 with the world in ruins about my ears. Night after night the north-easters drove down the roads, and roared in the churchyard yews, and hammered on my window. They were the very voice of the furious dissolution of the ramshackle between-wars world, the background of the mood in which the book's last pages were written. The book had been begun long before. There was impetus enough to carry me through. But once it was finished, what more could be done? For the time being, nothing. I felt sucked dry of hope and volition. Ironically, it was at this time that I received from America the newspaper cutting I have spoken of, informing the world that I had abandoned journalism in order to devote myself to what was optimistically called "creative writing." It was so ill-timed that it made me laugh when there wasn't much to laugh at; and then it made me say that if this thing called "creative writing" was off the menu for the time being, I must try something else in the meantime. So I

began to write this book, which, Heaven knows, is not "creative."

High summer has progressed to early autumn while I have been at work on this book. The bewildered baby pigeons have accustomed themselves to their new world and are part of the domestic landscape. I have not made much progress as a "bird-man." They will come fluttering down to me when I have food in my hands, but otherwise they parade their glistening white shapes up and down the red ridge of the roof. For me, as me, they seem to have no use whatever. They say that cats do not acquire a fondness for persons, but only for places. I do not believe this; and in the neighbouring village of St. Mawes there is at this moment a case of a pigeon showing great attachment to an individual, apart altogether from the daily dinner. The custodian of the castle there is in the habit of roaring on a motor-bicycle along the quarter-mile or so of road that separates the castle from the village shops; and no sooner is he away than you will see a pigeon—one of those with pinkish feathers and ruby eyes—winging through the air. It comes abreast on his starboard beam; and there you will see them: the man on that stinking reverberating machine, which rightly is the symbol and epitome of all the swift-striking beastliness known as mechanised warfare; and, flying by his right ear, the lovely bird, man's attendant spirit of careless aery beauty. The bird keeps at the man's ear all the way along that quarter-mile; then, when the bicycle stops, it alights upon his hat. You will see him remove his hat and shake off the bird on to some wall or window-ledge, where it waits to fly once more alongside him on the return journey.

These modern machines—and the motor-bicycle is one of the least complicated of them—are the depressing

answer one must give when people talk hopefully of rebellion against tyranny springing up here and there in occupied territory. Give these oppressed people time, they say, let them feel for a little longer the ruthless scrunch of the iron heel, and they will be up in arms. Then the war will roll swiftly to its appointed end.

Alas! this is to live in a fooPs paradise. It is the old question of using spiritual means against physical force. The will to shake off oppression may burn with deep spiritual force in men's hearts; but unless that will can be physically implemented it is unavailing. There was a time when the will to rebel could swiftly be translated into the means to rebel. An English yeoman of the time of Agincourt could make weapons as good as any that could be used against him. In a shed in the garden he could make his bows from his own yew tree and tip his arrows with his own goose feathers, and no one be the wiser. A rebellious village blacksmith could quietly assemble a whole arsenal of pikes and spears; and, even when armament became more complicated, it was still not impossible to make a fair show of matching it. Rifles of a sort could be made by those who knew how; and, indeed, the rebel had his chance just as long as weapons were things that could be made by one man. But when their complication became such that a specialist here made one part and a specialist there another, and the very process of fitting the parts together became a job for another specialist, and the making and assembling had to be done in factories and workshops that could in no wise be concealed, then the private individual was finally in the grip of the monster called the State, and his last possibility of dignified self-assertion was gone for ever. Lee Tai, the Chinaman in Somerset Maugham's *East of Suez*, asks: "Why does the white man despise the yellow? Because he has invented the machine-gun. That is your superiority. We are a defenceless horde, and you can blow us into eternity."

The machine-gun is only the beginning of it. The barbarian mounted on a motor-bicycle with a machine-gun raking across the handle-bars, or in a swift tank bristling with armament, and, as if this were not enough, supported from the air by aeroplanes blasting a way for these machines at the first sight of a check: this is the sort of thing the rebel has to encounter to-day, with no means of answering in kind. Let those who expect revolt among the conquered to bring them a happy issue out of trouble think again. The days of revolt are over, short of a seizure by the rebels of vast manufacturing resources. That is not a likely thing to happen. Not until an enemy is defeated by the employment of his own weapons can the unarmed who wish him ill make their wishes effective. Then, indeed, assuming his mechanic superiority to be shattered, assuming his sprawling embrace of a reluctant continent to be contracting in withdrawal towards his centre: then the oppressed can do much to speed the unwanted guest along the road to annihilation. But let there be no mistake about it—either in England or America—the battle will be won by those who stand on their feet and fight back with the devil's own weapons. Against armed evil only one sort of war is possible, and that is a "shooting war." The very invention of this idiotic expression illustrates the delusions of many contemporary minds. Kipling long ago warned us against trying to kill Kruger with our mouths. For myself, I think trying to kill Kruger in any way was a scandal to this empire; but let Kipling's phrase stand. It holds to-day. There are too many who think it is possible to sit in softness and utter moral platitudes and thereby be, in some sort, engaging effectively in the war. It can't be done. The oppressor is willing to leave you the copyright of all your moral slogans. They don't give him any white hairs. God knows, we in England uttered enough of them and should know by now what they are worth. They are wind, expelling a blank cartridge.

The world has reached the pitch where palliatives are worse than useless: they are a hampering nuisance. They always were. Soon after this war started I received a letter from a New York organisation asking me to be a "steward" at a banquet to be held there for the purpose of raising refugee-relief funds. I replied that I could not do this because all such affairs seemed to me to be useless child's-play. There was one effective way, and one only, I said, of stopping the scandal of the homeless thousands chivvied about the world, and that was to destroy the cause of their wandering. I still think this. No one is in any doubt of what the cause is. To tinker about with pimples on a dying body does not commend itself to my common sense. And when the tinkering is done by means of a bejewelled social evening, with flashlight photographs recording the face-saving effort, it nauseates me.

Up to Munich, we had been for a long time a most platitudinous and face-saving nation. After that, the national consciousness stirred out of its long sleep. We were aware that once again an immortal hour was about to strike. There was in most English hearts a deep shame, a sense of the nation's troth betrayed. We were not willing that this sort of thing should continue, and we were aware that before long a situation would be thrust upon us in which either it must continue or we must accept the consequences of believing in something. It is easy to profess the faith when there are no lighted faggots in the offing. We knew, after Munich, that the faggots would be lighted and faith put to the test of action.

The English people's consciousness of this, and their willingness to accept all that it implied, outran by miles the thinking of the politicians. But there was nothing new in that. The time had come when we must rid ourselves of politicians and find a statesman. Politicians are all very

well so long as the people is in one of its slack backward moods, not caring much about its direction. But once the people is awake, with its intentions oriented, it has a nobility which demands more than shabby makeshift. A statesman is a man who fits like a glove the mood of the nation in one of its great self-conscious moments, so that he and it have no disparity of end or means, but act as one thing. He is the heart and the voice of a body mainly inarticulate but consciously dedicated. Such was Abraham Lincoln, the greatest statesman in this sense that the world has known; and for us, in the nick of time, between the stirrup and the ground, Winston Churchill was there.

A strange figure in many ways, a figure that had weaved a path in and out of the party ranks for more years than many could remember, and this, as it curiously happened, but fortified him in the affection and esteem of all parties. I at least am prepared to see in his political divagations a sense that parties do not matter all that much, and that a man may choose his political *locus* at any given moment in accordance with that moment's content of national need.

Be this as it may, I cannot see anywhere on the political scene to-day—nor alas ! is there yet revealed for the political scene of to-morrow—any figure comparable to Churchill's in either its intrinsic or its representative amplitude. Something of the soldier and a good deal of the sailor, something of the artist both in words and paint, something of the independent John Blunt who knows how to make for his own use, and with his own unaided hands, the things he needs, he is a shining example of the virtue of the unspecialised, humane and adaptable mind. He is an aristocrat deriving from that *stratum* of English life which, not so long ago, governed the country from the country house; and there is this to be said about government from the country house: it is at least government from a house, and

from the point of view of a house, which is better than government from the point of view of a counting-house. This last was government as conceived by the Chamberlains, father and son.

With an aristocratic background of antiquity and splendour, Churchill never developed the long bleak nose and supercilious aloofness of the aristocrat who derives all from the past and is dead at the point of contact with contemporary affairs. Indeed, it is at this point that he is most vital and alive. He has never permitted his background to become his foreground. He is a historian, and he knows that the sun of the past is nothing if it has ceased to throw a ray for the illumination of feet stumbling along the roadways of the present. He has the most rare of all human gifts: the ability to speak the private heartening racy word to one or two of the humblest, combined with the power of being, when the occasion calls for it, the voice of the people—of all people—making the affirmation which like a trumpet has sounded through many mouths—Washington's and Cromwell's, Shelley's and Whitman's and John Ball's—the everlasting Yea for life against the Nay of tyranny, which is the death of the inquiring human spirit.

It has been my lot to observe this man on many occasions and in many places. I have heard him times out of mind address great assemblies; and I have heard his voice, disembodied, but for all that pregnant and unmistakable, speaking to the shadowy sessions of the world. But I was never more struck with his consciousness of the right word to be spoken at the right moment than when I heard him address one sentence to thirty or forty men assembled in the battleship *Prince of Wales*. It was my fortune to be in the ship when she carried Mr. Churchill to his meeting with President Roosevelt. Each night after dinner a cinema film was shown. Try to see these moments as they were. The double scuttles of the ship are closed—the

inner ones black—and the curtains are drawn across them. The long mess-room is brilliantly lit. On four or five rows of chairs such officers as are not on duty are sipping their after-dinner drinks, wearing the stiff winged collars and black bows of the ceremonial evening hour. It is a whole congregation of specialists. Threading the gold lace on their cuffs are the colours that tell of their callings: the surgeons' red, the paymasters' white, the engineers' purple, the schoolmasters' hopeful blue. In front, the screen has been put up. All is warm and bright and a little sophisticated as the mess-servants of the Royal Marines, in their white jackets, move here and there. Then an imperceptible tremor, or a sudden slight cant of the room, reminds you of the reality beyond this appearance. Outside this shell of white-painted steel the long rollers of the Atlantic are racing by. Forward and to port and starboard out there the destroyers are dipping through the water, taking the white waves inboard; and above us and below us in this ship are eyes ceaselessly watching, ears fixed to telephones, a complication of instruments under everlasting regard: for this charming room is rushing forward through more than night on the Atlantic: it is rushing forward through the night of destiny, a night infested with darker dangers than any that have ever raised their filthy heads against the human spirit. These men who are sitting around you know all about it. They have seen this very room awash with blood and water; they have committed from the decks above you their dead to the sea; and just beyond these drawn curtains you may see a jagged hole torn by the *Bismarck's* shell: the one "souvenir" allowed to remain when the *Prince of Wales* was refitted for this her first commission since that bloody battle.

So they sit and wait, and at nine o'clock Mr. Churchill comes in with Sir John Dill and Sir Dudley Pound and other notables, wearing dinner-jackets, smoking pipes or cigars. Everybody rises till Mr. Churchill sinks into a

deep leather chair in the front row. He is chewing an extinct cigar. The performance at once begins.

On the night I have particularly in mind the film was *Lady Hamilton*, and I suppose I betray no secret of state when I say that Churchill did not see it with undimmed eyes. The battle of Trafalgar, the death of Nelson, the sense of great forces locked then, as now, in a wrestle for the mastery of the world, put a hush upon that small audience of sailors, hurtling on a zigzag course through the black night, like none I have ever before known for poignancy, for what might be called the carry-over of the imagined moment to the immediate experience.

When it was over, the lights went up and all stood again in a deep emotional silence. Mr. Churchill rose from his seat, but he did not merely say "Good night" and go, as he had done before. He turned to the officers standing there, and, after a long scrutinising affectionate pause, he said: "I thought this would be especially interesting to you gentlemen, many of whom have been recently engaged with the enemy in a matter of equal historic importance." Then he went; and before breaking up they stood there for a little longer than they were accustomed to stand, clearly touched to the quick by that simple sentence which had so unerringly linked them with the immortal moments of this English people.

The film *Lady Hamilton* has caused a Niagara of tears: tribute to Hollywood's skill in grafting a whole body of illusion on to a bone or two of fact. At the outset we were shown a woman wretchedly poor, dogged by misfortune, abandoned by an ungrateful country to destitution in the streets of Calais. We were not told that Lady Hamilton's husband and Nelson had, between them, endowed her with a sufficiency, if hardly with luxury, and that she sank to

the depths because of her incurable extravagance and passion for gambling. We were shown Nelson in love with a beautiful woman who looked, all through the film, about twenty years old. We were not told that, when their great affair burst out, Emma was, in all senses of the word, a loose woman well past her prime, the overblown flower of the bud that Romney had loved to paint. This does not alter the truth that, on Nelson's side at least, the affair was a *grande passion*, but it would have required more subtlety than most film-makers possess to show the woman as she was and make us still believe in Nelson's love. Never was Emma Hart's profound vulgarity more publicly exercised than when she paraded her poor doting hero round Europe like an animal in a show. A love surviving this treatment must indeed have been deep and real.

We were shown Lady Nelson as a thin-lipped shrew and prig from whom any man would be glad to escape, not as a woman whose life had known much sorrow and suffering, not the least through Nelson's acts. One would have thought, to see this film, that she, and not Emma, was the evil factor in the hero's life. Evil, indeed; and the film concealed the most evil thing of all: the way in which the Queen of Naples, using Emma's snobbery as a tool, made use of Nelson and the British fleet to cut down the people justly incensed against her villainy and her husband's imbecility.

No; I could shed no tears over *Lady Hamilton*; but there was one film shown that week aboard the *Prince of Wales* that moved me deeply. This was an English film called *Pimpernel Smith*, sufficiently mechanical and improbable in its general outline, but having its moments. Leslie Howard played Pimpernel Smith, the obscure Englishman who made it his business to rescue men and women who were in danger from Nazi blood-lust. There was a moment when he was about to cross the frontier with a young

German woman. He tells her they are going to England, and he recites the words of Rupert Brooke:

*For England's the one land I know
Where men with splendid hearts may go.*

Often as I had read and heard those words, they had not entered my head since this present war began, and coming then, spoken in Leslie Howard's lovely voice, they had, for me at any rate, an overwhelming sense of truth and fitness.

There was another moment of even deeper truth, the *finale* of the whole matter. Smith is at the frontier, at night, about to cross, when Gestapo men seize him. By a trick, he eludes them and rushes into the darkness. A shot rings out, and whether he is killed or not we do not know. We see nothing but the Gestapo brute standing with the smoking revolver in his hand, peering into an impenetrable blackness; and out of the dark comes a voice: quiet, convincing, the very voice of Doom. It says: "We shall come back. We shall all come back"; and there, I felt, in that pictured moment on a screen, was the truth of the matter. That was how it would be. Not through great conquerors, not through the political contrivances of scheming man; but through the cold implacable anger of the obscure millions speaking out of the darkness of this present night. "We shall come back." Dead or alive, "We shall ALL come back."

When the showing of that film was over, I went out and walked the quarter-deck for a few moments before turning in. The night was black. Not a glimmer showed in the great ship or in the ships of the escort. To know that they were out there racing with us through the darkness required an act of faith rather than of reason; and it was comforting. God knows, I thought, this ship is like our land: rushing through a darkness in which no gleams are yet apparent,

beset with enemies below and above and around. We can do with comrades. A glimmer of white water, flowing back in a V from the driving bows, was all the light in the inky midnight hour. A few years ago, I thought, those words of Rupert Brooke would not have moved me. Splendid when they were uttered, they had grown dim like a fine family motto that had once had meaning but now was a mockery among the stock-broking descendants of those who made it.

*England's the one land I know
Where men with splendid hearts may go.*

No; it would not have been true. I could not imagine men with splendid hearts finding much satisfaction in a country whose damnation was not that it was inefficient, failing in its elementary duty to its own sons and daughters and to the sons and daughters of men everywhere, but that, being this, it was complacent, false to its own deep instincts of decency, and decadent.

One hears: "The war has proved we were not decadent." But we were, say what you will. We were rattling morally downhill at a pace that was alarming, till Munich pulled us up like a sudden heart-shock that tells a man he is playing the fool with his health. Now he can take his choice: he can go on in decadence or he can take steps to recover. We took those steps—none too soon, but- magnificently; and standing that night with the sea howling by in the darkness I felt that Brooke's words, thank God, were true again; and true again were the words that had come at the end of the film: "We shall all come back." We had exiled so much that was so splendid. In the nfcretricious glitter of our lives we had banished into the darkness all those who had spoken words of faith and courage, all those who had seen life as something more than a matter of self-preservation and self-interest. But they were coming back, the great law-givers and liberators; and between us, I thought,

we and they will do something yet, dark though the night is. It was something to feel that we could again, without cynicism, read Rupert Brooke, who had loved England and died in Greece.

The first time I heard Churchill speak was soon after the war of 1914-1918 had broken out. He came to the St. George's Hall, in Bradford; and though I remember nothing of the speech's argument, I remember, as though I were listening to it at this moment, the last phrase: "Let us go forward and put these grave matters to the proof."

The air is dizzy to-day with argument about the shape of post-war Britain. "There'll always be an England" is a popular song in America, and a senseless song it is. Until the gods close down the show, there'll always be a biggish island off Europe's western coasts; but we can't go much further than that. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." I suppose the City man, singing the song, wants to see an England teeming with investors, and the banker wants vaults stuffed with gold, and the advertising agent wants larger and larger "spreads" devoted in the newspapers to motor-cars, deodorants and laxatives, and the wise farmer wants to see more land in use more profitably. "England, my England" is qualified in each individual mind by that possessive pronoun; and, as we "go forward and put these grave matters to the proof," the success of our efforts will depend very much on how far "England, my England" is able to become "England, our England." And the matter goes deeper than this, because, what with one invention and another, all the disparate continents and countries of the earth are now as contiguous as a row of back-to-back dwellings in a Bradford slum.

It often interests me to observe how the profoundest poets and philosophers sometimes get no nearer the truth

Out of the People. The title is taken from some words by Walt Whitman: "Everything comes out of the people, everyday people, the people as you find them and leave them; people, people, just people."

This is an example of the bad habit Whitman sometimes fell into of shouting the obvious at the top of his voice. We hardly need to be told that all that concerns humanity derives from humanity; and if everything comes out of the people—as indeed it does—then all the evil in the world as well as all the good, all the coldness and lukewarmness as well as all the faith and ardour, comes out of the people. The man who goes down to Jericho, the thieves who fall upon him, the priests and levites who pass by on the other side, the Samaritan who succours him for love of a neighbour, and the innkeeper who looks after him for a cash consideration: all these are, as Whitman puts it, "the people as you find them, and leave them; people, people, just people."

Since we are agreed—and few to-day would disagree—that there will be no lasting peace in this close-knit modern world till *all* people want to give rather than to get—since this is so, what are our future hopes?

For myself, I distrust dogmatic assertions about the future conduct of mankind. Mr. Priestley does not content himself with hope. He is convinced. "It is my conviction," he writes, "that, under the stress and challenge of war, the people have left their lethargy behind for good."

"For good" is a long shot indeed. Even if we could speak with some confidence for all who live in our day, how can we venture to predict the conduct of the unborn, living in conditions that we cannot envisage? "The stress and challenge of war" are not new. Alas I they have been all too normal a condition of human life, and if, now and then, in a recoil of disgust, mankind has addressed itself to the discovery of more excellent ways, the enlightened generations pass into the dark wings, their moment

done, and new men come upon the stage with slacker thews and flabbier sinews. All too often, giants beget pygmies. In the race and in the individual there is a tragic misalliance of Caliban and Prospero; and the most, it seems to me, that we can hope at the moment is that Prospero is now about to have a good long innings.

That will be much; that will be something into which all we have and all we are may be cast with energy and enthusiasm. We shall not be helped in the task by notions about the divinity of the people. That will get in our way; for both God and the Devil are made by man in his own image. We shall forget this at our peril. To quote the words of a character in a recent novel: "Three things are immortal: good and evil and the hope in men's hearts that evil would be overcome by good. There would always be the battle, with the promise of unachievable victory swaying this way in one generation, and in another generation that way." If we can do something to assure that our generation is a mounting and not descending wave in the vast undulation of life towards its hidden destiny, we shall have a task of nobility enough. We need not—indeed we cannot—concern ourselves with the question whether the wave will mount "for good." Perhaps, at best, we shall be granted a glimpse of a far-off land before the hungry generations tread us down.

The more I look at that parable of the Good Samaritan the more it seems to me the greatest of all the parables. Such tremendous content in so few words, such widely differentiated *dramatis personae*. Speaking broadly, all the divisions of mankind are here held up to our regard: the poor bruised victims of other people's greed and aggression; the men of active evil in intent and deed; the sanctimonious appeasers and condoners of wickedness; the men of goodwill and active good deed; the men who are ready to do

the right thing efficiently enough if there's something to be made out of it.

There, broadly, you have all men: all the "people as you find them and leave them"; and as they were when this parable was first uttered, so they are to-day, and so they are likely to remain for many a year to come.

Humanity, still compact of these heterogeneous and internecine parts, is at a cross-road of destiny. There are those who tell us that if now a wrong step is taken humanity is finally doomed. I do not believe this. Terrible as our present predicament is, we are apt, as all men in like case have been apt, to magnify our own importance and the importance of our moment, which is no more than one wink of a signal-lamp flashing across the dark sea of cosmic time. There will be many winks before the final message is spelled out, if indeed there is any final message. If we were to take the wrong turning now we should plunge into a dark age of unpredictable duration; but this is another matter from the final doom of humanity. There have been dark ages before; and slowly, painfully, the human Sisyphus has picked himself up and begun once more the everlasting task of rolling his grievous burden to the summits. So, should the worst happen, it would be again.

But should the desires of all of us be gratified and the best happen, what then? Is it the golden age? There is not much reason to suppose so. A good deal, we hope, may then be done; but, while we work valiantly, as work indeed we must if we are to be worth the name of men, let us not fall into the folly of taking a new world for granted. It is not as though England, or any other land, will henceforth be able to make exclusive decisions. For good or ill, the world is now a unit. No great endowment of wisdom is necessary to show us that it will be a world full of rancours that will die hard. I do not see any magic wand waving over the Greeks to wipe from their hearts the bitterness they feel towards the ravishers of their land. The

blood of millions of murdered Chinese will cry out of the soil, and at whatever banquets Japan may enjoy it will be there, a siege of ghosts. Russian and German hearts are not likely to beat in delighted concord; and, look where you will, there are the elements of an emotional seething that will not quickly die down to a halcyon international sea.

It would be folly to overlook these elements of the situation; folly also to shrink because of them from the immense task that, at the best, will confront humanity. If the blood-letting ends, the sweat and tears at all events will not be done with when we lay down our arms.

It is strange that it should be necessary to say these things, but stranger still to find so many who expect to pass, almost automatically, into an earthly paradise. Each man has his panacea, his plan, his dictionary of the new tongue, his survey of the new Jerusalem. Fair towns and clean streets, comely children and labour-saving houses, an educated community that has laughed out of existence cheap newspapers and cheap films, perhaps even an international language and an international comity: having these (and, alas! these will not be easy to get), have we not everything?

Summing all this up, it would mean the abolition of poverty, the education of the people in the true meaning of that word, and the breakdown of international barriers. Would these things guarantee to humanity an unbroken sequence of upward steps, an end of the lapses and relapses that have plagued and tortured men and women in the past?

I do not think so. It is not my observation that feuds and bitterness are less frequent among the educated than among the uneducated; indeed, it is upon the educated we call when we wish to stir the brews of hate through propaganda or what not, or when we need new devilries of destruction. And if poverty is gone, what then? Are the happy men, the men of goodwill, found among the rich? Sometimes

—perhaps as often as among the poor; but that has nothing to do with their riches. And what will an international comity do? Will it guarantee an end of war, which is the thing we all think of as the main reason for its existence? Not necessarily, for wars are not the result only of clashes between nations. Robespierre and Cromwell and Lincoln are there to warn you off that delusion. There have been all sorts of reasons for wars. They have been fought for religion and for markets, for touchy pride and for noble ideas like liberty and equality and union. Construct what sort of international society you like: man has that in him which is capable of tearing it down in ruin.

When Bunyan in *The Holy War* considered the state of the city of Mansoul, he was aware of these destructive seeds lodged behind the fair appearance of human relationships. He pictured Mansoul captured by Emmanuel the Son of God. What now? Surely all is well?

When the town of Mansoul had thus far rid themselves of their enemies and the troublers of their peace, a strict commandment was given out that yet my Lord Willbewell should search for and do his best to apprehend what Diabolonians were yet alive in Mansoul. . . . He also apprehended Carnal-sense and put him in hold; but how it came about I cannot tell, but he broke prison and made his escape; yea, and the bold villain will not yet quit the town, and lurks in the Diabolonian dens at days and haunts like a ghost honest men's houses at nights.

So, to Bunyan, it was, even after Emmanuel had captured Mansoul: the "bold villain" who works man so much ill was yet unexorcised and would not quit the town.

It is impossible to conceive any condition of society without leaders. Ambition will urge men to leadership, which is power; and power, often enough to cause trouble, will corrupt, and corruption will spread. We may expect to see all these things, as well as much beauty, much nobility, continue to come out of the people; and we may not expect, within any span of time that has meaning for

finite beings, that man will achieve more than a qualified good or, conversely, a modified evil. Emmanuel and Carnal-sense, Prospero and Caliban, will see to that between them.

And yet ...

It would be a poor life if we never played a game without the certainty of success, never waged a fight unless we knew we should win it. I was talking to a neighbour last night, and the question of immortality came up. She could not understand, she said, how anyone who did not believe in life after death should want to live a good life here. But why not? If the normal span of life were believed to be a hundred years, should I want to play the devil because I myself believed it to be only ninety-nine? Or does an artist put less than his best into a job, even though he have no assurance that it will survive with the immortal? And, indeed, as a matter of common pragmatism, observation, it is not a fact that those who believe their souls will survive make a worthier showing here below than those who feel no such assurance.

It is a fortunate tendency of the human spirit that it can dedicate itself to great enterprises for no other reason than that they are great. It does not need even the assurance that they will be successful. "Never doubting clouds will break," sings Browning; but even this is not an element in the battle when it is being waged by the noblest spirits. The clouds may or may not break. We cannot be certain. We know they *ought to be broken*, whether we can break them or not; and that is enough. We can do no more than "go forward and put these grave matters to the proof."

Is this cold comfort? At all events it is the elixir that has warmed and fortified the choicest of our kind. To fight because we must, whether we shall win or lose; to fight indeed knowing that some of the battles *must* be lost:

to this alone can we dedicate ourselves. To imagine that out of the foul morass in which humanity is now plunged the lilies of a lovelier life will promptly and conveniently spring is to deceive ourselves.

There will always be the battle. From the day when the first witch-doctor grubbed among the roots of the earth and gathered its herbs, up to this moment of great laboratories and sanatoria and apparatus of an inconceivable delicacy, medicine has waged its war, which, in a real and tragic sense, is and always must be a losing war. For the doctor's war is against disease, and disease is fought because it brings us to death, yet in the end death claims us all. The doctor can do no more than here and there defeat one of death's allies, here and there for a time hold another at bay; but "one go down another come up" is the order on that battlefield; and so it will be on the battlefield that eternally confronts the human spirit. No elysium, no grand "new order" is in sight. If all the doctors of the world laid down their arms to-morrow, black wave after wave of pestilence would scourge mankind; but, as it is, an uneasy balance is held. That uneasy balance is what prevails also in the moral affairs of men. To preserve even that, the fight must be endless. All those qualities that mean the death of the spirit—greed, envy and fear—are lurking even in our greatest moments, ready to disrupt and destroy.

The soul that is unwilling both to expect and to endure the undulations of fortune, but looks only for steady and inevitable progression to a goal, is a danger to such moderate possibilities of improvement as we possess. If man, as I think, is a being not perfectible within any distance of time that we may profitably contemplate, then the preachers of Utopia do us disservice, attracting to illusory and impracticable ends the enterprise and energy demanded by our daily task of putting one foot in front of another. The good, it is said, is the enemy of the best, but the best which is

across ten fields of muddy loam may easily be the enemy of the good which takes us, resolved but ankle-deep, through each successive furrow. After the last war there was a widespread belief, founded in no reason that investigation could disclose, that mankind might now go ahead without any more of those major shocks that had till then plagued humanity. It was the gradual undermining of this belief, as the nature of man emerged once more, substantially unchanged, into the light of social and political events, which brought about a mood of indifference in some and despair in others in which duties were neglected and the Lotus-eaters' song was heard in the land:

*Let us alone. What pleasure can we have
To war with evil? Is there any peace
In ever climbing up the climbing wave?*

When Utopia is seen to be a mirage, it is bitter to have to dig in the sand for water; but we must do it or die. We must expect no continuing city and count ourselves fortunate if the seven-league boots of dreamers are, in fact, good for foot-slogging along the common road. If what we daily fight for can never know permanence, if time crumbles again and again the habitations in which our ideas are embodied, that is something which is in the nature of the case and which our minds must accept.

*Truth fails not; but her outward forms that bear
The longest date do melt like frosty rime
That in the morning whitened hill and plain
And is no more; drop like the tower sublime
Of yesterday which royally did wear
His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain
Some casual shout that broke the silent air,
Or the unimaginable touch of time.*

Towers sublime do not endure. The everlasting job is to underpin them as long as we may, and build again according to the best that is in us when time or our own folly brings them down.

In a novel called *Fame Is The Spur* I tried to bring to a crux in the relationships of one small group of people the ideas I have here been trying to express. A woman named Pen Muff, the blinded wife of a South Wales miners' leader, is told by her daughter Alice that she'll never bring children into this world "because the world is not worthy." To that Pen replies: "It's a coward's decision. Why, God love us, Alice, the world has been pretty tough on me. And if anyone said to me: 'D'you want it all over again, Pen Muff, just in the way you've had it, blindness and all?' why, I'd say: 'Ay, and again after that, as often as you like/ It's not a perfect world for children that matters, or that you'll ever get: it's children to work for a perfect world. No, no, Alice, believe me, there's going to be no harps and wings here below. By heck there's not. But when we stop working for 'em, God help us." .

This creature man being what he is, blessed with the strength and cursed with the blindness of Samson, that is his future as I see it. And to me it seems an adventure not without nobility to address ourselves thus consciously to bearing what Arnold Bennett has called the exquisite burden of life.

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