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THE LONDON ROUNDAABOUT

By
JAN & CORA GORDON

Illustrated by the Authors

LONDON
GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
BOMBAY & SYDNEY

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TO
STEPHEN GRAHAM
IN WHOM LIVES A SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP
AS BROAD AS HIS GENIUS FOR
VAGABONDAGE

PREFACE

IN a brilliant essay Mr H. G. Wells refers to a peculiar but quite comprehensible journalistic kind of misstatement, that a famous scientist was reported to have split a molecule in two with a knife. He pointed out that the feat must be one for ever impossible, because the two objects lie in quite different and mutually non-interchangeable worlds; that in the world of knives there could be no perceptible molecules, while in the world of molecules the knife itself would be no more than a swarm of molecules. Seen from the outside the knife is solid enough; seen with the molecular eye it is no more than a clustering agglomeration.

The writer about London finds himself in a similar fix, hovering between two kinds of reality, the exterior and corporate London, an apparently homogeneous reality, and the tumultuous molecular London, a swarming agglomerate.

The task is further complicated by the fact that inevitably the writer himself is bound to be one of the mere molecular units of the grand swarm. Thus one arrives at the almost impossible situation of a molecule trying to describe the knife; or thereabouts.

So we hasten to assure our readers that this is not an attempt to capture any concrete image of that greater, external London. It is, as its title implies, no more than a roundabout trip, like a trip round one of those whirlpools of traffic in the greater centres of London circulation, where painted arrows on the asphalt for ever swing your bus in a predetermined direction.

Sitting on the top of such a roundabouted bus, one may catch glimpses of the four quarters of London, glimpses hurried and unsatisfying, yet all containing something of the peculiar wholeness that makes up London from the molecular point of view.

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And still, although every passenger on the top of that bus is roundabouted past the same objects of the street, each will be, in fact, making an entirely different trip. Even though it may be no more than a circumviation of Trafalgar Square, no two bus-top Ulysses will be making the same journey, though they all start from the same old Strand and go out by the same old St Martin's Lane. For no two travellers will have concentrated on just the same objects, nor will any passenger have thoughts about those objects in any way similar to each other.

So we come to this task bringing our individual point of view. Having lived abroad for nearly twenty years, we may almost have gained a bifocal outlook. Being English, we offer self-criticism without an accusation of foreign prejudice; but, having become acclimatized to foreign lands and customs, we may be able to look at our native ways with eyes not totally veiled by habit.

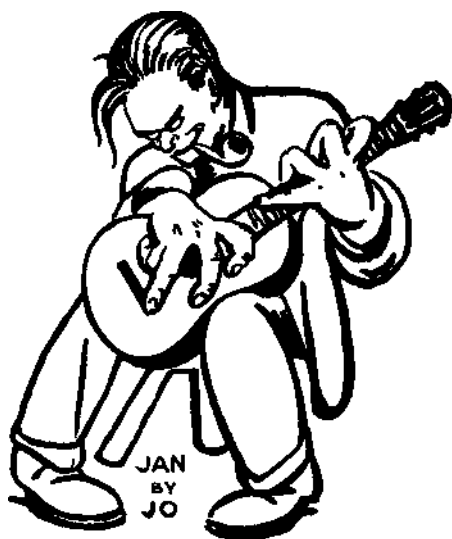
We may also suggest that self-criticism is almost always more accurate than self-praise. This fact will easily be granted with regard to individuals; nobody can be more generally offensive than the self-gratulatory man. Yet what we detest in individuals we complacently enjoy as nations. More and more loudly the nations of the world are blatantly busy in the hardly graceful task of slapping their own backs. The spectacle is not pleasant, even when it is called propaganda.

Although criticism is often resented, as if it were treachery, yet amid this world-wave of national self-satisfaction some Englishmen have retained enough sanity to repudiate a complete complacency over what is clearly a very imperfect and quite unsatisfactory state of affairs. That this spirit of self-criticism is, on the whole, an English characteristic should, to the self-gratulators, be a subject of satisfaction, rather than, as it now seems to be, one for resentment. It proves that many Englishmen have retained their sense of values.

Some reviewers suggested that in our last book, *Three Lands on Three Wheels*, we had not got the best out of England* Humbly we may suggest that it is not the Englishman's duty to get 'the best' out of his own land. His job should be to see himself from a critical point of view, and to leave to

perspicacious visitors the cataloguing of his virtues. For, strange as it may seem, we have a conviction that eventually what is nice and decent for individuals will also prove to be nice and decent for nations. Unluckily that day seems a long way off. Nevertheless, some general national modesty would be a great relief in this too be-propaganda'd world.

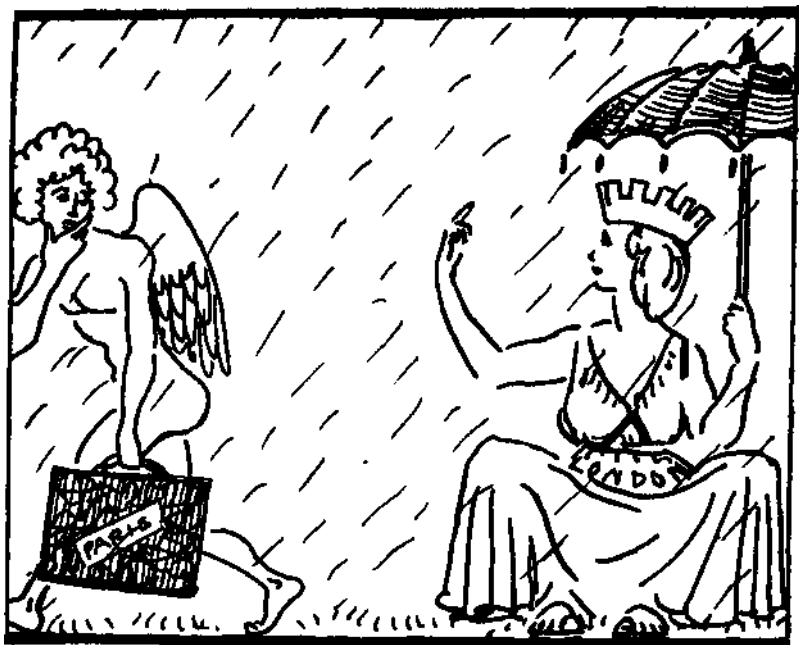
J. G.
G. G.



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EXODUS



CHAPTER I

THE STOLEN SPRING-TIME

POLAND, they say, enjoys six seasons each year; London has but three. For 'spring' is in London a word misused by poets, being actually a delusion, like the promissory note of a bankrupt. It is a period in which winter may change to summer, but much as a clumsy illustrator shades with a pen black winter and light summer alternating in ever-narrowing strokes, although interrupted here and there by a clumsy, thick pen-dash of belated winter.

**Change cloth nor clout
Till May be out**

is surely the most truthful expression of London's spring in English poetry.

But Paris, most unfairly, has two springs. It seems almost as if the Clerk of the Weather said to himself, "Dismal,

serious old London doesn't know what to do with a decent spring. It has no apparatus that allows people to appreciate a good spring. The parks are essentially summer parks—one can't lie on the grass in the spring; the restaurants and pubs are winter resorts, often made possible only by the glitter of mirrors and glamour of electric lights; the streets are humdrum and hardly impressive shopping streets. . . . No, spring would be wasted in London. But Paris has its gravelled gardens, its open-air *cafés*, its broad bench and tree-set *boulevards*, its wide pavements designed for loitering, its river traffic. . . . Paris, indeed, is built to appreciate the pleasure of spring. So why not remove spring from the place where it cannot be properly valued to where it can . . . ? "

Therefore, if you wish to enjoy London's lost spring, run across to Paris somewhere between the last week in February and the last week in March.

How does one know that it is London's missing spring? Merely by the look of it.

The pale sun, the tender blue of the sky, the pleasant combination of warmth on the one side and a thin damp chill on the other, all stamp the season as exactly the kind of spring that London would have if it had any spring at all. Not a bit like the real Parisian spring, that comes late in the year. There's little doubt about it: London's lost spring has been priggish by Paris.

This stolen spring is a most disturbing season. Bursting thus violently into the succession of grey and uninspiring days that generally marks the childhood of the year, it seems like a baby's smiles that interrupt a paroxysm of tears, and tempts one to desert normality much as the elfin heroine of seventeen tempts the amorous business man to desert his too-complacent wife. Still, although the amorous merchant may sit at his desk, with letters unsigned, dreaming of romantic impossibilities, and yet at last goes home soberly to his family-filled villa, so we also may sit at the *cqfi* terrace planning strange adventures, yet return in the end to the workaday studio, where we sit down to type another article or rough out another drawing.

Nevertheless, on this particular morning of false **February** spring we did sit warmly out of doors at a *caff* terrace, sipping our *cafi-au-lait* and making plans for an **adventure** different from any adventure we had hitherto undertaken. This was to be an adventure tinged with some risk and sacrifice, no less an adventure than the return to live in London. We were to make an attempt at genuine English respectability, or at least, shall we say, a semi-respectability. Complete respectability costs too much in both cash **and** trouble.

Item one: we were to give up Paris and all this. **Item** two: we should be giving up liberty. Item three: we should be giving up that simple, easy epicureanism which almost the poorest Frenchman can enjoy. Item four: we should be giving up our spacious studio rented at forty pounds a year. Item five: we should be giving up some of the faint nimbus of romance that often enhaloes the absent. Item six: we should be giving up the brightness, both of wit and of atmosphere, which lends Paris so peculiar a sparkle.

Is not that enough to sacrifice in one go: spectacle, liberty, palate, space, halo, and sparkle? And to gain what?

It must be instinctive in everyday man to tot up his losses before he estimates his possible gains. Perhaps this is because, in many of such personal accountancies, the gains may be rather like the invisible imports that play so mysterious a note in our 'Balance of Trade' reports. For us the urge homeward consisted almost wholly of such invisible imports. We could not hope to find in London any of the things listed above either of the quality or at the price available in Paris. One might almost say that Paris was still offering us a prolongation of our youth. Yet here we were deliberately turning our backs and choosing a London middle age.



CHAPTER II

AUTOBIOGRAPHY FROM A LOFT

A DUTCHMAN, intelligent, witty, sympathetic yet not sentimental, Dr Renier, author of an excellent book called *The English: are they Human?* is intrigued that the over-sentimental, animal-loving Englishman should continually express a morbid desire to have enough room in which to swing a cat. What strange, atavistic tendency, he asks, has made the Englishman envisage the apparently brutal proceeding of seizing an unoffending domestic pet by the tail **and** of swinging it round in order to gauge a room by the whirling periphery of its whiskers?

Kipling, a typical Englishman, has explained satisfactorily why every male man has a strong temptation to kick *at* a **cat**, **but** the mere kicking at a cat is an impulsive action. It is usually harmless, for the kicked cat fears the boot, and anything more difficult than the kicking of a once-kicked cat can hardly be devised. But to swing a cat is an act of

deliberate brutality. It hints, Dr Renier suggests, at a certain buried sadism in the English character.

Dr Renier is misled, as, indeed, are most Englishmen who employ the phrase. The cat is no living cat, but a nine-tailed cat.

He who is criticizing a lack of space thus is not really employing a slightly absurd and sadistic image, but is mentally usurping one of the functions of the public executioner. He is using the good old phrase of the Navy in Nelson's day, and the domestic cat may promenade the narrowest of modern flats untroubled and unswung.

However, in our Paris studio, rented for forty pounds a year, you might well have swung all the cats you wanted. You might even have swung boa-constrictors at will, so much space did we hire for that modest sum.

Our Parisian home was, it is true, almost devoid of every elegance or convenience. It was a single room, not unlike a huge typewriter-case, and at the back was a big gallery, reached by a flight of wooden interior stairs. We had no gas, no water, and only recently had been able to get in the electric light. Yet here for twenty odd years we had contrived to be content.

Earlier in history it had been the stables of the old Parisian omnibus company; no more than the gallery and a parquet floor were needed to transform it from a lodging-place for horses to the home of an artist. Yet, starkly simple though it might be, we felt our impending regrets. Its very simplicity had taught us simplicity, and here we had lived the simple life so long and with so much pleasure that we should hardly be tempted to live in any other way.

Twenty years of even the most simple existence bring accumulations. Jo had dashed over to London, and in a hurried week's scamper had found a new lodging, at three times the price for not so much room. Now we had to face the definite problem of upheaval.

In twenty years we had made this bare box something of a work of art. Serbian or Albanian rugs covered the divans or hung on the walls; huge pieces of pottery, dishes from

Seville or Granada, walnut oil jars from the South of France, a green glass carboy, like an immense bubble about to burst, a yellow Chinese jar that we had once used as a decorative substitute for a ginger cat—all these had to find new places in the new home.

But we would not have twenty years in which to shape the new place; we could not fit ourselves by gentle degrees, trial and error, until it grew just right. This time we should have to think everything out beforehand; we had to see our new place in the mind's eye, or at least Jo must, since I had not yet seen the place at all.

Therefore her chief preoccupation was not what should we transport to London, but what should we discard.

In one corner of the studio was an alcove, and over the alcove was a small loft. What that loft might contain gave me qualms of dismay. In one matter Jo and I are temperamentally opposed: she is a hoarder, I am a chucker. Like the White Knight, she will collect anything, murmuring to herself, "It may come in useful some day." Clearly in such a case there must be a working agreement.

We had fixed things thus: if I got exasperated with a thing and threw it into the ash-bin Jo was to leave it undisturbed, but if she could first smuggle it into the loft I was not to touch it. We won't say that the agreement was always scrupulously observed. "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds," says Emerson. Should Jo think I had been too hasty she might rescue my castaway and transfer it to the loft. But I, on the other hand, had never dared to violate the loft. Is there not a Spanish proverb that says, "If your wife tells you to jump off the roof, pray God it's a low one"?

Now Jo would be forced to review her magpie collection, and the excuse "It may be useful some day" would no longer wash; but to think of emptying that loft, to disturb the roots of twenty years, merely in answer to an almost subconscious call from one's native land!

On the emptying of that loft what strange souvenirs came once more into the light of day! Xavier de Maistre wrote his little masterpiece *Voyage autour de ma chambre*, and left

behind him a model for every young and precious writer who finds himself devoid of ideas. How many since then have not started off on trips round their rooms? So also we might start off on a tour of our loft, and lofts are many times more interesting than the rest of the house put together.

Out of our loft came tumbling not mere objects, but dusty souvenirs: a pair of skates, a fencing mask, an old battered trunk, a large ruined plate of zinc, a broken sketch-box, some planks smeared with large brown stains, a string of grotesque beads made of painted walnuts, a broken acetylene lamp, a canvas tent-bag, a pair of donkey panniers, all of which should have come in useful some day, but had not. Yet each object represented a different stage in our lives, mute illustrations to so many chapters of development.

The fencing mask, for instance. That represented Jo's adolescence, the time when fathers were saying that they would rather see their girls dead than riding bicycles, the time when Miss Marie Corelli set the dinner-tables of England talking and the Prince of Wales set them whispering, the period just before the grand transition began, when ten miles an hour was a spanking pace and when the favourite motto written in girlish albums was

Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever.

Girls were not encouraged to ride bicycles, but they might fence, in spite of the fact that it did, rather indiscreetly, expose the leg. But fencing was good for the figure, and in those days figures counted. Ladies were geometrical not psychological problems; they were contours without complexes.

Later the fencing lessons had come in really useful. Walking injudiciously one night along a solitary *boulevard* near the Seine, Jo was intercepted by a drunkard in evening dress. Dancing about, he implored her in amorous accents to stop and improve the hour, which certainly was not shining. In vain Jo tried to dodge him; he persisted in blocking her way. Suddenly a gust of rage, heritage from an irascible father, flared up. She clenched her fist, and with

a fencing lunge landed a straight right slap in the target of his shirt-front. Most girls strike ineffective blows because, instinctively, they draw back the shoulder at the moment of hitting, but Jo laid the full weight of her body behind the clenched fist. With a yell of " *Quoi done ?* " the drunkard sprawled backward into the muddy gutter.

That is one of the drawbacks of Paris, no respect for women, you may be tempted to remark severely. Not only of Paris, though. Once we were lodging near Fitzroy Square, and whenever she had to go out alone of an evening Jo used to make a little private bet with herself whether she could get from one end of Tottenham Court Road to the other without being accosted. And there too the fencing came in useful; for one rainy night she could rid herself of an importunate follower only by plunging her whole open umbrella decisively into the pit of his stomach.

" *Will you leave me alone?* " she exclaimed.

He did.

The foils had long been made useful as pokers for the stove, but the mask still remained, hoping to be useful some day, so long preserved by its mere uselessness. Yet now, thinking it over, why didn't we use it as a salad-strainer? *Vesprit de Vescalier* the French call such an idea, that comes after the occasion for it has passed.

.

The battered trunk had been my constant companion since I left school. It accompanied me to the mining college in Cornwall and to my first and only job as a mining engineer in the Malay. Probably if we burrowed under its superimposed labels somewhere we could find the remains of a P. and O. stick-on, "Not Wanted on Voyage," underneath the strata, like the Neolithic layer under the site of Troy Town.

That trunk illustrates the strange tricks of chance that rule our fates. Why take up engineering, and, having once taken it up, why did I drop it so abruptly? I took it up, perhaps, because of a love of drawing and of the sweet logic of mechanisms. But principally because I liked, and still like,

the smell of engines. Unconsciously I started life staking my whole future career on my nose.

But I did not follow my nose far. My parents, seeking for safety and pensions, diverted me from mechanical engineering towards Cooper's Hill. Another diversion landed me at the School of Mines, the last job I should ever have dreamed about.

My first expedition underground was almost the last. The students used a little old mine worked by a few Cornishmen on shares. The haulage was no more than a whim and bucket, a primitive windlass towed round by a horse which had become cross-legged from always walking in a narrow circle. Dressed in white rough working clothes, with hob-nail boots and a bowler hat of resin-hardened felt, a homely helmet, with a tallow candle stuck in a lump of clay, we had to climb down six or eight hundred feet into the guts of the earth by ladders with rungs of squared and rusty iron that had been worn at the edges sharp enough to gash the hands if we were not careful.

There, deep underground, in a smell of mud, rotting wood, sewage, and tallow candles, peering about in the dim-lit darkness, we played at mine-surveying, pretended to distinguish rich lode from valueless rock when all looked mere mud-smeared stone, and did our best to smash one another's thumbs hammering at the ends of steel drills. What strange tuitions our parents pay for!

As fag to the surveying party I was told to take a candle into the distant * end.' Ignorant of the first rule underground—" Watch your feet and let the hat look after your head"—I went along, eyes up, conscious that Cornish mine galleries had not been made for young six-footers. A small shaft lay open in the floor of the level. Through it I stepped.

Under normal circumstances and in daylight I should be quite incapable of dropping through a trap, catching at a cross-bar below, arresting my whole weight (thirteen stone) by the convulsive clutch of one hand, and swinging to safety. But unconsciously and in pitch darkness I succeeded. Between stepping into the air and clutching the beam there

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seemed to be no interval for thought. Swinging astonished in the blackness, I heard the hard and resonant hat marking the fall that my body might have taken, to land at last with a hollow thud on a pile of broken rock sixty feet below.

Subsequently I have reflected that this first unlucky introduction may have done something to prejudice my subconscious self against mining. For I can *now* realize that from that moment I repulsed any real interest in mining. My certificates, which guaranteed me thoroughly competent and of exceptional ability, were complete frauds. Of that quality, most essential for the mining engineer, the capacity to dominate men in the mass, I had hardly a spark. In subsequent years I may have become to some extent captain of my own soul, but nature never designed me to be even lance-corporal of anyone else's.

Luck again. I might have become a fairly decent mechanical engineer, but at mining I was a complete failure. Yet how lucky it is to realize in time when one is destined for failure. The trunk which took me out to the Malay in less than two years followed me back to England. Afterwards, covered with a rug, it had to serve as a seat in my first Bohemian lodgings, unfurnished, at three shillings a week, in Chelsea.

.

The planks, stained curiously in brown patches, twice useful, now had long been waiting another period of utility. Actually they had composed the first picture packing-case we ever used.

In retrospect not the final success but the early years of struggle on the lower slopes of Parnassus recur to the memory with a pleasing flavour. When Jo and I plunged into marriage a portrait commission for fifteen pounds formed the basis of our domestic calculations. So horrified was my father-in-law that he promptly acted in the best Victorian traditions, and at once commended Jo in the future to the care of the Deity, vice himself resigned. In the full flush of this doubly romantic event, an artistic wedding and a parental interdiction, our first exhibition of pictures took place.

It was not, properly speaking, an attack on the portals of Fame, but a deliberate and feminine assault on **the pockets** of the public. I say this in no spirit of Adam and Eve, **but** I should never have had the sense to exploit the end of the honeymoon thus. For the assault was directed on Jo's native place (her father having moved), and it reckoned on the fact that sentiment in such matters runs higher in favour of the feminine half of a newly married couple.

An old friend of her family, a land agent, lent us an empty shop for a week, and in the intervals between bride's lunches and bridal dinners we got our premises ready for the grand opening.

Our actions excited at first a lot of comment and even anxiety in local commercial circles. " Was it possible," the gossips asked one another, " that Miss Coora, or Mrs Gordon rather, and her young husband were going to open shop? " They trembled at the thought of such unfair competition, for the gentlefolk would naturally draw the gentry. They wondered where the blow would fall, and what commodity we were choosing. When they learned by devious ways that it was only Art they sighed in relief, and on the penultimate day of the show the butcher himself, in ceremonial clothes, with red face atop, and his wife in stiff Sunday satin, dared to look in on us.

He removed his hat, exhaled loudly, and, after having apologized for his intrusion, added:

" Ah tho't Ah'd get a little souveneer of Miss Coora theer if it was about a poond."

Luckily, previous to taking so temerarious a step, the butcher had canvassed the opinions of his customers. " Would it be thought presumptuous? " So we had been warned.

There was little in the show to please an English butcher, for Jo's pre-War designs were exotic and mostly of semi-nude dancers sporting in arabesques of scarves and counter-curves of cats. A realistic sketch was hurriedly found in the discard. It consisted of little more than a turnip-field and a **gate**, but the introduction of a girl with a basket turned it into a

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* figure piece.' Indeed, so well did the butcher's presumed taste agree with that of the general public that several visitors had to be shooed off with some tact.

As the show neared its finish we began to wonder whether we had not overestimated the butcher's pluck. On his appearance, however, he was at once led to his picture, approved of it, paid his ' poond,' cast troubled eyes at the exotic dancers, and withdrew with the satisfaction of a bold deed happily accomplished.

Our raid was not, in truth, so very buccaneering, although to many people a picture exhibition given by a friend seems little better than an act of artistic high way manship. Here at least the strain on our friends' purses was modest, for our pictures were small, and our prices to match. One or two larger things (hence the picture case) gave a certain air of authority to the smaller sketches. There was, for instance, one still-life which contained about ten pounds of potatoes all elaborately painted in detail before they degenerated from art to the casserole. This excited so much interest that we thought it sold a dozen times. A portrait of Jo executed by myself in the full glamour of our engagement delighted one old lady, a friend of Jo's dead mother. She fluttered about it for so long that our hearts beat high. The sale would have meant six months of tranquillity. But she finally decided not to buy, " because she had no one to leave it to."

This post-obit interest in art is an obstacle that an artist meets quite frequently. Many a promising sale has thus halted at the brink of the grave. And we, young idiots that we were, never thought of suggesting that she might leave it back to us.

Yet although we mulcted the town discreetly we returned to Paris well satisfied with Jo's experiment, and recompensed enough to show her repudiating father that the job he so cursorily confided to the Deity was, apparently, in capable hands.

We were returning to strange lodgings. These were in the attics of an old and lovely *pavilion* standing at the back of a courtyard garden. One of our rooms was a tunnel, forty

feet long, fourteen feet wide, and between six and seven feet high. Rumour said that in this *pavilion*, then in convent grounds, Louise de la Vallière had lodged before taking the veil at the Val de Grace, now across the street. When the house had been divided into mere flats the architects simply cut the huge ballroom into slices, as though it were a sandwich. We had the roof.

In it, although I had been studying art for something under eighteen months, we started an etching school, which was so far successful that one year, although I got all my pupils into the Salon, I myself, the teacher, was rejected.

These soiled planks set on trestles had served as a big table for the pupils. Thus they had got stained with grounds, varnishes, and printing inks. Waiting for another bout of usefulness, they had lingered for ten years up there in the loft, but must now be discarded to become the prey of the *chiffonniers*.

The broken sketch-box might have come in useful; it might have been used as firewood, or it might have been repaired. Actually it fell between the two stools; it seemed just too good to destroy, but needed just too much labour to repair. So it too had waited in that purgatory of possible things, the loft, and was now reappearing to remind us of our first travel experience after marriage.

Even as art students we had little money, but a great desire for strange adventures and foreign parts. "Still," said we, "if we must be somewhere, why not be somewhere else? Living *there* might cost less than it does *here*, and the difference would pay for the journey."

We spread out the map of Brittany, shut our eyes, and jabbed in a pin. . . . Camaret—on Finisterre—a pleasant name. London—Plymouth—Brest. It seemed we must take the ferry for two hours, then drive in a ramshackle wagonette called by courtesy *la diligence*.

How it rained! Mutual soaking made mutual sympathy, and our fellow-passengers answered our questions with friendly interest. . . . "How much was the hotel? . . . Five

francs a day? . . . Was there nothing cheaper? " They said we could try Madame Barbu's *bistro* in the Place, and what was monsieur's trade? Painting? *Bon! Chacun son metier**

The *bistro* front was whitewashed. It looked as if built over a bridge, for the entrances were two semicircular tunnels. Waterproof fishermen were lurching in from the rain. We crept after them into a room sombre and earthy as a cave. Dimly we could make out men grouped at a bar, behind which glimmered a spotless white Breton cap. In the gloom we distinguished the wholesome, wrinkled features of a cheery old woman.

" Do you let rooms? " we asked.

She looked at us grudgingly, and replied:

" The hotel is your mark. I accommodate fishermen only. They all sleep in one room."

" How about some lunch? It's so nice and warm here," we pleaded.

" You'll get rough food, but you are welcome. Take off those dripping coats. Til lend you some clouts while we dry 'em. . . . Quick. Ivonne, show them into the *salle*"

The *salle* had low windows, a sanded floor, and a black staircase which led to the fishermen's communal bedroom. Glad in scratchy Breton homespun, we ate shrimps, radishes, the *pdti* of the house, some tiny red crabs, fresh mackerel perfectly grilled, Brie cheese, grapes, and a threepenny bottle of wine. A delicious meal; even the wine.

Madame Barbu stumped in after each course with the expression of a chicken which has found something it is not quite sure of, an expression slowly modified by our heartfelt compliments. The remembrance of cold rivulets trickling down our spines faded as we sipped the fragrant coffee. At last Madame Barbu fixed us with a stern eye.

" I could perhaps let a tiny room—three francs a day—all found—not a penny less—to a *married* couple."

A flourish of Jo's ringed hand sealed the bargain.

The menfolk of Camaret caught lobster off the coast of Cornwall, while the girls packed sardines in a clammy fish-factory* At six o'clock their clattering *sabots* wakened us,

and an hour later we ourselves set to work, surrounded by old men and children. The former were art critics, for Cottet, the well-known painter, at the outset of his career, so poor that his toes protruded from his boots, had lived and painted there. Instead of parting with his meagre cash he paid with so many square inches of canvas per meal. To these old connoisseurs anyone who painted differently from Cottet was an incompetent, and they said so in emphatic Breton. Unfortunately for our own vanity we soon picked up a smattering of the language.

I was left alone by the children. They respected and feared men, but Jo, as a representative of England, they held responsible for the death of Napoleon until she had sketched them all into a picture. After that she became so popular and they so importunate that she had to refuse to paint any child except on Mondays.

Cronies we had in plenty; wisecracks with the curious French habit of repeating some pet platitude.

"*La vie est dure*" sighed old Mere Ctemence as she watched us paint. The conscript who turned up now and then to eat a good dinner always justified his extravagance by saying, "*Il faut s'amuser quoi?*" A woman who supped there had wandered all over France selling haberdashery on a wheeled stall. She yarned with gusto, but when we too started yarning she rapped out the classic "*Chacun son mitier*"

My daily pest was the village drunkard, who always waited until I was perched helpless on a gimcrack stool, with easel, palette, and brushes.

"*Je veux te chanter quelque chose*" he breathed in my ear. Often Jo saw me unhappily crouched over a sketch with hunched shoulders, while the drunkard towered precariously above me beating time to the measure of his song.

But when the lobster fleet returned the drunkard was submerged. Everybody was drunk. The streets were full of tottering men and tipsy cabin-boys. One evening a tiny fellow home from his first voyage insisted on standing Jo a liqueur.

"What is it to be?" he swaggered, patting the pocket

which contained his first wages. By mischance Jo chose **the** most expensive drink. It cost twopence. Her little host's face fell, but he smacked down his coin with a pretty air of indulgent manhood.

We soon became known as "the little strangers of Mire Barbu." She spoiled us, taught us Breton, and fattened us on lobsters and fresh sardines. She poured scalding drinks down our throats when we came in blue with cold, and she sent her grandchildren to scour the country for delicacies.

One day we saw wee Marie washing out a huge basket of snails. Rather nervously we asked her what they were for.

"For you/" she answered, beaming. "I gathered them this morning in the churchyard, and just look at these lovely ones in my handkerchief. I found all these on Mother's grave."

The snails were put in pickle. Three weeks later they were ready. Ivonne, the serving-girl, ate seventy at a sitting, but the dainty dish did not tempt us. The villagers all marvelled, and murmured, "Indeed the English are a strange people! They have not the true palate."

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An acetylene lamp of the simplest make, merely a couple of tins, one within the other, and a jet; a little battered, but it would have served again, in Bosnia or Albania perhaps. But it lay up there forgotten since 1913, undisturbed during these twenty momentous years.

Such souvenirs represent something far more than mere vanished youth. I don't think we waste much time mourning our blithe pasts. Age has its compensations, and along the years a balance of values seems to be fairly adjusted. The pessimistic adage says, "If youth but knew, if age but could." Yet if youth did know it probably wouldn't, and if **age** could it possibly wouldn't either.

But such souvenirs do represent a period of stability **and** innocence which the youth of to-day can never know. Looking backward, one feels a sense of amazement at the

simple trust we put in an unknowable future: the innocence of a Mowgli being nursed by a werwolf.

We painted our pictures and made our modest plans, still happily trusting in the grand security of the Victorian era, little dreaming that behind us was gathering the scientific age, like a great cloud that must first of all explode as the thunderstorm of war.

Looking back, one is struck by something almost significant in the quality of the peace of that last summer of an age now completely dead. It seemed then as if all the tremendous inventions that had come tumbling on our heads during the last twenty years had almost exhausted invention. Speed had been won, radium had been won, wireless had been won, and even television had been more than hinted at. Also in the arts new revolutions seemed hardly possible. " We must now settle to work and consolidate our inventions,"⁵¹ the world seemed to be saying. One could almost swear to a distinct, sensible pause.

Or did there only seem to be a pause because we chose that moment to bury ourselves for the whole summer on a little island in the Mediterranean, the then scarcely known Majorca?

In England everybody knew about Minorca—that was where the black fowls came from—but Majorca was hardly more than a name in the geography-book. We had been tempted there by a strange, dynamic French painter popularly called Champco, a long, lean, cadaverous bundle of nerves, who usually dressed in the typical panoply of the Montparnasse painter: black baggy trousers, velveteen coat, tall hat, and ginger pointed beard. His leanness was all sinew and vitality, and he strode up and down the red-and-orange terraces of that magic island, through the groves of grotesque olive-trees, bearing on his back enormous canvases covered with polychromatic paintings, until from the distance one might have imagined him to be a fantastic butterfly, escaped from Brobdingnag and happily resting here on a transoceanic migration.

Tall orange, pink, and blue houses with pillared air-

parlours under their roofs, deep blue sky and sea, Venetian-red earth, green fig- and orange-trees, grey olive-trees sprawling in rows, each tree needing a hundred square yards for its liquid nourishment; thus vividly is Majorca painted in our memories.

Champco had hired for us the deserted village inn of Deya, strange staircase village clustered on a sugar-loaf hill over ravines full of the fat, thorny-palmed cactus that bears the prickly pear. Our nine-roomed mansion was the topmost of the village. It had also a garden with almond-trees, but cost us only eleven shillings a month. Our maidservant asked sixpence a day and her lunch. Here indeed was the paradise of the impecunious.

A steep ravine led down to the tideless jade-green sea, where the eternal wash of the waves had eaten the up-standing, half-submerged rocks into semblances of huge advertisements for Victorian corsets.

And yet, after the first autumn downpour, we felt a desire to leave all this and take to the road. At dawn we passed through groves full of singing workers, whose strange voices, with their almost Arabian cadences, seemed to carve the air much as the harsh morning shadows moulded the landscape.

"Thieves!" shouted three swarthy lads some hours later, as we strode into a village, for they had never seen rucksack-bearing tourists before.

Pedro, the burly innkeeper, posed before a brilliantly striped curtain that shaded his doorway.

"Board and lodging? Five pesetas a day," said he.

"But our friend W told us you charged him only three."

"*El senor Ingles* ? Ah, but he was like a son to us! "

"We can be as a son and a daughter to you for three days," we pleaded. "Besides, we eat very little meat."

He hesitated. "We can at least show them the room," he murmured to his buxom wife, who was peeping round the curtain.

"*Son simpdticos*" whispered she, smiling.

" I have a proposition," said Pedro. " Stay here. We will note what you eat, and charge you accordingly."

That evening a delicious supper of many courses tempted us.



MAJORCAN FARM

" Bother the expense," said Jo. " We haven't eaten a square meal for months. Let's enjoy ourselves."

That evening all the villagers crowded in to see the new wonder, an English *senora* who shouldered her own bundle. Like many Spaniards, their attitude of semi-derisive curiosity changed to warm friendship with a few words. Recklessly

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contemptuous of the fact that we were nearing our last ten-pound note, we offered everybody the landlord's cheap smuggled Havanas and *anisados* at a ha'penny a glass*

" The policeman is a first-class dancer," confided our new friends. " He comes from Seville. They won't station a native Majorcan here, for how could he arrest his own uncle if need be? "

Although on duty, the policeman slipped in to drink a glass of *ants*. We begged him to dance, but with a sprightly tweak at his black moustaches he looked furtively at the glass-panel door.

" Impossible—on duty—might be seen,⁵⁵ he objected. To encourage him Jo and I danced the Highland schottische, humming the tune. Gradually we accelerated the pace, until the policeman smacked his thigh.

" *Dios!* The woman runs quicker than I do! " he cried. " *Vamos*. Cover the door." And he danced the *sevillana* as only a Spaniard can.

At the end of our three days⁵ stay the host gave us a bill for exactly three pesetas a day—*anisados* and cigars included.

Our next lodging was up in the mountains. The monastery of Lluch offered hospitality to all pilgrims. Those who could not afford the meal cooked by the monks were given kitchen accommodation, with free rice, charcoal, oil, and salt. Such were the peasants we could see toiling up to the monastery with bags and baskets of provisions; some even with live and protesting poultry slung over their shoulders.

The pilgrims⁵ kitchen contained a long block of brickwork pierced half-way through by little tunnels ending in flat grids. On these grids the burning charcoal was placed. Over the charcoal stood earthenware cooking-pots, and in lines, agitating palm-leaves energetically, the peasant cooks blew down the tunnels a current of air which set the charcoal in a crackle of sparks, and thus hastened the hour of their meal.

We, waited on by a stout and friendly friar, banqueted like sybarites on monkish cookery.

Pollensa, our ultimate destination, was a good walk from there. We dallied over lunch under a thick vine pergola

outside an inn, watching a live compass at work. Attached to a long pole, a mule was walking in interminable circles, turning the ancient Noria water-wheel—a survival of the model invented before Archimedes. A child sang to him, and, as if the song were turning the wheel, the mule stopped his work whenever the child stopped singing.



The jovial innkeeper weighed Jo's rucksack, marvelled at her stout shoes, and when she lit a cigarette clapped her on the shoulder, crying, "*Fuma tambiín !* We must turn her into a bullfighter/'

In Puerta Pollensa our pocket dictionary made us everybody's friend. Clad in tight jerseys, the huge-handed fishermen grasped our tiny volume under the wavering candle-light, mouthing our strange English tongue and enjoying the magic of finding the foreign words for themselves.

The inn proved afterwards to be the headquarters of the smuggling industry, but never in our travels have we experienced such solid proof of village honesty.

We had sent our trunk on by diligence to await us at Pollensa. It was not forthcoming. For a week we grew more and more anxious, until one day we met the local photographer. He exclaimed :

" The *senores* are they the *matrimonii* Gordon? " He then told us that he had rescued our luggage from the *diligence* on its arrival, as he felt that it might receive damage if it were left lying about at the inn.

On the same day a man with two dogs accosted us.

" How much do you carry in your pocket-book and what is your name? " said he.

" An English note for ten pounds—Gordon," I said.

" I return the *senor* his money," said the man. " It must have fallen from his pocket, and one of my dogs, hunting through the scrub, picked it up and brought it to me."

" I never knew I had lost it! " I exclaimed gratefully.

" I am indeed glad," said the peasant, bowing like a courtier, " that my dog's nose has saved the *senores* from the torments of anxiety."

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Too many souvenirs in the loft; too many reminiscences to pack—we could not linger long over them, for the transport company had fixed their day of call.



CHAPTER III

SPECTACLE AND SURPRISE

IN PARIS for a mere twopence apiece we could have a front seat at one of the pleasantest theatres of the world, the Theatre of Life. Our theatre was splendidly warmed and lit by the Grand Luminary itself—ultra-violet-ray treatment included free of cost. The mere paying for the drink, as in the Parisian *caji chantant*, secures the seat.

The back scene is the Place de Rennes, with the Gare Montparnasse in the background; the artist has specialized in light and atmosphere effects. The ventilation is excellent, but might be a bit draughty were it not for the glass screens thoughtfully supplied by the management. The play to be performed is *La Vie Parisienne*, and not a bad actor in the whole cast. At first the plot may seem a little disjointed, until you remember that this is not some minor play, concentrating on the haphazards of half a dozen characters or so, **and** the scale is truly gigantic, the *Comelie Urbainc*, no

less—or tragi-comedy, rather. Individualities are merged in the broad general result. . . .

The author? Ah! this is one of those spontaneous impromptus, like the performances of the old *commedia deW arte*, no written parts provided, though, by jingo! you might hardly credit the fact. Every performer is word-perfect, never makes a mistake, and misses no cues. Here's one of the most fascinating non-stop variety performances in the world, and the charge is but twopence, refreshment included.

Out of the general hurly-burly of supers who encumber the stage our *gargon* is the first actor to distinguish himself. His is a juggling trick. Last night we saw a Chinese tumbler jump from an elevated platform and turn two somersaults in mid-air, holding the while a tray covered with the most fragile of porcelain. The waiter's trick is similar in nature. Balancing on the tips of lean fingers a tray loaded with glasses, bottles, and coffee-pot, he sways himself and it, unharmed, through the jostling French *populo* intent on breakfast and talk.

But our waiter is incompetent as a showman. The great juggler, to impress his audience with the difficulty of the trick, must contrive to flop a couple of times. Otherwise we might not appreciate these difficulties. The facility of the hand deceives the imagination. Our waiter should periodically smash a trayful of bottles and glasses on the *cafi* floor. But he never does. We hardly realize the skill needed to steer so top-heavy a burden through a *cafe* full of French men and women dramatically reliving in word and gesture the events of the day before.

Then there's the coffee-pot trick. Flourishing the thin-spouted can two feet away from the glass, the waiter projects with faultless precision a stream of steaming liquid, snapping it short as though snipping a bit of string. The end of the coffee flicks down like the tail of a liquid snake, leaving your glass just abrim. So quickly, so easily done that you might never believe the man's dexterity. And yet it has nothing really to do with the waiter's job: mere decoration this, the

result of a certain job-vanity; the twiddly bits of the trade, so to speak.

If clients are not too pressing the waiter may steal a moment for conversation since we have attained the status of *habitués*. We also have a common interest, *le moto*—in English, the motor-cycle. In his youth the waiter had some reputation at *le velo*, and, with rump higher than head and hands lower than knees, his vividly clad torso, cross-gartered with spare tubes, and with milk-bottle in carrier strapped to his handle-bars, he was an active member of a racing club. Even now, at this pleasantly ripe and protuberant age of fiftyish, the great cycling events, the Six Days' Continuous at the *Vel' d'Hiv'* or the Tour de France, rouse him to pitches of lyric enthusiasm.

But now he promenades, faster yet more sedately, in what is called a family combination: motor-cycle and double-seated side-car resplendent in nickel and red and black enamel, far newer than our own old *armoire ambulante*. Yet he accords our shabby outfit a certain deference. It is *une machine anglaise*, and, like English tailoring, English engineering can still command respect abroad* "It's the steel that does the trick," says our waiter. "We cannot yet produce that combination of strength and lightness. . . ."

As a result of his *promenades a moto* our waiter knows the environs of Paris and the Ile-de-France thoroughly. He will discuss restaurants, church architecture, or points of view with intelligence. In fact, he is undoubtedly a man with mental resources.

He even has a touch of the artist. Early in the morning he sows sawdust between the tables. The reason for the sawdust may be left to the imagination, but it is then decorated tastefully by our waiter, who, taking a broom, scallops the *boulevard* border of this utilitarian layer into semicircles of opposed asphalt and sawdust, most prettily and accurately done. And if Giotto could prove himself to be the greatest artist of medieval Italy by merely scrawling a perfect circle with a bit of charcoal, surely our waiter should at least be deemed worthy of the Artistes Frangais

for drawing so many perfect semicircles with an implement as clumsy as a mere broom.

In Paris we rise early, and are often well on with the morning's work before London has done yawning. The reason may be atmospheric. While we sit here, and while the sun has been slowly climbing up the eastern sky, growing warmer as it rises, the traffic has been increasing in volume. There seems to be an *ilan* about Parisian traffic. Our London traffic slides, that of Paris surges. Is it that the Parisian streets are bumpier, and so the French are forced to use more resilient springs? Maybe.

This talent for dramatizing an otherwise humdrum existence, a talent most conspicuously French, is shared by the inanimate as well. Parisian traffic gesticulates. At first, indeed, its gesticulations seem to scare the traveller, who, parallel to the idea that every Frenchman in eager conversation is working himself up to a rage, feels that the traffic is driven with a murderous hate of the *bourgeois* pedestrian, almost as if it were an instrument in the hands of the communists.

Communist, undoubtedly, the majority of taxi-drivers are, but that is not peculiarly Parisian; it is also true of London. Indeed, a large part of the tippable trades seem nowadays definitely tinged with communism. Their contact with and dependence on the whims of the plutocracy is perhaps too continuous to be borne with patience. The taxi-driver's aggravations are most manifest: he is always outside in the wet and cold, while the * ploot' lolls in the dry and warmth; he is labelled, photographed, and ticketed with a number; always he is under the eye of the police. Small wonder, then, that he looks eagerly forward to the day when he may drive himself, pay his own fare, and go as fast as he likes down the wrong side of an unpoliced road.

Against the ever-increasing and always amusing background of the Parisian traffic the rag-pickers now take the stage and play their turn. Theirs is the low-comedy act of the morning.

From the dustbins of the Quarter they gather, their soiled sacks and baskets bulging with spoil, to the foot of a tree

almost opposite our *café* stalls. Not a pleasant job this rag-picking, you might imagine, yet they seem a jolly lot. Victor Hugo, in *Les Misérables*, was perhaps the first to dramatize the rag-picker of Paris, yet these seem to need little dramatization; they do that for themselves.

Behind them, written large across the *façade* of the Gare Montparnasse, is the motto of the Republic, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, quietly ignoring the fact that the railway runs four classes of travellers, first, second, third, and roof or imperial. The word 'imperial' may be a bit of republican satire, for here, though the traveller is the most highly placed and the most conspicuous, he also gets all the fumes and the sulphur. Liberty and fraternity our rag-pickers certainly enjoy. Wretched wage-slaves they are not, as their rude and humorous fraternity shows. And as for equality, let Monsieur Rothschild try to elbow one of them into the gutter.

Perhaps a sense of independence breeds the good-humour they so patently exhibit, for one would hardly expect it to be engendered by the filth they deal in. Yet there it is visible day by day, blooming like a lily on a dung-heap, and vividly contrasted with the pale-faced tensivity of the office-workers, who are continuously spewed out on to the pavement by the open mouth of the Metro. These gay rag-pickers have no time-clock to tick them off, and seem almost to prove the parable of the king who, needing the shirt of a happy man, found at last that the only happy man in his whole broad realm hadn't a shirt to his back.

Strange occupation, an existence of eternal bran-pie. At the foot of the tree, unmolested by the sauntering police, they void their sacks and sort their treasure-trove. Possibly this sorting-place is hereditary, passed down, a family heirloom in conjunction with the primitive right over a district of dustbins which is as jealously guarded as though the ownership of so sordid a property had more than the shadowiest of foundations in law. Here each day they assemble, old mother, son, son-in-law, and daughter, the old hag bearing as well-filled a sack as any. The women wear the full-pleated skirt of *the faubourgs*, the men have baggy corduroy

peg-top trousers, surely the most satisfactory working-man's clothes yet designed. You could drop them back into *Les Misirables* without altering a button. Only they don't look in the least miserable.

Their findings are quickly classified. There isn't much White-Knightishness about the rag-picker. He knows what he wants and doesn't stop to wonder whether a thing may come in useful some day. Paper, straw, cloth, vegetable-tops, bread, wood, and old bones are the prime objects of his quest. For each he has a special use. The bones go to the glue factory; vegetable-tops and bread feed his supplementary business of rabbit-breeding (though we won't deny that a lump of bread not too deeply soiled may go straight into the soup-tureen); the rags are sorted, and go some to the paper-mill, others of woollen stuff to be teased out, respun, and rewoven into cheap suitings for the million.

When the bags and baskets have been sorted and restowed, sometimes after a merry bit of pantomime with some casual find, an old hat or a bird-cage or what not, the father rag-picker arrives, perched high on a two-wheeled cart drawn by a decrepit white horse that itself looks as if found on some stable ash-pit. Having piled the cart with its tall load of 'something for nothing,' the merry family then add themselves atop and urge the old horse into the seemingly suicidal whirlpool of the Carrefour de Rennes. So they pass from the stage, leaving us to reflect that a gathering of such rag-pickers would probably hold about five times as much *joie de vivre* as an equal number of idealistic, semi-dyspeptic social reformers worrying over their degraded lot in this twentieth-century civilization.

« . . . »

Almost coincident with the departure of the rag-pickers the staff of the restaurant next door begins to arrive. At night the place has tucked itself into itself; the terrace tables have all been stacked within doors, the glass screens folded back, and the green-painted tubs of orange-trees and box-bushes lined up primly against them.

You perceive that France is not feminist, for while the men linger on the pavement the girls go indoors and at once set to work. They have no part in the little morning ceremony that ensues.

Suddenly a change of manner marks the gathered waiters. Their easy ranks stiffen to a kind of civilian attention. From the entrance of the Mero, level with the pavement, a man emerges. Perhaps, casually, you might hardly have noted him as different from his fellows, but here and now, caught, as it were, in a noose of welcoming respect, he has an air. His cocked bowler seems not as the bowlers of other men, his velvet-collared overcoat is replete with importance. Deference outlines him for us. It is the cook. Yet, important though he may be, he cannot give his subordinates a mere collective nod, as he would in our less mannerly England. He must shake hands with each ere, entering the restaurant doors, he draws them behind him, a captain marshalling his troops.

With his coming the restaurant expands like a snail emerging from its shell. The orange-trees and box-bushes are swung out to their appointed line, the screens are spread, the tables and chairs set in rows. Plenty of outdoor diners are expected, though this may be only February. No sooner are these preparations complete than two toiling men, one pushing, the other pulling in a leather harness, drag up the push-push full of the day's provisions, newly bought by the cook at Les Halles, the huge central market of Paris, dubbed by Zola *le Ventre de Paris*.

Continuously from under the pavement the Metro continues to disgorge its voyagers in bursts, as though controlled by a wave movement. There is the wave of early birds, *cafi* waiters and scrubbers, then that of the shop assistants, of the office-workers. For all of these the paper-woman strides to and fro crying in a thin, monotonous way, " 'L' Ami du Peuple ! Voild ' L'Ami ! " Most Englishmen have a vague suspicion of general French honesty. Nevertheless, the paper-seller leaves a pile of papers draped over the M&ro railings along with a tin can, and each would-be purchaser drops in

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his sous as **he** helps himself 'L'Ami da Peuple is possibly **the** cheapest paper published in Europe to-day. It costs about a farthing, and is really the means by which Monsieur Coty, the world's greatest *parfumeur*, gets rid of his super-tax and spreads his opinions.

Then follows the wave of school-children, and we may judge how much of French courtesy is due to early training. The cook, great man though he might be, could not refrain from greeting each of his underlings separately; so, too, the school-children may not toss one another a casual 'hello.' Adjusting their heavy, lopsided loads of books, they must shake hands and go through the ceremony; yet with no casual perfunctoriness. The French greeting still has a soul.

From this continually recurrent background we begin to distinguish individuals strangely Parisian. There is the little Annamese orderly. He waits daily for his master the Major, who is evidently lodging in the hotel. He looks an odd and ramshackle kind of a soldier; a regiment of him should make an English sergeant burst into sobs of bitter despair. Whatever intelligence he may have is hidden behind a mask of yellow face.

There is also the man taken a walk by his dog. The man drifts along absorbed in his paper. Where the dog drags he follows, when the dog stops he stops. In a zigzag path he visits one by one all those odoriferous corners, tree-trunks, lamp-posts, etc., which can excite the canine imagination, and thus, deviously, they pass across our stage into the wings. There is the Madagascan negress, her head always picturesquely done up in a brightly coloured handkerchief, which is folded into a commanding headdress something like half a bishop's mitre or a napkin on a dinner-plate. The bread-woman goes by pushing her load of long loaves in a deep wastepaper-basket on wheels. The chair-mender and his woman take up their position beside the door of the *café*, comfortably spreading the apparatus of their trade over the pavement as they squat to work. The glazier strides **along** piping out on a primitive instrument raucous melodies interspersed with his **shriek of " Vitrier ! "**

SPECTACLE AND SURPRISE

And beside us or behind, and within doors, the *cafe* surges with a strange atmosphere, compounded chiefly of the early-morning liver attack and the aftermath of passion. A touch of acidity, of worry, and of stridency marks the breakfast hour, which would certainly be absent from the after-lunch coffee interlude.

The waiter comes out once more. He fills our glasses anew, and in the ensuing conversation we confide in him that this is our last visit. We are moving over to London, forsaking Paris and all this.

" *Tiens !* " says the waiter, " is that possible? I am sorry. But if monsieur and madame are going to London would they be so kind as to undertake a small thing for me? . . . "

" Willingly, if we can," we answered.

" It should not be difficult, look you," said the waiter, "for I understand that she belonged to a very important family in your country. Her name, you must know, was Meess Smees."

" Whose name? " we asked.

" But the name of my mother," said the waiter. " Did I never tell you that I am, natally, an Englishman? "

" Never! " we cried.

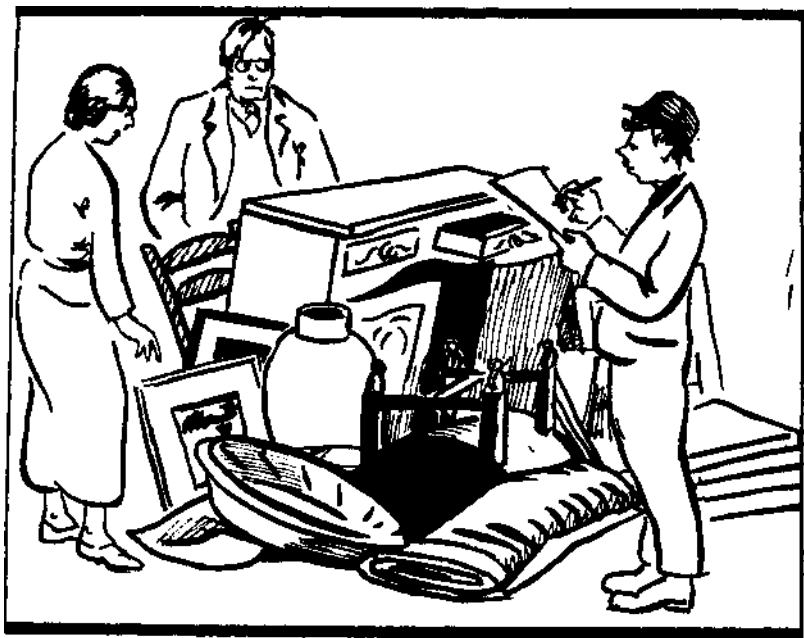
" Ah, but yes," said our waiter, " and not half English, you understand. I have my birth-certificate. Alice Smees of London, England, woman of independent means. Unluckily I have never seen her. I was, you understand, a found child, delivered to the Establishment for Foundlings by the midwife. But my mother was, I learned, a woman who did these things not inexpensively. That combined with the description, *rentiere*, shareholder, you see, has convinced me that I am a child of no ordinary woman. Indeed, if I have heard rightly the Smees family is a great family in England. There are Sir Smees, are there not, nobility, no less—Lor' Smees, eh? And then, you understand, my mother would be an old woman now if she still lives. She might be glad to hear that her son is alive and doing well. That is possible. Mees Alice Smees of London, so it was written on the certificate of my birth. Well, if it should

happen that you could find her for me I should be very grateful. . . . Because, you see, an important family like that, it should not be so difficult, eh? "

There are undoubtedly moments when discretion is the better part. Could we reveal to our hopeful waiter that the Smith family was so important in England that it took up some sixteen pages in the London telephone directory, followed tardily by the Jones family, which occupied but nine, and by the Robinsons, who had no more than a measly four and a half? Moreover, a thin suspicion haunted us that this patronymic Smith might be but a subterfuge and a pseudonym. English, indeed, he was, now we could take a second look at him, the cheerful grocer to the life. Aristocracy had hardly cast either his build or his features. No, better leave him to his dreams. " There is no stranger who does not come of noble blood," says a Spanish proverb; perhaps the same is true of errant and unmarried mothers.

Yet as we left the restaurant we marvelled. Contrast our waiter's manners, his use of language, his mere capacity to express his meaning in fluent French and his having something to express, his interest in cooking, in medieval architecture and landscape, and try to imagine the same product issuing from an English home for lost and deserted children. . . .

The idea was a little staggering and humbling. In England, we thought, Mr Smith, product of a foundlings' home, would have been a remarkable exception, in France he was a commonplace. A mere waiter.



CHAPTER IV

MOVING OUT

THE little English clerk from the transport company was ready to disembowel anybody's home with the cheerful nonchalance of a hunter disembowelling a slain animal. His actual job was one of mental compression. In a limited way he had to perform the task imposed on the fisherman who had let a jinnee out of its bottle; the task of getting so much jinnee back into so little bottle was paralleled by the task of getting so much studio into so little van. He did the Chinese-box trick inversely, and in a trice mentally had packed our small boxes into our middle-sized boxes, and these again into our trunks and Breton chests, and then quickly reduced us to mere cubic yards without the flourish of a single foot-ruler.

"Oh, studios," he said; "that's simple. Mostly flat stuff, pictures and frames and books; not like one of these here

dining-room and bedroom propositions. You won't want more than half a railway van. . . .

"Duty? No, you won't have to pay any duty; it's a household moving, you see. . . .

"How do you prove it's a household moving and not somebody trying to sneak in old furniture? That's quite simple. There's the bed, you see. If there's a bed it's household. . . .

"You've got no beds, only divans? Oh, we'll soon fix that. You'll need just half a van. We'll make sure that the party that has the other half's got the requisite bed. . . ."

Rather like the private detective in the divorce proceedings.

"Your pictures? Special duties on works of art? Well, I'm not absolutely sure about that. Better go down to the Consulate and make certain. . . ."

The office of the British Consulate in Paris has an atmosphere peculiarly depressing; in fact, the only place we know more depressing, now that the Morgue has been closed to the public, is the office for identity cards at the Surete. If it were not for the carefully dressed gentlemen behind the bar (no, counter), who stare at you over their spectacles, even when they have no spectacles to stare at you over, one might liken the office of the British Consulate to that of a large laundry. And we suppose that, one way and another, a good deal of dirty linen is washed there, anyhow.

The applicant for anything has a feeling that the Consulate is always remembering the period before ungentlemanly German competition forced it to take an interest in trade. It is like a poor relation of the Embassy, come down in the world, but never able to forget its high parentage. It seems to touch trade with a slightly supercilious finger. In a word, it hardly seems to welcome the tradesmen. At any rate, the British Consulate in Paris seems determined to give the lie to Napoleon's quip that England is a nation of shopkeepers.

In reply to our question concerning the import of personally hand-painted pictures the gentleman behind the bar

said with an aloof patience, " You may impaht pahsonal prahapaty ef you sahn a statement that you have **been** using it for ovah a yeah."

" Does that include pictures? "

" Cahtanly."

" But how *does* one prove that a picture has been *used* ? "

A gleam of humanity shone in the gentleman's eye.

" Oh, you don't have to prove it, ya know; you only have to sahn the papah."

Our next question froze him up again.

" What about taking back a motor-cycle of British manufacture which has been registered under a French number? "

" Ah couldn't tell you, ah'm sorry. Motor-cycles pay a tha'd of their value. . . . "

" But," we persisted, " a third of which value—the catalogue price or the actual selling value? "

" Couldn't say, ah'm shaw," replied the gentleman, evidently wishing we would go. " C'n always write to Landahn, you know. Customs House. . . . *Good day. . . .* "

We had some thirty paintings of fairly large dimensions. In addition to these we must have had four or five hundred smaller paintings, sketches, water-colours, and drawings. Could we truthfully say that we had used *all* of these for over a year, or could we, in conscience, sign a paper saying that we were not transporting them to London for commercial purposes? At any rate, we could always fall back for consolation on to a little song we once heard a Portuguese washerwoman singing. This tuneful and picturesque creature was pounding her linen at a small washing-place near the river Douro. She made a pleasant picture as she worked with a will under the streaming Portuguese sunlight, and as she pounded and splashed she sang the following *copla*:

**I do not care for too much truth,
For truth will only stir up strife.
Away goes sweet companionship
And all the courtesies of life.**

Or, leaving that tricky customer conscience out of the question, would the English Customs believe us if we did?

For if we were to be charged duty on all the art we **had** accomplished but failed to sell during the last twenty years we might at once give up the struggle and go into the Bankruptcy Court. The question was serious.

The problem of re-importing a motor-cycle of British manufacture baffled all the experts in Paris. The Touring Club de France could not enlighten us, nor could the Paris branch of the A.A. A letter to the Customs House in London was unanswered, and had it not been for Charles Lavell, our literary agent, who phoned personally to the chief of the Customs House, the question might have remained apparently insoluble. As far as we could learn, nobody having exported a British motor-cycle, except under a triptych, ever wanted to take it back again. For after all the British cycle abroad is always a British cycle. As our waiter, Monsieur Hegesippe Smith, said, "*Ca, voyez-vous, est toujours quelque chose unpeu special*"

In *Youth and the East* Edmund Candler has written an excellent chapter on the tyranny of objects. He tells us that the Indian name for luggage of all kinds is 'Boj,' and adds, "A very good word, with its sound of dead, inanimate weight, and its suggestion of incubus, a malevolent vitalized incubus." Truly is Boj a marvellous word, and as we slowly stripped our studio, skinning it with the ruthlessness of a medieval executioner flaying a criminal, we repeated the word bitterly as a kind of incantation, "Boj, Boj, Boj "; or, to vary it and take a leaf from Mr Polly's plenitude, "*Oh, sesquipedalian verbojoose of Boj.*"

Still, as Aunt Chloe says in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "Chillun, t'ink ob yo marcies." We had one "marcy" very visible. These mews studios were ranged in three long alleys, very homely and delightful and all bowered over with Virginia creeper, wisteria, and old man's beard. Being on the ground floor, they are handy for sculptors. There benighted persons lodge year by year, creating figures, groups, bas-reliefs, plaques, and so on, which year by year grow in upon them from every side, the space for their living contracting slowly **and** remorselessly as **the** space of the doomed man in an

Inquisition torture-chamber. As their space thus diminishes the tonnage of the sculptured Boj increases.

Talk about Frankensteins! Think of the sculptor's fate, doomed to live all day hemmed in by the pallid images of his own creation, and doomed to wake at night in the midst of half a hundred ghosts that must seem to murmur eternally with half-obliterated tongues.

No. Thank God for our "marcies." We weren't sculptors.

The tyranny of these objects, of this Boj, is equalled only by their malice. Give them but a chance, as in a house-moving, and they will do their very best to damage you. Doors will snap to unexpectedly, stripping your finger of its nail; things balanced with absolute security will cast themselves down from their perches, trying to knock you flat. As long as you keep Boj fixed in place it can only glower, but once disturb it and the hidden malice comes at once to the surface.

The malice of deed is perhaps surpassed by the malice of implication. Leave Boj severely in place, polish its face from time to time, and visitors will look about them, murmuring politely, "What nice things you have!"

Once begin to stir Boj up and it will shame you before the world.

Under the command of the stocky English furniture clerk, two lean underlings, slouching with the careless grace and the *chacun son metier* air of a true Parisian workman, gripped our Boj and strewed it about the courtyard. At once Boj began to play the part of a disreputable relative, with the sole object of bringing as much discredit on us as possible. That beautiful Breton dough-box, which with its half-barrel construction seemed almost unique, and was vastly admired, now, up-ended with its lid sprawling, looked fit only to be a feeding-trough for pigs. That Normandy sideboard with odd lovely lines, tilted, with doors swinging wide, seemed to ape the last of the toppers after the jag of the season. One would never have believed that this litter of mangy-looking rubbish had once formed the decoration of a not unlovely home.

Over this act of indecency presided that stocky packing clerk, notebook and pencil in hand, watching our middle-sized chests swallowing our little chests, and our bigger-sized chests engulfing our middle-sized chests, like the snakes in the story.

The stocky packing clerk was looking anxious.

"Ya see," he confided to us, "they've sent a van a size smaller than I ordered. . . ."

"And what will happen if you can't get it all in?"

Our Englishman had at least learned one thing in France: he could shrug most expressively.

"And these blighters aren't the least bit of good at packing," he said. "The French, they're the worst packers in the world."

"Who are the best, the English?" we asked.

"Not by a mile," said our packing clerk. "You try Holland. The Dutch, they're wonders."

"So you can pack in Dutch also?"

"Pack in Dutch? I'd say I could. I can pack in nine languages, including Basque."

"Basque? But have you ever had to pack in Basque?"

"As a matter of fact, no. But, you see, I married a Basque girl."

"But even so that's a hell of a language."

"It is," said the packing clerk decidedly, "even though you live with it. But, you see, my hobby's modern languages."

"Oh, and what are you going to do with them?"

He looked a little astonished. It seemed as if the question had never been asked before. Probably he had been chasing modern languages with the enthusiasm of a small boy chasing butterflies, because of the difficulties and the beauties. He was one of your Nature's Lavengros. A twinkle suddenly lit his Lancastrian eyes.

"Oh, just pack with them, I suppose."

He scribbled in his pocket-book.

"And," we inquired, "do you like Basque cooking?"

"It's good," he answered, but in so detached a tone that we remembered the French epicure who wrote, "The

average Englishman eats only to repair the wastes of the day."

" How do you like working here in France? " we asked him a little later on.

" Oh, it's all right," he said non-committally.

" But," we persisted, trying to match his case against our own, " wouldn't you rather get a job back in London again? "

" I'll tell you how it is," he said. " I'm a Lancashire man, I am, and a man from Lancashire is just about as foreign in London as he is in Paris. That's a fact. So you see it's about fifty-fifty."

Slowly the Boj was insinuated into that exiguous van. It seemed incredible that the appurtenances of twenty years of life should be compressed to the capacity of one small covered van drawn by a contemplative grey horse. At one moment it did seem impossible, but by letting down the backboard and by placing longitudinal planks on it the stuff was all carefully hoisted into place.

When the job was finished the van looked like the caricature of a Victorian dame with huge bustle behind. Indeed, so nicely balanced was the load that it could not safely be moved until the two packers had climbed on to the driving-seat to ensure that the whole did not tip backward, and thus go sliding down the road like a puppy with a tickle behind. Even then we felt sure that if one of the counter-balances had a good sneeze there might be catastrophe.

We stood on the pavement watching with anxious eyes our Boj slowly receding into the dusk. It turned the corner, the weird bustle sticking out behind like a comic circus feat. Then, as cart, packers, and Boj were swallowed up by the Parisian traffic, we turned back to our gutted studio.

Once indoors we gazed round with new eyes.

Was it possible, we asked each other, that we had spent twenty years of life in this sordid hole?

SPRING



CHAPTER V

LONDON ENTRY

GIVING Boj a fair start, we set off to England on the "wandering wardrobe" as the sculptor next door has christened our motor-cycle, side-car, luggage-carrier combination. We are not here concerned with the minor incidents of the road. It is enough to say that one o'clock on a fine afternoon in late May found us plugging along the main road between Lewes and London, looking for lunch.

We had already arrived within the sphere of influence of this great city. No dearth of houses here; they lined the road almost continuously, interrupted with bits of field or of parkland. But of places to lunch, of restaurant, eating-house, or even of pub, not a sign.

We English like to think of ourselves as an outdoor race, but had this been almost anywhere on the Continent we should now have reached the very **midst** of the **suburban**

THE LONDON ROUNDABOUT

excursion haunts, with little restaurants, dining gardens, skittle alleys, or amusement parks. Here was nothing but the desolation of villadom. We like to think ourselves the most outdoor nation in Europe, but are self-deceived. The public school is not England, and compared with the denizen of most Continental cities the average Londoner is a stay-indoors and stuffy creature, stewing contentedly in his dingy interior except when the pubs are open.

We came at last to a large, bow-windowed hotel of ruddy brick. Yet within this rather pretentious exterior the tap-room was fictitiously squalid: imitation old oak turned out by machine, with a polished bar and one oak table, with hard-arsed bench capable of accommodating three persons. It was quite comfortless. The beer was, of course, mass production, chemically matured, artificially gasified; the pork pies and potato chips, the only food available, were factory cooking, flabby from exposure, tasting so mechanical that one ate them mechanically.

That one could eat them with any sense of enjoyment at all was due to a curious natural capacity for transferring enjoyments felt in the past to similar but essentially non-enjoyable things in the present. Thus one may enjoy a bad photograph of a friend, although the photo is itself not in any way enjoyable, by calling up feelings of active affection to impose on the poor presentment. So when we enjoy a mechanical pork pie (which is, as it were, no more than the bad photograph of a really good pork pie) we call up reminiscences of past pleasures to supply the present lack. This, of course, is one of the chief resources of advertising; it imposes a clamorous virtue on the second-rate reality. So in the present case was the imposition of the description 'home-made' on the wrapper: the unblushing claim of second-rate factory food to be 'home-made * when it has been about as near a home as a workhouse baby!

We know that we are running risks in criticizing the "good, old-fashioned, oak-benched, sanded bar."

We, who have wandered in so many a peasant country, sleeping often on the floor, vermin-bitten, fishing our meals

out of the *ollapodridas* of the peasantry, ought to be properly grateful for almost the only remains of good old English simplicity left in the land. Do away with our tap-rooms and we have flung off yet another of the few links that bind us to the past.

But the English tap is no longer either natural or suitable, A peasant inn, peasant food, peasant drink, peasant conversation, and peasant mentality may be all right. They shape out an artistic and harmonious whole. But that this pretentious mansion of a place, obviously not fifteen years old, should be furnished with a deliberate imitation of Old English discomfort, a kind of sentimental playing at the romance of Dickens, when it contained not a spot either of romance or of Dickens, an imposition of arty discomfort and squalor without compensations, was unbearable. Could we have found there genuine old home-brew, matured in the cask, or real pork pies cooked by a hostess who knew what pork-pie crust could be, then we might have felt a sense of artistic unity that would have made "ye olde-tyme bar" and "ye olde sanded floor" a suitable and sentimental accompaniment.

Faute de mieux we had to slide along the hard bench, to swallow the gassy beer, and consume the flabby pork pies. Against the bar two motor-cyclists in their sports uniform, like a pair of divers lacking helmets, discussed technical things with enthusiasm. Behind the bar the host did his best to look like a sporting gent, as much as a check waistcoat and leggings would allow. Beside us, the only other occupant of the hard bench, was a little old man in shabby clothes slung with a canvas haversack.

Almost instinctively Jo sums up humanity by its hands. Those of the little old man at once attracted her attention. From his clothes he might have been a tramp who had found a lucky shilling and was now taking his ease in his inn. But these were no tramp's hands. They were well shaped and sinewy, with excellent thumbs, knotty knuckles, and delicate finger-tips. They seemed to hint at a capacity not suggested by his raiment.

Abroad we would have fallen into easy conversation

without preamble, but we had already grown wary of the Englishman's self-protective skin. We had, in fact, devised a method. This was founded on the dictum "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Jo took out a cigarette, tapped it in a special way, and asked me for a match. I at once began to slap pockets in a pantomime of dismay. It was ridiculous to have to invent so childish a trick for doing a perfectly natural thing, but we had found that, nine times out of ten, the Englishman grows cordial if you put yourself in his debt. The present of a thing even so slight as a match breaks down barriers in a marvellous fashion. The unconscious defence is benefacted out of existence.

The old man tendered his matchbox with a smile, and contact was made.

"Thanks," said Jo. "You are walking, I see."

"Humm," said the little old man reflectively. "Hiking, eh? Hiking is what they call it nowadays, isn't it?" His voice was unexpectedly cultured for his clothes. "No, madam, I am *not* hiking."

"Personally, I have no quarrel with hiking," said Jo, "as long as it is not overdone. I do complain that some of these hikers seem to think that they aren't treating Nature with respect unless they hump huge burdens round the country, like laden donkeys. In a wild country that is all right, but in a civilized one, where you can buy almost all you need, it seems a bit ridiculous. . . ."

"Just so," said the little old man, in a tone of voice that told Jo that her lead was not into his suit. Nevertheless the ice was broken, and since she was a woman he went on a little whimsically, "Now, I am—hummm—almost the opposite of a—hummm—hiker."

"The opposite?" said Jo. "What can the opposite be?"

"A sitter, madam," said the little old man, chuckling. "A sitter, a peerer, a watcher." He squinted at her from under shaggy eyebrows.

"If it comes to that," said Jo, "we are watchers ourselves. We watch people. What do you watch?"

" People? " said the **little old man, with a hint of disdain.**
" People, no! I watch bird-life, madam."

" Bird-life here? " exclaimed Jo. " I should hardly have thought that very profitable. Right at the edge of London like this."

" Precisely. *That* is what makes it interesting," said the little old man. " I am studying the contacts of birds with the town. You might be surprised at the varieties of birds that dare to live so close in to the city." He began to button his coat and arrange the haversack. " But now you must excuse me. I must not begin to talk—no, I must not begin. I have several calls to make this afternoon on my little friends. This is, you must understand, a most important season of the year. If you tempt me into talk I shall never get my round done. Good afternoon."

He stumped out of the tap-room. The host and the two motor-cyclists watched him go with the casual interest that men whose minds are half-occupied will give to anything on the move, a dog or a cat, for instance. " Odd-looking old blighter," they may have thought. They hardly realized that there went one of the lucky men of this earth, a miser of secret treasures that few would envy and nobody would want to steal. He had discovered and tapped one of the infinite stores of secret happiness which Nature reserves for the quiet ones of this world.

Coming into any capital city is a little like entering a great hotel by means of the sewers. London makes no attempt to seem other than she is, a human agglomeration so sordid, so smoke-stained and mud-begrimed that the men of the future will be astonished that we had any claim to be thought civilized at all. Writing of Limehouse, Thomas Burke describes a dusk as " lousy." And, indeed, this verminous epithet does describe exactly the emotional quality of London's squalid areas. These *tatterdemalion faubourgs* **hem** in the rich heart of the city **like** a million Lazaruses **spreading their sores before the rich man's gates.** The same is true of

almost every big town, but here in London the sooty grime, the untinctured ugliness of the streets, reach a pitch unapproachable *in* any other capital of Europe. We English pride ourselves on many a record—speed records, athletic records, business records, and so on. Well, here is another record we may not be quite so proud of..

For all our boasted cleanliness we are content with a capital the face-filth and ugliness of which are unsurpassed by any other capital in the world, and which have been equalled only in other cities of our own building, such as Birmingham or Liverpool.

This aspect struck us with an added force, since we had never before this entered London from outside by road. When one is in a train the squalor drives by too fluid to make a real impression. We now looked at the landscape of London with the eyes of strangers.

Stamping everything with a constant repetition was the appalling meanness and spiritless poverty of the architecture. In Paris we would have been bounding about on ill-laid, cobble-stoned streets; we might have been risking our lives in the seemingly reckless turmoil of the traffic; but even the poorest streets would have had a feeling of quality. Sordid though they too must be, the French can regard them with some national pride; these *are* French. And, looking at them thus, one could definitely deduce that the French are not a negligent race. There is a sense of character, shape, and pride in even the poorest streets of Paris. But the mean streets of London are characterless. We may shout, "Britons never, never shall be slaves"; our streets contradict the assertion. These are streets of slave-dwellings, stamped with a sense of spiritless negation, ugly almost by this very quality of negation alone.

The first impression of London from the road was hampered by difficulties with the London traffic. One was hardly in a mood to observe street-scapes. Merged in this mechanical torrent pouring northward, I was having a prolonged struggle with my own subconscious self. It wanted to drive on the right, as it had been used abroad.

In almost any occupation the subconscious under-man is what at last takes control. Our tools, our vehicles, become at last mere extensions of our unconscious capacities. My unconscious, so long habituated to the Continental practice, was used to travel on the right. Its hair stood on end at this insane dashing down the left of the road, at this reckless passing of cars, buses, and drays on the wrong side. In a continual fret of anxiety it protested against this inversion of all those gradually stored impulses.

Did I relax conscious control for a moment it tried to twist the steering into sheer disaster. No mere knowledge could change its pig-headed obstinacy. The subconscious is a Robot that takes time to learn new tricks.

If at any moment something unexpected supervened, as, of course, it might, I knew only too well that, in all probability, my first instinctive action would be the wrong one, at the last critical juncture the unconscious taking charge and driving me willy-nilly.

Nor did the London system of road-control help. In the slowly fading light the dark figures of the traffic policemen became difficult to see. Their white armlets against the kaleidoscope of the traffic, the variously coloured vans, the shop-blinds and the news posters, were so inconspicuous as to be often invisible and more of a nuisance than a help. We have clothed the police in blue for various reasons, but one of the most important is that of catching out malefactors, dark blue being a most inconspicuous colour.

Sheer pressure of circumstances has forced the authorities to do something about this. Hence the white armlet, a true British compromise. Instead of facing the problem in all its implications, instead of summing up the inevitabilities and working out the very best logical solution, we adopt a trivial compromise. The net effect of the white armlet in uncertain lights or in moving traffic is this: it merely dissociates the policeman's arms from his body and makes him yet more insignificant and more difficult to spot. The Americans use white overalls; the French, while retaining the complete uniform, have white batons. Both are much

more visible in the street than the parti-coloured London policeman. In fact, we feel that half of the compliments which are bestowed on the police for their management of the traffic problem should really be given to the London driver.

The traffic policeman should be dressed in the most conspicuous uniform or overall imaginable; he should be almost physically impossible to overlook, instead of being, as now, an extra strain on the concentration of the drivers. The obvious retort to this is, "Don't fuss. It will be all right when you have got used to him."

The fact that you *have* to get used to him proves that he is not fulfilling his proper function. The other day H. G. Wells was asking for professors of foresight. That is expecting far too much. We need merely a few professors of common sense to begin with.

Nothing occurred to give my looming subconscious a chance to send us head first under a truck. We crossed the river, and at last reached Hyde Park. The afternoon was drawing to its close, and in the dimming light we could see the knots of indefatigable talkers and listeners forming under the trees dark patches, sprinkled with pallid, attentive faces.

Jo had discovered a dwelling at the end of a respectable *cul-de-sac*, Enniscorthy Gardens, so called because it had nothing to do with Enniscorthy and there was no hint of garden to the houses, neither front nor back. All the ponderous five-storeyed houses had planted heavily pillared porches at the edge of the pavement, two regiments of porches facing each other mathematically all down the street. Here, once, the rich Victorian merchants had drunk their port or had held their *salons*, in which the bewhiskered snobs had posed and bragged before the ringleted snobesses in crinolines. But this now degenerate magnificence had become reduced to the boarding-house level, or had been divided into flats. Here, where flunkies had once flaunted, and cabriolets, broughams, and even private hansoms had

lingered, now only the milk-cart or the coal-wagon hunted custom. It was the kind of road that probably still harboured a few great-aunts, ageing maidens who had come into the family mansion on the death of that old, hard-dying papa. There were possibly two or three sable coats, well preserved, that still dared to face the daylight. We were to learn later that there was even an Admiral. But there was also a prostitute.



CHAPTER VI

GENIUS LOCI

THE would-be Londoner of modest means has three lines of life open to his leisure. He may live in a community, in a set, or, in the London phrase, keep himself to himself and

live as a free-lance. In the first case he picks his suburb, and the locality will almost pick his friends for him. In the second case he will first choose his set, and the set will automatically pick his locality. In the third case he will choose his friends *and* his locality for himself, but may have to pay for his presumption, for real freedom is a treacherous gift. Complete freedom is in any case hopeless to seek, for at least three considerations must rule even the freest of free-lances. First, he must be central enough to get and to be got at; secondly, he must not be so central that he pays exorbitantly for mere constricted space; thirdly, he must not be so far out that what he gains in cheapness of rent he spends in extra train fares.

This economical obstacle puts a stopper on a full half of the promising acquaintanceships offered in London. Fares are the bogeys of the wage-earner. If we invite Mr and Mrs Jones to dinner and Mr Jones returns the compliment, the housekeeping account is thereby balanced. But if it is going to cost the Joneses four shillings to dine with us and it is going to cost us four bob to dine back with the Joneses we do have to begin to tot up whether the extra skill of Mrs Jones's cook, Mr Jones's taste in wine, the Joneses' family wit, and the Joneses' intermittent friendship is really worth four shillings a go. Equally the Joneses have to do as much about us. Even taking the average return trip at three shillings a pair, the pleasure of running round to one's friends will soon mount up to some twelve or fifteen shillings a week, provided that one is but reasonably gregarious.

In this way London is hampering and ruinous. The English traveller has a tendency to grumble at the box-like discomfort of the Parisian Metro, but you can travel anywhere in Paris, round and round if you like, first class, for threepence a visit; and, provided that you don't put your nose beyond the ticket barriers, you can go on travelling like this all day for the same sum if you so desire. For the same amount of gregariousness you will pay five shillings a week in Paris (first class) against fifteen in London (third class).

Similarly, in New York you have only to drop your nickel (five-cent piece) into the collecting-box of the " Elevated " and you have the freedom of the New York Metropolitan system as long as you wish. Indeed, you may have it for longer than you wish if not wary. A sad tale is told of an old emigrant pair who ventured into the New York Metro during the evening rush-hour. Underground in New York are few direction signs and no porters; the two old people could speak English with difficulty. While frantically trying to find the train and to get information from the hurrying crowds, all too intent on their pushful business to waste time trying to disentangle their lingo, the old couple were thrust apart. Two days later the woman was found on a seat in one of the stations dead from cold, hunger, terror, and despair.

Nevertheless, such a gruesome proof of the liberty of the New York Metropolitan Railway does nothing to detract from the fact that in Paris for twopence (third class) and in New York for about threepence the town voyager can make his way economically in and round his own town to almost anywhere. Compared with such prices the London fares sound absurd. There seems to be no adequate reason why the transport systems in our great towns should remain in private hands, any more than there is for the post, the telegraphs, or the telephones. It is just as important for the average citizen to get his body from here to there cheaply and efficiently as it is to get a letter or a telegram similarly transmitted.

But, apart from the transport question, there are other taboos of which the free-lance dweller must be fully aware. To live in an outer suburb is to enrol yourself one of a tribe. Such people do occasionally return to town parties, and seem so like ghosts from the past that you almost expect them to converse by rapping out their messages on the top of the table. They rise up thus resurrected from Wimbledon, Streatham, Dulwich, Highgate, Golders Green, or Willesden, and talk lightly and with specious nonchalance about " catching the last/" They dangle dinner invitations, coupled with hints of the marvellous show of begonias they

can put up or casual references to getting acquainted with their dogs. But to adventure into the dim, wanly lit mysteries of Suburbia hunting for a homely feed daunts one almost more than an expedition to Africa.

When you do thus dare to adventure you find yourself in an apparently interminable road, which here and there disappears into blank countryside. The house you are looking for has no number, but a foolish name; nor are there numbers to any houses in the road, but only other foolish names. You wander distracted, peering from gate to gate, reading by matchlight the almost invisible imaginings of suburban self-expression.

Once arrived, only half an hour late, even then behind the dinner that fatal last train looms like the mummy at an Egyptian feast, and, as the Devil did to Faust, snatches you away just as you are getting really warm and interested.

No, decidedly you must beware of community-dwelling in the suburbs. Community-dwelling does imply that you have bent to circumstances and for human company must accept what you can get, a sacrifice to the modern heresy of quantity rather than quality. And for distraction you must compete with your neighbours in the pulling of weeds and the raising of flowers from Woolworth's seeds.

This is not a sneer at the suburbs. For the community-dweller the suburbs are excellent, for the flower-fancier, the dog-raiser, and the conscientious parent the suburbs are a necessity. But they are not for the free-lance in life.

Yet, having repudiated the suburbs, the problem was still not quite plain sailing. One must be very shy of an address in any way recondite. Five minutes' walk and only one corner away from any bus or tram stop and no more than one change on the Underground is about as much as the average friend will stand.

This is not a severe criticism on the enterprise of the Londoner. It is entirely due to conditions which are enough to daunt anybody. Two minutes away from a main road one enters a labyrinth of gloom, as badly lit as a negro quarter in an American town, in which lamp-posts twinkle

just far enough to lure one on, like a will-o'-the-wisp, but not giving enough light to show the wanderer where he is going. Dim, dark streets branch off on either hand, unnamed and unknowable. Even were the streets not numbered in contradictory systems, so that one cannot predict where one will find the address desired, the shrouded houses bear few visible numbers, or, when they do, are often found to be really in the street round the corner. And, far from this being the packed dwelling-place of man, it seems a desert. No man or woman passes by unless he or she is, like oneself, a stranger. If one does by chance find an inhabitant he will give instructions often in this manner:

" Yer goes straight along till yer gets to the Blue Cow; then you turns right till you comes to the Hoak-tree; there you turns right—no, left—wait a minute—no . . . left is right—that's right—and you go straight on till you come to Jimson's yard, and there you are, as you might say. . . . "

Conditions such as these are not the exceptions but almost the rule as soon as you lose sight of the gaily lit main streets. Yet in 1883 *Punch*, which can hardly be called a paper of rabid reform, was pressing for some urgently needed London improvements, among which were:

To establish several flower markets.

To establish fruit and vegetable markets.

To build restaurants on the Thames embankments which could be turned into Winter Garden dining-places.

To open Kensington Gardens to equestrians, after the manner of the Bois de Boulogne.

To compel all dust-carts, etc., to work between the hours of 4 and 7 A.M., and then to disappear. Coal-carts the same.

Sub-tramways for heavy wagons.

On every lamp-glass the number of the house facing it.

The name of every street to be legibly printed at the corner of every block at a certain height, and not skied.

" These," adds *Punch*, " will do to begin with. "

Only fifty years have passed since then, and not one of these suggestions has been "begun with" yet. On the same page is a picture by Corbould. It is entitled "Metropolitan Prize Puzzle No. 1. June near the Marble Arch. Puzzle, find the policeman."

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The 'set' exemplifies another modern refuge, that of specialization. Oppressed by the tremendous complexity of modern conditions, you may lighten your responsibilities by ligaturing your interests. There are as many sets as there are interests in life: high-brow sets, low-brow sets, middle-brow sets, bridge sets, tennis sets, chess sets, and ping-pong sets; dirty-story sets, fiscal-reform sets, church-working sets, nudist sets, canary-singing sets, exiled Irish aristocracy sets, open-air sets, dog-racing sets, and so on. The temptation to join a set is something akin to the temptation to smoke opium.

You may at first be tempted to test this in a spirit of curiosity, even though you are still able to look on a round of perpetual set-haunting with a strong sense of mental nausea. But set-dwellers are also akin to opiate fiends. They long to have you for their own. They spread snares in your way: invitations to free talks or to intimate gatherings. Gradually you begin to nibble the lotus flower of setdom, that refuge from complexity and confusion.

Your interests begin to harden more quickly than your arteries, your point of view narrows, your enthusiasm concentrates and sharpens, you begin to treat abstract questions as personalities. You may wake to the fact, if ever you do wake, that outside of the set your conversation has no longer any interest. Then, like the fox that has lost its tail, you yourself become a set lurer. You become a hunter of free men, to enclose them too in the narrow limits of your own set.

There is this defence against the average set: it is intimidated by distance. As a rule the members must live almost on one another's doorsteps, and they try to drag in those who are convenient to the doorstep. Therefore, to

dodge the set you have only to keep it at a decent bus-fare's distance. Wilde's aphorism, " The best way to get rid of a temptation is to give way to it," is true only in particular cases; in general cases it is a profound fallacy. Thus, if you feel the temptation to make love to Mrs Jones you will probably get rid of the temptation by making love to her, but this will not free you from the general temptation to make love to Mrs Smith or Mrs Robinson as soon as you have decently and tactfully shelved the Jones mistake. It is best not to put yourself in the way of set temptation. For certain localities will drag you down as surely as a quicksand. Willy-nilly the pervading set grabs you, and will not be denied.

Thus Bloomsbury will tempt you to the higher-aesthetic set; Gower Street to the regenerate-England-by-the-intellect set; Fitzroy Square and its environs to the middle-aesthetic set; St John's Wood to the " What-do-you-think-of-Komisarjefsky? " set; South Kensington to the bridge-or-be-damned set; Hammersmith to the own-your-own-boat set; Chelsea to the lower-aesthetic, the good-ole-booze, and the get-rid-of-your-complexes set; Balham and Tooting to the short-pants-and-hobnails-for-holidays set; Mayfair to the Royalty-to-tea-if-you-can set; and so on.

If one considers all the taboos, distance limitations, set dangers, and slum quarters there are really very few spots in London where a couple, rather easy-going, a bit shy in some ways, and strongly imbued with a sense of personal liberty, can find a flat with much real safety.

We heard that discovery had recently been made of a new locality in which delectable lodgments might be found at not exorbitant rents: Islington. It lay, of course, just at the edge of the great area now almost entirely ceded to the " Oh-bother-Moses-and-have-a-bit-of-ham " sets.

Yet Islington, charming though it might be, was one of those recondite places already mentioned, and further, although it actually was only N., it held more than a suspicion of £.

Now, London, like Caesar's Gaul, is divided into **three**

parts. The first great division is the river. That is common in every riverine city. One side of the river is always possible and the other is utterly *not*. Thus in Paris, despite the presence of the Chambre des Deputes, the Luxembourg, the Palais Mazarin, and the Sorbonne, the left bank of the Seine is distinctly *not*. So also in New York. A man going to Brooklyn would take a dramatic farewell of his loved ones, although Brooklyn is about the only possible place in which to live there, and certainly the only possible place from which to enjoy the true magnificence of New York.

So in London the transfluvian half of the city simply is *not*. No matter what delightful refuges you may discover in Battersea, everybody will think of you as one of the lost dogs; and as for Kennington, you might as well lodge in the New Cut at once and be done with it. Therefore S. is taboo.

From Highgate to Blackfriars Bridge another line is drawn. The *habitant* of Golders Green will cheerfully travel to Hammersmith for a bad dinner, though the journey is one of eleven miles, takes him an hour and a half, and costs about two shillings there and back. But invite him only six miles to Islington, at the cost of sixpence, and he will hesitate. Probably at the last moment he will wire or telephone with some excuse.

All day long he will go E. with undaunted courage, but after dark few Londoners will venture E. of the Highgate-Blackfriars line of their own free will.

Thus, by a process of exclusion, there seemed to be only three districts in London comparatively possible—the appealingly rustic slopes of Primrose Hill, the misty, reclaimed marshes of Westminster, or the genteel elegances of Bayswater.

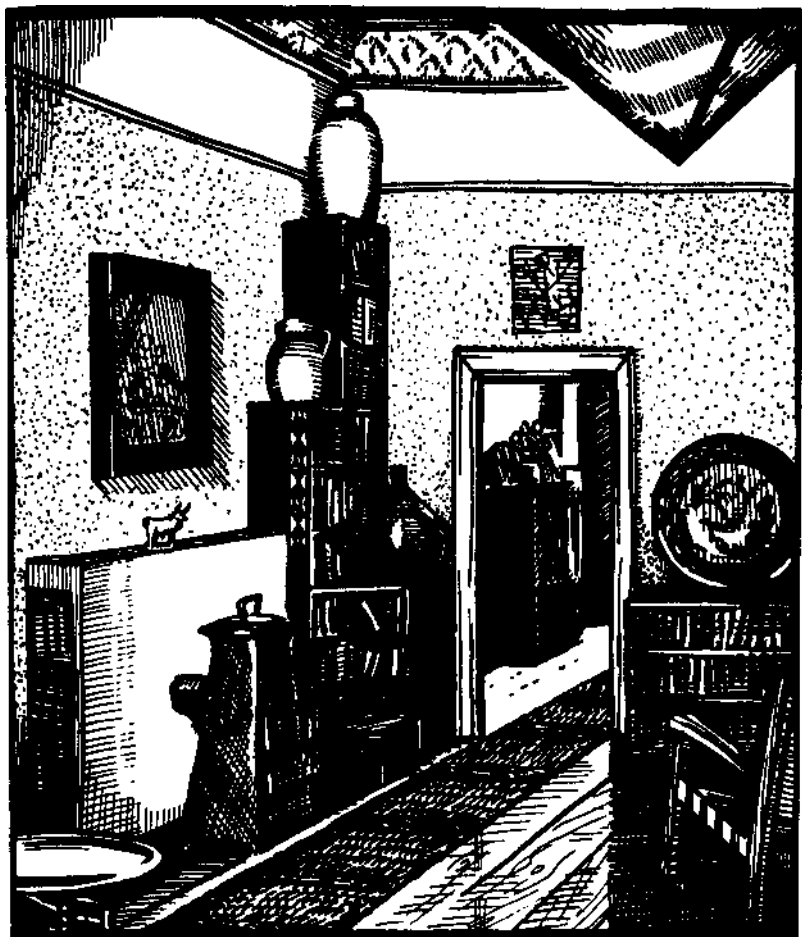
An eminent barrister, while apologizing for the non-appearance of a witness, began thus: "There are seven reasons, m'lud, why the witness in question is unable to attend, the first being that he is unfortunately dead. . . ."

There were also many good reasons why we did not take a flat on Primrose Hill, but the first was that there were no flats to be had. . . .

THE LONDON ROUNDABOUT

Nor, somehow, did Westminster tempt us. We might have liked lodgings in Petty France, in order to soften the sense of severance with Paris, but it looked beyond our means.

So Fate determined that our spiritual home should be in Bayswater, although the name has something oddly repellent about it.



CHAPTER VII

MOVING IN

Jo had been able to find a place, almost ideally suitable, in what was thus the only district left to us in London.

Running off, a pleasant *cul-de-sac*, from the Bayswater Road is Enniscorthy Gardens. It is, however, a deluding kind of road, promising by its breadth to let the unwary driver through towards Kilburn, whereas the actual passage is a small gut of a road next door. So that cars come

racing down our street, only to be pulled up short with a squeal of brakes that is more than a curse.

The outer aspect of the houses exhibits vividly the Victorian ideal. The underlying structure is massive, but utterly commonplace, built of honest-to-God and undisguised brick. Having made all possible arrangements for room space, basements, kitchens, conveniences, drains, and servants' attics in cubical brick, the architect then proceeded to add the Art. And what Art he added! Doric on the ground floor, bastard Renaissance on the first, ditto more or less on the second, Roman Empire on the third, with the honest-to-God brick showing visibly between.

The street has an odd, compounded look, as though one had cut the photographs of a British workman and a pretty girl into strips and had stuck them together alternately. And on the sky-line, where baroque vases in painted plaster contrast with the undecorated chimney-pots, it is as though the street was wearing half of an ornamental toque and half of a bowler hat.

Indoors the contrast between structure and ornament still held, emphasized, perhaps, by the division of this huge dwelling-house into flats of a floor apiece. The stone stairs, with meagre ironwork balustrades, were hardly a suitable transition between the pompousness of the portico and the splendour of our front door on the first floor. This was a veritable *chef-d'oeuvre* of commercial plaster-work in a near-enough Renaissance style. Once it had been the grand entry to the reception-ballroom which occupied the whole floor. The magnificence of the door was deceptive, only one of its glass-panelled sides being hinged, the other giving illumination to the bathroom, in which sometimes of a night, if the hall lights had been put out, Jo might be perceived, like Susannah, but only as a kind of pinkish nebula on the ground glass.

The grand reception-room had been split into five sections: passage, bathroom, and three living-rooms. In consequence of such a summary division pieces of the once noble ornamentation turned up in incongruous places. The

bathroom had a magnificent example of Victorian ornamental pillar design, the large room had a cornice of what architects call "Strawberry Hill Gothic," one of the smaller rooms burst suddenly ceilingward with two tremendous cornice supports of acanthus-leaf pattern, like examples in the old freehand-drawing books of the once ubiquitous Vere Foster. The chimneypieces were of cast iron, in which the imagination of a third-rate designer had done his durndest, one being covered with cast-iron plum branches and inset with bits of looking-glass.

The kitchen was not included within the flat, but was outside, a third of the way down the stairs.

"That," said the caretaker's gay Scots wife, "is one of the reasons why the flat is so difficult to let. Ladies don't like it that way. I showed this to one only a few days ago. 'Huh!' she says, 'think I'd take a place where all my food had to be carried across the stairs so that *anybody* could see it?'"

"Well," said Jo, "that is one of the reasons why I like it. If anybody gets the smell of our cooking we won't. Especially onions," she added thoughtfully.

The kitchen was a queer little place, surrounded by Renaissance arches and covered with a curved roof.

"Do you realize what this once was?" I asked Jo. "This was the conservatory. Here the Victorian young snobs and the Victorian young snobesses flirted among the palms. Here were popped those questions one of which may have eventuated into a Georgian poet. To think that this bower of amorous dalliance should have degenerated into no more than a place for a gas stove and a sink! Yet . . . on reflection . . . no. That is the normal course of true love. . . ."

"Well, I think we can get a jolly interesting decorative scheme here," said Jo practically. "Our brown French pots in those arches, our Breton china along those shelves, and I'm going to paint that white-wood dresser scarlet **with cellulose**. . . ."

Whenever as a child in church I heard the parable of the

man who had rid himself of his three devils I always visualized the interim state as that of an empty house. By a natural transition, whenever I ventured into an empty house I always felt like one of the seven devils coming in to take possession. That odd childish fancy sticks. The mere fact of having an empty house to garnish seems to contain the elements of a devilish adventure, quite unwarranted by the mere facts of the case. For the adventure really is nothing but a fortnight or more of sawing, hammering, staining, and painting; of measuring up, of running to the wood-shop, or bringing the wood back and then finding that the measurements have been taken wrongly. It is the job of trying to make a pound's worth of junk look like a genuine fifty pounds' worth of furnishing, filling in the gaps due to inefficient carpentering with plastic wood and covering the whole with deceptive cellulose.

You might think that a painter of pictures should be able to paint a set of bookshelves. This is not so. The temperamental needs are quite different.

A cheerful workman came knocking at our front door.

" You the parties what this 'ere vanload of stuff is for? "

" Probably," we replied; then, remembering our qualms in Paris about duty, " Did you have any trouble at the Customs House about it? "

" Fuss? " said the cheerful man. " Nar. We didn't 'ave no fuss with this 'ere lot. ' Ho! artiss stuff,' they says; ' they've never got nuthin'.' Didn't even poke their 'eads inside, they didn't."

We went on to our balcony to watch the furniture unloading. Once again we could revive some of the feelings of childish years. It is odd, even now, how certain things which used to seem so important and fascinating to us as children can still wear a retrospective halo of romance. Of such things the unpacking of the furniture van is certainly one. Another is the sight of an engine steaming

into a railway station. These will never lose **the peculiar and** poignant quality with which childhood has endowed them.

Peering between the bars of the areas, and squatting on the ramps of the porticoes, we had already noticed a number of dark cats. Now below us we saw, as it were, a general meeting of all the cats of Enniscorthy Gardens, to discuss the furniture van and the new arrivals. One cat fetched another cat, until there must have been a dozen, almost all black, for we found that the Gardens were famed for their black cats. They paraded under, round, in, and finally over the van; and when at last the men went off to their lunch five cats were left as sentries asleep on the van roof.

We cannot compare the qualities of the French and the English packers, for the French were packing, the English unpacking. These are wholly different occupations. Packing is in some sort a creative business; it calls out character; a man who packs reveals something of his own nature. But the unpacker is merely having a race with the clock. Unpacking is a job that urges almost everybody to speed; its only satisfaction is that of its rapid finish. So the furniture came shooting upstairs rather faster than we could deal with it.

At last we were left standing among a litter of our piled goods, wondering when we could ever bring order to the chaos.

One of the secrets we had learned in Spain, a secret which has not yet been fully appreciated by modern designers, and which certainly will not be encouraged by modern furniture-dealers, is this: that a well-proportioned room is best decorated when there is least in it. If possible there should be nothing in the middle. Our big room, nineteen feet by fifteen, we furnished with a corner divan, one Breton dough-box, two bookcases, one largish chair, two smaller chairs, and one small, half-height table.



When first married in Paris our furniture had been of an

even simpler kind. **The** house itself **had** been **that Louise**

de la Valliere *pavilion* already mentioned. For thirty-six pounds a year we had five rooms and the tunnel. In four of the rooms were six windows, not one of which was similar in shape to any of the others, as they were cut to fit the external decorations, not to suit the look of the rooms inside. Thus we had an oval window, a round window, an oblong window, a square window, a vertical window, and a triangular window.



Excluding the tunnel, our best room was papered a fine deep blue. In this we had an old table, two chairs—one a wedding-present, the other senile—an easel, and an upturned picture-case as a model throne. We had tried in vain to find an orange cat to contrast harmoniously with our blue walls, but failing this we found a huge yellow Chinese vase.

This vase had survived, and now, in London, was perched on the top of a tall corner bookcase opposite to the big window, and there simulated a gleam of sunlight high up under the ceiling, infusing a subdued sense of gaiety into the darkest corner of the room.

Actually we possess only three real pieces of furniture—the Breton dough-box, a Normandy sideboard, and an old chest made of walnut. One piece in each room gave it a *cachet*; a bookcase here and there did the rest. "Books furnish." Pictures on the walls, some large bits of Spanish pottery on the bookcases, in one of the smaller rooms a wall covered with an Algerian rug and spotted with odd musical instruments that we had collected: a Spanish lady's guitar, a *bouzouka* from Albania, a Serbian *guzla*, a Chinese flute, and an old *vielle d'Auvergne* picked up in a dusty shop near the Paris quays. . . . The very same things had decorated our studio in Paris, yet how different they looked here **in their new settings!**

In Paris we had grown used to them. **Now** we saw

them with eyes washed clean by novelty. How wise are the Japanese, keeping all their treasures in a storehouse and bringing them out only one by one! It is really true that works of art exhaust their active interest; we begin to accept them automatically. The wise would change their ornaments and pictures at least once every three months.

But the frightful cast-iron mantelpiece threatened to defy our best efforts. We began to feel serious about it.

"Take my tip," said our most authoritative friend; "there is only one thing you can do. Build it in with beaver board. You should remember . . ."

She did not quite convince us.

Those silly squares of looking-glass put me on the track. A good maxim in a difficulty is, if you can't mitigate exaggerate.

"Jo" I said, "we've got to make a fool of that fireplace. It is such a fool already that we have to make it a bigger. Why not paint all those plums and branches Cezanneishly, pick out the silly details in the brightest colours against a dark background? Make it match, more or less, that Spanish landscape of yours that hangs above it. . . ."

The job took Jo two days, but they were worth it. Oddly enough, the patterns, when thus emphasized, proved to be not unpleasant in their own way; they were merely unsuitable for cast iron. Now, painted in rich colourings, cunningly contrasted, wiped in places down to the original white paint, they have assumed the appearance of old French tiles, heritage of the labours of the Palissys. The bits of looking-glass became almost unnoticeable, or at the most mere oddities instead of offences.

When our authoritative friend saw the result she said, "Ha, yes! Well, that is just what I should have told you to do if you had consulted *me* about it. . . ."



One is not installed merely by placing the furniture. London's mechanical doctors had to come and vet the flat; gas and electrical circulations had to be

re-established, the pulse of the telephone must be taken. Through this we touched one of England's national peculiarities.

The Young Man from the Electricity, who came to review the fuses and so on, was nothing remarkable at first glance—a good-natured youth, with capable hands and a blue suit. In our inner room, the wall of which we had decorated with the panel of instruments, he stopped.

" You play? " he queried.

" Most of them," answered Jo.

" Aha! mine's wind," said the Young Man from the Electricity.

" What did you say? " asked Jo.

" I play wind myself," said the Young Man from the Electricity. " French horn."

" Oh, but that's terribly difficult, isn't it? " said Jo, in amazement.

" That's right," agreed Young Electricity. " But there's the benefit of it, you see. My father, he was a professional musician. Started me on the French horn as a kiddie. I grew up to the French horn, as you might say. Why, I knew the letters up to G a good year before I knew the rest of the alphabet. Now I'm one of the half-dozen French-horn players in London unattached to a regular orchestra."

" You—er—do solo work? " asked Jo.

" That's not the point," said Young Electricity. " The point is that all these here amateur orchestras haven't got amateur French-horn players. Can't get 'em, you see. You must be born to it. So they've got to hire professionals. That's where I come in, playing of an evening with these amateur orchestras! Almost always the same old things—know 'em by heart. But some of them are good, though. Good pay, too, and I can get on with my daytime job as well. Oh, yes, I earn plenty of money when I want to. But, bless you,



it doesn't last!" A look of annoyance and irritation came on his frank face. " Why, believe it or not, nowadays you can't take a girl—a nice girl, that is—out for an evening under thirty bob a time; that is, when you've paid for everything, say a seat at some show, a bit of supper afterwards, and the fares. . . . That's a fact. No, honestly, it takes a fellow just about all he knows to stay level. . . ."

" Well," said Jo, " you get off easily. Didn't you see in the paper the other day how they had sent round a *questionnaire* to some smart American schools to ask how much a girl expected a man to spend on her for an evening's outing? The lowest was five pounds, but some ran to twenty-five a time."

Young Electricity shook his head.

" Ah, that kind would be out of my class," he said. " And I'll bet those American fellers don't get any more value for their money, either."

" Why," said Jo, " when I was a student we used to go to the shilling gallery, and be glad to go there."

" Ah, well, yes, students and such, perhaps," conceded Young Electricity. " But when a girl has a nice little job of her own, sec'tary or something like, she'd expect a bit better, wouldn't she? And does," he added, with all the force of experience.

Telephones, being a Government servant, was a little superior to Electricity. He had risen from the class of execution to that of criticism. We had placed over the mantelpiece a picture of mine representing three Spaniards eating a water-melon. It is not exactly a realistic picture in the ordinary sense of the word. It was composed and painted with an emphasis on the rhythmical structure and tonal adjustments rather than on photographic accuracy, and would, we have always supposed, be fairly annoying to the average Philistine. But Telephones was quite undismayed by the picture's peculiarities.



" Now, that," he exclaimed, with enthusiasm, " is what I call a real picture! I see you go in for modern art. Well,

you know, that is just the kind of **art** I like. Of course, I never had any art education, but **when** you like a thing—well, you like it, don't you? "

"Not necessarily," I answered. "There are thousands of people who don't know what they like at all."

"Look at the Tate Gallery," said Telephones, taking no notice of my red herring. "Now, I go there quite a lot. Don't live so far off. That's how I come to drop in, Sunday afternoons, when it's wet. There's that gallery of French stuff. Some of *that* now! It's all right, eh? It gets *me*, anyhow. Look at lots of the other stuff there. It's all right—I mean, it's well done, I suppose, but it doesn't make you feel anything extra, does it? I mean, that's how it strikes me. . . ."

"I'll tell you something," I said. "The other day a lady came here. 'I can't understand these things of yours and your wife's,' she said. 'But you don't have to understand them,' I answered. 'What!' she cried. *Not understand them! Then what *can* you do?' 'You don't *understand* a beefsteak,' I answered; 'you *taste* it.' "

"I get you," said Telephones, borrowing his idiom from the movies. "You taste it. Yes, that's how I feel about it too. Well, I hope you will excuse me just saying what I thought. . . ."

"Any artist will always excuse you for liking his pictures," I retorted, laughing.

The first few employees of the gas company had apparently no aesthetic diversions. However, we decided to get an extra gas point fixed in the bathroom, and notified the company. An expert appeared to estimate for the job. He



dismantled the end of our bath, hunted up connexions under the floor, put all in order again, and disappeared. No news of him arriving for a month or so, we again notified the gas company, who **at** once, with a businesslike promptitude, sent another expert, who **again dismantled** the end of the bath, explored our sub-flooring, and once more restored

all to order. Having finished the job, our expert looked through the door into the smaller room, where I was working.

"Excuse me, sir," he ventured, "but can you tell me whether that old *vielle* there plays or no?"

"Eh?" I asked, looking up from my writing-table.

"That old *vielle* you got. Does it work, if you'll excuse me? Of course, I seen them before, but I have never heard one worked yet."⁵⁵

"Certainly it works,"⁵⁵ I answered. Taking the instrument down, I played a simple French air.

The *vielle* in question (sometimes called the hurdy-gurdy) is an old instrument from the Auvergne. It has a rounded body, not unlike that of a big mandolin lacking the shaft. In the sounding-board is a wooden disk, the flat edge of which is rubbed with resin like a violin bow. On turning this wheel with an outside handle it vibrates several strings stretched the length of the instrument. These strings can be stopped by means of keys, which fall back by their own weight. The bar beats and accents are produced by revolving the handle in little jerks, as I explained to the gas man—four jerks to the turn for common time, three jerks for three-four time, and so on. This turning of the handle is the trickiest part of playing the *vielle*.

"O⁵ course,"⁵⁵ said Gas, "I *seen* them before, but I never heard one *played*. Queer sound, isn't it, like the bagpipes?"

"But," I exclaimed, "you must know something about old instruments?"

"Well, sir, I takes an intelligent interest in 'em," he answered.

"Ever heard of Dolmetsch?" I questioned.

"Dolmetsch?" he retorted. "O' course, I knows all about Dolmetsch. Why, I been down to 'is place at 'Asle-mere, too. On a trip. Been all over it. Ah, that's a man now! Knows all about is job, e does, eh?"

"But however did you get interested in old instruments?" I asked.

Unluckily Gas was one of your inarticulates.

" Oh, I dunno. It just sort of 'appened. In fact, I couldn't reely tell you just 'ow it did 'appen—Well, thank you, sir. I mustn't stop 'ere talking too long. Got a 'eap of work to do to-day. . . . Good morning, sir, and thank you again. . . ."

Yet, despite the fact that two experts have now reported on our suggested gas point, which was several months ago, the gas company seems to keep to the good old British business habits, for no hint of an estimate has yet reached us. We suppose this may be good for unemployment, but surely gas might cost a little less if only one expert had been used and an estimate had been sent in.

However, they did send us, unasked, a lady apparently to induce us to use more gas. She tried to teach Jo the charms of using the good old British gas oven, which has, I should calculate, a thermal efficiency of about two and a half per cent. As a rather naughty experiment we showed her our patent Swedish fireless cooker that will bake or roast with the aid of hot bricks, the troglodytic system proving far more economical than that of the age of science. But the gas lady had a feminine loyalty to her job.

In men, for the most part, common humanity, once established, overrides any sense of loyalty to a *mere* employer. Judging from other examples, a gas man would have said at once:

⁴⁴ That's a good idea, that is. You take my tip, but don't say that I told you. Don't you use that gas oven a spot more than you've got to. Just eats up the gas, it does. *That's what they want, isn't it?* "

Several times workmen have told us how to go behind their employers' backs and get things more cheaply than they could supply.

" Crool, I calls it," said one, " the way we sticks on the money when you can get it 'alf the price round the corner."

But a woman is seldom able to cultivate such a sense of detachment. So our gas lady pursed up her lips at the Swedish cooker and went her way, reflecting, probably, that she had lost half a morning.

Another gas man, whom we will call Gas I I, came to replace a couple of broken pieces from the radiator. He looked round our flat, and made a different comment.

" Got a lot o' books, aintcher? "

" Well," Jo answered, " it's our job. We write them, you see."

" Ar," said Gas I I, " so you're authors. In this job you meet all kinds. Now, my daughter, she's a knockout for books. Got two signed author's copies she has too; one's by Wilhelmina Stitch and the other's by Jack London. Uster keep 'em carefully wrapped up in brown paper, she did, but now she's got a job she's bin saving her money for one of these yer folding, dust-proof bookcases, expanding, like you see in the hadvertisements. So now she can see her books through the glass. And on a Sunday afternoon she'll pull up a poof like to her bookcase and read all the hafternoon. Reads deep, she does, too. Why, Haich G. Wells is simply shellin' peas to her."

A few days later our front-door bell tinkled. Jo opened it, and there was Gas I I.

" Excuse me for troubling you," he said. " I was wondering if you could give me a list of your books. We'd like to get 'em out of the library, if you'll excuse me. . . ."

.

One day, as I was coming downstairs, the postman handed me up a letter.

" Q,," he said. " Thank goodness I don't have to climb that lot to-day."

" Why, yes," I answered, " I suppose you *do* get a lot of stairs on your job."

" Stairs? " he retorted. " In this house there's seventy-five up and seventy-five down, a hundred and fifty steps in one house, and there's twenty houses on that plan in this street alone."

Twenty houses at a hundred and fifty steps apiece, three thousand stairs for a single street.. .. And how many rounds a day?

Suddenly I saw London as a horror of stairs: butchers' boys, bakers' boys, grocers' boys, newspaper boys, postmen, up and down stairs all day burdened with heavy and awkward loads; trams with stairs, buses with stairs; bus conductors not only on their feet for eight hours a day, juggling with tickets and cash, but also climbing a couple of sky-scrapers daily into the bargain.

There is something to be said for the Parisian *conciierge* after all, and yet more for the American system of small hand-worked service-lifts for provisions. Even in Spain and Italy the people let down baskets on strings from the upper windows. We should love to see *that* system at work in Enniscorthy Gardens. Fancy Admiral Wiggins hoisting up the cat's meat! . . .

Also the vacuum-cleaner touts marked us as their prey. They called offering to vacuum-clean a bit of our flat, to prove by oracular demonstration how essentially dirty we were.

One was a long, rather silent Irishman, the other a robust, thickset man of no apparent nationality. The first gradually revealed himself as the salesman, the other was only the hired eloquence, the silver-tongued, the verbal seducer, or, in vulgar parlance, the 'barker.'

"Hello," said the barker, as soon as he was in the room, "you been to Russia?"

"No, Albania and Serbia," Jo answered. "Do you know Russia?"

"I was born there," said the barker. "Served in a Cossack regiment in the War. My father was English, though. . . ."

"That's the trick," he was thinking to himself. "Got the right sort of contact this time. These will be easy. . . ."

We could see anticipation shining on both their faces.

From a box they produced the apparatus, a nickel-plated, beehive-shaped thing, which, when the current was switched on, made a humming like a dozen furious hives at swarming-

time. To this they attached long pipes of silvery nickel, glittering enough to bedazzle any ambitious housewife* With the splayed nozzle the Irishman caressed one of our rugs, while the barker babbled on, and I waited for an opportunity to disconcert him. At last it came.

The barker uttered the ancient platitude of cleanliness next to godliness.

" No" I retorted, " that is where you are wrong. The two have nothing to do with each other; or, rather, they are diametrically opposed. Godliness is the worship of the spirit; it is a denial of the flesh and a repudiation of the world. How then can it be next to cleanliness, which is an affirmation of the materialistic outlook and is founded on the worship of the flesh? "

" D'jew mean to say you don't believe in being clean? " expostulated the bewildered barker.

" That has nothing to do with the argument," I replied, " What I am saying is, that the man who is truly godly and truly spiritual is so far lifted above all considerations of the flesh that he may not even be aware whether he is dirty or no. The Indian yogi or the Russian monk has a truer point of view on the just relationship between cleanliness and godliness. . . ."

While I talked on the Irishman was cleaning our rug. At last he decided that I had talked long enough. He was not fishing for red herrings, but for solid hire-purchase bonds. He began the second part of the oracular demonstration. Switching off the current, he disembowelled the apparatus, and from its canvas belly poured a mound of aspirated dust.

" There," said the barker triumphantly. " Now, in spite of what you were saying, don't you think that you have to own an apparatus that'll get that amount of dust from a single rug ? "

" Sorry," said Jo, " but we *did* warn you that at present we cannot afford to buy such an apparatus."

" Can't afford? " cried the barker encouragingly. " You don't have to afford to buy this. Just two pounds down and

the whole thing is yours. Look at what it will do for you: chairs, carpets, settees, walls, pictures. It'll dry your clothes and your hair, can be used to cool the room. You don't *have* to buy, of course; this demonstration is free—no obligations. But you can afford two pounds, can't ycu? "

" There you come against a prejudice," I answered. " Nothing will ever induce us to buy on the hire system."

" Oh, come, come! " cried the barker, blooming once more, for this was his especial territory. " Now, let's talk that out. What's hire-purchase but credit? And what's credit but the only foundation of modern business? Now, do you see, the average man don't understand what he can do with his credit; he don't know that he can use it just as a banker or a business firm does. We're here to teach him. Why, the expansion of private credit——"

" Excuse me for interrupting," I said. " We were in America when hire-purchase was expanded to its limit. The wages of almost every working man and clerk were mortgaged for two full years ahead. Everything was bought on hire-purchase—cars, houses, radios, dresses, clothes, boots, even motor-tyres, which were often worn out before the payments were completed. . . . Did you see the joke about the young couple saying, ⁶ Two more payments and the baby is ours *? Half of the world-trouble to-day is on account of false credits. Hire-purchase means increased production until all the available wages are mortgaged as far ahead as the salesman dare accept. But at that point it means over-production, because there is no more cash and no more credit. Production has to be reduced to the pre-credit stage. That means dismissing workmen. That means seizing the goods and having to store them, since there are no markets in which they can be sold. That means bankruptcy for the dealers and manufacturers, and that means more dismissals and more defaults. . . . There's your hire-purchase circle, and that is at least one of the reasons for the American catastrophe. . . ."

" It's not everybody thinks like you do. Eighty per cent, of our customers buy on hire-purchase," said the barker,

pushing a hand into his pocket and flourishing a bundle of contracts. "Got three new sales to-day, anyhow—"

"We can't give everybody sense," I said.

"All right," interrupted the Irishman impatiently, "buy it outright then. Eighteen quid down."

"And how much on hire-purchase?" I asked,

Their expression changed. "Only a gas-bag after all," they thought.

"Two pounds down, and only two pounds for ten months; ten bob a week, less than one and six a day. . . ."

"Twenty-two pounds," I thought—"more than twenty per cent, extra."

We explained that though the machine seemed very efficient we would only purchase outright when we could afford it, which was certainly not now, just after an expensive move from Paris.

Once again the Irishman interrupted.

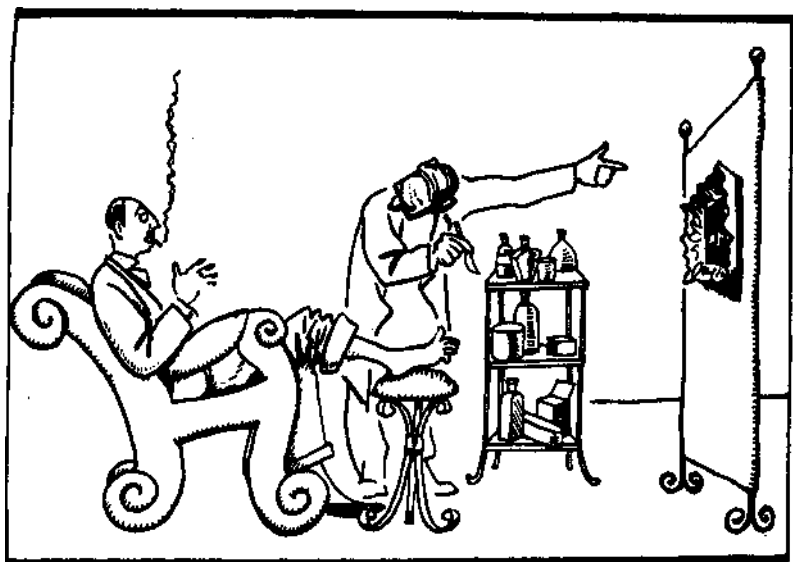
"See here," he said, "I'll make you a special offer for cash. Bottom price, thirteen quid down. There's a bargain."

"So it's not twenty per cent., but about seventy per cent.," I thought; "and, allowing for a natural belief that he still would make a profit from thirteen pounds, it is possibly a good hundred per cent."

Hire-purchase has the further evil of tempting the earner of a modest wage to buy expensive objects of impermanent value. And what expensive objects the poor will buy! The petty clerk buys a thirty-pound motor-bike; the shop-girl, living in a poor suburb, will buy a twenty-pound fur coat. Our greengrocer's son in the early days of the radio bought a set for twenty-five pounds which to-day is hardly worth ten shillings. The actual manufacturing price of a twenty-five-pound radio set is possibly about six pounds or less.

Under new conditions the middleman's profits, the profit of the distributor, a man who has little training, no handicraft, but only craftiness, a man who produces nothing, who is merely a parasite on trade, often amounts to over a hundred per cent. That is to say, under the competitive system of distribution an article may easily cost more **than double to**

buy than it does to manufacture. In many cases the profit is even higher, four or five hundred per cent. This applies not only to the luxuries, but even to the necessities of life, so that producers starve while consumers cannot afford to buy. Small wonder that civilization groans under the burden of a stupid financial crisis!



CHAPTER VIII

HOBBY-HORSE

THE most English of English writers, Sterne, cannot get far into his *Tristram Shandy* before he has both Mr Shandy and my Uncle Toby mounted on their hobby-horses full gallop through life.

In displaying their hobby-horsical interests, though both are closely allied in the very English bond of whimsicality, the witty author has sundered them as far apart as possible in their outward means of expression. Mr Shandy's hobby-horse is that of whimsical philosophy; it envisages a gigantic work of wayward logic, that is, however, never written, only talked about. Uncle Toby's, on the other hand, is whimsical craftsmanship. It exists by its concrete expression, and our good Uncle is content to follow the dictates of his whimsy even to almost infantile follies without perceiving their absurdity.

Of the two my Uncle Toby's hobby-horse is by far **the** more characteristically English. It is almost the quintessence of typical English hobby-horsedom. Mr Shandy's is much

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more Continental in flavour; its humour is more French or German than British; and we may note that most of the authors, real, misquoted, or mock, used in defence of Mr Shandy's ideas are themselves Continental. So also Carlyle, building up a whimsical philosophy, invents a German philosopher as father, because in the mouth of an Englishman the theme would have lacked verisimilitude. Though it took a Scot to write *Sartor Resartus*—a German couldn't have done it.

In his readiness to adopt a hobby the ordinary Englishman differs widely from the Continental. The Englishman's bent lies in the direction of deeds, the Continental's in that of words. The *cqfi* gives the latter an outlet by which much of the impulse towards constructive hobby is evaporated. It is almost unthinkable that in Paris a shop labelled "Hobbies" (or the French equivalent, whatever it may be) could flourish by selling to working men the apparatus for various kinds of home craftsmanship, pursued with enthusiasm and diligence after normal working hours, just as it is impossible to imagine in France a serious volume such as *Who's Who* including hobbies as important factors (which undoubtedly they are) of an eminent person's career.

A modern example of these home interests may be found in a monthly paper called *The Artist*. This magazine, beautifully produced and costing two shillings, is published solely to give instruction in the various branches of painting and the allied arts. On its inception by a shrewd Northerner expert opinion predicted that the magazine could not last six months. Smith's bookstalls, which handle a full half of the British paper and magazine trade, agreed to take four thousand copies, a half of the first issue, on sale or return, but candidly told the editor that they did not expect to sell two hundred and fifty copies. Within a week they were *Oliver Twisting*, with a similar fate. The first number was sold out in ten days, and a copy of *The Artist*, vol. i, No. i, is now to be bought only at a large premium, ten times the original value or thereabouts. The circulation is still increasing every month after two years of publication.

The Artist is not primarily bought by artists, **nor yet** by **art** students. It is bought by the thousands of **amateur** painters in the British Isles and the Dominions. In France such a specialized paper, at such a price, could not last three months.

The successful art magazines in France are all professional journals given over to critical analysis designed for connoisseurs. They are never technical; published for art lovers, not art practitioners. That is the difference. Here, while critical and artistic faculty is on a comparatively low level, the creative desire is very widely spread; in France, while the creative element is almost confined to the profession, a general critical appreciation is very common.

One case of pronounced artistic hobby developed to a profitable end I found in London by a happy accident. Needing a shave, I walked into a barber's shop just off the Euston Road. As the barber spread my face with creamy lather he remarked:

"Excuse me, sir, being so bold, but am I right in thinking that you are an artist?"

"That," I answered, as well as possible through the surrounding suds, "is a question over which the critics and I are sometimes at variance."⁵

"Oh, jess so, exactly," he replied. "But I arsked you because, you know, you some'ow or other reminded me of a customer we once 'ad. Yes, some'ow you reminded me of'im."

"Pleasantly, I hope," said I.

"Oh, yes, sir, of course, sir," said my barber hastily. "Though I can't 'elp hadmitting that he seemed to me a gen'elman of a somewhat 'asty temper."

"Easily upset?" I said.

"Well, sir, I'll tell you. Gome in 'ere regular as clock-work, 'e did, and very often I 'ad the pleasure of hattending to 'im myself. But 'e 'ad, sir, just as you'll excuse my saying you 'ave, a pimple on 'is face, a kind of a wart like, see? **Now**, one morning one of our **young men was attending to**

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'im, **and** just as 'e was lathered up the young chap says **to** 'im, but quite nice like and respectful, 'Hare you aweer, sir, that you 'ave a kind of a mole on your face? Now, sir, we could remove that painlessly and without no trouble to yourself And with that, and with 'is face ball covered over with the lather, believe it or not, mister, the gen'elman jumps up hout of 'is chair and 'e says, 'Wen Hi wants a blinkin' blinkin' wart taken hoff Hi'll go to a blinkin' blinkin' doctor and not to a ruddy barber,' 'e says, wipes the lather hoff 'is face, walks hout *of* the shop, and we never seen 'im from that day to this."

"Indeed," I said. "Well, though I may not have as hasty a temper as your friend, I am like him in one way: I'd rather you left my wart alone. . . ."

"Oh, yes, sir, jess as you like, sir, of course," said my barber. He stropped his razor, looking reflectively at the forbidden blemish. "Not, 'owever, that that detracts, has you might say, from my hadmiration of the gen'elman's paintings."

"So you are interested in art? "

"Well, sir, that's a fact, Hi ham. Not in a professional way, of course—not a patch on my brother, for instance."

"You have a brother an artist? "

"Oh, not an artist, sir. In fact, 'e's in a parallel branch to myself. 'E's a chiropodist. But 'e always did love a bit of art. Used to go round to all the sales in 'is spare time and pick up a bit 'ere and a bit there. 'E 'ad a neye, that's what it was. Now, sir, in 'is business 'e discovered a very remarkable fact. Which is that when gents is 'aving their feet done their minds hare unhoccupied. Now, what does 'e do but fix up at a nice convenient distance . . . Say the client's chair is 'ere, see, then the screen would be there, just nicely in line. It was a greyish, nootral kind of screen, it was. Then against that screen 'e'd stick up hanything choice 'e'd 'appened to pick up recent. And then, what with the client's mind being unhoccupied, as I said, and what with 'im looking at that there object, why, before the sitting was done ⁵**e might take a fancy to it and arsk the price. Then**

when my brother 'adn't got a piece of 'is own 'e'd go round to some of these 'ere dealers and borrey a bit, hon commission like, see? Well, one way and another 'e picked up so many hextras that 'e's practically retired from the chiropody business now. 'E's got a little place in the country, and a garden and a library and all. 'E still does a few extra specials, but mostly it's art stuff with 'im now, and very comfortably too. You ort ter see 'is art library. It's a fair peach. Books all round three walls, and every one of 'em about art. I tell yer, yer couldn't stump 'im on any art question you'd care to ask. 'E 'as it all at 'is finger-tips, right from the present day back to Gimerboo."

"By Jove!" I replied. "And what do you think of Cimerboo yourself?"

"To tell you the truth, sir, 'e's a bit too harchaic for my taste. Though if my brother 'eard me say that 'e'd let me 'ave it, I can tell yer—'ot *and* strong!"

Another odd encounter befell in a barber's shop near Regent Street. Once more holding me in the bondage of a sudded face, the barber began:

"I know you, sir. Years ago, beginning of the War, I saved you from being denounced to the perlice."

"Good Lord!"

"Remember when you took rooms in Robert Street, just off the Cumberland Market? Put up curtains, white with big black spots on, you did. 'That's for a signal,' says the people. Goes out every day with big portfolios under your arms, you did. * That's plans,' they said. Lots of toffs in cars come to your door and wait; 'orribly suspicious that was. 'Them's German spies,' says everybody. Going to denounce you to the perlice, they was. 'Garn,' I sez to them. 'What djer know about spies? Think spies would advertise theirselves like that? Naw, they're Bo'emians, they are!'"

.

Hobbies include such diverse interests as art, music, the drama, wood- and metal-working, motor-cycling, rose-

growing, marionette-making, dog-breeding and -training, canary culture, pigeon-fancying, physical culture, various kinds of games (played, not watched); and to these may be added recently radio, woodcrafting, hiking, and even nudism.

The stimulus behind such an interest as village music reveals clearly a difference between the English outlook on a hobby and that of the French. In both cases there is, of course, the primary musical aptitude. But in an English village the band is generally assembled from sheer love of the diversion; seldom do the performers expect to earn much in return for their art. It is art for art's sake with a vengeance. In France one of the prime inducements for the youths to take up music is that a musical conscript has far better treatment as a recruit in the regimental band than as a common foot-slogging *poilu*. Later the members of the village band add considerably to their daily wages by playing at the local dances, weddings, and festivals, which far exceed in number those of an English village.

Once mounted on his hobby-horse, the Englishman, no matter what his social station, begins to lose all sense of proportion. Even though his family may go on short rations the Northern miner's dog must be well cared for. I have known a puller of barley-sugar in a small Cornish sweet-factory who paid ten pounds for his banjo, although he was an indifferent player and never hoped to gain a sou with it.

Probably the hobby-horsical nature of the Englishman has deteriorated during recent years, and the loss is all to the bad. The cheapening of the newspaper has been responsible for much. The increase of excitement stirred up and kept at fever-pitch round horse-, dog-, and dirt-track racing, football, and boxing has diverted the working man's spare money, canalized his interests, and has enormously reduced his real value as a human being. The advent of the cinema has given the family a claim on the small balance of the weekly budget, a claim which he dare

not repudiate. The money left for hobby-horsical pursuits is very much less than it used to be twenty years ago. The Briton has become a man of more restricted personal and internal resources than he was.

Here also we may note the activities of certain associations, such as those of the Leisure Society, which, looking forward (with some optimism, perhaps) to the promised Utopia of shorter hours and some sane way of distributing the surplus productions of the machine age, is preparing to re-educate the Englishman in the proper use of his spare time.

Yet although the Englishman has shown, and still shows, a hobby-horsical interest in the creative crafts, his aesthetic capacity has gone almost wholly to seed. Taste remains in this country at a deplorable level. I think we may say that the artistic taste of the average Englishman is as low as that of any country in Europe, even that of the least educated, except, perhaps, Ireland. Indeed, the taste of the less educated nations is by no means the lowest, for they still* retain vestiges of folk taste, which was, usually, good in its own way.

This poverty of artistic taste cannot be laid wholly, as some would lay it, to the account of the manufacturers. That the factory has produced a large amount of tasteless and degraded art is true; that it has spread this aesthetic poison broadcast through the land cannot be denied; but the fact remains that the manufacturers' chief idea is generally to make money, and therefore to sell as much as possible. He takes his pointers from the sales records and from little else.

Had articles in good taste shown an inclination to sell freely he would have made them. The reverse has been the case. In fact, manufacturers are not always the soulless persons depicted by popular superstition. Not many years ago a manufacturer of printed fabrics told me that his firm, for its souPs sake, made a number of special designs of the most artistic patterns it could procure. These materials were always sent out mixed up with the other samples. Yet with unerring precision they were almost always put on one

side by the wholesalers and retailers. On such artistic materials the firm annually lost a considerable sum.

In Paris Jo was spectator of a comic little scene at one of the popular bazaars which spread their merchandise half across the pavements. A humble woman, standing almost in the road, was waving vigorously before a black-overalled salesman a pair of common bedroom utilities, one grasped in each hand.

"But I cannot understand, monsieur," she was protesting, in a loud voice. "This one"—waving it—"is marked at two francs fifteen, while this one"—brandishing it in turn—"not a bit better—in fact, one would say less commodious—is marked at two ninety-five."

"*Mais, madame*" said the shopman, taking the dearer jerry from her hand. "*Regardez done, madame*" And with a mingled air of tenderness and sentimentality he showed her the interior. "*II y a desfleurs*"

Yes, flowers, bouquets, whether suitably placed or not, seem to have been the bane of serious decoration. In the case cited the ornament was perhaps more than superfluous, yet ill-placed sentimentality has perhaps done more to force taste down than any other factor. If European taste is to be seriously resurrected (and, indeed, there may seem to be some hints of a revival) the chief motto dominating all others should be, "No flowers, by request."

The lack of taste in the average Englishman is clearly shown at the wood-shop where I go to procure planks of any width or thickness, three-, five-, or seven-ply wood of any area, or battens of any length, cut in a jiffy to one's own measurements. Thither I would hasten, bringing back on the "wandering wardrobe" piles of planks, which, with the aid of a few nails, became bookcases to fit the various unoccupied corners of our rooms. The shop itself was a rather depressing place, illustrating in too poignant a fashion this degeneracy of popular art. It was filled with the most uninviting specimens of experimental woodwork imaginable.

In Paris too they have these white-wood shops, but there the objects for sale have a visible sense of design. Touched

with the factory commonplace they may be, but touched with a sense of art they are also, and though commonly made have a sense of respect for line and proportion. But the English shop is in comparison a dreadful place, filled with fretworked radio-cabinets, cupboards, stools, and sections of furniture, table-legs, chair-backs and -bottoms, void of any hint of taste. It seemed impossible that a craftsman could handle tools at all and not, even by accident, produce at least one piece that showed a glimmering of beauty in proportion, line, or pattern. One would have said that this man was suffering from a state of complete imbecility of the art sense—or not imbecility, but positive criminality.

The chief workman was a tall and cadaverous man who seemed to be eternally smiling, a modern version of *L'Homme qui rit*, and for exactly a similar reason—that is to say, the smile had been imposed on his face by art and did not indicate in the least the state of his humours. This man's smile was due only to the fact that his moustache was cut with a convex lower edge, which seemed to keep the corners of his mouth turned up whether they actually were or no.

"Lor' bless you," he confided in me one day, "this ain't always bin my job—not likely. You heard of 'erbs?—that's what I did. Had a 'erb garden, I had. Doing well too—made my seven 'undred a year, an' no mistake; but perishing hard work it was, I'll tell you. Why ain't I doing it now? Had to quit. Lorst it all, straight. Speculating. Stock Exchange? No, chicory. You know, the stuff you puts into coffee. In the War, it was. Medical 'erbs my place was for. Then this blessed chicory goes up to a nice little sixty pound a ton. But it takes two years to be fit for use. Well, that looked pretty good to me, so I put the whole bloomin' place under chicory. Sunk all my spare cash into it, and a bit more too. But before I'd got the stuff into condition along comes the Armistice. The dealers skip over to Paris, and before I could get my stuff on the market it was 'way down to twenty pound a ton. Knocked the wind out of me. I paid me debts, I did, but that was about all.

" Do I want to go back to it? Fm not so sure. There's advantages, perhaps, being your own master, but there's drawbacks too. Did you ever think of this? When a man's his own master he works himself twice as hard as he dare to work another chap, and, by gum! he often pays himself half as much. And here's another thing, mister: I got nothing to worry about now. That makes a difference. F'rinstance, I can go to the pictures and enjoy them. I ain't thinking about what I got to do with my next lot of stuff, nor getting afraid that a frost'U come along and play the dickens with the shoots. . . . And that's worth five hundred a year to be quit of, I can tell you. ..."

A few streets from Enniscorthy Gardens was a large garage. Thither we went, seeking garage room for our motor-cycle combination. But from among the bonnets of massed Rolls-Royces, Minervas, M.G.'s, Rileys, and Austin sedans the garage man looked at us with an indifference that amounted to contempt, the flunkey's borrowed disdain, which Leech was so fond of caricaturing a hundred years ago.

" *That!* " he said. " We couldn't take *that here*."

" Do you know anywhere that we could take it? "

" Couldn't say, Ah'm shaw."

But, as we were turning the machine to leave, his natural English kindness won the victory over his professional contempt, and he shouted, "There's a place round the corner. Rabbit's Row. The name is Witsun. P'raps he could find room for you."

Rabbit's Row was a narrow, cobbled alley between two rows of shambling cottages, back to back with neighbours much more magnificent, in that curious London juxtaposition where wealth and penury lie, like King Gophetua and his beggar-maid, in each other's arms.

Some of the cottages in Rabbit's Row had been scooped out beneath and reshaped as stables or small garages. A **vegetable pedlar's cart** stood stocked high with Govent

Garden bargains, waiting for the horse. From No. 6 a notice-board protruded. On this was printed in rudely lettered paint:

6 RABBIT'S ROW

SMALL CAR

CYCLE GARAGE I

We hammered on Mr Witsun's door, and were greeted by a vociferous barking within.

" Good watchdog, at all events," we said.

A postern door opened in the greater door of the garage, and out wriggling and sniffing came the watchdog, a fat little mongrel, followed by its master, the garage proprietor. That universal good-humour which is so marked a characteristic of the Londoner shone clearly in Mr Witsun's face. It was a fine medieval face, with a pointed triangle of emphatic nose and a slit of smiling mouth, which opened squarely, rather like the mouth of a ventriloquist's doll.

His small cavern of a garage seemed stuffed with a couple of baby cars, several motor-cycles, a side-car combination, and a perambulator. But Mr Witsun assured us that *plenty* of room could be made, though how he was going to work the miracle we couldn't guess. This machinery-packed cavern was evidently his front hall; whitewashed stairs led upward to the cottage flat above. In many of the garage cottages of Rabbit's Row the stairs were outside the buildings, and gave them almost an Italianate air. Here we felt at home immediately. Meanwhile the watchdog had been examining nasally everything about us within reach.

" A good dog that," said Mr Witsun. " Now he knows you you'll be all right. If he didn't know you and you tried to get in at night he'd 'owl the roof off."

" Bus-driver I was," he said a few minutes later. " That was a job. I was driving in the old days, when each time you went out it was a toss-up whether you got home on your

own power or towing behind the next bus. And skid! Swinging some of those old buses about on a slippery day was a job, I can tell you! . . . Yes, they got a skid school now, where you learns how to skid 'em, but we did our learning on the streets. . . .

" In those days driving the last bus, that was a game. The chaps 'ud get on loaded up with bottles of whisky—



THE HOME OF HOBBY

specially if it was a crowd of those young nobbs that 'ud been sporting round the old Empire and Leicester Square. Free they were with their stuff. Half the time the driver and the conductor would be blind before they got back to the shop. We got so that we could drive the old bus drunk or sober, even though we mightn't hardly be able to walk out of the shop afterwards."

Here was a centre for one of the more expensive hobbies of young London: the motor-cycle. These glittering speed-

engines of nickel plate and black enamel, spotted with showy-looking dials and clocks, had been mostly purchased—or, rather, were still being purchased—on the hire system. At any rate, their owners repudiated the paltry slogan of "Safety first." Yet they spent far more time tinkering at the machinery than racing over the roads, for the drain entailed by the purchase instalments often left small balance with which to buy petrol and oil. Thus, willy-nilly, the bikes had become genuine hobbies.

Mrs Witsun was a strong, handsome woman with a witty tongue. She was acting as nurse to an aged paralytic negress composer, whose sister had given elocution lessons to the most famous negro actor in the world.

"When they lose their tempers," she said, "they'll curse one another in strange languages that put the blooming wind up me, I can tell you."

She had a habit of nicknaming her neighbours.

"There's a couple of Swedes behind us," she said. "Funny way they have of talking, eh? I call them the sea-lions. . . ."

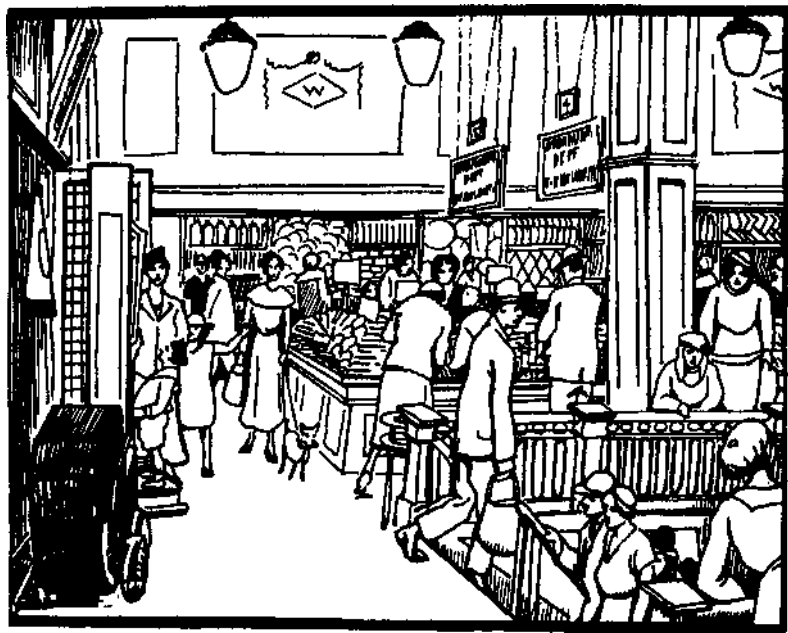
Later she presented us with an African trophy, a shield made from an elephant's ear.

Witsun himself had been born in Essex, a gamekeeper's son.

"I've got a brother there yet," he said. "Just moved into a new house, he has. Very handy for him, next door to the head gamekeeper's, it is."

"Is he also a gamekeeper, then? "

"Not a bit of it," said Witsun, grinning. "That's the point. He does a bit on his own, as you might say, on the Q.T. So it's very handy for him being where he is. When the head gamekeeper is in, why, he can be out safely, see, but when the gamekeeper goes out he just stays at home. . . ."



CHAPTER IX

WOOLWORTH'S

LONDON does not really consist of Sir Christopher Wren, Nash, the Adams, or places where Dickens set the sole of his foot. Compared with some English cities these may be like the plus in the BP, the little bit of something the others haven't got, but they are not the whole by any means. From the average London woman's point of view Woolworth's is far more important and interesting than St Paul's.

Therefore Woolworth's we sing :

The time has come, Mr Woolworth said,
To speak of many things:
Sweets, screw-drivers, and cellulose,
Or week-end wedding-rings,
And see if sixpences will not
Unloosen purses' strings. . . .

Everybody has heard of the curate's horse that used to belong to a drayman and had acquired the incurable habit

of stopping automatically at every public-house along the road. Few persons may be aware that the Borough of Westminster owns a remarkable horse, pulling one of its refuse-carts, which not only stops at the pub, but also stamps its feet with pugnacious determination until the potman brings out its pint of bitter. At the start of our vagabondage across Spain we suffered from a similar inconvenience, our donkey having been originally the property of a vegetable pedlar. Through the town he tried to turn in at all his everyday clients'.

Like the curate's horse or our donkey, Jo pulls up sharp whenever she comes to the door of a Woolworth's. That familiar red sign with the gilt lettering acts on her as the *espada's* red *muleta* acts on the bull in the ring. The lure of that heterogeneous bazaar tempts the mothers within to spend a spare sixpence, while outside the perambulators stand parked in rows. They emerge half an hour later with half a crown missing from the week's housekeeping money.

What a practical psychologist was Mr Woolworth!

It was not Woolworth who first discovered the trick of the unconsidered sum. The original genius was he who discovered the farthing pitfall, the man who discovered how very much less four-and-eleven-three seemed than five shillings, the man who realized that it was *le premier bob qui coute*.

Mr Woolworth's development is more racial. For it concerns not careful saving, but thoughtless spending. Woolworth's sixpenny bazaar is not primarily designed for a nation of savers, but for a nation of spendthrifts. Therefore it is apt to both American and English temperaments. To call a woman a spendthrift for blueing a casual sixpence may seem exaggerated, but when she really cannot afford to spend an extra sixpence without careful consideration (and a full half of London wives cannot really afford to spend reckless sixpences) she is, in fact, a sixpenny spendthrift.

The penny bazaar must have been Woolworth's *point de depart*, but he realized that for a penny nothing really seductive could be offered. He also realized that in the

right mood a bargain-hunting Anglo-Saxon would spend a mere sixpence as thoughtlessly as a penny. So the sixpenny trap was baited, half with things that were of excellent value and half with trivialities.

By a clever act of mental legerdemain Woolworth has contrived to insinuate himself into a peculiar position. He has identified his shops with the hunting instinct, he has become the covers of a continual quest. Woolworth 'news' is bandied about at the suburban tea-parties almost as eagerly as the League matches are discussed in the pubs, or the hunting prospects in the country smoking-rooms. "Do you know, my dear, the Woolworth's in Walham Green is selling the most marvellous coffee-grinders. Only sixpence, and you'd pay one and fourpence for the same thing in Soho. But there are only a few left."

Formerly we exhibited pride over the choicest of our possessions:

"What a lovely Chinese figure! "

"Oh, yes, genuine Bong. My great grandfather had it presented to him by the Grand Vizier Pooh-Bah. . . ."

Now, on the contrary, we pride ourselves on our worthlessnesses:

"My dear, where *did* you get your finger-bowls? "

The hostess draws herself up, and with an air of intolerable self-satisfaction says:

"Woolworth's."

The mere word is enough.

Cries of admiration greet the announcement.

"But which branch? "

"No good, darling; I got the last dozen."

Flattered in her mercantile *liaison* with Mr Woolworth, the hostess has a glow of internal content, stimulated by the envy of her friends. If Woolworth contrives to spread his interests much wider we shall really be able to imitate the modesty of the Chinaman in real earnest. "I am delighted **that** my totally worthless interior gives you pleasure."

Woolworth's slyness consists in this, that nobody gives him the credit for the bargains found in his bazaars. Each

takes all the credit to herself. Mr Woolworth no longer counts. He is there, merely the beneficent matrix, such as rocks are to the geologist, jungles are to the zoologist, seas to the ichthyographer, the inorganic world to the chemist, and so on. They don't give Nature much credit for the discoveries made there. So Woolworth has become bargain material, himself of small account.

How has he contrived this?

Just as Nature contrives it, by not offering all prizes at once or in the same place. One primeval skull is found in England, another in South Africa; so in Woolworth's one bargain, say, in coffee-pots is found at Islington, another in egg-slicers at Clapham Common. They must be tracked down with cunning and patience; then, when found, the finding redounds to the finder's credit. Thus, embedded in his normal strata of haberdashery and hacksaws, of gardening implements, gum drops, and gramophone records, of lunch dishes, literature, lamp-shades, and *lingerie*, of cosmetics and cooking-pots, of stair-rods, screw-drivers, sundaes, and stationery, of bead necklaces, boot-blackening, and bread-boards, the hunter now and again finds the perfect bargain, fifty per cent, below cost at least.

But here's the rub: in hunting the perfect bargain the housewife submits herself to the allurements of all the bright, attractive things which are not necessarily good value for the money. "Pooh!" says the natural Anglo-Saxon, "what's a sixpence anyway!"

Still, there's little doubt that in the sum Woolworth has done a noble duty; he has brought more happiness to the mere modern woman than all the husbands ever found. "For," as Lorelei might have said, "marriage is a toss-up, but a Woolworth bargain is a joy for at least a month."

Another secret is this: Woolworth's is entirely un-English in conception. It has combined the close calculation of the French, the routine of the German, the mechanized organization of the American, the good taste of the Austrian, the garishness of the Italian, and the merchandizing ability of the Jew. Its system of display and sale is French, its lunch-

counter is American, its popularization of good, cheap literature is German. Further, it needed an American firm to come over here to try to instil a sense of popular cheap good taste into the heads of English housewives.

In this latter question of good taste we are afraid that Woolworth's are playing a losing game. Not a losing game financially—they have too good business brains to do that—but a losing game in good taste.

In a recent broadcast talk Sir Charles Holmes said:

We all do lip-service to the importance of art in industry, but it is only here and there as yet that the enterprise of an individual breaks new ground, creates a new set of designs, and finds a new market for them. Too many manufacturers remain content to patch up old patterns; too many travellers and too many buyers for wholesale and retail traders have concentrated so long on prices and discounts that they have lost any capacity they ever may have possessed for discriminating between the products which they handle. So France, Sweden, or Central Europe dominate markets in which, with a little more judgment, we might make a place for Great Britain. . . .

But under the insistent demand for the poor in taste, for the over-elaborate and the flower-bespattered, which clamours indomitably from the less educated of England, the former good taste of Woolworth is weakening. Some, of course, is due to the import duties on things of foreign manufacture, but a great part of it is also due to the fact that poor taste sells more easily, and therefore it is not worth while to push the good taste across.

If only our legislators would make a rebate of fifty per cent, import duty on cheap foreign goods that could pass a committee of art specialists as being of real educative value in the matter of taste our own manufacturers might begin to wake up more rapidly than they are doing at present. At any rate, the number of objects of good proportion, simple and excellent in line and colour, that Woolworth's managed to find a few years back seem to me to have woefully diminished on their stalls.

The amazing success of Woolworth's is an added reproach

to the lack of enterprise among our English merchants. The scheme had been working long enough with great success in America, and the idea might have been borrowed by an Englishman of imagination. There were, indeed, firms that stood near enough to the idea who could, with but little trouble, have entered the field and become so firmly rooted that Woolworth's might not have attempted England at all. But our people were content to sit back in their office chairs and predict that such a notion as Woolworth's could not possibly succeed in London. Possibly in English hands it would not, because, as we have suggested, one of the big factors of success in the venture was its un-English combination of qualities.

Woolworth, Singer, Kodak, Ford, and Cook are five names rapidly becoming world-synonyms for the articles they represent.

In Spain they say " I am going to Singer " when they mean use a sewing-machine. In Albania ' to Kodak ' is to take a photograph. Over the whole of the Near East a ' Ford ' means a car. We English have coined but one international word to balance the American's four: ' to Cook ' means to travel in a lordly way.

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However, in our present juncture, when repeated visits to Woolworth's were no longer a dissipation, but a necessity, Jo found herself in the enviable position of a child who has discovered the key of the jam-cupboard.

Here in England we have one rival to the mercantile intelligence of Woolworth—Sir Jesse Boot. Yet Sir Jesse Boot's great success was first copied from an American model, which almost anybody might have got from enough visiting of the movies—the ubiquitous drug-store.

Still, his assimilation of lending library to drugs was a novel feature. How did he hit on this? Was it possibly from a contemplation of the old tag *Mens sana in corpore sano*? " I am providing for the *corpore sano*, so why not add the *mens* also? " Sir Jesse may have thought.

SUMMER



CHAPTER X

THE TROGLODYTES

IN America we went to a negro play called *Red-hot Momma*. We will not, however, speak of the exotic theme, but of the scenic arrangements. The centre of the stage was divided by a party-wall, so that the incidents took place simultaneously in adjoining flats. Here, nightly, in Enniscorthy Gardens we can see a similar repetition, but inverted. Our scenes are set, not side by side, but one over the other.

On a summer's evening the Gardens dispense with the heavy, shrouding curtains of former times. Some of the strict English sense of privacy has worn thin, and we are content to shelter behind veils of net, which, when the interior is lit while the street is dark, afford no veils at all. **So from the pavement we can easily watch two superimposed**

layers of society, the served and the serving, the served taking its ease in deep English armchairs, or clustered round the bridge-table, the serving, often a solitary girl, poring over a book, or ironing her own or her mistress's underclothing to the strains of a radio set. The served overlook the pavement, and can, if they wish, observe the spectacle of the street; the serving sit underground, with no prospect other than the coal-cellar door and the dustbin.

Upstairs women, no doubt good-hearted, may be in conclave, debating, with a hint of bitterness, the reluctance of the modern working girl to accept domestic service. They discuss the enormity of daring to apply for the dole while good servants are at a premium and even moderate ones are difficult to find. Sympathy is generally a product of the imagination. Few of these good ladies have ever willingly undergone as penance even ten days of real solitude. Lacking imagination, how then can they be expected to understand that a young and vigorous girl may be with justice reluctant to embrace a life which in older and saner times was considered fit for none but the austere and world-despising hermit? Yet even the hermit's sanctuary looked out on a prospect fairer than the coal-cellar door, although to a philosopher few sights might be more truly inspiring than that of a dustbin!

Plato's Republic was founded on a basis of slavery; the rather *passi* and mixed magnificence of Enniscorthy Gardens was founded on the basis of the slavey. In the prime of her regal honour the Queen of Spain was presumed to have no legs, but the architects of Enniscorthy Gardens were only too well aware of the excellent and apparently tireless limbs of the Victorian maidservant.

The first floor that we inhabit was once the splendid ballroom of a City man's house. The Victorians did not grudge themselves head-room. Our curtains are no less than twelve feet high, and do not reach the ceiling by a foot. The same is true of the ground floor. Those extra feet, all to lend

a sufficient dignity to the Victorian merchant or lawyer, had to be climbed daily by the servants carrying up the family burdens: hot-water cans, bath-tubs, coals, and so on. And, in addition, the girls had been buried a storey underground.

May we deduce that the basement—England's solution of the problem "What can we do with our servants?"—is a by-product of London's earlier commercial magnates? In Europe the feeling of the domestic servant as a family retainer has not quite died out. There the servant was, and to some extent still is, a recognized member of the family. Retainers were by no means undesirable objects, to be shuffled out of sight. Their presence, even if in mufti, added a certain *cachet*. They were called 'the people of the house.' But in a country where many of the rich men had themselves but recently risen from the servant class the position of the hired servant presented difficulties.

The nobleman, the aristocrat, or even the gentleman, could hob-nob with his servants with little fear of losing caste. He could keep his servants on the ground floor, so to speak. But the plutocrat's position in Society was almost as precarious as the position of his aitches. Du Maurier's Sir Gorgius Midas, for instance, had to impose himself on his servants. He had no retainer tradition, and the servant was, in fact, little more than a paid slave, a slavey. For his own dignity the magnate could not venture to share a front door with his own servants as a nobleman might do. He thrust them underground and spread his Doric porch over their heads.

But if the Victorian magnates did bury their domestics underground, with no more than cellar doors for all prospect, the kitchens of those days were possibly merrier places than they are now. Dear labour means lonely labour. Cheap labour meant plenty of labour. There was human society enough in those damp slavey caves. Cook, housemaid, parlourmaid, and possibly butler and buttons, made up a gay company, which had, at least according to Dickens, moments of relaxation.

To console the modern servant Science has been called in. The hermit might fill his loneliness with a whisper of the voice of God; the maidservant hears the voice of the B.B.C. No longer can the nagging mistress creep down the stairs to listen for the man's voice; no longer, working on the deductive system, can she prowling round to unearth the policeman from the kitchen cupboard. For now interminably a male voice draws on, lecturing the lonely servant-girl about the weather, the news, the fiscal question, the elements of art-training, Greek culture, or the history of Russia. Alternatively the saxophone's melancholy groan tells of gay dances, which the underground prisoner cannot enjoy, or the disembodied theatre gives her the vocal equivalent of what the silent films were optically.

No more need the mistress fear the voice of man issuing from the kitchen. Educated though it may be, it is the voice of no Don Juan of the pavements; seductive though its accents, it cannot seduce. Still, now and then may it not be used to cover accents less refined, yet more seductive? This we may not deny, though we cannot assert it with truth, for in such a case Miss Troglodyte draws down the blind.

Which gives us another and sensible reason why Miss Labour is so reluctant to go into service—the biological. For even if Miss Troglodyte may be an engaged girl, the risk of not attending her own wedding is far greater than that of her factory sisters. Limited in love-making as she will be to two nights a week, she suffers from the haunting fear that during the other five some other freer girl may be vamping her young man.

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In these fantastic days, madder and more unreal than the wildest of fairy-tales, when millions of men all over the world hover on the edge of starvation only because we can so easily produce far more than we need, when we are destitute merely because everything touched turns to plenty, we take for granted the idea that every one would welcome Utopia were it offered. Is this so?

Men are usually sundered by differences of opinion. That the bitterest sunderance can be brought about by everybody having the same opinion seems a case of sardonic paradox. Yet in practice the bitter sunderance of the world to-day is in fact due to a unanimity of opinion. It looks like two opinions, but it is really one and the same. Half of the world doesn't want to be *without* servants, and the other half of the world doesn't want to *be* servants. Over the difference in this fundamental similarity of opinion the present danger to Western civilization lies.

Here we see it nightly in Enniscorthy Gardens. On the ground floor the servant-owning classes sit round with evening whiskies-and-sodas, playing their interminable bridge, and underground the servant-girl pores over her solitary book.

For vanity's sake do not ask what book the girl below is reading while the mistress wastes her time with everlasting bridge. When gas-men cultivate old instruments, when co-operative coal-heavers study social science, and assistants in wood-shops are really herbal experts, a guess might be risky. The other day a reporter looked over the shoulder of a pretty girl in the Tube, expecting to find her deep in Ethel M. Dell; her actual reading proved to be *The Problems of the Gold Standard*. While our served classes refuse to take life seriously the serving classes are beginning to take it very seriously indeed.

To the watcher on the pavement the contrast is striking. Can a Utopia be conceived founded on these two opposite ends of one and the same desire?

It is a question, as it has always been, of the persistence of comparative desires. Freedom from slavery was won because the slave's desire to be free was always a little more vivid and poignant than the master's wish to hold him. This quality of inner desire in the end rules every turn of human affairs. And so the servant-owning class is doomed eventually, because its passion is at root a lazy one, while the servant's passion may be active.

This does not mean that every servant is an active worker

in the cause of Labour; many may even vote for a Conservative candidate; but it does mean that the desire *not* to be a slavey is almost always active, even if only in the subconscious, and the very mass inertia of that subconscious desire must eventually wear down the opposition of even the most intelligently possessive masters.

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The basement is no more possible as a principle of life than it is as a principle of domestic architecture. In practice the basement brings its own revenge. It was probably invented as a means of displaying family magnificence along the pavement level. In theory the haughty visitor of the sub-aristocratic class does not see the basement, with its contents. But actually and everywhere the basement is only too noxiously visible. It is one of the most striking peculiarities of London to the foreign visitor.

Where the Londoner tried to achieve a cheap magnificence he merely produced the area and the basement, and in its turn the basement has its revenge. All along the London streets the basement yawns, exhaling a mean, damp, and lichenous quality. London is a town of empty moats. Though these underground dwellings are not necessarily running with damp, they are nevertheless deprived of a proper proportion of air and sunlight, which adds little to their dingy charm. And the area still suggests damp and mildew; its thin scent clings in the air, and mental suggestion, far more potent than any truth of fact, stamps almost all London's domestic architecture in the mind of the curious explorer. A witty writer, Miss Tassinari, of Italian upbringing, has described, in one of her most vivid impressions of a London dawn, the image of a dustman hooded and emerging from an area, like some damned soul out of a pit in Dante's *Inferno*.

In this modern, progressive London statistics assert that a hundred thousand persons are still condemned to live below the sod, half-entombed before they are dead. As they stare through their windows upward they may only see the

sky cut by the bars of the area railings as by eternal prison-bars. Living thus in the shadow of the underground cage, can they really be expected to pump up much sympathy for the sufferings of the small caged songsters with which they relieve the monotony of their troglodytic existence? For similarity in suffering does not necessarily breed sympathy, but often contempt. The jumped-up workman is often the most slave-driving of masters. "Caiges!" says the troglodyte. "Tork to me about b——birds in caiges! Wot abaht me, then?"

And of those who so disturb themselves about the sufferings of the caged birds how many would extend an equal amount of sympathy and just anger on the conditions of our own underground caged and slum dwellers?

In another way the basement has had its own revenge, the slump having wrought havoc with many of the servant-owners. Our houses, cut into flats, now shelter the ex-mistresses. The lady, impoverished, has lost her right to the pavement's level, and must in her turn become a dweller in the caves.



CHAPTER XI

THE NEW POOR AND THE NEW COOK

THE spread of the present crisis has brought about one curious result, a much wider appreciation of the benefits and compensations of poverty. Please note that we do not mean penury. Penury has no compensations and few benefits, if we exclude possible heavenly ones. An Irishman has defined the difference between the two states thus > " In poverty you may have the divil of a job making both ends

meet, but in penury you can't make even one end meet at all."

Penury has no grades, poverty has many, from the kind of poverty you may find in Enniscorthy Gardens to the kind you get in the Fineharbour Road. In fact, as a modern definition poverty should be considered as the state in which you can just afford the luxuries requisite to your position, but are often hard put to it to provide the necessities.

The capacity to draw the best out of poverty needs a special upbringing. Properly to enjoy poverty one should have been brought up in fairly comfortable circumstances. The poor themselves cannot at any time really make the best of poverty; one might almost say that they do not know what poverty is. Poverty to the poor is only a negative situation, and anything, to be appreciated, must be positive. The positive states of the poor are either a lucky windfall, as when a backed outsider comes in, or the loss of a job, in which case penury looms. But to the *nouveaux pauvres* poverty is an active state, and thus can wear a different outlook. The poor have no perspective on poverty; they cannot hope to raise their problems to an aesthetic pedestal, and from thence enjoy them with an outlook often untinged by bitterness.

Poverty-boasting among the New Poor is no doubt partly a method of self-defence, but it has a snobbish origin. The fox without a tail boasted of his tailless freedom, until quelled by the brute who stood up slily waving his perfect appendage under the boaster's nose. The docked fox was trying to rationalize and romanticize his too obvious loss. And yet the half-truth of that fable should not take us in, tailless bipeds that we are. For, logically, the tailless fox was in the right; he was fundamentally a realist, not a romantic by any means.

The New Poor boasting of financial limitations may be like the tailless fox. They are making a clamorous best of their condition, and, given half a chance, would eagerly embrace the disadvantages they are so sly at pointing out. Few would remain poor if they were given the chance to be rich. And

yet it is a fact that by this very poverty we find ourselves in a position to buy pleasures which we could not possibly enjoy from wealth.

Everything has a trinity of values: the price we pay for it, the sacrifices we have made to buy it, and the intrinsic pleasure we derive. Charles Lamb has noted with regret that the objects which he saved up for and bought in his penurious youth had a far greater content of pleasure than those he could so easily purchase later in life. The only object that we enjoy to its fullest extent is something that we cannot really afford; then it combines all three aspects in the highest degree. In Charles Lamb's day the power of such enjoyment needed possibly a more intense capacity for detachment than it does to-day. In those days the person who dared to enjoy his poverty was a solitary. The ambitions of the world were set on success. The only true source of self-complacence was in success. Failure was altogether a too wretched condition.

Nowadays we have transposed many an everyday value for our spiritual convenience. *Nous avons changi tout cela*. To-day we can pride ourselves on Woolworth bargains. To-day failure may be self-counted as a hallmark of aesthetic success, and popular success is branded as a kind of moral failure. The motto *Vox populi vox asinorum* is almost as consoling as the word Mesopotamia. To-day our failures may draw pride from their very failure, and the man who has failed to please the *vox asinorum* of to-day confidently counts on the *vox asinorum* of the future to redress the verdict.

In a similar way our New Poor fortify and console one another. No longer solitary and unlucky, they can band together in a pride of humble estate, and cherish the cut-paper silhouettes of half a dozen ancestors, heavily framed in circular ebony, which they might hardly be persuaded to swap against the income of the successful tobacco-dealer round the corner.

These New Poor are steadily conspiring to change our fundamentally English way of looking at life. Drawing upon their youthful experience, they can refuse to admit that

life, merely because it is hedged in by monetary limitations, should be either uncomfortable or deprived of all grace. The New Poor have education, they often have cosmopolitan experience, and their peculiar position has detached them from the mass tendencies of our normal habits of behaviour. Education and experience of Europe has inspired their line of conduct. "If the average German," says a German economist, "had as much as the average Englishman he would live twice as well." "Then," says the New Poor, "why, by taking the German line of thought, shouldn't I live twice as well?"

The real poor cannot invent new ways of dodging the consequences of their own poverty. They are hemmed in by tradition, by lack of imagination, by lack of initiative, and by lack of examples. But the New Poor are in the very best of positions to take full advantage of the dodges of all nations. They can see their own drawbacks, and can borrow ideas from their neighbours. They can turn their own limitations into a crusade, holding up to scorn the shortcomings of their own land, while rendering a positive service by proving that these shortcomings are actual and can be overcome.

The chief English shortcomings are two: first a natural dislike of conscious forethought, and secondly a tendency to wasteful profusion. Your normal Briton hates to plan ahead in detail, and equally hates to save. If England had existed in A.D. 1 the parable of the foolish virgins might have been especially directed at her, but with this difference: had the foolish virgins been English they would, at the last moment, by hook, crook, persuasion, force, or diplomacy, have got hold of enough oil to troop inside the gates. They would have triumphantly muddled through, and then, as likely as not, would have gone round Heaven boasting about it.

The English working classes are bound to disdain a careful saving, which might lower them in the eyes of their neighbours. But the New Poor needn't worry about such things. Already they *are* as good as their neighbours, and maybe a bit better too. From such a position of social security **they**

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can set forth on their crusade. Undaunted by any fear of social loss, they can safely preach economy and domestic planning; they can clamour for cabbage-water soups, for potatoes in their jackets, for mashed nettles; they can preach the joys of home-twinking and the saving grace of cellulose. They are making economy respectable.

The true inwardness of the social revolution lies not so much in the fact as in the point of view. The point of view always counts. Thus to save a farthing merely in order to save a farthing might be deemed ignoble, just as to do a splendid deed and earn a V.G. in order to get a ninepenny medal and a small annuity would be ignoble. The medal is but the certificate of an act of devoted bravery; so too the farthing may be considered as the token of an act of imaginative housekeeping.

This makes all the difference. The problem has at once been raised from the rather sordid levels of mere money-grubbing to those of aesthetic satisfaction. Thus we ignore the actual value of the deed and consider only the spirit.

This change of spirit enables us further to transpose the department of housekeeping from the dull kitchen, its normal abode, into the realms of sport. And taking domestic economy as a kind of sport may at last endear it to the English and arouse a serious and enthusiastic consideration almost equal to the merely financial and gastronomic interest that it already has in France. Should this ideal transformation happily become accomplished fact it will be almost wholly due to the New Poor.

Already the effect is noticeable. Not in the homes of the wealthy do you find the best of cheer. You may dine in a lordly hall, surrounded by McEvoy and Orpen portraits, with servants dripping the champagne into your glass. You may try to help yourself awkwardly over your shoulder from dishes which are picturesquely made up to resemble tessellated pavements or rock-gardens rather than honest grub. Nevertheless, to dine really well you should go to the humbler home of some New Poor epicure, one who has studied the resources of three-quarters of Europe and who shops in

Soho. Here you will find the really recondite dainty, and you will drink some simple Bordeaux or Burgundy which, bought for a few shillings at a discreet wine-merchant's round the corner, has more true value and bouquet than all the carefully napkined bottles of the millionaire.

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It seems in practice as though our curses turn out to be sometimes our blessings, and *vice versa*. We English have always congratulated ourselves on the blessings of long periods of internal peace, and on the natural gifts of coal and iron. But actually the wars which swept over Europe taught the Continentals true economy, while the lack of coal and iron in abundance at least spared them from the curse of the kitchener, the family joint, and that boggy of the ticklish digestion, home-made pastry. It is true, we think, that the average European with the average Englishman's resources would live twice as well with half as much work.¹

¹ The day after these pages were typed we noticed a correspondence in the *Evening Standard*. It was directed at Miss Elizabeth Craig, the cooking expert, who had written, "If you want to make the least of a housekeeping allowance you should ask the average English housewife." One letter in answer was peculiarly illuminating:

"Miss Craig tells us to wake up. A great many of us are well enough awake, but that does not help much; it is time we need, two extra hands, and a great deal more strength.

"Having lived and kept house in more than one Continental country, I find the Englishwomen appallingly overworked in comparison with those on the Continent. Therein lies a great deal of the trouble.

"We *can* cook, we can be economical and thrifty, but from force of circumstances we must run a house, perhaps entirely without help or with help only one half-day a week. We wash fifty or more articles per week, do many repairs, paint, whitewash, garden, and walk quite a distance to do our shopping. We make clothes for the female portion of the family, must dress well and look leisured.

"On the Continent they are hard-working, but not as we know it. They have not our multitude of duties, and, in the same position, would have help every day for several hours, besides sending practically all the washing out, at a very reasonable cost, or, if washing at home, employ a most competent woman to do both washing and ironing.

"Meat is sold in small joints, boneless and practically without fat, so that there is no waste; one buys the quantity one wants, however small. For soup the exact quantities of vegetables may be obtained. Again no waste. Shops

When the country was being continually overrun by predatory troops the peasants had to learn to make the best of everything. But after the soldiers left the peasants had everything to make the best of. A rule of nature seems to be that the effort to get good results with limited means produces a sense of quality. Thus the starving peasants of Europe, often totally deprived of meat, had to learn the virtues of all the herbs in the field (the potato was not then existent). Often reduced to the rudest of roots that were edible, they had to find ways to make them decently palatable. So the foundation of the French school of cooking was laid, principally on almost a vegetarian and herbal basis, and became a great national possession.

Another circumstance helped and still helps the pre-eminence of the French cuisine: the male cook. Without any bias pro- or anti-feminist, we dare to suggest that, compared with the average man, the average woman is static

and markets to which one goes every morning are within easy reach: no long walks or bus rides. Curtains, etc., seldom need washing. No fire-places to clean; anthracite stoves or central heating taking their place. A cool cellar for storing food, potatoes, etc., and always an attic or two—and, in some countries, a special room where all sewing and other jobs are done.

" Houses are not so comfortable as in England, but they are easier to keep in order. The housewife, therefore, has a far more leisured and less laborious life than we do, and time in which to attend to cooking. A very important point is that a larger portion of the income is spent upon food.

" All Miss Craig advises I do, but what a life! The Austrian, French, German, or Swiss, to say nothing of the Dutch or Belgian, have time to take a pride in their housekeeping. Not for them the treadmill. They can buy leisurely what they require, and know that they will get it. As a matter of course their kitchens are well equipped—better, perhaps, than any other part of the house—and they can spend all the time they want on the cooking of the meal, partaken of by the entire family, either at midday or at 6.30 P.M.

" No midday meal for the children and another for the husband's dinner at night. No tea, a light breakfast, and for lunch or supper only coffee, bread-and-butter, with cheese and an egg, which is easily prepared.

" No, life for the Continental housewife is simple and easy, and for us difficult and complicated by too much work.

" Given the same opportunities, Englishwomen would be just as competent as their Continental sisters.

" HILDA GRAY

"*Surbiton*"

and incurious. She has the virtue of not getting bored as easily as a man. But, not being so easily bored, she isn't driven to experiment. For in essence experiment is the child of boredom. The man would rather try a new trick, even at the risk of failure, than go on doing the same old thing time and time again. It is more in woman's nature to play for safety. But playing for safety in the kitchen means doing what you know how to do and have already tested. It does not much extend the resources of the cuisine. No doubt one of the inducements that made woman play for safety was the fact that man lost his temper and made a filthy noise if his dinner went wrong; but that doesn't alter the trend of the argument, that cooking, though generally set apart to be the woman's job, has in France been lifted to its imaginative position by the ingenuity and experiments of the male cook.

The fate of New Poverty has brought the educated woman into the kitchen, not merely as a director, but as an active craftsman. She is far less conservative than her Victorian sister, and almost as curious and experimental as a man. In consequence amateur cooking has become an active interest in many places where formerly it would have been only too palpably absent. Moreover, the man is often tempted to assist, and finds in himself the seeds of an active culinary interest where formerly he would have been content to remain a captious critic.

In our own household we have a division of labour which our char finds most puzzling. Jo is the expert in soups, ragouts, and vegetables, but, as Mrs Harris once confided to a mutual friend, " Y'know, it's queer—'e does all 'er fryin' for 'er."

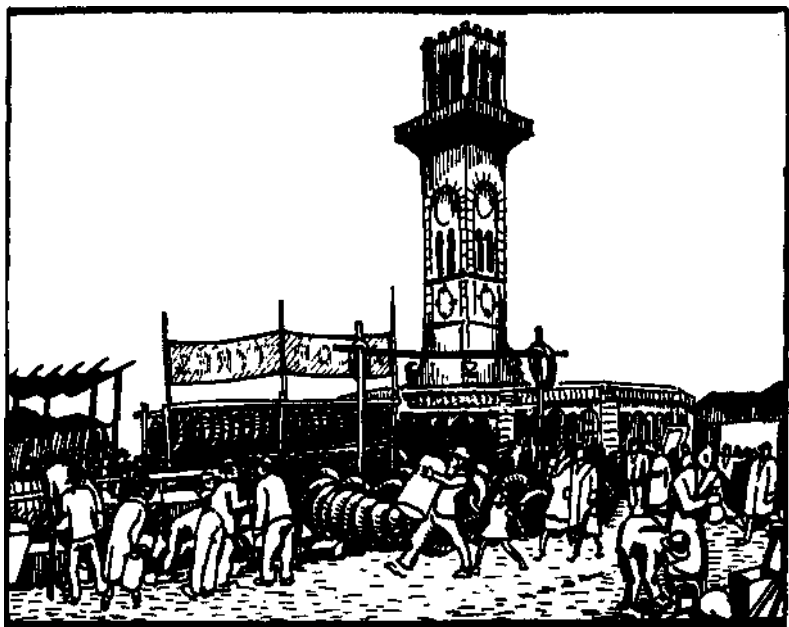
On the whole the New Poor do not spend much of their time worrying over the problems of religion. But, just like the Israelites, who didn't seem able to neglect Jehovah without sticking up a substitute, Dagon, Ashtoreth, or some other, so the New Poor have also their false gods and ceremonies, gods such as the Hebrews never knew.

Of such deities undoubtedly the coffee-pot is one.

Under no circumstances would any of the New Poor venture to criticize another's views on religion, but woe betide anyone who doesn't give the guests decent coffee! In the innocent Isles of Aran, off the coast of Galway, we encountered a humble philosopher who said, "Sure, a trade do be an inimy till you have mastered it." Nothing could be said more truly of coffee-making.

In Paris you can blunder into any old baker's, grocer's, greengrocer's, or general store, and there you may buy a packet of just ordinary coffee. This you grind and stick into your coffee-pot, and the trick is done: excellent coffee, and no trouble at all. But here in London what ceremonies, what pains, what an aroma of doubt, difficulty, exoticism, specialism, invention, and epicureanism surrounds the making of coffee! The coffee-shops have a semi-religious atmosphere, the coffee-mills are like the mills of the gods. Each individual coffee-maker has his or her particular shrine, whence only this peculiar miracle of coffee can be granted. Then the coffee-machines—what complexity! Some are like bits of the earliest locomotives, others look like alembics for the distilling out of the elixir of life itself. And the recipes. . . . The once-boiled, the twice-boiled, the thrice-boiled, as though coffee were stages to some epicurean Nirvana. There is the secret pinch of salt, the tiny spoonful of mustard, the caramelled sugar; there are light roast and dark roast, schools as sundered as the branches of Christianity itself; there are the Mochas, the Kenyas, the Javas, and the Brazilians, the finely grounds and the coarsely grounds. . . .

By their coffee ye shall know them.



CHAPTER XII

THE CALEDONIAN MARKET

O H , the Caledonian Market!" says the friend who knows all about everything. "Totally blown on! No earthly good going there now. Only dealers, and they know the value of everything."

No doubt the greater glories of the market are past; if that really is a glory when somebody who has about a thousand a year can find pride in boasting that he has bought for sixpence from a poor devil, who earns, maybe, a hundred a year, some object that is really worth fifty pounds.

The rumours of such great bargains, the fifty-pounder-for-sixpence class, naturally attracted hundreds of amateur bargain-hunters, who in turn attracted dozens of sly dealers determined to bamboozle the bargain-hunters. Probably if we could do the complete balance-sheets of the Caledonian Market, tot up those fifty-pound finds against the diddle

and bamboozling, the profit would be well on the side of the salesmen. Unluckily, the dealer who lets a fifty-pound bargain slip through his hands is not generally the one who sells a fake Sheraton chair. "Widout guarantee, mind you, or I couldn't let it go at de price. But if you ask what / think about it. . ."

Still, changed though it may be, the Caledonian Market, and the other London markets too, are notably the places where the city has retained more than a hint of its ancient flavour. They exhale a picaresque quality which the War, the movies, and the downward diffusion of respectability have destroyed with such success.

The London markets are almost the only places where the so-called English shyness seems to be put aside. The contrasting voices of the hawkers advertising their wares spread a general sensation of easy good-humour and wit very different from the normal aloofness of everyday life. Here London becomes Continental, and exhibits the peculiar freedom of manners so commonly met with abroad. Here the Englishman gives a hint of what he may become on a holiday at Boulogne.

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Up the sordid filth of the Caledonian Road, past the sprawling ugliness of the prison, which might almost be a furniture depository did one not know it to be a depository of human junk, we come to the slum at the back of which lies the big cattle-market handed over on Tuesdays and Fridays to the sale of bric-a-brac. At ten o'clock the crowd is already streaming along intent on the weekly bargain.

The dealers are still coming in, late-rising Englishmen as they are. Some are pushing the stuff piled high on costers' barrows, some bring it on motor-cycles with side-cars, some in vans or cars stacked till the springs are bumping. Along the road the pavement vendors are already in position: the man with the coat-hangers of copper wire, the bootlace merchant, the lemon girl, and the dog-race tipster. . . .

At the top of the hill, opposite one side of the market, the

usual smart out-of-work has instituted his private though unauthorized parking station. His eye twinkles as we drive up in the "wandering wardrobe," brought to cart away our purchases. He guides us to our place. Another few coppers towards the rent of his Rowton House apartment for the week-end. These owners of informal parking stations are generally bright-looking chaps, who refuse to sit complacently down in misery. They have staked out their claim to some possible pavement edge and have got on the right side of the local police. Who suggested a bribe?

Through the cast-iron gate-posts the crowd is streaming in. This is no crowd of bargain-seekers looking for a chance fifty pounds' worth for sixpence. These are the local folk doing their weekly shopping.

"'Ere y'are, mar," cries the smoked-haddock merchant, slapping the fish with a welcoming sound. Opposite him is one of the oddest of topical businesses in London to-day—the Exchange and Mart for cigarette coupons. On a black-board the current rates for sale or exchange are chalked up as though they were serious stocks and shares. Jo is at present industriously smoking herself to a blanket, an occupation in which I heartlessly refuse to participate.

To the initiated the market has its geography, typically London in character. Here is its Mayfair, here its mere shopping quarter, here its Oxford Street, its Covent Garden, its Tottenham Court Road, and its slums. Apart from the definite slummy bits, there are touches of slum distributed here and there, cheek by jowl with richer neighbours, just as in London itself.

The casual visitor generally finds herself at once in Mayfair. Silver and plate glitter and sparkle on tables covered with tent-like roofs. Such things are no cheaper here; indeed, you have to pay extra on account of the cartage. If you can find the dealer's shop, often in some dingy back street, you may get the same article at a cheaper price. He looks more like a real dealer at the Caledonian Market than he does at home.

Mayfair houses the specialists. They don't exactly

specialize, but you will find that each has a leaning towards a particular kind of object. This one may collect those queer bolster-like sausages of glass, sweethearts' comforters, which the sailor of yore used to give to his lass as a parting souvenir; the next may deal in brass earrings for horses, cunningly cast and carved in polished metal; this one buys knives, that one swords; here you will find one who seems always to get Tibetan praying-wheels, and here one who finds quaint prints and paintings; here is one who has glass ball paper-weights crystalline enclosing strange flowers or patterns of enamelled tints.

Here you may see all the cherished things of yesterday which have gone out of fashion; old enough to seem ugly, not yet old enough to have become quaint. Here is the border-line between the *is* and the *will be*. Along this line lie the true bargains, and here is the chance for the buyer with the instinct and the eye. Here is the chance for the person perspicacious enough to see in this discarded ugliness the elements of what will be considered quaint to-morrow and perhaps beautiful once more on the day after.

But to buy such things at a reasonable price is not true bargain-hunting; it is gambling. You bet on your powers to estimate the future trend of taste. If you have a hunch you must act quickly. Fashion won't wait, and at the faintest rumour the prices run up; dealers have been caught too often now. Something hitherto despised becomes *materia collecta*, and you must go bargain-hunting in another sphere. Ten years ago you could still find glass at the Caledonian Market; what you see there now is priced according to the ambitions rather than the knowledge of the dealers.

But such is not the true bargain-hunter's outlook. The bargain-hunter is trying to bet on a certainty, pitting a specialized knowledge against the possible ignorance of the dealers. Nevertheless the dealer does not grudge the bargain-hunter his finds. The loss is taken philosophically. Tit for tat. Once, when we had found a set of Spanish peasant plates made in a local Valencian factory and had bought them at about a quarter of the price they would have fetched

in Madrid, the dealer said cheerfully, " Now you got 'em would you mind letting me know what they really are and what they are worth? It's orl right. I got my money out of 'em. I ain't grumblin'. If you knows about 'em and / don't, well, that's up to me, ain't it? "

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Decidedly the Caledonian Market has a Continental feeling. For instance, it bargains. . . .

" How much? "

The dealer turns the object over. He isn't really weighing it up; he knows what he wants for it well enough. He is weighing you up. What are you—dealer, bargain-hunter, genuine furnisher, or just casual toff? The price varies, though the first stated is seldom the right one—it is a mere feeler.

" 'Arf a crown."

Nothing annoys the dealer more than if you merely shake your head and stroll away. That isn't playing the game.

" 'Ere, carm on. 'Ow much is it wuth to you, then? Mike an offer. . . . I ain't 'ard-'earted. . . ."

Once the offer has been made a certain etiquette should be maintained. You may bargain towards one another by smaller sums, but an offer to split the difference should be accepted or refused *in toto*. A friend was once bargaining for an inlaid box.

" Fi' bob," said the dealer.

" Four," said our friend promptly, although she would willingly have given five for the thing.

" Well, we won't 'aggie," said the dealer generously (he would have been well paid at three-and-six). " Let's split the difference and say four and a tanner."

" Four and fourpence," persisted our friend.

The dealer slammed the box down among his other things. With arms akimbo he stood sticking out his lower lip.

" Four and fourpence? " he sneered. " Four and fourpence, sez you, when I just hofferred ter split the difference. 'Ere you comes hup to the blooming market in your Rolls-

Ryce and tries to beat hus poor b——rs down tuppence. You got a nerve, you 'ave. Four and fourpence, sez you. Naw. You can 'ave the b——y box for five bob or you won't get it at all. . . ."

Another Continental feature is an easy familiarity towards the women. Just as in France the stall-keepers address their clients in endearing terms—" *ma fille* " " *ma petite dame* " or " *la mire* "—so here as Jo comes into the entrance the fish-stall man greets her, " 'Ere y'are, mar, nice bit of 'addock to-day. . . ."

'Mar' or 'dearie' are the English equivalents, and, though in other places they might be held as offences, here they pass as humorous pleasantries. How the huxters can estimate the moment when a woman passes from the category of 'dearie' to that of 'mar' is something that passes our comprehension.

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To go the full round of the market demands two or three hours of sharp-sighted concentration, even if you do pass hurriedly through 'Mayfair.' What a strange medley! Here are the garish clothes-stalls, fresh from the sweat-shops, but guaranteed to turn any girl into a good imitation of a movie heroine at fifty yards' distance; here you can find three-ply wood, glass beads, linoleum (probably stolen), jellied eels, gramophone-works, sarsaparilla, old pictures, boot-and-shoe polish, flower auctions, motor-tyres or derelict motor-bikes, semi-precious stones, chutney, mirrors, stick-jaw, furniture, old books, and forgotten magazines . . . and between the stalls of sheer junk are jumbled in. These latter attract the bigger crowds; men and women cluster over their accumulations of almost unimaginable rubbish, combing it through while the salesmen keep up a monotonous iteration, "All one price, ladies; all one price, gents. Any think you like for tuppence! . . ."

There are also the wandering merchants. The vendor of stout paper carrying-bags does a good trade, as also does the salesman of children's gauds. The pedlar of home

disinfectant strolls about carrying a clear glass jam-pot half full of water. At the bottom, immersed, lies a bean-like object from which is sprouting a green and leafy shoot. . . . A pungent and eucalyptine scent surrounds the man.



MARKET TYPES

" Nah, I ain't a-hoffering you rowses! " he shouts, in a penetrating, gramophonic voice. " I jess bin a-selling these 'ere in 'Oxton, and it ain't flahrs they thinks abaht in 'Oxton. Wot they thinks abaht in 'Oxton is hinsecks. . . . Nah, this 'ere is the honly genuyine Horiental bean, the most wonderful natchooral vegetable disinfectant known to science. Put a

THE LONDON ROUNDABOUT

couple of these 'ere hin the mattress and Hi'll guarantee yer uninterrupted re-pose. . . . Put one ar two in water like this 'ere, and they will scent the 'ole room, causin' hall your little troubles to leave promptly for next door. . . . Fragrance, bewty, hand hutility, hall combined. . . . Price, honly one penny the packet! . . . These yer packets Hi 'ave hon my right give red flahrs, these hon my left bloo, but both hare hequally hefficacious. . . . Hit's not of the flahrs they talks hof in 'Oxton, but hof the results. . . . Honly one penny the packet! . . ."

The excellent business he was doing seemed to indicate that there are districts round the Caledonian Road which might vie even with Hoxton itself. I bought a packet from curiosity, but whether of the red or of the blue variety I don't remember. At home I dissected the famous Oriental bean to find that it was made of cleverly moulded soap, heavily scented with eucalyptus. Evidently the fresh and leafy sprout had been inserted artificially.

Naturally the junk-stalls and the slums of the Caledonian are the most interesting, for here is the only chance to find the fifty-pounds-for-sixpence bargain. But in one sense the market resembles a work of art. If you approach a work of art expecting a certain kind of response you are incapable of getting the best from it; if you come to the Caledonian looking for a definite object you will probably waste your time. One of the peculiarities of the market is its changeability. The character alters every day, and what you found in profusion one week may be completely lacking the next.

However, in a very few visits we found a genuine American Indian wampum belt in perfect condition, for which we paid a shilling, two carved negro combs and a carved negro spoon at ninepence each. A dealer offered us an elaborately carved Lapp knife (value one pound in Lapland) for five shillings, but by rummaging about we found a better, the sheath decorated with primitive reindeer carved into the bone, for which we paid four bob. We bought a rosewood armchair for three shillings, and for another three shillings a tubular mahogany bed-table, which made a

perfect telephone stand, and a mahogany butler's-tray **with** legs for three and sixpence. An Old English harvest jug cost us a shilling, and at a stall that displayed the remains of a child's tattered theatre Jo was suddenly caught by a number of circular lacquered discs, evidently the bottoms of a cargo of Japanese trays. "How much?" she demanded.

"Penny each, mar," said the man.

"Good Lord!" I protested. "What on earth . . .?"

"Paint 'em with red cellulose and use 'em as dinner-mats," said Jo.

The Caledonian stimulates ingenuity. Our penny dinner-mats are much admired.

At another stall on the very edge of 'Mayfair' Jo found a number of boxes with loose tops, made of wood and covered with dark green cloth, the very things we had been looking for.

"What are those?" she demanded from the small foreign Jew of a dealer. . . .

"I dell you, laty," he said. "Dem's 'Enry Dobbs' shop. De von vot vent bost. I buy de boxis, see. . . ."

"How much?"

"Duppence, trippence, fourpence, all according de size. . . .

A mountain of a woman came bustling up.

"You dell de laty ve got more like dat at de shop? Naw, you wouldn't. Dat's so, laty; 'eap more. . . ."

Subsequently we went to the shop hunting more boxes. It looked not so much like a shop as a refuse-heap.

Everything that nobody wants stood there jumbled together in dust, dirt, and confusion. Discarded china of hideous design, veneered furniture of the very worst pattern, half peeled down to its native deal, books of the kind that nobody reads; and, somehow, in narrow passages left between these mounds of rubbish lived the little Jew, his monstrous wife, and a slatternly beauty of a daughter. The *clou* of the shop was a pair of gigantic Chinese vases of the most unpleasant colouring ever turned out of China; each stood about five feet high, and was decorated with a **big**

sprawling dragon. These the small proprietor indicated with a hand of hope.

" Don' you wanten buy dem? " he asked.

The fat woman brought up more of Henry Dobbs* boxes from a mysterious recess. She showed one containing two trays divided into many small sections.

" Dis von," she said to Jo, " I 'ave to charche you more dear for. Seexpence. Dis yere is a speshallility box, mid lots of apartments. . . ."

A week later when we returned for yet more boxes we found that the huge vases had actually disappeared.

" A chentleman buy dem from me," said the Jew. " Oh, a fine chentleman 'e vos! Got a great big place in de country vere Vs going to put dem, an⁵ ve go out, ve did, to see vere dey go. Oh, a fine place, 'e 'as, and a fine chentleman, too. . . ."

11

The Caledonian Market is not by any means a Jewish monopoly, as it would be in America or as the flea markets of Paris are rapidly becoming. The slums and junk departments are almost entirely in the hands of the English, and on the whole only the more refined sections are worth the Jew's while. Refreshments are handled largely by Italians. The working classes of London seem to have a passion for a weird drink named sarsaparilla, sticky-looking, yellow-tinted. The chief sarsaparilla dispenser was admonishing his *clientele* on the lines of Dr Watts and the busy bee.

" You votch-a de vosp-a. De vosp-a 'e know de goot tink ven 'e vont de refresh-a-ment. You take-a de tipp-a de vosp-a: 'e drink-a de splendid so refreshing sarsaparilla_____"

The dealer who sld us the Spanish plates was also an Italian. He had served in both the Italian and the English armies, and, having at first enlisted in England, he was transferred automatically when Italy came into the War.

" That was like going from heaven into hell," he told us " Why, in the Italian army they don't give you any socks, but only bits of **rag** to wrap your feet in. Talk about

blisters!—and when the boots give out you have to do as best you can with sandals. . . ."

We discovered that he had served in Albania.

"Yes, out there I was called General Nobile's Englishman."

"Tell us," we said: "how did the Italian troops cook the tortoises there?"

"Cook the tortoises?"

"Yes. The Albanians told us that the Italian troops had a dodge to make the tortoise into a splendid dish, but they could never discover the secret."

"Oh, you just boil 'em," said General Nobile's Englishman.

He was interrupted at this moment and called away to a new customer; we had not the opportunity of continuing the conversation. For a time we pondered. Had the Italians a stomach that could digest boiled tortoise while the Albanians had not, or was General Nobile's Englishman pretending to a knowledge he did not possess? Since then we have learned at least one way in which to cook tortoises. This is the process used by the English gipsies for hedgehogs: embed it in the middle of a clay ball and roast in the fire. It is fortunate that the Albanians have not discovered the method, or there would not be a single specimen of the pleasant, lumbering little beast left in the land.

The small furniture-dealer wandered to and fro among his stock, calling out in a monotonous, musical lament, not unlike the cry of an oversized peewit, "Vairy cheep, vary cheep." Of all things furniture is the most ungrateful to sell nowadays, and especially the furniture of what we may call the 'hiatus' period.

The 'hiatus' period should be noted as that which intervened between the time when furniture-makers constructed their goods chiefly for looks and *use* and the time when they turned them out for looks and *sale* only. Having neither made up their minds to grab all the possible profits, nor having yet completely lost their commercial consciences as to the probable lasting properties, they produced a hybrid

product, which is largely what now appears in the second-hand dealers⁹ shops. It is not old enough nor well made enough to acquire value, nor is it good-looking enough to compete with the hire-purchase novelties for the furnishers on the cheap. The Caledonian Market is stuffed with it.

Nevertheless, amid the shoddy veneer, the near-leather, and wobbly plate-glass we did spot an old ladder-back spinning-chair. The price was twenty-five shillings, and the dealer had us already summed up as the kind of people who never got the best of a bargain.

"No, I just brought it up here on the chance. Don't care if I sell it or no. It's unique. Never saw another like it before. . . ."

If he were telling the truth his experience must have been small. Still, the price was reasonable; in Baker Street we might have been asked a fiver..

"Now," said Jo, the transaction completed, "can you by chance tell us the best place to get a good cup of tea? "

"Cup o' tea, is it? " cried the delighted furniture-dealer. "I'll show you myself. You'd never think by the look of it. Best cup o' tea in the market. 'Ere, Jim, you carry the lady's chair."

He steered us through a couple of the iron barriers that divide the market-place radially; then, swinging round a tiny booth of green canvas, he presented us with a flourish.

"Clients of mine," he said to a jolly woman in a white overall. "Want a cup o' tea. I told 'em they'd get no better in the market. . . ."

In spite of the tiny size the booth seemed to be both a knick-knack shop and a tea-stall. In one corner was a small trestle table spread with family odds and ends, an oddly naive lot to discover in the Caledonian Market. They had, indeed, more the air of a vicarage jumble sale. The stall-keeper, too, had the sheltered air of presiding at a village bazaar stall, rather than of facing keen rivalry in open commerce. At the other side was the tea department. **Here**

the jolly woman in white wielded the teapot and busied herself with a Primus stove in a biscuit-tin with all the genial gentility of the local flower-show refreshment-stall. An indefinable aura seemed to separate them from the rest of the market, an aura such as used to divide the Gentlemen and Players at cricket.

For seats the ladies had nothing but an old trunk and a couple of collapsible stools, which looked as if they would collapse for good were I to trust my weight on them. A couple of genteel visitors who sat on the trunk, delicately sipping their tea, made way for us as we barged the chair to the back of the stall.

"That's right, that's right!" cried the jolly woman, in a round, rich voice. "Make yourselves comfortable. It's Liberty Hall here."

In five minutes we could see that she was selling not actually tea, but charm and personality. She was, in fact, selling exactly what the French sell, and one could see how the market folk responded. There were perhaps a dozen booths better appointed, more richly supplied with variety of cake or bun, but the happy amateurishness of this one made the difference. It was refreshing to see somebody making a definite pleasure out of her daily task.

Clearly both the proprietors of the booth were members of the New Poor, courageously facing new conditions and extracting something from their experiences. The tea lady's easy gaiety gave us a clue to something distinctive in English characteristics. It was so attuned to the natural gaiety of the market as a whole. It had a similar unconscious ease, an uncalculating acknowledgment of a communal sense of humanity. Dividing England into the three categories of working classes, serving classes, and served classes, we may find greater similarities between the upper and the lower classes than between the middle and either of the other two. And, if we might push a generalization further, perhaps, than a generalization should be pushed, we should like to suggest that, in some respects, the working and the served classes exhibit pride without vanity, while the serving classes

exhibit vanity without pride. Precisely this different centralization of the ego in each case accounts for the enormous difference in their humours. One might almost say that the upper and lower classes seem to be of a similar race, to which the middle class is almost wholly foreign.

A young man strolled up to the stall, and, ordering a cup of tea, swallowed it boiling, as if he were a professional hot-tea swallower at an old-fashioned tea-drinking contest.

"How are things?" asked the jolly woman.

"Not so bad, not so bad,"⁵ said the young man cheerfully.

"You see that boy," said the jumble-seller, as he turned away. "He's a musician really. Was a violinist at one of the big music-halls, but it got turned into a cinema. Lost his job, of course; couldn't find another. The crisis among musicians is awful. But he doesn't complain. Peddling razor-blades he is now. It just keeps him alive, but he's always cheerful. I tell you, that young man is a lesson to people. . . ."

We have often found that persons capable of understanding such admirable qualities may themselves have similar admirable qualities. And this, in fact, was the case. Gradually we wormed out the details of her own problem.

"How do you like this job?"

"Oh, I was scared to begin with. All my friends said that I'd never dare to do it. But once one has taken the plunge it is quite all right. Of course it isn't so nice in bad weather. Still, we both stuck it all last winter, and are feeling quite old hands now. Everybody has been so very kind."

"But didn't the regulars resent your butting in?"

"Oh, no. The dealers especially have been very good to us. Many of them will come round first thing in the morning. 'Well,' they will say, * anything likely to suit me to-day?' And if I have anything they will turn it over and make me an offer. Always very fair, they are. No trying to cheat one at all. In fact, often they have told me where I could go and perhaps get a better price. And I've tried that too, and they were generally right. But, you see, what with the time and the expense of the journey into the City

and so on, I usually find that it really pays me to take what they offer up here. I've found them most helpful. And if you have something you don't know much about they will give you information. And then customers too, even if they don't buy, will often tell you quite a lot about things. Oh, I've learned a lot in the last year, I can tell you. . . ."

She said that she herself had been a musician, and that her husband was a musician too. Convinced that he had real genius, she decided to drop her own music and to take up this market salesmanship in order to leave him free to develop. Our first estimate of her stall was correct: it was mostly supplied from the trunks and box-rooms of a large circle of acquaintances. Old lace and ostrich feathers seemed to be a speciality; but she had objects as widely distant as a pair of carvers and an incomplete mandolin.

On learning that we wrote books she confessed that she too had published a book, a fantasy, and had paid to have it illustrated also. . . .

" I've published a book too," interjected the cheerful woman, waving her teapot. " A novel it was. Dent's did it. But the War broke out just then, so they had to melt down the plates to make bullets with. Now I've just finished another. All about Atlantis, it is, and I'm sending it up to Scotland to be read over by a man who is a great authority on Atlantis. . . ."

The genteel couple had withdrawn, and to their vacant place on the trunk came a young woman with an acute though primish face and long, ladylike hands. She carried a bag stuffed with objects. From the greetings she was evidently an *habitué*.

" What luck to-day? " said the tea-server.

The woman opened her bag, and slowly, with the kind of light-fingered respect that women give to objects of an indeterminate value, she began to exhibit her purchases: a bit of inferior jade, a porcelain ink-bottle, a string of beads, a piece of ivory carving, a miniature frame set with small turquoises.

" Not bad for twopence," said she, fingering one.

" Eourpence this was. Had to pay as much as sixpence for this, but Til sell it for four shillings easily. . . ."

We could hardly imagine who would want to buy this rather distressing kind of bric-i-brac, but learned that she owned a curiosity shop in one of the outer suburbs. She wasn't buying on chance. All these trivial objects, polished up a bit, repaired here and there, would sell in the suburbs. Modernish taste has not yet by any means exorcized the love of bric-a-brac from the normal English soul. And on each piece she expected to gain at least four to eight hundred per cent, profit. *She* wouldn't tell you that the Caledonian Market was blown on by any means.

III

It is of little use going to the Caledonian with a definite objective in your mind. You will usually waste your time and overlook things which might, in other moods, have attracted you. On the other hand, you should memorize firmly the little maxim we overheard there one day.

" Wot I always says," dogmatized a stout woman to a thinner one, " and wot I sticks to, is, hif yer don't reely want a thing it's dear at tuppence."

Still, one day I did find exactly what I was looking for. Steven Spurrier had asked me to pick up for him any early copies of Dickens, with the Phiz plates. On the very next visit I spotted a number of familiar cloth-bound books with Dickens' sprawling signature across the cover. They were a part of Forster's first collected edition, and had not only the original copper-plates, but even the original interleaves of tissue-paper. As damp had soiled them considerably the dealer ceded them at a shilling a volume.

" I've got some more at home," he said, " and I'll send my little boy round with them all to-morrow. Mr Gordon, Enniscorthy Gardens—right. . . ."

Next day when the front bell rang I opened to the dealer himself, his arms full of books.

" Hello! " said I. " Where's the little boy? "

" Got another job," said the dealer. " Painting the back scenes for a marionette show. He couldn't come. But I had some business this way, so I brought the stuff myself."

Laden with the volumes, he penetrated into our sitting-room-studio. As he gazed round his face brightened with recognition.

" Why," he exclaimed, " I'll bet this is Jan and Cora Gordon's!"

" Right," we answered, delighted and flattered. " But how the dickens did you know?"

" Directly I clapped eyes on the pictures," he said. " Oh, yes, I know all your books. Like them, too. Fine. You see, I'm that way myself. Bit of a hobo. Why, Pve knocked about all over the States. Bummed it I have, too. See here . . ."

He dropped the books on a chair, and with a gesture halfdramatic, halfcomic, raised his bowler hat.

Hatted he looked an ordinary John Citizen enough, but raising the hat had much the effect of taking the little muff off the morning's boiled egg, for above the hat-line he was bald as a bandicoot.

" See that!" he exclaimed, placing a long, indicative finger on the polished dome. " Did that in the Arctic Circle, I did. Got the top of my head frostbitten. Not a blooming hair ever grown there since. . . ."

Once he had desired to be an artist, but the War and a complication of circumstances had prevented him from training. So from liking pictures he had come to dealing in pictures. The books had been only a side-line. He owned a shop near King's Cross, and invited us to come and see him there. Also he told us the true function of the Caledonian Market.

" We don't go up there specially to sell," he said. " It is really the place where the dealers come to exchange stuff or look for what they need. Kind of clearing-house—that's it. Say I want something; well, I tell some chap. Maybe he hasn't got it, but says, ' Why don't you see old Joe about it? He might have one.' Well, perhaps even **Joe hasn't**

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got it, but he can put me on to the chap who has. That's the way it's done up there. . . .

" You can't sell any *good* stuff up at the market, though, only cheap. . . . Just a waste of time to take anything *good* up there. Why, once I tried, for an experiment. Got a couple of genuine Rembrandt etchings cheap. So I says to myself, ' I'll try them on the market.' Had them up there on the stall, thirty bob apiece. Hundreds picked them up, but do you think anybody had the nerve to buy? No, nor the knowledge. Sold them at last to a collector, I did, one for eight quid, the other for ten. . . . No, you can't sell *good* stuff at the market. . . ."

He also confirmed the ex-musician's judgment on the honesty of the dealers.

" If you bring me something and ask me a small price, why, then, I pay it. That's your look-out. If you bring something and try to get the better of me, then I say to myself, ' All right, lad, I'll teach you a lesson.' But if you come to me and tell me that you don't know the value, and ask me straight what the thing's worth to me, I'll tell you as near as I can afford to pay, and that won't be far off the real market value. Lor' bless you, it wouldn't pay us to go round *doing* people. This isn't a gamble, it's business, and to get anywhere in business you've got to be straight. . . .

" But you try to prove yourself cleverer than I am—that makes a different thing, doesn't it? And there's lots that think themselves just a bit too clever. . . ."

Later Mr Kersley sent us a card for the marionette show, the London Marionette Theatre, run by Waldo Lanchester, H. W. Whanslaw, and Jan Bussel in a mews near Stamford Brook.

There we found a company of enthusiastic puppet-makers and manipulators. Mr Whanslaw was an artist who specialized in the illustration of historical works, thus combining art and erudition in a remarkable degree.

There also we met by chance Mr Poyser, Master of the

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Boy Singers, accompanied by several of his *proteges*. And an invitation to Mr Poyser's for a musical evening brought us to the acquaintanceship of Mr Bickerdike and his wife, who had recently produced a whole small early Italian opera with marionettes. But in addition to his interest in puppets Mr Bickerdike is a brilliant young sculptor, and also one of the few men alive who can play sweetly and convincingly on the Elizabethan lute.

One afternoon, in search of a few frames, we called on the Caledonian dealer after market at his own shop, hidden in a small side-street off the Pentonville Road. Here we found a perfect setting for a scene from Dickens. The window exhibited, in the most discreet taste, no more than an old oil-painting and a couple of prints against a beige curtain.

The vivacious little dealer welcomed us, and at once invited us to tea in the cellar-like kitchen, to which we crept down a corkscrew staircase. Here we met Mr Whanslaw and another of his marionette companions, and later the ex-editor of a well-known health magazine and former champion at wrestling. Thus do London's acquaintanceships grow.

In answer to my request for old frames Mr Kersley led me all over the house. The place was as odd as its owner. It was twisted, and stepped up and down as though it had been deliberately warped a bit in the making. Every spare corner was packed with old canvases and frames, the quaint *debris* of the past.

" See that," said the dealer, holding up an old-fashioned landscape. " That's the original of the engraving. And there in the middle is old Rooke's shop. He was a frame-maker and gilder; his son is a well-known water-colour painter, and his grandson teaches at Central Schools. That," he went on, pointing to a picture hanging on the wall of a bedroom, " is one of the few original paintings known by George Cruikshank. Afterwards he engraved the same subject for a Christmas annual, but he changed some of the accessories round a bit. This etching by Rembrandt I

picked up the other day at the Caledonian for ten bob. Not a very good print, you'll notice, so I don't expect I'll get more than a fiver for it. Perhaps lucky if I get that. . . .

"By the way, here's another odd thing I got at the Caledonian. A whole old set of Punch and Judy figures. Well carved, aren't they? That chap knew his job. We all think that they must have been made about eighteen-fifty or thereabouts. But look at the decision in that carving. No cutting wasted. Craftsmanship, eh? "

London has other markets than the Caledonian. We were always being told 'of markets in other and yet more distant spots: Mitcham Fair, where the costers used to buy their donkeys; the Rag Fair in Notting Dale, which the police have been vainly trying to close; Middlesex Street, usually called Petticoat Lane, and many more. Full of expectancy, we would rush off on the old bike to one sordid street after another, only to find the same set of dreary stalls, the same near-silk stocking stalls, the same second-hand gramophone records, the same beetroot-boilers, the same patent-medicine negroes, with brawny, exposed chests, vaunting their personal cures, the same huge weighing-scales and weight-guessing competitions, the same dirty-looking astrologers. The difference between one market and another was often too subtle to savour, but the more famous still retain their marked characteristics.

Sunday morning in Petticoat Lane is the Jewish festival of haggling. The huxters do not merely display their wares—they turn them into entertainment. They run about in the crowds like hoarse, angry dogs, snarling and growling at the public, which won't realize that here is the unique opportunity to buy something at bottom price (and usually at bottom quality). Furtive accomplices play the part of gullible passers-by. Jo herself was lured into joining in a tug-of-war with a pair of stockings by a beery-looking old man who pretended to doubt their strength.

Here also may be seen the strange metamorphosis of the

confidence trickster. As he ballyhoos his audience he swells like the ambitious frog. He stands before an open suitcase, his hands filled with packets of hope and speculation. They seem to be stuffed with watches and cash. A single shilling buys you a fine watch and a ten-shilling note—if you're the lucky one! As he perorates he appears to grow bigger and bigger. He shines with superior personality; luck appears to vibrate round him. The foolish purchase eagerly—and how many they still are!

Suddenly the man shrinks. Perhaps in the middle of a sentence his loud voice trails into silence, his air evaporates and leaves behind nothing but the image of a mean little crook*. Hurriedly he shuts up his suitcase and slinks away. A young bobby has strolled up to the edge of the crowd, and is craning his neck over the heads of the onlookers.

Fascinated, Jo once followed one of these men round the corner and watched the metamorphosis take place anew. The trickster seemed like the Rose of Jordan, that strange plant which shrivels or blooms according to the moisture or drought of the atmosphere; for him the public was water and the police drought. In fact, Jo followed this man with such apparent delight that she herself began to awaken official interest, and she thought it better to take herself off.

In any case it is better to leave Petticoat Lane before the midday crowd becomes so thick that moving is hardly possible.

At the edge of the Lane stood the cheap-jack in china. He piled service on service, offering them at fantastically low prices. As an occasional relief to his urgency he launched into an anecdote or interlude.

" 'Ere y'are, 'ere y'are! " he shouted. " When the missus 'as bust hup all the crockery 'ere's where you'll find the best to replace it with. 'Ere, listen to this. Gord mide the 'eavens and 'E rested three days; Gord mide the hearth and 'E rested three days; Gord mide the hanimiles and 'E rested three days; Gord mide the Garden of Heden and 'E rested **three** days; Gord mide Man an 'E rested three days. **Then**

Gord mide woman, and there ain't been no bloody rest hever since. An' there won't be no rest for you neither till you've bought 'er some of this superfine, hextra cheap, super-quality china, hofferred at unbelievable prices. . . ."

Much lower than this is the Rag Fair of Notting Dale. Slum houses, slum faces, slum complexions, and slumly dressed folk crowding the steps or loitering down the roads, patrolled by the ever-watchful police. Slum clothes festoon the area railings, lines of second-hand slum boots form a bodiless parade, slum bikes lean in the dirty gutters, old bowler hats adorn the railing spikes, and a few odd slummy remnants are grouped on the tenement steps: half a box of dominoes, a chipped teapot lid. . . . Who would ever want to buy such things?

The umbrella-seller was delighted when Jo bought three umbrellas.

"Mother covers them," he said. "'Arf a crown that one. Mother, she covered that one real good for a customer what never turned up. This little 'un you can *ave for ninepence. Reel silk, though." Afterwards on opening it Jo found that the silk had been joined together in small quarter bits. Still, they were useful for losing purposes. About one umbrella a month is Jo's normal allowance.

Not far from Petticoat Lane is the now notorious Sunday morning bird- and animal-market of Club Row, in Sclater Street, a slum of Bethnal Green, where you do seem to buy a pig in a poke, for furtive-looking men carry about small cages wrapped from view in coloured handkerchiefs. In some cases these veiled cages probably contain birds the sale of which is forbidden by law. But, till the recent controversy between the open-all-cage-doors people and the bird-seed merchants, few except the initiated knew of Club Row except as the most likely place to visit in search of a lost or stolen dog.

Latelý we met a countess who had actually recovered a stolen dog from Club Row. She went there, she said, in disguise, though how she disguised herself is something of a mystery to us, since nowadays all the girls of the East End

are doing their best to disguise themselves as countesses. Perhaps she put on a pair of imitation silk stockings. A countess trying to look like an East End girl trying to look like a countess is rather a complicated bit of fantasy.

Our first visit there was in the company of a cheery friend who once had a weekly job there. Every Sunday morning, with her pockets full of money, she had to go to the market



IN CLUB ROW

and buy up all the larks she could find. These she had to convey to the nearest piece of open land and there set free.

The public sale of small birds, as carried on in Club Row, is not a pleasing spectacle. Public salesmanship of all kinds is a blatant and brutal proceeding. To wander down Leadenhall Market on the fringes of Christmas and watch the auctioneering of the turkeys still left over seems to bring to a fine point the lusty brutalities of a public auction. The raucous voice, the he-man domination, the coarse witticism, and the broad hand-slaps resounding off the naked and dead meat combine to produce a queer spectacle, in which vulgarity and distaste are about mingled equally. There can be no doubt that Utopia will have to live on vegetables.

But the public sale of tiny, terrified living creatures, which are handled as publicly, as brutally, and as vulgarly as though they were mere dead flesh, has its own peculiar frightfulness.

Standing before a shop the walls of which are covered

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with bird-cages, the salesman thrusts his hand into a bigger cage and grips a canary. Holding this out over the crowd, he describes its points. With expert fingers he spreads out the wings. Grasping the bird by the throat, he stretches the skin, which apparently guarantees its powers of song. Then, turning the unfortunate creature upside-down, the auctioneer blows against the lie of the feathers to prove the bird's sex.

" All males, all males, as you can plainly see," he yells, brandishing the bird clutched in a brawny fist.

With the controversy of whether birds should be caged or no we have nothing to do. We are often tempted to think that those who waste too much time over the wrongs of dumb creatures think little of the wrongs of human beings. Lady Oxford and Asquith, writing in *Everyman* recently, said:

I was lured into broadcasting myself a short time ago upon * blood sports,' and was interested in the letters, signed and anonymous, which I received. Some were signed " Merciful," others " Love," and others " Fellow-feeling." In all these the desire expressed was the same: " Since you have broken every bone in your body while out hunting, what a pity it was that you did not break your neck! "

I never before realized how much lovers of animals were filled with venom for their fellow-creatures.

So we might waive the problem of caged birds till we have solved that of caged humans. But the palpable brutalities of public bird auction might be remedied without much controversy from either side.



CHAPTER XIII

ENTER MRS 'ARRIS

OF the hundred diverse groups that make up this broad city of London, of the Cabinet Ministers, M.P.'s, nobility, gentry, aldermen, Merchant-Adventurers, the Bar, stage, arts, furniture-dealers, sausage-makers, coal-hawkers, etc., two groups, and those from among the most humble, stand out as being the most characteristic.

That this grand and lordly city should in the ultimate be represented by two of its most poverty-stricken classes is matter for reflection. If a new set of armorial bearings had to be designed for the County Council the College of Heralds would not go far wrong in making one of the supporters a coster and the other a char. In Paris the equivalents would

be, we suppose, a French navvy and a tart, while New York would have a Jew and a cop.

What is the peculiar quality of such groups that gives them so complete a pre-eminence? Why, in the case of each city, should two of the less considered of the classes stand out so vividly before the others? No doubt it is a question of outlines.

In modern days every class tends to merge, to lose character and definition. Formerly, maybe, there was a characteristic City man, a typical parson or cab-driver, but to-day the City man has shed his top-hat and may go to business in plus-fours, the parson buttons his collar in front, whether God likes it or no, the cab-driver has become mechanical and mute. Nor can a class stand out when it ceases to provide the material for its own humour. In this generalizing and hasty century things live only by definition of outline and content of humour. They are interesting because they have shape and amuse. We are timid of drama, violence, or tears.

Unconsciously reviewing the masses that make up the town, we select those that have outline, colour, and comedy, or, in the case of a foreign land, where all seems comedy, we select by colour and outline alone. So, when we think of London we do not consider her aldermen nor her M.P.'s, but her costers and chars, especially the chars. George Belcher, the charwoman expert, easily places every drawing or joke that he makes about the char, but how would the artist exist who had to live on the human interest or the humours of aldermen?

We feel, with infinite regret, that the vivid quality of London's humour is degenerating. You may retort that, like *Punch*, it isn't as funny as it used to be, and never was. Our recollections of the humour of London are necessarily distilled from an immense welter of the boringly unhumorous now forgotten. Yet when we review the dulling forces continually at work on the public mentality—the more-than-daily Press, the talkies, the gramophone, and the radio, all doing their very best to level life down and to distract

thought from its **natural** resources—a conviction must grow that the criticism is in essence true, and that what we have gained on the merry-go-rounds we have undoubtedly more than lost on the swings. When we further hear that Billingsgate is being advertised as a pure fount of Sunday-school English, and that the bargee would rather be silent than make a maiden blush (though that might be more difficult than he realizes), we know instinctively that something has gone from the old heartiness of London life, which is not really balanced by the discovery of *psychopathia sexualis* as light conversation in the drawing-rooms of Balham or Golders Green.

To us, as, indeed, to most Londoners, the coster is almost a figure of myth. The more-than-daily Press gives us a photo of the King and Queen of the Pearlies as a hardy Bank Holiday perennial, but 'Arriet has cast her cartwheel hat and ostrich feathers, and the moke shows a strong tendency to retire under the bonnet of an umteenth-hand car, and there become transformed into six or seven decrepit mechanical horses.

Already the creation of Albert Chevalier and Gus Elen hovers on the edge of shadowland, persisting, perhaps, more or less as a commercially profitable anachronism, like the restaurants where Samuel Johnson may have dined or the tottering hostelries that Dickens may have depicted. But the char, being the quintessence of the poor, we have always with us. We may count as one of the benefits of New Poverty the gradual understanding of the char as a real human being.

America describes her as a scrub-woman, and in England formerly, when the basements of Enniscorthy Gardens were crammed with domestics, scrub-woman she was, and little else. *Punch*, that English weathercock, had little to say of her. She made few contacts with her employers, and her definite humanities were wasted on the backstairs snobbery of the upper domestics. She was merely * low.*

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She first shows over the humorous horizon with her insistence on a social status; from the moment when, repudiating the general appellation of 'woman/' she demanded the title of char-lady. This could hardly have happened in the States; the obstacles were too high: 'scrub-lady' could not have been maintained at any price. But now in London, having shed the 'woman,' she is also dropping the obnoxious prefix. The boy from the boot-shop round the corner, who visits us once a week to inquire anxiously about the state of our soles, always refers to her delicately as "the . . . the other lady."

The consummation hinted at in the previous chapter, a more sympathetic bridge between the served and the working classes, has to some extent been brought about by modern conditions in the family of the New Poor. Here two independent characters, the 'lady' and the 'other lady/' have at last come in sympathetic contact without the intervention of the professional domestic. For the char is not of the serving classes; she is a working woman. She is founded not primarily on a kitchen-sitting-room and a semi-private bedroom, but on her own home, husband, and family. She sells her labour, but not the core of her existence.

In this class, of all others, lingers some spirit of that ancient lawlessness which in older times made the Englishman one of the best and the worst of soldiers—the best for fighting and the worst for discipline. . . .

Another factor often levels up the difference between the 'lady' and the 'other lady.' Women are spiritually more democratic than men, at least when dealing with their own sex. (In dealing with the opposite sex the case is reversed.) Women count their values in a different way. Thus in a City office the most hoary-headed paterfamilias of a clerk bows humbly to the youngest squirt of a junior partner. But women count their importance not only in wealth, but in their personal and individual productions. In this way they show some of the artist's nature, and, just as the poor genius will despise the rich connoisseur, so the char with twelve children will secretly have her private sense of

superiority over the mistress with none, while, in her turn, the mistress will offer the char an unconscious respect. This entirely alters the domestic atmosphere of the home, for the house-living domestic was naturally unfruitful, no matter whether the mistress were or no.

" Loife! " said Mrs Harris, shortly after the first introduction. " What I don't know abaht loife ain't 'ardly wuth

*

knowing. 'Aven't I 'ad twelve children of me own? . . . Or you might say," she added, after a short but significant pause, " as good as 'ighteen."

Which shows that, as ' other ladies' go, we had got the right kind, or at least the right kind for us.

Mrs Harris was introduced by the * other lady' of a friend.

" A wonderful worker, I will say that for 'er," said the friend's ' other lady.' " But she's that interdependent, you'd 'ardly believe."

Mrs Harris carried energy in her broad face and humour in her blue eyes. Her hair must have been golden in youth, but was now a little like wood-fibre after several house-movings. Her figure had suffered the changes of civilization during the same period; at first it had been firmly and inexorably shaped by exterior and whalebone bondage, then it had possibly rioted free in no more than a body-belt, now it was distinctly suffering from the results of over-production. It had lost shape and was beyond control. Having reaffirmed her equator with a band, Mrs Harris let her figure look after itself, so that it sagged visibly above and bulged both fore and aft below. Making allowances for changes of fashion and station, she reminded us forcibly of an Ellen Terry gone to seed. That life which she boasted of knowing so well had ' put her through it ' with a vengeance.

Those ' as good as eighteen' had moulded her so that below the equator she bulged into a veritable shelf, on which for conversational purposes she rested her brawny arms. She had the physique of a dray-horse. Physiological experimenters assure us that a large percentage of human mentality stops at about the age of fourteen. Mathematically

and logically, perhaps, Mrs Harris had a fourteen-year-old mind, but it was no fourteen-year-old humour that played within. Labourer in suds and scrubbing-brushes though she might be, she was no moron.

She did not, it is true, show any active interest in the gold standard; her mind ran along the lines laid for it in her youth; her interests were autobiographical and obstetrical, chiefly concentrated on those 'as good as eighteen/ which actually had been twelve, and of whom seven had survived. She was a London Cornelia counting her riches in the fruit of her womb. Our childlessness brought us to her level. If we seemed richer in one thing she was richer in another, and this helped to establish a sense of easy equality and to override those class differences which under modern conditions are still such a barrier to a fuller development of the possibilities in England.

The fact that we were artists helped also to lower the barrier, and started her off almost at once on family history.

"My youngest—Jimmy we calls 'im—yer know, 'e's a bit of a artist. Paints a treat, 'e do. And observing with it, too. Why, only the other day, painting a ship on a hocean, 'e was, and 'e run out of blue. ' Oh, muvver,' 'e says, ' I've used up all me blue on the sea and ain't got a scrap left for the sky/ ' Then you'll 'ave to wait till ter-morrer,' I sez. But presently, looking out of the winder, mournful like, 'e says sudden, ' Whoy, muwer, skies ain't always blue; they're black.' And paints it black, 'e does, and makes ever such a pretty picture. . . . Oh, 'e's a corf-drop, 'e is! . . .

"Pitiful mind 'e's got, too, Jimmy 'as. If I gives 'im a penny or tuppence for sweets, as like as not 'e'll give it away to a beggar in the road, an' when I gives 'im a frippence for the church collection 'e says, ' Give it me in pennies, mar.' I used ter think it made 'im feel more important like droppin' in three pennies, but, Lor' bless yer, no such think! Only puts one penny in the bag, 'e does, an' gives the other two 'isself to a blind man or somebody singing along the pivement"

"Who does he take after," asked Jo, "you or your husband? "

" Not after me 'usband, Jimmy don't," replied Mrs Harris. " 'Arris, 'e's sly. 'E ain't altogether wot I'd call a naace character, 'Arris ain't. If yer does anythink 'e don't like, as like as not 'e'll keep quiet abaht it, and when you're not thinking abaht it any more 'e'll git be'ind yer and catch yer such a poultice on yer yeerole. But I don't 'old with that. I cops 'im a domino back. And ter think I was so fair cracked abaht that man once! Married 'im against all me fambly's wishes, I did. Nothing wouldn't stop me, it wouldn't. . . .

" 'Ad to walk out with 'im on the sly. Muvver, she tried fair to lambast it out of me, but it didn't make a 'aporth's wuth of difference. One night, foggy night it was, she ups and follers us, she did, with the rolling-pin. Crep' round in the fog arter us, and at last, coming up behind, silent, see, she ups with the rolling-pin and cracks the young man over the 'ead. And when the girl turned round, screaming, it wasn't me after all. The old fool 'ad lost us in the fog and had picked up a different couple. She 'ad a lot of trouble putting that right, muvver 'ad, and after that she left me to go me own way. Well, marriage is like 'orse-racing; yer always thinks yer spotted the winner, and nine times out of ten it's only a hawlsor an. No, if Jimmy took after 'is father 'e'd be no use to me. . . .

" But it's no good trying to tell a girl, is it? There's Nence, now, she *do* take after 'er father. She's sly, too. Naace-lookin', Nence is. She's my third, living. Posing for 'er picture to an artist I cleans up once a week. That's it; she sits and I scrub, and she gets better pay than what I do. ' You look after yerself, Nence,' I says. ' Men is men and girls is girls, and seven in the fambly's enough, without any little hextras.' But you can't talk to Nence, not reely. She gets annyed so easy, you'd never believe. And when she gets annyed she 'as a narsty 'abit of climing yer with 'er teeth_____ "

" Claiming you? " said Jo, astonished.

" Yuss, climing yer. Biting, yer know. Regular little savidge she is. And she don't care who she climes, neither.

She'd as soon bite 'er father as anybody. So we don't anny Nence any more then's necessary."

One peculiarity of Mrs Harris developed early in our acquaintanceship. A friend had given us a box of chocolates on Thursday, These we put into a drawer and thoughtlessly finished over the week-end.

On Monday morning, as Mrs Harris was sweeping out the studio, she suddenly remarked, " Blowed if you 'aven't bin and gorn and et up all them chodlits! . . . "

" So we did," said Jo. " We finished them yesterday."

" And I never 'ad my whack,"⁵⁵ said Mrs Harris.

"Eh? "queried Jo.

" I seen them in the dror on Friday,"⁵⁵ said Mrs Harris, " and I thinks to myself, * Some of them's mine.⁵ I meant to lift one or two on Sat'd'y, but what with me wages and me being a bit late I clean forgot. And now you've gorn and finished the lot."⁵⁵

" So sorry,"⁵⁵ said Jo. " I quite forgot to offer you some."⁵⁵

" Oh, it don't matter reely,"⁵⁵ said Mrs Harris, accepting the apology in the best spirit. " Bilked me proper, you did. Yer see, if any of my people 'as a bit of anythink special, well, I do think I ought to 'ave my bit too. There was one lady I worked for—oh, proper mean she was! Just married, too, and 'ad a great moniment of a wedding-cake, which she guarded like as if it was made of diminds. Kep' it wrapped in silver paper and under lock and key, she did. Cut off little bits like me little finger for 'er visitors. Not one scrape did she so much as offer me. So I sez to myself, I sez, ' I'll 'ave my whack at that.' And one day she leaves 'er keys abaht. I cut orf a great slice and 'id it in the dror. Next time she goes to the cupboard she lets out a scream. ' Ho, Missis 'Arris!' she says, * what 'ave you bin doing to my wedding-cake? ' ' Me? ' sez I. ' 'Ow could I ever 'ave done anythink? ' I sez. ' Never let the keys out of your 'and, you 'aven't. I know no more what your cake tastes like than the man in the moon,' I sez, and even that didn't make 'er give me a bit. And it was troo, too, 'cause, you see, I 'adn't 'ad a chance of slipping the slice back 'ome. . . . "

We took the hint, and Mrs Harris shares our chance dainties. Thus her innate spirit of loot—sweet English euphemism—is assuaged.

" It ain't as if Fd ever pinch anythink," said Mrs Harris one day, as we offered her the tithes. " Fd scorn to *steal* a think. But them's what I calls me perkeysites. Anybody round our way 'ud always trust me. Sometimes I mind shop for people, but there's never anythink missing. Only time in me life I don't seem fit to be trusted is when I'm kerryin'. Then I do get funny abaht things. I wants 'em, and some'ow don't want to pay for 'em, see. Queer, ain't it? Say I'm passing a fruit-stall; I sees a 'and 0' bananas, or a bunch o' gripes, or a melon, and I sez to myself, ' That's mine.' I waits abaht till nobody is looking, and I ups an' pinches it. Carn't 'elp meself. But, bless yer, they knows all abaht my little 'abits down our way. ' Oh,' they sez, ' thet's Mrs 'Arris. She'll drop rahnd and settle up when the nipper's come.' An' I do, too. Keeps me private account all fair, and, when heverythink's over, rahnd I goes and squares up. Makes 'Arris fair mad, it do; 'cause 'e cawn't see it either way. ' If yer *wants* 'em,' 'e sez, ' whoy carn't yer pye for 'em? But if you 'æ pinched 'em wot's the worry afterwards abaht?' But thet's the way men is, ain't it? I mean, if they 'ad to do a bit of wot we've got they'd know more abaht it, strike me if they wouldn't! . . ."

Sturdy Briton that she was, Mrs Harris naturally hated all official control. This characteristic both unites and severs the served and the working classes; they are both fundamentally contemptuous of the law, and a full third of the bitterness daily growing in England to-day is due to the fact that the law is lenient to breaches committed from above and harsh to similar misdemeanours committed from below. Thus, from the point of view of the served classes, the policeman is a good chap, who can generally be squared if treated with jollity and tact. From the point of view of the working classes he is an enemy, an instrument in the hands of the rich. Mrs Harris was quite positive about the matter.

" Me sister's second 'usband,for 'er sorrow, is a policeman,"

she said. "And the things she's told me abaht 'im I wouldn't repeat. If you ever marries again, mum, take my advice, don't you ever marry a policeman! A dawg's life, and lonely; 'ardly nobody'll associate with yer. Yer see, yer never can know wot'll 'appen, and there's lots of times when the very one thing yer don't want 'anging abaht is a policeman, ain't there? Oh, I don't deny but wot 'e makes good money, wot with one think and another [sniff]; but, as me sister says, * It don't compensate, an' there's many a lonely 'eart beating beneath a hermine cloak '; she got *that* out of a poetry-book."

To the police she added the Health Insurance and the school inspectors. She was not, naturally, in an Olympian position to see these things as the first fumbling introductions of a deeper sense of national order; she could not view the general benefit which in the end must be brought about. She could only feel and resent the amount of personal arrogance, the sometimes hasty wielding of power, and the impatient injustice which they had superadded to the trials of the poorer classes.

"I 'ad a little girl wot died, once," said Mrs Harris, in tones of tender reminiscence. "Clarry 'er nime was. Squalorosis, or some such nime, the doctor said she 'ad. Just faded away, she did, till there was 'ardly nothink left of 'er but the bones. But she died the loveliest death I ever see. 'Muwer,' she sez, 'there's a wonderful cross all in a glory of light—carn't yer see it?—floating up there. Oh, muwer!' she says, true as I'm 'ere,' ain't it too wonderful!' And 'er eyes was all shining so you could know she was seeing it. Then she just give a couple of quick breaths, sighs like, and was gorn. 'Ad to lift 'er up in the sheet, we did, to put 'er into the coffin. And, will you believe it, just two weeks afterwards that school inspector summins'd me fur not sending 'er to school. Yeh, I didn't 'arf 'ate 'im for a bit_____"

"How rotten! " we agreed.

"But I got me own back, I did," said Mrs Harris, cheering up. "It was this way. I'll tell yer* . . .

" There was a woman moved in up above me, and blowed if one day the school inspector didn't come to see me as bold as brass.

" ' Ho,' I sez to 'im, ' I ain't got another child died recent, so you needn't come 'ere with no more summins! *

" ' Carn't you let bygones be bygones? ' 'e sez. 'Yer don't think I did it a-purpose, do yer? '

" ' If you knew what I thought,' I sez, ' you'd crawl out of that door on yer belly like the snake in the Bible,' sez I to 'im.

" Well, 'e kep' on talking, while I thinks, ' What do you want 'ere? ' 'cause I knew 'e'd not come rahnd for the sake of *my* bright eyes. Presently 'e lets out the cat, and sez casual:

" ' Thet woman Mrs Jimes, wot's moved in up above. 'Ow many children 'as she got? '

" ' I don't know,' I sez, ' and, what's more, I ain't no school inspector's nark.'

" ' Well, I thought you might 'elp a chap,' 'e sez. ' Anyway, you might 'ave 'eard their names. No 'arm letting me 'ave them.'

" Then I gets an ideer.

" ' I never seen 'em all at once,' I sez.

" ' P'raps not, but you must 'ave 'eard 'er calling 'em,' 'e sez.

" ' Oh, orl right, then,' I sez. ' I 'eard 'er calling out Jim and Bob and Alice and Floss and Nell.'

" * Jim, Bob, Alice, Floss, Nell,' 'e sez, counting on 'is fingers. * Why, that's foive, ain't it? '

" ' Seems so,' I sez.

" ' D'jer know 'ow old is this Floss and Nell? ' 'e sez.

" ' I 'eard Floss was six or seven and Nell p'raps a year younger or so,' I sez to 'im.

" ' D'jer know she ain't sent Floss and Nell to school? ' 'e sez.

" ' Oh, ain't she? ' I sez, narsty. ' Then you'll 'ave a good chance to summins 'er, like you did me for Clarry.'

" ' Forget it,' 'e sez. ' I'll 'ave to tell 'er about it first.'

" ' Well, tike my tip then,' I sez. ' That Mrs Jimes there 'as a tongue like hacid. You tell 'er what you wants and then git out as quick as ever you can, or she'll take the skin orfyer,' I sez.

" * Ho, we'll see abaht that!' 'e sez, but 'e took my advice all the same. Hup 'e goes and raps on 'er door, smart. Mrs Jimes comes out.

" ' I'm the school inspector,' 'e sez, lofty like. * And let me tell you if you don't send your Floss and Nell to school by next week you'll be 'earing from me abaht it, see? ' And off 'e goes before she can answer a word.

" Downstairs she comes, with 'er jaw 'anging open.

" ' What's been biting the school inspector? ' she sez to me. ' Is 'e barmy? ' "

" ' 'E might be,' I sez. ' Honly last month 'e summinsed me for my little Clarry wot 'ad been dead a fortnight. Wot's 'e done now? ' "

" ' Bin and told me to send Floss and Nell to school,' sez Mrs Jimes. ' Wot's 'e getting at?—a cat and a dawg. . . . ' "

" ' Oh, 'e's barmy all right,' I sez. ' You take my advice. Don't you bother abaht 'im, and when 'e does summins yer take them to the court in a bawskit. . . . ' "

" Well, seeing the fuss abaht my summins, 'e didn't like to summins 'er at first like I 'oped 'e would, but 'e come round three or four times, and Mrs Jimes don't say nothing—not that 'e give 'er much opportunity. Presently it spreads all round our way 'ow the school inspector was pestering Mrs Jimes to send a cat and a dawg to school, and they would all wait round the corner to see 'im come an' do it. But at last the story reaches 'is mother-in-law's years. One day she catches 'im just as 'e 'ad come down from Mrs Jimes. And dint she 'arf give 'im 'er jaw! All the people wot was watching from round the corners, they come out too, and I tells you, 'e was fair jeered out of the court. . . . "

" Naturally I wasn't wantin' to meet the school inspector just then. I went abaht peerin' rahnd the corners to make sure 'e wasn't 'angin' abaht before I'd go an' do me shopping.

But 'e got me at last. Popped right out of a door just as I was passin'.

" ' So it's you, is it? ' 'e sez, shaking 'is fist under my nose. ' Makin' a fool of me tellin' me to send a cat and a dawg to school. I've a good mind to summins yer. . . ."

" ' Summins away!' I sez. ' I never told yer to. You honly asks the nimes she calls out, and didn't I tell yer I wasn't no school inspector's nark? Serves yer right, it does, fur nosing rahnd. . . ."

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But in spite of her manifest humanity Mrs Harris has the good old national tradition of 'keeping 'erself to 'erself.' There comes a moment, often difficult for the uninitiated to guess, when decent jocularly becomes impertinent familiarity. Mrs Harris had different ways of dealing with these, but none more characteristic than on one occasion during the War.

" One of these kow-lonial soldjers, 'e was. The wust of them is they don't know 'ow to be'ave themselves; couldn't see when a lark was a lark, if yer sees wot I mean. Naace young man 'e was, too, but didn't know when 'e orter stop. Kerryin' a kipper 'ome, I was, an' blowed if 'e didn't try to git me rahnd the waist an' give me a kiss, right in the middle of the street! . . . So I jess hups with the kipper, an' I swots 'im 'ard across the fice wiv it. Then I drops it disdainful into the gutter, and I sez to 'im, I sez, ' You spiled me tea.' "



CHAPTER XIV

OUR QUARTER

EDGAR ALLAN POE, in his essay on poetical composition, shows how the grand epic is really composed of a number of small poems cunningly interlocked. The large town also consists of a number of smaller towns interlocked. Most capital cities, however, have a nucleus of some splendour; London is almost bare in this respect. We once

asked an Austrian visitor her first major impression of London.

"I was frankly amazed,⁵⁵ she answered. "I stood in Oxford Street and said to myself, 'But this cannot be one of the most important streets of the greatest capital in the world. It is nothing more than an overgrown country town.⁵ Except for a little bit round Westminster it is—how shall I put it?—totally devoid of grandeur. *Das ist keine Hauptstadt*" The other day a witty Pole, Dr Czarnomski, dubbed it "twenty provincial towns looking for a capital."⁵⁵

"Overgrown country town" though it may seem, London is not only one overgrown town, it is dozens. Place the point of a compass almost anywhere west of Kingsway and describe a circle of half a mile; you will enclose an almost similar proportion of wealthy streets, shopping areas, secluded garden squares, boarding-house areas, lodging-houses, and slums. In almost every main street you will find the same shops in similar proportions: a Woolworth's, a Boot's, an A.B.C. and a Lyons⁵, an Express and a United Dairy, a Greig's and a Home and Colonial, a Partners and a Maynard's, two dyers, two bookshops, two family chemists, half a dozen fruit-shops and tobacconists⁵. Everywhere you will find this business of distribution doubled and trebled, yet almost everywhere you will find it slack, incompetent, and incorrigible. You will find the English shopkeeper obsequious in receiving orders, unenterprising in promoting custom, and pig-headed against receiving hints.

Selfridge's pleasant commercial philosopher, Callisthenes, writing on the requisites for success, gives the following list:

Judgment, good common sense . . .	25	per cent.
Imagination, vision . . .	15	"
Energy, physical and mental . . .	12	"
Determination, strength of purpose . . .	12	"
Courage, willingness to take risks . . .	11	"
Ambition . . .	10	"
Self-confidence—after it has been fairly won. . .	10	M

This leaves 5 per cent., which we may allot to the following group:

Tact, knowledge of human nature.
 Adaptability, fitting into new surroundings.
 Appreciation of the value of time.
 Cheerfulness under all conditions.
 Indifference to obstacles.

Then the following are characteristics which, although they may be regarded as derivatives of the main group, should be held clearly before the mind as of primary importance:

Originality, which comes from imagination and self-confidence.
 Alertness, quick seeing and thinking, which is a part of mental energy.
 Love of work, which is the outcome of physical energy and determination.
 Love of learning, which springs from ambition.
 Enterprise, which is a complex of imagination, energy, self-confidence, and ambition.

One day, requiring a certain well-known brand of lemon-juice, we went to the nearest grocer.

" No, indeed! *This* is the brand we stock. . . ."

We then tried several chemists.

First shop: " 'Fraid not. . . ."

Second shop: " Sorry, don't. . . ."

Third shop: " As a matter of fact, we haven't. . . ."

Fourth shop: " No sale for it. . . ."

We returned to the first chemist.

" You said you had not that brand of lemon-juice? "

" Fm sorry, we haven't."

" But would it be possible to order it? "

" Certainly."

" Would it be *much* trouble ordering it? "

" Not the least."

" Then, since we live just round the corner, since you presumably want custom, don't you think that by offering

spontaneously to order it you might have tempted us to deal regularly at your shop? "

The chemist looked amazed. Then he spotted the flaw in our argument.

" But,' he said brightly, " how was I to know that you lived just round the corner? "

At a large provision-dealer's Jo complained that a few eggs sold to her had been bad.

" Next time you send 'em back," said the shopman. " We'll change 'em."

Jo said to Mrs Harris, " If you like to take back those bad eggs for yourself the shopman said he would change them."

Next day Mrs Harris came in a rage.

" Blimy! " she said, " I'd sooner 'a died almost than tike back them eggs. Treated me somethink shameful they did, almost as hif I'd stolen 'em. , . ."

In her turn Jo went to the shop.

" . . . if that's the way you treat a woman merely because she looks poor," Jo concluded.

The shopman looked cynical.

" Couldn't happen here," he said. " Woman's probably inventing; they do, you know, when they're given jobs by their mistresses they don't—er—fancy."

" As it happened," retorted Jo, " I gave the woman the eggs for herself, and her coming was quite voluntary. . . ."

Let's see, what did Callisthenes enumerate as the concomitants of success: judgment, vision, mental energy, tact, alertness, enterprise? In most local tradesmen these could be counted as minus quantities. And Napoleon called us a nation of shopkeepers!

Enniscorthy Gardens is on the down grade, in spite of its favourable position. The wealthier inhabitants of the quarter live just behind, in Maple Gardens, which really do have gardens and are quite exclusive. But between the backs of Enniscorthy and Maple Gardens has grown up a mass of

flat-topped studios, across which, in the dusk, mysterious figures make their way. Very handy for burglars, those flat-topped roofs, and the Gardens have suffered in consequence.

" One gentleman in the road," said our caretaker, " he'd a terrible time. Didn't lose anything really, because, you see, he'd emptied all his chests and sent the vallibles to the bank. What does he do but lock up all his cupboards and drawers again. Didn't half make a mess *of him*, they didn't. You see, they smashes everything open to look for the stuff, and then, when they don't find anything, they smashes up the rest to pay him out for the trouble he'd given 'em. Oh, they carn't half be vindictive if they like! . . ."

So when we went off for a holiday we left prominently on the mantelpiece :

NOTICE TO BURGLARS

*Everything is open, but nothing's worth
taking. Better not waste your time.*

THE OCCUPIERS

Yet on occasion the burglar may be of use. Some friends had a quantity of old silver. Being of the New Poor, they did not use it on account of the polishing required, nor did it fit their modernish interior. They could not sell it, as parents objected. One evening while they were at a party an obliging burglar broke in and lifted the lot. The insurance was most useful.

" There was a feller hanging round only the other night," said the caretaker. " On our back wall, he was. The wife woke me up and said she'd seen a torch flashing. So up I gets and opens the window, and I calls out, ' Here, you! Hop it! • That's the last I saw of him.'"

But the rag-and-bottle men arouse his suspicions.

" I don't like those fellers," he says. " Come snooping round, looking into all the areas, going into the houses. Can't keep a check on them. And half the time they don't carry a sack with them, so if they did buy anything they couldn't carry it away. . . ."

We have already been burgled. Almost an initiation ceremony, one might say. The thief popped into the only door left unlocked, and got away with a Woolworth electric-light bulb and a roll of toilet-paper.

But even more strange burglaries have been brought off. In a house opposite, built on a similar plan to our own, so that the kitchen is across the stairs and a few steps down, a



OUR MOST IMPORTANT CORNER

lady was just dishing up her Christmas turkey. She returned to the dining-room for the soup-plates, and when she got back the whole of her Christmas dinner had disappeared. Nor was it ever traced.

"Had a confidence man here once," said the caretaker. "Living just there. Nearly got him, too, but the police wouldn't take my advice. One day a feller comes to me. 'Look here' he says, 'you got a chap named Harrison in your blocks?' 'No' I says, 'but there is a chap named Harrison living in that house. Big, heavy-faced feller; always carries a suitcase with him.'⁵ 'That's the bloke,' says

the man. ' We've been after him for months. Nearly got him in a big hotel up West, but he slipped off the day before we were going to arrest. Is he there now? ' ' Don't think so,' I says, ' but I'll soon find out.' He wasn't there, so the copper asks me to 'phone when he does come back. . . .

" A few days later back he comes. I go over to a lady's across the street. ' Mind my using your 'phone? ' I asks her. So I rings up the station. ' All right,' they says. ' Can you keep hanging about till our chaps arrive? You'll know them. . . . ' ' Oh, I'll know them all right,' I says. ' Can't miss 'em—the boots, you know. . . . '

" Up and down I dodges, not too conspicuous, till the two coppers turn up—plain clothes, of course, but I soon spotted 'em. ' You got some men posted in Maple Gardens? ' I asks them. ' No,' they says. * It don't matter; we'll rush him.' But he wasn't as easy as that. Up they go, knocking at the door. ' Who is there? ' calls out his wife. ' The Law,' they says. ' You can't come in; I'm not dressed,' she cries. Well, she takes her time dressing, and won't open till they threaten to bust in the door, and by that time she, of course, has skipped over the flat roofs and is clear away. Yes, I told them, but they knew better. Why, the feller *picked* that flat on purpose. Yes, confidence man he was; done hundreds. But they got him at last, about four months afterwards. . . .

" You'd be surprised," went on the caretaker, " how we've got to keep our wits about us nowadays. There's the flat sneakers, for instance. They'll come up dressed so nicely to ask if you've got any furnished flats to let. And, when you take them up, one will make it his business to get your attention off somehow, while the other slips a bit of something valuable into his pocket. And it's you that gets the blame, and no extra pay for it neither. . . .

" Or there's the couples: a young feller out for a bit of a lark with a girl. They'll come along as bold as brass, pretending they're getting married and looking out for a flat to set up in. Then, as like as not, the girl'll spin a tale she would like to take a few measurements, and she's sure you must be busy. So please don't waste your time, but they

will bring the key down when they have finished. Huh, I finish them quick enough, I tell you! . . ."

Backing Maple Gardens is our local slum. There again is one of the peculiarities of London, the sudden and astonishing transition from extreme wealth to the direst poverty. An old book I once found on the art of preserving the health of princes explained how palaces were of necessity malodorous places, since the princely state demanded large stables and a grand retinue, while large stables and a big retinue resulted naturally in much manure and unavoidable filth. The princely state was, in fact, founded on the putrescent, and the one could not exist without the other.

In spite of our so-called advance in civilization the parallel still seems to hold good, and hardly a rich part exists that has not its private sink round the corner. As in the case of princes the more magnificent the state the bigger the middens, so in London the richer the district the more horrid the slum. According to reliable statistics there are no less than nineteen hundred acres of slum property in London, and should you wish to find the worst don't hunt in Limehouse, Rotherhithe, or Shadwell, but look behind the stately houses of Bayswater, Kensington, or Earl's Court. An odd bit of irony revealed that in our own neighbourhood some of the very vilest of the slum quarters are the property of the Church of England; so that Lazarus not only sits at the door of Dives, but also has to pay him rent for the doorstep.

The transition from the wealth of Maple Gardens to the penury of Fineharbour Road is striking enough. Along the pavements of one the Rolls-Royces stand; along the pavements of the other are the coster-barrows, selling pitiful junk that one can hardly imagine to be worth wheeling from the backyard.

Yet even Fineharbour Road has degrees, degenerating as it goes northward. At the southern end are the Woolworth's, the Marks and Spencer's, the fruit and vegetable shops, the cinema; then come the fried-fish shops and the Salvation Army shelter.

Here is a new definition of London: a county bounded by fried-fish shops. How much do we live by our noses? On several occasions we have made nightly sorties with the 'wandering wardrobe,' and on each occasion have been struck by the rank barrage of the only definite odour that London exhales apart from petrol fumes. From every direction we have had to pass through areas of rancid fat fuming from the supper-bars of the poor.

No longer may we vaunt the roast beef of Old England as a national dish, for in the first place the beef comes chilled from the Argentine, and in the second place its pre-eminence has been usurped by the fried-fish-an'-chips of New England. Is this not more nationally suitable? We never did claim to rule the earth and the produce thereof, but we did claim to rule the seas, and for that reason alone should proudly vaunt ourselves as fish-eaters. For do not think that fried fish is a mere modern upstart; its origin may be as remote and as honourable as that of roast beef itself. William Langland has mention of it in *Piers Plowman*:

Bote hit weore fresch flesch or elles fisch i-frizet.

The fish-an'-chips marks the beginning of the degeneration of Fineharbour Road; the Salvation Army marks the aspiration in degeneration. Passing by one evening, Jo looked in from curiosity. Clustered by the door were a number of poor women, watching a small drama developing within. A girl was bent weeping on the shoulder of a woman, while at the side stood a tall negro in earnest consultation with an 'Army' official.

"Huh!" said one of the old women in an undertone to Jo. "Fust time I seen 'er weepin*, the mischeefuss little bitch____"

Suddenly the girl lifted her head—a negress, in whose coal-black face white eyes and teeth flashed.

"'Ow could I know?" she cried.

The negro's face woke to anger.

"You'd 'a known soon enough if it 'ad suited yer!" he shouted, raising his hand. The pink-palmed paw seemed

about to slap across the girl's face, but **the** official restrained it. The girPs head fell on the comforter's shoulder, **the** weeping broke out as loudly as before, and again the scene became static. . . .

" That's 'er father," said the old woman. " Don't 'arf lead 'im a life, she don't! "

South of the fish-an'-chips the second-hand dealers aspire to the status of antiquaries. Not that they ever reach that height, but they use the same methods, sticking up the price a bit whenever a semi-respectable customer looms. North of fish-an'-chips they remain merely junk-shops, selling whatever they can sell, and accepting whatever they can get.

For the happy hunter there are far better bargains to be found in spots like the north end of Fineharbour Road than in the Caledonian Market. In search of a dining-table, we hunted the road, and at last hit on the very thing.

Behind a dirty window were the sweepings of house refuse, tables, chests of drawers, and wardrobes with sad and faded graining that imitated no woods known to botany, achieving a perfection of the ugly that would have been brutal had it been deliberate. Yet buried in this hopeless trash we spotted a leg. It was a thinnish leg of oak, straight in line, bevelled on the inner corner; * Sheratoned ' we believe the term is.

" What is that? " we asked, as coolly as circumstances would permit.

" Oh, *that*," said the junk-dealer. " It's an old table. **One** flap is broken in two, but I have the extra piece."

Slowly he disinterred it from the rubbish. It was a flap table of very fine old oak, spread out measuring some six feet by five. Age and neglect had warped the boards of the top so that it had a wave-motion effect, and the half of **one** flap was missing, like the arm of a disabled soldier.

" Bin in the shop some time," said the junk **man**, **looking** at it with mild disfavour. " You can 'ave it for six **bob**. . . ."

He brought it round to Enniscorthy Gardens **next** day. When she saw it Mrs Harris exclaimed :

" Well, there, **I'm** **blowed** if you 'aven't bin an' gorn an' **bought my table!** "

" Was that yours? " said Jo.

" Oh, not hexactly," said Mrs Harris, " but I bin looking at that table these six weeks, meanin' to buy it some day. 'Ow much? "

" Six bob," said Jo.

" Thet's right," said Mrs Harris. " 'E ain't done yer. And to think that for the last six weeks I bin sayin', ' Thet's mine, thet is.' "

Swallowing her disappointment, she agreed to find a modest carpenter who would undertake the repairs. He arrived, a small man in a huge cap, beneath which the skin seemed to hang in folds, festooning a projecting chin and a wobbly mouth. No sooner had he set eyes on the table than he gave a hoarse laugh.

" Blimy, if you ain't bin and bought my table! " he cried.

" Your table? "

" Yus. Larst six weeks 'ad my eyes on that table, I 'ad. Meant to buy it meself and fix it up. An' you go an' snaps it hup under my nose. ... "

He chewed gum at it, his lantern jaws and the suspending folds working ruminatively.

" Yus," he said at last, " ain't 'arfa treat that. Done out of me own table, and then arsked to repair it. Naace bargain you got, too. 'Ere, you try to buy one of them flaps at a shop, and yer'll pay ten bob for it, just for one flap."

" Well, then, why didn't you buy it? "

" Oo! I dunno, yer know. Yer gotter make up yer mind, ain't yer? Then you dunno, do yer? And then when you do, why, there you're done, see? That's 'ow it was."

But Finehafbour Road is also a street-market. Along the edge of the pavements the hawkers compete with the shops, and between the two the pavements are thick with buyers. Down the narrow alleys prams, half baby-carriages and half shopping-trucks, advance like small belligerent tanks. Near the end the road plunges under a railway arch and the stalls begin to thin out. Here gather the quacks: the negro doctor, who guarantees you universal health at sixpence a bottle, the sly-looking tipster, offering sure winners at two-

pence a go (and keeping a sharp eye out for the police), the quick-fingered gentleman with a card-trick, and, once more, the Oriental-bean seller from the Caledonian Market, with his fake beans made of soap.

Here also is the shop of misfit china, where seconds or cracked pieces can be found for absurd prices. The magnificence of a complacent cat posing among jars of cheap pickles tempted us inside.

"Deat on doks, 'e is," said the proprietor, a withered little Jew. "Yoost see one dok, an' 'e's out of dis shop like lightnink. All de doks vot lif roundt 'ere, dey know 'im, and dey vorks on de odder side de roadt ven dey passes dis shop. . . ."

"What country do you come from?" we asked.

"Greece," he answered.

We tried him with Serb and Albanian, but he knew nothing of either language. Then, with an inspiration, I tried Spanish. His small, withered face became alive with delight.

"Ah!" he cried, "you know our language?"

"*Si, seiior*" I answered. "And I know what you are, too. You are one of the old Spanish Jews expelled from Spain by the Inquisition. . . ."

"That is so," he said proudly. "But we still keep our language, and we still keep ourselves. . . ."

He told us that the Spanish Balkan Jews had a community of several hundreds in London, that they had their own synagogue and kept to their own community. In New York the Spanish Jew looks on himself as the aristocrat of the Hebrew race, despising the Jew of German or Russian origin.

AUTUMN



CHAPTER XV

PARKS

IN actual area of open spaces London is possibly unrivalled. The total square mileage of open green space in London, including gardens and parkland scattered round the town, would probably more than double that of any other capital in the world.

Yet looking out of the back window of a moderate home might make one reflect that the average Londoner should be the happiest criminal on earth; he already has the prison habit. No matter which way you look, the whole of the 'tween-streets area is divided into tiny out-of-door prisons called 'backyards.'⁵ If these small prison spaces really afforded any privacy there might be some excuse, but they are all overlooked from the first-storey windows. Therefore this need of excessive self-walling must remain a mysterious concomitant in the already mysterious character of the Englishman.

From the front windows one may look down on another piece of almost senseless privacy, a pleasant green square surrounded by tall iron railings, shut by massive iron gates. The actual value which the tenants of the square derive from the rabid seclusion in which they maintain their garden is problematic. In a square of sixty houses, many of which are cut up into flats, and which may be presumed to contain about a hundred and twenty to a hundred and sixty families, you will seldom see more than half a dozen persons in the gardens even in the most beautiful weather. We may estimate that out of, say, three hundred residents not two per cent, use the gardens for one per cent, of the year. An early fable we learned was that of the dog in the manger. We were strictly instructed that of all despicable characters this was the worst. Yet, wandering round the outsides of all these imprisoned spaces, one can only wonder whether the residents ever teach their children this most humane of all fables.

Apart from the rather selfish and arrogant aristocracy of these private bits of London's open areas, we may note with amusement that an English character stamps even the greater parks and gardens of the town. For, like the districts, the public gardens have their appropriate quarters. There are the aristocratic sections and the slum sections side by side, the one hardly ever infringing on the other.

Of all London contrasts that between Kensington Gardens and Hyde Park is perhaps the most striking. Nothing separates them but a mere railing, but how different their auras! We remember once travelling from Portugal to Spain. The train was a through express; we had no need to change coaches and were in an empty carriage, yet even on passing the frontier a difference of quality was perceptible. So, too, on the sinuous Serpentine, which lies equally in the one park and the other* Watch the boats that pass under the bridge. The boat-load of Cockney youths, approaching the bridge with all the loud gaiety stimulated by a passage through Mr Lansbury's Lido, will emerge on the other side, from under the arch, visibly subdued to the more discreet respectability of Sir James Barrie's fairyland.

Cars honk, clatter, and throb round the peripheries of Hyde Park, but Mr Punch's suggestion, made in 1883, of opening Kensington Gardens to equestrians has not yet been conceded. In Hyde Park there are bowls-players, tennis-courts, bathers, football games, orators, and hooligan tussles. Hyde Park is a bustle of plebeian activities and vulgarities, but Kensington Gardens centres round its shrines—its Albert Memorial, its Round Pond, its Rima, and its Peter Pan statue. The perambulator is the only wheeled traffic that passes over those serene paths, and the only centres of activity it contains are the children's playground and the ever-fascinating sand-pit.

How many times have we not found Hyde Park the centre of some agitation! But only twice have we seen the serenity of Kensington Gardens seriously disturbed.

The day was a sunny Sunday. Passing along the green alleys of Kensington Gardens, we were astonished to perceive a small crowd at the edge of the Round Pond.

"A crowd in Kensington Gardens," we said, and hurried to find out the reason for so unusual a gathering. When we did arrive we found it attached to the end of a string.

The string led steeply heavenward, and at the far end, soaring over the tree-tops and dwarfing the distant towers by its loftiness, fluttered a marvellous kite. Technically speaking, kites should not flutter; they ought to stand stiff to the wind, like the sail of a racing yacht; but this lovely thing had been designed for beauty as well as for efficiency. In twenty yards the string had thinned to invisibility, and the toy seemed as free up there as a living thing finding its way against the wind, writhing behind it a tail full thirty feet long, vividly scarlet, as though a fantastic tropic ray-fish had escaped heavenward from a coral aquarium. In the joy of this delusive liberty it seemed to dance on the air, now diving, now climbing, while that sinuous tail described a series of arabesques on the background of the blue, as though writing a mysterious message of joy, which we were, alas! too unskilled to read.

The jinnee of the string, at the very core of the crowd,

was one of the smallest and ugliest Chinamen we have had the luck to see. He was dressed in dirty and ill-fitting slop clothes. Beauty and the Beast, no less. And yet the Beast himself was transfigured. London? Limehouse? The Docks? Whatever noisome cell he haunted during the weekday was forgotten now. Clearly half of his soul was up there in the empyrean, soaring with his marvellous kite; the other half burned from his eyes to greet it.

No longer a lost fragment of the Celestial race, London's drudge, he had been translated by the elusive beauty which he so dexterously controlled. The kite swooped and curveted at his express command. He it was who wrote with a mere pen of string those undecipherable messages on the sky in a flowing scarlet script. As he loosed or jerked the twine the magic kite above soared, dipped, and soared again, ever climbing higher and yet higher.

And to the crowd this hideous, sordid little Chinaman seemed also transfigured. He had brought them this unexpected vision of beauty, and for this beauty the crowd was mutely grateful. We did not think of his ugliness, but of his magic, and among us there could have been few so unresponsive that they did not thank him for his gift.

Wilder and wilder grew the evolutions of the kite, till it was swooping against the sky, as though the little Chinaman were a sky-fisher and the kite a gigantic fish struggling to be free from the agony of a hook. At last, with one tremendous plunge, the kite, passing beyond his control, dived head first into a group of distant trees. The scarlet tail streamed after it like a long stain of blood, then subsided, sucked down by the air-currents.

We gave a groan.

Instantly the scene changed from delight to dismay. With a crash the Celestial came to earth. His magic lamp had gone out, and the plain daylight showed him as no more than an escaped slum-dweller. The jinnee of the kite was only a grotesque dwarf.

Along the direction of its fall little groups of mystification were created. Father, pontificating to his womenkind on

the grass, found his platitudes interrupted by the sudden descent of this heavenly string; lovers, lying together oblivious of all external things, were sundered by a string descending from the skies; the string slipped under parasols and twitched them from the lax grasp of their drowsy owners; the baby clutched at it with a crow as it fell across the pram____All along the string a hundred people, hitherto disconnected in this world, found themselves unexpectedly tangled in this frail bond.

Hastily surrendering his bobbin to a boy, the grotesque little Chinaman began to scamper along the line, shrieking out:

" Doana poo to detta string-a! Doana please poo to detta string-a! "

And we all, stricken with anxiety for the fate of that threepenn'orth of beauty, scampered with him, echoing his urgency.

There, high in the tree-top, hung the flaccid kite, like a fish on a stall. All the fluttering life had gone. The splendid tail hung forty feet overhead, a drooping curve that crossed the top of the opposite tree with a scarlet sweep, and yet had enough over to flip the summer breeze like a tall ship's home-coming pennant.

We gathered below, our faces staring upward like the lenses of fifty moon-searching telescopes, and in and out among us scuttered the little Chinaman, as a flustered bird scurries through reeds. Mechanically now he cried:

" Doan poo to detta string-a! Doan poo to detta string-a! "

Almost every crisis in life seems to pause, waiting for its litde Napoleon, the man of the moment* So now this incident paused. An old lady, whose ineffectual face seemed to indicate that never once in her life had her advice been taken, shrieked futile suggestions with a strident certainty. " Lay you five to four they've not got it down by the time the gate closes," said a sporting man to a pal. . . .

A lanky lad pulled off his coat and handed it to a by-stander. Placing a park chair under the tree, and using it as a step-ladder to the lower branches, he began to climb vigorously.

Already he seemed to be beyond the margin of safety, but the kite hung far out of reach, tangled in the smaller twigs. Under his weight the branches sprang like fishing-rods. Still the kite could not be dislodged.

Hanging from his arms and treading other branches under foot, the climber made his way, seemingly suspended in the green and leafy element, like a bold swimmer treading water in a tank. Farther out still he went, laughing like a Fairbanks, playing a broken neck against the rescue of a threepenn'orth of cane and paper.

How grateful we were! First we had the spectacle of aerial beauty, now this exhibition of dare-devil courage. Twice in this one hour our spirits were raised above the common level, which does so well for everyday affairs. How instinctively we rejoice when some one spurns, laughing, that dullard's motto, "Safety first"!

"'S orl right," said a creaking voice at my side. "Ef them brawnches do break, why, the other brawnches'll ketch un."

The kite was reached. A cheer for heroism—or was it only for dare-devilry, since courage on a worthless quest may not be true heroism? Yet who are we to judge sneeringly between them? We stayed below on safe ground.

Slowly the hero descended. He came down more carefully than he went up, pushed no longer by the questing fire. Now he was in the lower branches, and we pressed closer to give him the welcome he deserved. But we paused.

He slipped from the chair happy in the feeling of our ready approbation, pleased both with himself and with us all. Suddenly his face changed, the delight faded.

Over him, unmoved by the drama of his exploit, stood a tail park-keeper, his chin thrust forward relentlessly, his notebook open, his accusing pencil poised.

"I'll 'ave to 'ave your name and address, please. Not allowed to climb trees in Kensington Gardens. . . ."

Then, turning to the small delighted Chinaman, who had wrapped up his rescued kite till it was no more than an inconspicuous bundle of paper and sticks, the keeper said sternly:

" 'Ere, you, hoff you go! Can't do that sort of thing in Kensington Gardens. . . . Spoiling the trees. Ef yer want ter fly yer kite go to 'Yde Park. . . ."

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Even in this disturbance Kensington Gardens remained true to character. The incident of the kite contained something fairy-like; the next disturbance was even more so. It happened at the top of the Serpentine, which suddenly becomes ornamental, with sunk lily-ponds, a fountain, and a few waterfowl.

Here we found a concourse of full fifty people, rapidly growing in numbers as it sucked by irresistible attraction all those visitors within the area of that indefinable telepathy which warns one that ' something is up.'

As the positions of vantage were already occupied along the edge of the small ornamental pool, those persons on the outer edge of the throng thrust, craned, coaxed, queried, and nearly quarrelled, striving one and all to reach the focus of interest. Between the legs of the crowd dogs whined or snarled, while children squirmed in and out, and were in danger of immediate suffocation.

The cause of this outburst of human energy was a baby dabchick, about as big as a penny ink-bottle on legs, which balanced, peeping, on a few fronds of half-submerged weed, while the mother swam fussily round with those odd, clockwork-like motions peculiar to dabchicks.

So small a nucleus of life to hold so large a crowd. And yet more and more thickly the people pressed about that tiny twittering thing, which was all unconscious of this hydra-headed benevolence. Along the pavements of Bayswater Road the passers-by caught the infection, and, hurriedly deserting their townward intentions, pressed for the nearest gate. From the tops of buses passengers spotted the throng, and raced down the steps.

A spirit of astonishing sympathy breathed from that growing crowd, subconsciously offered to this tiny spark of new life that, balanced on the water-weed, thought only of

its mechanical doll of a mother, paddling round like a clockwork water-toy.

We found ourselves jammed up against a middle-aged woman of a semi-sportive, tweedy appearance. With the easy communicativeness which marks the New Poor she turned to Jo.

"If this was a French crowd," she said, "it would be throwing stones at that thing there, the brutes."

"Do you think so?" asked Jo, amazed at this belligerent introduction. "I'm not so sure myself."

"I am," said the woman. "Don't I know France!"

"But," persisted Jo, "we have lived there twenty years, off and on. I can assure you that a Parisian crowd would probably behave just like this one. Look at the sparrow-charmer of the Tuileries Gardens. Why, he has taught the sparrows their names—Napoleon, Josephine, Poincare, and so on—and each would come for its particular crumb. . . ."

"Well, after what I've seen in Brittany——" said Tweeds.

"Oh, but Brittany isn't France, any more than Wales is England!" protested Jo. "Besides, that is the country. Do you think that English country boys wouldn't be throwing stones too? And, anyway, the Bretons, they are like the Welsh or the Irish. . . ."

"Ah, the Irish," said Tweeds, dropping the argument like a hot brick, "they're a queer people, now. I was staying over in Ireland last summer, and not far from us was an odd old creature. One day I went to the farm to ask if she had any ducks for sale. 'Sure, mum,' she said, 'ducks is cheap to-day. You could have the loveliest ducks for half a crown the couple.' 'But, Mrs Mulligan,' I said, 'that is most reasonable, very cheap indeed! Would you please send a pair over to the house?' 'Sure, mum, I'd be delighted,' she said; 'but the fact is I haven't any.' "

"We were staying in the Aran Islands last summer," said Jo, "and one day an islander said to me, 'Tell me, mum, isn't London a very wicked place, then?' 'Oh,' I said, 'it's not so wicked as all that.' 'You can't tell me, then,' said the man. 'Don't I read *John Bull* every week?' "

We worked our way out of the crush and began to climb

Buck Hill, on the western edge of the Gardens. Looking back, we saw that the tiny dabchick had not moved. The crowd was denser than ever. Soon the police would be needed to disperse it.

A few days later we saw a companion picture in a daily paper. It showed a policeman holding up the traffic of a busy thoroughfare to allow a duck and its ducklings to cross the road.

Regent's Park also has its different social sections. There is the aristocratic part, entered by Cumberland Gate and edged by the grounds of the Toxophilite Society. Across Chester Road one enters the plebeian part, with the tea-house and the broad open spaces, where, in proper weather, urban lovers sprawl in almost improper embraces. The Zoo too has its peculiar atmosphere. So has the portion cut off between the Hanover Circle and the lake. Though we are apt to look on Paris as a city of incomparably looser morals than London, one sees in the parks a freedom from amorous restraint which would be severely discouraged in any of the city parks of Paris. Perhaps our stricter moral control allows a public expression of amorousness to be carried further without so much fear of consequences.

One summer I spent six weeks in the public ward of a London hospital. In the next bed was the gardener responsible for much of the floral beauty of Regent's Park. He was not the head gardener, and showed little pride in his peculiar gift, which was a natural capacity for setting flowers in beds. He had an innate colour sense, combined with a power of mental visualization. As he explained to me one evening, talking in the weary voice of a very sick man:

"Yer see, it ain't so simple a job when yer thinks about it; I mean, yer see, it ain't like painting, so to speak. Because with all **them** flowers you just got to know what colours they'll come out, and 'ow all **them** colours will go together, and wot



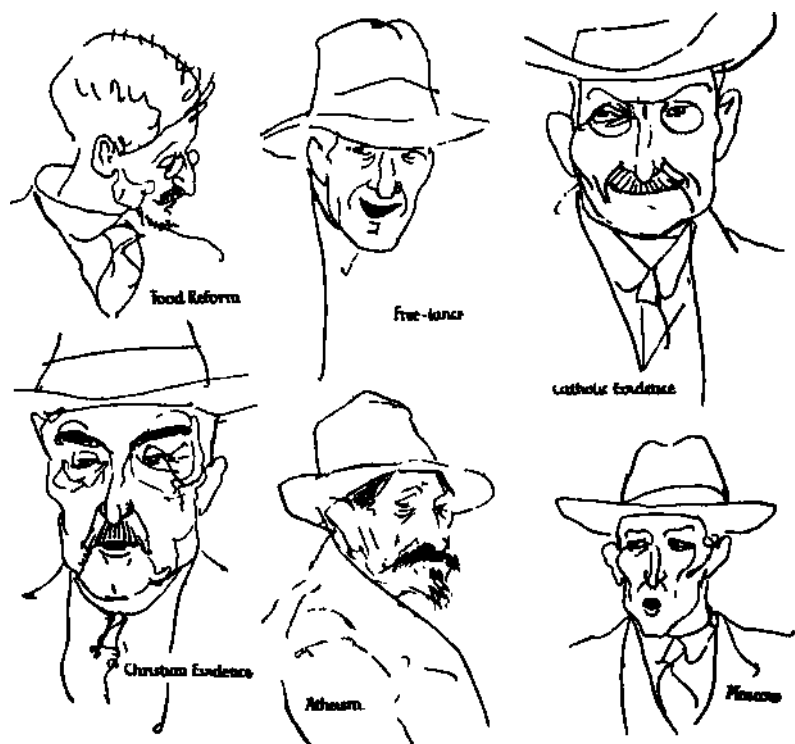
'eight they'll grow to, because that makes a difference. An* you got ter think all this hout before it 'appens, if you gets me, because once they begins ter bloom you can't shift 'em about. If a feller's paintin' a pictcher and gets 'is colours wrong, why, 'e can paint them over again, but with us we can't do that. We got to do it in the 'ead, with the mind's heye, as the saying is. I got all me notebooks for years back now, but all that worryin' and thinkin' and plannin', I tells yer, it makes my 'ead ache, it does. In fact, you may say that from spring on I generally got a 'eadache from thinking too much. . . ."

I found a general fear of the headache brought on by too intense thinking. Almost any invitation to use the imagination was repulsed by the jeer, " Ah, go on, trying to make my 'ead ache! " One of the invalids was a brilliant draughts-player. I never saw him in the remotest danger of losing a game, yet he was most reluctant to play.

" Coupl-a games on end," he told me, " and I'll guarantee meself a 'eadache for two hours afterwards."

I was really puzzled by the evidence of such excessive mental fatigue coupled with such inborn aptitude. Education has, of course, given us control; we exert the amount of mental effort needed for any particular task. But the unaccustomed thinker, like the unpractised athlete, tends to exert his full powers even when it is quite unnecessary.

In reviewing the possibilities of the working classes we are apt to overlook the consequences of defective mental training in childhood, and so England is very tempted to look on intellectual and artistic capacity as a birthright of the served class. As a matter of fact, we might consider that the development of talent for the educated is a flat race, while for the uneducated it is an obstacle race. No wonder that the man on the flat generally makes the best pace.



CHAPTER XVI

AT THE MARBLE ARCH

LOS ANGELES has imitated London with a small city park where on Sundays the speakers may set up their rostrums and expound to the *populo*. But there is this difference, that whereas at the Marble Arch our bobbies drift casually about, with aloof and tolerant expressions, in Los Angeles the cops lurk tense, with all ears astrain; one hint of Socialism, Marxism, or Communism, and *wop!* the miscreant is beaten over the nut and hurried off to gaol. Except in moments of crisis, we in London have learned better manners and better sense. A painter soon discovers that if he mixes **together all the** tints in the paint-box he gets only a **dull** and muddy **grey**,

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so the English statesmen were the first to realize that if one mixes together all the various creeds and opinions the result is an innocuous neutral tint of mind.

Karel Capek, in his witty *Letters from England*, has the shortest and keenest criticism on the speakers of Hyde Park. He tells us how he listened to one speaker after another, and was in every case suitably edified. As he drew away from the crowds, passing a flock of Hyde Park sheep, the oldest sheep raised its head and uttered an impressive "Baa." Capek felt almost equally edified by this speech also.

The old sheep said "Baa," and, in their varying ways, all the other sheep are saying "Baa" as well. Sheep most of these so urgent public orators assuredly are, strange, human sheep, each baaing its typical note, and producing in chorus a blended sound not unlike that of the flock going down to the shearing-fold.

Sheep, all intent on this one thing: to make the world a perfect place for other sheep to live in, and all serenely confident that, when the world has been made a perfect place, everybody will consent to become sheep-like and settle down to a sheep-like existence. Opposite though their routes to heaven seem, may they not all, perhaps, be equally efficient? Scientists tell us that, in all probability, as nearly as He is revealed in His works, God is a pure mathematician. Pure mathematicians tell us that space is no more than a huge inconceivable curve, so that he who started out due east for infinity, and travelling for ever eastward, should at last return from thence in a due westerly direction. . . .

Here, daily, so many different Paradises are offered to us that we hesitate between them. Here is the Catholic Paradise, rather wittily presented; the Nonconformist Paradise, platitudinous and generally out of tune; the Salvationist Paradise, urgent and denunciatory; the Atheist Paradise, argumentative and optimistic; the Socialist Paradise, plausibly material; the Communist Paradise, exasperated and unmanicured. . . .

The mentality of the orators is not so interesting as that of the listeners. Some orators persist Sunday after Sunday,

almost unattended. Still, no matter how feeble-minded the speaker may be, he will always find some loiterer even more feeble-minded to stay and hear. Although the motives that drive the speakers seem easy to comprehend, who shall understand the motives that bring the audiences? For hardly an opinion is expressed here which has not been better and more lucidly expressed in some part of the daily Press, or in quite easily reached pamphlets. One might assert that in Hyde Park no doctrine ever is properly expounded, since it is always cut short by the interference of hecklers and by the most inconsequent of questions. Thus, a speaker trying to disprove the voyages of St Paul will be asked his opinions on the Irish sweepstakes, and a single-taxer will be closely questioned on his views about the Sunday opening of cinemas.

Hardly anything can ever be said that is well said, there is small instruction to be gained, and apparently but little true entertainment, yet day after day, week after week, the same habitual listeners stand there, straining ears to absorb the same interrupted ineptitudes.

" 'Ave yer noticed," said a soldier to Jo, who was sketching in the crowd, " it's the long-nosed folk what listens and the short-nosed what gets the fidgets and walks off? "

Jo reviewed her pages.

" You're right," she agreed. " Almost every one of my drawings is of a long-nosed man."

For Jo had discovered one use for the Hyde Park meetings, a use hardly contemplated by the originators, and sometimes resented by the victims.

An orator, no beauty, noticed that Jo was sketching him in his own crowd, not listening at all, but actually using him impudently as a model.

" 'Ere you are agine! " he shouted. " Saw you at the sime gime last Sunday. Cheek, I calls it, drawing folk's fices, what's their own business and nobody else's. Why don't yer stay at 'ome and dror yer own fice in the glass? "

It was a ticklish moment. The crowd's opinion hung suspended, waiting for Jo's answer. She had **to** use **some**

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sharp repartee, for a soft answer turns away no collective wrath. If the crowd massed against her she might find it difficult to sketch in peace later.

" I V e drawn my own face too often already," she retorted, " so now I V e come out to look for something funnier."

She continued on his portrait.

Once during our trip in America Jo had suggested setting up as a lightning-portrait artist in a travelling show.

" Are you putting this up to me as a serious crayon proposition? " asked the proprietor.

" Certainly," said Jo.

" The point is," went on the man, " do you draw people as *they* think they are, as they *really* are, or *as you* think they are? "

" From bitter experience I have learned all three," said Jo.

In practice it is easy enough to get sitters for portraits done as *they* think they are; it is more difficult to find those who will sit for portraits as they *really* are; while the career of the artist who insists on drawing portraits as *he thinks* they are is seamed with cooling friendships. Even the reputation of an Augustus John will hardly bear the strain.

But here in the parks were crowds of free sitters, who could be drawn as they really were, or even as Jo thought they really ought to be, without let or hindrance. The act demanded some nerve at the start, and a certain amount of sureness in result, suitably to impress those spectators immediately surrounding her.

Some years have passed since the day when Jo first trudged off to Hyde Park with a sketch-book under her arm. For a while she hovered hesitating on the edge of the crowd, as a Serpentine swimmer hesitates on a freezing morning, before she ventured to immerse herself in the mass of serried listeners. It was a moment to test a woman's courage. To stand thus and draw with a fountain-pen, directly in ink, without preliminary pencillings or chances of correction, under the eyes of strangers, was a test of true pluck. Yet, what magnificent models! The faces were posed before her alive with active interest, quite unconscious of being drawn,

feces imbued with that peculiar quality of vibrant life which, as a rule, escapes from the average artist, because he must generally deal with the paid or conscious model stiffened into a lifeless posturing.

Jo's hand trembled, her line wavered, but gradually innate competence asserted itself. What did it matter, anyway? Here nobody had to be pleased; here would be none of that criticism of wounded vanity which is the portrait-painter's bugbear. Indeed, the more grotesque portraits delighted the spectators leaning over her shoulder. Gross caricature they could recognize, and their true critical faculties were not high. Soon they affected her no more than if they had been mere solemn stone park statuary.

A strange feeling of excitement replaced her vain nervousness. The pen began to move more fluently. Jo felt as if a hand better than her own were guiding it over the paper.

Thus a passion for park-sketching took birth. During every London visit she tried to keep Sunday afternoons free, as a weekly treat. Very hard and concentrated work, but a treat all the same. Standing thus for four hours, each head representing some three minutes of intense drawing, the fatigue would grow, almost as if the pressure from the heel spread slowly up the spine till it seemed to bore into the base of her skull. Yet this was balanced by a curious mental exhilaration and happiness. Sometimes she would return home with over a hundred drawings, full and vivid character-studies caught straight from life.

Good-humour, that fundamental English principle of existence, rules the park crowds. Perhaps it is owing to this fundamental principle that the park speakers can persist; in other and more excitable nations they would have come to active blows long ago and would have been suppressed.

"Keep your 'air on!" is our motto, and a speaker who loses his temper soon becomes the butt of the crowd.

The first speaker whom Jo studied in some detail was an old *habitué* of Regent's Park. Lean, lantern-jawed, clad in sombrero and velveteens, with a red tie and a goatee beard, he had been a queer Don Quixote of the Rationalist

platform there for years. He had a loud and booming voice, and usually opened his meetings with a shouted, strident challenge:

" John Bull, where art thou? "

Simultaneously he brandished a copy of the Bible, which he was about to demolish before an audience of vacant-faced lads, a few artisans in Sunday black, some tittering flappers, one or two half-amused ratepayers.

If a heckler ventured to question his statements he retorted, " Do you know it in the original Greek? " Which usually silenced any attempt at argument. Whether he himself knew the original Greek was never divulged.

Beyond that he drowned challenge in a loud, braying note, which could be heard almost all over the park. Often when he was holding forth the tigers were being fed at the same time in the Zoo. His hyena-like bellowings and the megaphonic howls of the tigers for raw, crunchable bones sounded like challenge and answer, echoing through the jungles of scepticism.

But one afternoon a little old lady came to stay, intent on taming the Bradlaugh tiger. Every time that the old man paused to take breath she leapt into the air, squealing out Biblical verses, admonishments, and anathemas. In answer he brayed, to which she shrieked " Shame! " in a piercing falsetto. It was like a contest between a demented bassoon and a cracked oboe, playing on such different pitches that neither one could drown the other.

" Silence, woman! Be decent! " he roared.

" You'll go to hell! You'll go to hell! Hurrah! Hurrah! " the old virago squealed, skipping with crazy glee, like a child at a party.

For several years the contest raged, picturesque old veteran, apostle of freedom from superstition, and bounding little lady, proclaiming the Christian faith like a pert child with a skipping-rope.

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Jo soon found out that a few hecklers did much to improve the pitch. They kept the audience interested and amused,

the expressions remained more eager, while she herself was less liable to attract notice. At last she divided the speakers into two groups, the glib and hired orators, usually paid by societies for propaganda work, and the exhibitionist neurotics, who were convinced that they had a burning message to deliver. The glib paid speakers were, of course, standardized;



INDEFATIGABLES

more or less talented for their jobs, but fundamentally quite uninteresting. But among the amateurs one sometimes found unusual types, bursting with a peculiar vitality, which on occasions might turn to sheer outrageousness.

One speaker in particular held interest by the extravagance of his methods and the lusty quality of his lucubrations. He was a man of fifty, with bright, mad eyes and short, upstanding hair, like a scrubbing-brush. He claimed to be upholding the rights of youth, but what particular rights he was upholding, or how he proposed to have them upheld,

he never explained—at least, not as long as we listened to him. His methods of risky and scandalous statement roused such controversy that the subject never got beyond preliminary skirmishes. On one occasion he excited opposition in a very small and pompous Jew, who had temerity enough to shout out " Shame! " The speaker came round on him in a flash.

" Shame? " he cried. " You dare to shout shame at me! You? I'll tell you here and now what is the matter with you. Your parents went to bed too late one night, but even then they set the alarm-clock so that they shouldn't go on too long, and you're the result. . . ."

Most members of the crowd finding themselves the victims of Jo's pen took it with a grin. Some, however, resented her action. Either they suffered from an inferiority sense and imagined that Jo was turning them to ridicule, or else they regarded their faces as so much personal property, something valuable, which was being improperly filched. A rare but unpleasant type.

One day, sitting on the horseshoe bench in Regent's Park, Jo was sketching other occupants of the semicircle: a Norland nurse, a child, a soldier. But at the far end a dapper, miniature John Bull, modernized, with skimpy moustaches, spats, and a natty cane, fixed her with a furious eye. Jo wisely determined to miss him out, but he suddenly bounced from his seat.

" Gross impertinence! " he snorted. " Taking liberties with the persons of absolute strangers! Steps should be taken to suppress the nuisance. May I tell you, madam, that you are *not* going to make a caricature of *me* I "

Jo answered in a mollifying voice that she had not intended to do so. She could see who didn't want to be drawn.

This only enraged him more.

" Who wants to be drawn? . . . How dare you draw people? I am surprised that anybody stands it! Preposterous!

Amazing, that soldiers of the realm sit by and permit such outrages! . . ."

The soldier of the realm looked up stodgily from his paper.

" Wodger mean? " he grunted crossly. Then, addressing the air round him with a glassy look:

" Anyone might think that nobody couldn't 'ave no 'obby like_____"

He buried himself again in the reports from the racing-stables.

When people caught Jo's eye in the crowd they would often wink and grin, as if she were a sort of legitimate larky pickpocket, or a clown on holiday. However serious she might be feeling, she had to grin back roguishly, as if drawing were the funniest of jokes. Not easy. A candid friend once told her that when intent on a drawing she wears an almost murderous look; so, in public, she has to leap from murderess to low-comedy actress, trying at the same time to concentrate on a fascinating and difficult bit of character-study which may move away at any moment.

A glance through Jo's sketch-books confirms the observant soldier's dictum. Eighty per cent, long noses to twenty per cent, short is about the general proportion, with very few women. The short noses may fidget and move; the women are not only fidgety, but their eyes are always alert. Fix a woman twice with your glance, and she is almost magically aware of it. They seldom lose themselves in their interests, trained from babyhood as they are to be self-conscious. Start drawing a woman, and she at once looks up, spots you, smiles, and either begins to pose all wrong in a more becoming position or else moves away.



The self-conscious male, on the other hand, is a pest. He usually has a pudgy, dull face that nobody would ever want to draw, but he will spot you, force himself to the foreground, wait to be drawn, and, when you do not take advantage of his invitation, will come round to ask why he is not being drawn.

" You are too subtle for pen-drawing," Jo would answer, using tact.

Sometimes she would gather her own circle. Having slipped into the outskirts of some group, she would attract a few onlookers. The speaker might finish, pick up his stand and banner, and leave Jo in the middle of a silent, concentrated crowd. The odd silence would attract the curiosity of passers-by. The crowd would grow. Then Jo, with a smile, would fold up her sketch-book and slip quietly out, often pausing on the outskirts of her late group to draw the puzzled expressions on the faces of the last arrivals, who were looking in vain for the centre of interest.



CHAPTER XVII IN OXFORD STREET

OXFORD STREET caused the Viennese lady most astonishment. Indeed, when one pauses to look at it with unveiled eyes a sense of some inadequacy must surely be felt. For Oxford Street and Holborn might be called the chief Main Street of the world. It is the principal thoroughfare in the greatest capital city that man has yet built. Now, with that idea in your mind, look once more at it. Piccadilly or Regent Street may be more fashionable, but they are not as important. Try it by the mere traffic test. There are thirty-nine lines of buses running along Oxford Street; Piccadilly has but twenty-two, and Regent Street twenty-five.

The crowds on the pavements repeat the evidence of the traffic. Every afternoon the window-shoppers crowd the

narrow walks, enjoying the mercantile spectacle, feasting their eyes on the luxuries that they are usually too poor to buy.

What a lucky faculty humanity possesses in being able to spend with the imagination! Unimaginative though the majority of these window-shoppers might be estimated by the intelligence tests of a psychologist, yet they have imagination enough for that pleasure. They can take refuge from the penurious reality in a land of rich dreams, and the mere existence of this dreaming faculty makes the proletariat safe for the plutocrat to handle. Take away this dreaming faculty from the poorer classes, turn them into clear-sighted realists, and in no time they would be smashing the fine plate-glass windows all along Oxford Street, and would be walking off with all the pretty raiment that they so innocuously covet.

It is strange to reflect that the whole of our top-heavy civilization is founded, in fact, on the dreams of the working and serving classes.

You may perceive this dream if you watch them looking into the shop-windows. Two kinds of expression predominate: the sharp, questioning look in the face of the shopper who is seeking, say, a hat she can really afford to buy, or the delighted, etherealized expression of the woman who is mentally putting on the hat she is far too poor to purchase. Reality and idealism walk hand in hand along the smooth pavements of Oxford Street.

Reality and idealism also face each other through the thin sheets of plate-glass. Here along the pavement walks woman as she is doomed to be, there in the window is posed woman as she would like to be. Only a thin layer of transparency separates the one from the other, but it is almost as impassable as the surface of the mirror in which a kitten is trying to play with its own reflection.

In vain does the customer have the article fetched from the window; it is never the same. It can never be the same* The illusion of the shop-window belongs to a kind of fairy magic, and that territory behind the glass is a fairyland into which mere mortals cannot penetrate.

Nor would woman willingly give up the illusion. Not the realism of the model fascinates her, but the subtle unrealism. Man never is blessed, but always about to be; so woman never looks like that, but always hopes to. To see ourselves as others see us—who wants that? The fat lady at the dress show doesn't want a fat mannequin to make clearly visible exactly how she will look in that model frock. No. Fifty inches round the hips likes to choose her dresses from thirty inches, and mentally pockets the delusion whole.

In this case of mannequins we English are a little bolder, a little less self-deceiving, than other nations. Now and again you may see in a shop the notice, "A special mannequin is kept for fuller figures." That is possibly the most weighty evidence on record of good English common sense, for no French dressmaking house patronized by Frenchwomen, Americans, Germans, Spanish, Scandinavians, Italians, and South Americans would ever dare to exhibit a mannequin model for ladies whose figures had 'spread.' In England, also, do not think that the shop goes the whole hog; its stout mannequin has at the most a forty-inch hip circumference, but no forty-inch customer ever picks her dresses on that girl.

Figured in wax, the ideal young ladies pose in ideal raiment. You may perceive that the leaping power of delusion is graded in distance, and the mannequins of different classes measure this distance with a fair accuracy. Thus the poor classes have only an ambition to look like normal pretty human beings; the wax faces in *their* shops would be suitable for Madame Tussaud's. But as class rises fancy spreads its wings. Nevertheless, only the most wealthy and sophisticated are able to appreciate themselves as practically featureless eggs or as gilded Robots cut from a sheet of three-ply wood.

A cynic might claim that the different classes of mannequin almost measure the amount of palpable humanity remaining in each class, and that the artists, though perhaps unintentionally, have hit off waxen images of the souls of the would-be purchasers. The cynic might not be without

some justification, for one might easily imagine another kind of Robot play, so staged that the different social characters were represented by their appropriate mannequins.

Near the Marble Arch stands the first attempt at giving Oxford Street a suitably architectural magnificence; beneath Oxford Street runs the first attempt at giving London an adequately modern form of passenger transport. We must reflect, a little bitterly, that neither was of English inception. Oxford Street's first magnificent building and the Twopenny Tube were both American in origin. We might be tempted to paraphrase Malvolio: some cities develop, some achieve development, and some have development thrust upon them. Examples: New York, Paris, London.

From the Americans Woolworth and Selfridge we English of this nation of shopkeepers must now take lessons in the art of keeping a shop. Very grudgingly we learn. Only a short while ago we came across a rare example of blundering English methods. A firm of English drug manufacturers decided to try to popularize its products in France. They circularized all the departments most expensively; neither cash nor trouble was spared. The results were tragic; few orders were received, and the whole campaign showed a serious loss. French conservatism, you may think. Not at all. When trying to analyse the causes of the failure it was pointed out that all the weights had been given in avoirdupois, and all the prices in sterling.

What peculiar quality makes Woolworth and Selfridge so apparently efficient? After all, they are working in England and with English staffs. Why, then, cannot the other English shops on the same lines manage to compete with them? It seems to be a question of tradition and technique. The American system has in it something splendidly controlled, yet apparently loose-jointed; there is the difference between the English and the American systems as between a drill and a dance. If I were Commander-in-Chief of the Army I should try to introduce regimental clog-dancing in preference

to the present system of marching drill. A regiment that could clog-dance in unison might have far more control, flexibility, and a totally different mental outlook from a regiment that could merely quick march, form fours, and wheel. So in mere commerce the loose-jointed yet strong control exemplified by clog-dancing is necessary to modern shopkeeping, as is proved by our American instructors. But we find the martinet system far less mentally fatiguing, and, as we English seem to shy instinctively from all forms of mental fatigue, we persist in the more rigid, unimaginative system.

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To the female of this establishment—namely, Jo—the bargain basement at Selfridge's began to exercise an irresistible attraction. Its value had first been pointed out by a clever housewife, and Jo, keeping office hours with palette or pen, had little time for learning much about the normal shopping habits of London ladies.

There is this difference between the French and the English shopper. In the street the Parisienne scans the windows with a keen and masterful glance, but once within the shop she will stroll, turning over and testing the materials, trying on a hat or two, pricing a dress, and so on. In London the casual element is usually kept for the street; once in the shop the woman becomes businesslike and purposeful. She knows what she wants and where she will find it. So the casual stroller, enjoying the shop in a French way, may often be jostled, and find herself at odds with the other customers.

The modern shop lures its female customers with stockings and scent. Formerly, in Victorian days, stockings were things a self-respecting gentlewoman asked for in a voice only one tone louder than that with which she asked for frilly drawers. Stockings hid in boxes, and were discreetly displayed. As for scent, she might use a touch of eau-de-Cologne, but most *nice* women felt that anything more than Pears' soap risked the epithet *rapid.'

THE LONDON ROUNDABOUT

Now stockings are displayed blatantly, ladies' legs are far less of a treat than ankles used to be to the bus conductor, and why old *roues* spend their money on leg-shows at the popular variety halls when the whole of Oxford Street is at their disposal passes the understanding.

" Going down,⁵⁵ intones the lift-girl, in her mechanized voice. Once we said to a lift-girl, " Which do you like better, going up or going down? " She stared at us as though we were lunatics. Yet of necessity one should have a choice, and that choice should reveal inherent characteristics. I like going down. I enjoy the sense of strange lightness which the fall brings. Jo, on the other hand, likes going up. She likes the sense of aspiration and the fact of standing yet more firmly on her feet. Perhaps in such differences one might discover some of the elements of a successful marriage—the goings up should marry the goings down, like Jack Sprat and his wife.

On this occasion Jo was going decidedly down, down to the bargain basement, where the troglodyte workers linger, seeing no sunlight from winter's beginning to winter's end, except that wretched allowance afforded by a chance week-end.

" I'll tell you," one girl confided to Jo. " At first that continual electric light seems to eat into your head. But in the end you forget about it. Then it's like everything else, isn't it? "

The excitement of bargains! Frocks, seconds, out-sizes, extra shorts, bankrupt stocks. . . . Packed files of them dangling from the rigid shoulders of the dress-hangers. Economical shoppers have a curious way of bowing at and grabbing materials as they appraise them. . . . There are the counters of hats, graded according to price. Housewives trying on hats roll their eyes aslant, while thoughtful friends suck their teeth critically. They wig-wag and pose before the glass, dramatizing themselves in the new hat. By what canons does a woman judge whether a hat suits her or no? Mystery. She wears a French expression which the English-woman reserves only for the millinery counter. Children

being fitted with hats, being thrust remorselessly into hats; if the question of how a woman appraises a hat for herself is a mystery, how much greater 'a mystery is the art of choosing a hat for your child?

Here's another line of tempting legs, stockings again. Seconds. Flesh-coloured woolly ones at one shilling the pair.

Oh, what a nice cardigan! But no, the sleeves are half a yard too long, as if it had been made for a gorilla. The absent-minded knitter must have been in love, and dreaming that those arms were specially designed for hugging purposes.

Hair-curlers. A lovely young girl with luxuriant locks sits with a movie-star expression, while a clever gag-girl winds the curlers in her hair. But it is difficult to go on looking lovely with one's head like a sea-urchin.

Shy and bulky women from the country hesitate at the edge of the escalator. Daughters married and now used to town gadgets scold and thrust them on to the first moving steps, whence they sail downward with an hilarious air. . . .

At the bottom more stockings. . . .

White-wood furniture. To-day white wood has much of the charm that raw terra-cotta vases held in one's school-girlish days. There are so many dimly imaginable ways of ruining it by means of decoration. It needed the pluck of an Ambrose Heal to say, "What's wrong with white wood left as it is?" Nudism in wood.

The manners of the salesmen in these large London shops compare most favourably with those of the French. In fact, one might almost say that they have exchanged nationalities in manners. The French hired salesman is too often an impatient and bullying autocrat. He advances towards you imperiously, and from a long distance intones, "*Qu'est ce que vous voulez?*" mentally adding, "*Et plus vite que fa.*" But courtesy surrounds the English shopman like an aura—that is, unless you happen on a floorwalker out of his department; then he may be extremely haughty.

At the white-wood department Jo fell for a white-wood stool with a box inside itself. Among the pantomime glitter

of kitchen utensils she bought a roaster to put on the gas-stove. She rushed into a veritable orgy of buying, regardless of the fact that the bargain basement won't deliver by van. She loaded herself with hair-curlers, cardigan, stockings, stool, roaster, bulls-eyes, bacon, biscuits, Japanese rice, and some very gorgeous soap, vivid in scent, to please Mrs Harris. Finally a large pot of marmalade.

Staggering towards the door, she felt the cloak slipping from her shoulders. Shrugging did no good; it only made the slip worse.

"There, love, you'll be all right now," said a kind old voice with the cracked note that comes into English people's voices on a winter's afternoon just before tea-time. Jo felt at once pleased and cosy, as if the old nurse had just tucked her into bed after a steaming bath. She turned to thank a bright-eyed, pippin-faced little woman, who looked like a highly respectable ex-housekeeper.

"Looks as if you bin enjoying yourself," said the little old woman. "One can *see you* don't come down 'ere every day, like I do."

Jo explained that she was back in England after a long absence; not yet used to shopping in London. But her grateful smile suddenly changed to dismay. . . .

"What's the matter?" asked the old dear.

"Fve lost my purse!" exclaimed Jo.

"Never mind. P'raps you've laid it down somewhere."

"The marmalade counter," Jo gasped.

"Come, love," said the little old dear, tipping Jo's hat straight, too straight. "We'll go to the jams."

The young woman at the jam counter when she heard of Jo's loss put on the expression of a competent nurse at a minor casualty.

"Go to the lost-property office," she said.

"It was green-and-brown leather, and——"

"Much better try the lost-property office," repeated the girl.

"Come, dearie," crooned the Good Samaritan. "I know where *that* is. You see, I come here every day to buy bread.

You see, it's an Object; and then I goes round the basement pricing things. I need new spectacles, you see, that's why_____"

" But I'm afraid I don't see," said the bewildered Jo.

" Well, seeing improperly as I do, I can't read the daily papers, and I never did accustom myself to those wobbling cinemas, so this makes a distraction, and with my magnifying-glass I can make out the price-cards. . . ."

Her sense of direction seemed rather vague, and Jo was forced to ask the way. But the little old Good Samaritan repeated every answer as it was given, at the same time telling a complicated story of her niece and a lost purse and the lost-property office.

" And would you believe it, there it was," she concluded.

" And there is my purse! " cried Jo. For over the counter the lost-property girl was just taking the purse from another assistant, doubtless the junior jam-girl.

" Indeed," said the lost-property girl, in a very aloof voice.

Jo was not perhaps a very reassuring figure, with hat sliding backward, cloak slipping off, and dishevelled hair; just the sort who would be lurking round the lost-property office corner, ready to jump forward and cry, " That's mine! "

" How much did you have in it? " said the lost-property girl.

" Goodness, I don't know! " Jo faltered. " Anything between two pounds and five."

The lost-property girl gave a loud sniff.

" I'll put it right, love," said the old Samaritan, grubbing busily with her black cotton gloves in the recesses of Jo's paper-bags. She waved her finds at the lost-property girl, tickets from the cash-registers. " Ah-h! " she exclaimed. " That proves it. The ticket for the marmalade."

But according to the Selfridge psychology a marmalade ticket proved nothing. The lost-property girl was hot and uncomfortable. What was a well-meaning girl to do about it?

Suddenly Jo remembered that over her shoulder hung

the twin in pattern, a larger bag, into which the purse fitted. The resemblance was proved. Jo received her purse, grinning foolishly. But no one was amused.

" Now, love," said the old Good Samaritan, rearranging Jo's cloak and retipping her hat, " let's get them parcels fixed up a bit. It's in the family. . . . What is? Why, a good deed every day. All of us is the same. Look there now, you've got the marmalade upside-down. If that fell out there'd be no lost-property office for that. And I wouldn't keep these stockings in the bacon bag; wool soon picks up the smell, and though bacon smells good in its place,' everything in its place and a place for everything,' as my great-uncle used to say. . . . And that reminds me about my great-uncle. . . . It's quiet in this corner, and I'll show you his photograph. . . ."

What the great-uncle had to do with purses and marmalade Jo couldn't imagine, but she was even more bewildered when, in place of the bewhiskered veteran expected, she saw the face of a pallid, still young man, with serious and staring spectacles.

" But that's never your great-uncle! " she gasped.

" Why, no, poor lamby, that's my nephew! You see, 'e buried 'im."

" Who? "

" Almost broke me poor sister's 'art it did. Died of a bash on the 'ead with a cricket-ball."

" That's terrible."

" Yes," sighed the little old Samaritan, looking vaguely into space with a ruminative air, " there's lots dying of these here bashes nowadays, too."

Jo's mind groped helplessly amid bashes, great-uncles, and marmalade.

" But what did your great-uncle——" she began.

" I'm telling you," said the old Samaritan, pointing to the photo. " A good deed a day was the 'abit of our family. 'E was my great-uncle's last good deed."

Jo wondered desperately whether the great-uncle had struck the fatal blow which had lifted the staring young

man from this life to which he was so obviously ill-fitted. She looked inquiringly at her benefactress; the stool and the roaster and the marmalade were getting very heavy and were cutting her fingers, but she did want to hear the true facts of the case.

"Buried 'im, that's what 'e did," said the old Samaritan. "And 'im with only twenty minutes to live 'imself at the very time. And 'e knew that too when 'e 'eard of Percy's death, but 'e insisted on arranging all the details 'imself over the telephone. 'That's my good deed to-day,' 'e said."

"But did he really die twenty minutes afterwards?" gasped Jo.

"Ain't I telling you? You see, it was easy, so to speak, for 'im to arrange it all, being an undertaker by trade. Only 'im being old then—eighty-four years—'e didn't do any more undertaking, except now and again to oblige an old friend as a pleasure. . . . Now, do let me see you upstairs. I don't feel you can look after yourself properly, not with that slippery cloak and the marmalade, and you knowing well that there France—it must be a funny place if what I've heard tell of it is true. . . .

"Here we are. The buses stop just under this post. Hundred and eighty-eight, that's your number. Goes straight to Notting Hill. There's the marmalade and there's the bacon on top and there's your purse. You'll be all right now. Conductor, don't forget to put this lady down at Notting Hill. She's from France, and isn't quite sure of her way about. . . . Good-bye, dearie. . . ."

She rapped her cotton-covered knuckles on the glass window, and waved as the speeding engine gripped the bus. Her good deed was accomplished.

This fortunate spirit of kindness is one of London's qualities we may be most thankful for. On another occasion Jo found herself in a bus, and, searching for the money, discovered that her purse was reposing on the mantelpiece at home.

"'Ere," said the conductor, arresting her hurried movement to leave, "youjain't got no reason to get off just because

you ain't got a penny. And wot's more, I'll give yer another penny to pay yer fare on the next bus."

His action seemed quite disinterested, as for some time he resisted Jo's attempts to get his address. But after she had left the bus Jo was followed up the street by a fellow-passenger, a cheery woman obviously of the poorer classes.

"Excuse me, mum," said this second Good Samaritan, "but it's 'ard to be round the town without any think in yer pocket. Couldn't I lend yer a shilling to be going on with? "



CHAPTER XVIII

ON LONDON RIVER

FROM where we live, at the north corner of Kensington Gardens, you can get clear out of London on no more than a quarter of a mile of pavement. The London summer having arrived hot and steamy, one morning we stepped on to the grass at the extreme corner of the Gardens, bound for Greenwich. Already the flutter of nurse-girls pushing their chariots of prams had gone by. There seems to be three distinctive clans, to correspond to our social divisions. There are the nurse-girl aristocrats, branded with the initials of famous institutions, and certified to preserve the health of rich men's children under most conceivable circumstances. The middle class push their own babies, and trust to Mother's hints picked up from the daily papers. The lowest follow the most ancient

code, or, as one might paraphrase the well-known rhyme of the flea,

Big kids have smaller kids
Who tag behind and blight 'em,
And smaller kids have baby kids,
And almost *infinitum*. . .

The vehicles differ as much as do the respective stations. The aristocrats have deep lacquered boats, the *bourgeois* push pretentious imitations of a visibly cheaper make, but the little urchins trundle wheeled chairs, springless and fifth-hand, which can be folded up to stow into the narrow quarters of a slum tenement.

Yet of all three classes the children of the poor have surely the better fun, for they can use the children's playground, with its swing-boats, its slides, see-saws, rocking-disks, and sand-pit. As we enter the park we pass by this playground of the poor, with its complement of summer joy.

Who first started these playgrounds for the poorer children? Not, we may imagine, anybody with subtle revolutionary social intent. Yet these playgrounds may be quite revolutionary in effect. Old saws contain much wisdom. That bygone proverb "Bring up a child in the way it should go" is as wise as many another. The old Conservative diehard who blusters about pampering the children of the poor is from his own point of view quite right. What the child has once enjoyed it may look on as a right in the future, and the right to enjoyment is surely the rock on which the whole social struggle breaks.

How much enjoyment? What kind of enjoyment? And, lastly, what is enjoyment?

If we begin to breed up numbers of children who have learned the true pleasures of out-of-doors enjoyment, are we not at the same time, perhaps, breeding up a number of people, future citizens, who are not going to stay content with present-day conditions or anything like the present-day conditions? And if we may say that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton we may also suggest that some part of the inevitable social revolution of the

future is being **stimulated** by the playgrounds of **the London** parks.

The childish players at the one end and the earnest speakers at the other are but natural corollaries. The steps are as follows: from playground to Boy Scout, from Boy Scout to hiker, from hiker to social service, kibbo-kifting, social-crediting, and all that, and from all that to nudism. Not every one will take the full course, for the large inert mass of humanity takes few steps on its own initiative, but the ones who do take the steps—and they are not really inconsiderable in numbers—are those who in the end will give orders to the others. Having played in their childhood, they will not be satisfied to drudge all their lives. They will demand a proper proportion of playtime and leisure.

Playgrounds for poor children, Mr Lansbury's Lido—*partem et circenses*. Odd people that we English are. Invariably we educate our subject nations, for the English working class has been in effect another subject nation, and yet we seem to think that the process may be stopped short at a definite spot most convenient to ourselves. We are continually drawing imaginary Rubicons, the crossing of which is *verboden* with threats of the direst consequence, but when our Caesars of progress coolly step across we hastily retreat, drawing futile Rubicon after futile Rubicon with undiminished optimism, wasting our time trying to defend imaginary barriers, instead of preparing the whole land for peaceful and sane occupation. How ridiculous the future will think us!

Americanism comes creeping into the London parks, where the cafeteria imitates New York's servantless restaurants. Here, sitting under the shadows of the spreading elms, sipping a cooling drink, we could hear the cries and shouts of the bathers in the Serpentine.

Mr Lansbury's Lido they call it, popular creation of the Labour Party. But it is already suspect by the National Government, for they are taking samples of the water flowing from the lower end. And if a sufficient microbic content can be detected our Bumbles will have it shut up—

of course, purely on sanitary grounds, merely to protect the people from themselves.

Emerging from the succession of parks along Birdcage Walk, we found a small crowd assembled opposite the Institution of Civil Engineers. Waiting at the door was a White ambulance van and overalled attendants.

" What has happened? " I asked a spectator.

" Blowed if I knows, guv'nor," answered the man.

" S'pose the 'eat's copped some old bloke inside. . . ."

In the forefront of the group stood a slum child dressed in soiled *eau-de-Nil* satin. Her legs were firmly planted in the road, and all her interest was concentrated on that yawning door and its promise of tragedy. A tall girl of seventeen leaned through the crowd.

" Carm on, Oivee," she urged.

" Naw," replied Oivee succinctly.

" Ow, carm on, Oivee! " repeated the girl wearily; then her voice changed to well-acted seduction. " Carm on and look at the pretty ducks/"

Oivee flashed back a glance of supreme contempt.

" Look . . . at . . . the . . . ducks" she sneered.

For a moment the elder girl was silenced; then, with a wail of impotence, she cried, " Ow, carm on, Oivee! Don't be so mawbid-minded."

Ivy was not to be dragged away by giving her state of mind a name, and thus we left her, resolutely morbid. We crossed the quarter of a mile to the Westminster quay, and came out at the water's edge of London River.

A cheerful member of the New Poor was Captain X, twice commander of giant ocean liners, formerly official in the Admiralty, and now skipper of a Thames launch and partner of a London waterman. In a minute we could see what had, perhaps, been responsible for the gallant Captain's rise, had perhaps also been responsible for his fall, and now was a great consolation in his eclipse. He had one of God's best gifts to man, the showman spirit.

The true showman spirit conveys almost inexhaustible riches to the lucky possessor, since by its grace he comes partly to own whatever he is showing off. He takes it into himself and incorporates it as a personal possession. Thus, formerly, in spirit Captain X owned the great ocean liners he controlled, and in part the Atlantic Ocean as well; proudly he would display his possessions to the passengers in his charge. Now, humbled in the extent of his actual possessions, he may be spiritually richer, for he owns about half of this grand riverine metropolis—indeed, all that part which can be seen between Westminster Pier and Greenwich.

Before we started he passed round the certificate of his adventurous career, a framed copy of a newspaper article written by a reporter with an eye for the copy loose in this complex city.

"That," said the gentleman on my left hand, as he passed along the frame, "is verra interesting—verra interesting indeed. . . ."

Taking this remark as an informal introduction, he went on, in a semi-religious voice:

"We have just had the preevelege—may I say the *graand* preevelege?—of being shown round our Houses of Parliament. Oor member, a splendid gentleman, procured us the permeesion. . . ."

Though they should not have, yet the words did come to us with something of a shock. A grand privilege? Was it so? Were our Houses of Parliament really a site almost sacrosanct? Were these M.P.'s really splendid gentlemen, or were they more like the figures in Belloc's burlesques, or, at any rate, ambitious people willing to lend themselves, for the prestige of the letters, to the interminable boredom of dull debates every issue of which was already decided by the automatically herded vote? One might perhaps think with some respect of the famous ventilation system of the House, or of the marvellous mechanical perfections of Big Ben, but could one really think with awe of this talking-shop which has so signally failed to resolve any one of the problems urgently presented to it since the War, which has failed

equally in finance, disarmament, unemployment, Ireland, India, and America?

But our Scotsman looked just the kind of man who lives happy in the conviction that every institution of the British Isles is by predestination great and grand. So his trip down the London River was a long chorus of self-gratulation addressed to the lady at his side, who, we judged, was his bride. She carried visibly that air of bright happy submission which is rarely seen in women of much marital experience.

The afternoon was sunny, hot, and hardly more than hazy; London stood out clear on its muddy fringes. Upright at the wheel of the little panting launch, Captain X exhibited his London: Scotland Yard, much more prosaic than the detective tales make it out to be, the Board of Trade, the immense flats of Whitehall Court, in which one might be tempted to imagine that nobody has ever died, no hearse having ever approached the door, since the poor corpses are smuggled out of the building in a big wardrobe specially kept for the purpose. . . . On the other side of the river the County Hall floated on its immense raft, so that if England were suddenly overwhelmed, like a second Atlantis, it might survive, making the Chairman of the London County Council into a second Noah. The Shell-Mex building looked like a huge, clock-faced, square-headed Robot shouldering its way over the roofs of the town. Here was Charing Cross Station, squat and squalid, Hungerford Bridge, possibly the ugliest bridge in any town of London's importance. Here was the little gem of Adelphi Terrace, continually threatened by the vandals, yet still persisting in its quaint beauty; Waterloo Bridge, that is costing more in debates than it should have in repairs, followed by Somerset House on the one hand and by the most dismal succession of wharves and storehouses almost to Greenwich on the other.

In a novel by Sir Philip Gibbs one of the characters, strolling along the Embankment and looking across the stream flooded in the moonlight, says, " Wonderful, isn't it? **And** yet some asses talk about the ugliness of London. . . ." **The** proof is hardly convincing. Thus one might say of a

hideous woman with lovely finger-tips, heavily veiled, and seen only against the radiance of floodlights, " Isn't Alicia beautiful? What fool would call her ugly? " But floating thus on a hot and pleasant day, a day not entirely remorseless in its clarity, a day which tempered distance with the charity of atmosphere, one might be tempted to ask oneself the question, " Is London really beautiful, or no? "

A city may claim many different kinds of beauty, and in some ways these resemble feminine beauty. A woman may have beauty of body, but poor features; she may have a lovely face, but a bad figure; she may have lovely details, she may dress well; she may have beauty of ambience, or she may light up well. So also the city.

London might have had beauty of plan; Wren designed to make her the noblest capital on earth, but Charles the Second was no Napoleon I I I , and London's chance of having a magnificent structural unity disappeared in a mean squabble of petty property owners.

Beautiful details London has, but they are often difficult to find. Travelling thus along the river from Westminster Pier, is there really one exquisite building—worthy of a great city, that is—to be seen ? The Houses of Parliament ? Morris would have turned them into a dung-market. Scotland Yard? It is not worthy to be even what it is, second-rate workhouse architecture. The County Hall? Considered as an ark, it is marvellous; considered as architecture, it smacks too much of the drawing-board and the ruler and of a borrowed and unassimilated inspiration. It lives as a pen-and-ink drawing, not as stone*

If the fifty best buildings of the world were to be selected, would a single complete London building find place among them? We doubt it. If the fifty best bridges of the world had to be picked, would one of them be a London bridge? Assuredly not. Among the ten finest river frontages would London's be counted? Hardly. Of the ten finest streets in the world, would a single London street be included? Of the ten finest perspectives in any city, would one of them be London's? Of the ten most impressive panoramas, would

the London panorama count? Only the blindest patriot could assert so.

Karel Capek, in his brilliant *Letters from England*, notes this fact plainly:

You can ride for hours and miles on the top of a bus, from Ealing to East Ham and from Clapham to Bethnal Green; and you will scarcely find a place where your eye could derive pleasure from the beauty and lavishness of human work. Art is what is deposited behind glass in galleries and in the rooms of rich people; but it does not move about here in the streets, it does not twinkle from the handsome cornices of the windows, it does not take up its stand at the street-corners like statues, it does not greet you in a winsome and monumental speech.. . .

What, then, has London? It has what everything English has, atmosphere. And with its subtle atmosphere London contrives to create beauty, touching everything, even the sordid and hideous, with an illusive charm. Yet atmosphere in itself, abstractly, is not a beautiful thing. It is beautiful only because we have arrived at a stage of divorcing the pleasures of the eye from the judgment of the conscience. Surrounded as we are by poverty, misery, and human frustration almost too poignant to be consciously borne, we force ourselves to live by our eyes alone, which can be made non-committal, by the subtle introduction of the idea of an abstract 'beauty.' When we have arrived at the aesthetic feat of admiring the beggar's rags as 'picturesque * we have often almost succeeded in forgetting the need to sympathize with his empty belly.

So much of London's beauty is beauty of this purely aesthetic kind. Think of the artist shaping out a lovely picture with a battered ash-bin, some yellowing cabbage-tops, a couple of useless and rusted kettles, and a tattered umbrella. How ethereal Chardin might have made such a subject! London contrives to shape out its loveliness with materials hardly more noble in the mass. Consider **the** famous Lavender Wharf. Could anything more remote from lavender be imagined?

If London's beauty lives in its atmosphere we **may** almost go on to say that the beauty consists in precisely that element which does its best to stop us from seeing London at all, and within limits the less we see of London the more beautiful it becomes. Nor is the atmosphere of London a thing of which we may be legitimately proud, compounded as it is of fog, coal smoke, damp, and filth.

Apart from London's atmospheric beauty, which merges a dozen incongruous styles and a hundred architectural ineptitudes, which fuses cathedrals, fish-markets, store-houses, and slums into a grandiose city mass, there are the smaller and more particular London beauties; but few of them are visible from the river. The old inns and quiet courts, some of the simple squares surrounding quiet gardens—these have a beauty all their own, although the beauty is not properly that of a great city, but of some cathedral town in the slow countryside.

"*Das ist keine Hauptstadt*" said the Viennese girl, and she was perfectly right. Seldom does London rise to the proper dignity of the capital of the greatest empire that the world has ever known. What would the Roman Emperors have thought of London as the capital of their world? How may we contrast Wembley with the Colosseum, St PauPs with St Sophia, Ludgate Circus with the Forum, or the St Pancras Baths with those of Caracalla? To think that a set of over-civilized, poverty-stricken savages produced Athens and the Acropolis, and all that the British Empire can show for its glory is London! Our ghosts will have small cause for pride when the archaeologists of the future come grubbing in *our* ruins. Will the Wilenskis of the future argue as to whether a reconstructed statue found shattered to three hundred and sixty-five fragments in the region of St James's can really be a genuine Epstein, and, if so, whether it has been properly put together again by the experts of A.D.2500?

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Yet once a doctor said to us, "If London were not a **great** city it would be a health resort." **For despite the**

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obvious contaminations, he went on, the natural air of London is better and more stimulating than that of most of the world's big capitals. Apart from its suitability as a health resort, how many know that it is actually, in a very modest way, a seaside place, and that London Beach, in the season, swarms with bathers and sun-bathers at what times its sands are uncovered by the salt estuary waves?

Compared with the size of the city, London's beach can hardly be called adequate, but what it lacks in spaciousness it more than makes up in congestion. It lies just at the foot of the Tower, and in fine weather might be compared with the beaches of Coney Island, New York. But Coney Island is extensively advertised, special trains bring the bathers there, artificial amusements tempt the city tripper, while here no sights other than a Beefeater or the Guardsman tempt the visitor.

Seeing the exiguities of the beach, it is lucky that the bathers are cut to fit, and its chief charm is the tiny, twinkling, joyful population of children clad in small bathing-slips of primrose, emerald, cobalt, vermilion, or scarlet. The most delightful point of view is from the Tower Bridge, with the sparkling beach seen between the grim, grey old Tower and the older, greyer river, like some fantastic bed of strange exotic sea-anemones.

That dismal drabness which once stamped the lives of the slum children from their birth, like a dreary prophecy of their eternal fate, here seems to be banished. The freedom from too many clothes, from the superabundance of multitudinous petticoats or waistcoats, which used to muffle them in layer on layer of complicated rags, has given the children a novel grace. For the thin, under-nourished slum child of London is no stupid, clumsy animal. Many have a natural sense of drama, and touch life with a gesture.

Over the iron railings the old Beefeater, scarlet-faced to match the braiding of his quaint uniform, looks down on the gay, half-denuded crowds with a face of apoplectic envy. We noticed the Guardsman in his sentry-box. From beneath his huge bearskin the sweat pours down his face; but more

than the mere heat makes him perspire. Evidently he is an inexperienced sentry, for his rifle is leaning against his legs, while he studies intently the card of instructions that normally hangs within the box.

We splutter on down the river, past the wharves where the Margate steamers tie up, past the moorings of the *Showboat*, floating cabaret vainly trying to make London's river gay and fashionable. We pass Wapping Old Stairs and the dreary little pub in which the notorious Judge Jeffreys was caught, past Cherry Garden Pier, but little of cherries or of garden to be found there now. Rotherhithe shows up, and reminds us that, however much London River has been purified during the last hundred and seventy years, the sensibilities of humanity have been sensitized to no less extent. To those who bemoan the good old days we might recommend a perusal of Fielding's *Voyage to Lisbon*, which started here. Fielding, almost dying of dropsy, had to be carried to the wherry from the foreshore of Rotherhithe.

I think upon my entrance into the boat, I presented a spectacle of the highest horror. The total loss of limbs was apparent to all who saw me, and my face contained marks of the most diseased state, if not of death itself. . . . In this condition I ran the gauntelope (so I think I may justly call it) through rows of sailors and watermen, few of whom failed of paying their compliments to me by all manner of insults and jests on my misery. . . . It may be said that this barbarous custom is peculiar to the English, and of them only to the lowest degree; that it is an excrescence of an uncontrouled licentiousness mistaken for liberty. . . . This may be said, and this is all that can be said; and it is, I am afraid, but little satisfactory to account for the inhumanity of those who, while they boast of being made after God's image, seem to bear in their minds a resemblance of the vilest species of brutes; or rather of our idea of devils; for I don't know that any brute can be taxed with such malevolence.

Having been tapped of ten quarts of water, and with his wife tortured by toothache, Fielding dropped down towards

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Gravesend, and we followed in his tracks. Here, beneath the shadow of Wren's magnificent hospital, which Fielding says "presents so delightful a front to the water, and doth much honour at once to its builder and to the nation," lies the second of London's beaches.

A narrow footpath leads to it, along which the crowds surge. The path is so narrow that perambulators meeting are unable to pass, and traffic jams are terrible, neither being able to advance nor often to retreat.

Here on the steps of the old hospital a lad of eighteen, clad in no more than a pair of trunks, lies spreadeagled in the sun, while by his side a sardonic old tramp fills his pipe. To move up or down the stairs to the water's edge is almost a free fight; the perambulators jam, the mothers tug, the boys bawl, the girls squeal. Yet all through this jostling, pushing, jamming, and thrusting one can plainly feel the solid good-humour of the English in the raw.

Our Mrs Harrises state the antithesis clearly, "Better laugh at it than cry, ain't it?" So courageously they will laugh where other nations might weep or lose their tempers. Humour has different depths. By the easy Continental humour one may be misled, and, expecting to find it profound and universal, may discover that it is often only skin-deep. English humour, sometimes appearing as reserve or even dourness on the surface, is fundamentally human, and will persist genial and genuine long after that other more facile humour has been torn to shreds.

Such easy, deep-seated humour prevailed on the beach. It was not sparkling nor witty, but it was a human humour, which one could trust. Near the top of the steps Jo smiled at the harassed mother of four small sons, all tow-headed, all dressed in green jerseys of a spinach tint, their skins tanned by the sun. The family had just succeeded in squeezing itself up from the beach, which under the incoming tide was shrinking as remorselessly as the piece of wild ass's skin in Balzac's tale.

"You must have a job with that lot," said Jo.

" Eh, thet I do, mem," said the mother cheerfully. " But I queues 'em up, I queues 'em up. . . ."

" Muwer, muwer, look! There's a ship coming down! " shrieked the smallest.

" That there's Jimmy," said the proud mother, turning to Jo. " You'd be surprised what that little chap knows abart ships. Cracked on 'em. If there's ships about I 'as to keep my eye on 'im or 'e'U be aboard some'ow before you could say the word—was, too, only the other day. Sailor 'e'll be, no doubt about that. Surprisin', ain't it, 'ow they shows their ways o' thinking and them, as you might say, 'ardly breeched yet? That one there now, Alf, my next youngest, engineer 'e's going to be. Screws is 'is speciality. It's fair surprisin' wot 'e'll unscrew, and 'ow 'e does it. Blowed if I knows. When I goes into a shop—hironmonger's, say—I 'as to keep my eye on 'im sharp or 'e'll 'ave every screw within reach unscrewed. And when yer gets things unscrewed, why, yer never know what mightn't 'appen, does yer? Yuss, engineer 'e'U be, or I misses my bet. . . ."

We crossed the river through the Greenwich Tunnel, that shining, echoing drainpipe reverberating with the tortured yells of ecstatic children. Then up and out into the streets of the Isle of Dogs, and here in a side-street we encountered another aspect of the good-humour of London. A canal crossed the road, and over the canal was a swinging bridge. But the bridge was barred, and a dense crowd stared through the gates, laughing and joking.

" Sufferin' from the ruddy 'eat-waive," jeered a man. " Bin waiting for 'ow many ruddy years for the blinking thing, and now we gits it it won't work. . . ."

Along the back-streets of Limehouse, Shadwell, and Stepney we went, noting the changes that time had brought into this once notorious quarter of London. But in spite of the parks, the recreation-grounds and bandstands, and the splendid new communal houses, strangely Italianate in structure, the most vivid note was again struck by the children.

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For the whole of riverside East London has taken to the simple life. Almost every child under ten or twelve whom we saw was in a bathing-suit, the youngest merely in trunks, with browned bodies sun-stencilled with white lines by the shoulder-straps. Once again we were struck by the amazing natural grace which the freedom from clothes lends to childish bodies. A strange feeling, almost of exultation, possessed us as we saw these youngsters released from all the inhibitions due to foolish clothing, revelling in the sun-bathed streets or in the small tree-shaded gardens of these riverine slums. We felt strongly that both this acceptance of a new kind of bodily freedom and the vivid tints of the bathing-suits must have some sort of mental repercussion on the future. Doubtless the slum mothers thrust their children into bathing-dresses from mere motives of convenience, thus being freed from the labours of washing and mending stockings and underclothes. But this cannot stop here. Nothing stops, ever.

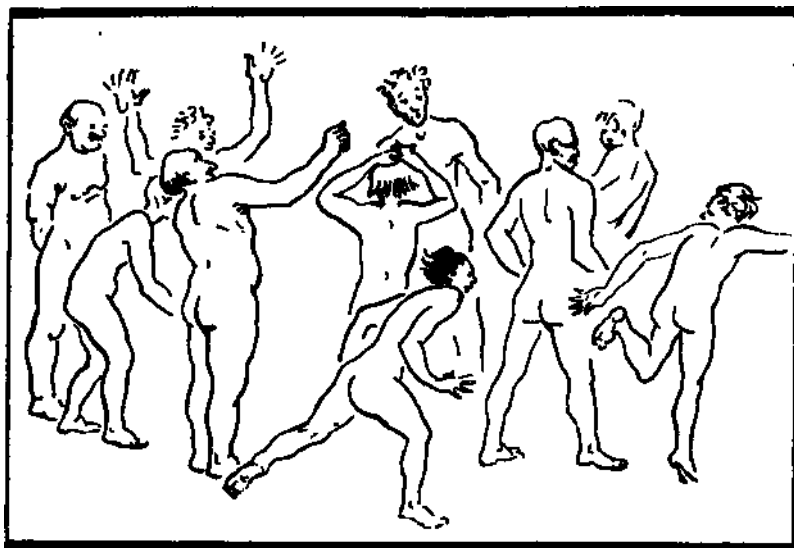
These childish sun-bathers of Wapping strike a new note in the slums of London. Colour has touched their drab lives with a hint of pagan beauty.

But as the Bumbles must test the microbic content of Mr Lansbury's Lido, so also they must challenge the libido content of this slum sun-bathing movement. No Eden is without its snake, and the poor policewomen must perforce act the part of angels with flaming batons, driving out the small Adams and Eves, lest the serpent should be tempted. For the children of the poor are always haunted by one danger, that of the old and lascivious men, who, having long worn out capacity and passion, are still left with the ullaage of a tormenting lust. These are horridly stimulated by this display of semi-clad innocence; their withered libido boils up at the sight of a small girl in a bathing-dress. So though the freedom of the young may be curtailed, the passions of the aged must be protected.

Uncontrolled desires in youth make for uncontrollable

lusts in middle age. The numbers of old, semi-senile reprobates with the hobby of exposing their persons to small girl-children is almost incredible. Every police court deals with several each week, and, compared with the numbers who actually do get arrested, the numbers who pursue their beastly pastime undetected because the children are afraid to complain may be estimated.

After all, freedom is but a comparative word. To preserve the freedom of these old lost libertines the colour and freedom of childhood, on which the future relies, must be forbidden to the slums into which it had, for once, found a way.



CHAPTER XIX

UP TO NUDISM

THE upper and lower class of Continental have very different images of the typical Englishman. The upper-class European tends to regard the Englishman as a frigid, self-seeking, money-grubbing, poorly educated Puritan hypocrite, hiding his commercial intentions behind a mask of beneficent religion, and trying to convert the heathen in order to sell them gin and the products of Manchester. The lower-class European, whenever he has met an Englishman, tends to see him as an unaccountable, often spendthrift gentleman, trustworthy, kind but slightly mad. These two pictures contain so little in common that one may feel surprised how few of our Continental friends or enemies have ever tried to assimilate the one to the other.

The truth may be that, like die and medal, they really represent a similar object, though in the one case it is seen as concave and in the other as convex. Both spring from the peculiar nature of the Englishman's attitude towards

life. This may be pictured as a little like the prospect across a London park in the winter. The near objects stand out distinct enough, but at a very short distance things begin to blur into a pleasant unity, terminating in a fringe of delicate haze, with vague outlines, which may hide and beautify anything, though the object hidden may be no more than a horrible slum. So also the Englishman's mind tends to see things clearly only as long as they are immediate; haze quickly clouds almost any distant prospect and renders it enchanting. Thus the Englishman can always start off with the highest of resolves towards a future which, although it may be of the foggiest, he can always presume to be delightful. "Time enough to bother about it when I get there," he reflects—the art of * muddling through/ as it is called by its proud protagonists.

The educated foreigner, who usually sees with much more clarity and some cynicism, cannot bring himself to believe in the truth of this congenital English mental fog. He believes that the Englishman starting out towards a future object in such a spirit must be in reality a cynical hypocrite. On the other hand, the lower-class foreigner, who sees the foggy-minded Englishman dashing in where angels (who usually have some prevision) fear to tread, takes for granted that the man must be mad.

When, however, the Englishman is forced to face an immediate and practical difficulty he will tackle it almost as ruthlessly as anybody else, though hampered a little by his previous and optimistically expressed intentions. What the foreigner now notes is the actual difference between the Englishman's original protestations and actual actions, the rift between the fog and the reality.

Thus, in Kenya, for instance, we generously promised any dispossessed natives alternative accommodation, little dreaming that gold might be found on their territories. Of course, when the gold was discovered we *had* to dispossess the natives, just as any other nation would have dispossessed them; but another nation might not have been foolish enough to make rash previous promises. In such a case

another nation would have been acting within its rights, while we behaved as scoundrels. So, too, we have educated many of the natives of India, hoping (1) to Christianize them, and (2) to turn them into imitation public-school boys, not realizing that (1) an intimate knowledge of the workings of Christianity, as practised by the modern State, would convert nobody, and (2) that public-school boys, even imitation, would automatically resent foreign domination.

Yet if this congenital foginess does produce both the apparent hypocrite and muddler-through as well as the apparent lunatic of Continental travel it also produces a queer kind of reaction within itself, the happy crank.

In France cranks are few, but often exaggerated. One day in Paris an American girl friend called on Jo.

"Are you out for an interpreting job?" she asked. "The big idea is this: there's a professor says he has discovered the microbe of love. Kind of blood test, I think, that shows who's suitable to marry who. Now, my New York paper's told me to get the story, but I don't believe my French's strong enough. So they've allowed five dollars for an interpreter. . . ."

In a dreary suburb the two were shown into a typical *bourgeois* interior.

"Don't look much like a love lab-or-a-tory to me," said the American, sniffing up the encrusted smell of old horsehair and recent garlic.

The professor was an old man, sagging in body and in features, with pince-nez glasses balanced on a sharp ridge of a nose like an uncertain rope-dancer.

"You tell him," said the American girl, "we want that microbe-of-love story, and no frills. Get to it."

"Bacillus?" queried the perplexed old professor. "I know nothing of a bacillus. My thesis rests on a purely chemical and physiological basis. My thesis, *mesdames*, is as follows: our pure Celtish French stock should be absolutely forbidden, by law if necessary, with severe penalties, from mingling its blood with that of the infamous and abominable Teuton. . . .

"The two stocks are incompatible," he cried, flourishing pamphlets. Statistics poured on them faster than Jo could translate. "Look!" he shouted. "*Le regard frangais*" He exhibited an idealistic and nobly posed drawing from *U Illustration* of a French *poilu* upright and facing death with clear gaze. "*Le regard allemand*" he sneered, brandishing a photo of a German prisoner unshaved and ragged, just rescued from the inferno of a front-line trench. "The French body," he stated, showing an outline apparently taken from the canon of Praxiteles. "The German body," he grunted, displaying an obese distortion due to fifty years of self-indulgence and beer-drinking. Then, in true French style, he clinched the argument. "Why, *mesdames*, a frog placed in Teutonic urine expires immediately; in our Gallic liquor it survives for ten minutes. . . ."

Jo soon came to the conclusion that he had lost a son in the War, and that, combined with Gallic egoism, ever ready to effervesce, had addled his brain.

"Well, gimme the story quick," said the editor when the American girl got back to the office.

"Story?" said the reporter contemptuously. "There's no story. The old bird's a nut."

So the editor had to sit up till midnight writing the story himself, and as for the girl reporter—why, the Saturday pay-envelope contained a note that her services would no longer be required.

Still, we may say that owing to greater natural mental clarity, also perhaps because of a greater individual selfishness, and maybe owing to the prevalence of the *cqf£*, the crank seems to develop in smaller numbers anywhere on the Continent compared with England.

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The crank has been defined as a small thing that starts powerful revolutions. As such we may be proud of our cranks. Modern democracy, modern humanism, modern electricity, modern transport, industrialism, hygiene, and education are all more or less due to English cranks or cranks

of **English** parentage. **In turn**, almost every one of those cranks had to make his way and to force his really valuable improvements in the face of mass opposition. By its cranks humanity has been benefited in its own despite.

Owing to changing conditions we are now in danger of rushing to the very opposite extreme. Modern life has been profoundly altered by a series of moral and material shocks, yet these shocks have by no means proved that all kinds of social earthquakes are to be eagerly welcomed.

Thus, in the art world, for instance, the fact of some artists formerly derided being hailed as men of genius does not prove that every unintelligible artist is a misunderstood genius. The old outlook was really saner than the new. It was better that such men as Millet, Cezanne, and Gauguin should have had to fight a battle all their lives, and that they should have had to demonstrate the value and lasting power of their works, than that every art charlatan should be welcomed as a genius of the first order. So also it is better that the crank should have to force his revolutions against the dead weight of social disesteem than that a hundred emotional and merely mass-swayed hystericals should at once fling themselves forward to help him turn his handle. In many cases social inertia is by no means the bad thing that impatient reformers would make it out to be.

Only a few years ago a hope expressed by the majority of intelligent reformers was that a gradually improved system of education would raise the level of mass intelligence. The systematic investigations of scientific psychology have tended to prove that the mass level of the normal intelligence is not, and cannot be, raised by education, and that we must decide to use humanity as we find it, an illogical herd easily swayed by mass suggestions which have little relationship to the social necessity.

But as soon as one kind of crank gives up his claim to the masses another kind seizes the unoccupied territory. Since salvation is not to be found in the *mens sana*, may it not be discovered in the *cor pore sano*? In this there does seem to be a faint line of hope. **It will probably be found easier**

to develop humanity by its luxuries than by its necessities, because humanity will try to pay for its luxuries, but usually tries to get its necessities on tick. The healthy body developed within certain conditions tends to demand and to concede certain conditions which together balance to produce an acceptable working *milieu*.

The conditions which the healthy body are ready to concede are, first, a certain amount of discipline and, secondly, a reasonable amount of work graded according to its mental capacity. The conditions which the healthy body demands are, first, clean living; secondly, proper supplies of food, clothing, and ornament; and, thirdly, a reasonable amount of leisure and amusement. On the whole, it seems that the healthier the normal body the more it is willing, or even eager, to submit to the proper kind of discipline, and the more readily it will use up a certain proportion of its healthy energy on productive labour. Repugnance to either discipline or work is found generally in either unhealthy bodies or subnormal or abnormal minds.

The urge towards health is wholly towards the general good, and thus the aspects noted in the preceding chapter, the children's playgrounds and the sun-bathers of the slums, are direct stimulants to social reform. To these we may add modern dress conditions. The insistence on the female smile has led to an extensive use of the toothbrush, even by the poorest classes; school swimming and bathing classes have developed a much more acute sense of personal cleanliness, which the feminine fashions of short hair, low necks, and transparent stockings tend to render permanent on the girl's side, and, by reflection, on the young man's side also. The conditions of Queen Anne's day, when a lady had her hair done once a fortnight, are to-day almost unimaginable, even among the poorest of slum children.

As a result of personal health and cleanliness the movements towards self-discipline and towards health organizations **are** growing with spontaneous rapidity. The popularity of the Boy Scouts, of the woodcrafters, of hikers, of Girl Guides, **of** girls' sports clubs **and of women's institutes**, **all** show **a** strong

tendency towards social organization brought about not because of a raising of the general intellectual level, but more because of a sense of social sanity induced by sane **bodies**.

An interesting feature of this urge towards physical sanity is a distinct divorce from the earlier ^c gentleman's * idea of athletic development. The public-school idea of sport was based on a competitive scheme; it aimed at the creation of the fictitious hero, heritage from the Greeks, which still persists. In practice the pains of competitive sport, the agonies, strains, and disappointments, usually by far outweighed the pleasures—at least, for the average performer.

But this new development offers opportunities for every one. It purposes a more contemplative route towards the healthy body. In an average hiking party the man who can do his five and a half miles per hour is not particularly welcomed, nor hero-worshipped by the band, which is cheerfully content with its humbler three and three-quarters; and in a camping club the mass level of efficiency, not any special virtuosity, makes the game socially profitable.

The result of this new athletic outlook on the serving and working classes is clearer in Germany as yet than in England, although here the movement is spreading with great rapidity.

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Our first view of Germany's new type of woman was on the lawn of a *Schloss* in which we were spending a week-end.

Tall and lithe, with a clinging white sweater, she stood surrounded by scrambling children. We watched her antics with a curling, curving rope. Throwing a lasso with the agility of a movie actress, to our delight she caught the demure nurse-girl well below the middle, and in a moment spun her out of decent nursemaid dignity into a chaotic whirl of arms, skirts, and legs.

"That," said our hostess complacently, "is our nursery governess, Countess X. She is most satisfactory, a brilliant sportswoman, particularly gifted at tennis and horse-training, **very good** with, children, and remarkable in times

of sickness. Unfortunately for us, she wants to experience English life as nursery governess in some big country-house, where all her gifts will have full play."

The children began to have a high old time leaping over the lasso, which was stretched from a garden roller to a huge zinc cistern into which they could plunge when hot.

Their mother was absent, shooting big game in Africa. Their grandmother, the *chdtelaine*, proved to be the first link of the sporting chain. When her husband showed us his trophies—lines upon lines of chamois antlers mounted in neat rows, and for some reason arranged on each side of his sanctum according to sex—she remarked :

" Yes, I climbed the mountains with him while he shot all those."

Over the *Schloss* hung the spirit of the great-grandmother; her life-work of tatting and lacework covered beds, pillows, and tables, and shrouded the windows, through which we had an exquisite bird's-eye view of the curving Rhine, with its pleasure-steamers and the sinuous string of barges taking the twists of the river like a modern necklace.

We met our second specimen of new Germany as our old motor-bike with its side-car wardrobe was taking the road at a steady pace. A pillion pair flashed past us down the hill. The attractive young creature behind turned and waved. We returned the salute. At each corner she waved, and we waved back.

They stopped and waited for us at the bottom. Her pretty curls wilfully fluttered free from her regulation *bireL*. Otherwise she was enveloped in the neat imitation of an engineer's overall adopted by the women pillion-riders of Germany.

In exchange for our explanations about the uses of our odd turn-out they told us of many an obscure old town within a hundred-mile radius. She talked well, displaying without pomposity a taste for history and architecture, and we put her down as a young teacher, when—

"How are housemaids being paid in England?" she asked. "I sometimes think of going into service over there."

She was Sarah Jane, keeping company with her young man.



Another type of Germany's bread-winning class, the daughter of a family completely ruined by the inflation, was the secretary of the *Verkehr's* bureau in a famous thousand-year-old town. All day long she sat in her little bureau receiving travellers, and for the good of the town giving them help, advice, and pamphlets.

At slack *Verkehr* moments we sometimes inveigled her to coffee in a queer old house covered with carved saints. She told us of her precious holiday—two weeks in the Tirolean mountains.

"Alone? Why not? With rucksack, mountain boots, and an axe, off I go by train to the Tirol. One day's walk brings me to an *Aim*, where one can put up for the night, and there I wait about to join up with an experienced party of climbers. I scan the various newcomers, taking an appraising glance at their calf muscles.

" 'Can I come *mit*? ' I say to the leader of the most earnest-looking group. He studies the set of my neck, the workmanlike cut of my mountain breeks, and hefts my ice-axe critically.

" 'Lift up your feet/ he orders. ' Yes, boot-soles are all right. No mountain teeth missing there. You seem to know your job. Tie yourself on.' And we all tramp away upwards without another word. Of course, we treat one another in the spirit of a purely detached *Kameradschaft* . . . that is understood."

The modern woman is, however, only beginning to make herself felt in Germany. The brilliantly painted old houses of the small towns are still presided over by *Hausfraus* who cherish as thrones of honour the family sofas on which their most important guests must be installed in state.

We lived as paying guests in the house of an impoverished painter, who, on account of hard times, was forced to barter his pictures for food. Through all the vicissitudes of inflation and ruin his wife had conserved the stiff ceremonials of German middle-class life.

"Will you deign to descend and partake of coffee?" she would say, knocking at our door instead of ringing a peremptory gong.

"Will you be so worthy of love as to try this cutlet?" was her dinner ritual, and when I politely passed the potatoes she lauded the carefulness of my upbringing. From these heights of courtesy, instead of saying grace before meat, she would descend with the ejaculation:

"Grip into it!"

Our hostess's cooking was most palatable. Our *pension* terms were four and a half marks a day, and we enjoyed an ever-varying menu of new and interesting dishes, which, alas, she brought one day to a conclusion with a gigantic tart made of custard, sugar, and onions!

Economical pressure was forcing the mother to bring up her daughter as an apothecary. Instead of mixing custard and onions, her long, lanky girl was experimenting at school with sulphuretted hydrogen.

Her mother bewailed modernity, as it was destroying the old virtue of saving.

"Nowadays girls are so expensive to dress," she grumbled. "They must all have the same things—gym shoes, ruck-sacks, canoe trousers. All that money used to go into the savings-box for the future *trousseau*."

The peasant women have not changed much. Exercise is no new thing for them, as they have always worked on the land.

In the far corners of the Bavarian Tirol engagement is

still considered so binding a ceremony that while living in their fathers' houses they may have five or six healthy children without being looked on askance. The young couples remain faithful, and as soon as their united savings can run to a separate home there is a gay wedding, and the bride removes with her chest of drawers and flock of children to a hard and sparing future.

That witty man Whistler was the first to suggest that Nature imitates Art. By this he meant no more than that one's eyes learn to see aspects of Nature after Art has pointed them out. But, oddly enough, Fashion proves herself to be stronger than Art, and Nature does seem to follow Fashion. Comparing the wasp-waisted ladies of the eighties with the bean-poles of to-day, one could hardly imagine that they belonged to the same species, or, indeed, to the same family. The whole change that has come over the German woman is notably marked in her physique. The full-bosomed, short-legged German *Fran* has not only flattened, but lengthened in the leg to an extraordinary extent.

And with the lengthening of the leg there is no doubt that much of her old sentimentality has gone. She is no longer the plump, simpering dependent whose head has been stuffed with ideas of mawkish love till it suffers from a kind of fatty degeneration of the emotions.

She has become the athletic rival of men, voting against them and competing with them in the hunt for occupation. But the development is so recent that the reaction of the German man to the change has hardly yet become vocal. But once he does realize the full significance of the change vocal enough no doubt he will become.

We English have taken up the movement with a less competitive spirit. The record-breaking business doesn't haunt us as it does the Germans. Human competition will naturally stir up the Englishman or -woman, but that abstract 'breaking the record' in certain classes of feats is not so enthralling. The element of human antagonism and of record-breaking is precisely the worst element in this whole business of athletics. For a concentration on **the**

win or on the record tends to narrow the outlook, whereas the spread of less intense kinds of sport, such as hiking, woodcraft, camping, swimming, gymnastics, or folk-dancing, tends to develop breadth of interests as well as health.

Naturally the crank, having started the revolution, is not going to be satisfied till he has made the ultimate turn. So this attempt to pack a greater and greater sense of freedom and health into the narrowing limits of everyday life has resulted in the final effort towards naturalistic liberty: nudism. This was developed first in Germany, but is now severely controlled there by law. Now the movement has taken root in England. London has several flourishing colonies of nudists within a short voyage of her boundaries.

We were introduced to one of these camps by that strange Londoner I. O. Evans. How can we describe in a few words the peculiar blend of personalities combined in Evans's elastic body? An illustration may make the contrast clearer. One Friday may find him faithfully at his desk in the secluded monotony of a Government office, but the following Friday will possibly discover him happily asleep under a damp stone in the Vosges, or consorting on level terms with, and assisting in its nefarious occupation, a band of Andorran smugglers* Or, more incongruously yet, combination of the cave-man, the mechanical age, and the British Museum, you might chance to discover him in the heart of an English copse, mother-naked, and pounding out on a typewriter some chapter of his brilliant condensation for young readers of H. G. Wells' *Outline*.

Five minutes' walk from the end of a bus route brought us to a small farm, and there, picking up a clue, a string, like Theseus' guide into the Minotaur's den, we followed it along hedges and through gaps to our destination.

Here in the middle of a cool wood we found a dozen small tents dotted about a clearing. Some twenty Londoners in various states of nature's dress welcomed us to their retreat. Although most were quite without clothes, we could feel that some were decidedly more naked than others, for tan, in itself, made a kind of vesture, harmonizing the ones who

had acquired it to their woodland surroundings. Those of the members whose skins were as yet pallidly transparent from lack of sufficient sun-bathing struck the eye with a feeling almost of improper exposure, making us think irresistibly of those grubs that are found under fallen stones in graveyards.

All through the week-end, secluded in the heart of this wood, these sophisticated savages cast off the trammels of civilization and bent their best energies to the task of being naked and unashamed.

What, why, and how is nudism? First, nudism seems to be a *cri de amr* from the suburbs. It is a protesting effort of those souls who, born with an innate sense of real freedom, lack either the power or the opportunity to build up an individual and personal life outside of the devices of everyday wage-earning. Tied thus voluntarily or by necessity to office work by day and to suburban existence by night, they have to seek the most drastic contrast possible to hold themselves sane.

Yet in many a camp ethics and repressions are still strong, so that taboos strange and suburban are erected, as that no person in the nude may caress, fondle, or even touch another person of the opposite sex under pain of instant expulsion, and in a subtle way most camps are accused of having a faintly prim atmosphere, like an inverted Dorcas meeting.

Such was not the rule in the camp we were now visiting. Here the nudism practised was rather the natural development of an out-of-doors faith, an urge towards health without suburban restrictions. Many of the members were of the actively intelligent though office-bound type which is always hoping to find a new way to Utopia by some novel political device.

Thus, one girl had brought with her a pamphlet, published in Germany, containing a number of photographs of the more frightfully battered war-wrecks, men without faces, men reduced to mere trunks, and so on, a catalogue of nightmarish horrors.

" This," she declared, " should be published everywhere as a protest against war. If men would only study this they would be deterred from joining up."

Sitting round with the nude companions, we discussed the question. It was pointed out to her that the photos might be used first for morbid sensationalism; secondly, that under the mass suggestion of war few men of value would even remember such a document; thirdly, that no number of accidents in coal-mines ever deterred men from becoming miners; fourthly, that the individual always imagined that he personally could not suffer such a fate; and, fifthly, that a civilization founded principally on fear of consequences would be a poor state to live in. She admitted the arguments reluctantly.

As artists, the nude came to us with no shock or strangeness. Fifty years ago it was highly improper for a woman to show her ankles, but to-day unless conditions are arranged to stimulate the erotic the mere naked body is not sexually exciting.

Truly nakedness is more of a disillusion than an excitant. We have been accustomed to think of the human form divine, while, in reality, most human forms are far from being divine. Lady Mary Montagu, writing of the Turkish bath in Constantinople, comments on the fact that when one can see the whole body beauty of face becomes of secondary importance, but one may also reverse this idea, and say that the more of the average body of the average citizen or citizeness is revealed the more one understands how much a clever costume adds to the charm of the face.

The body of the average city-dweller is not yet ready for exhibitionist purposes, and although we have seen numbers of nudist photos from both English and German camps we must admit that for sexual excitement a bathing beach covered with modern bathers in subtly sensual bathing costumes and pyjamas is twice as suggestive and many times as beautiful as the supposed frightful dangers of the nudist cult.

A common belief seems to be that these nudist camps

are organized by old *rouis* as an extension of the Bohemian orgies of Germanic libertines. The very opposite is actually the case. Nudism, taken neat, is as earnest a creed and as dogmatic as Christian Science. Its motto is *Mens sana in corpore sano*, and if the healthy body is to be got by exposing it wholly to the free airs of heaven the healthy mind may equally be induced by a casting away of all those clothing complexes which stimulate the sex imaginations of the young due to the fictitious value of the hidden flesh of the opposite sex.

No, the nude is far more exciting as a hidden promise than as a palpable fact. Strip the body to the buff, and two-thirds of its sexual appeal fades away. It is, indeed, strange that the moralists have not yet understood this fact. Blinding themselves by their old-aged preconceptions, they clamour against the indecency of the exposed body, whereas to the normal common sense the chief argument against nudism is its appalling decency.

By rights, the only intransigent opponents of nudism ought to be the bands of cheerful sinners who would hate a world in which woman was stripped of all those subtle sexual attractions due to cunning dress and camouflage. If the Puritans could only understand what nudism really implies we would find the Four-square Gospellers, the Revivalists, and the Fundamentalists rushing off to the woods and on to the beaches, and there stripping themselves to the skins and of their fleshly terrors at the same time in one or two stances.

But when that happy day comes nudism will have lost its peculiar and special virtue, that it to-day has, that of being the most perfect antidote against growing or ingrowing Suburbia. For undoubtedly Suburbia and the spreading spirit of Suburbia is one of the most terrifying problems of the present age. In a London residential street there is a sort of fireproofness. There everybody tries to keep his freedom by not knowing his neighbour. But in Suburbia such aloofness is almost impossible. Suburbia combines the worst elements of town life with the worst elements of village life. There all

the small vices of collectivity find their breeding-ground under the impulse of that terrible tyrant snobbery. For this growing evil of large-township life nudism is at present some sort of antidote. And as an antidote it gives a healthy outlet to spirits cramped and stifled by suburban conditions.

But from our personal outlook too much time, energy, and care seem to be spent in the mere act of being naked. As outsiders, looking on, we felt that the efforts of the members seemed directed to building up a fictitious naturalism under conditions which were far from being natural.

This camp, however, wished to dissociate itself from the practice of nudism as a cult. They merely called themselves sun-bathers. But to our minds, apart from the irony of calling oneself a sun-bather in England's changing and chilly clime, the act of sun-bathing is also a cult with its special limitations, with which we are sure this association of free-and-easy citizens would not agree. We prefer to call them air-bathers.

Nudism proper is a cult, almost an obsession. Sun-bathing, in the true sense, is almost a vice. Dwellers in really hot countries regard the sun as a virulent poison, and instinctively avoid it as much as possible, unless, like the negroes, their physiques are specially adapted to it. From personal experience of workers in sunny lands about the Mediterranean we cannot exalt the sun as a fount of all physical benefits. The Spanish peasant who toils all the year round under the broiling sun should be crammed with ultra-violet health, but this is far from being the case.

And from personal experience of sun-bathers in the South of France, the Balkans, Spain and Portugal, and California we have gained a strong suspicion that, whatever benefits the sun may confer on the sun-starved body, it seems to have an almost equally deleterious effect on the brain. Under the pounding of the ultra-violet rays the mind grows torpid, and we suspect that one of the great charms of sun-bathing is this peculiar torpidity, which dulls the senses **like** an opium dream, and is, in fact, a mild substitute for **drug-taking**.

THE LONDON ROUNDABOUT

Some at least of the sun-bathing clamour is due to newspaper publicity, and also to the advertising push of the violet-ray-apparatus manufacturers. But when this has died down we may almost expect to find that the prejudice against overmuch sun, so pronounced in really sunny lands, has been founded, as so many local prejudices are founded, on hidden and unsuspected truths, which future generations may recognize.

At any rate, anything more tedious than a colony of seaside sun-bathers concentrating, to the exclusion of almost all other interests, on the colour of the epidermis can hardly be found.

A stimulating aspect of the nudist cult was its complete democracy. When Kipling said the Colonel's lady and Judy O'Grady are sisters under the skin he might also have said that they are sisters in the skin. Such, at least, would have been the evidence of the nudist camp. During the afternoon a sharp but sudden shower made most take shelter in the various small tents dotting the glade. Jo found herself crowded under canvas with a small nude girl, a nude boy, and a large, powerful old man clad in nothing but a flourishing set of "Ole Bill" moustaches. She was soon embroiled in a discussion on the politics of Lloyd George, and in the course of talk discovered that her companion was an ex-policeman.

Beside the policeman were a doctor and his daughter, a barrister, several Civil Servants, some women secretaries and typists, and a couple of young East End Jews. Of all the nudists these two, though socially the most incongruous, were the ones who walked the sylvan scene with a peculiar feeling of aptness. Both were fine physical specimens, lean-muscled, and in their way strikingly handsome. Both had been burned to a rich brown, the tint that an Old Master would give to his satyrs. They seemed almost like images that a Roman master might have cast in a pale bronze, endowed magically with life. They both had the controlled and rhythmic movements of the trained athlete—in fact, we might say that their movements, like their bodies, were fit to be nude, for naked movement has its own laws, and often

sits badly on bodies used to being clothed. Comparing the gestures of African savages and of nudists in general, we must conclude that a great gulf still lies between nude gesture and naked gesture.

Curious to learn more of these lads, I questioned the handsomer.

" I always bin interested in physical exercises and keeping myself fit," he said. " For a long time I practised muscle control; that takes some discipline, I tell yer. . . ."

He began to give me an exhibition, causing any muscle to leap and twitch at will. Clearly this lad had a peculiar quality of will-power, which in him had taken the athletic bent. In another type it might have led to science or art.

" What is your job? " I asked.

" I'm a furniture-maker," he answered.

" You must have suffered terribly in this slump," I said.

" Veil," he answered, " you see, me and me fader, ve do a fery fine feneering. So ve still got plenty of vork to do. But dere's others. I tell you. . . . One chap near us—got several vorkmen, too—veil, 'e vork and vork till 'e got 'is store filled up vid furniture—two tousand pound vorth. You tink 'e can sell it? Not von stick. 'E offer it for a tousand pound. Not von bid. 'E offer it for fife 'undred; pooty near less than it cost 'im to make. Now"—a crease of genuine perplexity seamed his fine forehead, distress showed in his eyes—" vot I can't see is dis. Vould you call a chap like dat a scoundrel ven 'e 'as a fire? "

" But," I asked, " did he have a fire? "

" Oh, yes, 'e 'ad a fire all right! But vot I can't see is dis—some of de people call dat chap a scoundrel. I don't see dat. Ain't 'e paid 'is insurance for fifteen, maybe twenty, years or more? Ain't 'e paid 'is insurance two or tree times over, or more too, before dis 'ere crisis comes? Now, in such conditions ain't 'e got a right to 'ave a fire an' get 'is money back if 'e can? Or vot's insurance for? "

" Did he get away with it? " I said.

" Oh, yes, 'e get away vid it all right! But vot sticks in me is dose people calling 'im a scoundrel."

" At any rate," I said, " he'll have a job getting a new insurance, won't he? "

" Veil," said my athlete, with a sly grin, " in de present crisis 'e ain't going to start off in de furniture business again, not just for a bit. . . ."

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The sun was sinking, the week-end was coming to a close. One by one the nudists began to strike their tents. Jo, lying on the grass, deep in a discussion of current problems, was suddenly amazed to find that her companion had all his clothes on. The policeman reappeared, his moustaches no more than the natural adornments of a burly citizen; his child came from the tent no more than a small British schoolgirl; the doctor became a motor-cyclist, and his Junoesque daughter was again an everyday pretty country flapper. They had taken off their travesty of the flesh.

The rather thin atmosphere of a slightly chilly Puvis de Chavannes in which we had been living all day suddenly became that of a photo in the *Daily Mirror*, though we the clothed had been the only ones to feel the chill.

Our nudist experience was over. . . .



CHAPTER XX

GOSSIP AT A COFFEE-PARTY

IN Chicago one evening we were invited to supper. As the coffee arrived our host, little more than a chance acquaintance, said, " Now, what show would you like to see? Shall we 'phone up a show and get seats? " We were tired, and recovering from too much public entertainment. This very evening we had been feeling grateful that no gang of strangers was invited to meet us; the prospect of a ' show ' attracted us not at all. " Oh,⁵ we protested, " why not stay here round the fire and chat? Then we could get to know one another better." " What/' they exclaimed, " stay right here? " " Why not? " we asked. Host looked at hostess, with acute doubt written clearly on their faces. In English fashion we arranged ourselves round the fire, and spent the evening yarning. As we rose to go they exclaimed with enthusiasm, " Well, now, that's a new experience! We've never tried that sort of thing before."

This did not imply, we imagine, that Americans never sit about and talk. Sitting and talking is naturally the commonest kind of pastime. But they had never looked on a quiet evening round the fire as a possible means of extracting a real and positive enjoyment. American social enjoyment usually consists of convivial crushes, heightened by much drink and boisterous conversation, which degenerates rapidly into competitive badinage and vocal fireworks.

On the Continent social conversation tends towards discussion, which may be literary, artistic, theatrical, political, financial, news-of-the-day, or else purely intimate and personal. In fact, both in America and on the Continent most conversations become rapidly family or technical, so that the average stranger soon finds himself merely a listener. His only *rdle* is to smile intelligently and wait for the moment of his release.

Thus the chatty, anecdotal method of self-expression, which still remains fairly popular as a London after-dinner amusement, provided that the bridge menace can be kept at bay, is probably as typically English as any surviving custom. Indeed, from many a foreigner's point of view the anecdote is the Englishman's curse, for the foreign mind works more easily to the general, while the Englishman works to the particular. So that the foreigner will indulge in a number of broad generalizations, leaving the particular to be inferred, while the Englishman will give a string of particularized anecdotes, leaving the generalizations therefrom to be guessed.

Although in such a contrast the Englishman's seems to be the looser type of thought, this is not always a fact, for most generalizations prove to be somehow inaccurate, while unstated inferences from particular cases are far less dogmatic.

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In setting out, then, to M.'s party we were entering on a typically English adventure. The distance was not far, and we elected to walk. From the main street the road at once passed, of course, into labyrinths of darkened squares and

gardens, where London seemed determined to live up to its title, the City of Dreadful Night.

Suddenly a wall built across the road stopped the way. This was surprising, for the map showed no such obstruction. Still, there was the wall, with trees on the other side and branches hanging over in the dim lamplight. An exploratory traverse revealed that twenty yards along the wall was an opening blocked for wheeled traffic with iron pillars. Through this opening we made our way, to find that the wall was exactly what it seemed to be, merely a wall, backed by some five feet of earth, built clear across the road, without apparent rhyme or reason. Why this wall should be allowed to maintain its arrogant and useless obstruction we cannot imagine. Put it down as one more of the mysteries of London.

Another mystery of London, why few of the houses are ever numbered visibly, was explained this evening. It seems that the cheapest and most visible house numbers are made of white porcelain. These are no sooner put up than the errand-boys have lots of fun smashing them off. As most of the councils are occupied by the representatives of house-owners, they will not force themselves to mark their houses visibly and permanently. Nor, indeed, has any authority yet been able to decide whether the numbering of the houses shall proceed alternately along the street, odds on one side, evens on the other; or up one way and down the opposite; or whether houses need be numbered at all, provided that they bear some futile name for purposes of identification. But *Punch* derided all that fifty years ago.

In fact, almost every indication in London, or want of indication, shows a peculiar and intense localism. The habit of leaving the streets unlabelled, the houses unnumbered, the chaotic and cursory method of setting out the waybills of the buses, the use of public-houses not only as bus termini, but also as general direction marks, emphasize that ingrowing Londonness from which **London** suffers. It seems to imply that nobody should ever live in London who does not know **London** by heart, or that any

dweller in any district never should move out of his own district. This, combined with an almost total lack of urinals, for either men or women, except in very central spots, shows a thoughtless lack of imagination and sympathy for the stranger which is, as a rule, far from being the characteristic of the normal Englishman.

London good-humour is well illustrated by another disorderly habit of the London traffic, the refusal to put on the standards of bus-stops numbered tickets by which places may be taken, such as are in use almost everywhere on the Continent. The result is that during the rush hours a man who is unwilling to thrust a woman out of his way may himself be thrust on one side, and has no adequate remedy except personal aggression.

In such conditions a woman may take unfair advantage of the natural courtesies. Some years ago Jo went to a friend's house to fetch a large rucksack full of books. Arriving at the bus-stop, already rather late for an important dinner engagement, and too hard up to afford a cab, she found a huge crowd waiting for seats. Here ruse succeeded in doing what force could not. Hanging the big bag over her arm, folding the arm across her chest, and draping her cloak carefully over the bag, she stood meekly awaiting results. In a moment way was made for her, and she was carefully ushered into the first coming bus. On the other hand, France has the advantage of us by reserving special places on the trams and Metro for War cripples, and by transporting the blind free.

In his own home the Londoner still dares to entertain a few friends without ostentation. A ring of comfortable chairs, a cup or two of coffee and a few biscuits, a round of amusing anecdotes, suffice. Nor is London ashamed to offer you so simple an entertainment. Thus it differs from France or America.

In France entertainment is a gesture; the house is swept and garnished, the hostess must prove herself to be a culinary

artist, casual and careless hospitality is practised only towards intimates or relatives. So also in America. The States are hospitable, but their hospitality must be elaborate or nothing. Here in England we have the tradition that good gossip is enough, and even in these times an evening of quiet conversation is still a common pleasure.

At the expense of many matches we at last stumbled upon the house. As casual collectors of London character, we had arrived most opportunely, for M. lived on the first floor, and a wordy battle had raged on her stairs that very day.

"It all started this way," said our hostess. "The son of the policeman who lives in the basement generally looks after the house fittings, door-knocker, brass, stairs, and so on. And then there is the 'lady' up above. Very proud she used to be, with two daughters who were checking-clerks in a big draper's shop. But one daughter got consumption and the other an illegitimate baby. . . .

"Spends her life quarrelling. Funny how these women can't live without their quarrels!"

"But surely," we said, "isn't that the only way that they get zest into life? They stagnate. The only kick left to them is either gin or fighting."

"Or both ____"

"Yes, but only the really vital ones fight."

"Well, then, this woman is vital all right. The first squabble she got up with me was because she said that my char was going round gossiping about her daughter's baby. I said, 'How can I stop her? I only hire her services half a day, not her tongue.' Anyway, what need was there of gossip when anybody could see the girl pushing the perambulator about, and no marriage that anybody heard of? She did quite well out of it for a bit; out-of-work pay, maternity benefit, and a pound a week from the gentleman. Though how a perfectly nice-looking girl who was engaged to be married to a very decent young man with a good job lets herself go out for a spree with another man old enough to be her grandfather is what I can't imagine. . . . Oh, but I'm forgetting. The very first signs of a fight on the mother's

part were after my six weeks' holiday. I had taken my personal roll of toilet-paper out of the lavatory—didn't want it to hang there all the time getting dusty. When I got back she was very high and chilly. 'I'm sure/ said she, * there'd be no danger to your toilet-paper from Aus. And I may say, too, the 'ole 'ouse takes it as a reflection' . . . But she calmed down that time when I explained. . . .

"To-day, you see, the policeman's boy polished all the gadgets round the house. The quarrel started because she complained that he had cleaned my name-plate better than hers. 'And always does/ she said, 'and it's most improper your favouring one of the persons in this house, like you do.' He answered her back, and things were already getting personal when the daughter joined in. Finally the girl called him a 'Hyde Park ranger.' I suppose that was meant to be pretty hot, but the only one I know of is a Major Somebody who draws about £2000 a year for it. The boy came back at her, and called her an 'Eastbourne Terrace walker.' . . . Eastbourne Terrace, you know, along by the side of Paddington Station. That's the favourite local haunt. It's dark enough for the police not to notice you, but light enough to get the glad-eye. . . . Things were very warm after that, but I think the lodger stepped in. . . ."

"But this woman up above?" I asked. "Two daughters not in work, one is dying of consumption and the other with a baby. How do they live?"

"That's one of the mysteries of London," said M. "How do they live? She pays seventy-five pounds a year for her rooms, and they keep a lodger. Beyond what he pays I don't think they have a bean. . . ."

"But there seem to be numbers of such people," I said. "They have nothing. Apparently they earn nothing. Yet they live in quite respectable houses. We couldn't do it, you couldn't do it, but somehow *they* do it. How?"

"Talking of these quarrels," said G., "I must tell you about our Rose. She's the step-girl. Comes from the district behind. Terribly poor, the lot of them. Most work as step-girls, you know; sixpence a time once a week, whiten the

step and polish the door-knobs. Easily do ten a day when they're in full work. Five bob a day. That's not bad for a girl of fifteen or sixteen. . . .

" Rose's mother, she's a fighter. Never reads, never sews, never thinks, nothing else to do. Some time ago Rose came to us, fifteen she was, nice-looking in her way, delighted with being just confirmed. Mother'd given her a little gold cross and chain. . . . A short time later I opened the door. No Rose, but a little girl, golden hair like an angel, orphan; but they had adopted her into the house. 'Hello,' I said. 'Where's Rose?' 'Oh, I'm going to do the steps now,' she says. 'Didn't you 'ear? Rose as just 'ad 'er biby. 'Er mother's so pleased, because it makes up for the one wot she lost two years ago.' 'I didn't know Rose was married,' I said. * Oh, no, mum, she ain't!' she said. * But Rose and another girl was larking with a couple o' chaps on Bank 'Oliday, and now they've both got bibies.' Later on Rose came back, terribly proud of her kid. I painted her with it. Any shame? Not a bit. I asked her if she was going to marry the chap. 'Wot,' she cried, 'me merry 'im? I'd never think of it. 'E's much too domineering. Always tries to domineer yer 'e does.'

" When hopping-time came the whole family naturally went off; it's their annual holiday in the country. They push their stuff out on perambulators, and live in the open, as if they had done so all their lives. All crammed into one tent, babies and all. After they came back the little golden-haired girl was doing the step. * Had a good time? 'I asked her. 'Luverly, mum,' she answers. 'But Rose's muwer, she gits into an orful fight as ever you see. 'Er and the lady in the next tent, they gets into 'aving words. All about Rose it was. And the lady in the next tent she tore up Rose's muwer's arm somethink shameful; 'ad to 'ave six stiches put in altogether she did. But of course Rose's muvver couldn't be expected to stand for what she was saying about Rose; calling 'er dreadful nimes she was, nimes what you'd never believe—why, nimes what begins with o, and things like that. . . .'"

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" Considering their violence," said M., " the amazing thing about these fights is how they blow up and how they blow over. I remember one ghastly affair. It happened in a big courtyard house with a balcony, quite near me. A young man was living there with his wife, wife's mother, and three pretty sisters-in-law. How the row started I can't imagine; probably something quite trivial, but he decided to kill the lot, and tried to do it with a carving-knife. He slashed their faces and shoulders to ribbons. When I arrived the horrid thing was over, but two of the girls had taken refuge on the balcony, and the blood was dripping down into the courtyard. Then he tried to cut his own throat, but couldn't even make a decent job of that. . . .

" In a week the whole family was back, bandaged up like a line of dolls. In spite of the tragic side I couldn't help laughing, to see them, all five women, marching off to the hospital to be bandaged every day. Well, here's the amazing thing. At the trial the wife appeared in his defence, said it was all her fault, that she had irritated him beyond control, and when he came out—I forget how much he got—she took him back again. . . ."

" But that is quite normal," said K. " I remember a case where the fellow deliberately tried to kill his wife with poison, and damn' nearly did. He got ten years. But when he came out the woman was waiting at the prison door for him. . . ."

" Frightfully odd," said Jo, " the psychology of the London poor, and especially of the London poor woman. One almost comes to the conclusion that their pity is far more powerful than their passion. I have heard of two extraordinary cases lately. One was that of a friend's cook. Nice, cheery, pink-cheeked woman, the last you would ever suspect of tragedy and sacrifice. Married she was to a commercial traveller in a small way. Gradually she suspected that his absences from home were longer than mere business seemed to make necessary. She investigated, and found that he had another wife and a child, but that the other woman was the second wife, the bigamous one. She

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did nothing at first, but slowly became certain that her husband loved the other woman more than herself. Pretty beastly situation. One day the other woman called on her. She had found out too. And she accused Mary, the real wife, of having stolen her husband. And Mary, whose only idea was to protect the man, didn't tell her that she was the second wife, and that the child was illegitimate. No, she held her tongue, and a few days afterwards quietly disappeared."

" You don't have to go to novels for incredible plots."

" The other is in some ways more unusual. This second woman, Florrie, is the one who cleans the stairs. Funny-looking woman, undersized, poky-nosed, pop-eyed—last woman you'd expect to inspire passion. Florrie, then a servant, was engaged to a young man at Harrods. The date for the marriage was fixed—in fact, her mistress had given her a wedding-dress. The worst of a servant's job is that on the evenings she can't get out some other girl may be vamping the young man. A friend told Florrie that this was actually happening; a girl in the same shop was amusing her lover's disengaged evenings. ' You'd better sift this out,' said her friend. So Florrie took an extra afternoon off to sift, and caught the couple leaving the service door. The young man begged only to be allowed to see the girl to a bus, but Florrie said, * No; her or me.' The young man elected for Florrie. But on thinking things over Florrie decided to break things off, and gave back the dress to the mistress, who passed it on to a niece. The young man became more passionate than ever. At last he persuaded Florrie to consent again; once more the mistress gave her a wedding-dress. But this time, far from hearing that the young man was still dangling round the other girl, she heard that he had married her. Naturally she gave back the dress again; that was Florrie's second.

" But here's the strange part. Shortly after, Florrie having settled down, back he came. He protested that Florrie was the girl he had always loved, that another chap really got the other woman into trouble, and that he married her

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out of pity. He said that as soon as the baby was weaned, and the girl could get another job, they had agreed to part for ever, and then Florrie would be able to marry him. . . ."

"That's all right," said K. "It's the marriage ceremony that counts. The blessing of the Church. A little bit of bigamy's of no consequence as long as it isn't spotted by the police. . . ."

"Well, Florrie wasn't so sure. She loved the man all right; she was convinced that he loved her, and that he was telling the truth. He kept on pestering her. Another man was after Florrie also—wild about her. This one put it to her, 'You marry *me*> and that will settle the business.' At last she agreed to that. 'And neither of us have regretted the day,' she says. That evening the accepted suitor, taking a tram and passing down the gangway, tripped over a pair of feet, looked up, and saw to his surprise the other man. 'I got a bit of news for you,' he said. 'Me and Florrie is going to get married.' And Florrie says her husband says he'll never forget the look on that fellow's face, not till his dying day. He talks about it still sometimes. . . ."

"Florrie used to work at one of the big shops as a wine-breaker. Pouring the wine into the mixing-vats, I imagine. When her child was coming the doctor told her to quit for the sake of the child, but she couldn't—husband out of work. 'An' when me baby comes,' she says, 'although me and me husbin's both teetotalers, it's got all the failings of a dipso-you-know's child. In'aling them fumes before it was born. . . .'"

G. was an artist, an old friend of the art-schools. She had married K., who was both actor and artist at once.

"It's a rotten business having two interests," he said. "For instance, if I go round hunting for a job on the stage I've got no time to paint. But if ever I give up hope and settle down to painting or drawing, no sooner have I got well into my stride than along comes an offer for a theatre job. I remember there was one joke about a beetle that I

tried to finish for about two years. Every time I got well settled out of a job I thought, ' Well, I'll get that beetle-joke drawing done this time/ and every time I started it another job would turn up. At last I did get the damn' thing finished, sent it off to a paper, had it accepted, and before they could print it the blooming paper went smash. . . ."

Owing to the increasing difficulties of the times, they have followed a growing custom of buying their own house and letting off half of it, so that they live on a very modest rental. For their holiday money they concentrate on newspaper prize competitions, and, with the exercise of considerable talent and wit, manage to squeeze from this source quite a pleasant annual sum.

" Have you any work at present? " I asked G.

" Oh," she answered, " I've got a perfectly bloody job, a portrait to copy. About the rottenest piece of painting I've seen for a long time. And I have to reproduce it *exactly*. It's not so difficult to copy a good piece of painting, because it grows naturally; it has a painter's lightness about it. . . . But with a rotten thing there's no logic. You simply have to copy every smear and brush-mark exactly. More than twice the trouble. But we take this kind of job in turns, and K. did the last one. . . ."

" That wasn't so bad," said K. " A portrait of Handel it was. They said it was by Reynolds' old master. Not a bad bit of work at all. But some fool of a dealer had been trying to clean it himself, and had simply cleaned the wig off. Just used petrol on it, I suppose. I had to paint in a complete new wig. Went down to the National Portrait Gallery and studied every trick they used then-a-days. He wanted the colour of the coat changed, too, but I made a nice thing of it. . . ."

" A short time ago," went on G., " I had a queer little job. Once I did a series of book-jackets for a publisher. I got only the sloppy ones to do, and loathed them, but nothing that I could say would ever make them take me off the sob-stuff. At last I rather chucked it. However, they are now making a series of cheap reprints, and wrote to me asking if I would

bring my book-jackets up to date. So P've been at work changing the fashions of all the pretty maidens' clothes. . . ."

"Taboos are funny things," Jo said. "Are there any taboos in the book-jacket business?"

"Not that I know of," said G., "except that every publisher I've ever met is yelling for a striking design and for something different, but if ever you give him anything striking or different he is scared out of his senses. . . ."

"We did pantomime posters once," said Jo. "As a kid I always wondered why the poster outside never had anything to do with the pantomime inside. Then we found that the posters were mass production. We had a job of designing any old kind of poster, shove in any notion, at three quid a time, or five pounds if there were more than six figures in it. The chap who ran this business was a burly, blustering Lancashire man. Came to our place in Paris—that was the Louise de la Valli&re flat, no furniture in the sitting-room but a table, a couple of chairs, a yard-high yellow pot, and a picture packing-case as a model throne. * This won't do,' he said. * Tha'll never succeed this way. Living in mook. If tha wants to sell pictures tha's got to look's if tha pictures sell. Go two 'undred into debt; it'll pay ye back every pound of it. Look at P. there. Living like you 'e was, and starving on it. Took my advice, and ince that day 'e's never looked be'ind 'im.'

"While we were on that job we had a brain-wave. You should put intelligence into this, we reasoned. How do posters tell out? Why, by looking different from the others. So we analysed all the pantomime posters we could find, and noted that the least usual colour was green. We went to work and did a whole lot of green posters—and only found out when they were all chucked back at us that green was absolutely taboo. And we had been expecting to make our expenses for the following summer *and* a reputation. . . ."

"Oh," said K., "the theatre's full of superstitions! You try whistling Tosti's *Good-bye* or / *dreamt I dwelt in Marble Halls*, and see what happens. You'll get thrown out on to the pavement."

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" Same thing will happen in France," said Jo, " if you wish anybody good luck."

M. was a parson's daughter, and had once been a school-mistress. Teaching failed to satisfy her ambitions, so, taking a leap into futurity, she had invested her savings in an apprenticeship at rent-collecting and the supervision of slum tenements and reconditioned houses in connexion with a housing association. Now she was supervisor of a district in this neighbourhood, one of London's worst quarters.

" I came across a funny case of superstition the other day," she said. " One of our old tenants, a woman, was complaining of the draughts in her room. We had spent a good deal on that house, and could do no more at present. So I said, ' Well, Mrs Jones, why not get a sandbag and put it against the bottom of the door? '

" ' Sandbags? ' said the old woman. ' I wouldn't 'ave a sandbag in the 'ouse—nasty unlucky things they are. Kills yer, that's what sandbags does.'

" * Oh,' I said, * I didn't mean that kind of sandbag!'

" ' Nor me neither, miss,' she said. ' I know what yer means, them that keep out the drarfs. My old father, 'e lived in this very room 'e did. " Oh, Jane," 'e says, " the drarfs is somethink cruel! " So off I goes to the building-yard, and brings back a big bag of sand on me shoulder. 'Eavy it was, too, I'll tell yer. Makes a sandbag I does, and claps it against the door. Blowed if 'e wasn't dead next day! Then I got me old uncle to come over an' live in 'is place. An 'e goes on just like dad about the drarfs. So back I goes to the building-yard and 'umps another bag o' sand, and makes *Hm* a sandbag. Claps it against 'is door one night, and blowed if 'e wasn't dead next morning! No, miss, not another sandbag in this 'ouse, I says.' I suppose somehow she completely stopped up the ventilation and stifled them, though how I can't imagine. . . ."

We asked her about the conditions of the people among whom she worked.

" Our association is trying to prove that even slum

housing can be run on commercial lines and still give the tenants decent conditions. That is to say, we pay salaries to all employees, and four per cent, interest on the capital. All the rest of the money earned goes back into the houses for improvements. The condition of some of the houses when we take them over is quite unimaginable, but we put in water for every floor and decent lavatory accommodation without having to raise the rent a halfpenny; in fact, we can't raise it because of the rent laws.

" We are hampered by two things. First, the exaggerated value put on the property by the landlords. One can't buy up even the old tumbledown stuff except at absurd prices. Slum property, as run, is one of the most paying investments known."

" Our char," I said, " lives in a house that cost the landlord about two hundred pounds to buy at the beginning of the War. Ever since then he has been drawing about sixty or seventy pounds a year in rent from it."

" Exactly," said M. " But the second obstacle is the people themselves. Some have decent instincts, and are glad to get better conditions, but there is also the definite slum mentality, and with that you can do nothing. You improve the place, and in three months it is as bad as ever."

" Still, we do have hundreds of people asking us to take over the house they live in; but we can't get them. You can't buy them at an economical price. That's one of the big obstacles to slum improvement. And, then, many of the people don't want to live in the council houses. There are too many regulations and too much concrete. They're cold and clammy. They have a workhouse atmosphere. Lots and lots of the poor would far rather live in a cosy slum, and, for one, / don't blame them. . . ."

G. and I were discussing the real-life romances of the students with whom we had been at school.

There was P., the gayest, most winsome little pagan of the whole place, half a dozen men mad about her. Two

wanted to divorce their wives and run away with her. One tried to fling another down two flights of stairs. So, small and afraid of marrying a big man for fear of having big babies, she chose a small man to fall in love with, and then had one of the biggest babies on record. Her husband, badly wounded in the War, was saved from becoming a neurasthenic wreck by taking to drink. Booze saved his brain. During several riotous years he grew healthy, and was becoming well known as a painter, while she dropped her art completely. Suddenly, when the drink was beginning to tell, they changed from Parisian Bohemia to the English country. He turned over a new leaf, and grew into a respectable churchwarden. Lately G. heard that both suddenly turned Roman Catholic.

Another real-life romance: M., the loveliest art student of her day, and as gifted as she was mentally passionate. She was the most complete contrast to P., quite disdainful of her own charm, wishing only to be left alone to work and think. She too married, more from importunity than for any other reason. Her husband began to succeed wonderfully in journalism, while she became a mother and a Cubist at about the same time. During the War the husband was given the Legion of Honour for his services to the Allies, but at the height of his career threw up everything to become the missionary of a modern semi-religious cult in America. M., now with two children, refused to leave Europe. But he, though of European education, was of American birth* Thus, in refusing to go to the States, she was in law guilty of desertion. Still, deliberately she did refuse, keeping herself and her children in Paris by painting decorations and by designing fabrics. Mentally M. was a perfect idealistic anarchist—freedom for everybody, therefore freedom for the children also. By refusing to go to America she lost her nationality, so had to have a League of Nations passport; but one child was English, the other French, being born in England and France. What a tangle! And the children are now Catholics. "And a jolly good thing too," says the atheistic M. "It will give them something to hold on to."

" By Jove! " I say to G. " If we had only known what would happen to all the school geniuses. . . . "

" As an old nurse of mine used to say," added Jo, " ' Lor,⁵ miss, W folks does get squandered round! ' "

" Yes," said G., " who would have thought that R. would have become fashionable, that slow old T. would have become an A.R.A., that N. would have turned up as a half-drunken, half-genius notoriety, that M. would have been killed; that the absolutely incompetent S. would be making his £1500 a year in advertising, that L. would be running a small high-art pottery, that C. would have become a countess and H. a prostitute, that E. would be the most efficient private secretary of a Colonial governor, that you would be writing or that I should be copying simply rotten portraits for a living? . . . "

" No," said I. " Queer, too. . . . The actual results don't tally with people's original talent. . . . "

" But talking of the queer things that may happen," interrupted Jo, " our Mrs Harris told me an odd tale this morning. Mrs Harris isn't a fool; she's had what she calls as good as eighteen, and in consequence has become apparently the obstetrical authority of her district. ' Yer knows, missus,' she said to me, ' they comes to me when they wants advice. A few days ago our Nence, she says, " Mar, yer knows Alice wot was merried six weeks ago? " " Yus," I says, " I do know 'en Sixteen she is, and far too young to be merrying. " " Well," says my Nence, " she's got a biby now. " " Ow, 'as she? " I says. " The poor little rat " " She's just wondering if you'll 'ave a look at it," says my Nence. " Why, " I asks, " ain't she satisfied with it? " " It's a nice biby as fur as I can see," says Nence, " but some'ow she's a bit worried. " " 'As she showed it to the doctor? " I says. " Yus, she 'as," says Nence. " And wot did⁵e say? " I asks. " 'E kinder gives a laugh, and says, * It's as you mide it, but it's a nice biby/ 'e says. " " 'Ow, did 'e? " I says, thoughtful. " All right, then, tell 'er to bring it round ter-night. " So Alice, she brings the biby round; nice, 'ealthy child it was, too, and 'er a little thing looks more as if she ought to be playing with dolls,

not real bibies. But it didn't take me long to see what was wrong, but o' course I couldn't tell 'er. So I says, casual like, so as not to give 'er cause for thought, " It's a narce biby orl right. I 'aven't seen a narcer biby, but I tells yer, Alice—don't go exposin' it round too much, see? "

" * An' all the time me 'usbin was setting there in the corner reading 'is piper, and me not thinking that 'e was taking any interest in things. But when she'd gorn 'e looks up, and says, " Wot's she christened the kid? " " Why, Jim," says our Nence. " Well," 'e says, sharp as a needle, " I'd bet fifty-fifty it ought to 'a bin Jemima." Oh, 'e's sly is me 'usbin!' "

Poor Mrs Harris has her own troubles at present. Once a week she cleans out for an artist. He had Nence round to pose for an Academy picture. The portrait was progressing splendidly, it seems, but yesterday, during his absence, Mrs Harris thought of dusting a lot of canvases stacked with their faces to the walls. Among them she found a couple of studies of Nence in the nude.

" You could 'a knocked me down with a fewer-duster," said Mrs Harris, " ter think that there little bitch, what's me own daughter, 'as bin sitting there without a stitch on—and what else, I asks yer, besides? Blowed if I knows what to do about it! I 'aven't dared say a word, 'cause if 'er father 'ears of it 'e'll 'ide 'er to within 'arf a inch of 'er life, and then she'll leave the 'ouse, and 'er money lost. Then there's Mr Johnson, too. Narce young chap I thought 'im, but young men will be young men; you can't blame them—not reely. And there's that Academy picture what 'e's so hexcited about. . . ."

" But, Mrs Harris," said Jo, " don't think the worst. Lots of models who *do* pose in the nude are perfectly respectable, and a young man who's keen on his work is very often not bothering about anything else."

" I wouldn't trust that there Nence, though," said Mrs Harris. " Yer know, when yer've got nothink on, why, yer don't feel the same, do yer? And, then, if it 'ad only 'appened somewheres else. Things do 'appen, don't they?

But right under me nose, so to speak, when I got a job. Don't yer see, missus, it makes things so arkward . . . ? "

At present Mrs Harris's perplexities are still unsolved, but she is watching Nence's figure with an expert eye, balanced between fears, hopes, and social doubts. . . . In fact, in a different sphere, " What should Mrs 'A. do? "

A few days later Jo went round with M. on a rent-collecting expedition. Even in these reconditioned houses she was appalled by the conditions of discomfort and overcrowding which London forces on its poorer citizens. M. herself was not in the best of odours with her committee, for she had spent five hundred pounds more on improvements than her rent collections justified. So for the time being she had to harden her heart about any but the most necessary repairs. Apart from the arduous task of persuading the poor to part with their rents her chief duty was wherever she went to pull all the plugs.



CHAPTER XXI

WIRELESS

A LONDON ghost returning from the beginning of the century, and gazing over the roofs of the town, would perceive but little change. In this compare London with New York. Here he might see little except the Shell-Mex building and Bush House altering the skyline. A foreigner might be struck by the spiky appearance due to the plethora of churches, the spires of which stick up over the general wave-movement of roofs like the masts of a sunken navy. From above London is hardly impressive, except for sheer extent, and even in that it cannot rival Los Angeles, with its four thousand square miles of city area. Yet the returning ghost might imagine one odd thing, that Londoners had suddenly taken to home-laundry work and were using the roofs as drying-grounds. Pardonably he might mistake the aerials for clothes-lines.

Our first engagement at the B.B.C., to spread Spanish

folk-music on the ether, came through a singular chain of circumstances. It started at a queer little restaurant in Charlotte Street, which, having been patriotically christened by its owner after his home valley in the Swiss uplands, Losenegger, had rapidly been transformed into "Lousy Nigger" by the Bohemians who frequented it.

At the Lousy Nigger we picked up, sheer chance of juxtaposition at cramped tables, a young demobilized officer who was trying to force his way into popular fiction on the lines of Sabatini. His stories had talent, and we gave him an introduction to our literary agent. But the lower slopes of Parnassus are seamed with precipices, to which one must cling with finger-nails and toes, scrabbling one's way up by painful degrees.

Broadcasting was then in its infancy. The young writer had an opportunity of deserting the printed word for the ether. As a friendly gesture he roped us in to perform to that Robot ear the microphone.

In those days, having done little public lecturing, we were naturally nervous. We shuddered at the anticipation of such an ordeal, and hunted out the best professional advice we could find. There is something peculiarly paralyzing in the thought of that cold, mechanical machine picking the words from one's mouth and repeating them ruthlessly. There is, for instance, the well-known story of a bishop who, broadcasting a sermon, ended the benediction thus, "In the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost." Then, after a slight pause, "I don't think."

Actually he had turned to the assistant and remarked, "I don't think that I have enjoyed an experience more." But the assistant was a little late in switching off the transmitter.

An inherent lack of humour is probably the most terrifying aspect of the microphone. Before a human audience, if one slips, a smile or a wretched joke will often capitalize a mistake, may even make it valuable.

This inhuman mechanism demands, in its turn, an almost inhuman precision, which daunted one in fancy.

Luckily, we thought, we know some actors who have broadcasted. Could we do better than seek their advice?

"The great thing is to avoid all expression of voice," said one well-known actor impressively. "There is always the danger of making the microphone chatter or shriek. And the nearer that you are to the microphone the louder your voice will sound, so that you can easily produce an effect of emphasis by bending or bowing towards the instrument."

"It sounds fearfully difficult," we murmured doubtfully.

"Oh, you'll soon get used to it," they assured us.

The authorities insisted that we must first write out and submit a copy of our talk to the censor, for we were not merely publishing a book that anybody might read, but were whispering straight into the ear-hole of the world. And we must be careful in turning the pages, or the rustle of the paper would be transmitted too.

So we laboured out our discourse. The censor thought that in speaking of conditions in the Balkans during the War we had better not mention that we bribed, with presents of ordinary Tommy's ammunition-boots, Serbian colonels to stimulate their assistance in getting our hospital work more efficiently done.

With censored manuscripts to read from, and under the threat that if we deviated a line from the script we should be suddenly cut off in mid-sentence, with the job of keeping our voices pleasantly monotonous and looking after all the terminal J'S, which should be sounded clearly, though not serpent-wise, and with the idea that emphasis could be got only by bowing in courteous fashion to the microphone, we were told to go ahead and *be as natural as possible*.

For a week before we had been practising in our room, talking over the speeches till we had grown sick of every sentence in them, and bowing, like a pair of fool secretary-birds, to the blacking-tin, which we had set up as a model microphone.

Three days before the broadcast Jo caught a cold that went straight to her vocal cords. In a day her voice changed from hoarse to a thin, sepulchral whisper. What could one

do? But that afternoon we had tea with Naomi Jacob, then on the stage, and not yet launched as a successful novelist.

" Oh, I've got some marvellous stuff!" she said. " I have to do the drunken Cockney woman in *The Ringer*. I got an awful throat, and a doctor pal gave me this. You try it."

She decanted some, and with it Jo went next morning to the nearest chemist for a throat brush. To him she explained the immanence of the radio broadcast and our panic anxiety.

" Allow *me* to paint you, madam'" said the chemist.

With expert touch he planted the magic formula just where it was needed.

" Charge, madam? Nothing at all. I hope that JWH will accept it as a small tribute and that / shall have the great pleasure of listening-in to-morrow night. I have a wireless set."

The anxious day came, that for the Spanish music. We were ushered into a huge hall, draped in grey felt curtains and set with a whole orchestra of empty chairs and music-stands, a grand piano, and a shrouded big drum. Here in a corner we were grouped about a microphone. After a few preliminaries of adjustment, since the voices and the instruments had to be graded in distance to carry equally well, panic seized me when I realized that, crouched as we were, I nursing my guitar, Jo with her laud, bowing to the microphone would be almost physically impossible. Our talk would have to float out to the listening world unemphasized, and in all its native monotony.

The influence of all those untenanted chairs was also strange. The imagination set down on them a ghostly audience of trained musicians. Instrumentally we were not professional musicians, only enthusiastic *dilettanti*. Few persons realize what a great gap sunders the one from the other. Few realize the hours of incessant practice, in season and out, which has drilled the professional artist to an almost mechanical state of precision. He should be capable of performing under almost any conditions. But the *dilettante* relies on his nerves and emotions. Here in this huge grey-

hung studio, confronted with that ghostly orchestra of invisible critics, there seemed no possibility of rousing the emotions. Only the nerves remained.

" Watch for the light, and then start," said the suave-voiced operator.

We did our best to control the quaver in our voices to a studious monotony. Over the rims of our encumbering instruments we did our very best to bow for emphasis. The time for the music arrived, and we struck bravely into a Spanish dance, the *garotin*. But the terror of the machine had so gripped Jo that an involuntary muscular contraction of the wrist bent her hand back, away from the strings. By no effort could she bring her hand down to the instrument. Luckily I was beating out a rhythmic introduction across the resounding cords of the guitar; her lack would not be noticed. But what when the melody came? We both were sweating with terror. Were we to break down before the whole of the radio world? Her melody was indispensable, for in this piece I merely accompanied with various kinds of chords, rasped, scraped, twanged, bumped, or thumbed. . . .

The microphone stared at us relentlessly through its circle of eyes. We were playing into the ear of the world, and Jo's hand had gone on strike.

The studio door swung open a crack, and the inquisitive head of a workman peered round the edge. A body in overalls quickly followed. He grinned, and stood listening. At once Jo concentrated all her attention on the man; she would play to him, and ignore that Robot ear on the stand before us. With the human touch her muscles loosened up, her wrist relaxed, and she struck a chord just in time for the opening phrase of the dance. The situation was saved.

The following week we told the world all about the Balkans in twenty minutes, and a few days after were invited to dine with a prominent official.

Over the nuts and wine, as we were telling some of our usual yarns, the official broke in, " But why didn't you tell your stories like that for broadcasting? Frankly I will admit that I was disappointed with your talks."

We explained how carefully we had been coached.

" Oh, but actors," he said, with a hint of disdain, " they have to be kept monotonous. They are so used to ranting and forcing the voice that even when we choke them down as much as possible they generally manage to overdo the expression. And nothing sounds more absurd from the transmitter than a good theatrical rant. We are so used to it in the theatre that we don't realize how unnatural it is. But produce it without the footlights, costumes, or scenery, and then listen to how it sounds. . . ."

Evidently we had been inscribed in the records of the B.B.C. with a black mark, very difficult to live down.

Our next experience of broadcasting was in New York.

This time we were asked to take part in a Swedish hour organized by a committee of prominent Swedes, headed by a well-known doctor. He was a strange-looking man; might have a touch of Tatar in his blood. He had emphasized a Chinese appearance by a long and noble beard, perfectly tapered to a fine point at about the lowest button of the waistcoat. In moments of complacency the good doctor was used to caress this beard downward, finishing the hand-stroke at the extreme tip, with an unconscious flourish.

" De Svedish hour vill bekin at seffen-dirty precise," said the doctor, in the strong sing-song tones of the Scandinavian.

However, the *New York Times* announced the hour for seven. I telephoned.

" Dadt is a grade mistake," said the doctor's serious but lilting voice. " Seffen-dirty is de precise hour aranced."

We arrived at seven-fifteen to find the transmitting-room in dismay. The " grade mistake " was on the doctor's part, and he was faced with the problem of fitting an hour's programme into three-quarters of an hour. This might have been done had the performers consented to reduce in proportion their respective contributions. But, on the contrary, having got possession of the microphone, each in turn showed an extreme reluctance to leave the instrument.

As we entered the transmitting-room we heard a Swedish schoolmaster proclaiming to the States the benefits conferred on them by the Swedish colonists.

" Ve goom 'ere" he was intoning, " to brink to dis new landt de benefits of our ancient coolchures. Ve goom 'ere to minkle vid American bloot de grand sdrains of de anchient Norsemens, vot fearst desscoffer de coundtry. To our ancient Finelandt ve goom brinkink de penefits of our Northern 'eritage. . . ."

Ten minutes later he was still droning on.

" De suberiority of de Svede gan pe proofed by de results of de school examinations. In many cases de Svedish childrens dake all de first brizes for intelligence, dey lead de schools in deir athletick . . ."

We began to wonder how many American radio fans muttering " By God, they do! " had switched off to more congenial programmes offered by Wrigley's chewing-gum service or the Waltham Watch Company or . . .

Having been scheduled to speak for five minutes, the schoolmaster continued for twelve minutes before he could be detached from the microphone. His place was taken by a young lady who was to sing a few sentimental ballads. Her voice was good in its way, but she suffered, with many sopranos we have heard, from a conviction that to take a high note you must take it strong. The first time that she soared thus *fortissimo* into alt the operator was unready. His jaw dropped, and he sprang too late at the microphone, which stood on a tall support, like that of a standard-lamp. On the second occasion he was ready for her. He gripped the microphone standard, and as the high note burst out thrust the apparatus at arm's length away from the singer. Mathematical laws dictate that the volume of sound decreases according to the square of the distance from the emitting object. He was but doing his best.

I conjectured that a mental struggle now took place in the operator's mind. Was the lady going to understand the hint, or was she going to release the next high note with undiminished volume? He must be quick, yet not too quick.

Nevertheless, he had trusted somewhat to the lady's intelligence, and, *rather* expecting that she would diminish the volume, was not quite quick enough, so that the sound of that note must have come from the receiver rather like the sound of a train whistle suddenly engulfed in a tunnel. During the rest of this item we saw a repetition of our own original technique, but reversed. Instead of the singer bowing to the microphone, the microphone bowed to the singer, or, rather, it leapt away from her, and dashed as hurriedly back. And all through the Swedish girl sang on lustily and unperturbed, taking the high notes with full power, like an aviator looping the loop.

When the songs were over, and as the next performer was preparing to step forward, the doctor approached the instrument.

" I veesh you couldt see de peautiful plue eyess and de lofely goldten 'air of de laty vot's yoost sunk you dat sonk," he said impressively. Then, returning towards me, he murmured in my ear, " Von moost mek a yoke [joke], to kip de public amuset."

As time went on, and the programme, far from being condensed, showed signs of stretching, the poor doctor became a prey to anxiety. His complacent beard-stroking developed signs of panic. Faster and more nervously his shapely professional hands travelled the length of that perfect hirsute cone, faster and faster, till he looked more like a conscientious workman pulling barley-sugar for a speed-test than a reputable New York physician conducting an evening of National Propaganda.

The *grand finale* was to be a children's choir singing Swedish folk-songs, directed by the doctor's wife. No doubt the children had been admirably trained; their little folk-tunes were delightful and pleasantly rendered. From the loud-speakers of the United States they should have issued in strange guise, for the conductress had stationed herself quite close to the microphone, ignorant of all those mathematical laws about volume and distance. She conducted **the** choir by a series of clucks, clicks, hisses, pishes, to-whoos,

tut-tuts, and other ejaculations, each of which no doubt had its particular significance, and might be translated into *crescendo*, *diminuendo*, and so on.

But she had entirely overlooked the remorselessly unselective quality of the apparatus. Her strange *obligato* to the choir's tunes should have come out with a devastating effect from the loud-speakers, and we might have revelled in the imaginative picture had it not been for the certainty that by the time the Swedish hour had reached this, the plum of its programme, not one single set, valve or crystal—not even that of the most enthusiastic Swedophile in the whole of the States—remained in tune with the wave-length emitted from the transmitting station of the Roosevelt Hotel.

It is our conviction that the gorgeous absurdity of that final number circled the entire globe without catching a single receptive aerial.

Yet we may be mistaken, for after eight months spent in a Los Angeles bungalow court we decided that the Babbitts of America would listen to anything rather than endure the tyranny of silence. During eight months of monotonous sun in California we, surrounded by thirteen other bungalows in our own court, with fourteen bungalows to the right, fourteen to the left, fourteen behind, and fourteen across the road, thus had sixty-nine bungalow dwellings within easy earshot, and numbers of them were installed with loud-speakers, and their windows were always wide open. From seven-thirty in the morning, when the physical-jerking exercises came over in words of command, till midnight those loud-speakers volleyed and thundered. Anything on the air was better than nothing; you turned the knob, tuned in the set, and left it all day, even when you went out shopping. You collected indiscriminately physical jerks, cooking lessons, club lunch speeches, revival meetings, political meetings, advertisements, junketings, football matches, weather reports, sacred music, profane music, or *premUres* at the big movie-houses. Every bungalow collected its favourite kind, and launched it on the tormented air, so that the unlucky author, chained by sickness to his own

bungalow for six weeks, fed daily on a salad of sound compared to which the critical morning at Babel must have been almost insignificant.

Now, back in Old England, we had been wondering whether in the move from Savoy Hill to its modern palace at Langham Place the B.B.G. might not have mislaid the memoir of our previous fiasco. % Apparently they had, for one morning a pleasant voice hailed Jo on the telephone.

" That Mrs Gordon? "

" Yes."

" B.B.C. speaking. We are wondering whether you could give us a talk for school-children on Czechoslovakia? "

A short pause ensued, while Jo was fighting with her conscience.

" I'm awfully sorry," she answered, trying to make her voice as delightfully transmissible as possible, a sort of sample voice, " but we have never been there."

Talking of sample voices, the English folk-singer David Brynley had an amusing experience in New York. Late on a December evening his telephone bell rang.

" That Mr Brynley? " asked a voice.

" Yes."

" Say, you're the car'l-singer, ain'tcher? "

" I beg your pardon."

" You sing these here English folk-songs, eh? "

" Certainly."

" Got any car'ls in your repertoore? "

" I have some carols, yes."

" All right, sing one."

" I don't quite understand."

" Sing one right now. I want to hear a sample of your voice."

" Do you mean sing one now, into the telephone? "

" Sure."

A little bewildered, Mr Brynley sang his carol into the mouthpiece.

"That's all right," said the voice at the conclusion,
" You're hired."

We looked at the letter with mixed feelings:

I shall be pleased to see you for a television test on Tuesday.
I should be very glad if you will bring with you any costumes
you would like me to see. . . .

Yours faithfully,

THE BRITISH BROADCASTING COMPANY

For we had rashly suggested that the television department might be interested in a selection of our Spanish folk-tunes played on the laud (or Spanish lute) and guitar, the former instrument being practically unknown in England, and Jo perhaps the only performer on it in the island.

Now that our suggestion had been taken seriously we began to wonder whether we could pull it off. Playing and talking before people are easy enough; one borrows from their interest and sympathy. The audience helps you on. But playing before these relentless mechanisms is a different matter. These automatons automatize you, and to fit their Robotism you must yourself become something of a Robot. Could we do it?

" Bring with you any costumes . . ."

What sort of costumes? No hint in this official letter. No circular with rough general suggestions. Jo looked out her most likely costume?, and selected a peasantish dress spotted with large red roses and a white Polish shawl, also redly beflowered. We then remembered that Steven Spurrier had been making television drawings for the *Radio Times*.

" Hello! That Steven? Look here, old chap, what's the best sort of garb for television? "

" Black and white," came back the voice of experience.
" Stripes or squares—something striking."

We tossed Jo's wardrobe round in despair. There was black, there was white, but of black and white judiciously blended or contrasted nothing.

" Have to make one! " cried Jo, and took the first bus to Burnet's.

An hour later she returned with a packet of black-and-white-striped cotton.

" Hope that's startling enough."

She flung herself at a table with pencil and paper.

" Something like that/" she said, showing a hasty scribble of a *robe de style*.

But I had to cut out the skirt, and an experienced and altruistic friend fashioned the frock for us, and had Jo fitted into a maze of diagonals like a camouflaged ship at the end of the Great War.

Then how we practised! *Thrum, thrum, thrumpitty, thrum !* We had to get the music practically automatic. It had to be so automatic that one could almost play the music and do the family accounts at the same time.

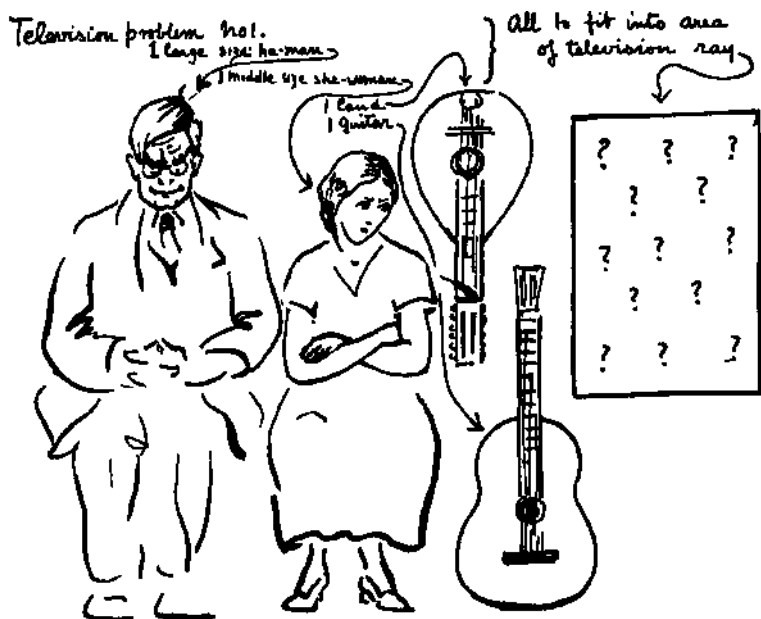
One feels horridly self-conscious going into the grand entrance of the B.B.C. carrying instrument-cases. It is like a *Punch* pen-drawing by Arthur Watts: hugely tall, massive pillars shooting upward, and in the far corner a tiny desk with two polite clerks. And from settees against the wall other artists (?) watch enviously to note whether you have an appointment or have merely blown in from the unemployed spaces. The feeling is exactly that of entering the lobby of a big movie lot in Hollywood.

From this gigantic hall we passed suddenly into corridors so narrow that they come as amazing contrasts to the palatial exterior. The courteous young man (B.B.C. manners are as impeccable as the accents of the announcers) led us to bronze doors that hid the large lifts.

" Going down," says the liftman sepulchrally. And down you go, two storeys below the pavements, into the silent guts of the earth, where no external sounds can penetrate. So that the narrow gallery into which we were now ushered was really a kind of mine-gallery, the gallery of a mine of sound.

The gallery opened into a lounge lit by subdued lights, with the strange rigid sense of modern refinement, one modernistic picture, one modernistic table, one modernistic ash-tray, and a pot of quite unmodernistic flowers. Here we were deposited to attend our fate.

Waves of nervous depression came on, until we gradually



became aware that from the far distance a thin, disembodied voice was declaiming musically:

" Tom, Tom, the piper's son,
Stole a pig and away did run. . . . "

Then a flute and a saxophone played a rapid *obbligato*, in which Tom's criminal and hasty steps were intermingled with the pig's squealings.

Tom, Tom went on stealing the pig with a number of musical variations, while a group of solemnly serious people, all walking with the rigidly, columnar stiffness of the personally conducted tour, sidled into the lounge.

" Here," said the young and spick conductor, " is where the artists wait. On the right are the artists' dressing-rooms;

on the left and at the end are the studios. We find that many artists, even the better ones, seemed almost incapable of doing their best out of their usual surroundings, so in the studios we have had to introduce as many of the normal theatre fittings as we can. We even provide audiences, so that the presence of the microphone is felt as little as possible."

That was certainly an advance from the old days at Savoy Hill.

The personally conducted tour listened with an air of humble and earnest attention, at the same time stealing glances at ourselves. Sitting there with her instrument, Jo thought, "Ha! I am exhibit A, Jan is exhibit B"; while I, on the contrary, was thinking, "Ha! I am exhibit A, Jo is exhibit B."

Respectfully attentive, the tour drifted away, replaced by a pretty but actively practical girl, who promptly sized us up, agreed with enthusiasm that Jo's dress was the very thing, but forbade my white shirt.

"Grey or pale blue," she said. "White throws up a ghastly reflection on the face.

So I stuck to my day shirt, popped into dress-trousers, wound a black scarf round my waist, and there I was, a passable imitation of a modern Spanish player.

But when Jo came out. . . On a blank white face the girl had drawn black outlines round the eyes, thick black eyebrows, black lips, and grey shadows. I had often seen Jo as a black-and-white drawing without any sense of strangeness, but now to see her as a black-and-white reality was almost repulsive. Odd that what looks quite natural on paper seems horrible in nature.

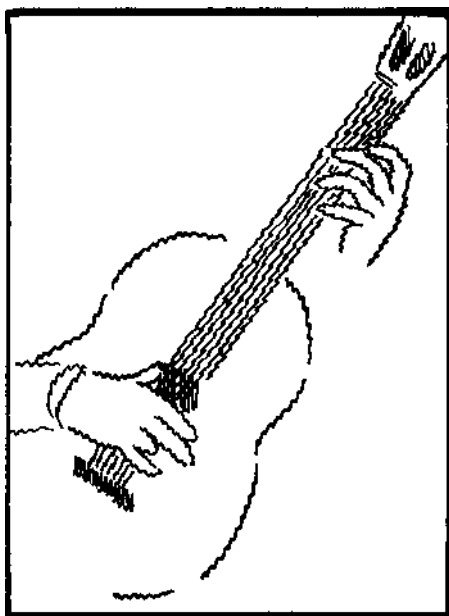
Then the audition began.

Nervous? There was no time to be nervous. In a big, dark studio we faced an oblong opening in a blank wall. In the oblong window stood a black box, from which played a flickering white square brilliance. This flung on to a screen a patch of vibrating illumination about two feet six wide and four feet high.

The problem before the girl was how to fit into a quivering oblong two feet six by four feet one large-sized man, one middle-sized woman, and two instruments, leaving them space to play and not get entangled in each other's movements.

"Can't be done," I said to myself. "This audition's a frost from the start."

At the television department of the B.B.C. they must be experts in the art of adroit condensation. Bit by bit the girl and an assistant compressed us till, by a miracle, we managed to fit inside that flickering oblong. Whenever we had tried



a new position we had also tried a few bars of music, so that by the time the final fit was achieved all our nervousness had flown.

Yet, even so, to play was not easy. Conditions were very peculiar. When I looked down at myself I seemed to be drawn as if with thin strips of dark and light, like the lines of a pen-and-ink drawing. Actually these strips were not stationary, but composed of tiny spots of light travelling so fast that they seemed to be continuous lines. Whenever these speeding lines of light cut a narrow diagonal line a different effect was produced. Then the vibrational nature of the light was revealed clearly, and the strings of my guitar and of Jo's laud seemed not to be straight lines at all, but rapid zigzags. When, in addition, I found that my fingers seemed also zigzagged the problem of playing without errors became serious. To paraphrase the nursery rhyme, I might have improvised:

There was a crooked man,
Played on a crooked string,
And with a crooked finger made
A television ping. . . .

In fact, the girl said to Jo, " Some people are so disconcerted by the effect of the ray that we have to stand in front of the light till they get used to it. "

First we played *ajota*, or *hot a*, as the Spaniards pronounce it. Then I played '*farouka*' in solo, scraping the strings with the backs of my nails, beating out the time on the sounding-board, and generally showing off all the various tricks that characterize the Spanish guitar. While I was playing my solo the girl showed Jo into the operating-room, where, before a desk set with dials, a young expert twirled knobs. In a corner an oblong square of light about as big as a postcard flickered. Suddenly he placed the knobs in a proper adjustment, and clearly on the small screen I appeared, thumping and banging.

" Those hand-movements are interesting," said the girl, " but, by rights, he ought to be made up. I would have done so, but didn't like to. He looks so severe. Still, for an audition it doesn't matter."

Jo laughed, as she remembered a little scene in Albania. I had been compelled to grow a moustache, as without a moustache I should have been despicable among the mountain chiefs. The moustache had sprouted very bristly and aggressive.

" Is that your husband, *madame* ? " said a Russian officer of King Zog's bodyguard to Jo. " *Eh bien, il riest pas pricisimnt firoce, mais il tCapas Pair bien commode* "

The girl now wanted to try on Jo the effect of the Polish shawl, to which she had taken a fancy. But, just the opposite as in photography, the photomicro cells, which reduce the light-impulses to electric waves, are most highly excited by the colour red. The red flowers were incisible on the white.

" If you look closely," said the young engineer, " you will notice that those big red flowers can just be seen, but actually as *lighter* spots of white on the white background."

WINTER



CHAPTER XXII

A LECTURE IN SOUTH BROMLEY

ONE dismal night at the tail end of October Jo was gathering a few slides together for a lecture which she had been engaged to give at the Methodist Hall in South Bromley. By night and alone she was to adventure into the dim labyrinths of outer London. How mysterious and unknown are the suburban fringes of this great city, where after dusk few voyagers venture except hardened residents!

Under the darkened immensity of the chilly station she found a train standing with wide-open doors. A feeling of dim unwelcome shrouded the suburban platform, along which hurried the figures of tired City slaves, each clutching in

one hand a small dispatch-case and in the other **the pale** sheets of a fresh evening or a stale morning paper. Like automata, they moved with apparently unseeing eyes along the platform. Automatically each Robot slipped into its habitual carriage of its habitual train.

Strange that the English, who invented the railway train, have never learned to enjoy it. From records left by older writers it seems evident that the stage-coach trip was generally as convivial as the passengers could make it. But such a trip was usually rough and tough, and the Englishman's good-humour blossoms best under such conditions. The comfort and luxury of our railway carriages bring out his worst features, emphasize his bearish individuality. Only on one condition is a railway carriage in England humanized, and that is when it most resembles the old stage-coach—cram twelve passengers into the space normally designed for eight, and you will create twelve temporary and jovial friends.

On no occasion does the Englishman's peculiar railway churlishness come out as on the double daily trip between the City and the suburbs. Morning and evening the average suburbanite takes a travelling dose of what may be called news-anaesthesia. Propelled swiftly by the magic of modern transportation from or to his suburbs to or from the City, he sits there in a state of semi-coma, while news, or, rather, the scandal of the world, trickles through his head, like water through a sieve.

The unwitting Jo, forced for a monetary consideration to venture Suburbia-ward, found herself in a quandary. Philip of Macedon invented the phalanx, in which all the shields were impenetrably overlapped and interlocked, but who invented the suburban phalanx, in which all the newspapers are overlapped and interlocked? Wandering along the un-receptive train, the desperate would-be passenger realized that if she were to travel at all she must take courage in both hands and force somewhere an opening in those serried ranks. So, choosing a carriage which contained a woman, or, rather, a skirt showing under a newspaper, Jo entered

forcibly, and crumpled her way to a seat. The spread newspapers closed over her passage as water flows back over a dropped stone.

Luckily Jo, who always lectures without notes, had the chief points of her lecture to think out, so the journey proceeded into the night unbroken, except by the clatter of wheels, the rustle of newspapers, and the wheeze of a juicy pipe in the far corner.

As the train slid on Jo began to realize with some dismay another symptom of the intense localization of London. About fifty years ago *Punch* published one of his puzzle-drawings, "Puzzle—find the name of the station." That puzzle has remained unsolved till this day on the suburban lines. Just as every Englishman, even if he comes from John o' Groats, is expected to know instinctively exactly the position of the Nag's Head, the Angel, and the Elephant, so every traveller on a suburban railway is expected to have a mystic power of divining locality. No light shines on any signboard, no porter deigns to shout out any name, even unintelligibly.

Jo began to feel anxious. In desperation she addressed herself to the blank walls of newspapers.

"Can anybody tell me how far we are from South Bromley?"

A shudder of outraged reticence stirred the surfaces of the papers. Was somebody trying to storm the shielded privacy of a suburban voyager? If an Englishman's house is his castle, surely his newspaper is his ironclad, his travelling defence.

Nevertheless, she bent forward to the newspaper opposite, with its skirted base.

"Excuse me, but *could* you tell me—how many stations to South Bromley?"

For a second the newspaper was chopped down; two eyes glared through chilly spectacles at the intruder.

"Couple," snapped a voice that was expressly official. No trivial conversation should be started on *this* train.

Two stations farther along Jo stared into the murky night. Could this tiny place really be South Bromley?

" Excuse me," Jo said, with all the artificial brightness at her command, " but is this it? "

Only half an eye was exposed.

" Next," snapped a voice.

At the following station, which also was small and dark, Jo sprang to the door. But metal gadgets always perplex her; she could not find the trick of the latch.

" Oh," she cried, in sudden exasperation, " *could* somebody help me out? "

The walls of newspapers rustled, but did not move. Wrapped in the anaesthesia of news, the travellers might have been almost unconscious of the interloper's existence, or more probably, like the dreamer on the edge of an opium intoxication, they did not choose to be disturbed. Let her wrestle. They hadn't invited her into their carriage, had they? Suddenly the handle ceded, the door flew open, almost spilling Jo and her dispatch-case on to the platform in a heap. As she turned to close the door a flare of quick fury, heritage from an irascible father, gripped her. She thrust her head back through the opening and chanted in icy tones:

" Thanks so much for your extreme courtesy."

The newspapers, impenetrable shields, remained unmoved.

Stumbling along the platform, she wondered, " Can this really be South Bromley? "

" Naow, nothing like," said the porter. " That it ain't. If you ain't quick you'll lose the train."

With urgent hand under her arm he opened a door and thrust her forcibly in among a fresh set of newspapers as the train gathered motion. But the violence of her entry didn't disturb the phalanx. One shield only was lowered, that of a pleasant young man, who smiled and said that South Bromley was several stations farther along. Then he re-formed the wall.

As Jo was carried along she pondered over the strange hypnotism of this daily newspaper-reading. What did these people get from their eternal reading? Take any one and cross-examine him on yesterday's newspaper. What would he

remember of it? A trainful of Italians or Spaniards would have been discussing any number of different subjects; they would have been exercising their vitality. Good fun, and how real compared with this fantastic trainload of dumb beings rushing voiceless through the night, stuffing their brains twice a day with the excreta of Fleet Street! Queer development of civilization; whole communities of sane men who lived in almost daily fear of having to address their neighbours.

• • • • •

Jo's lecture was fairly settled in her mind, and she had a moment to observe the flat line of papers before her. Some, inside out, showing the cartoons—a Tom Webster, a Strube. • ..

We have a bone to pick with the popular caricaturists. Not one has the faculty of synthesizing an ordinary Englishman into a truly descriptive and satisfactory image. The Frenchman, the German, the Swede, the Spaniard, the Italian, and even the hybrid American are successfully depicted by their own and by foreign caricaturists. But the typical Englishman seems a figure not so easily caught. Certainly no foreigner would accept as typically English either John Bull or any of the popular images of John Citizen as drawn by the daily caricaturists.

Belcher's charwomen *are* English, but Strube's little man is obviously a German, and, if we may deduce from his name that Strube himself may be of Germanic origin, we realize that natural physical impulses, no matter how deeply hidden, will out. Lavengro has the perfectly true tale of the short-legged artist who always drew his heroic figures with legs too short. But we also refuse to accept Webster's George as a typical Englishman, as well as Poy's distressful John Citizen.

In trying to pick out a type to represent the dam-fool, tax-paying, submissive ass of a wage-slave the caricaturists were confronted by the odd fact that no matter what a simple-minded, easily bamboozled, squeezable, submissive

kind of an idiot the normal Englishman may be, he doesn't look it. Take all the suburban trains for a month, haunt the Underground, ride round the tramways at a bob a day, and you will not find in every thousand passengers more than one or two who are in the least like Strube's caricature or Webster's George. Poy's John Citizen looks like the degenerate butler of a temperance reformer, and might be found in slightly greater proportions—say, four-tenths of one per cent.

But you will find the pallid, pimply faced, lanky lad of an Englishman who looks as if he fed on ideals and nut food and slept with the windows shut; you will find the sallow, lantern-jawed lawyer's clerk of an Englishman; you will find the hacked and hatchet-faced kind of Englishman; the bluff and burly type of Englishman; the fat and fussy Englishman; the acid and surly Englishman. But nowadays you will very seldom find even Punch's John Bull, infrequently Poy's John Citizen, seldom Webster's George, and if you ever do find a typical Strube we will bet our hats he is really a German.

Leaving John Bull aside, since he was clearly intended to be the beer-drinking, beef-eating, dominating kind of country squire, proud of his * muddling through' talents, the figures of Poy, Webster, and Strube are designed to represent that patient, brainless mass of Britons who vote Labour at one election, and because of some scare headlines tumble over one another to vote Conservative the next time, and will be voting Labour again in a few years, unless they, can be ballyhooed into voting Liberal for a change. They are the people with no policy and no background, and whose lives, except for a few hectic occasions, when they are really capable of considerable altruism and self-sacrifice, are herded forward under the great and ignoble slogan " Safety first." In such a case the popular artist was faced with a difficult problem. He had to invent a figure which would be racially recognizable, but which existed in such small numbers that the readers would not feel themselves to be personally offended. The existence in us of the German

strain, that nation which, despite the evidence of the War, we have always looked on as a simple, easily led, rather fat-headed, plodding kind of a chump, has undoubtedly led us to adopt these typically Germanic types as being adequate substitutes for the fat-headed Englishman.

.

At a fair-sized station the young man and some other passengers resumed the normal appearance of life, and prepared to leave the carriage.

"Is this it?" asked Jo.

Over his shoulder the pleasant young man nodded helpfully.

"Good and early," thought Jo, stepping on to the platform. "I'll see if I can get a cup of strong coffee, to give me a fillip."

"Cawfee?" said the ticket-collector. "Yuss. You'll 'ave to cross the line, hover the bridge, then just outside and a little way hup the road. I'll yell yer across to the other collector, see?"

The late October drizzle fell on her shoulders as she left the station. Here she got a shock. Just beyond the glow of the lamps stood a small girl, begging. By her side, in a low-wheeled cart, was a most distressing case of arrested development. Tiny, withered, and old, with the bloodless parchment skin of ailing years, he looked as if both mind and body had stopped growing in early childhood. His vacant eyes stared up into the dreary night, and except for the ragged beard nobody would ever have guessed from his size how old he was. Paralysed, too! With helpless hands and nerveless spine, there he lay, motionless, thoughtless, so cold—how many dreary years had he existed like a mollusc, shut within the shell of his pathetic humanity?

Jo felt hurriedly in her pockets. Nothing but three half-crowns. Things weren't too flourishing with us at that moment. Couldn't give away half-crowns at random.

"Look here," she said to the child, "I've got no change. Will you be here in an hour and a half?"

The child nodded her head sadly.

" You shall have all the coppers in my pockets," said Jo.

She hurried on, tormented by a feeling of meanness. " Fancy leaving that poor wretch out there in the cold and damp with your pocket full of half-crowns," muttered Conscience.

" Cup o' cawfee? " said the *cafi* woman. " 'Ere you are, good and 'ot. You want a cup o' cawfee on a night like this, don'tcher? How far is it to the Methodist 'All? Well, there's a big Methody Church up the road, but I don't know that there's a 'all attached. May be, but I never 'eard of it. . . . What? The South Bromley Methodist 'All? But you ain't in South Bromley. This is Beckenham. . . . "

A puzzled and disappointed little girl saw Jo suddenly dash past her back into the station.

" 'Sori right," said the ticket-collector. " Train's gone, but you can easy catch the next one, in five minutes. Ticket? Oh, don't you worry about that. Jest explain wot 'appened at Bromley That'll be all right."

Back among the newspapers, Jo remembered the pathetic small child waiting in the damp. Conscience towered over her, more accusing than ever. Why didn't you give that half-crown and be done with it?

A wild and stifled giggle outraged the ranked papers.

Half a crown? She had just remembered the date. Sense had struck Jo suddenly. . . . Why, of course—nearly November. . . . Paralysed, indeed—just a Guy Fawkes!



CHAPTER XXIII

DAN

IF there is one consistent feature in all the odd inconsistency of London it is a persistent consistency in inconsistency. London is incredibly tortuous and badly built; its streets, apparently inefficient for their purpose, at last reach their destination—often a pub. How apt that London, the most inebriate capital in Europe, should erect its pubs into public monuments. Even the dialect of London is not homogeneous, for, as Shaw pointed out in *Pygmalion*, to an acute ear the

accent of the street-hawker from the Rag Fair in Notting Dale differs as much from that of a dog-thief in Club Row, Bethnal Green, as that of Sussex from Devon.

So, in looking round for a human type who may in some sort symbolize London, we must be careful not to pick one too consistent, and yet must be able to find that his apparent inconsistencies are a coherent part of his total humanity.

Of typically London parentage, Dan is possibly the most unusual character in London to-day. Almost every feature unusual in Dan is paralleled by something unusual in London also.

If you are ever tempted to reread Balzac you at once submit yourself to a strange phenomenon: you come into a land where everything seems a little larger than life. Life, indeed, is portrayed, but on an heroic scale; Balzac's figures move across the background of the *Comédie humaine* like close-ups across the screen of the moving-picture. So, though subjugated by the immense spread, extent, and variety of his knowledge, observation, wisdom, and wit, you may feel almost daunted by the colossal scale of his images. You cannot draw quite far enough away from them. Just as at the conclusion of a film of passion you unconsciously think, "There never was such a kiss," and just as the Irishman looking at the stuffed tarpon muttered, "Begob, the man who said he caught that fish was a hell of a liar," so one is tempted to feel in Balzac's gigantic world what a hell of a liar he was.

Yet life, not always the gentle schoolmaster, now and again condescends to correct our too hasty impressions. Now and again in real life one may meet a figure who does carry a hint of that Balzacian exuberance, who seems built on a scale slightly larger than most men. One such is Dan. And yet Dan walking the London pavement, which he has seldom deserted, with his respectable black bowler hat, his neat blue suit, his small, pointed moustache, and his Pippa look of cheery satisfaction, might make you think that here was the most typical of all those daily, suburban-travelling, newspaper-reading, safety-first-worshipping, lawn-mowing products of an intensive office existence.

Jo was the first to meet this remarkable, and indeed unique, character. During the War we had passed through Serbia and the famous retreat. Having reached London in rags, and lacking visible means of support, we were trying to capitalize our experiences. The sale of some photographs temporarily banished the wolf, at least round the corner, but to continue the good work Jo had written an article called *A Woman's Day at the Montenegrin Front*.

"If anybody can tell you where to place that article it's Dan Rider," said Heron Lepper, the well-known scholar and author. "I'll give you a note to him. He's got a small, queer bookshop in St Martin's Court."

Queer little place it was, the window hung with caricatures of Shaw by Simpson, drawings by Beardsley, by Phil May, a framed letter or two, and the oddest selection of books. Within the welcome was even odder, for from behind a littered counter sprang out a small man with a great guffaw of laughter, that made one inclined to believe that here was the den, and that Daniel had swallowed the lion, intact and still vocal, as the whale did Jonah.

It is queer how habits seem to get attached to different trades. Even in *The Arabian Nights* the barber is loquacious. In medieval times learned anchorites lived in dim and musty cells; to-day the second-hand bookshops of Charing Cross Road are as dim and as musty as were the old anchorites' cells. Into most booksellers the mustiness seems to have seeped slowly, but there was nothing dim or musty about Dan, except his interior. His vivacious health seemed to be enhaloed pinkly and plumply in the gloom, as though he auto-generated a Rembrandtesque spotlight, the psychical glow triumphing over the physical gloom.

Down more steps to an inner sanctum and to yet deeper gloom Dan led Jo, and there served her with tea. Here he was used to receive the most unexpected company—artiste, writers, social reformers, scholars, anarchists; anybody who had an idea in his head and a tongue to give it expression was welcome. And as likely as not the broker's man was there as well, a perennial visitor, like a maiden aunt, acting

as a willing housemaid, subjugated by that rubicund charm and that leonine guffaw.

Dan read Jo's manuscript, and at once said, " Send that to the *Westminster Gazette*. They'll eat it."

Eat it they did, and spewed it out again as print.

From this manuscript and a few others grew our first travel-book, the publishing of which, though a digression, gives another unsuspected sidelight on the peculiar quality that characterizes the humanity of this baffling London.

We had offered other sketches of Serbia to Cecil Chesterton, editor of the *New Witness*.

" You ought to make a book of these. Can't do it? Nonsense. Go to Chapman and Hall, suggest the idea to them, and say I sent you."

Unluckily, or luckily, I have an uncontrollable kink in memory for the common names of the world. If Jo tells me to meet her at the Hippodrome it is odds on that I will subsequently be found fuming outside the Coliseum; if she makes a rendezvous at Marshall and Snelgrove's I will probably seek her at Debenham and Freebody's. So, sailing down the stairs of the *New Witness* office, I said cheerfully, ' Come along, Jo. We will go to Chatto and Windus."

Then, being perfectly certain in my mind where the offices of Chatto and Windus lay, I led Jo with satisfied decision straight to the doors of Smith, Elder, while Jo, who was perfectly aware of my odd mental vagary, followed me, smiling, to see what would happen.

There is nothing more effective to ensure a reception than the conviction that you will be received, and, still under the illusion that we were coming with all Cecil Chesterton's authority, I practically forced my way past the office-boy into the presence of Reginald Smith, publisher and K.C.

Long, lean, white-haired, and with a kindly smile for impetuous youth, Mr Smith rose from his chair, almost Jo's dream-image of the ideal publisher. What we said about the book or the Serbian adventure is vague in our memories, for we both talked at once in a Gordonian fugue for at least five minutes.

"Very interesting, *most* interesting," said Mr Reginald Smith, smiling. "But what made you come here? Mr Cecil Chesterton? Strange, I have never had any dealings with him. . . . Am I to gather that, never having written a book before, you wish to induce me to agree to publish a book not a word of which is yet written? Well, there is one thing I must admire in you—your cheek. Why not write the book and then bring it?"

We hastily explained our financial state, and the impossibility of spending time on a purely speculative undertaking. We said that our diaries and drawings were very complete, and that we had published one or two articles in various newspapers, the *Times*, the *Westminster*, the *New Witness*. . . .

"Leave the articles and drawings," said he. "One way or another, Til promise to put you out of your pain before midday to-morrow. But before you go, Mrs Gordon, please, where did you get that hat?"

It was a startling if original form of headgear, picked up piecemeal from the veiled women who squat with their wares in the bazaars of the Balkans. Wound about an Albanian man's rounded fez, made of coarse white felt, was a patch-work handkerchief, many pieces of brilliantly coloured fabric, royal blue, vermilion, apple-green, citron. Probably some economical woman had cut off the sound bits of several moth-eaten handkerchiefs and had pieced them together irrespective of colour or pattern, a Joseph's coat of a scarf.

Pinning all this magnificence in place was a large circular silver brooch, designed in piled clusters of blobs, made by a mountain silversmith, and purchased with the help of our Serbian friend Nikola Pavlovitch, who in his time had been rent-collector, thief, brigand, *comitaj*, coal-miner, and gambler.

Breathlessly Jo sketched in the hat's history, and then we rushed home to live through the intervening hours.

Twenty-four hours and fifty-six minutes later, anxious not to seem too anxious about our fate, we skulked at **the** street-corner, but, unlike Cinderella, couldn't wait for **the**

clock to strike. The expression of our future publisher told us the news before he opened his mouth, but what he said was:

" We will sign that agreement at once. But for goodness' sake please write the book as like that hat as possible.⁵¹

Never have we received a better or more compact piece of advice, for that hat, containing local colour, costume, peasant crafts, poverty, human interest, and the picaresque, had been put together with imagination and taste.

Thus Dan really started us off on our literary career.

.

The War awoke in Dan certain points of character which up till then had been somnolent. His character had always been marked by definite traits: his breadth of vision, his natural generosity, his charity of judgment, were outstanding; his native intelligence and his critical faculty in literature were acute. In addition, Dan had undoubtedly that pragmatism of honesty which made Robin Hood a national hero.

For a Chelsea Bohemian to be charitably minded is perfectly easy; he is, in general, only condoning those liberties that he himself wants to enjoy. But for a respectable John Citizen, who lives in his suburb, owns his house and garden, who travels his daily route to and from business, and has a working agreement with the local parson, the task of being really broadminded and spiritually charitable is another affair. Dives is hardly in as much danger of missing the Kingdom of Heaven as Ananias, who, except for being unluckily caught out, was no doubt as respectable an everyday bloke as could be found, with a thoroughly suburban outlook and the motto " Safety first."

Yet Dan, born in the pettiest of petty *bourgeoisie*, working at a trade that should be the quintessence of petty bourgeoisdom, the keeping of a small shop, had contrived somehow to develop a mentality which soared easily above those restrictions which hamper even the most broadminded of ordinary men.

Until the War broke out opportunities **for the expression** of Dan's inherent capacities had been rather limited. He had been active along certain lines. He had become a powerful and original natural speaker, and could have made his way easily in Labour politics had he wished. But personal advancement has never tempted him. Dan could be bound down by no party machine, nor by any mechanized form of human improvement.

Not till after the War was under way did he realize the national consequences that must ensue from rampant profiteering in house property, which would follow the enforced cessation of all private building enterprise. For the details, brilliantly and amusingly written, of this little-known struggle on the home front we may refer you to Dan's own book, fifty times as interesting as its title would suggest, *Landlords and Tenants*, if you can get it.

There are many who maintain that the astounding activities of this almost obscure second-hand bookseller saved England at that moment from a real revolution, and almost in defiance of the larger part of the house- and property-owners of the country. What France saw she had to do spontaneously and immediately England was compelled to do, and was compelled to do by a stony-broke Cockney tradesman. It was an epic contest, comparable only to that between Jack and his giant. The age of fairy-tales is not yet past.

For Dan placed his rather chubby finger slap on one of the sore spots of modern society, the private ownership of a national need. Bread may be the first thing that man must have, but a roof is certainly the second. And nowadays if a man has twopence he does not split them up as Mohammed suggested, one penny for bread and the other for flowers of the white narcissus. The white-narcissus days of civilization are temporarily in abeyance. The modern proportion would be about one halfpenny for bread and a penny-halfpenny for roof.

The housing problem was not controlled by **great corporations**, as was the bread supply. It was in **the hands of a**

swarming mass of small speculators, human vermin breeding on the poor as virulent as the bugs that swarmed in their slum dwellings. As M. told us, the capital value of the worst slum property is so high that the reconditioning societies cannot buy them at a profitable capital outlay.

With the sudden cessation of all private building, resultant on the War, the lucky house-owners found themselves owning a corner in man's second immediate necessity. Rents were starting to rocket when Dan stepped in. Few uninquiring people realize the wave of revolutionary indignation which was beginning to sweep through the families of the private soldiers at the heartless profiteering in poor men's rents which was threatened at that time. Read *Landlords and Tenants*.

Dan had this characteristically London trait: no London street ever seems to go straight to anywhere; it wangles its way. So also Dan, almost penniless, and confronting an influential, moneyed, and consolidated class, could not go straight. He also wangled. He wangled gorgeously, wittily, blusteringly. With his leonine roar he laughed his way through obstacles that might have daunted many a more important man. Then, having forced Parliament to make laws that saved the roofs over the heads of the soldiers' wives, he had to start another organization to compel the magistrates—property-owners most of them, and almost all in active sympathy with property-owners—to administer with justice the new laws, which they despised and disliked.

Meanwhile his business had collapsed from inattention, for Dan could not be bothered with selling books while he was saving the homes of the nation.

Dan introduced us to his particular lunch-table. This had such peculiar features, something so incongruous and so London in its make-up, that it will not be out of place.

Every day in the dingy upstairs room of a small Soho restaurant a group assembled for lunch. The central figure was Robert Steele, the brilliant and beloved medieval

scholar, then and still at work on the gigantic task of editing the complete works of Roger Bacon. Other principal daily diners were Netta Peacock, then editress of the *Russian Year-book*, Colonel Maude, military expert on the *Evening Standard*, Levatt and Stevens, socialistic window-cleaners, Dan, busted bookseller and president, secretary, office-boy, and general Pooh-Bah of the War Rents League, Victor Rendel, novelist, and editor of the *Athenaum*, and Whisky Bill, a blasphemous American painter, rescued from the clutches of alcohol by a Christian Science wife. The original nucleus had gathered under the shadow of William Morris and the Fabian development of his ideal socialism, but all political bias had long ago disappeared.

To these seven or eight steadfasts others came and went, so that sometimes the table, which would hold six at a pinch, was surrounded by fifteen or sixteen chairs. Among these lunchers were Arnold Dolmetsch, who at the moment had set clavichords and lutes aside and was trying to push on to the Government a charcoal cooking-stove of his own design; Holbrook Jackson, editor of *To-day*; Webb, the woodcutter; Jo Simpson, the painter and caricaturist; J. W. N. Sullivan, then analysing and detecting the German newspapers for the British Intelligence Department; Le Riche, chief examiner in French for the British Navy; Jo Davidson, the American sculptor; Claude Houghton, whose novels have since proved his worth; Wray, correspondent to the *New York Tribune*; Middleton Murry; Elizabeth Banks, poet, artist, and designer of toy elephants; John Ferguson, the Scottish modernist; Heron Lepper; Anne Estelle Rice, the American painter; Scott Stokes, once secretary to Cardinal Newman; Miss Scott Stokes, his brilliant daughter, then regenerating the basement service at Harrods; Miss May Morris—and others. . . .

Of this daily gathering Steele was the Dr Johnson. His ferocious "That be damned for a tale!" seemed to sweep all argument on one side, though it really began the discussion. The queer part of the whole was also typical of London Town, an unexpected coherence in all these

incongruous parts. Day by day they congregated, though the casual observer would have said that they had little in common. Colonel Maude was a typical smart soldier of the old school. Whisky Bill was blatantly Middle West, and periodically invited the whole gathering to migrate to God's Own Country, though he never explained why he had remained himself so long an exile. A full half of the



pimple-nosed artist's conversation consisted in blasphemous expletives, and each time that he let off a particularly raw sample of Middle Western the Colonel would jump in his chair, and his eyebrows would twitch like a pair of railway signals operated by a signalman with St Vitus's dance. The good Colonel had invented a system of perpetual motion, which he was always trying to get Sullivan, as a mathematical and scientific expert, to examine. And pushed across the many discussions, literary, philosophical, critical, or merely anecdotal, might come homely reminiscences of Levatt, who, although he was now the part owner and manager of a big window-cleaning company, had started life as a butcher's son, and boasted that with a heavy meat-cleaver he could chop in two a fly perching on the block.

To the crowded table Dan would bustle up, bearing an invariable botde of slightly sour Medoc, his daily drink, whether in funds or broke.

" **Well, Dan,** how goes it? " we would cry, and as he

lunched heartily he would tell some new tale of a cunning wangle effected on behalf of a distressed client.

Man cannot live by ideals alone, though. How Dan at first kept his end up at all, hampered as always by a total lack of funds, was a mystery. Now his fame was spreading. For the half-crown subscription he offered valuable advice, and even help in court, aided by a philanthropic and clever lawyer, Schultess Young. Indeed, Dan was becoming so well known that to find a place where he could carry on the work became a real problem.

He lived at Turnham Green, a typical suburb, some way out beyond Hammersmith, yet his house was crowded every evening with consultants, and he was forced to see people till late into the night. Mrs Cecil Chesterton, always enthusiastic for any really efficient social push untrammelled by red tape, at first lent him a room on her stairs near the beginning of Fleet Street. A few days later there was a queue of subscribers waiting to see Dan. In a few days more it became so large that extra police had to be detailed to manage the obstruction, and the tobacco merchant, owner of the house, though himself a liberal-minded man and willing to help in any way possible, had to protest that it **was** ruining his business, customers not being able to approach his shop.

Dan moved to another office. The same thing occurred.

By the end of the War he had collected half a million subscribers. The clerical work must have been incredible, and had he been ambitious and held his association together Dan might have been able to exert great political pressure.

But that wasn't Dan's way. Personal ambition did not move him. There was a necessary job to be done; he did it, quite thoughtless of the benefit he might himself derive from the task. As soon as the urgent need seemed over he lost interest in the problem, and turned his attention to **other things**.

During the height of the campaign Dan showed a quality rare in reformers, an ability to see arguments on the other

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side. Bertrand Russell has said that if house-heating were a matter of political opinion one-half of England would keep its rooms at freezing-point, the other half at boiling-point, Dan was no freezer or boiler. He was never even a tenant maniac; the idea never dominated the man. He was just as ready to take the part of a landlord who was being unjustly treated by the tenant as he was to take that of the tenant unjustly treated by the landlord.

Such a width of vision is a hopeless asset for one bent on political success, or, indeed, for anyone bent on any kind of success, since success comes as a rule from narrowness, not width, of vision. The man who wants to get on must be quite ignorant that the fence has two sides, and that there can be the slightest virtue outside of his own backyard.

The War at an end, the rent laws fairly well known, magistrates moderately controlled, landlords reasonably submissive, and tenants less urgent, an admirer offered to set Dan up once more in Museum Street. But almost simultaneously with the opening of his new shop Dan discovered a new focus of wrong, the workhouses. Many soldiers coming back from the Front had been unable to find work. Driven with their unfortunate families from pillar to post, they had at last been forced to take temporary refuge in the workhouse. Once inside, they found difficulty in getting away. Though theoretically they were free, practically they had become almost prisoners.

Dan rushed to their aid, and, in investigating the trouble, found conditions changed superficially from the times of Dickens and Bumble, but fundamentally little altered. He got himself elected on a Board of Guardians, and started once more his career of trouble-maker. Which gives us one of our most satisfactory imaginary pictures: Dan with his leonine guffaw, his immense buoyancy and bluffness (also bluff), his cheerful contempt for all forms, manners, and rigidities, making hay of that civic collection of local magnates.

" I'll tell you the kind of thing that is happening all over the country," said Dan one day. " There was a very decent

ex-soldier, his wife, and three kids. Been in the workhouse three years now. The thing works this way: can't get work because he's in the workhouse, can't get out of the workhouse because he's got no lodging that he can go to, and can't get a lodging to go to because he's got no work. That's a pretty vicious kind of a circle, eh? And the workhouse people, *they* don't want to help him; able-bodied men in the workhouse do all the jobs for nothing; the good women work as slaveys without wages. I've had to run round. Got him the promise of a job, got him the promise of a lodging under guarantees for the rent, found a guarantor. So they *had* to let him out. Then at the last minute there was another snag. Kids had been three years in the house. Their clothes had been put away ... grown out of them. Nothing possible to go out in. So round I ran to a charitable Catholic woman I know, and she helped them out with the clothes. Workhouse wouldn't give 'em any. Don't you believe it. Now think of that going on all over the country ... all over this blooming country that we were making a place fit for heroes to starve in—what? "

Civic reform went hobbling badly in double harness with Museum Street bookselling. A full half of the time Dan's bookshop was locked and inaccessible. Once more Dan retired rather hurriedly from business, to become technical adviser to a firm of young publishers. And this job Dan held till the publishers in their turn closed down, one young aspirant having found a far deeper interest in model engines, and the other having married a wife, and so couldn't attend to business.

Coincident with this new failure, the threatened repeal of the Rent Restrictions Act has given Dan a new opening, and probably an urgent one, in the field that he has so triumphantly made his own.



CHAPTER XXIV

A BIT OF ARSON

D A N in his character of cheerful aid to the distressed million naturally could not rest at mere rent restrictions or work-house prisoners. One thing dragged another in its train. Once people discover a person who is willing to give help without sermons, and in a way totally divorced from the repellent atmosphere of institutional charity or committee-fed benefit, they will roll up in their hundreds. Dan's help was undoubtedly of a non-institutional kind; he contrived to invest it with a peculiar aura of genuine humanity. Almost anybody, no matter what kind of a tangle he was in, would be sure of getting the right kind of understanding from Dan, because of all reformers, lame-dog helpers, and natural philanthropists whom we have known Dan is the only one who shows no hint of moral judgment. This is

probably because Dan himself has the first and most essential gift necessary in a genuine reformer: he has no moral standards.

The breadth and depth of humanity that such a statement implies may be incredible to the ordinary man, who must live his little life by rule of thumb. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner* is not a true statement.

One day not long ago Dan arrived at the restaurant, and we could see at a glance that he had a new and living case of trouble in his pocket. An extra twinkle brightened his eye; his laugh was, impossible, more leonine than ever. Certainly he was on the track of somebody in a mess, for the only hard-luck story which does not excite Dan's sympathy is his own.

"Hello, Dan!" we greeted him. "What's in the wind now?"

He ordered a *tournedos napolitaine* and fried potatoes.

"Odd case; one of arson," he said, with a bellowing laugh, as though arson were one of the funniest little home amusements in London.

"But how the devil did you get hold of an arson case?"

"Well, this really came out of a rent case, sort of sideways. There's a woman and her husband—at least, he's not, but that makes no difference. Came to me one night, trouble with the landlord. Going to distrain. 'You lock the door,' I says. 'Don't let him in. I'll see to it.' Selling eggs round the markets they are—got a cart—great lump of a woman, like a lot of bolsters tied together, and a little worm of a man, who orders her about. . . ,

"I heard nothing of them for a time, but a couple of days ago the worm turned up at my house all of a sweat. She's in the police cells. It seems that the landlord bounced 'em without any proper order; sent in his men and cleared out the furniture. And the fools never let me know a word.

"Left behind a mattress, a few picture-frames on the wall, and an old packing-case or so. . . .

"Next morning—I dunno, worm got the hump, I suppose—wouldn't get up and look after the egg business. Stayed

there till the pubs were open. By this time girlie got in a hell of a rage. * All right, laddie,' said she, or words to that effect. ' If you won't get up you shan't go to bed.' Piled the mattress in the middle of the room and set fire to it. Of course, nobody likes fires going on under them, so they ring up the police and the Fire Brigade. . . . There was a shouting and a scurrying. Mattress never blazed at all properly, only smouldered and stank. Still, the old girl had got some rags of her temper left. . . .

" ' You'll be charged for this,' says the copper.

" She stands there, so I learn, like a fat porpoise on the cross, and yells out:

" ' All right, then! You put me in for something I didn't do; now you can put me away for something I did do.'

" Gives the blooming show away—that's the worst of it. Don't quite know how we are going to get round that. And it's true, too, she's been in police hands before. Silly business. She and the worm drove up to a general shop in Harrow Road. In she goes to buy herself a hat. Picks on a couple of choice ones, and runs out with them to show to the worm. Meanwhile the police have moved Mr Worm with his cart round the corner. The hat girl is after her, and blest if she doesn't go scooting down the pavement looking for the worm. Had up for shoplifting, see? There you are, previous conviction. Looks bad. . . .

" Sent up to Old Bailey, perhaps, and it may be three years. But I'm hoping the magistrate will see the rights of the case. I mean, it's absurd bringing this in as arson. . . . It's merely a case of hysterics, and you can't send a woman to quod for that. Come along with me to-morrow. . . ."

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For the police-court Mrs Jennings had decorated her wide and pendulous person with a purple blouse and a hat with a green ornament. Her bulging face, built for the repartee of the market-place, was tinged with a blend of bewilderment and defiance. She had the look of an animal in a trap, for she was in a trap, the trap of the law.

From the outlook of the bewildered, unorganized, illogical mind of the uneducated poor the police-court is a trap, and little else—that is, as long as the police have intervened. To the magistrate they will come bearing their family troubles; they will trust him, an independent arbitrator. But once the police have stepped in his functions change in their eyes; he is a part of the system. The system has got you, and will put it on you if it possibly can.

So, to their minds, the police-court is by no means a fair arena, in which justice is sought out impartially. The scales seem to be weighted; and, of course, they actually are. The defendant cannot hope to make his case really clear; he has had no practice in public exposition; still less can he hope by cross-examination to dissect the opposing evidence—that is an expert's business. Nor can the lawyer do it properly for him, since the lawyer cannot see within his client's mind, and is often more concerned with getting through the case as conveniently as possible than with seeking out the exact truth. So the client is aware that even in the lawyer's hands a case is seldom tried on its real merits. It is argued out in a maze of obscurity; the trap of the law, not the liberty of the subject.

Behind the actual law is the court missionary, who seems to hold a preliminary secret tribunal, of which the verdict, though not openly stated, may be clearly implied, since if his verdict is favourable he may exert pressure on behalf of the accused. A lack of pressure may easily hint at an unfavourable decision.

Although arguments can be brought against this point of view it is the one most commonly held by the poor, and is the outcome of a bitter practical experience. After all, it is not the ploughman who is in the best position to know what the toad thinks of the harrow.

Small wonder, then, that Dan's fat client stood there flamboyant but dazed, turning dog's eyes on Dan, her only hope.

The first witness was the woman who lived above. Under a hat perched at a *chic* angle a most *unchic* yellow face glinted

malice at the unlucky criminal. Several times Mrs Jennings tried to correct the witness.

" 'Ere, it wasn't like that—— "

" You must not interrupt," insisted the magistrate. " When your turn comes you can ask any questions you like."

A look of despair settled on the criminal's fat face. Ask questions? How could a body remember all the misstatements, let alone ask questions, afterwards? That is how it was. She felt cheated. Never let you get in your own version properly the police didn't. . . . The job was hopeless.

" Now," said the magistrate, " any questions to ask? "

" Yes, sir, please, sir," said Mrs Jennings. She hesitated. How could she make that tissue of misleading statements straight? Her intelligence gave way under the strain. Hopeless. At least, there was one question which could be cleared up.

" Please, sir, will you make her tell you that the window was open at the bottom and propped up with a milk-bottle? "

" It wasn't," snapped the witness.

" You're a liar—it was! " screamed Mrs Jennings.

" You call me a liar, you—— " snarled the witness.

" Silence! " cried the magistrate, rapping the table.

The next witness, a girl, who gave her occupation as "lady of independent circumstances," was clearly sympathetic to the fat egg-woman. But in reply to Mrs Jennings' crucial question she could only reply, " Well, it might have been."

" Might have been? " said the prosecutor. " Was it or wasn't it? What did you see? "

" It might have been," said the girl. " But I couldn't say, I'm sure, for what with the fuss and the running round I never looked at the window at all."

" Then why couldn't you say so? " asked the magistrate.

For a moment the policeman recalled seemed to be on Mrs Jennings' side. Yes, he did remember that the window was open. Then he dashed her hopes. " At the top, I think," he added.

" No, it weren't at the top. Why, the top's been stuck this two years! It was at the bottom," wailed the prisoner. " Please say it was at the bottom."⁵⁵

By this time the court was deeply interested in the window and the milk-bottle, although Dan was whispering in Jo's ear, " I can't think what this blessed milk-bottle has to do with the matter."

" Was it the top or the bottom? " the magistrate asked the man.

" My impression is that the top was open," said the policeman kindly, but firmly, " but I shouldn't like to swear one way or the other."⁵⁵

The two firemen could give no information on the vexed question. Only Mr Jennings swore, with worm-like vehemence, to the fact. Still, he was Mr Jennings; his evidence went for what it might be worth.

" Please, sir," he concluded, " I'd like to say 'ere and now that Maggie 'as always bin a good girl, though a bit⁵asty, p'raps. And it wouldn't do ter put a woman away just for a bit of temper, would it? That larst time, now, a complete mistake——"

" Herrumph, herrumph! " said the magistrate severely. He wasn't supposed to know that there had been a last time.

" You let 'er orf this time, and I'll look after 'er," said Mr Jennings boastfully.

But when Mrs Jennings⁵ part came to plead the window and the milk-bottle played no part in the defence.

" Gan't think what she's been trying to get out with that milk-bottle business," muttered Dan to Jo.

Mrs Jennings was committed for trial by a jury of her peers at the Old Bailey.

By this time Mrs Jennings had taken rather a fancy to the magistrate. He had not been hard on her, and, after all, he did do his best to get evidence for her on the milk-bottle question.

" Please, sir," she bleated, " can I be tried by you, sir? "

" Nonsense, woman, of course not," snapped the magistrate

testily. His sudden irritation was only the self-defence of a kind-hearted man against all the pitifulness that he daily dealt in.

" Well, then, sir, can I have bail? "

We don't suppose that Mrs Jennings had any real idea of what bail meant. To her it probably meant some dodge by which one could go free till the trial came on. How could she, who could not raise a pound or two for a lawyer, hope to find bail?

" No, impossible,⁵⁵ said the magistrate sharply.

" But, sir, you can't 'ave me shut up till——" Mrs Jennings had a sudden awful vision, all the consequences of her rash act descending on her -relentlessly. " Why, 'Any carn't never 'andle the egg business all alone. It'll be fair ruin, that's what. These two days 'as been bad enough."

" You should have thought of that before," said the magistrate. • . .

" Here," said Dan, " I'm off to see her in the cell, and to find out the great milk-bottle mystery."

The worm came sidling up. Before the trial he had handed Dan a pound towards the solicitor's expenses and general court fees.

" Please, sir," he said, " can I 'ave my quid back? "

" What? " said Dan.

" Well, you didn't get 'er orf, did yer? "

" Look here, my lad," said Dan cheerily, " if you don't want your wife to go in for three years you'll have to raise a damn' sight more than this pound, I can tell you. Now, then, get to it. . . ."

The worm looked at us in a bewildered fashion.

" Excuse me," he said, " but seeing you with Mr Rider there, I thought. . . not being introdooed—that is, are you anything 'elpful and Christian-like? "

We assured him that we were Christian, although not very helpful, only sympathetic.

" But," we questioned him, " what about this window and milk-bottle? What did it mean? "

"* I dunno," he said.

" But you swore the window was open/ "

" She told me to," whined the worm. " But it didn't 'elp much, did it? "

" It certainly did not."

" I didn't think it would," said the worm. " And 'ere she's gone and left me with the egg business on me 'ands. I'm sure I don't know 'ow I'll carry on, I don't. I do think the magistrate might 'ave given 'er bail, don't you? "

He stood a moment twisting his hat in futile hands. Then sidled off.

Five minutes later Dan came hurrying up.

" I've got it! " he cried, with one of his characteristic and tremendous guffaws. " Here's the mystery. Ever heard anything like it in your life before? Was she worrying about putting in a stretch of three years for arson? Not she. What she said to me was, ' I can't 'elp what they're going to do to me, can I? Once they got yer, yer for it. But one thing I wasn't going to 'ave said rahnd our way. I got a cat and kittens and a puppy—well, then, I wasn't going to 'ave them say that I could set fire to a place and not leave a 'ole for them to get away by, see? ' "

" In fact," said Jo, " all her efforts were concentrated on trying to prove that she had done the thing deliberately."

" That's the way their minds work," said Dan. " Get them fixed on one point, and they'll follow it out, no matter where it leads to. . . ."

As we left I said to Dan :

" Now, what is it going to cost that woman, even if you do get her off at the Old Bailey? "

" I can get a barrister pal to do it for nothing, I hope, except for copies of the depositions. She'll have to pay for those."

" All right. But if she had no way of wangling it, and **had** to pay foF her defence? "

" Oh, thirty or forty quid."

" So that if a poor man is wrongfully accused and can find no friend at court he cannot hope to defend himself adequately unless he can raise forty pounds ? "

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" And lots do get convicted, too, just because of that," said Dan.

.

Jo followed the case when it came on for trial at the Old Bailey. She was introduced into the court by the barrister who, seeing that Dan had once helped him with a rent difficulty, generously took on some of Dan's cases for nothing. Many lawyers, like doctors, give their services free to the poor—provided, that is, the poor can get a proper introduction.

Queen Anne is dead, but how many realize that the English Bar is still in mourning for her, and that the grey wigs, white bands, and black raiment are signs of grief for a poor lady whose name stands now for little but a locution and a period in furniture? As a sign of character the wig is interesting. There is the wig aggressive, the wig sedate, the wig hilarious, the wig ferocious, the wig worldly, and so on, all depending on the set, the fit, the cock, and the state of dilapidation. The two little tails that dangle down behind from the rows of neat curls are oddly like two little legs, and dance a ballet of their own, the ballet of the law. These tails have calves, ankles, heels, and toes; like the legs of marionettes, they prance their frivolous way through the most solemn of solemn cases, ridiculous comments on the majesty of common justice.

Mrs Jennings, blooming like a big purple velvet flower, once more faced British justice.

" Guilty or not guilty? " asked the clerk.

" Not guilty," squeaked Mrs Jennings.

Rapidly the evidence was presented. There was little that Mrs Jennings⁵ barrister could do for her; the policeman did not attempt to repeat his police-court exaggerations, nor did the milk-bottle theme reappear.

The judge looked up.

" Mr D——, I confess that I cannot understand why the accused has pleaded as she has. As far as I can understand she has publicly admitted that she did in fact. . . . From the evidence she hasn't a leg to stand on. If it goes before the jury the law will have to take its course, and Til have to

sentence her accordingly. It is most irregular, but can't you get her to reconsider her plea? "

" I have tried, my lord."

" Please try again now."

The barrister stepped across to Mrs Jennings. An undertoned discussion followed.

" She has consented to reconsider her plea."

" Guilty or not guilty? " said the clerk.

For a moment Mrs Jennings looked mutinous. Inside herself she knew that somehow she wasn't guilty, and to have to say that she was, with all the neighbourhood talking about it, was a hard task. Wasn't the lawyer there to defend her and to get her off? But he had told her that he couldn't get her off at all, and that if she pleaded guilty she would get less ' time * to do. Still, it was bitter hard, pleading guilty before all those women. . . .

She opened her mouth like a gasping fish, and from the back of her throat, with an odd, childish note, very strange in so large a woman, breathed, " Yes, sir."

" Yes? What does that mean? You must plead guilty or riot guilty."

" Jest as you like, sir."

" It's not as I like at all. It's not my business. Do you plead guilty, then? "

Faintly Mrs Jennings assented.

" I understand," said the judge, not too harshly, " that you were in a highly wrought up and hysterical condition, that your man had annoyed you, and you wanted to give him a lesson. I expect that your nerves must be in a bad condition, and that what you need is a period of rest in which to think things over. Doubtless you didn't realize that the burning mattress might have set fire to the house, and thus endangered the lives of the inhabitants. . . ."

" Please, sir," bleated Mrs Jennings, " may I say a word, sir? "

" If you wish," said the judge more gravely.

" Please, sir, abart this setting fire to the 'ouse—wdl, seeing the way it was kep' and the rents we was charged for

rubbish, and then the landlord taking away my furniture, which he 'adn't a right to do, not as Mr Rider says, I don't see that there was much 'arm done in setting fire to *that*, and as for endangerin' the lives of that worthless lot that lived——"

" Silence, woman! " roared the judge, banging his desk. " Three months in the Second Division. Take her away."

" You see," said Dan, " it all depends on the intelligence and good sense of the judge. We were scared because this man is High Church, and looks rather harshly at a bit of living in sin. Simply because the woman wasn't married we thought he might pile it on a bit, but as things were he wasn't so bad. We couldn't fight the case properly, because they wouldn't call the only witness favourable to her, the little prostitute. And we couldn't call her because they would have shot her morals to bits in the cross-examination."

" But what would her morals have to do with her evidence? "

" Nothing, but they would have played the dickens with the jury. The jury system doesn't really try the rights of the case, but only the prejudices. The whole of British justice rests on the common sense of the judge.

" We have been wondering a good deal about the psychological results of our much-praised system. Here we boast that a prisoner is considered innocent till he is proved guilty. But that is only a boast. In the first place, he isn't treated as if he were innocent. But, in the second case, the theoretical assumption of his innocence tends to place all the weight of the trial and all the efforts of the investigators on the side of guilt. What everybody in court is thinking is guilt, guilt, guilt? But if the prisoner is presumed probably guilty, as he is in France, the question becomes whether he may not possibly be innocent. And so the trend of investigation is innocent, innocent, innocent. Is it not possible that under the French system fewer guilty men escape and fewer innocent men are condemned? Excluding political cases, of course, for as soon as politics come into play in France nobody expects justice. . . ."



CHAPTER XXV

THE DAINTY DOSS-HOUSE

ONE cold evening several years ago we were having supper with Mrs Cecil Chesterton and her adorable secretary, known to the world as 'Bunny'—otherwise Miss Dunham. The occasion was memorable. Mrs Chesterton, called by all her friends 'Keith' had been commissioned by a well-known London paper as a journalistic adventure to leave her house with no money in her pocket and no written character. She was to see how a talented woman with a capacity for cooking could keep herself alive for some ten days or so. The actual details of this thrilling adventure can be found in her book *In Darkest London*, but we who shared that final

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sausage-and-mash supper and pulled her clothes into a suitable shabbiness little realized the outcome of her adventure.

Curiously enough, a day or two later, dressed in all our glad rags for a supper with Raymond Radcliffe at the Café Royal, we found her in Piccadilly Circus with a match-tray. She had already become a twopenny capitalist.

Passers-by in that circus of strange encounters must have been astonished to see a couple in full evening dress fling themselves enthusiastically into the arms of a wretched-looking beggar-woman on the gutter's edge. Grasping her arms, we hurried her towards the door of the Café Royal, the match-tray bounding before her, and all the matchboxes on it dancing mad little sarabands. But her resolution held firm. She refused to enter, and reluctantly we had to leave her in the bitter wind. . . . But at least we had the satisfaction that evening of toasting her courage in excellent Burgundy.

Keith returned from that expedition with a passionate resentment of the horrible difficulties, discomforts, inquisitions, and criticisms facing the homeless woman.

Nobody has put this point of view better than herself, and the result has been that tremendous effort made in memory of Cecil Chesterton, her husband, indefatigable champion of the * put-upon.'

Having such an intimate knowledge of the origin of these houses, Jo determined to spend a night in one of them.

However, she wanted to do this unknown to Keith, fearing that a friendly solicitude might try to smooth the path too much, and in smoothing out some of the difficulties might also smooth some of the natural humanities.

After broadcasting for elementary school-children about port-wine farms in Portugal, Jo hurried home and turned out her suitcase, full of clothes for our motor-bike trips. There was an old serge skirt, washed and shiny. The coat was grubby and greasy from motor-bike troubles. The shoes and stockings and a weatherbeaten Shetland cap matched **the** suit in dilapidation. It was only too easy to frazzle her **hair, detach** a wisp, and rub her hands up and down **the grubby coat.**

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She slunk out of the noble entrance of our Victorian abode, and hurried down the street, hoping that the lynx eyes of Enniscorthy Gardens were not turned her way, thinking, " How those Bohemians do disgrace the place! "

Outside King's Cross she approached a red-faced newspaper-man.

" No use playing at being a Cockney," thought Jo. " Better be a battered, worn-out gentlewoman."

With an exaggeration of timidity she showed him a paper on which I had printed the name of the street. Sucking his teeth, the newsvendor peered at the paper.

" It's the Cecil 'Ouse you'll be after," he said, and gave her a friendly pat on the shoulder. " *You'll* be all right to-night."

" Cecil House " was written up in big letters across a neat plain front, as if it really wanted to be seen. Jo felt easier, though very nervous, about being spotted as a peeping Thomasina.

Inside the doorway was a narrow passage, and a kindly face could be seen looking through a pigeon-hole window.

" Is there—er—could I have—a bed? " Jo asked anxiously, keeping her voice without much intonation.

The matron gave a smile and said, " Yes."

What a precious quality in that single syllable! For many years Jo had seldom heard one mere word that acted so powerfully upon the imagination. Fake though she was, it relieved even her of a load of anxiety, and what must it not have meant to the homeless women, grateful for even this slight temporary rest from the bitterness of the street? She gasped with genuine relief, " How much? "

" A shilling," said the matron. " Your bed'll be number twenty. What name? "

Jo hadn't thought about a name. She looked at her questioner in a panic.

" Josephine Turner."

The matron wrote it down as if she liked the name.

" That's all right," she said. " Do you want to go out **and** come in again? "

" No. Some one told me—there was—is there—a bath? ^M Jo faltered.

" Surely/* said the matron. " Here's a big towel; **and** do you want soap? "

Jo furtively held out a crumpled paper bag, in which she had pushed toothbrush, soap, and an old nightdress.

" I have—a tiny—bit,⁵" she answered.

" Here's a nice piece,³⁵ said the matron, " and you can use it all."

Jo sidled out, and crept upstairs first, to search for bed number twenty, and found three rooms. Some pretty casement curtains were drawn, and in the shaded light she could see cheery blue-and-white counterpanes on beds that were divided from one another by neat wooden chests. The beds were well separated, like hospital beds, but somehow the rooms looked cosier than hospital wards. Perhaps because the ceilings were not so lofty; perhaps because of the curtains.

The bathrooms were downstairs, all white and spotless. The baths, big ones, gleamed. The walls were white-tiled.

Oh, the delicious restfulness! Gushing hot water—any amount of it! She happened to be just tired enough to get an inkling of what that bath, that welcome, and no questions must mean to an overtired, underfed, homeless woman.

After the bath—that was that; but now came a nervous moment. Jo had to face the other lodgers. She wondered how she could carry off this disguise of a battered lady who had seen better days. She wondered with a hint of panic whether her fictional capacity would stand the strain of their possibly expert curiosity. But on reaching the sitting-rooms she was received with so easy a sense of comradeship that she felt reassured.

The sitting-rooms had a cheery effect on the spirits. Such blazing fires! And the woodwork was painted a blazing orange-vermilion. There were lots of comfortable brown wooden armchairs and some long tables.

On the tall nursery fender of the inside sitting-room a few undies were being dried, and gossiping round the fire

were the early arrivals, half a dozen or so. Considering their destitution, they were amazingly clean and neat.

In one corner-seat was a tall twenty-five-year-old, her head haloed with a wreath of curl-papers. Opposite her was evidently the seat of honour, occupied by a middle-aged woman, whose mouth twisted on one side as she talked. She was dressed in dingy brown, and her brown scarf had a hole in it, which did not escape comment. Rags were not in favour. She explained why she hadn't mended it.

Although merely a lodger, she claimed and got some deference, and was addressed as "Nurse." At first she certainly appeared to be an outworn Sairey Gamp.

"First time I've ever known the radiators to heat up so slow," she said, in a granulated voice. "Was your bath-water hot? "

"Oh—it was!" Jo gasped. "So hot—I was—almost frightened."

Jo gathered that not only could you have a bath, hot water *ad lib.*, but you might wash all your clothes and dry them on the radiator.

A sharp-nosed girl who had been hunting for a job as hotel servant said, "I'm off to the shop for some fish and chips. 'Ere, I'll leave a notice to keep my seat."

She wrote something and showed it to Nurse, with a pleased toss of the head. Nurse twisted her lip, and the girl popped the paper on her seat and ran out. Nurse remarked, "I don't think that sort of language is clever. Anyone can do it."

"That's right," said a childish-looking girl with her golden bob so carelessly cut that she might have done it with the nail-scissors. "But, still, when everything's the bloody limit it relieves yer some'ow."

Nurse ignored the remark, and the sharp-nosed girl returned with a paperful of fish and chips, and offered Jo one, which Jo took gratefully.

"Wot colour's them knickers?" said a girl with a bound-up wrist, dreamily gazing at the clothes drying on the nursery fender. "Would it be salmon? "

" **Peach**" answered Nurse, sucking up a rush of saliva induced by the mention of the luscious colour.

" Peach/" repeated several voices voluptuously.

A tall woman in a tailor-made, followed by a faithful terrier, came in and handed everybody some slabs of bread and butter and mugs full of hot tea.

" A nice woman. Must be—behaves well to her dog," said a cadaverous old body who was keeping up a low buzzing monologue, which sounded like distant bees on a summer's day.

A bulky old soul accepted her piece of bread, and later on handed it to Jo, saying, " To-day I've 'ad a full day's eatin'."

Old-fashioned corsets pushed her full figure upward to meet three double chins. She was the spit of the *Punch* caricatures of Sir William Harcourt.

" Wot 'aven't I eaten to-day? " she said. " An' some'ow I can't fancy my supper. . . . Began with gripe-fruit this mornin'."

Jo was interested and mystified, but nobody else listened.

" An' then me dinner was steak an' kidney pie—stewed rhubarb—and they gave me a bit o' cold beefsteak an' onions before I left."

Everybody woke up. Golden Bob murmured wistfully:

" Wot / fknies is mutton wiv onion sauce."

" Lamb an' mint," corrected a girl whose cheeks were a little fatter and mouth a little more pointed than the Mona Lisa's.

Everybody mentioned some solid, sensible dish, and swallowed with melancholy satisfaction.

Jo thought of the Serbian retreat. After tramping for five weeks and feeding on occasional eggs, otherwise falling back on our own bag of rice, filled with something that resembled live fleas, we also had comforted ourselves by repeating the names of good, plain meat dishes.

As we lay on the floor of a dirty pub in San Giovanni **da** Medua, thirteen of us, eleven men and two women, we **would** murmur dreamily in the darkness, " Sausages that

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go pop in the pan," or " Cold roast beef, rather pinkish/⁹
The latter was Jo's special longing.

Our yearning for these things seemed to grip with anguish
not our tummies, but our hearts.

The lady with the chins continued to intone a long list of
the day's edibles. No one seemed surprised, but she deemed
that an explanation was due to Jo as a stranger,

" 'Ad a day's work at a pub, you see," she said.

The thin-faced girl had unbandaged her swollen wrist.

" Gaw," she said, " 'ow it do 'urt! "

" Bandaged too tight," said Nurse, with an authoritative
sniff. " I know them 'orspital students."

" Has she burned it? " Jo asked the woman with the chins.

" 'Ousemaid's knee, dearie," she replied, " only it's tuk
'er in the wrist."

Nurse was telling everybody a dramatic story about
some one who had behaved very badly. " Wrote me two
letters of apology she did—and 'er writin's that illiterate."

" That's right—an' then folks says one's hard! " cried
Sharp Nose. " Tries ter push'yer down. That's wot folks
does. . . . 'Ave another chip," she said to Jo.

Jo sat munching, vacant-eyed, but listening with sharp
and eager ears, and noticing what she could.

The golden-haired girl was hardly more than a child,
but her crude, almost unconscious cynicism showed that life
retained few mysteries for her. On Jo's left was a dark little
seventeen-year-old with such a red-painted mouth that it
stood out beyond her small face, like a doll's, and her brown
eyes moved from side to side as if a string were pulling them.
You expected to hear her squeak " Papa," " Mamma."

Both girls suddenly began to complain about their feet,
and took off their shoes and stockings.

" Well," said Nurse, with a prim pregnancy to Golden
Bob, " walkin' about all day as *you* do, it's natural."

The Dark Dolly contemplated one of her own toes with
soft pity.

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" An' I'm always paintin' it with iodine," she sighed.

" Jes' wot yer didn't orter do! " snapped Nurse.

Another pair of feet appeared. Mona Lisa also had her foot troubles.

" Didn't I tell yer? " said Nurse, pointing at the wad of cotton-wool which was separating two toes. " Gettin' better that is. Workin' up for a fine bunion you was, with your love of a natty shoe."

Sharp Nose defiantly pulled off a badly laddered stocking.

" Talkin' of bunions," she said, " that's the real thing."

" Oh, poor girl! " thought Jo. " How can she wander round looking for work with a foot like that? "

Here Golden Bob made some cynical remark about a lot of boys who were collecting for something.

" To-morrow I'll get my mutton an' onion sauce," she laughed.

Nurse turned the granulated voice on her.

" None of us criticizes you for 'ow you leads your life," she said. " But it ain't interestin' to *hus*. 'Tain't no subject for conversation."

The girl's wide eyes had the curious lack of expression to be seen in those of a scolded school-child. Nurse belonged to the age which had a right to nag and be disagreeable. Her words couldn't hurt.

Golden Bob looked round.

" I've got two little toes on my left foot," she said, and stood wobbling like a stork while she tried to display her foot to the circle.

Jo took her arm and steadied her.

" Let me look," said Curl-papers, craning to see. " Hmph! " That was her one remark for the evening.

Nobody seemed convinced by the double toe, and Golden Bob sank into her chair.

" That," she said, " is wot I've got."

Nurse changed the subject back to the drama and the illiterate letters of apology. There was another story about a woman who wanted to borrow Nurse's comb and lend it to somebody.

Nurse's voice droned on, like a coffee-grinding machine.

"An' I sez to 'er, * Lend yer *own* comb.'... I'm particular I am. . . . Why, I wouldn't lend my comb to nobody—not if it was the Queen 'erself asked."

"Did you read about Ivy in the papers?" said Mona Lisa.
"Came here once or twice she did. Got caught trying to do away with herself."

Golden Bob turned her enormous faded blue eyes round the circle.

"I don't seem to 'ave the nerve for that," she said, turning to Jo. " 'Ave you, now? "

"Not just quite," Jo answered.

"Tried it once wiv a gas-oven," she continued, "but I leffor after the first sniff."

Nurse again changed the subject. Certainly she didn't like Golden Bob, who always seemed to be overstepping some invisible law of etiquette. The dark little doll was also obviously following the oldest profession in the world, but she was less blunt; also she was happy that day.

After wolfing her fish and chips—"The first I've 'ad to-day"—she fetched a letter out of her shabby vanity-bag, and stretched it out to Nurse and the 'housemaid's knee' girl.

"See 'ow 'e wants me again," she trilled, with pride.
"Can't get along wivout me 'e can't."

"If ye're talkin' of that messenger boy," said Golden Bob,
"Vll chuck yer as 'e's done over an' over."

Dolly's face looked radiant.

"Naow. Straight, 'e wants me back bad, I tell yer."

It was ironically touching to see the pathetic delight of this girl, who, selling her body in the street to any chance comer, could yet be moved at the thought of somebody who wanted her for her own personal self, and not as a mere instrument of sexual pleasure.

Here everybody stopped talking to listen to a remarkable argument between Mona Lisa and Nurse, gynaecological and obstetric in character. Nurse's display of apparent learning revealed only too clearly the fictitious nature of her title.

Golden Bob interposed with some startling statements, and was promptly squashed by Nurse.

The talk went on, no mere London party patter. Every one was talking about subjects that really interested them. They were right down to the raw facts of life—liberty, danger, illness.

A sudden clamour interrupted the talk. They all turned to watch a quarrel between an untidy old woman with a basket and a solid, short-skirted woman all cut of a piece, like the figurehead of a ship.

"You'd better look to yourself,"⁵⁵ said the short-skirted woman, with meaning. "Matron will be drawing the line at such as you."

"Matron's got nothing to say against me" retorted the old woman. "She knows my profession. Professional step-cleaner I am, and that's more respectable than some."⁵⁵

She flicked her eyes round the younger members of the group.

Everybody turned on the old woman. Slut she might be, but could have been worse.

"Just look at the mess you're in," they said. "You'd better look out."⁵⁵

"You know" said Mona Lisa, "Matron offered her a pair of shoes, and she won't have them."⁵⁵

"Wot?" said the old woman. "Me take new shoes?" " 'Oo'd 'ave pity on me if me boots looked too good? "

As she stumped off Jo gathered from muttered remarks that her opponent with the sensible boots and sturdy leather gaiters was a beetroot-boiler, who peddled the succulent ruby roots on a coster-barrow in a street-market.

It was late, and by some subtle intimation almost equal to that by which the hostess draws the ladies away from the dinner-table the women sensed that it was time for bed.

These are typical of Mrs Chesterton's methods. There were no harsh-voiced commands—no sergeant-major-like domination. . . . They all slowly arose, as though of free will, and trooped upstairs. By this time Jo realized that no one walked quite naturally. Everybody had some foot

trouble. And so with the others she walked slowly and painfully up to the bedrooms.

Each person picked up her bag or package, and carried it up to the bedroom, where Jo noticed later that each package was carefully stowed into bed with its owner. Sharp Nose's vanity-bag was stuffed so full that it was evidently acting as a suitcase.

A pretty woman was sitting on her bed talking dolefully about a hospital and an operation. Her knee was swollen badly.

"They wanted me to stay an⁵ see the specialist," she was saying.

"Don't you worry," said an unwieldy young woman whose bed was next to Jo's. "You've been through the X-rays, so 'arfthe battle's over."

"Not if me leg's got to come orf," wailed the sorrowful girl.

"Won't 'ave to. The X-rays done a lot for you, an' now you've been serious enough to go through the X-rays—why, they won't dare not to take you into 'orspital! And that'll be the best time you ever 'ad in your life. I've 'ad it at the Garret Anderson. Nothin' to do but stay in bed an' eat beef.

"Now, take me. It's different. I've got an incurable complaint." Everybody pricked up their ears. "It's a goitre, that's wot it is."

"Wot's a goitre?" asked the tired old woman, stopping her buzzing, bee-like monologue.

"It's a galloping goitre wot I've got. 'As a lot of little legs—like a hoctopus. An' it gallops round inside you that fast—the doctor can't scarcely never catch it. Once in 'orspital they got it 'eld fast in me froat. They did it lots of good, but it got away from them it did."

Subdued moans were coming from under the bedclothes of the poor girl with the bad knee.

"Brave, that's what she is," burbled the old Buzzing Bee. "Crying . . . trying to keep it dark."

The beggar-woman had been complaining about an open window, and remarks were being exchanged.

"Ow, you make me tired!" ejaculated Galloping Goitre. "You cost me sixpence a week in Aspros."

" More fool you to *buy* 'em," retorted the beggar-woman.
" I gets all my aspirin free—charity."

The squabble developed until the beggar-woman suddenly sat up on her dignity.

" Don't you forget I've bin an engaged woman."

" And jilted," sneered Galloping Goitre.

" 'E never did. I gave 'im up. ' Letitia Maud,' sez 'e-"

" Letitia Maud!" cried everybody.

" That's me. An' me mother's name was Susan Dora."

" Now, that's queer," pondered Galloping Goitre, softening.

" My mother's name was Dora Susan."

Here the occupants of eight beds supplied the double names of their mothers. The ninth bed was superior. She had a mother with three names.

In the semi-silence which had fallen Golden Bob suddenly said loudly:

" And she sells her body in Regent's Park."

" Ow!" shouted Galloping Goitre, and, turning in bed with a movement of exasperated protest, she covered her head with the sheet.

" Well, wot's she to do?" protested Golden Bob. " 'Er 'usband's deserted 'er, an' there's the baby to keep."

" You know a lot, you do," said Sharp Nose, who took Nurse's side in keeping Golden Bob down.

" I know becos I goes to Regent's Park wiv 'er," said Golden Bob, displaying the pride of a child who proves that she is grown up.

Again this blunt remark was received coldly, and Jo realized that Golden Bob had again overstepped the decent obscurities of her trade.

Jo left one eye open over her sheet, and watched the old beggar-woman peel off several faded cardigans. She wriggled into a puzzling but not unclean garment, and wrapped round her head the hopelessly laddered silk stockings a charitable lady had given her that day.

Conversation gradually tailed away, with its accompani-

ment of the buzzing old woman. The silence was broken occasionally by the suffering girl's stifled sobs under **the** blankets. . . .

When Jo came down in the morning some of the lodgers were drinking tea and eating their slabs of bread and butter.

The three-chinned woman offered Jo another slab of bread and butter.

" Food don't seem to mean no think to me to-day," she said. " Oh, wot a night I've 'ad! Orful. It's that there gripe-fruit. They made me take that instead of beer; said it ud be good for my froat. I expect it mixed bad with the liquorice I was taking, an' the allspice too."

Jo looked at her stupidly.

" They say there's quinine in it."

" Quinine, is it? Well, quinine don't go well with liquorice. I'll never eat them nasty gripe-fruits agine. I feel like my bed I do."

" What'll you do? " Jo asked. " Sit in the park? "

" Yuss. An' rilewey-stations if it rines."

" Ooo! A letter for me! " cried a fine-looking girl with a strong column of a neck and vigorous curly hair.

" See what Lyons have sent me? 'Tain't so bad. See what they says about me? " She held up an official-looking sheet. " That's a fine character they've giv me. Of course, I always was more civil than some of those saucy flappers."

Golden Bob, Dolly-face, and a sad-looking girl with a bright orange dress turned wistfully and gazed long at that paper, a thing they had never possessed, could never get—a character.

Dolly-face was almost unrecognizable, so pale, with anaemic, white lips. She was economically applying little dabs of cream on her nose. Out came her paint paraphernalia. She tipped a mirror in front of her, and soon the red, red mouth was pouting beneath the white, white nose. **She** again fetched out her precious letter, the letter from **the boy who** really wanted her.

" **What would you do?** " she asked, **putting it under Mona Lisa's nose***

Mona Lisa read it with the expression of a responsible lawyer. She squealed, pointing to one phrase.

"Fd, I'd . . . stiffen 'im fer that!" she cried.

"Still . . . 'e do really want me," said Dolly-face.

Mona Lisa drank off her tea, and looked fiercely into the bottom of the mug and then at Dolly-face.

"I'm readin' your fortune in the tea-leaves," she said. "An' it's for your good I'm tellin' you. Keep off the Euston Road to-day. The tea-leaves tells you that. You'll be shut in to-night if you don't. They've put on extra police. I'm tellin' you for your good."

Dolly-face looked rounder-eyed than usual — rather thoughtful. . . . She edged off to Nurse, who was sitting ready, dressed for the ten-o'clock exodus.

"Does the tea-leaves tell yer wot's true?" she demanded.

"Neaow," grated Nurse. "When it comes orf right they sez it's wonderful, and when it don't they sez nuffink."

Dolly-face stood on one foot, weighing the sore-toed one in the air. She looked round at the gay red paint, the crackling fire, the pictures, and walked slowly out.

A few days later at a gathering of the earnestly intelligent Jo said to me, "My God, what rot these people are talking! They seem to have lost all their humanity. For real interest, real friendliness, and real conversation give me the Cecil House."



CHAPTER XXVI

THEATRICAL

To a full half of the dwellers in outer suburbs London itself is little more than the place where sales and theatres happen, and of the two, who shall say which is the more important?

Although we were lucky enough to see the movies from inside-out at Hollywood, we have had but little connexion with the legitimate stage. Once Jo acted as part of a Spanish orchestra in a Stage Society production, and had the honour

of **getting** her eyes heartily damned by Edith Craig, Once I was tempted to take a part in *By Candlelight*, produced in English at the Theatre Femina, Paris. One night I particularly distinguished myself, for half of my moustache fell off in the middle of the scene.

From time to time during the War Jo and I had given small illicit thrills to a queer little actresses' *café* behind Leicester Square. I was in uniform, lieutenant in the R.N.V.R., although I had never been nearer to the quarter-deck than the Royal Academy Schools, which were the headquarters of the Naval Camouflage section, under the well-known marine painter Norman Wilkinson. Jo and I had formed a habit of meeting at this odd little backwater of a *café*, where touring actresses forgathered in a cosy room with comfortable wicker-chairs. A fat and motherly ex-professional called most of her clients by their Christian names, and conversation dealt almost exclusively with personalities or the geography of the British Isles.

"Where's Dora now?"

"Oh, haven't you heard? Why, she's at Stoke-on-Trent, with the third *Lovely Jane* company. ..."

It was a plump, genial, scented world of its own, on the fringes of which we used to sit, sipping our coffee and eating our pinkly sugared buns, lapped in a discreet aura of sympathetic tact, due to a suspicion of romantic sin.

Many readers have enjoyed Priestley's novel *The Good Companions* because, although the characters stand up solidly English and in the round, the episodes seem somehow just removed beyond the bounds of probability. Realism and romance are cleverly blended, and romance becomes for the time reality. Yet how often the old adage "Truth is stranger than fiction" is found to be true! As a rule, the strangeness lies in the regions of coincidence, which, happening with uncanny frequency in actual life, could not be admitted to serious fiction that deals not with possibilities, **but** with probabilities. Yet what could be more unlikely

than that a whole romantic situation set out in one of the most popular of recent novels should, almost simultaneously, be repeating itself in actual life?

Among Dan's many interests is that of the Arts League of Service, a society which brings good drama to the remoter villages of England, Scotland, and Wales, the actors transporting their own scenery in caravans, and more or less paying their way as they go. At the dress rehearsal of a new tour he introduced us to one of the producers, Miss Judith Wogan.

The question of 'luck' or 'no luck' is always open to debate, though seldom settled, like that between freewill and predestination. Most of those who fail are ready to ascribe their failure to lack of luck; most of those who succeed are generously ready to give luck a fair share of the credit. Yet on meeting almost anybody who has achieved success a peculiar quality may be felt, and hardly ever has success been gained unless this quality is present. One might say people are like sound jugs or leaky jugs; luck may pour success indifferently into either kind of jug, but only the sound jugs can hold it. But you may also find quite sound receptacles into which the necessary luck has never been poured. Still, the capacity is there to be noted—by the sensitive observer.

This capacity for success reveals itself often as an almost luminous toughness of human quality. When you meet such people you can feel that they seem a little more condensed than normal humanity. Think of the old catch about a pound of feathers and a pound of lead, and you have a similar sensation that a pound of such a person should weigh more than a pound of the everyday man. Yet this extra sense of weight is not dead weight, as in lead, but a living, lively weight, the extra vital weight of the potentially successful.

Modern psychologists have now admitted that their hopes from intelligence tests and so on to grade humanity according to its future tasks in life have been disappointed. For the intelligence test gives no measure of a capacity for success, which may modify or even invert the other tests and

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measurements. So the prize-winner in intelligence may fail in life, while the * moron ⁹ may be pre-eminently successful.

Yet whenever this potentiality exists we should be able to recognize it. It surrounds personality like an aura, something like the field offeree round a magnet. There are fakers of potentiality as well, such as the bluff commercial traveller or the vacuum-cleaner salesmen.

Naturally such radiations of success are given off in varying degrees. The most powerful radiators of success are often rather repellent to meet as human beings. They are like a drink that is too potent. Their specific gravity is too high. In human contact one bumps off their personalities, feeling slightly dented in the process. Such hard-centred, bumpingly potential people are almost always successful. They need no luck. Those are the ones who start as drummer-boys and end as Field-M Marshals; who start by sweeping out the office and end by sweeping up the House of Lords.

But the person dowered with just the right amount of success potential is the best of all humanity, humanity well sauced.

Though few ordinary persons would call Dan a success, yet that potentiality radiates clearly from him. So also it was one of the most striking features of the *petite* figure of Miss Judith Wogan; that and the sparkling quality of her eyes.

" You get her to take you to her theatre," muttered Dan. " Interest you it would."

" Certainly," said she. " Come any time you like. It's the Grafton, right under the hotel, you know. But really it is an awful show, non-stop variety. . . ."

" Yes," said Dan, as we went off together to tea in a genteel *café* run by near-ladies, who gave us near-vicarage tea in an atmosphere of near-frigidity, " queer girl that. Real, she is." Whenever Dan calls somebody real he means it. " Started this little theatre to produce good stuff, intellectual, eh? That's what she is interested in. Development of the drama. But it would have been no good keeping it on over the summer, eh? So, instead of shutting the place up, she **let** it to a variety company and went off for her

holiday. Off the map, yachting, roughing it. Comes back to her hotel to find a sheaf of letters, telegrams. . . • The manager has bolted with the cash-box and the company is up the spout. Huh! What's to do? She at once chucks her holiday and dashes back to London to help 'em out. Good Lord, she's not interested in non-stop variety! But for five months now she has been running that shop, just to keep the poor beggars off the street. Oh, yes, a good girl she is! Worth knowing. . . ."

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Miss Wogan's little theatre was underground. Once it had been a tiny local cinema specializing in wild and woolly Wests or films of the penny-blood description. But she had hollowed it out, and redesigned it with square pillars and amusing modern art transparencies painted by an East End artist. As a theatre it was the ideal size.

The great London theatres suffer from a distortion of scale. The needs of the pay-box have enlarged and enlarged theatres till they are quite out of proportion to the possible capacity of any actor. In the world-wide contest of quantity against quality quantity has submerged the good sense of the theatre.

In the huge theatres imposed by the huge expenses of the modern play the illusion of the stage has been driven too far away from the audience. All except a few favoured stall-holders see and hear the drama too diminished by distance. Emotions should be conveyed by volume and tone of voice, and by the visible size of performer. One cannot really sympathize with a sorrow or passion that arrives to the ears as a thin, reedy whisper, nor can you feel very deeply the heart-break of a mere pygmy figure. A certain distance is needed, but only just enough for the footlights to gild the figures, so that they are shaped in light more than in perceptible grease-paint.

For a theatre this distance may be short, and so the growing popularity of the intimate theatre is justified. But in a music-hall the characters are drawn with a cruder brush,

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more like dashed-off caricatures than finished portraits. Therefore the distance to create illusion may be much greater, and the large music-hall is appropriate to its own subject-matter.

Miss Wogan's little underground theatre, large enough for an intimate play, was not really large enough for an intimate music-hall, if such a thing were possible. So that in this tiny and modernistic theatre, with its back-screens of folded aluminium sheeting and its elusive lighting, the show had much of the effect on the artistic palate of fried chips and pickled onions eaten off a dish of expensive modernistic ware. And to find a woman of Miss Wogan's calibre running such a show was much like finding the editor of *Art Work* running *Ally Slope's Half-holiday*.

The mainstay of the performance was a long-legged, lean personality called Fred. Fred had the angularity that marks so many a hardened music-hall actor. His face looked as if it had been carved from very hard wood with a blunt pocket-knife, his arms and legs were jointed like those of a marionette, and his clothes had been shaped by use at the knees and elbows, so that altogether he looked more as if designed by Tenniel for an old *Punch* cartoon. He acted as *compire* and stage-manager, besides appearing himself in several acts under different names, as singer, dancer, or mimier. Later we found that he had a wide *repertoire* of songs with choruses exclusively vegetable in kind.

The bright spot in the show was an old music-hall star tempted from her retirement, who gave imitations of yet more remote stars. In her we could feel the inherent potentiality of success, which, despite the disadvantages of age and an outworn fashion, could still shine luminously.

"I'm trying to keep up a series of old stars," said Judith Wogan. "Among the amazingly poor stuff that is offered one has to do something."

Later that evening in the little bar—for Miss Wogan was licensed to sell wines, spirits, and tobacco—we were introduced to another old star eager to be tempted from retirement.

"Oh, yes" she said, preening her feathers and drawing

up her now dumpy figure to its fullest extent, " I was **the** original creator of that famous success, *You winked at me, my Lad*:⁹

And vaguely I remembered a *vignette* of my lost youth, the gallery of the old Euston Music-hall, and far below, at the bottom of an illuminated well of vision, a small figure in a bright blue satin ballet-skirt and swansdown, shrieking raucously and with naughty gestures kicking up its legs into the air.

It was indeed a case of " Itchabod o' man," as Mr Polly said.

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Later we were again invited to the Grafton to hear an audition. All the raw material out of which the smaller non-stop variety shows had to be constructed was weekly passed in review.

One small advertisement in the *Stage*, and up they poured, feeling within themselves the potentiality of genius. And down there on the stage, in turn, they squalled, bleated flabbily, sang off the note, kicked up their heels, performed the same old song and dance, sometimes well sung and badly danced, sometimes well danced and badly sung.

" We let them go right through their acts," said Miss Wogan. " But in many places they are whistled off before they have well begun."

" It's pretty tough."

" Perhaps, but the majority deserve it. They have no right to appear at all. But what is pathetic is to see really promising talent often so badly produced that one can do nothing with it."

As each turn was concluded Fred, sitting next to the owner, nursing a big book in which he noted all particulars, would shout in a comforting voice, " That's all right! "

But the concluding phrase was perhaps a better indication.

... iar.

" ... **thanks.**"

" ... **then Q.**"

" ... **letcher know if we wantcher.**"

Or " . . • lemme see, *what* is your address?"^M

Most conspicuous was the lack of imagination displayed. The old stuff well done, the old stuff badly done, nevertheless it was almost always the old stuff. If one argued that anyhow here were only the dregs of musical talent offered, yet it was, on the other hand, a part of the thin cream of *any* kind of talent that floated high over the capacities of the normal untalented mass. With so many of the theatres shut down, so many of the halls become cinemas, so many so-called artists out of work, this was the height of superfluous talent left unemployed, and this superfluous talent showed a minimum of originality, merely the product of the suburban song-and-dance master's classes.

This seemingly harsh comment applies only to the *better* portion; the worse was almost beyond imagination. The old joke of the stage-struck housemaid and of the cook-wife with aspirations of the Vincent Crummles is no joke at all, but merely the bitter truth. Here they came displaying their poor shreds of talent, as though the living skeleton of a freak show should enter for a beauty contest.

At last, almost at the tail of the sad procession, a tiny, crouching man climbed down to the stage. As he took his place we saw that he was hunchbacked, and his face glistened with a peculiar grey pallor. With the gesture of a Lear he waved the accompanist aside, and at once began to sing in a low, barely audible voice a completely unintelligible song. It was almost like listening to the wind whistling in the rigging of a ship or hooting in the chimney hollows. We sat there wondering what would develop, but the old man stood there whistling on and moaning till Fred called out, " That's all right, thanks."

The hunchback took no notice, but remained on the platform, rocking himself to and fro and moaning vocally.

"That's all right, o' man! Heard enough! Thanks!"⁵⁵ shouted Fred, with emphasis.

The old man clicked up his head, and stood staring into the darkness of the theatre.

" What's that? " he asked.

" That's all right, o' man. We see what you do now. That'll be enough to judge on."

" But you ain't seen my act yet," protested the hunchback.

" No, but that's all right. We know where we are . . . see? Let you know. . . . Got your address here. . . ."

Still protesting, the hunchback was urged from the stage.

" Sent us a letter, that one did," said Miss Wogan.

" Two pages of it. Here, have a look. . . ."

The letter, written on a dirty piece of paper in almost illegible pencil, began:

After my song I shall proceed to give a vigorous representation of a shipwrecked man escaping from four pirates. After a terrible and blood-curdling chase, during which I baffle my enemies several times, I am captured. I then give a grim and realistic representation of a man about to be beheaded, but at the last moment I contrive to escape. . . .

This continued for another page and a half.

" Trouble about a show like this," confided Fred, " is that it takes time to work it up. You've got to get it properly known all round about, get the people in the habit of coming regularly, see? Oh, I've no doubt that in time we'll have the snappiest little show here of all the small non-stops in London! . . . "

Fred had no misgivings. This was his life. But for the artistic mind of Juliet Wogan the experiment can have been little less than murderous from beginning to end. A few weeks later she had a good opportunity of passing the theatre on to a spiritually more profitable experiment. And thus this living example of the truth that truth can at least be as strange as fiction came to an end.

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A voice over the 'phone called me.

" This is Mr Dolphin speaking, stage-manager of the Hippodrome pantomime. I happened to hear that you had a play. I have a company that is looking for a suitable play. Might I see yours? "

Talk of coincidences!

At a New Year party in Paris the host came up to me. "There's a chap very excited to know you are here. Says you and Mrs Gordon changed the course of his existence." We were introduced to Warren, then manager of Crawford's Advertising Agency in France. He told us that he and his wife and child had been living in an underground flat in Birmingham, almost down and out, physically and spiritually. By chance he found *Poor Folk in Spain* on a second-hand bookstall. The book had given them a new outlook on life, and from that moment they had gone ahead. They looked on that purchase as the turning-point of their career.

A few years later Eirene Millar turned my novel *Piping George* into a play. She had offered it to an agent. At the very moment that the agent was telephoning an enthusiastic report of the play to a possible customer Mr Dolphin, Mrs Warren's father, who knew of us only by hearsay, overheard the conversation. He had tried then to get a look at the manuscript, but the agent, hoping to plant it on a well-known actor, was aloof. The play had not proved as acceptable as the agent had hoped. There were managers who liked the first act, others who liked the second, and still others who liked the third, but he could find nobody who liked all three at the same time.

On one occasion it fell into the hands of a Manchester magnate who was proposing to set up as a theatre patron. From his wife Miss Millar's husband, acting as business manager, received a letter from which we have made the following extracts:

To MR FEARON

I herewith return your 'play.' . . .

I think the less said about it the better. Surely the fire would be the best place to put it.

I cannot understand the mentality that could consider anything so vulgar and so sordid. . . •

The person who wrote *Piping George* would be better employed sweeping the streets.

Yours truly,

MAY MARLOWE

This letter may have been prophetic, for if this present book is not "sweeping the streets" it must very nearly be.

Now, Mr Dolphin, needing a play, had heard by chance that we were in London.

At the Hippodrome he introduced us to the publicity manager, who readily gave us permission to loiter and sketch behind the scenes at the big pantomime. One night we presented ourselves at the stage-door.

A short passage brought us straight to the back of the stage, where formerly the Johnnies lingered flirting with the ballet-girls, as depicted by many an old-time artist. But they don't linger and flirt there now—at least, not in modern pantomime.

No sooner had we stepped into the narrow labyrinth left between the serrated edges of the standing scene and the packed masses of the flats not yet used than we were surrounded by a rush of girls all dressed as hobby-horses, who ran past us hurrying, right and left, towards their dressing-rooms for a quick change. Three flights up some of those girls had to scamper between each change of costume, and little time to stop and flirt even if there had been any space left for the Johnnies.

Behind the scenes the unofficial intruder had to be always on the alert. He felt very much as a beetle might feel which had got inside the works of a piano during a piano and orchestra *concerto*. While before the scenes on the stage the pantomime might be developing normally, behind was a silent scurry, and woe betide anybody who got in the way. In one theatre they told us that an unwary visitor had got his arm broken only a week before. Huge pieces of scenery, precariously balanced in the hands of brawny stage-carpenters, came rushing along the narrow corridors.

At one moment you might be absolutely alone in the dimly lit back-stage areas, and at the next you would be almost submerged and overrun by a mob of dancers and chorus-girls crowding in haste to the flies. And all this colour, all this sudden impact of human energy, developed almost in silence, like the passage of strange ghosts on the edge of a cardboard purgatory.

The half-lit world behind the scenes was a strange place, altering every few minutes in size, shape, and colour, peopled by the actors, dressed in garish style, waiting their turns, by the stage-carpenters in overalls, thrusting or pulling at the flats like experienced librarians pulling books from the shelves, and building in a few minutes with the flats, made only of wooden laths and painted canvas, huge and apparently realistic objects, a ship, a balloon and basket, a toy-box big enough to hold ten girls dressed as wooden soldiers. And a few seconds later, when these things had done their work, they were disintegrated back to their flat constituents, and once more stored in book-like order.

Down on the left was the big switchboard, from which all the lighting effects and the curtain were controlled. Everything had to be drilled to the cue word, twenty times as precise as a regiment on parade, stage-hands drilled, electricians drilled, actors drilled, dancers drilled, chorus drilled. . . . Rattling off an evening's amusement with an eye on the clock. Time-tables? Railways are nothing to it.

" Yes, sir," said the assistant stage-manager, " I have to keep a schedule of every scene every evening; how long it lasts, how long the intervals, and how many *encores* for each song. And if we're a minute off time for any scene the boss bloody well wants to know why."

" That's a feet," agreed an actor who had just come off the stage. " And lots of managements used to want to know why you don't get the same number of *encores* every night. Say you've been getting four *encores* for a particular number, and one night you happen to get three. They'll have you on the mat to know what's happened. How can a chap be sure? Even the weather makes a difference, and there's a hell of a difference between audiences. But some of these bosses take you for a machine. And it puts a man off badly, too. Gets the wind up about his *encores*, and then can't do his best work."

" They don't do that so much now," said the assistant stage-manager.

" No, they don't do that much now," agreed the actor, " but it's baiji enough as it is."

" You're right," said the assistant stage-manager heartily.

" What does *he* do when he's not in pantomime? " I asked, as the actor went away.

" Oh, he's all right," said the A.S.M. " Wife's got a little business, quite comfortable. Takes what jobs he likes, and in the summer works a concert party on the beach. Nothing to worry about, not him."

Jo, who had been chivvied into a corner by a sudden spate of charging scenery, found herself against a small door which suddenly opened at her back.

" Excuse me, madam," said a dresser, " you'll have to step away a bit, I'm afraid. You see, there'll be a gentleman hurrying in here to change in a minute."

Jo squeezed herself into a corner. A moment later Dick Whittington's cat bounded from between the flats, dashed across the space with soft thumping feet and flung himself into the tiny room.

" I wonder," mused Jo, " what he is going to change into."

A minute later out he came decorated with a big pink bow.

" Best cat actor in the profession," said an acrobat dressed as a pirate. " Used to do an animal show of his own on the halls, but he's getting older now. Still, he's quite comfortable. Wife's got a little business, you know. . . ."

" Come over here," said Mr Dolphin, hurrying up. " There's a rather interesting bit of scenery-changing done now."

We peered round the corner over the A.S.M.'s shoulder.

The big curtain fell heavily on the applause. In the subsequent gloom the whole stage appeared to come monstrously to life. A row of painted houses seemed to kick up their heels and gallop across the stage as though they meant to flatten us against the walls. But at the last moment they swung about, turned themselves inside out, and came to rest as the interior of a medieval kitchen. One had a momentary vision of an earthquake without the quake.

"And you mustn't miss the firework display," said the stage-manager. "Miss Gompton goes up in a balloon surrounded by catherine-wheels."

"But you can't use real fireworks in a theatre?"

"Oh, no, it's a trick! You watch it, and tell me how it's done."

The firework display was most realistic. Against a dead blackness of black velvet the catherine-wheels threw off glittering coronas of sparks that whirled in all directions. There was no fake about the whirling sparks . . . most realistic. Against this brilliant background Dick posed on the edge of the balloon basket. Then *click*, down came the curtain; *snap*, the fireworks stopped as if by magic. . . .

"Well, how is it done? . . . Emery wheels driven by electric motors spinning against steel blades," said Mr Dolphin. "But they're a damn' nuisance, all the same. It's ten to one that a motor refuses to work, or that something sticks. . . ."

"Why, of course," I said, "carborundum wheels. That is the job I did for a year during the War, finishing up the finer running parts of the aeroplane engines at Rolls-Royce's. But we didn't look on those sparks as things of beauty, I can tell you. All they meant to us was steel-dust in the lungs. And now you are using it in pantomime, to amuse the kids."



We were astonished at the intense interest that the actors themselves, especially the dancers and chorus, took in the play. They had already been at work six weeks, not counting the week* end rehearsals before that, yet, although they might not hang about and flirt, at almost every opportunity they seized positions in the wings to watch the principals, Leslie Henson, Fay

Compton, the Cat, or the Aunt, at work. They watched with an intensity that amazed us. One would have thought

that in six weeks of performances and several weeks of rehearsals they would have been sick and tired of their own show.

This continued delight in the spectacle, a sweet theatrical innocence, was also expressed as a regret that we had not seen the show from the front. " Oh, now you've seen it from the back you *must* see it from the front," they said reproachfully. " I'm sure Mr P. would give you tickets." Nor would they have understood had we replied that from the back the human spectacle was a dozen times more interesting than that from the front could ever be.

During the interval Mr Dolphin brought us to the stage-manager's cubby-hole, a tiny office behind the stage. Here were the A.S.M. and a girl, the ballet-mistress. She looked very young for so important a post, but her apparent youth covered a high competence, and the radiance of an inherent capacity for success gleamed within her.

" If I think any girl on the stage isn't doing properly I have to tell this young lady," said Mr Dolphin. " Then she passes it on. To tell the girl direct wouldn't be correct at all."

On talking to the ballet-mistress we discovered another incongruity. Her head, her arms, her legs, her skill, might all be in the theatre, and, since she had so important a post, they must have been of considerable value, but her heart was in the Isle of Man, where the people still believed in fairies.

" I hate the town and the theatre," she said. " I love the country. Tried to escape from all this I did, and got away for five years, too. But this crisis pushed me back again. . . ."

Contrary to the natural idea that everybody connected with the stage ought to look on a London job as the climax of ambition, the sentiment in the stage-manager's box was all for the delights of the provincial tour.

" No bother with *matinees* every day," said Mr Dolphin. " Why, here in London you've never got any time to yourself. And often you have to run round all the morning as well, looking after things. It means that you're often in

the theatre twelve or thirteen hours a day and six days a week. Now, in the provinces, working only nightly shows and Saturday *matinhs*, you have all your daytime free. And at week-ends, if you've got a competent stage-carpenter, you never worry about the stuff from Saturday night till Monday evening, . . ."

" And you haven't got the bosses on your back all the time, neither," said the A.S.M. bitterly. " Well, boys, I'm off for a quick one."

The ballet-mistress took Jo up to the girls⁵ dressing-room. Four steep flights up they climbed, and Jo was breathless enough by the time she had reached the top, yet the girls, after dancing their parts on the stage, must rush up at full speed, change in haste, and rush down again, to dance with unabated vigour for the next scene.

The ballet-mistress opened a door. A clamour of voices burst from within.

" This is Mrs Gordon," said she. " She would like to make a sketch or two, if you don't mind."

The girls welcomed Jo heartily.

The dressing-room was little more than a bit of cut-off corridor. Behind the chairs of the girls drawn up to the long table, with its comprehensive mirror, there was only just room to pass by, pushing into the mass of cloaks and



tights and coloured costumes hanging along the wall. Faces smiled at her from the long mirror, some chalk-white, covered with powder, with staring pink cheeks, or one still white, the other red. Fixing Jo with an authoritative glare was a bobby's huge *papier-mâché* head, standing on a cylindrical neck at the corner of the mirror.

Jo felt an interloper, but just' as nobody loves a fat man, so everybody seems to like the artist, and soon she was put at ease. A hobby-horse costume

and a pair of shoes were swept off a chair, and soon she was enjoying tea, toast, biscuits, and a cigarette.

" We've always said that Laura Knight ought to get busy and paint our untidy dressing-table," said one girl. Jo took the hint, and made a quick sketch of the litter, dozens of bottles, everybody's special taste in powder, lipstick, rouge, and grease-paint remover, mysterious tiny tubby bottles mingled with huge bottles and coloured boxes.

The whole theatre was in dismay to-night. An announcement had been unexpectedly posted on the board, stating that the pantomime was closing, without the customary notice. Yet in spite of this, which may have meant almost tragedy for many of the girls, they seemed to be taking things very philosophically, with that ready cheeriness of the London girl under adversity which was so noticeable during the War. " Gorne up agine," the Cockney women would giggle in the food queues. " Gorne up another 'ipenny—blimy! " As though the increasing of prices which pinched them week by week was nothing but a huge comic joke.

The huge six-foot girl who acted in the policeman's mask stood mopping her face. The gauze-covered holes in the enormous head did not let through enough air for comfortable breathing. Sitting primly next to her was a girl dressed in nothing but tights and a *brassiire*, with a litde white woolly collar round her neck. She was busily knitting a white sweater, and anxiously fiddled with the collar, which she was trying on. Evidently collarette and sweater belonged to each other. They represented pleasure; the tights and the *brassiere* were work.

" I've simply got to get this darned thing finished by the end of the week," she said. " I've got nowhere to go next.*

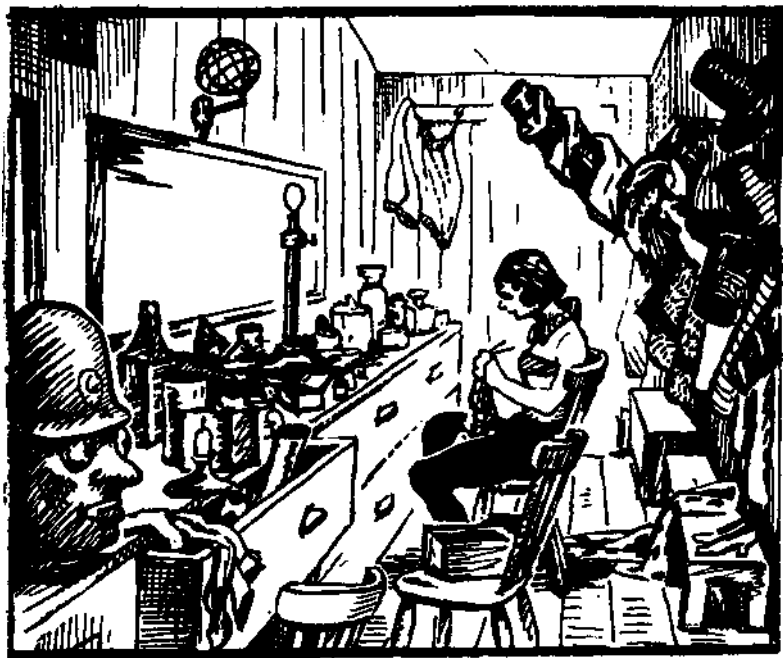
" If I were you I'd be hunting up the next job," said a girl wearing a medieval pointed hat, enormously tall, so that she had to move her head with great caution. " I believe you are thinking more about that blessed sweater than you are of your next job."

She had a pretty face, but **a sharp, responsible expression,**

the kind that reminds one of Hergesheimer's quip, "The worst of a good wife is that she sharpens up after marriage."

"Huh! It's not the dancers that need the dole," said the sweater-knitter. "Ballet's in now. We can always get a job when we want it."

"But you can't get it without going out to look for it," said the responsible girl, slowly wagging her enormous



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cornucopia with a ludicrous inadequacy. "Look here, there's an ad. in the *Stage* for six bottle blondes, and you won't even go along and nip it up."

"Well, I can tell you this bottle blonde is going to hug its little pillow in the morning!" cried a Florentine page, shaking her bob vigorously. She had no heavy headdress. "Performances afternoon and evening, four flights between every change. Catch me going out job-hunting in the* mornings. Let them find another bottle blonde."

A depressed-looking brunette was poring over the wanted

columns. Brunettes were blown on, she wailed. All the blondes made some retort, but it was drowned by a sudden blare of cacophony from either next door or just below. It seemed as though a sextet of saxophones and a few odd bassoons were having an argument, for they played out the same bar in umpteen different ways and seemed to disagree so much that several played their versions simultaneously.

The roomful of dancers could stand this no longer, and attacked walls and floor with fists and feet. The musicians, to prove that they were free-born, answered with a long, donkey-like blare. Then, to prove that they were also men of heart, they ceased their melodic argument and were silent.

The call-boy's voice changed everything. The room twittering with eager voices and a *frou-frou* of book-muslin became suddenly deserted, except for the knitting girl, the police-girl, and a depressed dresser wearing the philosophic smile of the shelved *houri* surrounded by youthful pranks and vitality.

" My people don't know that I have only a dresser's job," she told Jo. " They think I'm in the straight pantomime."

" Anyway, darling, lend me half a crown," crooned the knitter. But this the dresser was not willing to do, and they spent the rest of the time arguing about it.

The long police-girl was lying stretched out on two chairs. On her truly magnificent legs she wore a pair of amber tights.

" Oh, that's part of my first costume," she said. " I was really engaged to do a lovely lady, all amber tights and sex appeal. But these tights don't fit so darned well. . . ."

" What do you do to keep 'em up," Jo asked, seeing no signs of elastic.

" Pennies," she replied. " Stick 'em in the top, screw 'em round, and then tuck 'em in. That stops the tights from sagging at the knees."

She sighed.

• " Wish I didn't feel so rotten. But I'm going to dress and hide in a minute. My pal's offered to dress up and go down as me, but I'd rather manage if I can. It's queer, but we've

all been pretty bad this time. Only a fortnight's rehearsal, and working day and night. Simply a miracle the way the thing has got pulled together. But we've all had bad bouts ever since. Well, I suppose it's all in the day's work. . . .

" Funny job I've got next week. They're opening a new cinema out at Kilburn, and they are going to get Amy Johnson to be godmother to it for a week. I'm going to be doorkeeper. That I am clear about, but whether Amy's really going to be there . . . I hope she is."

Suddenly she bounded up, thrust herself into her uniform, slipped the policeman's huge head under her arm. . . .

" I'm off," she said. " If they come looking for me say I've gone down. But I'll really go and hide in the lavatory for a bit," she added, as she shut the door.

All this seemed so different from Jo's experiences with Eirene Millar in the dressing-rooms of a Parisian theatre.

Here in London was an atmosphere of good-fellowship, an undercurrent of larking and of the hockey-field, a kicking at discipline without any real intent to mutiny, a hankering for treats. But the more real things of life were hidden, though possibly only because Jo, the stranger, was there.

In Paris, on the other hand, just because Jo, the stranger, was there, the members of the dressing-rooms exhibited themselves more vividly than as a rule. There the dressing-rooms were dramatic; the stage did not stop at the edges of the flies, as it does in England. Some neurotic women were still posturing in their own rooms, exchanging fulsome compliments, showing photographs of their babies and of their young men, comparing notes about lovers or about their jewels, discussing absent acquaintances, or even the latest book or picture show, arguing about ideas, or even offering one another ten per cent, commissions for any little job or favour that another could do for them.

The dresser was chanting the woes of the promptress: Everybody had been given a present by the management, but die promptress had been overlooked. This was little less

than a catastrophe. But to tell the story first: all **the** details of **the** promptress's life had to be run through, and then, as the dresser was determined to put the injustice before the management in a proper way, most of the details of the dresser's life had to be explained also.

In the midst of the tale the door was suddenly flung open, and a flat-faced young woman paused on the threshold, with a vapid smile. Round her neck were huge glittering jewels, such as one naturally associates with a visit to Clarkson's. She placed a beringed petunia-nailed hand complacently on her bosom, said something banal, and withdrew.

"Do you know what that was for?" said Suzanne, a young actress who had the most perfect vocabulary of filthy English words Jo has ever heard. "That was all for you, to give you a chance to see her jewels. Her soap-maker is crazy about her—such a girl, *hein*, with no distinction of mind at all! . . ."

"But were those real?" Jo gasped.

"Real?" cried Eirene. "She could buy up this theatre with them. And she has taken this little job only to show the world her diamond ring. Her Russian paid a hundred thousand francs for that."

"A hundred and forty thousand," said the dresser. "I know that's right, because my man knows a man who . . ."

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But actually it would be difficult to compare the Parisian dressing-room with a London one, especially on the dancing-girl level. For the French cannot produce successful dancing-troupes. The girls won't submit to the rigid discipline which holds all good dancing-troupes in control, and from which comes the almost school-like atmosphere of the dancing-girls' dressing-room.

As Eirene said, Thdrfese or Margueite will always put personal interests, lovers, headaches, or rendezvous **before their job**. They look **on** the theatre as a **convenient shop-window in which to display themselves**. So the majority of dancing-troupes have to be imported from England.

The higher ranks of the French stage are at least defended from one of the chief evils of the London, the evil of serious and experienced actors being crowded out by the wealthy and aristocratic amateur. The French stage is still quite *diclassi*, and the mere fact of being on the stage makes a woman socially almost unpresentable. This, of course, is all to the good, for one of the worst evils done to the artist is to make him a Society mountebank, and because the man is talented with his brush, pen, or voice expect him to be entertaining at the dinner-tables of the dull.

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Thrusting their way about with all the Cockney impudence of their kind were the children, tremendously self-possessed and skilled at their job, clever little mimes and dancers. And, again, in the children one could already spot those who had auras of potential success. Even when they were merely waiting in the wings some were obviously so much more vital than the others. It was instructive to note how deeply the dancing had already penetrated under their skins. Many of them were miming, posing, and posturing the whole time, and any tune set them irresistibly a-jig. Their nerves and muscles had been tuned in to the rhythms.

Walking among them like a baby princess was a tiny child who looked not more than four years old at the most. She had a song and dance of her own. Her minute self-possession was a miracle to see, but her actual age was kept a strict secret.

" Ah, that's a mystery," they replied to all questions, and a mystery it remained.

" You come over here and look up at that ' drop,' " said the A.S.M. to Jo. " It's loaded with girls."

Jo looked up. Suspended high over the scene was a drop-scene like a curtain, two feet thick. The front was patterned in a gilt rococo style, and set in it, strangely distorted to Jo's vision by the strange perspective, were a number of half-nude girls. The front curtain dropped for a moment; creakingly, because of its great weight, the scene, loaded

with all this beauty of living decoration, descended into place. And after the descent and a decent interval for applause it slowly ascended again to the high iron-grid balconies, where the members of that living and lovely load crawled carefully from their precarious situations back to normal safety.

An actor looked over my shoulder as I was drawing.

" My word, you do get it down quickly! " he said.

" You can't linger over a job," I answered. " Every man must know his trade. Only a matter of training. . . . "

With him I fell into casual talk, while on one side the carpenters were quickly constructing a platform over which the pirate and a little French dwarf were to play a set of acrobatic pranks.

" This isn't my real job," said the actor. " It's all this damn' crisis. . . . A chap has got to do what he can get. I'm a song-writer really. Why, I wrote that well-known song—perhaps you've heard of it—*Our Lodger's such a Nice Young Man*."

" Heard of it? " I said. " Why, when I was a student everybody was singing and whistling it! You must have made a fortune out of that."

" Oh, did I? " said the actor, without bitterness. " Why, look here, I made more in the last six months out of that song than ever I did when it was the hit of the year. You see, I wrote it with another chap. They offered us ten quid down or a royalty. Now, I was all for the royalty, but my partner was hard up. He wanted the cash. It was a gamble. How could anybody know it was going to catch on like that? It's easy to say afterwards, isn't it? So we took the cash, and not another penny did those publishers offer us, though they made thousands from it. But lately the gramophone people chose it for their disks. Old favourites, you know. Sixty quid I got out of that. Just off the disks alone."

" That was bad luck if you like," I said.

• " Yes, I never did another song like that one. And somehow they don't seem to care so much for my songs now! It's all this jazzy stuff. Won't look at anything else* The

stuff isn't melody, to my mind. But Pm coming back all right. Just finishing a musical show. Been at it some years. If I can get that taken on, you'll see then. . . ."

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" You come over and look at this" said Mr Dolphin, as they were erecting the scenery for the final *tableau*. " Did you ever see any painting rougher than that? Why, the shadows on the houses are just drawn in with great brush-lines!"⁹

And, in truth, the shadows on the building were only hatched in with lines, like a huge pen-and-ink drawing.

" But from the front," went on the stage-manager, " this is the most realistic scene of all. Those houses absolutely stand out solid."

The wings were crammed with the actors mustering for the *grand finale*. Into the already encumbered spaces behind the wings was led a huge white horse, on to which Miss Compton mounted.

" As old a stage-hand as any of them," said Dolphin. " Always use him for any horse work on the London stage. Worked in *Chu Chin Chow* he did. . . ."

The closing chorus burst into song, and the stage was packed with a glittering company. But behind one could clearly perceive that the night's work was coming to an end. Stage-carpenters were methodically restacking the flats for their next performance. The A.S.M. was looking at his watch and cursing under his breath.

" Five minutes late," he growled. " Can't we ever get this bloody curtain down on time? "

We began to realize vividly that, however much glamour there might be on the stage, precious little of it filtered out to here behind the wings. This was the daily job. With the same kind of relief with which a man hurries home from the factory or the mine these workers hurried away from the theatre. The job was over for the night. Time to get a quick one before the pubs shut. Yes, the front of the stage might glitter with silks, satins, tinsel, and art, but here were only

raw canvas and bare struts. No glamour for the stage-hands.

And not so much glamour for the actors, neither. The curtain down, while the theatre yet echoed to the last rounds of applause, the girls were racing off to their dressing-rooms. They also had done their job for the day. Those well-drilled dancing legs, all that syncopated sex appeal, were humanly tired.

Outside on the pavement lingered no Johnnies with bouquets and supper invitations. That fashion is over, and where once a crowd of the curious and the lustful used to gather now a few schoolgirls may wait, hoping to see a star in real life.

In the hearts of most who left that night was a cloud of dismay because of the closing notice, which had been posted up without the usual warning. So many weeks of rehearsing, and then only six weeks of show, spelt something like disaster. The resting-list loomed over many, with the savings of only six weeks to face it. Prospects were bleak.

" And at the end of the six weeks will that material be scrapped for good and a new one started next year? " I asked Mr Dolphin.

" Not at all," he answered. " Everything we have been using will be listed and numbered. Every bit of property, even the artificial vegetables in the kitchen scene, the fruit, everything, is put into store. Next year the whole will be transported, lock, stock, and barrel, to Liverpool. And the next year to Birmingham, and so on."

" And the same with the actors? "

" Fay Compton will probably go as principal boy, and all those who apply will get their old jobs. That's how the pantomime business is always worked."

We went out into the misty night. Taxicabs, Tube, and buses were rushing the theatre audiences back to their suburban homes. We said cordial good-nights to the genial stage-manager and parted.

He disappeared into the darkness. His day's work was done.



CHAPTER XXVII

BALAAM

WHEN first starting to write about London we could see no clear way in which to write about London at all. At first we faced the problem of doing all those things that ought to be done, and of not leaving undone those things that ought not to be done, yet still it seemed that almost every way was blocked. We were up against the professional: the professional archaeologist, the professional monumentalist, the professional Dickensian, the professional hole-and-cornerist, the professional pub-crawler, the professional lounge-lizard, the professional restaurantist, the professional East Ender, the professional West Ender. . . .

Then it struck us that while all these varied professionals had been looking *into* London there seemed to be few who had been looking *at* London, and, in fact, the best way

might be to let London write itself—that we should take things as they came. But now that we have gone so far in the task it seems that London has been a long time in getting her own introduction written. There were so many other aspects of the town we had hoped to include. Things which we originally intended writing about have been squeezed aside by things which we had no thought of mentioning.

Vaguely we had thought of a chapter on the pavement artists and the various schools of pavement art, one on street musicians, including an adventure of the Swedish master-fiddler in London, a criticism, from the modern point of view, of Lamb's *Decay of Beggars*, a small vocabulary for the use of the intelligent foreigner of London locutions and the surviving street-cries, a dissertation on the mass suggestion and effect of the news-posters, an analysis of the blood-lusts of the town and their enjoyment by the modern girl, a note on the decay of bank holidays, with explorations of Epping Forest, a quick survey of the Jewish London, Jewish courts, Jewish settlements, and the position and use of Christian servants in East End households, a comparison of English and French poster art, the problems of the London gipsy and the caravan settlements, London inventors and the Patent Office, canary-singing and fishing clubs, the modern development of the cinema in England at what is euphemistically called Elstree, but is really named Boreham Wood. Somehow these chapters didn't get written. Before London had finished writing its own introduction there was little room for anything else.

Sterne, writing his *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, found that he was living faster than he could write, and so had the enviable prospect of an unending task. The same is true of London, and there seems no logical way of drawing to a close, except by dying with the unfinished manuscript on one's hands. Sterne abruptly concluded his job with the witty story of a cock and a bull; some critics may hold that this, our book on London, has been little else from start to finish.

In Chapter I we saw ourselves leaving Paris and all that,

we envisaged ourselves deserting spectacle, liberty, palate, space, halo, and sparkle for no more than a hope of invisible imports to take their place. The casual or over-patriotic reader might be tempted to believe from our account that our imports seem invisible enough, and that we have repudiated the slogan of Mayor Bill Thompson of Chicago, "Throw away your hammer and get a horn." In many ways we have been knocking London, and yet a frank criticism of its shortcomings may not be a sign that a person despises his own country. In fact, quite the contrary.

Yet what should emerge, we hope, from this collection of often disjointed jottings may be some evidence of the peculiar and vivid humanity which can be found almost everywhere in London by the good-humoured seeker. Once more London, in its apparently formless complexity, shows a coherence of its own. In Paris the outlines are crisp, the characters definite, the preliminary aspect entertaining; in London the outlines are veiled, the characters chaotic, the preliminary aspect aloof. Yet as in London the chaos and the poverty of architecture are made bearable or even dignified by the ever-changing and beautiful atmosphere, so the first chill aloofness of London is more than mitigated by the profoundly human quality of the London individual.

And so, coming to the task a little like Balaams, expecting to curse, at last we find ourselves constrained to bless. We must be content to let freedom go and dwell under the domination of Dora, we must sacrifice the delights of the Parisian spectacle, our palates must be content with our own experiments and those of our newly poor friends, for halo and sparkle we must accept the progressive standardization of what once used to be Cockney

But beyond all these losses and substitutions we can count as valuable though invisible imports the satisfaction that comes from a submergence among our own natural kind, and, above all, the continual delight of contact with that one overwhelming asset of our townsmen, an easy humanity.

