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WOMEN AND CHILDREN LAST

By
BEVERLEY NICHOLS

Author of
Down the Garden Path



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To
ROSALIE

Some of the sketches are here published for the first time.

To the Editors of the *Daily Mail*, *Nash's Magazine*, the *Woman's Journal*, *Britannia and Eve*, *Harper's Bazaar*, the *Sketch*, and the *London Magazine*, I am indebted for permission to re-print material which first appeared in their pages.

B. N.

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Foreword

THE title of this book has a certain significance not usually associated with such titles, and, strangely enough, the significance did not strike me until the collection was almost complete. I called it *Women and Children Last* merely because the book was divided into four parts, and the essays about women, which are called, by journalists, 'sex stuff,' and by writers, 'feminine pieces,' seemed to fall naturally at the end. Thus the tide was at first purely expeditious.

Then a few days ago, the morning brought me a letter of whimsical sweetness and charm, which began with the words: 'Dear Mr. Nichols, You are crazier than a bed bug.' And after I had fondled it, and gazed out of the window on to the tall trees of Park Lane, over which there was hovering a purely personal mist, I lowered my eyes, and savoured it again, finding particular pleasure in the delicate tail-piece. '. . . Anyway you are a bum, and would probably let a woman drown if you were on a ship and it was going down.'

The letter was signed: 'Six American School Girls,' and a more invigorating sextette I never wish to hear. I have entirely forgotten which piece it was which prompted their tribute, and the fact that I have forgotten is in itself significant, because the letter reminded me poignantly that after every one of those essays I had received similar tokens of friendship. Indeed, there were once seven thousand in a week. (*Sic.*) Which proves that somebody must have been touched on the raw.

Women and Children First? Has the phrase still a

ring of unquestioned authority? Even in the sinking ship? I think not. A decent man - of course - or a decent woman for that matter, would always save a child in preference to himself. (I hate these mythical moral problems, but they really are relevant.) However, I fail to see why, in a cargo of fifty men and fifty women, the fifty women should consider it their divine right to occupy the only life-boat, and leave the fifty men to drown. In these days of Amazon Channel swimmers it really seems a little unkind.

I am not basing my argument, however, on the efficiency of women in the water - which contrasts somewhat painfully with their frequent inefficiency on land. The whole problem is deeper than either land or water. If I merely say that I am suggesting that women, if they claim equal rights with men, must also claim equal responsibilities, I shall be accused of re-hashing a stale journalistic subject. But if, as is my habit, I turn this suggestion from the abstract to the concrete, and accept its implications, and say, for instance, in plain English, that I think women should join their countries' armies in war-time, and fight and be killed, I shall instantly find myself labelled as a revolutionary.

Well - why is the suggestion so very terrible? It is certainly a logical rejoinder to a great many feminine demands. Women are the greatest war-mongers of all, for the simple reason that they know absolutely nothing about war, and invest it with a halo of romance - yes, even after reading *All Quiet on the Western Front*. In my opinion there is a very ugly sexual motive at the back of their heroics, but we need not go into that. The point I wish to make is, that wars would be at least less common if some of the white-feather Amazons, and the grim-jawed committee women, and the bouncing amateur nurses, and the whole poisonous crew of feminine war-mongers were put into khaki and sent to the front

trenches. Many of them, at least, would be far more physically capable than some of the wretched, stunted, diseased, little middle-aged bank clerks who were dragged shivering from their desks in the last days of the war, and hurled, like so much rubbish, against a similarly constituted enemy.

I am growing quite hot, because war is my King Charles's head, and war and women together are almost too much for my temper, and quite too much for my style. And I am leading the reader astray, too, for this book is of a far lighter tone than the last few paragraphs might lead you to believe. But 'light tones,' especially in journalism, are apt to be sickeningly monotonous unless they are sketched against a background which is at once deeper and more constant, and I wanted to remind myself, if not you, that this background did actually exist.

Let us therefore desert the sinking ship, and for a moment only, examine the significance of the title in its broader sense. It should really be written with a mark of interrogation after it, for then the whole question of that loathsome word 'chivalry'⁵ - which conceals more bunk than any word in the English language - is automatically raised. It recurs constantly in these pages. I am fairly typically modern in this sense, that I do not encourage my emotions, I do not deliberately work myself into a frenzy of sentimentality or anger merely for the sake of enjoyment. If I see an emotion coming down the street, my tendency is to shy - to turn up a side alley. But with the best will in the world, a man with ordinary emotions cannot fail to be occasionally moved by the individual and general contemplation of womankind; and if I am moved, I wish to be moved in the right direction.

It seems to me that a great many men are being moved in the wrong direction. The old direction. The

direction in which Sir Walter Scott was moved when he wrote those frantically arch and bogus lines:

'Oh, woman! In our hours of ease
Uncertain . . .'

Really, the very sight of those words, to which I have referred at least once in this book, make it impossible for me to finish the quotation. It is against such hoary and pernicious platitudes that my pen has moved most keenly and constandy. The uncertain, coy, and hard-to-please woman gets it, as far as I can give it to her, in the neck. So do lots of other types of women; my object being, not merely to annoy, but to straighten things out in my own head. And from this straightening process - or so at least it seems to me - there does emerge, in these pages, a certain attitude to women which may or may not be general in my generation, but is certainly strikingly different from the poses which were prevalent before the war.

As a minor but significant example, I may observe that I am, I believe, the first man to point out, with any definite conviction, that women are appalling housekeepers. This had been so obvious to me from the age of six - although I was brought up in an exceptionally well-conducted home - that it was some time before I realized the necessity for writing about it. When I did write about it, I let loose hell. Who *was* I? Why, how, and which *was* I? And other equally penetrating questions. Merely because I pointed out that women, in their homes, were incapable of organization, incredibly foolish in their management of servants, extravagant where they should be economical, economical where they should be extravagant, and almost universally prone to create difficulties where no difficulties exist. These facts, one would imagine, must be so obvious to men that only their sense of chivalry can explain their silence on the matter.

I have not that sort of chivalry. The occasion for it has vanished. If women insist upon demanding equality, it is only fair that they should have equality of criticism, and in this book they get it. I am sick and tired of the veils and illusions and sentimental mysteries which women weave round themselves, even in these days, and I am not so sexually obsessed that I can be a party to worshipping at shrines which, to me, are false. Some women, reading chapters like: 'The Female Sphinx,' or 'The Chameleon Woman,' will toss their heads, accuse me of being a woman hater, and rush to the mirror to make up their faces - a simple act which hardly any woman does competently, although she may practise six times a day. Others, reading the chapter called: 'For Husbands Only,' will throw the book into the dustbin, and there are quantities of braw, bonny, beastly girls whose fingers will itch for their riding-crops after perusing the singularly lucid and delicate phrases which are strewn through the chapter entitled: 'What I Shall Buy My Wife.' However, there may be some who will do none of these things, who will read me asexually, in the spirit in which I wrote.

Apart from all this woman business, the book is difficult to classify. For me, I mean, not for the reviewer, who will find golden opportunities for the use of his most vicious invective. I am what is known as a successful journalist, and successful journalists, though they may often write well, even profoundly, are bad critics of their own material. So I may have chosen all the wrong things - it may be all a terrible mess - I may have set great goblets of sentimentality next to thin little draughts of cheap cynicism - I don't know. And honestly, I don't very much care. For most of the book is sincere, and some of it makes me laugh - in the right places, I add hastily.

B. N.

PART I

MORE OR LESS FICTION

Flowers in Winter

I AM not good at writing short stories, though I get a good many ideas for them. Here is one.

A man had a garden. He was a middle-aged bachelor, old for his years. Before he came to the country he had worked in the city, where he had made the modest fortune with which he bought his house.

When he first arrived, tired and a little lonely, he wondered if he would be bored. Gardens, to him, were merely the patches of land in front of houses. Nice places to sit in during the summer. Useful to keep off neighbours. That was how he used to think about them.

But now - his garden slowly spread its magic about him. It was not a large garden - only an acre and a half - but there was a certain enchantment about it. Perhaps it was the wall which enclosed it - a tall, mossy, red brick wall of tender colour, that was a riot of wall-flowers in the summer - or perhaps it was the immense cedar tree which brooded in the shadow of the farther corner. Or, perhaps . . .

He spent a wonderful summer, and a wonderful autumn. Then, towards the middle of November, when the last chrysanthemum had withered, and the final late bud of a hardy rose had been nipped by the frost, he began to be worried. It was impossible that the garden should be as bare as this. Surely there must be something - some brave flowers that would cheer him through the winter? He consulted his gardener, who said, 'What's the use without an 'ot-house?'

Yet he was not discouraged. During that first winter

there was born in him a fierce will to conquer Nature, to arrange things so that, in some way or another, he *would* have flowers in winter. He began to buy gardening books, and as soon as he opened their pages he would turn to the calendar for the winter months, leaving the blazing chronicles of spring and summer unheeded. And gradually he learnt the sweet truth, known to all good gardeners, that there is no day in the year when the earth does not offer some reward to those who love her.

He learnt that the winter jasmine flings its golden stars across the dreariest weeks of December. He discovered, too, that at this time the Christmas rose, *helleborus niger*, lifts its proud, pale blooms from the mud and clay, defying the winds that sweep about it and the frost that stiffens its brave petals. And the *daphne mezereon*, with its happy rose-coloured flowers and elusive fragrance - why had nobody told him about that? There was an iris also - *iris stylosa* - that bloomed even when the whole world was deep in snow. And hardy heaths whose blossoms flushed from white to mauve as the short days of the New Year sped by. And yellow aconites that brought something of the gaiety of buttercup days to a shivering world, and marigolds that lingered long after their time, like guests to whom we are loth to say good-bye. And winter-sweet, and many curious bushes, whose berries glowed crimson and yellow and purple against their dark, frozen leaves.

These things, he discovered, and many more. And with each new discovery he would write a letter to his local nurseryman ordering the objects of his fancy. He would not rest until he saw the precious plants dug in. By the time that spring began to break, in tree and meadow, there was hardly a winter flower known to this country which he had not planted.

The year sped by. The marvellous, coloured pageant

of summer flowers entranced him it is true, but somehow he was always waiting. Even as he stooped to pick a red rose, with the heart of the world in its brooding petals, he would close his eyes and across his mind there would sway the dancing stars of a sprig of yellow jasmine.

Summer went. Then, towards the middle of November, he began to see the fruit of his labours. As the weeks went by his garden woke to a strange, almost uncanny life. There were blossoms in every bed, and colour on every wall. True enough, the flowers seemed sometimes sad and tattered, for it was a hard winter, but they were flowers for all that.

Early and late he hovered around them. In rain and sleet you would see him bending over the earth to touch some delicate shoot, skirting a wall to nail some wind-blown spray. He caught a cold, but he paid no heed to it. It was as though he were burnt by a fever. . . . A few nights later his housekeeper found him sitting by the fire clutching a sprig of daphne in his hand. The daphne was just breaking into blossom. The hand that held it was feeble and burning hot. He died of pneumonia a few days later.

When they buried him his grave was covered with flowers-jasmine, Christmas roses, marigolds, daphne, and a single iris that had bloomed too late for him to see.

The Tragedy of the Gigolo

IN spring you can see him sipping bacardis on the terrace at Cannes, or driving down the Champs Elysees in a big scarlet Renault. You may have a sight of him walking down Bond Street holding a Borzoi on a leash, or lolling against the bar in the Casino at Le Touquet, a look of unutterable boredom on his face. Later on, he will be lying out on the sands at the Lido, very brown and decorative; and recently he has been observed at Salzburg for the August season. In the autumn, he is usually somewhere in New York, occupying a very modern apartment, and wearing very bright dressing-gowns. The gigolo of whom I am thinking was in this last situation when he began to tell me about himself.

I can see him now, his fine, fatigued profile outlined against a crazy chaos of snow-white skyscrapers. His dressing-gown came from Charvet - it was designed in triangles of orange and black. His cigarettes were imported from Benson and Hedges, his clothes were from Savile Row, his terrier came from Dublin, and looked, in its cushioned basket, as though it wanted to go back.

It all began (his confession, I mean) with a single remark. He said, 'One's *got* to be smart.' I said, 'Don't use that abominable word.' He replied, 'It's the only word for abominations such as I.' And since he was in a mood of self-pity, I let him talk.

His was a typical history. He was a Russian. Before the Revolution - he must have been about seventeen then - he had owned his horses, his cars, his servants. He was the only member of his family who escaped. He

starved in Athens for a year. He came third class from Athens to Paris, and continued the starvation process there. When he was twenty he joined a second-rate musical comedy bound for Nice. It played for a fortnight and disbanded. He found himself in that earthly paradise with a dress suit, a hundred francs, and a profile.

He was a little tired of it all. He took the profile along to the manager of one of the largest hotels and asked for a job as a waiter. The following dialogue ensued:

'Have you a dress suit?'

'Yes.'⁵

'Can you dance?'

'Very well.'

'Are you amiable?'

'Amiable?'

For reply, the manager pointed to a large and fiercely powdered woman who had just walked past them leaving little daggers of the latest Lenthéric perfume stabbing the air.

'Would you *-par exemple* - be amiable to that?'

The young man drew himself up a little haughtily, as though he were back in the old days, confronted by an insolent groom. Then he sighed. 'Who knows?' he said.

He received a hundred francs a night and his dinner, and any tips which might come his way. At first the thing was so revolting to him that he almost lost his job. He would dance stiffly with an air of detachment which was not at all to the liking of the middle-aged Chicago ladies who had left their husbands at home. He even refused tips. It was one of those refusals which brought matters to a head. One of his patronesses stamped angrily out of the room after he had waved aside a hundred-franc note. There was the sound of heated voices behind a screen. The manager sent for him. A few minutes later he had capitulated.

There began a period of small gains and acute bore-

dom. Night after night he would dance and dance, repeating the same parrot phrases. 'You are the best-dressed woman in the room.' (One could always say that, even if one's partner were seventy.) 'You dance so naturally.' (That was another safe one.) And then, if one were particularly hard-up: 'I am so lonely.' That led to complications; but, by now, he was prepared to face them.

The young women he avoided. For one thing, they usually had husbands. For another, he was susceptible, and might lose his poise. Most important of all, they were not rich enough. They might dance for a whole hour, and then leave him without even a hundred francs. No; the middle-aged women were the best.

He got to know the others in the same trade. He became wiser, more avaricious. There was Pierre, who was frankly an animal and a blackmailer. He was making a fine thing out of a silly Argentine widow who was crazy about him. There was Victor, who used the 'soul-mate stuff,' because he was too lazy to do anything else, and found it very easy to lie on a sofa reciting obscure poems from French reviews to his latest conquest, who was under the impression that he had written them himself. There was George, an American of unknown extraction, who was always bubbling with high spirits. Everybody liked George. He played jazz so perfectly. And though he was a shameless gold-digger, there was something a little human about him, because his gains were invariably spent, within a week, on some fluffy and insignificant little shop-girl who thought that his money was made in real estate. Which, in a manner of speaking, it was.

My friend had no intention of dissipating his substance in the manner of George. The season was ending. It was time that he found some protector who was willing to make a more permanent arrangement. He had

no time to lose. His possessions, at the end of a season of six months, were as follows:

- (1) About fifteen cigarette-cases, in gold, shagreen, crystal, and onyx.
- (2) Half a dozen sets of dress-studs, waistcoat buttons, and links.
- (3) A sealskin coat.
- (4) A small but 'smart' wardrobe.
- (5) About ten thousand francs.

They were typical of the belongings of every gigolo - and by now he had accepted that phrase without distaste. He even gloried in it. He took a subtle pleasure in strolling through the lounge of some hotel towards tea-time, perfectly dressed, hair sleek and scented, hands manicured, dark rings under his eyes, bending down to kiss the fingers of some infatuated dowager. He knew that all the fresh young Englishmen were calling him a 'lounge-lizard,' that the pink-faced American girls were openly sneering at him, but what did that matter? To him had come the strange exhilaration which comes to all those who lead lives which are a deliberate affront to the traditions of organized society.

Still, one cannot live on exhilaration. One needs more substantial assets. If only he could obtain a 'settlement!' He lay awake at night, dreaming about it. He saw himself with some soft-hearted, warm-blooded female, driving to the lawyer's office, signing papers, having bonds transferred to him - an income for life. It needn't be a big income - a few hundred pounds a year - but an income, so that he could escape from all this. But his dream never materialized. 'Settlements' were few and far between. Apparently, even the most infatuated dowagers were aware of the transience of human affections, and preferred to keep a tight hold on the purse-strings.

In June he met a quiet, respectable-looking woman of vast wealth. She was a widow, and her husband had made a fortune in a few years out of public utility companies in the United States. She had never been to Europe before, and our friend, to her eyes, was something strange and exciting and new. He was like one's first cocktail after a diet of sour milk. She fell in love with him - nicely, quietly, but genuinely. She demanded very little. She wanted his companionship. She liked to stroke his hair. Occasionally, in the small hours, when the moon floated like a bloated pearl over the fantastic arabesque of Nice's sky-line, she would kiss him - a pathetic, frightened kiss, that yet suggested a fierce fire underneath. However, the fire never blazed up. He was infinitely relieved. They went to the Lido together.

And now began that curiously tangled and perverse relationship which all gigolos, sooner or later, come to know. What *was* he? Lover? No - they were not lovers. Servant? No - for it was always he who, in theory, gave the commands. What then? Officially, he was her 'secretary.' Upon that she had insisted. To her respectable and conventional mind the title seemed to invest their relationship with a certain legitimacy. On some mornings, when her mirror showed a face lined with fatigue and a mouth that drooped in spite of the cleverest application of lip-stick, she felt inclined to change the whole programme, to adopt him as her nephew, to mother him, perhaps even to send him to Oxford or Harvard - after all, he was only twenty. If he had been really clever, he would have recognized that maternal instinct, played upon it, and made for himself a permanent place in her life. But he was not accustomed to maternal instincts, and he allowed them no chance to develop. So whenever he saw that tired, kindly look in her eyes, he would order a cocktail, and send her some orchids,

and treat her like a debutante, and soon, very soon, her shrill laugh was echoing in a gondola on some obscure canal, her parasol was carefully tilted to conceal the lines which even an Italian sun will discover, and her purse was ready to pay, pay, pay, and pay. For what? Even she would have difficulty in telling you.

In September they returned to New York. Not on the same ship. Oh, no. Europe was one thing. America was another. 'After all,' she would say to herself, drawing herself up so that she looked like a prim little schoolmarm on a tourist's trip, 'one must have some standards.' However, her standards did not entail a severing of the relationship. She made him an allowance of a thousand dollars a month, and chose for him an apartment off Park Avenue - one of those places where there is no elevator. She insisted on this detail, because she did not like the idea of facing an inquisitive elevator boy every time that she came to call. And she called at least once a day.

One must again insist on the curious quality of their companionship. Although it was intensely possessive, on her part, it was not passionate. Nor was it a friendship of similar tastes, for they liked entirely different things. She hated champagne and would only drink a cocktail under protest. He was a connoisseur of vintages and had a little cocktail bar in his apartment. He had feared at first that the discovery of this bar would infuriate her. Actually, it was one of the wisest things he could have done. Though she would not admit it, she loved to have her authority flouted. Even more did she love the feeling of illegality. For twenty years she had drunk ice-water with her husband in a house which belonged to him. And now, here she was drinking Martinis with her - 'friend' - in his apartment for which she was paying. It was terribly *chic*.

'*Chic** - she had learned the bastard word from the

advertisements of expensive American magazines, and though she knew it not, that word was having a permanent effect on her psychology. She associated it with the slim, long-legged girls whom one saw wearing somebody's furs in the back pages. She associated it with the long corridors of the Ritz in Paris, with Henri's at lunch-time. It meant the Lido in August and Villa d'Este in September. It meant Le Touquet in the spring, nibbling hot cheese-cakes as one watched celebrated actresses walk down the terrace. It meant dinner at the Saint Regis roof in New York. All those bright, bold, slightly bad things. And, of course, it meant her-'friend.' To own him was the last word in '*chic*.' If he had left her she would have felt not so much unhappy as *disclassie*. It would be equivalent to being cut by a duchess.

That was why he said those words to me in his apartment, 'One's *got* to be smart.' He had learnt it from bitter experience; whether he liked it or whether it bored him, he must always appear perfectly turned out. He must always demand caviare, even if he longed for *hots* (*Tamvre*). He must always take her to the most expensive places, must turn up his nose at anything but a Rolls or an Hispano, must smoke Turkish cigarettes, though he craved for 'stinkers.' Even the Irish terrier hStd worried her. She would have preferred a Borzoi. But he had allayed her anxiety on this score by informing her that the favourite dog of the Prince of Wales was also an Irish terrier. So that she was satisfied.

Then, one day, she died. Quickly, unobtrusively, without a word of warning. He learned the news at seven o'clock in the evening. She had been coming to him for a cocktail at six, and after an hour he rang up **her** house to learn why she was delayed. A frightened maid answered him, and rang off. He could not believe it. This time a doctor came to the 'phone, spat a few

contemptuous words over the wire, and slammed down the receiver. He felt stunned. He stood by the mantel-piece, this smart, weary young man, and the light sparkled on his white shirt-front, and on the diamond studs for which *she* had paid. He stood looking at himself, *through* himself, and suddenly he made an angry grimace, for the sight he saw was not pleasant. He swallowed a cocktail, and lit a cigarette from the latest onyx and diamond case. He threw a white scarf round his neck, slung his sealskin coat over his arm, and went off to a speak-easy. He got very drunk that night. At dawn he lay on his bed alone, and the little room echoed with maudlin sobs.

She left him not a penny. He had never expected anything, for he knew that, with her curious bourgeois psychology, she would have considered it improper to admit their relationship to the sanctity of the law. So that all her money went to Aunt Louise and a brother in London, and to various grim and charitable institutions which reared their stone facades in the Middle West. And none of it went to the boy who had laughed with her in the moonlight, and driven with her under the chestnuts in the Bois, and taken her in his arms, once or twice, like a tragic slave. Nothing went to him.

He very quickly came to his senses. He sold everything she had given him, even the store of old liqueurs. He dallied with the idea of a job, but he was unfitted for useful work. He returned to Nice. He stepped out at the station one sunny morning, a little older, a little more fatigued, but still the perfect gigolo. As he drove past the massed flowers on the promenade - stall after stall of golden roses and white carnations - his spirits began to revive. He visited the manager of the hotel which had first employed him. Yes, they would be glad to have him back. A hundred francs a night - and tips. And - he must be amiable.

You can see him there almost any night, dancing exquisitely with women whose red necks are hung with priceless pearls. If you pass close enough to him you may hear him whisper, 'You are the best-dressed woman in the room.' Or - and you will remember that this is a sign that he is particularly hard-up - 'I am so lonely.'

'Lonely?'⁵ Yes, that may be. But one would like to know which was the lonelier - the woman or the man, the mistress or the gigolo? The queen or her jester, the keeper or the kept?

and the years - how could they ever end, how could she even *hope* that they would ever end?

Her real fear, though she does not know it, is that she may be bored. She does not realize that as the years go by she is spinning for herself a web of such intolerable ennui that it will eventually throttle her. She thinks she is managing her life very well.

'I don't believe in taking risks,' she says to some fellow-piece of human driftwood that Chance has floated towards her.

'I never go anywhere in the wrong season, and I always make the most careful inquiries about the hotels. This one, for instance, is just as good as the last. . . .' Just as good, just as bad, just the same - though she dare not admit it - just the same, like the maddening, endless picture that one sees in mirrors, that face one another, repeated to eternity.

No - no - she must not be bored - that must not happen. And sometimes, as she sits there and thinks, this fear grips her more sharply than usual, and she gets up hurriedly, and leans over the concierge's desk to ask in a high-pitched voice, if, perhaps, they could arrange for a sleeping compartment on Monday instead of Thursday.

And when she finds that this is impossible, her face falls. And the curious, chattering crowd in the lounge wonder who the strange, well-dressed woman can be who walks past them so quickly, looking as though she wanted to cry.

I know that she is futile and selfish, that she has only herself to blame. I know that I ought not to pity her. I know that I do, and always shall each time that I see her sitting in every hotel lounge, all over this curious globe.

The Story of a Fan

I WISH that these words might be as delicate as the flutter of a fan — and as significant — for it was a fan that inspired them.

In an old antique shop it lay, and the dim sunlight of the dying year fell on the little brilliants round its handle - such a fragile handle - and lit them to a momentary sparkle of green and blue, like the flash that comes to the eyes of a woman who is old and sad, when memories are around her.

And then, as I lifted it, the sunlight faded, and once more it seemed pale and a little drab - the figures of rose and silver that danced through its delicate filigree seemed to droop disconsolate. It was no longer a fan. It was merely an antique. And the voice of the man behind me rasped, 'Thirty guineas.'

It is morbid, no doubt, and decadent, and generally deplorable, that a mist should ever come over the eyes of an adult male. But the mist arrived - from what distant, drifting clouds of Pity I know not - and through it I saw candles, shining like stars on a November night, and heard the thin, sweet lament of violins, and the swish of silks long faded, and in the centre of it all, dipping and darting, folding and unfolding, the fan. And behind the fan was a laughing face in all the glittering flush and pride of youth.

'Twenty-five guineas if you pay cash,' rasped the voice. The violins ceased - on a discord - the silks flashed out of view. Only the face remained. And it seemed as though it were twisted with grief, shamed and

humiliated, as though I had taken that fan and hurled it over the years that intervened, until it fell, broken, at its unknown owner's feet.

For I should explain that it was no common fan. In its day it had tapped the wrist of many a noble earl, spread a pretty veil of discretion over many exquisite, half-finished epigrams. It had lain on fine tables, and then, as the years went by, on tables not so fine, till it had ceased to be used, but was only a 'possession,' to be guarded against a rainy day. And the rainy day had come, and some street door had opened, some woman had hurried out, clutching a little parcel in her hand, and the story of the fan was finished.

Now it is sometimes good for us, as we make our prosaic passage through this apparently prosaic world, to realize that we are not the only people whose hearts are wrung by anguish. Every house, at some time or another, is Heartbreak House. Every street, at some desolate hour of night or day, is Sinister Street. And every man, however shallow he may seem, however 'bright' he may appear to his neighbours, has known himself, at some turn of the clock, to be despised and rejected of men.

To admit this fact is not to align oneself with the characters of Tchekov, who howl if anybody offers them a £5 note and scream with horror if they see the sun. It is simply to allow pity to enter for a brief space into your heart.

Pity is *passi* with the new generation. It has become a disreputable emotion with the young. Why? Because ever since they can remember it has been passing out of the minds of individuals into the hands of corporations.

The dole is an example of pity on a colossal scale. As a result of it very few young people really pity the miserable creatures one sees drifting like withered leaves along the Embankment. Those creatures have ceased,

in their imagination, to be human beings, neighbours. They are merely units on the debit side of the National Balance Sheet.

But there are some neighbours about whom the State does not worry. They are very quiet, and shabby, and they live behind drawn blinds, and nobody cares tup-pence whether they live or die. They are the women who sell their fans.

Through what agonies such women are passing in these days it would be hardly decent to inquire. When you are poor, and old, and utterly alone, you live in the few possessions that you have gathered around you. Your last hours of wintry sunshine come to you as you are dusting a little ornament, or burnishing a silver bowl, or looking long and deep into a water-colour, rather faded, 'By a pupil of David Cox.'

These things are life itself to you. They are all that you have left to keep your self-respect. As you open a book with a beautiful binding, and see the proud book-plate, with its scrolls and flourishes, you straighten yourself and your eyes light up. As long as you have these . . . as long as you have these. . . .

The latest brood of the bright young people will sneer at such obsolete figures, if they ever realize their existence- But I would pray them, if they happened to buy a fan with little brilliants round its handle-such a fragile handle - to treat it tenderly.

The Mirror

SHE came into the shop very timidly and stood standing in the shadow, running her fingers up and down the seam of her shabby coat. She was tired and old, but I think that once she had been beautiful.

When the assistant asked her what she wanted, she clutched the parcel which was under her arm, and looked at me with a sort of pitiful appeal, as though entreating me to go. But I could not go, for I was waiting for my own parcel. I could only retreat to the other end of the shop, out of the range of those sad, frightened eyes, but not so far that I could not hear a soft voice, a lady's voice, saying:

'I have a mirror here. . . . I thought perhaps . . .'

There was a sound of rustling paper.

'Been in the family, I suppose?' A pause. 'About 1780. French.'

'Yes,' she said. 'It belonged to my great-grandmother, the Comtesse de - .' There was a faint weary ring of pride in her voice, like a distant echo of glory long departed. 'One of the few things saved from the Revolution.'

'I can give you ten pounds for it.'

There was silence. It was a most agonizing silence. Any sound would have been better than it - expostulations, sobs, recriminations. But she was of the old school, that suffers and says little. At last I heard:

'I had hoped that . . .'

'Quite.' The man's voice cut her short quickly. 'It's a pretty mirror. But this is a bad season. I may have

it on my hands for a year. And what with overhead expenses . . .'

'I quite understand.' The voice was firm again - indeed there was a certain authority in it, as though a mistress were speaking to a servant. 'I will accept your offer.'

Another silence. Then the closing of a door, and she was gone.

I went back to the counter. The mirror lay before me.

It was a delicate piece of Louis Seize. Two pouting Cupids linked arms through a garland of tarnished roses. The surface was of that exquisite and shadowed silver that is like an English lake at dawn. I lifted it to the light, saw my face in it, saw a thousand faces in it. . . .

I saw the face of the old lady who at this moment was walking away from the thing that she had loved and sold. Saw it when it was young and bright-eyed, with lips the colour of cherries. How often had she stood before it, laughing, in the sunshine of a different world, a happier world perhaps. *

And gradually, as the mirror faded, so had she faded too - the mists that had floated over its tranquil surface had been reflected by the mists that had come to her eyes. They were part of one another - the mirror and the old lady. Friends who had no secrets from each other. And now, her friend - the one friend who knew that, in the old days, her skin had been like the petals of a wild rose and her hair like a tangle of yellow silk - **that** friend had gone.

That, to me, is the magic and the tragedy of the mirror, of all mirrors. They need not be fine, nor old, nor wreathed with a delicate emblem of roses. A cheap little square of glass in a shoddy handbag holds, on its glimmering surface, as many mysteries.

For there is only one confessor to whom a woman tells

every secret of her life, and that is her mirror. Only the mirror knows that she cried whenever a certain door was shut, only the mirror knows that her eyes, which were always so calm and placid when they faced the world, were wild and restless when they sought their own mimic reflection.

Only the mirror knows the pitiful little pretences with which she tried to stave off the marks of age, the first time that she lifted her thick hair and darkened a tell-tale strand, or stood with a mask-like face, smoothing and smoothing the forehead which was once so clear and white. . . .

At every crisis in her life she has flown to that mirror for consolation or for knowledge. She has asked it questions that she dare not put into words. She has taunted it, loved it, hated it, entreated it, thrust it from her, only to take it up again and search it more eagerly. That is why it seemed to me so terrible for the litde old lady in the shop that the Louis Seize mirror had to go. It was her only record, in an oblivious world, of beauty that had been and glory that had departed.

And yet women throw away their mirrors! A hand-bag gets worn and shabby, it is put aside, until at length it finds its way to the dustbin. Sooner or later the little piece of cheap glass is shattered, or is buried, or lost, or drifts down to the all-embracing sea.

A Woman Walks

'NICE walk?' asked the man of his wife, as she came in.

'All right.'

'See anything?'

'Nothing much.'

She had started at Oxford Street. At the first corner she saw a very fat woman gazing wistfully into a shop window, her eyes fixed on a slim delicate model that could only be worn by a girl of eighteen. The fat woman was nervously, spasmodically running her fingers down her sides. It was embarrassing, a little horrible.

'One day,' she thought, 'I may be like that. I may have to go to the outside department, and listen to the attendants telling polite lies about my figure. . . . I may pant for breath when I clamber into a bus, and never see a challenge in a man's eyes. . . .' She hurried on.

In the next block there was a ladder over the pavement, and nearly everybody was passing outside it. She watched them. Quite sophisticated-looking girls would stand aside and wait their turn rather than pass underneath. Smart young men stepped into the gutter. One old woman was delayed for nearly three minutes, so crowded was the little patch of pavement.

As she watched, her mind was stimulated by this phenomenon. She remembered dark, evil superstitions in a book she had been reading, and then through a mist she seemed to see herself as a little girl, pressing her nose against her bedroom window, and hear her nurse's

anxious cry, 'Come away, come away . . . you mustn't look at the new moon through glass.'

She walked on.

A taxi drew up just in front of her.

As the door opened, and the Tare' emerged, she had a glimpse of the inside of the taxi. There was a beautiful bunch of bright pink paper carnations in a little silver vase, and tiny draped side curtains, and spotlessly clean (though somewhat inconvenient) antimacassars on the seats.

It was really a very pretty taxi, and she glanced at its owner. He was pale, and as he drove off he seemed to be coughing. She expected that he was very proud indeed of his taxi. She wondered if he felt that it was like a little home, gliding through the streets, and she wondered how many people thanked him for the carnations and the antimacassars and the draped curtains. She would have liked to take a ride in it, so that she might thank him at the end.

There was a traffic block now. The policeman held out his hand. It seemed that the stream of cars would never end. As she watched, she saw the policeman drop his arm for a brief moment and then raise it again. He looked as though he were raising a heavy weight, and she suddenly realized that all over London hundreds of policemen's arms must be aching.

She had never thought of that before. She stepped into a dark shop entrance and tried holding out her own arm. Long before the traffic moved on again, she felt tired. Never again, she thought, when she sat in a car, propped up against the cushions, would she curse the policeman who was holding her up.

The road was clear again. As she crossed over she remembered that she had promised to order some more photographs from the shop which she was now approaching. She went in and gave her order.

Just as she was leaving she heard a woman's voice behind her saying, 'I wonder if you could trace a photograph for me.' 'What name, madame?' asked the assistant. 'Captain-. He was killed in October 1918. That was the date the photograph was taken.'

The woman spoke in a quiet, flat voice, and she did not once raise her eyes from the counter.

'Oh!' she thought, as she went outside again. 'I do hope that they find the photograph for her. I do indeed.' And she thought how long ago it all seemed, and wondered if Captain - had been the woman's lover, and if he had been, what she had done without a photograph for all these years. Or perhaps there had been an accident, a fire maybe . . . that would be terrible. . . . She shivered slightly.

She went into the park. There was a fresh, gusty wind. It swept away the clouds from the sun, it blew the leaves in a whirl about her feet, it brought the blood mounting swiftly to her cheeks. There were a thousand things to see and to love whenever the wind was blowing - it turned the lake from a sheet of steel into a gay, swirling sea of adventure, it brought out the swift gold in children's hair, it turned the dogs from placid household pets into the wild forest creatures that they were, it letjoose the tongues of the trees. It reminded the rich of their security, the poor of their raggedness. Or did it perhaps bring even to the poor a sense of chance and freedom, as though, perhaps, over some distant hill some wind was racing towards them, bearing good tidings on its wings?

She turned home.

'See anything?'

'Nothing much.'

For how, she thought, can one explain these things - to a man?

A Man Walks

'NICE walk?'

'Yes.'

'See anything?'

'Nothing much.'

He had started from his club, but had soon turned into a side street. It was very quiet here after the roar of the traffic. The sound of a piano came tinkling to him, and looking up he saw that he was passing a house with an open window through which he could see the silhouette of a girl playing.

She played beautifully - a professional, he supposed - and she was just nearing the end of a Chopin scherzo - the one where there is a succession of immense chords, like mighty rocks against which Chopin had dashed the silver spray of his fantastic cadenzas.

Mary used to play that, he thought, as he listened. He wondered why Mary never played now. No time? That had been her excuse. But surely she could have *made* time? When one held in one's ringer the key to that magic dominion of music it seemed crazy to throw it away as she had done.

The music rose and fell - it was as exquisite to him as rain to a parched land. He stood there, a lonely, ordinary, ageing man, until it stopped. The silhouette vanished from the window, the blinds were drawn; he went on.

He was back again in the main streets now. Suddenly he started. There in front of him was an immense tiger,

ready to spring. It was only a stuffed tiger, of course, glaring through the plate-glass of a taxidermist's shop, but the illusion had been extraordinary for the moment.

He went a little closer, pushing his way through a group of London idlers who were gazing at the window. The tiger was a magnificent beast. Quickly, deeply, almost ferociously he envied the man who had shot him. He would give years of his life to have been that man, just during the few minutes when he had stood in some dark jungle, peering through the trees for the striped, slinking form, his heart beating with the incredible elation of the hunter.

Why should some men have such thrills while they were denied to him? Why should some men know freedom, and the tang of distant seas, and the hot caress of strange suns, and the music of surf breaking on wild remote shores, when for him life was charted, safe, and dull?

He hurried on. It was very crowded at the corner of the street. An absurdly pretty girl stood on the pavement edge, clutching a brown-paper parcel and looking with frightened, violet eyes at the buses which roared towards her, paused, discharged their frenzied loads, consumed a fresh consignment of humanity, and roared away again. He paused and watched her. Now and then she put a foot timidly over the edge of the pavement, as though she herself wished to be consumed by one of the monsters, but always the charging crowd was too much for her.

Impulsively he walked towards her.

'Can I help?' he asked. She started and looked at him. Her eyes were like immense pansies after rain. She stammered, 'Thank - you,' and clutched her parcel again. Then she added, 'I wanted to get to South Kensington.'

At that precise moment a new monster descended on them, charging in the direction of this delectable

locality. He took her arm, pushed through the crowd, deposited her in a corner seat, and then - incredible man - charged out again, and stood on the pavement, raising his hat, until the monster had borne her away.

As he pushed his way on again the whole question of marital fidelity urged itself upon him. He had been faithful to Mary, but there had been times when it had been horribly difficult. Would he always be faithful to her? He supposed so - dully. And yet he wondered why. What was there that was so very precious about his untarnished fidelity?

He passed a florist's shop. Proud, tawny chrysanthemums raised their gold and bronze heads to the electric light. Sprays of purpled orchids trembled ecstatically in the draught of an electric fan. Carnations nodded, white and crimson. There were early violets in trays.

Why was he not running into the shop, as he once ran, to spend half a week's salary in flowers for Mary? Was it because he had ceased to love her? No. He almost shouted the word aloud, for this was a blasphemy against which his whole soul revolted.

He did love her. She was absolutely essential to him. But there were degrees of love. Why could not women realize that? Why could not they realize that there were some impulses of men which fools called 'love' but which were in no way connected with it - in no way destructive of the true love which animated them? Or were they destructive? He wished he knew. He felt so tired, with all these problems in his head. He went in and ordered a bunch of yellow roses to be sent home. As he gave the address his voice shook a little.

'See anything?'

'Nothing much.'

For how, he thought, can you explain these things - to a woman?

A Touch of the Sun

IT is late in the month of October. On the Venetian Lido empty tents flap disconsolately. Along the fantastic, grilled, corrugated coast between Marseilles and Men one a few abandoned gigolos wander limply, offering then brown bodies to the sun, their only lover, and a rapidly cooling lover at that.

The world - by which, of course, we mean the socially registered world - has left these delicious shores. There was a sudden panic, as there always is in fashionable places. People woke up one morning to find that the Princess Santa Jehovah had packed up her trunks and left the Super Hotel at Cannes. That was sinister news. On the following morning it was learnt that the Due di Brasserie had lifted his anchor and sailed his yacht contemptuously out of the harbour of Nice. On the next day, Miss Elsa Maxwell was observed entering the office of Messrs. Cook in Monte Carlo, and leaving it with a ticket to Paris clasped gently, but firmly, between her fingers. That settled it. The season was over. And along hundreds of miles of coast, from Biarritz to Venice, young men and old men, matrons and maidens, precipitated themselves to their rooms, pushed things into bags, demanded their bills, crowded like frightened sheep into the trains de luxe, and were shortly ensconced, battered but safe, in the cabins of the *Mauretania*, the *Olympic*, the *Bremen*, the *He de France* - and if we have omitted any lines, we can only regret it, and pass rapidly on to the story which is panting to be told.

You, gentle reader, are, of course, among the crowd

of delicate persons whose fashionable activities we have gently chronicled. You were at the Lido, or Juan-les-Pins, or some such spot. Otherwise you would not be reading these chiselled (and extremely important) observations. Only this morning you stood in front of the long glass in your dressing-room, quite naked, and observed the delicious tinge of brown which illuminated the upper and lower portions of your anatomy, noticing how strangely it contrasted with the virgin pallor of your middle regions, and wondering if this enchanting tint could possibly last till after Christmas. You *cannot* deny that you did these things, because if you denied it, there would be no moral to this story, and since we have already proclaimed that it is a story with a moral, we have no intention of denying it.

Yes - the seeds of sun-fever have sown themselves, however lightly, in you. Next year it will be much worse. You will stare more fixedly at your coloured body. You will wish that you had lingered later in the languorous embraces of the sun. The year after . . . but we are anticipating. Better to tell you the story of one who, like you, began by laying himself innocently, diffidently, on a certain beach, little realizing what lay in store for him.

He had left Oxford in the summer of 1924. He was then a perfectly normal individual, with a pink and white body, and a pink and white brain. His misguided mother, who had a genius for leading people astray with the best intentions in the world, took him down to Cannes for the summer. After the fashion of healthy youth, he bought a pair of bathing shorts, rubbed his shoulders and his legs with oil, and demurely offered himself to the embraces of the sun. (Mamma, meanwhile, was equally demurely offering herself to the embraces of the local gigolo during *Thes Dansants*.)

The usual symptoms, mental and physical, occurred. His body became very red, while his mind was slightly tinged with green as he enviously regarded the almost negroid epidermis of various young men of questionable occupation, who paraded themselves before him. There was quite a little scene when, at the end of two weeks, Mamma decided that she had lost so much money at the Casino that she could not possibly afford to stay any longer.

'How *can* I get brown in two weeks?' he demanded peevishly.

'But, my dear, what does it matter whether you are brown or not?'

To which the boy, with tearful eyes fixed fiercely upon a brilliantly beige individual, had replied, 'What does it *matter*? What did we come here for, then?'

You see, already he had a touch of the sun. Two weeks before, he had never even thought about the colour of his own body. But already it had begun to assume paramount importance in his eyes.

That was in 1924. In the summer of 1925 he took a month's holiday from his chambers - he had just been called to the Bar - and returned with a strange glint in his eyes. He had managed to get really tanned this time, although his eagerness had made him overdo it, with the result that his shoulders were still red and blistered. 'Next year, I shall take six weeks,' he muttered to himself, and to a few friends.

It was significant that he had already become secretive about it, as though he knew that it was something over which he had no real control.

.And in 1926 he *did* take six weeks. And at last he achieved perfection, as far as his tan was concerned. But when he came back to London, the glint in his eyes was wilder than ever, and he could not setle down to his work. He had returned in Septeniber, and by

November, when the tan was beginning to wear off, it was agony to take a bath. He would stare angrily at the slowly fading line of brown along his waist, which marked the place where the top of his bathing suit had lain. It was only a faint coffee-coloured smudge now, and soon it would be gone altogether, and he would be a dingy, commonplace white again. It was maddening. He thought with envy and hatred of the young men of doubtful occupation on that enchanted beach, who lay like lizards, from the first scented days of March till the earliest tang of the winds of late October. Why should they be there all that time, while he only had a few miserable weeks? How could he ever reach that stage of perfection - belong to that strange crazy aristocracy which had sprung up, like some exotic weed, along this purple and fantastic coast?

In 1927 he took two months. It was madness of him to do so, because he was just beginning, to build up a promising practice. Women liked to consult him. 'He looks so healthy and normal,'⁵ they used to tell each other, 'so different from these tiresome, white-faced legal people who seem to have stepped out of a Dickens novel, forgetting to dust themselves in the process.' There was a far-away look in his eyes, however, that rather troubled them when they actually came down to business. As though his mind were elsewhere.

It *was* elsewhere. A good many hundred miles south. Indeed it was a miracle that he was able to transact his business at all, because his whole body was tingling, aching for the kiss of the sun that was being denied him.

Sometimes, when it was a fine, cloudless day in London, the mental agony would be almost more than he could bear. True, it was another sun, a milder, gentler lover that beckoned to him through the dusty windows, laughed at him through the green leaves of Lincoln's Inn, and stretched slim, golden, tantalizing fingers on

to the yellowing parchments that lay before him. But still, it *was* the sun - a sister sun, if you will. And even in London the lure was beginning to prove too strong for him. He would leave his desk, hurry out into the roaring Strand, jump into a taxi, and tell the man to drive to Hyde Park. From his husky, broken voice the taxi-driver usually concluded that he was bearing a young lover to some particularly delectable rendezvous. He was. For never did a lover hurry more ardently to meet his mate than this deluded young man to seek the embraces of the light.

And when he reached Hyde Park, he would stride rapidly across the grass in the direction of the Serpentine, for it was there that the sun glittered on the waters - dazzling his eyes and yet refreshing them. It was before the days when one could bathe in that curiously prosaic strip of water. The British Labour Government had not yet decided to strike a blow at its own prestige by allowing the proletariat to exhibit their unclothed bodies in their full horror.

At moments like these, clothes were a torture to him. He would run his hands nervously up and down the buttons of his waistcoat, and tug at the lapels of his coat. If only he could get into a bathing costume! It would not ~~fee~~ be the same thing, of course - the tan would only be a mild and feeble one, but at least it would be *something*. Like a kiss that brushes faintly and passes by.

Women meant nothing to him now. In the old days he had been a hunter, light-hearted and gay, easily drawn by a delicate mouth or a pair of soft eyes. There had been little love affairs; charming, shy affairs with the bloom on them. All that was over. He had another mistress whose kisses were fiercer and more compelling. Sometimes, indeed, he felt like a young acolyte offering his body to a goddess who had stooped to receive his love. It is dangerous for a young man to allow himself

to sink into such a psychological condition. It is the reversal of the proper attitude of the sexes.

'I wish you would tell me who she is/ his mother would say sometimes.

'Who?' he asked her, examining his finger-nails.

'The woman you are in love with,' she answered.

Then there would be silence until his mother impatiently said, 'Well?'

But he would only smile, and look out of the window, where the sun was sparkling on the grey roofs of Park Lane.

It was in 1928 that the break came. He told his parents that he was going to take his holiday a little earlier than usual - say in June.

His senior partner made a scene. He pointed to a pile of briefs that were clamouring for attention. 'You're throwing away twenty guineas here,' he said, 'fifteen guineas there, thirty guineas here - and possibly even fifty guineas on that case that came in this morning. Apart from which, you are putting me in the devil of a hole. What's the matter with you? Don't you *want* to get on? Don't you want to make money?'

But he only bit his lip, and looked out of the window with a strange, almost mad glitter in his eyes.

He went, and he never came back.

In a little Casino, not more than ten miles from Juanles-Pins, there is a jazz band. It is not a very good jazz band, because the Casino is somewhat shabby, having seen better days. The carpets are threadbare, the croupiers are sleepy, and the food is second-rate. And since the only people who come there to dance are French bourgeoisie, what reason is there for employing, as music manufacturers, any but the cheapest artistes available?

If you happened by some unfortunate error to drop into that Casino some time during the season, to dine,

and if, after dining, you danced, and glanced at the seedy individuals who were playing for you, you would observe among them a young saxophonist of a quite remarkable shade of brown. Were it not for his thin, straight nose, and his blue eyes, which are set like glass in the dusky face, you might well imagine that he had a touch of coloured blood. But, of course, he had nothing of the sort. For, as you will already have guessed, he is the hero of our story.

Yes, indeed. He has come to this. The sun has snared him finally. For her he sacrificed everything. Mother, father, aunts, partners - his inheritance, his future, his country. They were all burnt up, shrivelled to ashes, by his strange passion. He has no money, no home, no friends. He has only his lover, the sun. And every morning, after his cup of lukewarm coffee, he hurries to the deserted beach to worship her, and stays there, in an ecstatic and horrible stupor until she leaves the world to darkness.

This is a true story. It is so true that it is almost libellous. But when one is writing a story with a moral, one cannot trouble about such petty details as libel. And this moral is aimed, quite definitely, at you.

A Piece of Lace

With apologies to Mr. Michael Arlen

THIS is to be one of the 'smartest' stories ever written' The word is revolting but apposite. For by it we are not referring to the plot; we doubt, indeed, if we have a plot at all. We mean, rather, that the persons concerned, with one regrettable exception, are of the *plus haul monde*, and that the properties with which they are surrounded are of the most elegant.

To prove this, we cannot do better than show you the heroine, whom we may call Anne (was there not a queen of that name who died?), as she sits in a soft, warm light before her dressing-table, confronted with a problem which needed an ineffable delicacy of treatment. For she was about to set out to a nursing home to visit a sick husband, and she had to tell that husband that she was aware of his unfaithfulness to her. You may doubt whether this situation needs a particular delicacy of treatment, but will you not permit me to tell my tale in my own way? For she had, in addition, to inform him that, though she knew of his infidelity, she did not really care a damn. *And* (you will observe the cumulative effect of that conjunction) she had also to indicate that, though she did not care a damn, she still loved him. Which was quite true.

As Anne considered this psychological tangle, she felt as baffled as an amateur pianist endeavouring to play the first concerto of the dark-eyed Mr. George Gershwin, who, being gifted by the Devil, can cause three distinct rhythms to join hands together in an unholy

measure. She herself had three rhythms to which she must soon be dancing, and obviously, were she not to stumble, she must conduct herself with consummate care and tact.

Stepping out of the soft, warm light into the more candid sunlight that flooded into her room from Park Lane, she surveyed her mirrored reflection. She continued to survey it, and then she nodded. Yes, she had been wise to discard the black. It had given her a look of mourning which she was far from feeling. And the pastel blue had been altogether too indefinite. After all, she had to make it crystal clear that she really *did* know that Henry was quite definitely misconducting himself, and if one were surrounded by yards of sweet, feathery blue, one might feel tempted to pretend that the whole thing was merely platonic. No; green was the only colour. It was sophisticated without being harsh. It was essentially the colour for the more epigrammatic moments of life, and if this were not an epigrammatic moment, what was?

She moved back into the soft, wpxm light. The vital question of accessories had still to be decided. After all, Henry was sick; and though she was quite certain that she would be able to clarify this situation with a minimum of fuss, leaving both parties happy and still united, it was essential that her preparations should be perfect.

Her perfume-what should that be? It was most important. Of course, one usually visited sick-rooms in a cloud of eau-de-Cologne, but that would be quite impossible this afternoon. The very faintest whiff of eau-de-Cologne invariably made her feel like an old-fashioned schoolgirl filled with moral inhibitions, and how could one tell one's husband, in such a mood, that one did not mind him having a mistress? So she pushed the gold-topped bottle of eau-de-Cologne to a remote corner of her dressing-table.

Should it be something warm or something cold? Should it be clean or cloying? In front of her was a bottle of perfume, '*N'aimez que moi.*' That might have done if it had not had so unfortunate a name. Henry, her husband (were there not eight kings of that name who died?), had such terribly sensitive nostrils. If one's clothes were redolent of a perfume which by its name proclaimed the ideal of single' fidelity, it would be hard, if not impossible, to adopt that modern and sensible attitude which she was determined to adopt. And so she pushed the '*N'aimez que moi*' away also.

It might be Chanel, or it might be Molyneux, or it might be Lelong. All of these charming people had created perfumes which seemed to have been designed solely for the use of wives who did not mind that their husbands had taken mistresses unto themselves. Unhappily, Henry (whose nostrils, as she reflected, seemed almost *morbidly* alert) might associate these odours with her dressmaking accounts, which were substantial. And associating them, he might feel inclined to think that he himself had a grievance, which would never do. And so she pushed the Chanel No. 5, the Molyneux No. 22 (and being a simple country person, I forget the number of the Lelong) to join the eau-de-Cologne and the '*N'aimez que moi?*'

Now I dare not tell you what perfume she eventually chose. But it was a tender thing and of a subtlety unsurpassed, a perfume that made one think of white lilac in the Bois, but only vaguely, for it would be fatal to become too sentimental.

On the bed was a pile of hats - cloche, soft, hard, tiny, huge - which should it be? Tentatively, she placed on her head a black hat from Maria Guy whose brim drooped low. It had obvious advantages. It would spread a discreet shadow over her eyes. should the inter

view prove affecting. It would afford cover in case she found the comedy irresistible. But would not that be a form of cowardice? Would it not tend to suggest that she was doing something dishonourable, whereas she was only going to tell her husband that she did not mind his having a mistress? It would. She removed the black hat from Maria Guy.

A purple cloche, created by Agnes in a moment of abandon, was also discarded. It made her look a little *louche*, and we need hardly point out that this was, of all situations, the least *louche* which can be imagined. And other hats too were flung, one by one, on to the floor, till at last she came to the right hat, which was of the shade of green that glistens in the early pages of a renowned and ancient history, and seemed to be invested, proudly, with something of the knowing chastity for which its author is so rightly revered. But I shall not tell you who fashioned it.

There remained the question of flowers. Only yesterday the Due d'Araigne had told her, as he sipped his yellow chartreuse through mauve and crinkled lips, that orchids made her look like a divine wraith. But she was not particularly anxious to look like any sort of wraith. For though she did not mind her husband having a mistress, she had no sort of inclination to become an unsubstantial shadow. She and Henry would have such jolly times together when he got well, and when this foolish business was settled. Perhaps a single red rose? It would look pretty against the green. But then again, so many poets had been shamelessly outspoken on the subject of red roses - 'My love is like a red, red rose -' In the soft, warm light she softly hummed the old lyric to its traditional tune. A little sadly, at the thought of the transience of things. No - it should not be a rose. Nor lilies of the valley, for that was the sort of flower one chose when one went to call upon Mr. Curtis Bennett.

At last she decided that she would wear no flowers at all. At which decision she felt greatly relieved.

She was ready now, and it was time to start. She drifted towards the telephone to order the car. But here again her hand paused, irresolute. In which of her cars would it be most suitable to set forth? The wrong sort of car might upset her terribly. If she ordered the Rolls, she would be bound to feel dignified and respectable by the time she arrived, and when one feels dignified and respectable it is such an effort to tell one's husband that one really doesn't mind his having a mistress. And if she ordered the Daimler, her imagination would desert her, for Daimlers make life seem so extremely easy. And if she ordered the Bentley, she would begin to feel moral, because as everybody knows, the high morality of Bentley owners is one of the most encouraging signs of British industry. And if she ordered the Hispano, she would probably overdo the whole thing, and become so Continental that she would beg her husband to take not one mistress but a dozen. Which, since she had no intention of leaving him, would be far too expensive.

And so she ordered the - but again, I dare not tell you in what make of car she eventually set forth. But it was a car which might have been specially designed for the occasion - a car that was neither too slow nor too fast, neither too rakish nor too sober, neither too narrow nor too broad - a car, in fact, which understood.

And as she drove through the swift and silver streets, she leant back her beautiful head in its exquisitely apposite hat, and sighed with content, stretched her charming body in its utterly appropriate frock, and was pleased; savoured the perfume which was so subtly suitable, and smiled. For she was a simple woman.

The person who stood by Henry's bed, while this meticulous toilette was in progress, was a person one

could never, never regard as smart. Never could one imagine her standing, like the ladies in the advertisements, with protruding hips and skeleton ankles, on the steps of the Ritz, while men like lizards draped chin-chilla over their shoulders. By no stretch of the imagination could one envisage her curled, like a marionette, in the bowels of a vast car. She was, indeed, one of those people who pay no sort of attention to the gospel according to the shipping companies - she *never* travelled in the *Mauretania*, she *never* went to Deauville in July, or the Lido in September, and she thought that Claridge's was a disease caused by the English climate. As for the little things of life, the buckles, the bags, the lip-sticks, the lingerie, the delicate sweep of a heel, the vintage of brandy which one should sprinkle over one's *fraises du bois*, of these her mind was desolately virgin. Indeed, she was in such a state of savagery that I should not have been surprised to learn that her bath-salts did not match her soap.

There she sat, this person whose gross proportions I am vainly trying to veil with a silver-spangled net of words, and the room was heavy with her breathing. She was watching Henry - the pale, weary dilettante, sick, so very sick - and in her nice candid eyes (which were" worthy of a better setting) there shone a light of conquest. 'You ought to have it out,' she said harshly but kindly.

Henry closed his eyes. 'Of course, it's masochism,' he thought. 'That's what it is. Just simple masochism. I love this woman because she hurts me. I love her because her outrageous vulgarity deliciously afflicts me. Actually I egg her on. I believe - yes, I believe, that if she were to use the word *serviette*, I should suffer some quite exquisite spasm. But at the moment I am not strong enough for such delights -'

Aloud he said:

'There is no need. She understands.'

'All the more reason to have it out then,' she insisted.

'Darling, don't talk like a dentist,' he sighed.

'What's that?'

'Nothing.' He laid a white, nervous hand on hers.

'What time is it?'

'Close on three.'

'You should go. She said she was coming at three.'

'Not before I've got this situation figured out.'

He winced once more. 'Figured out!' Was not that something people said in America? 'Figured out!' He shuddered with neurotic pleasure, as though she had struck him.

'Cold, darling?'

'No, no. A goose over my grave.'

'Don't you carry on like that. You'll be fine in a few weeks. That's why I want to get this situation -'

'Figured out!' he panted.

'Yeah.'

'What do you want to do?' he asked very faintly.

'Well -' She folded her arms. Actually, she went through that vulgar motion! And then she said: 'I like things to be fair and above board, I do,' she said. 'I like to put my cards on the table, I do,' she said. 'Now, I love you and you love me -'

For a second she paused, and in that second it seemed to Henry that a sudden vivid shaft of sunlight flooded on to this woman he loved, this woman with the coarse, kindly face, framed by the expensively ugly hat, and the fine large body, clothed in a dress which was fantastically decorated with lace. Oh, that lace! How fussed and twisted it was! How palpably 'imitation!' And yet how comforting! He had a momentary impulse to bury his head in it, like a small boy, to brush his lips against it, to draw it in a sheltering veil over his aching eyes.

'And you love me,' she repeated, 'and we haven't let a thing stand in the way of our love. And you say your wife knows. But how do you *know* she knows? She hasn't ever said so, has she?'

'There are ways of saying things without words.'

'Such as -'

'Such as decorating one's bedroom in Empire instead of Louis XVI. If Anne did a thing like that it would mean a tremendous spiritual crisis.'

She thought him delirious. Anyway, she never could keep pace with his mind. She went a step farther.

'Do you think she cares?'

'I don't know.'

'Well, you ought to find out.'

'I suppose so.'

'And,' she leaned forward triumphantly, 'how are you going to find out if you don't tell her, in so many words?'

'She will find a way of telling me.'

She shook herself impatiently. The lace chattered round her shoulders. 'What do you think you are - a mind reader?'

'Perhaps.'

He smiled. But it was a somewhat disturbed smile. How *would* Anne tell him? By words; never. That was unthinkable. In their ten years of married life they had passed through many crises, in silence. Daggers had been thrown, by an intonation - insults had been delivered with a smile - passionate reconciliations effected with a yawn. The conduct of their lives was as elusive and owed as much to suggestion as the figures of those ladies in the back pages of magazines, whose toilettes are indicated by a single, silken line.

But-in this situation, would their amazing sensibility be adequate? He adored Anne. He imagined that she would regard his new entanglement with no more interest than the purchase of a new car. But one

never could tell. She *might* be worried. And if so, how should he know? He must watch her very, very carefully. He repeated:

'Anne will find a way of telling me.

'Well, I give it up. I'm used to plain dealing.'

Her blunt words brought him back to reality.

She leant over and gave him a kiss.

'See you to-morrow, dearie,' she said briskly.

He half rose on his pillow.

'You've forgotten,' he said.

'What?'

'Give me - give me something.'

He stretched out his hand.

She understood. Always, when she went away, he would ask for some little thing which he could keep until she came again. He was like a child who asks his mother to leave the candle burning when she bids him good night. And, like a mother, she humoured him, knowing that her presence was to him a form of light (though how garish a light she did not guess), and that even in her smallest belongings some of that light would ectoplasmically linger. Sometimes she had given him a flower from her dress, sometimes a handkerchief with a cloying perfume - once, a bead from her bag.

'Well, baby, what shall it be?'

He looked at her standing above him, so strong, so powerful.

'A piece of lace,' he whispered.

'What? Off my new dress? Of all the cheek!'

'Give it me - give it me,' - his voice rose like a bird, and his fingers stretched out, clutching at her like a kitten's claws.

Alarmed, she shook him off. She had never seen him like this before. Falling back on the pillow he began to cough, deeply, hopelessly.

She scowled at him for a moment. And then her

rough, capable hands groped at her bosom. There was a faint, tearing sound, and a little piece of lace detached itself. She pressed it into his hand.

The cough ceased. He said, 'Thank you,' and lay back on the pillows.

After she had gone, he drew the lace slowly backwards and forwards over his lips, half closing his eyes as he did so, like a child dreaming with a doll. Then, as he heard steps outside, he quickly put the lace into the cigarette-case that lay on the side of his bed. It was a charming cigarette-case of shagreen and platinum, with a coronet in diamonds. It had been given to him, years ago, by a burnt-out Spanish duchess with enormous purple eyes. For in those days he had been a simple boy.

They met on the stairs. The woman was in shadow, and thought that Anne did not see her. Indeed, as she slammed the door behind her, she congratulated herself on the clever way in which she had faded into the shadows, slinking by.

But Anne *had* seen her, though even the most lynx-eyed observer would not have guessed it. And had seen every tiny grotesque thing about her, from the hat which was like an ugly blot, to the lace which fluttered and fussed and fumed in yellow chaos about her. And seeing her, she had smiled, and minded even less than before.

'Darling Henry,' she whispered to herself. 'He always adored baroque.'

She was standing by his side. Their two thin hands were clasped together. They were each asking silent questions of one another, and, at the same time, trying to answer them.

He studied her from under half-closed lids. She was looking away from him. She seemed neither sad nor glad; she was, as always, aloof and undisturbed. Did

she care? Did she? Had he really hurt her? How he longed to put the question into words! Instead, he said:

'You are alarmingly chic, dearest!'

How perfect Henry was! Could she tell him that? Why not? Would it really matter if she said to him, 'I saw that quaint, square woman on the stairs, and I know she is your mistress. I think it so sweet and original of you, and I wish you would tell me all the funny things she says, because I don't mind in the least so long as you are amused.' Instead, she said:

'I suppose I am.' Then, with a sigh, 'It's a sort of disease.'

'Chic?'

'Yes. But most women never catch it. You're chic, you know, too.'

'Terribly.' The subject seemed to him too obvious to discuss. Besides, he *must* find out if she cared about - the other thing. If he did not find out soon, he would be so tired, and then he might begin to cry, and when he cried he became feverish, and the room would be filled with tattered dreams. He said:

'Any changes at home?'

'No, darling. Nothing. Oh! I forget - a new butler. Portuguese.'

'Why Portuguese?'

'He was born right in the middle of Portugal.'

'I see.'

Henry pondered this revelation, but he could not extract any deep significance from it. By no stretch of the imagination could he see how the engagement of a Portuguese butler could argue any emotional crises in Anne's heart. Now, if she had told him that she was having the entire house redecorated in *art moderne*, it might well indicate that she desired a break with the past, or if she had informed him that she had engaged an English cook it might imply that she desired to with-

draw utterly from society and live a life of penance. But a Portuguese butler. No. It didn't fit the situation.

'Nothing else?'

'No.'

The faintest shadow crossed her face. He must not cross-examine her like this. She would find her own way to tell him, to make the whole situation clear. But she must have time. She *must* have time. She stretched out her hand.

'A cigarette, please.'⁵

Unthinking, he handed her his case. She took it, holding it affectionately for a moment, for she had been quite fond of the burnt-out Spanish duchess with enormous purple eyes. Then she opened it, and from its glittering lining there fluttered down a piece of lace - carelessly fluttered a tiny piece of lace - to lie there on the floor, a silent witness before them.

Now this was one of those moments in life when the senses are so acute that the ordinary laws of Time, Sound, and Space are quite annihilated. Thus, though the lace, as it fluttered, made no more actual sound than a spider weaving a web on the ceiling, to both this man and this woman it seemed to whirl through the air with the sound of a tempest, and to strike the floor with the noise of thunderbolts. And though it had only a few inches to fall, it seemed that the distance was endless, that it was still falling, falling before them, in the manner that one falls in dreams. And though the time of the entire episode was probably (if one must be tediously accurate) only some fifteen seconds, yet to them both it seemed that all their lives they had sat there silent, watching something that was a witness, watching the piece of yellow lace on the faded crimson carpet.

Rigid, like waxworks, they watched. The sun poured through the window. Far below in the street an automobile, turning a corner, hooted three times. Then

Anne bent forward and picked up the piece of lace from the crimson carpet.

It is now that this tale, dream-like, draws to its almost insanely swift conclusion. For in that piece of lace Anne realized that she had found the solution to the whole problem. By means of that piece of lace she could tell him the three things that she had come to tell him, which, as you will recall from the sweetly languid introduction to this story, were that she knew he had a mistress, that she did not mind his having a mistress, and that, though she did not mind him having a mistress, she still loved him. And the words in which she told him these things, as she placed the lace in the cigarette-case and handed it back to him with a cool, tired smile - the words in which she told of her knowledge without telling it, and dissipated for ever the spirit of that vulgar Other Woman so completely that she might never have existed, were simply three, and even those words were whispered:

'Not real lace.'

There was the sound of a cigarette-case being placed on a polished table. Between them there passed the smile of perfect understanding.

True to Life

IF you had been sitting in the stalls of the Grand Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, on the first night of Nigel Chelmsford's comedy, *The Pure Woman*, and had cast your eyes up to the stage box, you would have seen a silk hat, resting on the edge of the box, and by the side of the hat a white-gloved hand. And - since the very fact of your being able to get into this particular first night at all implies that you would be an extremely knowing person-you would instantly have realized that both the hat and the hand belonged to Nigel Chelmsford himself, and that these things were all you would be allowed to see of him until the final curtain, when, of course, he would come out and make one of his infuriatingly witty speeches.

However, it is unlikely that your eyes would have been on the stage box at the precise moment when this story opens. For, according to the pencilled notes on the pnjjnpt man's chart (which afterwards played so important a part in the evidence), it was exactly nine minutes past nine. And it was at this moment that the curtain swept down on the first act, hovered a moment, an expanse of faded golden velveteen, and then shot up again as though it were blown to the ceiling by the thunder of applause which echoed through the auditorium. Your eyes most certainly would have been on the stage. So that you would not have noticed a curious phenomenon with regard to that white-gloved hand which fluttered through the first sentence of this mysterious chronicle.

The hand twisted, arched itself a little, and then perceptibly it shrank. There was a moment's pause. Next, for some curious reason, the fringe of the curtain seemed to fall over the wrist. But we must put an end to these finicking mysteries. We must emulate the gentlemen of the cinematograph, and switch to a close-up. What are the plain facts of the matter?

The plain fact of this matter (and it is so plain that it is a bore even to write it, with so many other exciting things going on in the stalls - the Duchess of Wrex smiling sweetly at Lady Air, for example, which implies some fearful tragedy in wait for her ladyship) - the plain fact is, that Nigel Chelmsford was removing his glove. And the reason why he was removing it with such excessive caution was that he did not wish anybody to realize that his hand was not still encased in it.

You see, this was his fourth *premiere*, and he had built up a charming little legend about his *premieres*. There was always the silk hat, the white-gloved hand, and nothing else. Everybody knew that he himself was attached to the glove. In fact, a famous artist had painted a masterpiece in crimson and pale gold, with a single stab of white indicating the edge of the box and the glove (which by now seems to be recurring with something akin to monotony). The picture had been called 'Nigel Chelmsford, Esquire. Full length.' Until now, Nigel had felt pleasure in this little ceremony. He had enjoyed sitting far back behind the curtain, unseen by even the players on the stage, experiencing divine emotions through the medium of his right hand. But to-night he could bear it no longer. He was acutely, maddeningly bored.

In a moment the reason for his boredom will be apparent. But all the teachers of the Art of Short Story Writing are constantly informing us that Action is the thing which counts. So we will introduce some Action

and show you Nigel, rising to his feet, leaning wearily against the wall behind the slumbering crimson of the curtains, and placing his hand tentatively on the door-knob. But since that is all the Action we can introduce for the moment we must fall back on Psychology (for the Teachers of the Art of Short Story Writing are very keen on that, too - though only as a form of padding, when the Action is running dry).

Now Nigel's mind was a curious mind. The psychoanalysts would tell you that he was a masochist, a person who delighted in pain. But the psychoanalysts have such sweet old-fashioned minds. They take everything literally. When they say a masochist they mean a masochist, which is almost as unimaginative as calling a spade a spade. That is to say, they conjure up bloody visions of whips and bare backs and other medieval things. But in the far subtler pages of this book, it will be understood that Nigel's masochism was of the soul. To the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune he bared his breast with an enchanted smile. By the glittering prizes he was unmoved. And life had offered him so many in the past few years.

Action again. Yes, yes. We can accommodate you. For at this moment Nigel turned the door-knob of his box asud opened the door a fraction, so that a slant of smoky light glints across these pages. He was waiting for an opportunity to retreat. And he had already decided where he was going. He was going home . . . to his wife . . . to that radiant and golden-haired creature who was never permitted to come to his first-nights because they sent her into such *crises de nerfs* that life with her was an agony for days afterwards. How delighted she would be to see him! She was sitting at home at this very moment, drinking double brandies, like the shy, trembling thing she was. No other woman in the world would understand why he had been forced to leave. She

alone could comprehend the utter boredom of success. For if his play had been a failure, if there had been *longueurs*, and coughs, and that dreadful wobbling of necks which betokens a restless audience, he would have been exhilarated. He might even have poked his head forward in the box in the hope that some outraged lover of the drama would boo him. But there was no chance of that. Even through the chink of the door (on the outside of which was written, according to his instructions, 'No *admittance*,') he could hear the sickly phrases of adulation:

'Too delicious, isn't it?'

'Divine.'

'Such *perfect* lines.'

'Monstrously clever, don't you think?'

He shuddered. He could not bear it. He *had* to get away. He would return before eleven, to make his customary little speech. But in the meantime. . . . He beat his foot impatiently on the carpet. The interval seemed interminable.

Then, suddenly, there was the sound of a distant bell. The shuffling feet in the corridor quickened. There were hurried *au revoirs*. In the vast auditorium the lights paled and flickered - remained poised, burning dimly. From below the music was heard gasping through its final ecstatic bars, which appeared to have been composed in that spirit of hysteria which afflicts all writers of theatrical music. The footsteps outside were now few and far between, and galloped past the door. The lights flickered again . . . once more . . . the orchestra gave its last gasp. Then darkness and silence, followed a second later by the swift whirr of the rising curtain and the clear voice of Nigel's heroine, cutting across the tense and crowded stalls.

Now, at last, Nigel slipped through the door of his box, limped swiftly across the corridor (for he was

afflicted in the manner of Byron), pushed the bars of a convenient exit, and found himself in the cold airs of an April night. He heaved a sigh of relief, and hailed a taxi.

'70 Berkeley Square.'

For that was where he lived. (You see, he was a good man at heart.)

And now we are going to break every rule of the Teachers of the Art of Short Story Writing. We are going to break the continuity of the Action (not that there has been exactly a surfeit of Action up till now), and we are not even going to pad out with Psychology. We are going to do a quite unpardonable thing. We are going to quote. At considerable length, too.

Perhaps, however, the quotation is not quite so inapposite as the Teachers of the Art of Short Story Writing might at first imagine. For it is extracted from the second act of *The Pure Woman* - the very act which was being played on the stage of the Grand Theatre as Nigel sped beneath the flashing lamplight toward Number 70 Berkeley Square. And the reason that we quote it is in order to show you exactly what manner of mind Nigel possessed. A cruel, heartless mind, we think. Completely devoid of sentiment, even of common humanity. Brilliant if you like, logical if you will. . . but then you have read enough criticisms of him yourself.

Probably you possess the Collected Works. But in order to save you time, we print below the complete and unexpurgated edition of the last five minutes of Act II of *The Pure Woman*. We are not indebted to the publishers, Messrs. Semon and Double, for their permission to do so.

ACT II

THE PURE WOMAN

{A Comedy in Three Acts by Nigel Chelmsford. Semon and Double, 7s. 6d. net.}

Page 83.

The persons are Noel, Amy (his wife), and Paul.

The scene is Noel's flat in Bruton Street, Mayfair, and Mr. Chelmsford's only stage direction as to the interior was '*Terribly Modern. White walls. Lots of black mirrors. Cactuses poking about in corners. And, of course, some lovely Swedish curtains, that look as if they had been dipped in blood.*'

If we turn to page 83, we find two persons in dressing-gowns, locked in an illegitimate embrace. The persons are Amy and her lover, Paul.

Noel enters. (It is the fourteenth line down, if you are being tiresome, and verifying your references.) The following dialogue then occurs:

NOEL. Darling. You've copied my dressing-gown.

AMY (*detaching herself with reluctance*). I have done nothing of the sort.

NOEL (*throwing his hat and stick on the sofa*). But yes. Shamelessly. Ivory-coloured satin. Nobody wore ivory-coloured satin dressing-gowns in the house before. At least (*with a slightly acid glance at Paul*) not to my knowledge.

AMY. It's not ivory. It's beige.

NOEL. Don't talk like a dressmaker, darling. Introduce me to your lover.

AMY. Oh! I'm sorry. Paul!

PAUL. Yes?

AMY. This is my husband.

PAUL. I know.

AMY. Well - get up and say 'How d'you do?'

PAUL. Is that the right thing to say?

NOEL. In modern comedies, yes.

PAUL *{speedily}*. I suppose we ought to fight *{a rather tense pause}*. Or something.

NOEL *{with a quick sigh of relief}*. Thank heavens you said 'or something.' For a moment I had a terrible feeling that you were going to wave your fists all over the room.

AMY. But he did. *{To Paul}* Didn't you, dearest?

PAUL. Did what?

AMY. Mean what you said about fighting?

PAUL *{with a yawn}*. No. I didn't.

AMY. Paul!

NOEL. Amy, don't be ridiculous. You're behaving like a cavewoman.

AMY *{powdering her nose}*. Am I? You know *{meditatively}* I think I *am* rather a cavewoman. Primitive - and all that. With a sense of primitive virtues. . . .

NOEL. You mean the elementary indecencies.

AMY. Do I? Perhaps. Anyway, it's immaterial. Are you going to divorce me?

NOEL. I'm not sure. *{To Paul}* Have you a cigarette?

PAUL *{fumbling in dressing-gown}*. I think so.

AMY. How heedless you are! I ask you a question affecting my entire life, and all you do is ask for a cigarette.

NOEL. But a cigarette affects my entire life, too.

AMY. Is that an epigram?

NOEL. Darling, I told you never to ask that question again. Everything I say is an epigram. *{To Paul}* Please. I shall expire if I don't smoke.

PAUL *{handing cigarette-case}*. Here you are.

NOEL. Thanks *{takes cigarette-case and examines it. Suddenly he steps forward quickly}*. But I don't understand.

AMY] What don't you understand?

PAUL,

NOEL. These are Turkish!

PAUL. Well? What about it?

NOEL (*with tremendous excitement*). But . . . but I thought you smoked Cuban?

PAUL. Cuban?

NOEL (*impatiently*). Yes. You know. Black things. Like weed-killers.

PAUL (*pompously*). Are you trying to be funny?

NOEL (*speaking very quickly*). No. Fm strangely serious. (A pause.) Have you never smoked Cuban?

PAUL. Couldn't even find Cuba on the map.

NOEL. That settles it, then. (*To Amy*) Amy!

AMY. Well?

NOEL. Who is it that smokes Cuban cigarettes in this house?

AMY. I don't know.

NOEL. The fireplace was littered with them yesterday.

AMY (*with a brave attempt to appear coy*). Was it? What was yesterday?

NOEL. Wednesday. The fourth. The anniversary of Queen Alexandra's birthday, if you insist.

AMY. Oh. Then it must have been Stephane.

NOEL. Who is he?

AMY. My dancing master.

NOEL. Is he your lover, too?

AMY. Oh-yes.

NOEL. Thank heaven!

PAUL (*in a grieved voice*). Amy!

AMY (*impatiently*). What is it?

PAUL. How could you?

AMY. How could I what?

PAUL. Deceive me.

AMY. I didn't. *He* did.

PAUL. I'll wring his neck.

NOEL. Divine expression!

AMY. You'll do nothing of the sort. That's Noel's job.

NOEL. Oh, no, dear. It isn't.

AMY. You seem to have no decent feelings.

NOEL. I have. I'm positively burbling with relief at this moment.

AMY. Relief?

NOEL. Yes. You see, I like Paul (*pointing to him*).

PAUL. Thanks.

NOEL. Yes, I feel . . . I don't know . . . sort of brotherly towards him. And it would have cut me to the heart if he had smoked Cuban cigarettes.

PAUL (*with heavy amiability*). You're a sportsman, you know.

NOEL (*with a shudder*). I should prefer you to call me a connoisseur.

AMY. I feel fearfully neglected.

NOEL. It won't be for long, dearest. I'm just departing. I have several mistresses gnawing their underlips with impatience for me.

AMY. Brute!

PAUL. By the way, didn't you take my cigarette-case?

NOEL. Yes. And by the way, didn't you take my wife?

PAUL. I see. You think that a fair exchange?

NOEL. Certainly. (*Looking at cigarette-case.*) It's eighteen carat.

(There is a moments pause. Then, slowly, they all smile. Noel puts the cigarette-case in his pocket. Paul puts his arm round Amy's waist. There is a feeling of perfect serenity. Slowly the curtain falls.)

It was this shamelessly cynical dialogue which was echoing or would very shortly echo on the stage of the Grand Theatre, as Nigel sped home to his wife under the flickering lamplights. As he thought of it, he smiled, and lit a cigarette. It was so very deft and polished, that scene. But it was not only its polish which pleased him. For, as he gazed into the polish, he saw the reflec-

tion of his own face, smiling back at him. The longer he studied the brilliant surface of his own wit the more did he realize its depth, how essentially true it was to himself, how it mirrored his own philosophy of life. He knew that if ever he found himself in a situation similar to Noel's, he would behave as Noel had behaved. He would dismiss it with a flick of his fingers.

Actually at that moment, as the car purred under the thin spring leaves of the square, he clicked his fingers at an imaginary tragedy. A female passer-by, poised with her foot over the pavement, caught sight of the gesture through the open window and thought him drunk. She would have thought him even drunker if she had seen him, a second later, bury his head in his hands in a sudden realization of his own futility - a sudden ghastly sense that the reason why he had flicked his fingers was because he had nothing to flick them at, and that the reason why he could write these brilliant mockeries of love was because he himself had a heart of stone. It was a strange, strained face upon which the lamplight shone as the car drew up with a jerk at Number 70.

He crossed the pavement. For a moment he paused. How fragrant was the scent of the lime trees, drifting down the breeze! Thank heaven, at least, that his physical senses remained to him. He entered the hall. It was (we regret to state) a block of flats, or, as the Americans, with their vivid imagination, would term it, 'an apartment house.' He ascended four flights. He emerged. He walked down a corridor . . . came to the end of it.

Then as he turned the corner, he stopped, suddenly rigid. For the door at the end of the passage swung open, and in a flood of light (as though the drama should be presented to him with its utmost force) appeared the figures of his wife and her lover.

Her lover? Yes! Need we go into sordid details of

proof? Can we not be content with chronicling the fact that both these persons, as they stood in that electric haze, were wearing dressing-gowns? Surely that single observation, to the genteel minds of those who read these tales, is enough to damn them, to remove them at once from decent society? Especially when one adds that they were quite exquisite dressing-gowns - hers of tawny satin, so that she seemed a Tanagra statuette, and his of a peacock green, with a Chinese dragon sprawling in silky abandon across its shoulder.

The figures swayed - absurdly, like marionettes blown in a wind of doubt. For, you see, none of them had ever been in quite so painfully obvious a situation before. It was like being taken to see a play by Sir Arthur Pinero - husband, wife, lover - a crude, old-fashioned triangle. And it was so long since they had seen a crude, old-fashioned triangle. Modern designs were far more complicated. They all felt a little as though they were being mocked. Even the light was wrong, glaring and commonplace. So that Anne, who always sensed the one important thing which should be done in any crisis, drew back into the shadow.

Her movement broke the spell. Nigel said:

'Darling, you've copied my dressing-gown.'

His voice sounded like the strained echo of a nervous actor, drifting out into the sad spaces of an empty theatre. But you must admit that it was a charming remark, in the circumstances.

And Anne laughed. She turned to Peter, her lover, and said:

'I've been telling you all the evening that Nigel was an angel.'

Nigel smiled. 'Not *quite* all the evening, dearest?'

'Why?'

Their voices were normal now, soft and even, and they drifted through the doorway as they talked - Anne

to the sofa, Peter to an arm-chair, Nigel to the fire-place.

'There must have been moments when/ he paused, 'when you didn't speak at all.'

'Nigel, darling, don't be coarse.' Anne's forehead was shadowed by the faintest frown.

'I'm terribly sorry,' he said. 'I suppose it's because I've got such a literal mind.' (How jerky this dialogue is becoming, he thought. Staccato. Disconnected. What was the matter with him?) To Peter he said, 'Has Anne given you a drink?'

Peter gave a faint sigh of relief. He was a sensitive creature, and he had been so afraid that Nigel might attempt to be sarcastic. Besides, he wanted a drink.

'No.' And his voice was a little peevish. 'She never does.'

'Never?' Nigel paused, with his hand on the decanter.

'Oh, dear! Have I said the wrong thing?' Peter looked appealingly at Anne.

'Yes. As usual.' She turned to Nigel. 'You see, this has been going on quite a long time.'

'What?'

'This affair with Peter.'

Nigel did not look at her. 'Drink, Peter?'

'Thanks.'

'Quite a long time,' said Anne again.

'Say when, old boy.'

Peter said when. Anne shrugged her shoulders and went back to the fire. If Nigel didn't want particulars, she wouldn't bore him with them. Still, she did think, in common decency, that he might have been at least curious. Aloud she said:

'How's the play going?'

'Marvellously. Quite a model audience. Like a lot of pretty sheep.'

Peter chuckled. 'Wish I had your brains, Nigel.'

Nigel darted a swift glance at Peter's legs, of which an unnecessary amount was showing from beneath the dressing-gown.

'You appear to have compensations,' he said.

Anne saw the glance, understood it, and said, 'Peter, you'd better get your things on.'

'Why hurry him,' said Nigel. 'He looks so sweet like that.'

'He was going in any case,' said Anne sharply.

'I see. The passionate interlude was, for the moment, at an end?'

She started back. Wasn't there rather a queer ring in his voice? But when she looked into his face she was reassured. He was smiling broadly, not at her, but at Peter. And Peter was returning his smile. She felt infinitely relieved.

'Peter,' she said in a nice, sensible voice. 'Get dressed. You'll catch cold.'

'All right.' He stretched and rose to his feet.

'If you feel at all shivery,' said Nigel, 'you'll find some aspirin on my dressing-table.'

'Thanks.' Peter paused, and went up to Nigel with his hand outstretched. It was a pity that Nigel, at that moment, was lifting the decanter, because it spoiled Peter's gesture of friendship. Still there was a warm ring as he said, 'Nigel, old boy, you're a sportsman.'

And how could one have bettered Nigel's reply: 'From you, Peter, that means such a lot.'

So Peter went out of one door, and Anne, being a perfect lady, went out of the other, and Nigel went to the fireplace, where unfortunately we can only see his back. For nearly fifteen minutes there was silence, broken only by those conventional noises which one can buy by the packet in the courses of short story writing - the hum of a taxi in the street below, the sputter of a log

on the glowing hearth, and the soft tramp, in the distant room, of a man getting dressed. (Though this noise, in the more orthodox courses, is usually omitted from the list.) Gradually even these noises ceased, so that when there were footsteps in the corridor outside, and when Peter's voice rang out wishing him a cheerful and boyish 'Good night,' Nigel was quite startled.

Anne, in a pretty tea-gown, appeared behind him.

'See him out, will you, Nigel? We've said good-bye.'

'Of course.'

He went with Peter to the door, and down the corridor.

'Good night.'

The door closed quietly. Outside, the gates of the elevator clanged to, and the echo of its descent died away. Nigel was walking back towards the sitting-room. As he saw his face reflected momentarily in a Chinese mirror, he started back. He did not recognize it. He looked like a mandarin - drawn, with thin, straight lips and smouldering eyes. He pulled himself together. He was smiling again when he went in to Anne.

She rose from her chair. Her arms stretched out to him in welcome.

'Darling, you *are* perfect', you know.'

'So are you.'

Yes, as he studied her, he admitted her perfection. She was like a rose awakened, not one of those tiresome country roses that are marred by some faulty petal, plagued by some small but hideous insect. No. She was like the rose of the Ritz which has no flaws, which seems indeed to have no end and no beginning.

'You made me feel so beautifully at home.' She lit a cigarette, and, as she did so, her profile was bathed in an amber glow. The beauty of her was like a knife to his heart.

'So did you.'

The profile crinkled to a smile. 'It's your wit I love, Nigel. Your lovely wit.'

And from now on, in this dialogue, Anne's back was perpetually turned on him.

'Not, by any chance, my lovely self?'

He threw out his arms, bowed, threw back his head. Then again he caught sight of himself in a mirror. (Why were there so many mirrors in this damned house?) He was being ridiculous. He was making himself a pathetic figure. Pathetic! As if there were anything pathetic in this situation!

'And the play is really going well?' She was, of course, a little constrained. Naturally. She was a lady. But she felt that the scene was accomplishing itself with admirable smoothness.

'Marvellously. I'm going back to it in a minute.'

'So glad.'

'I knew you would be.'

'About the play I mean, not about your going.'

'Of course.'

'You deserve it all, Nigel.'

'Thanks.'

How radiant was the pink-white flesh of her back! With a sudden, clumsy movement he stretched out his handjgroping, as though to touch her. She sensed the gesture, misinterpreted it.

'Cigarette?'

He forced a laugh. 'Thanks. Apposite, aren't we?'

'They're in the little box on that table.' His fingers searched for them. 'We mustn't be *too* apposite, must we, Nigel?'

'How do you mean?' Where were those cigarettes? All he could feel was something straight and cold, something that seemed to urge his fingers to clutch it, like a - like a knife.

'Well . . .' and her voice was sweetly sane. 'We

mustn't be too detached? Is that the word?' She half turned, and then turned back again, gazing into the fire.

'Is it?' What . . . oh what . . . was he saying? And why were his fingers twisting . . . twisting like this . . . round the little Chinese knife which lay so incongruously by the side of the cigarette-box?

'Yes.' She leant her chin on her hand. 'It's lovely being sensible, and modern, and all that, but one doesn't want to overdo it. One doesn't want to elaborate it, I mean. For instance, take to-night.'

'Yes, to-night.' The very steel was cutting into his fingers.

Her voice chimed on monotonously. 'You were perfectly splendid about it all. You accepted the whole situation in the only logical way. After all, it's ages since we've . . .' The pink-white shoulders dimpled.

'Yes. Ages.'

'And so, since we're both human, there's no reason why . . .'

'None.'

'All the same, I think, just for the fun of it, you might have been a little more . . .'

'What?'

'I'm terribly bad at adjectives. Distressed? Enraged? Normal? What am I trying to say?'

'Don't ask me, dearest!'

(Surely she must hear that note of agony in his voice. But no. For she continued.)

'It makes it all too like one of your plays, don't you think?'

'Yes. Too like one of my plays.'

His voice seemed to come from a distance. His throat was dry. Something extraordinary, something agonizing and horrible was happening to him. He was caught up in a drama over which he had no control, making gestures which he had not imagined, speaking lines

which he had not written - many lines, tumbling incoherently from his lips, making the suave, exquisite creature before him start and tremble and turn in a quick motion of alarm. And almost the last line of this sudden violent soliloquy was, 'It's time we stopped acting my plays, isn't it, dearest?' And the 'dearest' was like the hiss of a snake.

As he said it, his hand was raised - that thin white hand which caught the light like a glitter of brilliant paint on the canvas of a maniac - raised for a second. And in that second of steel and silence their eyes met in a mute and mocking mirror that hung on the wall above. And all the comedies and all the tragedies that Nigel Chelmsford had ever written or would ever write were echoed on that silver surface. Echoed for a brief and hideous instant. And then, the mirror showed only the crumpled body of a woman stretched in death, and the grotesque, stiff back of a man as he stumbled away, blindly, from the thing he had loved and killed.

If you had been sitting in the stalls of the Grand Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, on the first night of Nigel Chelmsford's comedy, *A Pure Woman*, and had cast your eyes up to the stage box, you would have seen a silk hat, resting on the edge of the box, and by the side of the hat, a white-gloved hand. And had your eyes not been riveted to the stage (for at this moment it was five minutes to eleven, just before the final curtain), you would have noticed a curious phenomenon with regard to that white-gloved hand. It twisted, arched a little, and then perceptibly, it *swelled*. There was a moment's pause. And then, if once again we may emulate the gentleman of the cinematograph and switch to a close-up, we observe, with a certain distaste, that at the end of one of the fingers appeared a stain, faint at first, then dark, then flushing to an angry red.

But how could we have noticed such things when so many excitements were going on all round us - for example, the final, brutally casual scene on the stage, where the hero, having discovered that his own brother had seduced his wife (by correspondence), carelessly lights a cigarette with that same brother's love-letter, observing as he did so, that the family never had a sense of styl'd? How could we have noticed anything at all, indeed, as all around us burst out the thunders of applause, and the curtain descended, an expanse of faded golden velveteen? How? But we must not go on asking these questions. We must continue the action to the bitter end (the end *is* very near now, and it is bitter enough, you will agree). And the only reason we wish to continue it at all (for the details will still be fresh in your minds from the newspaper reports) is in order to correct a slight inaccuracy. It concerns the speech which Nigel at this very moment was beginning, as he stood, tall, thin, and a little twisted, like a black crow, poised before the great faded curtains. That speech has never been quite completely reported. Here it is, word for word, as it floated out, in his curious, high-pitched voice, into the spaces beyond:

'LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, - I have not the faintest intention of thanking you. (*Loud laughter.*) After all, I am poignantly aware that the only person who is deserving of any thanks is myself. (*Louder and longer laughter, which gives the Duchess of Wrex an opportunity of putting two quite audacious dabs of pillar-box red on the extreme tips of her upper lip.*) But I am even more poignantly aware that you have not the least idea why you have to thank me. (*Applause, and cries of 'Hear, hear.'*) I will tell you. You have to thank me because, instead of giving you an artificial comedy, I have given you a piece of stark realism. (*Here, one woman giggled loudly, under the mistaken*

impression that she was meant to do so. She very quickly stopped, and history will never tell whether it was Lady Air or the Duchess of Wrex who so forgot herself but from the stony way in which both these ladies glared at each other, and from the remarks which they subsequently made about each other's tactlessness and lack of sensibility in emotional crises, it might well have been either, or both.)

'I have given you/ repeated Nigel, 'a piece of stark realism. I have shown you men and women acting as men and women do act to-day. You have seen a woman cheated. What did that woman do? She merely shrugged her shoulders. *{Here he shrugged his own shoulders in a curious distorted way, that called for no laughter, but only deepened the silence.}* You have seen a lover mocked. What did that lover do? He merely flicked his fingers, because, you see, it was all absolutely . . .'

And it is there that the speech, in most of the newspaper reports of the subsequent trial and condemnation of Nigel Chelmsford, breaks off. One cannot wonder indeed at the omission, for the scene which immediately followed was so chaotic and so horrible that even to-day the very memory of it is confused. However, all are agreed on the main point, which was that after the words. 'He merely flicked his fingers, because, you see, it was all absolutely . . .'

Nigel paused and slowly stretched out his gloved hand, and flicked his fingers himself. But the glove was no longer white. It was red - a fresh and glistening red that shone against the faded golden curtains like a hideous stain. For a space of nearly ten seconds there was silence, and then there was a shrill and grotesque scream from a woman who rose from a seat in the front row, staggered wildly for a few paces, and then fell. That scream was the cue for general pandemonium. And in the uproar he stood there, thin and black, while the exit doors were choked with a riot

of shamed and screaming women, their eyes darting back, in hysteria, to the raised, gloved hand. Still he stood there, while the great curtain blew out and round him in the icy draught, and the spot lime shone pitilessly down on his white contorted face, twisted to a smile, with lips that moved incessantly.

Which reminds us. What were those lips saying? What was the end of that sentence - that very tantalizing sentence - of which the world heard only half? In the interests of accuracy only - for they were not very sensational words - we will tell you. 'True to life.' That was what it was. 'True to life . . . true to life . . . true to life . . .' over and over again, like a mad child repeating a lesson. He was still saying those words until the moment when, a week later, he entered the dock to give his historic and heartless defence. And there is a man in a certain prison, who lives by death, who will tell you that when they blindfolded him, and when a bell tolled the hour of eight, those were once more the words which he said, the same words which are written at the head of this mournful but conscientious chronicle.

PART 2

JOURNALESE

Making a Man of Him

MY school life was dominated by a pair of steel rings. These rings were of the ordinary gymnastic variety, and they hung from the ceiling in the centre of each dormitory. To my young, and perhaps morbid, imagination they seemed to command the entire room, like two great steel eyes, glaring into one's soul. For those rings were not hung there merely as ornaments, nor for the pleasant delectation of those who chose to use them. They were not a luxury - they were a necessity. Every new boy who entered that house was informed, as soon as he arrived, that in six weeks' time he would be expected to be strong enough to haul himself through those rings and turn a somersault on them. If he were not strong enough to do so, he would be beaten, in pyjamas, with the rest of the dormitory lined up to watch.

I can hear the Spartan mothers smacking their lips over this custom. This is the sort of ordeal which they are constantly demanding for their sons. I wonder if they would still demand it if they could have seen what actually happened. I believe that this practice made some boys cowards for life. Concerning the physical effects, I am not qualified to speak, but it is obvious that the strain on youthful hearts must have been considerable.

Many of the boys were weak and over-grown, with tiny muscles that were quite incapable of supporting their own weight. These were the boys who, naturally, were subjected to the greatest strain. They used to go up to dormitory early every night-three or four of

them - undress, and lie down on the floor to do physical exercise in a feverish effort to get the necessary strength in time. The veins on their foreheads would swell out, they would gasp and pant, and when they rose, exhausted, their hearts would be racing so fast that they lay awake for hours. Five weeks more, a month, three weeks, two, one . . . Towards the last week those who were still incapable of doing what was required of them showed frenzied activity. They thought that if only they could make their arms ache enough the muscles would come, and all would be well. Poor, unhappy little fools!

You may say that I am making a great fuss about nothing, that all they suffered was a matter of ten strokes in pyjamas. Apart from the fact that ten strokes in pyjamas is a pretty arduous ordeal - I should like to bend a Spartan mother over the end of her bed and see how she responded to a couple of them - the beating was a comparatively minor part of the punishment. The main ordeal was spread out over the whole six weeks, when the boys lay panting on their faces, trying desperately to increase their strength. The injustice of the whole thing was what affected me most bitterly. I myself had strong arms, and passed easily enough. But I was revolted by the sight of the others being beaten - for *weakness*. You might as well beat a boy for being short-sighted or lame. It is not his fault. He did not make his muscles. He has done his best. But because it is not good enough, he is beaten. Can you possibly defend it on any grounds whatever? Yes, you can, if you are a Spartan mother. For it is a perfect example of the good old practice of 'making a man of him.'⁵

I do not believe that physical pain ever made a man of any boy. I do not believe in these bruised, boyish heroes, who are turned into Empire builders by the simple process of castigating their behinds. The behind

is a tender portion of the anatomy, and an undignified portion as well, and if a boy is made unduly conscious of it at an early age, he is not likely to grow into an Empire builder. He is far more likely to develop an inferiority complex, which is fatal if one wants to cultivate the proper pose of arrogance in the colonies.

The idea that you create character by violently bruising the skin is an idea that should long ago have been relegated to the medieval dust-heap, over which Mr. G. K. Chesterton browses with such wistful perseverance.

Physical pain never did anybody any good. Yet it is the basis of the philosophy of all those parents who want their sons to grow into 'men.' And it is the reason for their loud and perpetual championship of all the imbecilities of the public-school system. I shall now proceed to range a few of those imbecilities in a row and knock them down with the bricks of my crude (but apparently provocative) prose.

Imbecility Number One. The Cadet Corps. Every boy who is going to grow into a 'man' must join the cadet corps. It is 'Voluntary' of course. No boy *need* join it - unless he has some curious objection to being made the laughing-stock of the entire school and the object of all the masters' derision. Completely voluntary! That is one point in its favour.

What are the other points? I will tell you. It will give him an invaluable training in the tactics of the last war. The tactics of the last war, compared with those of the war which is coming, will be rather more antiquated than the manoeuvres of Hannibal appear to-day, but that is a detail. You are making a man of him.

It will fill his poor, puzzled little head with a lot of bloody illusions. Grizzled sergeants who served in the Boer War will roar at him during bayonet practice, telling him that the sack he is prodding is the stomach of a blankety German. (Oh, yes! these things *are* going on

to-day, in merry England and in merry America!) He will be taught every possible fallacy and bestiality.

What does it matter? You are tying a noose round his neck - all parents who do not preach peace at any price are doing that - but you are making a man of him. The fact that you are probably making a male corpse, as well, must not trouble you.

Imbecility Number Two. Compulsory cricket and football. I am not a crank, and I fully realize the benefit of compulsory games. Boys from twelve to eighteen are inclined to be physically lethargic, unless they are prodded into a certain amount of activity, with the result that their systems are clogged and their complexions become spotty. I cannot bear spotty complexions. And that, to me, is a quite sufficient reason for continuing compulsory games.

But why such odd, graceless, muddy, boring games as cricket and football? The main object of a game, surely, is to invigorate the body, train the eye, and relax the brain. Tennis is the game, *par excellence*, which fulfils all these functions to perfection. Yet if you suggest to the average headmaster that tennis should be substituted for cricket, he will regard you as a 'Bolshevik.' Why? Because you play tennis with a soft ball and cricket with a hard,-and consequently you do not run the risk of having your nose broken in tennis. In other words, tennis is an unmanly game because it does not hurt.

Because it does not hurt If you analyse the intellectual and physical curriculum of nine schools out of ten, you will find that the things which are painful are the things which, in the eyes of the typical schoolmaster, are good. That is why the Spartan mother still approves.

Imbecility Number Three. 'Early School.' If you are rash enough to question the merit of a system which drags boys out of bed to do an hour's work before breakfast, you will always be told that the boys are 'hardened'

by it. I fail to see how 'hardening' is connected with any intellectual process. If the boys were made to bathe or run races at this hour there would be some method in the madness - though it would still be madness. But they are only made to sit with empty stomachs, yawning over books, until the bell rings to summon them to chapel. I do not know if chapel is included in the 'hardening' process. It certainly cannot be defended on religious grounds.

This fetish of early school is a remnant of the grand old British doctrine that anything that hurts a boy must be good for him. It is perpetuated from generation to generation because most schoolmasters are only grown-up schoolboys. If you were to take a census of schoolmasters, you would find that an alarmingly large proportion of them had gone straight from school to college, and straight from college to school again, with a possible polite interlude on a reading-party in Spain.

I should like to meet the schoolmaster who had been down a coal-mine, or speculated on the Stock Exchange, or danced in the back row of the chorus, or opened the doors of taxi-cabs on Broadway, or learnt the lore of the commercial traveller, or had done anything that would teach him that life is hard enough without trying to make it harder for youth.

You may tell me that if my principles were adopted, England would no longer be a nation of fighters. Well - what of it? Why do we want fighters? Isn't it obvious to the meanest intelligence that the fewer we have of them the better? If you breed fighters, you will get fights, and I should have thought that the world had seen enough fighting to last it for some time. The Spartan mother will probably say that even if *we* do not bring up blood-thirsty children, Germany will, or America, or France, or China, and then 'where will we be?' I haven't the least idea 'where we shall be.' But the world has to

begin to be rational on some part of its surface, or perish. And I fail to see why it should not begin in England.

In any case, we have already ceased to be a nation of fighters, in the only sort of fight which is of any importance to us, as an industrial country, *i.e.* the commercial. Owing to our fantastically antiquated system of 'gentlemen's education,' which permits French to be taught by men who could not tell a Parisian taxi-man how to drive to the Ritz, which still regards German as a somewhat shady language, which ignores geography as an effeminate pastime (except at Harrow, which possesses, in Dr. Cyril Norwood, a perpetual and blessed exception to all the foregoing remarks) - owing to these ludicrous limitations, we are turning out thousands of young men whose main object in life seems to be to write to me for jobs.

The Poison of Proverbs

PROVERBS are supposed to represent the accumulated wisdom of the ages, and that is quite enough to make me distrust them. For the accumulated wisdom of the ages is usually silly or evil, like an old pond that has grown foul with the rotting of centuries of dead leaves. In certain technical and mechanical professions, such as medicine or surgery, the modern man stands on the shoulders of the ancient, for the simple reason that knowledge is his main objective. But in the broader activities of mankind there is no such thing as accumulated wisdom.

In the realm of statesmanship we have only attained to accumulated idiocy. Morally we are on the same level as the Romans in the third century, except that we are vulgar, while they were gay. Esthetically we are not fit to lick the boots of the Greeks.

I cannot understand this veneration for proverbs. If I had a young son I should tear them down from his nursery walls. I should begin by taking down that text, 'All is not gold that glitters/ because it is a criminal thought to put into a child's mind. It is all very well for shopkeepers and the proprietors of antique shops, but if you put that sort of idea into children's heads you will turn them into stunted little cynics. They will begin to question the brightness of a new penny, and they will end by sneering at the sunlight.

However, I was not thinking primarily of the effects of proverbs upon children, but upon adults. Here are a few of the more popular aphorisms, with my own notes upon them:

'A rolling stone gathers no moss?' This phrase is a great favourite with old gentlemen all over the world. It is significant that there is a version of it even in Chinese. The aforesaid elderly gentlemen spit it out into the faces of all young men who do not wish to remain in a rut. If Wen-ling-chow scrapes along the verandah to whine to his master that he has been offered a position of promise in a neighbouring rice-field, his master will frown at him and repeat that parrot phrase. If a junior clerk timidly informs Sir Arthur Solidbottom that he wishes to try his luck elsewhere, he will meet with the same reception. Old men do not like rolling stones, because they cannot put their feet on them. They cannot step on them and grind them into the mud. It is perfectly true that rolling stones gather no moss. The whole point of it is: Who wants to be covered with moss, anyway?

All great men have been in one sense or other rolling stones. Napoleon would have died a respectable Corsican military official if he had listened to that proverb. As it was, he rolled himself over the face of Europe. Cromwell would have stagnated among his local pastures and the English Constitution would have been a greater parody of democracy than it is to-day. Trotsky would have continued to let off his superfluous emotion by shaving the beards of his customers in that little barber's shop in New York - or was it Chicago? In fact, everybody who has ever done anything would have done nothing at all.

The only proverb for which I have any use expresses the precise opposite of the rolling stone idea. '*standing waters you will find poison?*' And that is really not a proverb at all, but an observation of the poet Blake, who is generally admitted by posterity to have been a raving lunatic. Judged by posterity's standards, he was, which is one of the chief reasons why he is worth reading.

ⁱ *Early to bed and early to rise is the way to be healthy,*

wealthy, and wise.' I would make a quick guess that this irritating jingle contains as many inaccuracies as can be compressed into a single sentence. Take the word 'healthy.' Why is it healthier to sleep from ten till six than from one till nine? Why? Is the atmosphere different? Is the world spinning at a different pace? Is there any conceivable reason?

Then, again, 'wealthy.' I will not make the too obvious observation that a large proportion of the population, such as the theatrical profession, depends for its livelihood upon activities which begin after eight o'clock at night. But why should wealth be a matter of the daily time-table? I believe that Lord Leverhulme used to rise at six, but from bitter experience I can assure you that a great many millionaires sleep till twelve. It is really too silly to talk about, but it should be observed that the fallacy is a perfect example of the belief in quantity as opposed to quality. When I was at school I used to be infuriated by the insistence of my masters that I should spend an hour over reading a task which I could assimilate in ten minutes. At a sensible institution I should not have been dragged to school at 7 a.m. to do an hour's work which I had completed at 7.10.

However, speed is still considered immoral in England. In my mother's time the word 'fast' meant immoral. I suppose the word 'slow' was therefore synonymous with virtue.

'A stitch in time saves nine.' This is the creed of all the busybodies all the world over. It is the logic which animates all those who are dominated by *fear*. I know a man who is always changing his investments at the least market depression, because when a share depreciates a shilling he immediately jumps to the conclusion that it will depreciate nine shillings. As a result his capital has been steadily shrinking throughout the last ten years. He has actually quoted this silly proverb in my face, and

it dominates his whole outlook.. He is the mental equivalent of a woman I know who is always guarding her children against the possibility of sin. She thinks that if they drink one cocktail they are bound, by some mysterious law of nature, to drink another eight. Again, the ridiculous proverb is to blame. If you *stop* a girl drinking a cocktail, she *will* drink nine, if she has any spirit.

What do I care if a stitch in time does save nine? The time occupied by making that one stitch may be ten times as valuable as the time occupied by making the other eight. So that even in the pure realm of mathematics the proverb fiends are not necessarily right.

'Make hay while the sun shines?' This is a brutally cynical proverb. It is much appreciated by inferior authors, who, having made a success with one book, sign up gullible publishers for their future productions. It is equally appreciated by proprietors of shoddy-smart restaurants, who take the opportunity of a silly vogue to cram country cousins into obscure corners, charging them five shillings for a couple of sardines and a piece of tomato rind. It is, in fact, the gospel of all 'go-getters,' of all those charlatans who, having no faith in themselves, realize that they must capitalize to its utmost extent any small success which they may gain in a world which worships small successes - and attacks big ones.

But there is a tragic side to this proverb. Consider the recent Wall Street crashes. Americans adore proverbs. They hang them up in drug stores, in elevators, in the most unlikely places. 'Make hay while the sun shines,' is a special favourite. Is it too much to suppose that this false and foolish doctrine, constandy reiterated, played some part in the stock-market boom? The sun certainly *was* shining. Everything was going up. Ought one not to make hay - and go on making it - conscious only that the sun was shining, forgetful of the financial clouds that were massing on the horizon?

'Look after the pennies and the pounds will look after themselves?' Here you have the mind of the proverb-monger at its worst. It is a cringing, hypocritical, lack-lustre mind - above all, a miserly mind. Nobody but a miser could possibly approve of such a statement. I am not writing in the foolish vein of one who has never known poverty. I have never had a halfpenny from anybody since I left Oxford, and I had no business, no profession, no friends, and no belongings of any sort except a couple of suits which were not paid for and a fountain-pen which was. But I did not 'look after the pennies,' at first because I had no pennies to look after, and later because the very idea struck me as horrible. For a happy carelessness of pennies is the first delight of manhood. I remember walking down the Thames Embankment one evening in spring, years ago, when I had sold some little article to a newspaper. The daffodils were dappling the lawns in the Inner Temple gardens, and the sky over the river was like a field of daffodils itself. I bought a newspaper, gave the boy sixpence, and told him to keep the change. I told him to do so in a loud voice, because I was filled with the patrician vulgarity of youth; but, all the same, those five pennies which I threw away gave me a thrill of pleasure which I shall never forget.

And if that sounds like an episode in the earlier life of Little Lord Fauntleroy, I can't help it.

There is far too much saving and far too little spending. There are far too many dull young men endeavouring to save five hundred pounds to invest in an Argentine beef factory, and far too few happy young men spending half a crown on a good beef-steak.

'More haste, less speed!' I do not know to whom this infuriating generalization is meant to apply. It obviously does not apply to athletes, nor to *prime donne* during their rendering of the mad scene from *Lucia*. It can therefore

only apply to the man-in-the-street. It is sure comfort to the man who is never able to make up his mind, the man who can't decide where to go for a holiday, and leaves it so late that he ends by staying at home. It has a counterpart in its sister proverb, '*Look before you leap*' It comforts countless unhappy women who spend their old age in solitude because their mothers had described the pitfalls of marriage so vividly that they did not dare to take the risk.

I have a peculiar hatred for this proverb, not because I do not realize the dangers of life, but because I realize them so acutely that I think that any sort of caution is absurd. Every step that we take is a step in the dark. Every road that we walk along is a road that leads to an unknown destination. Every cup of wine that we drink may bear in its dregs some hidden poison or some hidden delight. If we look before we leap we shall never leap at all. We shall go on looking and looking and looking - into Nothingness.

My Sense of Humour

I HAVE never laughed at a practical joke, nor at a drunken man, nor at the suggestion of marital infidelity. If one is to judge from the music-halls, these three classes of humour constitute for a great many people the main sources of life's amusement. And yet, in one way or another, I seem to be laughing a good deal. Are there others like me, and if so, are the music-halls wrong?

Here are some of the things which make me laugh:

(1) People walking down Piccadilly past street musicians or an ex-soldiers⁵ band.

At a distance of about fifty yards, when their eagle eyes have detected the danger spot, they moisten their lips, swing their bags or their walking-sticks, and bring to their countenances a look of determined other-worldliness.

See? Hear? Certainly not. If a pink elephant were to emerge from any of the clubs and say 'Pish' at them, a phenomenon which, I believe, has frequently occurred during the festive season, they would neither see nor hear it.

In fact, their abstraction occasionally defeats their own objects, for on several occasions I have seen generously proportioned ladies collide with a loud report just in front of the band itself, so complete has been their withdrawal from earthly things.

(2) Dancers. In order to extract the fullest and most riotous amusement from the spectacle of other people dancing you should, somehow, shut off the music of the

band. There are one or two streets in London where one can look into the restaurant through the windows, and the sight of quantities of gargoyles silently revolving is worth any money.

I once stood outside the ballroom of the *Mauretania*, in mid-ocean, and watched. The only sound one could hear was the long-drawn sob of the waves and the flapping of canvas chairs. But inside, like marionettes jerked by unseen wires, the young things and the old things wobbled their legs, swayed their arms, smiled, and nodded.

It was terribly funny, and it was also rather frightening - these grotesque little wriggings over the face of an angry sea.

(3) Snobs. I adore them. Especially the celebrity snobs. There is a woman in London for whom I would break any engagement at any time.

But, alas! she never asks me now, because when a sentry recently disappeared from Buckingham Palace I vouchsafed the opinion that it was foolish to search for him, since he would certainly be lunching with Lady 'X' on the following day.

(4) The man who wants to tell a story. Many a time I have sat back at a crowded table in an ecstasy of enjoyment while Mr. Jones bounced up and down on his seat, looking wildly this way and that, moistening his lips, and saying, *ad nauseam*, 'That reminds me.' But as soon as he has emitted this warning phrase everybody bursts out again, in the manner of the guests at a recent seance who were asked to talk loudly in order to drown the sinister noise of the medium producing protopods.

Which reminds me that protopods are extremely funny. They make me think of large vegetable marrows that would go pop and put their tongues out at you if you treated them unkindly.

(5) Men of affairs who lay down their swords - or

whatever their particular toy may have been - for the pen. They always want to write about sunsets. One finds this sort of thing: The Drainage Bill was safe at last. I leaned back and heaved a sigh of relief. Outside my window the sky was rich with the varied tints of amethyst, topaz, purple, vermilion, indigo, and turquoise. It seemed to me a portent.'

We all know, too, the chapters which begin: 'I am no writer. My life has been too exclusively devoted to the services of my country. But when I think of the beauties of nature . . .' and thus they begin to think of them, in terms of mountain-tops, rushing rivers, and 'autumn tints,' when all the time we are longing for them to tell us what the Duchess really said.

(6) All amateurs, in fact, are extremely funny. I am funny when I play tennis or play Cesar Franck, or try to get Oslo on the radio. And other people are funny when they try to do my job.

A writer is regarded as fair game by all people with ideas. They come up to one and say, 'Oh, you know, I thought of a *shattering* sketch for a revue to-day.'

I hiss 'Did you?' and glare at them, at the same time trying to think of something very far away, very remote and peaceful, like the top of Mount Everest. 'Yes,' they gurgle. 'You know I was sitting in an omnibus and an old woman came in - you really should have seen her - wonderful character - you know - Maisie Gay or Nellie Wallace - and she just sat down . . .'

'And then she got up again,' I say, from the top of Mount Everest.

'Why, yes . . . how did you know?'

'It's a way old women have. . . .'

'And then . . . ' they go on. But, as a matter of fact, they don't. For if you laugh very loudly and very harshly, they will eventually be routed and slink trembling from the room. Laughter is a supreme antiseptic.

If all the Cabinets in the world in August 1914 could have met together and been tickled in the ribs there would never have been a war. Which reflection, when you come to think of it, is not funny in the least, though many people will probably disagree with me.

Some Obscure Heroes

EVERY day some young man bounces off a bridge and rescues a woman-who would probably much prefer to be left to drown like a lady. Every day some other young man pirouettes through the smoke of a burning building and throws everything human within reach out of the window. Every day other young men are firmly seizing ebullient horses, checking ferocious dogs, and obtruding the courses of undisciplined lions. They are heroes.

Every day other young men are pushing diamond studs into somebody else's shirts, ironing somebody else's trousers, and standing to attention while somebody else goes out to spend the equivalent of a month's wages on a single night's entertainment. Every day, in various blocks of flats, young men with eager muscles and a longing to leap and run are sitting in deserted lifts, waiting for somebody to press a button, with the bitter knowledge that they will sit in that lift for the rest of their lives, if they are lucky, and that they are really only living on charity, anyway. And they are heroes, too.

The world is still full of well-meaning people who would be deeply pained by the suggestion that servants are human. There are, of course, lots of women who are quite angelic to their maids, whom they often secretly like far better than their own relations. But these same women can be inconsiderate to the verge of cruelty with their other attendants.

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Consider chauffeurs. I get abominably restive about

chauffeurs. One drives to a house for tea at five o'clock, and the chauffeur waits. Tea is consumed, and is followed by cocktails. The chauffeur waits. Darkness falls, and soon it will be time for dinner. The chauffeur waits.

One drives back - a distance of a few hundred yards. Then there is dinner, and half-way through dinner, somebody suddenly remembers, and says, 'Oh, tell Jarvis we shan't want him any more to-night. He can call at ten to-morrow morning for orders.'

Now this astounding cruelty is practised by the most estimable employers every day. It is practised by people who write large and secret cheques to ear-hospitals, by people who froth at the mouth when you mention stag-hunting, by people who write letters to the papers saying that they saw a woman slap a baby in Hyde Park last Tuesday four times in the wrong place, and is that the sort of thing we are coming to, yours indignantly?

Yet they just don't seem to realize that for hours and hours they continue to torture a young man with patient eyes sitting in their own car. For it is not so easy to sit in a car when one is young and the dusk is falling, and there is a lisp of movements on the pavements and laughter outside, and all the bright chances of love and adventure. Not so easy from the hours of five-to *ten* when you know perfectly well that your employer doesn't want you and won't want you except for that litde drive of a few hundred yards which could perfectly easily be accomplished in a taxi-cab. That is why I say that the average private chauffeur is a hero.

To endure poverty in the face of great wealth calls for qualities of vital endurance. That is why every honest bank clerk is a hero. I could not possibly be an honest bank clerk. I should smooth those notes between my fingers and hear in their crackle the sound of music by the sea in some Southern city, and I should put the notes in my pocket.

Well - those notes must always be whispering similar temptations to the young men who handle them, and on certain days - grey, long days when there was sickness at home and no money for the rent and a baby coming - those temptations must be almost unbearable.

All this sounds as if I had just returned hot-foot from witnessing a dramatization of *Eric, or Little by Little*, but I cannot help that.

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A few schoolmasters are heroes. Most, of course, are insufferable bores who ought to be horse-whipped. (More than one sneering face drifts up from the past as I write.) But sometimes in seaside towns you will see a young man walking rather self-consciously at the head of a 'crocodile*' of obstreperous little boys.

To most of the passers-by he is simply the master at a 'prep' school - and many would tell you that he had an easy job, with long holidays, and should consider himself lucky. Should he? Lucky? To have to hear the poetry he loves mouthed and mumbled by Smith minor? To have to instil into dull minds a number of those elementary fallacies which form the first course of traditional history?

Is that so lucky? . . . when at Oxford one has dreamed of being a Socrates, wandering in a garden with beloved disciples, tasting the exquisite fruits of learning.

That sentence sounds horribly high-falutin', but if you really explore the minds of most of the young men who leave the 'Varsity to embark on a teaching career you will find that they *are* high-falutin' . . . in the best possible sense of the word. They all want to be great head masters, to give their message to the world through eager youth. And most of them end up shabby, poor, and disillusioned, in an ugly villa in an ugly town, having learnt that nobody wants to hear their message, that

youth is not eager, and that the average parent does not care what happens to his son provided he doesn't get his feet wet.

Nobody grudges the medals which we give to the brave and die learned - nor even the medals which we give to the rich. But there is one other medal which should be struck, and the man who is entitled to that is the Man in the Street. And on the back of that medal I would write the three words: **Tor Carrying On.'**

A Word for the Chorus

THREE letters lie before me. They all arrived to-day. They are all sad, and when I have quoted extracts from them you will realize why they are all also stupid.

*'I am really desperate. In fact, I would be quite willing to go into the chorus**

'Even the back row of the chorus would be better than tramping round from agency to agency.'

'I've no pride left. I'd even go into the chorus, if I got the chance.'

All these letters were written by amateurs, and behind each of them is the assumption that 'the chorus' is a sort of large, comfortable bag into which any sort of human eccentric may be dropped and made to fit.

Hardly a day passes in my life on which some strange lady does not buttonhole me, take me into a corner, and tell me, in earnest tones, of some niece or cousin who does really charming Spanish dances (with or without castanets, as desired). And always the conversation ends with that remark about 'even' the chorus. As though being a chorus girl was the next thing, in the theatrical profession, to being on the dole.

Now there is only one answer to these people. If they are sufficiently optimistic to imagine that they will be able to wrest a livelihood from the theatre, they should realize at once that they will have a much better chance if they try for speaking parts straight away, and leave

the chorus as a lofty ambition to be attained only after years of hard work.

At parties one often meets charming young people who could be lifted bodily on to the stage to play parts, or rather to 'be themselves.'

The young man in a grey flannel suit, lying with his head on a hassock and observing, with tremendous gloom, that he has forgotten how to fall in love . . . he could be transplanted, without any alteration whatever, into the average Lonsdale comedy.

The young woman in the brilliant scarlet jumper, who runs a comb feverishly through her yellow, electric hair and stares out of the window for a taxi that never comes . . . you could ship *her* over to New York and give her a good part in any play that deals with the lives of the supposedly smart set in London.

Neither the young man nor the young woman, however, would have the least chance of entering the chorus without a very strenuous training. I only know one chorus really well, and that is the chorus known as Mr. Cochran's Young Ladies, who during the rehearsals of the 1930 Revue filled me at first with delight, then astonishment, and ultimately with awe.

It may be unfair to take these young ladies as an example, because they are exceptionally brilliant, individually and collectively. But since the ambition of every other girl in the kingdom (if I am to judge from my daily correspondence) is to be a Cochran Young Lady, it would save a great deal of trouble if the amateurs would realize that it is much easier to get into Parliament, to marry a millionaire, or to swim the Channel than to be a perfect chorus girl.

As for talking about going into 'even' the chorus! If anybody says that to you, ask them the following questions, in rapid succession:

'Can you stand on your head?'

'Can you kick your father's top hat off his head without kicking his nose?'

'Can you dance on your toes?'

'Can you sing in tune - not with yourself but with others?'

'Are you exceptionally pretty?'

'Are your legs the sort of legs that can be observed in all positions, on a cold morning, by hard-bitten managers in the stalls without exciting misgivings?'

'Can you check all immoderate longings for sweets, cocktails, and cigarettes?'

'Can you rehearse interminably, dress in a stuffy, crowded room, run like greased lightning on to the stage, and look as fresh as though you had just come from a bathe?'

'Can you learn principal parts, and keep your head if you suddenly have to play them, and keep your temper if you don't?'

'Can you stifle, month after month, your own longing for personal applause, and content yourself with doing your utmost as a member of your team?'

'Even,' the chorus! Apart from this idiotic assumption that the chorus is easy, there is the equally ridiculous conception that once a girl is in the chorus her personal responsibility ceases. The actual fact, of course, is that it increases in direct ratio to the number of the chorus itself.

When you sit in the stalls and see sixteen exquisite pairs of legs flashing in a complicated rhythm across a brilliantly lit stage, does it ever occur to you that if one of those sixteen girls began to slack, or to dream, or to tire, the rhythm would be confused or utterly lost, and the 'number' - which is only, perhaps, a single, glittering moment in a long pageant - ruined?

Evidently it does not. It seems that no age ever does justice to its choruses. In the 'nineties the chorus girl

was supposed to be a scarlet woman, easy and legitimate prey for any young man with enough money to pay for a champagne supper.

Since it is now generally admitted that chorus girls are no more scarlet than any other girls, and since society has flooded the stage with its recruits, we have Jeapt to the other conclusion that the chorus is a sort of charitable institution for the poorer and more bohemian relations of the rich, demanding no particular talents and no special training.

I would not blame any chorus girl who told me that she found the legend of the 'nineties the less irritating of the two.

A Word for the Underdog

'You are a writer,' said my host, choosing a cigar from the box the waiter was handing him, 'and so you can write about *anything*, whether it's worthy of notice or whether it isn't.'

He glanced round his shoulder.

Tor instance, you could probably write a column about this pillar behind me.'

I followed the direction of his gaze.

'I could certainly write a column about that pillar, I said. Tor it happens to be covered with blood.'

Which is about as good a beginning for a short story as you could desire. It is dreadful to have to admit that the blood was only animal blood that had spouted' in a most tactless manner from an exuberant piece of lamb, and was instantly removed by an outraged *maitre d'hotel*.

Unpardonable, too, because the whole thing is irrelevant. For my attention was not arrested by the blood that had suddenly appeared on the face of the pillar, but by the blood that had suddenly disappeared from the face of the young waiter who had been carving.

He was white as a sheet. In his eyes was reflected the appalling terror of one who may lose his job - the look of a hunted animal. For the rest of the time that we sat there his servility was pathetic. He would have lain on the floor and allowed any of the well-fed patrons to walk on him. Yes - and yet he was a normal, decent boy, born into the world to laugh and run and love.

However, he kept his job. Not through any power

of mine but through a word from my host, who was a director of the place. But it is quite possible that if we had been shown to a different table, and an irritable, complaining guest had been sitting in our place, the young waiter would have lost his job and a whole chain of tragedy have been begun.

Do we think of that - we who happen to have a little money - to be temporarily in the ascendant? Ask yourself a few questions about some of the other under-dogs.

Has anybody, for example, ever put in a word for the telephone girl? I have seen music-hall sketches in which she was murdered, to the vociferous applause of a crowded house. I have heard countless 'jokes,' in which she is revealed as a congenital idiot. One would imagine that she was an enemy of society. To me she seems an extremely hard-working, efficient, and courteous individual to whom we all owe a deep debt of gratitude.

How would *you* like to sit, hour after hour, with an instrument on your head, and a perpetual buzzing in your ears, listening to invisible people shouting numbers at you? Numbers, numbers, numbers! I should have thought that it was enough to drive one mad. 'Hop, four-six-fife-thr-r-ree. Number engaged.' 'Ger-r-rard, double two double O. That will be a toll call; four pennies, please.' 'Double six nine one,' etc. etc. On and on. When one's head is aching, and one hasn't had a holiday for six months, and one's young man is walking out with somebody else.

Are we a race of barbarians that we continually jeer and scoff at these wretched girls, who are only human beings after all - girls who cry when they're unhappy, and love pretty things, and would all like to be great ladies, and *are* great ladies in my opinion?

Consider another example. We who are well fed and decently dressed regard the police force as essential to

our well-being - as undoubtedly it is. If we are threatened or attacked we consider it our right that a policeman should instantly appear to defend us. But some of us are insulting to the police if they venture to address a word to us without being asked.

Not long ago I and another man were compelled to drive to a boring party with an equally boring girl. She parked her car just off a busy street. As we were going away a policeman arrived, and said politely:

'I'm sorry, miss, but you can't park your car here.'

The hard, insolent glint of the spoiled little rich girl came into her eyes.

'There's no traffic,' she said, 'and I shan't be more than twenty minutes.'

'I'm sorry, miss.' He was perfectly respectful, but quite determined.

'I think you're being quite unnecessarily officious,' she said. And remained stock-still.

I looked at her and thought, 'How vulgar and futile and disgusting you are! How I should like to see the policeman turn you over and smack you and send you home on a bus.' Instead of which, I said, like a perfect gentleman, 'We can run down to St. James's Square and leave it there. It's only five minutes.'

She stared at the policeman. 'If this man insists on being officious, I suppose we must. I've a good mind to take his number.' After which utterly degrading scene we got into the car and drove away, with an angry clamour of whirring gears. I hope that policeman reads these lines and accepts my implicit apology.

I often read that the modern young man is rude to his hostess, that debutantes do not write letters of thanks after a week-end party, and that people behave dreadfully at dances. All this seems to me of the smallest importance. Very rich people *ought* to be rude to one another. It is stimulating to their nervous systems. But

they ought to be very polite indeed to the underdogs - if only because scoring over a servant who is not permitted to answer back is as gallant and amusing a feat as potting a bird in a coop.

Laughter in Court

I READ the other day the story of a girl in humble circumstances who had posed as an heiress. She was arrested and tried, and during the proceedings various letters, which she had written to a boy she loved, were read aloud. They were evidently absurd letters. They spoke of her fine home, her servants, her jewels, and her rich friends. Very absurd they were. The occupants of the court, according to the newspapers, were convulsed with laughter.

I do not think much of the occupants of the court.

The girl stood there, listening. She was described as pale, slightly built. When it was all over, and the spectators had laughed their fill, she muttered, 'Thank you,' and did not raise her eyes. Whether this was the occasion for a final round of guffaws, I do not know. All I know is that the laughter ought not to have been allowed, ought not even to have been possible.

I can't think of any deeper bitterness that a young girl could suffer than she suffered. She had done wrong - one knows that - and she deserved to be punished. But if one has a spark of imagination one should realize something of the agony through which she had already gone.

She had written those letters in some shabby, stuffy little room. They were love-letters. And as she wrote them something very strange happened. . . . She began to believe the impossible. The shabby little room slowly changed, broadened out, was lit by soft lights. She herself, this girl whom a casual reporter dismissed

as 'pale and slightly built,' became desirable and lovely. There is something royal about all women in love, and this royalty descended upon her. It was a rococo royalty - the crown was crooked, the jewels were paste, the sceptre was not hers by right - yet, in those few enchanted hours she lived.

And for this she was put in the pillory, her dreams were dragged before the public, her poverty and her pretentiousness were made ridiculous, and the occupants of the court were vastly amused.

I have not that sort of humour. I may have a funny code of morals, but I find cruelty the one unforgivable sin. And, if you suffer from an analytical mind, you will be bound to admit to yourself that cruelty plays an unpleasantly important part in the psychology of modern laughter.

For example, we never tire of poking fun at the people whom we describe as *nouveaux riches*. I am utterly incapable of understanding why. Is it funny to make money? Is it funny to wish to raise yourself, however clumsily, to the levels of leisure and culture which are admitted, by the makers of these jokes, to be so desirable? Is it funny to be born poor, to have had a skimmed education, to have been snubbed and ignored when you were young, to have looked through the windows of restaurants and watched rich people spending the equivalent of a week's salary on a bottle of wine? Are these things so paralytically amusing?

To me there is a great deal more humour in the antics of the *anciens riches*, who have never had to struggle, who strut through life with the proud assumption that the world is theirs by right. *Those* people send me into gales of secret laughter - at least I hope it is secret.

For the *nouveaux riches* I feel only two emotions. First, admiration, because they have shown themselves alive in a country which contains far too many living corpses,

and secondly, a mild concern, for fear that they may do anything particularly embarrassing to themselves. Personally, I should not care if they wore pink ties with their dinner-jackets and rushed all over Leicestershire talking about dogs instead of hounds, but it would hurt them. So I always wish them luck.

Cruelty and laughter, in this curious age, seem to be more and more entwined. Many of us will doubtless soon be bursting into peals of mirth over jokes about young artists who have had their pictures rejected by the Royal Academy. That is so very amusing, is it not? But it is not so amusing as the staple modern joke, which is, of course, the ugly woman.

Crude minds have always been amused by physical deformities - street boys will always guffaw at the hunchback. But I did not think it possible that the supposedly intelligent could take such a marked delight in jeering at women. I am writing this article in a club which contains rather more than the usual assortment of humorous magazines, and a brief inspection of their pages reveals joke after joke about this one subject. Pictures of pretty girls flouting plain - pictures of weary, homely creatures sitting neglected in the corners of ball-rooms - pictures of shabby, stunted girls dragging themselves through the streets. And always underneath these pictures some callous catchword which is apparently intended to amuse.

Again, I ask myself why? Why is ugliness supposed to be funny? The editor who allowed his artists to make jokes about a man who had lost a leg in the war would be rightly dismissed. But countless editors allow their artists to make jokes about women which have exactly the same sort of appeal - the appeal to the lower, animal part of men's nature which decent people try to suppress. I don't think ugliness is funny. I think it is tragic. So is beauty. But that is another story.

Mahvlz!

'IT was a mahvlz party. The cocktails were too mahvlz for words, and the young man who played the piano was so mahvlz that something mahvlz ought to be done about him.'

Which is a fairly adequate replica of any description of any social event in this year of somewhat rococo grace.

It may have, dawned on the lynx-eyed reader, who is not fooled by queer phonetics, that the sinister-looking word so often employed above stands for 'marvellous.' I have chosen to write it as it is pronounced. To say it really properly the eyes should be partly closed, the head tilted back, and almost all the breath should be expelled from the lungs.

Not long ago Professor Gilbert Murray opined that swearing was a nervous trick. People said damn, and all ijiose other silly little words, because they really wanted to scream. For so many dreary seasons had they crept to bed at three in the morning, for so many dreary luncheons had they nibbled a little smoked salmon, swallowed a little gin and a little black coffee, that their tortured organisms could bear it no longer, and whenever they were subjected to the least annoyance they spat out the feeble, naughty little word. It was really more pathetic than culpable.

But 'mahvlz' is an even more pathetic symptom. When you see a drooping caricature of a man or a woman, standing in an artificial light, nervously flutter-

ing his or her hands, and repeating, in a husky voice, that he or she has just heard a 'mahvlz' story, or eaten a 'mahvlz' dinner, or bought a 'mahvlz' dog, you are witnessing a really pitiable example of social degeneracy. You are face to face with an unmistakable atrophy of the intellect.

There are often equally alarming symptoms. The present writer - whose well-deserved reputation for degraded insolence is partly due to an almost incurable desire to tell the truth - recently hied himself to a wedding.

He saw, at this melancholy but necessary function, a man and a woman, neither of them strikingly beautiful, though apparently in the best of health, walking slowly down the aisle, followed by four young women, each bearing about three guineas' worth of yellow lilies. The spectacle, though moving to the immediate relations, was not calculated to inspire great excitement in those whose families (and pockets) were not affected.

After this, the present writer, somewhat against his will, found himself in the thick of a reception, surrounded by quantities of silver ink-stands, together with a few ink-stands in brass (which, it was generally understood, were presents from foreign royalties). A band played with considerable enthusiasm in an alcove. Ribs cracked in every direction. Portions of a large cake were nibbled, with an almost sacramental frenzy, by the female guests. And the air was thick with one adjective - 'thrlg.'

It was - one was assured - a 'thrlg' wedding. The bride had looked too 'thrlg' for words, and hadn't it been 'thrlg' when Betty Hopcastle dropped the lily, and slipped all the way down those 'thrlg' steps, and wasn't it almost unbearably 'thrlg' when she had whimsically turned aside to the Press photographers and said, with a girlish laugh, 'Lucky it wasn't a banana'?

Even more irritating is the word 'lishus.' Time and again I have seen a woman wearing a red frock approaching a woman wearing a green frock and hissing at her, with ill-concealed malice, 'My dear, that's really a "lishus" dress.' As though the woman really was wearing a delicious dress of an edible quality.

Delicious is a word which should primarily be reserved for the products of the kitchen.

Occasionally, in very gay and feathery prose, in exquisitely artificial passages where the shadow of the eighteenth century seems to drift over the written page, permitting delicate and naughty conceits, I would forgive a novelist for writing, very slowly and with infinite care, the word 'delicious.'

But I will not forgive my acquaintances, bunched together in a corner like a lot of dyspeptic antelopes, inhaling thick draughts of cigarette smoke, and drooling the word all over the place.

I have heard of 'lishus' epigrams and 'lishus' restaurants and 'lishus' scenery until I have felt like throwing the speakers through the window.

I have even heard of 'lishus' infidelities. The fact that an anaemic Guardsman was recently cavorting about with a half-witted widow whom 'everybody knew' - you know the sort of widow - was described as indubitably 'lishus.'

There ought to be a law against such words.

Sun Crazy

Cannes, 4th September.

IT is very comforting, as one clings like a stranded clam upon these scalding rocks, to remember that the sunlight is stimulating the corpuscles, encouraging the lungs, and definitely averting the danger of rickets. That is to say, it is comforting if one considers only the welfare of the body. But if one occasionally considers the welfare of the mind - a low habit which, happily, is sternly discouraged by modern society - the sun is not quite so comforting.

For it is clearly evident that the sunburn habit is rapidly developing into a mania. By all rights the summer season should be over, which was one of the principal reasons why I came down here.

But it is still in full swing. Wives whose husbands are dictating longer and longer telegrams every day, demanding their return, are deliberately throwing those telegrams away (they are usually mutilated beyond comprehension in any case), and spreading themselves out in complete oblivion upon the sand, to taste the last biting kisses of the sun before it fades.

It is like the last act of Ibsen's *Ghosts*, where the curtain descends on the fevered words of a madman, 'Give me the sun . . . give me the sun!' It is not a mere passing phase. People are definitely planning their lives so that the tan will never leave them. A new snobbery has been born - the snobbery of tan.

Of course, at really formal and dressed-up affairs, where the men wear tops to their bathing-suits and the

women wear lip-sticks with theirs, the primeval passions of jealousy and hatred are temporarily moderated, for the simple reason that there is not so much bare skin in evidence.

But on all other occasions the atmosphere is charged with malice. Watch any little group of women on any of the crazy terraces which are hewn from the solid rock all along this fantastic coast. Study them during the entry of one of their sisters who has flushed a deeper shade of brown than any of them. An expression of sickly loathing gradually appears on all their faces. Their lips droop, their eyes water, and their nostrils curl. The object of their hatred, who is perfectly aware of the misery she is causing, discards as much of her clothing as is permitted by the Code Napoleon, and struts round, purring patronage.

She goes up to a friend, who is already so dark that in London one would be tempted to suspect her antecedents, and says, 'Darling, if this is *your first* day, *do* be sure not to overdo it. . . .'

To another, who is glowering in a corner like a crimson danger-signal, she says, 'Angel, what a relief to see a natural skin again. Poor *me* . . .' and waves in front of her a coffee-coloured arm which the crimson woman would take supreme pleasure in biting.

But these episodes are only the minor examples of a general madness. I believe the sun is actually burning up the brains of many of the people who are offering themselves, like human sacrifices, before it.

Do you remember the mesalliances of the war . . . the matches which were solely due to the glamour of a uniform? In the early days of peace the cheaper divorce courts resounded with the confessions of disillusioned wives who admitted that when the puttees had been folded into the ottoman, love had flown out of the window. (The more expensive divorce courts told the same

tale, only in these cases the disillusionment was described as 'alienation of affection.')

Exactly the same thing is happening down here, except that the glamour of the uniform is replaced by the glamour of tan. A brown youth drifts into the life of a bored woman. In this rococo setting, where the chimes of the clock are only heard in the ratde of a cocktail-shaker, where the days are a brilliant bewilderment of blue and the nights a deceptive interlude of purple, romance blooms as easily as the clematis on the scarred cliffs. And as easily dies.

A charming comedy waits to be written about it all. It is European society's colour question. I would lay Act I at Cannes when the tan was at its height.

Act II would be laid in London, three weeks later, just when it was beginning to wear off, and if the curtain were lowered for a minute in this act, to indicate the passage of another two months, one would have ample material for a *scene dfaire*, between an outraged, cheated woman and a pale, desperate man.

Act III would depend on the temperament of the dramatist. Having a penchant for happy endings; I myself would finish it off with the invention of a really efficient artificial sun-bronzer which would unite the happy pair in permanent bliss.

If Somerset Maugham were writing it, he would probably lay the last act in the following season, with the young man desperately trying to regain his lover's affection by lying in the sun all day, and coming out in blisters for his pains.

The New Snobbery

I FIRST encountered it - the new snobbery, I mean - at about ten minutes before noon on the departure platform of the Gare du Nord.

I had bought an ordinary first-class ticket on the regular midday train. After piling my cap, magazines, and walking-stick into an imposing (and I hoped deterrent) heap on the seat, I descended to take a little fresh air and to see how many acquaintances it would be necessary to avoid during the journey.

I had not walked more than a few paces before I was aware that there was a sense of strain in the atmosphere. There is always, of course, a sense of strain in the Gare du Nord - one seems to hear the throbbing of the heart of industrial France under its grim, arched roof.

But this was different. It was confined to the particular platform on which I stood. The people on the right-hand side of the platform looked sheepish - a little furtive, as though they were ashamed of something. The people on the left, however, were buoyant, somewhat haughty, and evidently ashamed of nothing at all.

I do not say *all* the people were divided into these two classes, because on every station platform there are plenty of charming, interesting people, such as railway porters, young mothers, and excited schoolboys. Nevertheless, the two classes were very distinctly in evidence.

Then, suddenly, I realized the reason for this strange psychological gulf. There, on the left-hand side, glittering superbly in the sun, was the Golden Arrow. Its windows seemed to flash derisively at its poor meek sister on

the other side, a train abounding in first-class carriages, it is true, but not nearly as first-class as the Golden Arrow's.

A purist would observe that it is not possible to be firster than first. But then purists do not usually travel by the Golden Arrow. Nor are purists aware of the profound depths of snobbery into which the modern soul will sink.

Before the Golden Arrow shot through the pages of the time-tables, upsetting all previous standards of luxury travel, first was first, and third was third, and never the twain would meet. One could go no higher than first, unless one was royal, with a special train, or suffering from an infectious disease, with a sealed compartment.

But now quantities of Channel crossers would shrink with shame if they were detected in an ordinary first-class carriage. You will hear many an opulent-looking woman in the dining-car explaining, in loud, hurried voice, how the shame of travelling by the ordinary first-class train was forced upon her. 'There simply wasn't a seat in the Golden Arrow,' she shrieks. 'Not a seat!' She glances round *to* see that this vital fact has registered. 'That's why I'm *here*?' she yells; 'not a *seat* in the Golden Arrow!'

Feeling that she has at least made her position clear, she assumes the correct slumming expression, and prepares to endure her martyrdom. But in the boat at Dover and even at Victoria Station you will hear the same voice uplifted, in the same apologia.

Half of these women - and the men are just as bad - do not travel by the Golden Arrow because it is quicker, nor because the seats are a little softer, nor because the service is smoother. They travel by it for the simple reason that it costs more. If the seats were like pin-cushions and the food was execrable, and the waiters

pulled long noses at everybody in the train, they would still travel by the Golden Arrow. If the steamer belched smoke over them and the crew danced hornpipes on **their** suitcases and the cabins were swarming with rats, they would still travel by the Golden Arrow.

Comfort, celerity, convenience - these things count for nothing. The only thing that counts is the knowledge that even if they tried they could not be spending more money. I see evidences of this form of snobbery everywhere. Consider the case of the theatre. Quantities of people would rather sit in the twentieth row of the stalls, behind a large pillar, at the extreme end of the row, than in the middle of the front row of the dress circle (which is always the best seat in any theatre). Any man with an experience of taking women to the theatre will confirm this assertion.

It is the same with night clubs - those abominations of desolation to which even the sanest man sometimes finds himself unwillingly propelled. There are lots of comparatively inoffensive night clubs in London where one can dance and talk in comfort - and also breathe, in moderation.

But there are only about three night clubs where fashionable young persons wish to proceed, and in none of them can one dance, talk, or breathe. Yet people are delighted to be seen in them, squashed between a wall, a table, a drum, and a palm, half asphyxiated, completely deafened, and partially blinded, unable to eat or drink, whereas they would rush behind a curtain for very shame if they were observed in any of the places which are not of the Golden Arrow class.

It is all very puzzling to me. But diverting, too. For soon there will be a Diamond Arrow, and then we shall see some fun.

Some Rules for Highbrows

(1) *HAVE a rich father.* - This is almost essential. It is impossible to assume the correct poses in front of the correct Bloomsbury mantelpieces, to pitch your voice at the correct pitch under the correct Chelsea ceilings, if you are always being disturbed by the thought that you have to earn your own living.

(2) *Realize the supreme importance of the right sort of ignorance.* - Thus, though you may be living on the interest of shares in British Industrials, you must know nothing whatever about British industry. Nor must you know anything about the Stock Exchange. If you were to suggest that there was any drama or pathos in Throgmorton Street you would be instantly *declassé*.

Again, though you constantly assert that flowers are a necessity to you, it would be terrible if you knew anything about them. You must not know, for instance, that Madonna lilies need protection from wire-worms, and that delphiniums detest clay as much as roses love it. No. Flowers to you must be only a divine splash of colour against a white wall, to be thrown away when they fade.

In fact, nearly all knowledge must be taboo to you. You must know nothing about the interior economy of your own body, for that would destroy your pleasure in your tenth cocktail. You must know nothing about the intricate process by which the best champagne is made, for this would cause sordid reflections as you drank it. Nor must you know very much about the laws of England, for this would cause you to be apprehensive,

and an apprehensive look is terribly ageing, as we all know.

(3) *Despise technique and pin your faith on 'flair.'* - For instance, if you play the piano, do not dream of playing five-finger exercises or practising arpeggios. Such a procedure is universally admitted to be 'degrading.'

Instead, buy quantities of obscure French and Spanish composers, transcriptions of ballets, and, of course, new American blues, and scatter them over your piano. In a few days, when enough sherry glasses have stood on them, they will look quite old and used.

Meanwhile, you will have been sitting at the piano, playing suspended sevenths with the soft pedal down, which always creates a good effect.

Or again, if you paint, never learn to draw. Never, never! Never sit in front of a vase, holding your pencil at arm's length, like those misguided students at the Slade, nor narrow your eyes at a model, trying to understand the play of light on a muscle. No. You are above that. You must paint imitation Picassos and bogus Sickerts, and you must ignore the fact that both these masters - whom you adore for all the wrong reasons - were (and are) masters of draughtsmanship, who were born in a less enlightened period, and have consequently encjpred a tedious discipline to which you must not dream of submitting.

(4) *Remember that nearly all successful authors, dramatists, and composers are, ipso facto, second-rate.* - You belong, you must remember, to the select aristocracy of the unpublished and unproduced. When I say 'unpublished' I am not forgetting your vivid little poem on Crabs which appeared in that Oxford review, nor your remarkable curtain-raiser which was nearly produced in a barn at Hampstead.

I mean, merely, that you have never actually been vulgar enough to show us what you can do - you have

never thrown a book, like a stone, into the great pond of public opinion, to see the ripples that it may - or may not - make. And the theatrical managers, being, as you know too well, criminal congenital idiots, have never put you through the painful ordeal endured by minor dramatists from Shakespeare down, of hearing your words delivered to any audience. You are therefore - are you not - exquisitely qualified to judge? And, of course, to condemn?

For it would be fatal, would it not, if any sentences of yours caused thousands of readers to smile, if any tune of yours was whistled by the butcher's boy? It would mean that you had something in common with the multitude, which would be too, too tiresome to endure.

(5) *Never show yourself a victim to any 'ordinary emotion'* - You must rule out of your emotional range all such subjects as the love of women, the glory of sunsets, the fear of the unknown, the sweetness of childhood and the mystery of death. I am not entirely certain *why* you must avoid any thought or reference to such things, and I am too tactful to suggest that it is because they might make you, by comparison, look a little foolish. But I do know that it would be difficult to refer to any of these primary forces as 'amusing,' and if you can't call a thing 'amusing' it is therefore futile - is it not?

I hope I have made myself clear. It might be summed up by saying that you must always choose the twisted by-paths, and never walk down the main highways, always sneer when the rest are laughing, and let your laughter cackle into the world's silence, always kneel in reverence when the rest are passing by, and always stand when the rest are kneeling.

But remember - most important of all - never, never, never be published or produced.

The Vulgarest Thing on Earth

THE enterprising manager of a well-known London night club, realizing the intense boredom of the modern diner-out, has added interest to his dinners by arranging that they shall be eaten to the accompaniment of prize fights.

On one night in every week a space on the dance floor is roped off, and scantily attired gentlemen with red noses thread their way through the crowd, remove their dressing-gowns, glare and frown and pant, and then proceed to bash each other about in the approved fashion.

All of which is very appetizing.

Now, if I wrote that sort of thing in a novel, I should be accused of having a morbid mind. 'It is a pity,' they would observe, 'that a writer of talent should deliberately mar his pages by such passages as that in which **his** heroine, at a wildly improbable night club, hurls a *lobster cardinale* in the face of Bill Bloggs, the Bermondsey Wonder, owing to her unseemly passion for his opponent. Nor is it conceivable that even so disagreeable a character as Lady Julie would deliberately stick a fork into the calf of Phil Phipps owing to her outrageous partisanship for Bill Bloggs. Such things simply do not happen in England,⁵ etc. etc.

Well, such things are happening in England, in the neighbourhood of Bond Street. I don't know whether the women actually hurl lobsters at the boxers or stick forks in their calves. But I do know that they are participating in the vulgarest form of entertainment that has **ever** come to my notice in ancient or modern history.

I may be unduly squeamish. Even the ordinary sort of entertainment in restaurants slightly embarrasses me. I cannot feel happy at the sight of some wretched dancer whirling his way round the room in the hope that a lot of over-fed men and women may condescend to give him a faint round of applause. It makes me a little hot to see some singer come out into the middle of the room, and force a smile, and beam around her, as though we were all friends, and lift up the voice which she - poor devil - knows is a good voice - if only we would listen.

These things hurt me, because I know the salaries which the artists receive, I know the tortures they suffer, and I know that every artist, even the third-rate, broken-down, common old music-hall singer who is first turn in provincial halls, is usually a more sensitive and emotional being than the average member of the audience.

But at least, on these occasions, there is a semblance of gentility about the whole thing. GentiUty is a frowsy word, but a kindly one. The ordinary sort of artist can at least surround himself with a wall of make-believe if he is singing in a restaurant. He can say, 'They are being as quiet as they can - they can't help the corks popping - and the reason they aren't looking at me is because they've got to eat - and perhaps they aren't bored or rich at all, but only enjoying a rare treat - and maybe they're too excited to listen to me.'

He can say those things, and I think he does, and gains comfort from doing so.

But what excuse can a boxer make to himself? If you wish to be cheap and smart and fling in my face the sort of reply which I sometimes receive from anonymous correspondents, you can say, 'Boxers never think about anything but money, and they're probably delighted to receive payment for prancing round before a lot of pretty women; without the danger of seriously hurting themselves.'

That is **the** sort of cynicism which is sillier than sentimentality. For I refuse to believe that any grown-up man can find it other than degrading to exhibit himself in such circumstances.

As for the women - the less said about them the better. It would be impossible to insult them, because they themselves are insulting everybody concerned.

They are insulting the chef, who has, presumably, spent a lifetime in order to learn how to give them pleasure. (I often wonder what chefs must feel when their favourite dishes, over which they have laboured - even dreamed - are returned to them untouched.)

They are insulting the wine, because they merely gulp it feverishly in order to stimulate themselves for the thrill of the next round.

They are insulting their escorts - if it is possible to do so - by allowing themselves to be dragged to a place where conversation is obviously an impossibility.

Finally, they are insulting themselves. I am not becoming 'Victorian' nor am I writing for effect. Every instinct I possess is revolted by the thought of this thing - the thought of women sitting down in the evening to spend a sum which would keep a poor family for a week in order to crowd a new sensation into their rotten, empty lives.

Some Hotel Suggestions

I HAVE recently been staying at a large provincial hotel. As far as the hotels in this country are concerned, it was of a high standard of excellence. That is to say, the bathroom was not more than three minutes' brisk trot from my bedroom, several of the drawers in the wardrobe could be opened with only a minimum of assistance, and there was a rumour that the orchestra was on the very point of bringing its repertoire up to date by learning a full selection from *No, NO, Nanette*. Though I admit that this rumour never materialized.

In addition, there was a charming sense of humour in the managerial policy. Many is the happy, spontaneous laugh which they gave me by carefully arranging other people's laundry on my bed. The sight of a bright green nightdress and eight pairs of silk stockings more than reconciled me to the loss of a couple of dress shirts.

In view of these undoubted advantages, it may seem ungrateful to suggest improvements. But just as a pebble may mar a perfect walk, so a single item on the bill may spoil an entire visit. The item in question was 'one bottle of whisky - 17s. 6d.' Now I think that is a mistaken policy. One does not mind - much - being charged 25s. in a restaurant for a bottle of champagne which costs the management 10s. because the champagne is usually accompanied by all sorts of little extras for which one does not pay - the bucket of ice, the gaily papered wooden spinners, to say nothing of an entirely gratuitous display of the backs of white ladies who are imbibing similar potions.

But none of these delights goes with a bottle of whisky delivered to one's room. All that happens is that a spotty page-boy knocks at the door, leers knowingly as though he knew all about these secret drinkers, and departs with a shilling tip. Whereupon, since they have forgotten to bring the soda, one obtains some lukewarm water from the bathroom, mixes the horrible concoction, and feels abased in the soul.

I may be alone in objecting to this extra charge, because it is gladly being paid all over England, but since I do object to it it would be a good policy for the management to remit it. And they could easily have been forewarned of my objection if they had engaged the first necessity of the ideal hotel - a psychologist who would carry the title of 'Discoverer of Peculiarities.' Five minutes' conversation with such a person, on arrival, would smooth away a lot of difficulties.

In America they already have such an official, but they give her too much power. She is called the 'hostess.' She always looks like a retired contralto, and sails round the hall during rush hours, turning an eagle eye upon all those who do not look as though they were liking life very much at the moment. These hostesses used to terrify me. 'Was I comfortable?' they would boom. 'Had I visited the new Moorish palm court in the annexe, and if not, why not?'

That is, perhaps, going too far. But a clever woman might find all sorts of little peculiarities which the management could consider. There might, for instance, be certain weird people who did not fully appreciate the charm and utility of the one rusty coat-hanger which is always provided in the wardrobe. There might be certain hygienic cranks who failed to see the real delicacy of the litde toy pieces of soap, firmly stuck to their wrappers, which are whimsically placed on the wash-basins. There might even be certain dullards, uninterested in

chemical phenomena, who would not appreciate the lessons to be learnt from ink in the semi-solid state. With all these strange people the 'Discoverer of Peculiarities' would have to deal.

I have one peculiarity which I should mention as soon as I arrived. I should ask to be excused from the Salome dance which the *maitre d'hStel* invariably performs round one's table when one enters the restaurant in search of nourishment. Of course there *are* certain occasions when one likes these ceremonies - when one would feel positively unhappy if at least six waiters were not assuming rhythmic poses and registering rapt admiration at one's genius and charm. But there are also times when one quite definitely wants to mumble 'Steak and lager' and be left alone.

For this purpose the 'Discoverer of Peculiarities' would be employed to stand at the door in order to study the faces of all incoming guests. Of a thin, keen-eyed man coming in alone she might say, 'That man knows what he wants, so take his order and don't play any tricks.' Of a young blonde with a male escort, Tut her near the band, so that he won't have to listen to her conversation, and get the waiters to do a butterfly dance round the table between each course. Don't pay the least attention to what she wants to eat.' Of two old ladies, hesitating in the entrance, timidly clutching their bags, 'Put them in a quiet corner and get somebody to talk to them about diet.'

If nobody can be found worthy of undertaking the task, I might possibly be persuaded, for an enormous fee, to do it myself.

Baby Talk

FOR a whole hour I have been sitting in the park listening to women talking to babies.

There is probably a law against listening to women talking to babies in Hyde Park. But I do not in the least regret having infringed it. For it is high time that somebody took up the cudgels on the babies' behalf.

'Woodle woodle pom pom,' croons an immense woman in the ear of one infant. 'Woodle woodle pom, did it woodle on the pom pom?' If she had any sense at all, the look of sullen resentment on the infant's face would tell her to desist.

I observed some babies who were polite enough to conceal their boredom. They merely averted their gaze, or tactfully examined their toes. Others were frankly hostile. But all of them I am quite sure were aware that if this sort of thing went on they would be in grave danger of developing complexes.

I am quite convinced that the babies who do listen to such sentences as 'Did it woodle on the pom pom?' develop, in later life, into politicians. The question has so very much in common with the majority of questions which they do ask in Parliament.

I want you to try to put yourself in the baby's position. Supposing *you* were sitting quite inoffensively in your perambulator, surveying the foolish grown-ups who hurried by you, on errands which, in your infantile wisdom, you knew to be perfectly futile.

Supposing you were dreaming wise and exquisite dreams about clouds and fairies and immense woolly gods and goddesses.

Supposing, in your secret and delicate language, you were gradually framing a philosophy - a philosophy which, alas, will be shattered like a silver bubble as soon as you begin to grow a little older.

Now would *you* like it if, suddenly, through the rosy, dappled clouds of your imagination, a Titanic visage thrust itself, and, without the slightest provocation, observed, in hissing tones, 'Croodle, croodle, croodle - did it sproogle on the woogle?'

Your mental balance, to say the least of it, would be seriously disturbed. Apart from the grave difficulty of framing a suitable reply to a question couched in such general terms, you would feel a justifiable resentment at being approached in this manner at all. The question, you would instantly perceive, was not a question which had been posed with any serious desire to obtain information.

The owner of the Titanic visage, you know too well, is not really anxious to learn whether the croodle sproogled on the woogle. No, it was simply another form of insult to your intelligence. These vast, foolish people who loom about you are under the extraordinary impression that *they* are wise and learned and that you are foolish and feeble and helpless.

Helpless you may be, and feeble - but foolish . . . if they could see inside your head! They would fall with their faces to the ground when they caught a glimpse of that immense horizon that is reflected in your eyes - those still, silver spaces in which are mirrored the trailing clouds of glory which we bear about us.

So it is through life. We are perpetually insulting the intelligence of children. As a child I remember the following classes of offenders:

(i) The people who told me that I used to be 'so⁵ high. What did they expect me to be? A midget? What is the

object of this impertinent comment on growth? I would advise all children to whom this remark is addressed to reply, 'Yes, and the last time I saw you, you had only one chin. Now you have two and a half.'

(2) The people who told me that in their day little boys and girls did not, etc. Firstly, this observation is untrue, because little boys and little girls always *did*, etc., and always will, etc.

Secondly, it is stultifying. The correct reply to it is, 'Yes, and in your day little men and little women ate too much, wore unhealthy clothes, were ignorant of hygiene, had a false code of morals, and thought the idea of a world-war too foolish to contemplate.' In case children find this too difficult to repeat, I suggest that they put out their tongues. Nobody could possibly deny that this, at least, is an old-fashioned gesture.

(3) The people who told me jokes about other boys and girls. They would take me by the elbow and breathe heavily into one's face and say, 'There was once a litde boy who met a little girl on an omnibus, and, etc.' There is only one thing which children can possibly do in these circumstances. That is to say, 'I know a much better one than that. There was once a leading lady who went to a night club and ordered a bottle of champagne. She drank the bottle and then . . .' There will probably be no need to continue the story further.

I could enlarge the list, and so could you, from your own memory. And if you would only think about it a little you would realize that babies are wiser, and children more sophisticated, than you. So let us stop this 'Did it woodle woodle on the pom pom?' business. If the baby could reply, it would say, 'The answer is a lemon.'

Who is the Happiest?

As often as the hands of the clock turn to different hours, bright or dim, so often does one's mind vainly seek fresh explanations of that tragic word, happiness.

'If only I were well!' cries a sick man . . . and then he sees another sick man, in worse state, but wearing on his face a smile of radiant (and extremely irritating) content.

'If only I were rich!' cries the poor man, and then he passes the door of the Ritz and sees a millionaire coming out of the restaurant with the light of seven devils in his eyes.

'If only I were good!' cries the sinner.

'If only I were beautiful!' cries the plain woman, and then she drives through Hanover Square and sees, if she is lucky, a certain exquisite profile silhouetted against a green curtain . . . a profile that seems to be traced by the hand of a tragic artist, so sad it is, belonging to . . . However, that is not our business.

At first the problem seems insoluble. It is not made any easier by classifying people under nationalities. Americans ought, by accepted standards, to be the happiest people in the world. Their bodies - I almost wrote their coachwork - are, on the whole, the fittest. They do exercises to the sound of the radio in the chill light of dawn, their refrigerators are filled with fresh lettuces, they have gruesomely efficient dentists, and the whole continent blazes with artificial sunlight under which countless business men bask, growing pinker and pinker.

Their pockets are still full. They have bathrooms the *size of* cathedrals and yachts the size of battleships. They can plaster the aforesaid healthy bodies with emeralds the size of eggs.

They have peace . . . (except, of course, in Chicago). By peace I mean something rather different from the strained silence which we are enjoying at the moment in post-war Europe - which is like the silence in a room full of relations after the reading of a will in which all the deceased's money has been left to a dogs' home.

And yet - are they happy? Read Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*. No - read *Dodsworth*. *Dodsworth* - and he is a composite picture of vast masses of contemporary Americans - is as unhappy as a child crying in the night. Worse still, walk down Broadway when the crowds are swirling, like dark troubled waters, over the giants' causeways which they modestly call 'sidewalks.'

Look into the faces of the rich, the beautiful, the healthy. And then retire to your skyscraper apartment and read a little Dante, just to cheer yourself

Nor can you classify happiness according to sex. Personally I think that men ought to be much happier than women. Their bodies are less complicated. They are not subject to the grotesque social imprisonment which, in spite of the much-boasted *Emancipation of Women*, is still in force, even after endless crusades and fiercely pitched battles.

And yet . . . I would guess that there are more happy old women than old men. There has been more than one musical comedy about a merry widow. I don't remember any about merry widowers.

Least of all can you classify it according to age. It is true that in clubs one may still occasionally encounter magenta-coloured colonels who tell one, as though they

were repeating a lesson, that 'Schooldays are the happiest times of a man's life.'⁵

Perhaps the old Borstalians may be able to say that, but I'm sure that the rest of us can't. Youth is a period of petulant fevers and spring sicknesses - middle age a long Sunday afternoon - old age a lonely winter's evening - or so the pessimists might say.

The optimist, on the other hand, might observe that youth was a glorious morning (for all optimists delight in *cliches*), middle age a golden harvest, and old age a sweet serene evening.

Both would be equally inaccurate. I have been slapped on the back by octogenarians who were almost indecently cheerful. And by young persons of the same temper. There seems to be rather a vogue for slapping me on the back.

At the same time I have listened by the hour to disillusioned infants and croaking ancients. So where do we stand?

I think I know. If I were a doctor I should explain it in terms of glands - for, as every schoolboy would be aware, personality is entirely regulated by the functioning of the pituitary and the thyroid glands. Apart from being able to stick my finger on to the place where these glands are situated, I am rather vague about them. But at least I know one quality for which they are responsible, one gift with which they endow a man, if they so please - the gift of being able to live for the moment.

That is the supreme gift for which I would have asked the good fairies. It is the gift which was given to Midas, except that it turns to gold not material things but the exquisite, intangible things of the spirit. It was this gift which brought a smile to the face of a friend I have lost - a friend who died sightless.

We were walking through a garden. He could only just see the flowers. For me they were a carnival of

colour. For him they were a dim blurred mass. He smiled. I didn't. Funny things - glands.

This moment . . . This butterfly moment . . . with Time flashing and sparkling on its wings . . . if only we could catch it . . . if only . . . !

Blues

OCCASIONALLY I get the blues. So do you, unless you are a horribly hearty and disgustingly normal person.

As swiftly and as unexpectedly as the clouds sweep over the sun in April the light is shut out from my world. A few hours ago I might have been planning, with tremendous enthusiasm, some work that was going to stagger mankind. (I knew, of course, that it would do nothing of the sort.)

And now, for no tangible reason, I can't work or think. I look at the paper with dull eyes and count the dreary years which are left to me before I die.

This happens to me, and it also happens to you, and I want to know why it happens. So let us use the process of elimination. For though there are a great many plausible explanations most of them are spurious.

Blues, for example, are not due to the weather. I have been as blue as a Dostoevsky widower on a lovely spring morning, with the sun shining on the cherry blossom. Nor are blues caused by 'unrequited love.' I have had an average share of that, and the sensation is quite different. It is depressing enough, of course, but the unlucky lover has not that same appalling, suffocating feeling that a thick black cloud is smothering the earth, never to be lifted.

They are not a result of poverty. Some of the happiest people in England are on the dole. And the year when my overdraft was the largest happened to be the happiest year of my life. Nor do they come, as the bustling busybodies would assure us, from having nothing to do.

I love having a job of work which has to be completed, but I also adore a long, golden morning when one need not exert oneself at all - when there are three clear hours in which one can lie in the grass watching a spider spin its web, or — if you are a townsman - wander down any street that beckons, dallying in front of the shops, and making up stories about the people inside them.

They are not even caused by the state of one's country - by what Burke would have called *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*. (If Burke had lived to-day he would have needed not an essay but an encyclopaedia in which to express his disapproval.)

Nor finally - and this is the strangest thing of all - do they arise from the state of one's health. Consumptives are notorious for their high spirits. Even the blind are astonishingly cheerful. Why, oh, why, then, should we who can see and dance and run, be seized by this strange, enervating spirit of temporary despair?

I thought that the answer might be discovered in the East. Indians, apparently, are never 'blue.' Even after gazing upon the curiously depressing features of Mr. Gandhi their spirits do not sink. The reason for this mental tranquillity was explained to me by an Indian with whom I had been discussing that remarkable book, *Bengal Lancer*.

'It is all a question of the rhythms of your breathing/' he observed. 'If you would study Yoga, which is the union of your spirit with cosmic consciousness, you would understand.'

'But let me study Yoga at once,' I said. 'I'll breathe in ragtime if it will do any good.'

His distant eyes gazed through me as though they were studying the remotest peaks of the Himalayas. 'You *might* master *pranayama*?' he crooned, 'which is the science of breathing. But not before you had mastered

yama-niyama, asana, and mudra. Including, of course, the *dkauties.*'

'Of course I would include them,' I said brightly. 'How long would it all take?'

He beamed at me. 'There are some men,' he observed, 'well under seventy who have obtained a good working knowledge of these things.'

Which made me bluer than ever. If I have to indulge in heavy breathing until I am seventy years old in order to avoid these fleeting clouds of depression I would rather pass out of the world at once.

No. I do not believe that the cure is to be found in such practices. I think it is much simpler than that. For you will not be blue if you can turn your thoughts from self. I think about myself- and so do you - far too much.

It is very ridiculous, when one realizes that there are forty million equally interesting people in England alone about whom one could think. Yet we turn our eyes inwards, studying remorselessly, tirelessly, this curious and essentially finite creature called 'me.' Isn't that enough to make anybody blue - that wearisome study of a single biped? I think it is.

And so, as the symptoms are beginning to come over me at the present moment, I shall descend to my back yard and gaze fixedly at the windows of the house next door. There is probably a law against doing that in England, but a law-breaker is never blue. He has too many other people to think about.

On Being Alone

NOBODY in the world has the faintest idea where I am. For all you know - or probably care - I may be in Berlin, Moscow, Peru, or Ashby-de-la-Zouch. I have not spoken a word of English for nearly a week, and even then I have only spoken to waiters, chambermaids, taxi-drivers, and the like, whose conversation, consisting principally of negatives and affirmatives, seems to me quite enchanting.

I have never been in this happy situation before, and it is almost the most agreeable thing that has ever happened to me. After breakfast I can sit back in my chair, in pyjamas, and smile and smile at nothing, only ceasing to smile when the waiter comes to remove the breakfast tray, in case he should think I am an idiot. (It is rather a terrible criticism of modern civilization that persons who smile by themselves are usually hurried off to padded cells.)

I say to myself, 'Nobody can possibly ring me up. Nobody. Nobody can possibly ask me to lunch, tea, cocktails, dinner, nor supper, nor to any wild and woolly party. Nobody can even ring the bell and ask if I want a vacuum cleaner, and "if not, why not." Nobody can ask me when I want my bath, what suit I will wear, nor if "the men" may come in for a minute to "look at" the curtain rods. Nobody, in fact, can do anything to me at all. I am alone, in the silence.'

Such silence! It is incredible. It is not literally a silence, because in the distance I can hear the high, plaintive notes of taxis, and the rumbling of trams, while in

the next room there are the sounds of a Frenchwoman making her morning toilet - a formidable and sonorous performance. No - the silence is what romantic novelists would call 'the larger silence' - the silence of the spirit. For none of these sounds has anything to do with me.

I know that none of the taxis is bearing friends towards me, and I am quite certain that the Frenchwoman is not making those astonishing noises and crashes for my benefit. She is not, for instance, gargling with such passion in order that she may shordy knock on my door and float, like a spring breeze, into my presence. I am nothing to her, and she is nothing to me. Nobody is, for the present.

I sit at a high, open window and look out on to a jumbled medley of rose-coloured roofs, and I realize that the only important thing in life, after health, is Time. And Time, in its full, exquisite reality, must be tasted alone. Then it ceases to be an affair of hours and dates and places. It is a miraculous medley of light and shade, of sound and of silence. It flows on, broadly and smoothly as a river. It is no longer chopped up by a lot of tiresome litde bridges and barriers.

Just as life is calmer, so it is also more exciting. For the simple reason that I have nowhere to go I can go anywhere. If a side-street looks attractive, I go down it. I followed one yesterday, meandering down it like a stray dog. It went over a river, through slums, past two cemeteries, and then it suddenly decided to become respectable and ended in a garden, where I sat and ate cherries. Which was lunch.

And all the time, everything in that street had seemed so vivid, just because one was not trying to reach the end of it - the bakers' shops, with men like powdered ghosts outlined against blazing fires - the *antiquaires* - the bars with their rows of jewelled cordials - the taxis buzzing

by with very red-lipped women in large black hats - all these seemed more brightly coloured than ever before, *because one was not trying to reach the end of the street*. Why are we always trying to reach the end of the street?

Everybody ought to do what I am doing at least once a year. It would drive some people nearly crazy, of course. Lots of white-faced girls with yellow, smoky fingers and mauve shadows under their eyes would hurl themselves, with shrill cries, off the nearest cliffs after the first two days of complete solitude. Lots of young men who grow neurotically peevish when their speedometers register less than eighty would be found dancing round the market-place with idiotic grins on their faces, quite, quite mad. I wish, all the same, that they would do it, for then they would be locked up now instead of later. It is only a question of time.

Married people, emphatically, ought to do it. Some would return as lovers, others as penitents, and some would never return at all. I should imagine that women would form the majority of the latter class. Men are extremely wise to go away with their wives for holidays, because many wives, once they had tasted the bliss of solitude, would never go back to their homes. There would be tremendous competition to enter nunneries, and the boats to the remoter South Sea Islands would be packed.

For, from the moment a woman marries, unless she is both very rich and unusually independent, she bids good-bye to solitude. And if she found it again - even for a few hours - well, I would not like to vouch for the consequences.

My Version of Vulgarity

I HAVE been called 'Vulgar' on a great many occasions, and on no single one of these occasions have I been able to discover why. In nine cases out of ten one is called vulgar for merely telling the truth.

Now I myself am all at sea about this question of vulgarity. I was called vulgar for observing that President Wilson looked like a dentist. Well, he did, didn't he? Besides, I have a very high opinion of dentists. In any case, the observation was not made in any spirit of rudeness - it was made in an endeavour to explain his mind, which was obsessed with the idea that you could extract racial prejudices and rooted traditions as easily as you could extract a row of teeth.

Similarly, I was called vulgar for writing that Big Bill Thompson should have been a pirate. I regret having written that. I ought to have written that he *is*.

Turning from the personal to the general. I am even more puzzled by the world's conception of what constitutes vulgar behaviour. I have never been able to worry myself about half the things which one finds so severely denounced in books of etiquette. I do not cringe when I hear anybody referring to a 'serviette' instead of a 'napkin,' because 'serviette' is a prettier word than its genteel equivalent. Neither do I shrink back in horror from the sight of made-up ties. They look much more attractive than some of the weary bootlaces that are tied round the necks of the younger generation. And I am certain that if it should ever be my privilege to witness a man eating his peas with a knife, my first reaction would not

be one of outraged gentility, but of amazement and fascination at the sight of so perilous an ordeal.

These, however, are considered the minor sins of vulgarity. When you analyse the major sins (or rather, what the world considers the major sins) you will nearly always find that they are in some way or other associated with undue exposure of the human form. For instance, people will talk to you about the vulgarity of French revues, such as the *Folies Bergtres*, and when you ask them in which direction the vulgarity lies they will nearly always refer in pained voices to the nakedness of the chorus.

That is completely inexplicable to me. If it is vulgar to be naked, it is also vulgar to be alive. If the naked body is vulgar, so is the sun and the sea and the stars. There is much more vulgarity in the cheap and bunchy little dresses which are to be seen on the figures of so many chorus girls than in the most daring and unclothed spectacle that Paris has ever presented. It is only another version of the hypocrisy of the English attitude which sniffs at the sun-bathers of the Lido, but approves all the bathing regulations at our more respectable seaside resorts where, for instance, one is not allowed to walk from one's hotel to the beach in a bathing dress, even if one is wearing a mackintosh on top of it.

You cannot, in fact, become vulgar by taking things off. You can only become vulgar by putting them on.

I can best illustrate my own conception of what is really vulgar by telling you a little story. Not long ago I was dining with a very charming, but very poor, artist, and his wife, in Chelsea. The man was not what is known as a 'gendeman,' and his wife was certainly not a 'lady.' though she was one of the most charming women I have ever met.

It was a great occasion for them. Not only was it the

first little dinner-party which they had ever given, they were also being honoured by the presence of a rich and popular woman who made it her hobby to patronize the arts. I disliked this woman from the start, because, although her behaviour was outwardly perfect, she gave a subtle sense that she was slumming. However, all went well for the first part of the dinner. The food, admittedly, was unpleasant, and there was a terrible sense of strain - a feeling that the little maid who waited on us was indulging in hysterics in the kitchen - and a conviction that our hostess was inwardly tortured with anxiety. Still, everything went well until the arrival of the sweet.

It was one of those revolting and complicated forms of trifle, studded with daubs of thick cream, and decorated with quantities of spiky almonds, which made it look like some frightful form of sea fish. Frankly, it intimidated me, but as soon as I saw it, I realized the vast labour which had gone to its creation, and determined that I would ask for at least two helpings. But everything was spoilt. For as soon as she saw it, the guest of honour fixed it with an icy stare and said the two sickening words, *'How amusing!'*

It sounds a tiny, trivial thing to have said, and it was - just that tiny, trivial piece of evidence which condemned that woman as a vulgarian. If she had struck her hostess a blow across the face, she could not have caused her greater pain. I hardly dared to look at our hostess at all, but when I did so, I saw that her lips were set very tight, and that her eyes were filled with tears.

I had worse indigestion that night than I have ever had in my life.

That story points a moral, or, at any rate, provides us with a test. And to me, the paramount test of vulgarity in any person is the way in which that person treats his inferiors. If a duchess is rude to her maid, even in the

privacy of her own bedroom, then that duchess is a vulgar woman, though she may trace her ancestry to the remotest beginnings of history. If, again, an employer is rude to his office boy, and takes advantage of his position to make sarcastic remarks about him in front of his clients, then that man is a vulgar man, even if he holds an entire industry in the palm of his hand. Anybody, in fact, who indulges in that cruellest form of blow, *the snub*, is vulgar.

Certain schoolmasters are among the vulgarest creatures on earth, because they take advantage of their little stock of learning to humiliate their pupils. I once wrote an essay on this very subject at my public school, and I rashly mentioned among my class of vulgarians a young science master whose chief delight consisted in cross-examining the stupidest boy in the class until he was reduced to tears. I was beaten for telling the truth, of course, as I am constantly beaten in other ways to-day.

Frequently, however, you can reverse the test, and discover vulgarity in the way in which a man treats his superiors.

Let me enrage you for a moment, in order to illustrate my point, and record an opinion which will sound something like sacrilege to all lovers of English tradition. I myself think that one of the vulgarest acts in history was perpetrated by Sir Walter Raleigh when he laid down his cloak in a pool of mud before the feet of Queen Elizabeth. If ever there was a case of unnecessary ostentation, it was there.

Not having been present at the episode, I cannot enter into details as to the extent or depth of the mud over which it was necessary for this lady to pass. But no deep historical research is necessary to enable one to sense the underlying motive of outrageous flattery that lay beneath an act so flamboyant. If I had been in the

place of Sir Walter Raleigh, I should either have procured a plank, or else I should have addressed a few courteous and well-chosen words to her Majesty, informing her that she was fortunate to have so vivid an example of the disgraceful condition into which she had allowed her public thoroughfares to relapse.

You may say that Sir Walter Raleigh was only acting in the spirit of his age, which was one of extravagant conceits and fantastic gesture. If we admit that, then there is a certain excuse for him, although fundamentally I think the accusation holds. The fulsome compliments which were paid by the Elizabethan poets to their patrons and patronesses - the long and tedious dedications extolling their virtues and graces - all these seem to me to be vulgar in the extreme. I know that it was an age of patronage, but all patronage contains the essence of vulgarity.

And in a minor degree it was the system of patronage which afforded Disraeli the opportunity to carry on his astonishingly vulgar private correspondence with Queen Victoria. Some people, especially if they are ardent Tories, are touched to tears by the story of Disraeli's flatteries and fawnings. To me they are no more inspiring than the politeness of a shop-walker. Rather less, in fact, because the shop-walker, at least, is carrying out his job.

In comparison with Disraeli's efforts, the action of Sir Walter Raleigh is fairly innocuous. Not quite, however. For even if we can believe that he really wished to ruin a perfectly good cloak, because of his deep emotion of patriotism, the very fact of making a public parade of any deep emotion is in itself vulgar. One sees a great many instances of this form of vulgarity in modern life. I am not referring to the mere *showing* of emotion - after all, people cannot help crying at railway stations. The offence occurs when it is actually thrust upon one's notice.

There are a great many husbands and wives who seem to think it necessary, when one is in their company, to assure each other of their mutual devotion. This does not only refer to newly married couples, but to quite middle-aged people. Such conduct makes me feel physically sick. If they were not devoted, they have no excuse for living together. And if they are, why remind one of it? It is far more embarrassing than the sight of the couples inter-twined in Hyde Park, for after all, these poor people are not seeking publicity. By the condition of their lives publicity is always with them.

To-day such forms of vulgarity are particularly rampant. Many people seem to consider that the affairs of a man's heart or a woman's soul are public property. For instance, there is a large body of elderly busybodies who seem to consider it their right to ask any fairly young unmarried man why he is not married. This question enrages me so much that whenever I am asked it I lose my temper, and say something which, I fear, is not strictly true, such as 'because I only like negroes.' Certainly, however, it seems to me a really dastardly question, especially when, as so often happens, it is asked by some creature with a penetrating voice at a crowded dinner-party.

After all, the reason why a man is not married may be because he happened to fall in love with a girl who married somebody else. There might be a dozen tragic reasons for his singleness. To remind him of these things, and to force him to make some trivial reply about a subject which may be wringing his heart, is an example of the most loathsome form of vulgarity.

That seems to cover most of the ground. But I must confess that there are certain well-defined forms of vulgarity to which I have a secret inclination. (I would not make this confession were I not sure that my weakness

was probably shared, in some form or another, by the majority of my readers.)

For instance, it would give me real joy to possess one of those fast and incredibly expensive cars that one sees standing outside the Ritz in the Place Vendome in Paris. I should incline to a huge white two-seater with scarlet wheels, and a coloured chauffeur dressed in a white leather coat and a scarlet cap. It is all very silly, and bad form, and all that, but I should adore it.

Then again, I should like a box at the opera. Perhaps one can hardly call that a vulgarity. Yes, though, I think it would be, for as far as the music is concerned, I infinitely prefer the stalls. It is simply a question of the pomp and ceremony which is attendant upon the ownership of a box that really appeals to me. And I should like a house in Grosvenor Square, simply because of the address, for I would really much rather live in Queen Anne's Gate. And I really would not mind being the Earl of Beverley.

So now you know the worst. My only defence is, that since none of these passions is likely to materialize, they cannot do you or anybody else very much harm.

To Vague Young Men Seeking Jobs

I HAVE come to the conclusion that there exists in this country a large floating population entirely composed of young men who spend their time in writing to me for 'jobs.' The letters come from every sort of district. They are often admirably phrased. Some of them show such eagerness that it is painful to read them.

And nearly all of them are futile, because none of the young men seems to realize that he is asking for something which does not exist.

There is no such thing as a 'job.' There never has been and there never will be. There are posts to be occupied, specific tasks to be done, demanding expert knowledge. But there is only one profession in England which is of the vague, comfortable, inexpert type capable of being filled by any well-meaning amateur. That is the profession of politics. In all other walks of life one ounce of knowledge is worth a ton of enthusiasm, as you may perhaps realize if you will study the three composite types set down below.

(1) Arthur Jones, aged 20. - Left school two years ago. His father could not afford to send him to Oxford. Artistic inclinations. He cannot draw, but would like to design rooms - decorate houses. He is sure that his taste is as good as anybody's. Can he not get a job in a West End decorator's?

No. He cannot. He may have taste but he knows nothing. It is not enough to be able to stand in an empty room and say, 'We will have the walls white and get our colour with these lovely brocade curtains.'

Lots of people can do that - I am rather good at it myself.

What he should have done was to specialize with grim earnestness. He should have said, for example: 'There is a firm in Blank Street that specializes in Queen Anne furniture and interiors. I am going to learn everything about Queen Anne furniture that can possibly be learnt.⁵ He should then have read every book on the subject he could lay his hands on, attended lectures, visited museums, asked for permission to enter private houses. He should have learnt to detect fakes, should have studied woods, polishes, handles. In two years he might have been a useful asset.

Two years? A long time you may say. But how many English homes contain young men who have spent a good deal longer than two years looking for 'jobs'?

(2) Robert Smith, aged 23, Rugby and Oxford. - Father too crippled by taxation to make him an allowance. Of ordinary intelligence, would like a secretarial position in a business firm with a view to 'working up.' Has been making inquiries for over a year. No success. Why?

Because he is completely useless. He wants a secretarial position. Can he write shorthand? No. Can he type? No. Can he keep accounts? No. Then of what use is he?

These remarks apply to all those men who want secretarial jobs. Every young man who has been to a school and a university labours under the extraordinary illusion that he can be a 'secretary' - as though a secretary were a sort of male companion instead of a highly trained expert.

What Robert Smith should have done was to learn shorthand and practise it arduously for a year, at the same time collecting every scrap of information about the business of *one particular firm*. At the end of that

period he might have been a useful man instead of a useless gentleman.

(3) Harry Williams, aged 21.-Just leaving Cambridge. Stage-struck. Played important roles in A.D.G. productions with considerable success. Has a pretty voice and is good-looking. Fancies himself as a *jeune premier* in musical shows and wants to begin in revue. Only a couple of songs, you know, and a few lines, and a dance or two - and as for salary, he'd not want much - only £30 a week, or even £25. Can I get him a job?

No, I cannot. Why? Because he knows nothing and is not trying to learn anything. He dances nicely enough in the ballroom and his tap-dancing is a great success at parties. But let him get up on an empty stage at an audition and do a number and dance a chorus before a row of hard-bitten experts. He will leave that theatre a sadder and wiser man.

What should he do? If he is determined to go into revue he should spend the next year at a dancing-school, kicking up to the ceiling; tapping, tapping, tapping; standing on his head, stretching his muscles, knocking himself about. He should learn how to sing, how to speak, how to smile. He might possibly be good enough for the chorus then, though I doubt it. I may sound discouraging. I cannot help it. Anybody with a grain of sense and honesty is forced to admit that this country since the war has been muddled into such a precarious position that the keenest application and specialization are needed if a man wishes to get a job and keep it.

The education of the average English public school seems specially designed to produce a nation of lift-attendants. The number of lift-attendants is unfortunately limited.

I trust that some of my correspondents may take these remarks to heart.

Come into the Garden

IT will soon be April. And April to me does not mean spring-cleaning, or new suits, or Budgets, or casting clouts, or the raising of a lot of dull blinds in Grosvenor Square.

It means, quite definitely, sweet peas two inches high, wallflowers in blossom, daffodils in the small orchard, lilac leaves, delphiniums four inches high, Madonna lilies sprouting, and battalions of narcissi thrusting green spears through the tremulous earth.

All of which points to the fact that I shall soon be quite useless to fulfil any functions but that of gardening correspondent. Instead of explaining to modern matrons the best way of keeping undesirable persons away from their young daughters, I shall explain, with even greater fervour, the best way of keeping undesirable insects off young carrots (the article, in any case, will be the same).

For gardeners to me are the only wise men. I may be rude to presidents, apathetic to authors, and positively insulting to millionaires. But when I meet a gardener I take my hat off. He is the only man in this world whose feet are solidly planted in the earth.

Here are some of the things which my garden has taught me.

It has taught me that one is a pitiful, grotesque fool if one tries to cheat nature. Flowers and women, for instance, are so very much alike. When I see a primrose that foolishly pushes forward its pretty head in February, only to be nipped by the avenging frosts, I think of

the pale, immature little girls who dance too soon - and too late. I think of tired, wistful faces of seventeen and eighteen, silhouetted against the windows of a car that glides through the streets at dawn. When I see those full-blown red roses that by some fluke of nature manage to flaunt their petals through the mists of November I *think of women who linger on* the stage too long, women who do not know when to leave off - a tragic ignorance, for the art of leaving off is the greatest art in life.

My garden has taught me the aesthetic value of discipline. It is dangerous to say it - but gardening is amazingly good for one's prose. The inexperienced writer loves to take a fistful of bright, glowing words and scatter them across a white page, to dip his fingers in a golden bowl of rhetoric, to spatter his periods with epigrammatic tinsel.

The inexperienced gardener loves to take a packet of seeds and toss them over the brown, humble soil, with the sort of gesture that one associates with the ancient distribution of largesse (a custom that I feel was not so entirely satisfactory to the recipients as the Tory historians would have us imagine).

In either case the result is unsatisfactory. The prose does not come off and the seeds do not come up.

Lovely flowers are grown by men who understand their roots. Lovely prose is written by men who understand grammar. To grow a rose that is flawless is as difficult as to write a sentence that is perfect. And the difficulty is of the same character. Roses must be pruned. So must words. The blights of nature and the blights of artifice need the same sort of antiseptic. Indeed, I often feel when I am reading some of the latest novelists that I would like to take a syringe and spray the entire page, just to see how many parasitic adjectives would wilt and crumble away.

My garden has taught me a vital lesson in elementary economics. Shares are exactly like seeds. I used to buy some shares, and be very excited about them for a few weeks. Then, when I had learnt the exact place to search for them on the financial page (half-way down the column headed Textiles, worse luck!), and when they showed no signs of moving, I grew bored with them and sold them.

It was the same with seeds. I would sow a packet, rush out the next morning, and for lots of mornings in succession, until finally I scabbled in the earth to see if they realized that they were keeping everybody waiting. The result in both cases was sterility.

It is only after one has been given the freedom of the soil that one realizes the tremendous importance of forgetting about seeds, and about shares too. Sow and forget, and rigidly avert your eyes from the spot, and one day you will wake up to find you have a marvellous bonus dividend of golden blossom.

PART 3
MAINLY ABOUT WOMEN

For Husbands Only

CONTRARY to popular legend, I was not born in a cocktail-shaker, nor was I brought up in a night club. I was reared in a respectable God-fearing household, where my father ruled the roost, though my mother ran the house.

When I say that my father ruled the roost, I mean that he occupied the most comfortable arm-chair, read *The Times* before the rest of the household, decided whether the roses on the terraces should be Gloire de Dijon or Dorothy Perkins, retained an incompetent gardener because he liked to hear him tell broad stories, drank sherry when everybody else wanted cocktails, and generally lived in the only way which will ever make a woman stick to a man, i.e. entirely to please himself.

When I was in America I found very few households of that nature. I found, too, very few households so completely contented. I found, however, a large number of households where the wife reclines on a divan and lets her husband sit upright on cushionless chairs, seizes all the most interesting parts of the papers, decides that she must have the dining-room painted vivid jade green and old gold even though the mere thought of these two colours combined gives him a headache. She employs a dud chauffeur because of his nice blue eyes and his pleasant smile, elects to take a country place at least ten miles from the nearest golf-course, and generally lives in the only way in which it is quite certain that she will begin by being thoroughly bored by her husband and end by hating him - i.e. entirely to please herself.

That is really the whole matter in a nutshell. The average European marriage is more successful than the average American marriage, *not* because European husbands are gentler, politer, or more forbearing, but because they are very well aware of the supreme importance of 'treating 'em rough.'

If you are inclined to deny the comparative success of the European marriage you can very quickly convince yourself by referring to the statistics of divorce in America and, say, England. If these statistics don't enlighten you, nothing will.

In order to prove our point, we shall have to use two words to which the psycho-analysts have given a rather sinister meaning - masochism and sadism. Actually, at their worst, they mean the desire to be hurt and the desire to hurt. The former, except in perverted natures, is an exclusively feminine, and the latter an exclusively masculine, quality.

Consider for a moment the sheik, and you will realize how deeply rooted in the feminine mind is this quality of masochism - this delight in being maltreated. The sheik novels and films enjoy their enormous vogue simply because they satisfy a subconscious instinct of women. Taking their feet off their husbands' necks for a few hurs, they emerge from their comfortable homes, depart to the nearest cinema, and there in darkness enjoy a mental orgy in which they imagine themselves ki the place of the heroine, being thoroughly walloped.

When these women return home, the only thing which they need to make them completely happy (though they don't know it) is for their husbands to catch them round the neck, shake their heads until their teeth rattle, and then say, 'Sit down and read me to sleep.' Instead of which they are nearly always greeted by submissive males who hurry away for footstools and sweets and ask them if they find the light trying to their eyes.

Submission - always submission! It drives any decent woman mad. Women always *demand*, of course, and that is why those whose demands are accepted are the unhappy ones. As any psychologist will tell you, the worst thing you can possibly do to a woman is to deprive her of a grievance.

I can make this point crystal-clear by referring to a certain phenomenon which could be observed in London during those apocryphal days when shingling was still a novelty. At that time the whole town was resounding with the low moans of thousands of women whose husbands or fiances refused to allow them to cut off their hair. You heard this sort of thing: 'Jack says he proposed to me because of my hair, and if I shingle he'll break off the engagement.' Or: 'Harvey threatens to *strangle* me if I even have it bobbed!'

So tragic were these protestations that a woman I know said to me at the time, 'I think men are absolute brutes. There's that poor little Lady Blank who's longing to shingle. She's just the type that ought to, with her boyish head. And that horrible husband of hers says that if she does anything of the sort he'll take the first mistress he can find. She's absolutely miserable.'

To which I replied, 'She's nothing of the sort. Haven't you noticed the trill of delight when any of those women are telling every one that their husbands threaten to beat them or strangle them? There's a much brighter light in their eyes than in the eyes of the women with more placid husbands. The husband who would allow his wife to wear a nose-ring and paint her entire body blue if the mood seized her makes that sort of politeness equivalent to indifference. And the one thing no woman will stand is to be ignored. Or obeyed. It's the same thing.'

You cannot run counter to the fundamental psychological truths. It is as bad for the man as for the woman.

One of those fundamental truths is that every man has in his make-up a certain amount of the bully, and it is quite essential that he should have some opportunity of behaving, quite aggressively, as cock-of-the-walk. Any woman, having centuries of tradition behind her, will recognize this fact and accept it. If you have seen Sir James Barrie's play, *What Every Woman Knows*, you will remember how a very wise little woman, who married a stolid young politician, was at infinite pains to conceal from her husband the fact that he owed his political success to her brains. She was, in fact, the perfect wife.

The average woman in a similar position - but then you can't imagine the average woman in such a position. If she had any political ability she would most certainly claim credit for it. In fact she would probably claim credit for it whether she had it or not. I know of more than one politician who mumbles on all public occasions that he 'owes his success entirely to his wife,' when all that she has done has been to spend his money. It would have been more accurate if these men had followed the example of that superb humourist, Mr. P. G. Wodehouse, who recently dedicated one of his books to his daughter Leonora, whom he adores. (So do I.) The dedication read: 'To my dear daughter, without whose constant help and encouragement this book would have been finished in half the time.'

A man must appear to be a bully, even if in reality he is nothing of the sort. It is infinitely better for all concerned, particularly for the women. If they are wise women, and not fools, they will still manage him with the utmost ease. If necessary they will weep.

A woman's tears are worth a good deal more than their weight in gold. They have frequently been known to crystallize into diamonds within a few hours of their shedding.

Do you remember Queen Elizabeth - that woman

'strong in nothing but perversity' - and the Earl of Essex? She tried to rule him, and apparently succeeded, just as many wives are trying to rule their husbands. Essex rebelled, and was sent to the Tower and lost his head. But to-day the rebellion has to take less open forms, though those forms are not necessarily less picturesque.

There is one form of revolution - divorce. You may tell me that most divorces are initiated by the woman. I quite agree. *Legally* it is nearly always the woman who starts proceedings. But this very fact is one of the strongest arguments of my case, for of all amazing conventions none is so staggering as the notion that a 'gentleman' does not divorce his wife, but allows himself to be divorced.

To what extent this convention is dying out I am not aware. But I *am* acutely aware that it has no place in a twentieth-century civilization. It belongs back in the ages when 'chivalry' was carried to the most fantastic lengths, when men (in the glib language of the historian) 'risked death in the arena for the sake of a lady's glove' - the lady in question being probably even more ignorant and conceited than her modern sister.

We laugh at Frenchmen for their conduct of the duel, but Frenchmen laugh a good deal louder at us for our superstition of divorce. I have known men who were patterns of virtue married to wives who would have made Messalina look like a back number, wives who numbered their affairs by the pearls round their necks. And these men meekly go to a lawyer's office, arrange the sordid business of some technical misconduct, and are duly divorced, while their wives go on their way rejoicing. Such a spectacle in an age of so-called 'sex equality' is a little too grotesque to be endured in silence.

Yet what else can you expect as long as the conventions of married life run counter to the basic psychological facts of human nature? What else can you expect

when the man, who by physique, by temperament, and by economic position should be undisputed master, is actually in a position of subservience to the woman?

Do not, please, accuse me of being a woman-hater. It is precisely because I adore and reverence women so much that I hate to see this abominable tangle which leads to unhappiness in a million homes. Which is why I propose to cease from this tone of polite deprecation for a moment, in order to come out with the truth about women.

The truth is simple. To put it bluntly, they are demanding all the privileges of a mistress while expecting all the privileges of a wife. Now, it is right that a man should be subservient to his mistress. It is, as it were, in the tradition. The gayest and most selfish spark of the 'nineties would stand for hours outside a stage door, his satin cloak flapping in the wind, his face worn and tired with agonies of expectation.

He was prepared to receive insults and rebuffs, to have his pearls thrown back in his face (although they were usually very quickly retrieved). As it was in the days of de Maupassant, so it is now, and so will it be always. The mistress is privileged to be rude and overbearing, for the simple reason that she moves in a haze of romantic passion which lends even to her crudest actions a certain delicacy, a certain fragrance.

But the wife cannot afford to carry on like that. She lives in a very different light - no purple glow for her - at best the placid light of domesticity. Yet she domineers, in little things as well as big, as though she were La Belle Otero in her prime, driving down the Champs-Elysees, sparkling with diamonds, having just refused the invitation to supper of three marquises, a duke, and a prince.

Consider a very simple illustration. The other day I was sitting in the lounge of a restaurant, smoking a

cigarette. Suddenly I saw a sight which made me drop the cigarette and burn a hole in the carpet. *I saw a man kneeling down on the floor, doing up his wife's shoe!*

I know she was his wife because they were well-known people. But wife or no wife, the thing was amazing. It gave me the sort of feeling one gets when one sees an Italian peasant woman staggering through the sun-baked fields with a heavy burden on her back, while her amiable spouse trundles along behind her in the donkey cart. It was a reversal of the proper relation of man and woman. I don't say that a woman ought to do up a man's shoes. I think that the action is a menial one which should be performed by oneself, or by a servant who is paid to do that sort of thing. As for a grown man's going down on his knees in a public place and humbly lacing his wife's shoes - well, if that isn't a little cartoon of mankind in chains, I should be glad to know what is.

What, then, is to be done about it? Well, if I were a husband I know what I would *not* do about it. I should not allow myself to be treated by my wife like a footman. I should not consider it necessary, after a quarrel in which I had no part, to rush to the nearest flower shop and send along a spray of orchids. I should not submit to being kept waiting an hour for dinner.

And I should not live where I was told, irrespective of my business. Nor should I sleep in a modern bedroom if I didn't like modern art. Nor should I go on paying, paying, paying, without receiving some sort of account of what I was getting for it. Nor should I find it necessary, on my holidays, to be accompanied invariably by my wife. Nor . . . but one might go on like that for ever.

Perhaps it would be best to sum it all up by saying: 'Nor should I ever, in any circumstances, kneel down and button my wife's shoes.'

What I Shall Buy My Wife

I AM not writing about seasonal gifts. My mind is a blank about them. I have always given women a bottle of scent and men a case of whisky. (Of late I have been wondering if it would not be more suitable to send some of the women the whisky and some of the men the scent.)

No - I am trying to formulate a philosophy of married life. It is such an immense subject that one can only treat some tiny aspect of it with any hope of success. And it seems to me, as a presumably rational, and certainly articulate, bachelor, that there is no better method of giving my point of view about marriage than by making out a tentative list of those things which I should give the woman I married.

I shall assume, for purely practical purposes, that I am not a millionaire. Otherwise my imagination would run away with me, and the article would be littered with yachts, and castles in Spain (looming through the miſt), and it would probably end up with a dramatic scene in which I bought back the Koh-i-noor diamond from the Crown of England. I shall also assume that I am not particularly poor - not because I could not tell you anything about poverty - but because I should soon tire of writing about the pretty things you can buy at Woolworth's.

I am therefore in comfortable circumstances (for the purpose of this essay), happily married, and trying, as best I can, to build my happiness upon firm foundations.

I should buy my wife:

- (i) *A Library*. - It would not be a large library, but

it would contain most of the books I love. She would find in it, for example, the poems of Meredith, and I would pray that she might turn to *Love in the Valley*, so that its enchanted words, which are like the petals of a wild, white cherry tree, might flutter through her life. Then there would be *Wuthering Heights* - for that would warn her of some of the terror of love, would lead her through those scarred and naked regions of the spirit which man creates, and some women must enter. And the *Old Wives' Tale* to remind her that even if I am a brute I am not such a brute as Sophie's husband. And *The Well of Loneliness* that she might have pity for her sisters who were born with stunted souls. And George Moore's *Hilolse and Abilard*, because it is the most beautiful love tale in the English language. And Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* to give her poise, and induce a feeling of superiority when she was interviewing the cook. And Somerset Maugham's plays, *Our Betters*, *Penelope*, and *The Circle*, so that she might take my peccadilloes in the right spirit, and - if she feels like indulging in minor infidelities - indulge with a certain *chic*. And Freud on the sub-conscious, which would explain a lot of things. And a book by A. F. Hornibrook, called *The Culture of the Abdomen* - because I realize that the basis of a successful marriage is a successful digestion; and Herrick's poems, because all that I could ever say has been said with singing words by him; and *Cranford*, because no house can ever have too many copies of *Cranford*. And, of course, my own works, in their foreign translations, bound as portentously as possible, so that I could point to them on awkward occasions and say, 'Well, if you won't listen to me, Germany (or Sweden or Italy, as the case may be) will.'

(2) *A Mirror*. - A cruel gift this. For I should hang it where the light shone clear and slanting, pointing with relentless yellow fingers at the lines which gather

round the eyes, and trace their blunt pattern about the mouth. Crueller still, when I tell you its design - for I have it now, in a locked drawer - a design of radiant Cupids, with plump, laughing cheeks, that have remained smooth through the centuries, while those who peered into the glass have slowly faded. Yet, I would give it to her, and hang it in that tell-tale place, because I have always believed in knowing the worst. I have always believed in studying one's own reflection in the most pitiless light. It is for this reason that I like to argue with people who are cleverer than I, because I want to know exactly how silly I am. I like to entertain people who are richer, play with better players, laugh with better jesters. This sounds as though I were a loathsome parasite. Very well. Have it your own way. I prefer to regard it as a humble method of bettering myself.

Most women won't do that. Most women won't walk into the light. They won't deliberately sit in front of the glass in their least attractive position and honestly face the facts. I would ask my wife to do that. Not for *my* happiness, but for *hers*. For I realize that there will come a day when the mirror can no longer be cheated, when no amount of rose-coloured shades, of careful pondering and skilful posing, will conceal the fact that she is old. And that day will hurt. I don't want the woman I love to be hurt like that - not all at once. It had better come gradually, and we had better face it together.

(3) *A Spinet*. - You may think this a perverse, ultra-precious sort of gift. Most men, I know, would prefer to give their wives a gramophone or a radio set. 'What is the use of a spinet?' they would ask. 'You can hardly even *hear* the beastly thing.'

That is exactly why I should choose it, because you can hardly even hear it. I am not merely making the

usual, obvious protest against noise. I am making a plea for the lost art of listening. Those thin, sweet notes of the spinet are as elusive as the call of a bird in some autumnal wood. They seem to drift across infinite distances. I defy any women of sensibility to play a spinet for a few minutes every evening without gaining something of the peace which seems to brood, like a spirit, over its ancient, trembling wires. *You can hardly hear it.* No - but then you can hardly hear the wind in the grass on a May morning - nor the singing of the kettle on the hob. You can hardly hear the most beautiful words that men and women ever whisper to one another - held close in the fastness of the night.

For this reason I love my spinet and I would have my wife love it, too. I am tired of shouting and being shouted at. I am sick of an age that considers cheap tunes, played simultaneously by six saxophones, of more merit than a true melody gently plucked out on a few withered wires.

I hope that I shall never have to shout at my wife, nor she at me. I hope that we shall understand one another so well, that we shall be so exquisitely attuned, that a mere inflexion of the voice will tell us all that we want to know. Sometimes when I see young couples screaming at each other at night clubs, even if they are screaming affectionately, I ask myself how they ever manage to stop screaming, how they are able to revert to the normal without feeling flat and bored and vacant. Perhaps they *do* feel like that. I should, if I joined the shouting brigade. But I never shall. Nor shall my wife. And if you feel that the idea of playing a spinet in the evening, instead of going to a movie or a night club, is boring, then you had better look deep into your own soul, and look fairly quickly. For the germs of the screaming disease are already in you.

(4) *A Clock.* - Not an ordinary clock, I would have

you understand - no stolid grandfather's model, nor any vulgar alarm with its shrill tinkle. No - I would buy her a clock which I saw once at an *antiquaire's* in Venice. It was curiously carved in tarnished silver, and was shaped like a starry sphere - like the world, in fact. And it was held aloft by a Cupid, who nodded his head in a melancholy measure whenever the hour struck. Such wisdom there was on that Cupid's face, and such resignation, such a sense of fatality in the nodding of his head.

Maybe the lesson would be wasted. Maybe she would see in it only a pretty ornament. However, if she is the woman I imagine, she would dream over that clock as I have dreamt, seeing the frail minute hands glide over the silver surfaces of the world, and, as each hour struck, nodding her head in time with the god of love. And immense, shadowy thoughts would pass through her head - of the 'transience of things' (as the treacly school of Edwardians would say), and the irresistible march of age. Until the clock struck eight, with a shallow tinkle, and reminded her that it was time to dress for dinner.

Which reminds me that this polite custom of changing one's clothes has probably averted a great many minor tragedies.

(5) *A Subscription to the Best Women's Club that she could suggest.* - I must admit, at once, that this gift is largely prompted by malice. It would be bad policy for any wife who really loved her husband to pay fifty guineas entrance fee to X's club, because there is a disagreeable possibility that he might become permanently attached to that institution. But any man who loves his wife ought to insist that she belongs to a club, for the simple reason that women's clubs are so completely hellish that the worst home is a paradise in comparison with them. If you pay a woman's subscription to a club, nothing will prevent her from using it, because women cannot bear not to use things. If they have free seats for a concert

they will go, even if they detest music, and will be bored stiff for two hours, rather than throw the tickets into the waste-paper basket. They will gulp down scrag-ends of mutton, even if they are not hungry, rather than throw the stuff away. Thus, they will go to their clubs in a spirit of stern duty, once their subscription is paid. And after the acute discomforts of these institutions with their atmosphere of hysteria, intrigue, sex-repression, back-biting, hatred, and frantic *ennui*, they will come home with such relief that you will hardly be able to cope with their amiability.

(6) *A Return Ticket to Manchester.* - I should buy her this on the same principle that I should pay her subscription to the women's club. Manchester is the nearest approach to hell that I have seen in any country in the world, and once my wife had visited it, even for a day, she would be comparatively content to live in any other locality. Even if Destiny compelled me to move within a stone's throw of the stock-yards at Chicago, or to pitch my tent on the edge of the Suez Canal, she would realize that it is preferable to Manchester.

I once spent three weeks of early spring in Manchester. From the heavens streamed a perpetual flood of black snow. The noise was deafening, the shops were drab, the air in even the finest streets smelt like that of a foul cellar. The houses were caked with the grime of centuries. So, apparently, were the people. Most of the architecture was built in the most revolting style of the whole Victorian period. For miles and miles one drove in rattling tram-cars without seeing a green leaf or a smiling face. Even the dogs looked depressed. And no wonder. I would rather starve on the Thames Embankment than live on twenty thousand a year in Manchester. Compared with it Glasgow is a paradise and Winnipeg a garden. I have said enough, perhaps, to indicate that I do not like Manchester.

(7) *A Good Cookery Book*, inscribed as follows: 'To my dear wife, in the hope that she will read, mark, learn, and that we may both inwardly digest.'

The ignorance of the average Englishwoman in matters gastronomic is appalling. Not one woman in ten can even mix a proper salad dressing. (In case you wish to know how to do it, take the yolks of two hard-boiled eggs, mix them into a paste with olive oil, and a dessert-spoonful of lemon juice - not vinegar - two tablespoonfuls of Worcester sauce, a teaspoonful of mustard, add some more oil to give the right consistency, and sugar to taste. This is a dressing which you will not find in any cookery book, and it is worth its weight in gold. It is given here free of charge. And, by the way, if you are mixing a salad, kindly throw every radish and cucumber out of the window, even at the risk of hitting someone on the head. Radishes ought only to be eaten by Gadarene swine, and cucumbers are only fit to be served cooked, with lots of melted butter, very young. However, once I begin to talk recipes I become wild and strange, so I will stop here.)

I would also give my wife, with the cookery book, a blank exercise book in which she might note down any dish that was a particular success, so that she might refer to it when her imagination flagged. I cannot bear to see women coming up from the kitchen with white, strained faces, as though they were nuns who had been wresding with the devil, and panting, 'I hope you don't mind, but I thought that cold chicken for lunch . . .' Any woman who says things like that has obviously not 'thought' at all.

I know that eventually all the work would devolve upon me, but I should not really care. I love watching things sizzling in a frying-pan, and my haddock *mornay*, cooked in a chafing-dish, is a thing to dream about.

(8) *An Enormous Dust-bin*. - Perhaps I do not mean

that quite literally. But I should certainly see that there was some sort of receptacle in the house into which useless objects could be pitched. I am tired of the absurd legend - assiduously fostered by generations of complacent women - that men are 'hoarders.' I am tired of comic pictures showing wives staggering back from the doors of their husbands' studies at spring-cleaning time in horror at the muddle which they perceive in them. For women are far worse 'hoarders' than men.

There is hardly a married woman in the kingdom who does not possess some cupboard stacked with 'ornaments,' pictures, odd spoons, pieces of ribbon, a brass elephant or two, an unused gong, some desiccated pieces of india-rubber, a set of Japanese wind-bells, some cracked gramophone records, two moth-eaten jumpers, some unwearable boots, and several pieces of fur, which were ripped off a coat, and 'may come in handy some day.'

They will not come in handy any day. If you ask her to put the ornaments on the mantelpiece she will tell you that they will not 'go' with the other things. If you then ask her why they therefore cannot 'go' altogether, she will say that it would be a shame to waste them or that she has sentimental attachments to them, or that they might 'do' for a wedding present if Ada got married. If you point out that the possibilities of Ada getting married are remote, and that even if Ada did get married she would snarl with rage at the thought of receiving two chipped vases, decorated with views of Windsor Castle, which, as she well knows, have been standing on the back shelf of the cupboard for six years - if you point out these things, you will be called an unsympathetic brute.

Again, if you suggest to her that she might throw away the odd bits of fur, she will retaliate fiercely that one of them is a piece of real mink. And if you ask her

what is the precise practical or aesthetic value of a piece of real mink kept for several years on a hook at the back of a cupboard, she will suggest with withering sarcasm that you have evidently come into large sums of money and wish to buy her a set of sables. And if you dispel this illusion, and tell her that you are merely anxious to avoid having more moths in the house than is compatible with hygiene, she will, once again, call you an unsympathetic brute.

Hence the dust-bin. And I should do my utmost to see that it was used, from the very beginning.

(9) *A Pearl*. - I mean, of course, a pearl hung on a cord, to which I could add another on each of her birthdays. If I were really rich, I should give her a pearl necklace, but even so, I should give her a single pearl as well, just for the fun of adding to it. Think how exciting it would be, as the great day drew near, to go round to the jeweller's and bend over the counter, matching and comparing, examining this one for colour and that one for shape. I should grow so interested in the necklace that I could not possibly do anything to risk breaking up my marriage, because it would mean breaking up the necklace as well. Each pearl would have a special significance of its own. This one we bought after some tearable quarrel, when we both thought the end had come. How wise and smooth and untroubled it looks now! And this one - do you remember? - on the day you whispered to me the Tremendous Secret. If you look at that pearl long enough, I swear it will wink at you. And this one, with a flaw, when I was on the verge of a financial crash. I wouldn't tell you, and tried to bluff it out by ordering the most expensive pearl in the shop. But you knew that things were bad, and showed a sudden, violent desire for a pearl with a flaw in it, which only cost a tenth of the price of the other one. And I, little guessing, drew a deep breath of relief.

And, a few months later, when I had pulled through, by the skin of my teeth, I learned that you had known, all along, and promptly rushed off to the shop, pretending it was your birthday when it wasn't, to return with the pearl which I couldn't afford before. It is a lovely pearl - but not so precious to me as the one with the flaw in it. For the flaw in the pearl proved that there was no flaw in you. . . .

'How I do run on,' sighed Ella Wheeler Wilcox, emptying another bucket of ink into the ink-pot. Still, I enjoyed that little sentimental interlude, even if you thought it rather grim.

And so, I might run on for ever. For, you see, I am a bachelor, and I have never had to put my theories to the test. You may say that they are foolish theories, and that I have irritated you, which would please me very much indeed, because the world is far too full of writers who do *not* irritate their readers. You may also tell me that I am wildly impractical, that I should really find myself constrained to offer my wife such gifts as blankets, garden-mowers, moth-balls, Vim, rugs for the 'spare-room,' etc. etc. Well - if that is your argument, I would reply that the only answer to it is a cheque-book, which is the most prosaic sort of book in the world.

I did not set out to furnish a villa, nor to pay a grocer's account. I set out to lay my own sort of gifts at the feet of my own sort of woman. I may never meet her - but the gifts are there all the same, waiting.

A Woman in Moonlight

ONCE, on the terrace of an old chateau in Provence, there occurred a tragedy which was entirely due to four words. They were not evil words, nor were they spoken in anger. Those four words were, 'Look at the moon.'

It may seem quite absurd to suggest that words so simple and so commonplace could possibly cause even a storm in a tea-cup. Actually, they wrecked two lives. A young man said them to his fiancee. All night long they had been dancing in the shadowy ballroom, under the diamond chandeliers, with the moonlight beckoning a silver finger through the casements. They were both desperately in love.

The boy's love was probably deeper than the girl's. But he was a poet at heart. And since the moon is, for every poet, his especial mistress, the beckoning of that silver finger became too urgent for him to resist, and he went outside, taking the girl with him.

They stepped on to the terrace. The night was warm and tremulous, scented by the yellow roses that drooped over the balustrade. He gazed up at the sky. He whispered those four words, '*Look at the moon!*'

And the girl pulled at his arm, put her face close to his, and said, 'Can't you find anything better to look at than that?'

Which was the beginning of a quarrel which never healed.

That happens to be a true story. If a sentimental novelist had written it (instead of life itself), the boy would have taken the girl in his arms and kissed her,

murmuring apologies, telling her that her face was far lovelier than the moon's and that as long as he had her by his side he was unaware of the glories of nature, deaf to the plaint of the nightingale, senseless of the rose's perfume, blind even to the majesty of the Wool worth building at sunset. Actually, however, he had the heart of a poet, and, since poets are the only honest people in the world, he protested. He wanted to look at the moon. Something deep and primeval inside him urged him to pay his homage to that eternal mistress. And something equally deep and primeval inside the girl urged her to stop him. If she had been a clever girl, she would have knelt by his side in mutual worship, even though she hated the chilled golden face that was drawing her lover's eyes. But she wasn't clever. She was like the great majority of her sex, the sex that won't let men look at the moon.

During the long, painted pageant of life they are perpetually pulling at men's arms, and saying, 'Look at me! Don't linger in that valley, don't enter that market, don't pause to pick those flowers, don't listen to that philosopher, don't turn your head away - look at *me*!

It is because I believe that this is the supreme error of all women that I have to tell the truth about it. I do so with a certain amount of trepidation, because bitter experience has taught me that it is extremely fatiguing to tell the truth about women. It entails the opening of so many letters of abuse . . . although, after a certain amount of practice, one can detect such letters without opening them, by the frenzied writing on the envelope and the bulky nature of the contents. However, tell the truth I must, and the truth is that even in this age of sex-equality, co-education, subways, and all the other things which are supposed to bring men and women together in sensible friendship, the average woman is still utterly incapable of talking to the average man

without expecting him to make love to her. It needn't be expressed violently, but it has to be expressed in some way or other, by a glance, or an intonation, or the pressure of a hand, whether you are dancing, or playing tennis, or passing the salted almonds, or taking off your hat. If the under-current of courtship isn't there, your name, as a man, is mud.

You need only to retire to the corner of the room and watch a *tite-d,-t\$te* between even the most casual acquaintances of the opposite sex, and you will have to admit the truth of my contention. Come into the corner with me for a moment - one sees so much life from the corners - and fix your eyes upon some young woman who is sitting down to talk with a personable young man. What does she remind you of? Well, for me, she is like a cat arranging itself for the night. That is why so many women of considerable intelligence make such hopeless partners in a *tite-a-tete*. However interested she may be in the subject, however clear and well-formed her ideas, she *cannot* merely sit down and talk. She has to get in the right light and expose the correct surface of knee, and droop the right arm over the edge of the chair, and tilt the chin, and open the eyes, and modulate the voice, and generally go through all the contortions which are supposed to be alluring. The little idiot! Doesn't she realize that if a man is in love with her, she will look just as attractive to him, even if her face is covered with smuts and she has a cold in the bead? And doesn't she realize that if a man is not in love with her, these gyrations are merely irritating?

No, she doesn't. And I believe that one of the reasons why she doesn't is because women have always been taught to make love by other women, rather than by men. Who wrote the columns in the newspapers telling little Clara Smith of Peckham how to get back her young man's wandering affections? Women! Who pro-

duce all the endless books on Charm, Mysticism of Love, Secrets of Sex Appeal, etc. etc.? Women! Who is the first person who explains life to a girl, who tells her how to behave if she wishes to be attractive, who pats her hair before her first party, whispers counsel before her honeymoon? Again, a woman. As a result, nearly every woman has the wrong idea about the things which really do attract men, because they have gone on repeating the same old lies for centuries, until to-day the echoes of those lies form a shrill soprano chorus through which it is almost impossible for the masculine voice to be heard. Besides, most men are too chivalrous to tell women that they are making mistakes, to remind them that there are occasions when they want to forget love, when they want to regard a woman merely as a person - something with the usual number of legs and arms, in whose company they find a detached and impersonal pleasure.

Chivalry of that sort has never been my strong point. I prefer history. And I wish to enunciate a somewhat startling historical theory which flashed upon me the other day in a ballroom. I was sitting, as usual, in a corner, glaring about me with my customary bad taste. Suddenly I noticed a woman at the other end of the room who had a whole flock of men about her - the sort of flock which always used to follow the heroines of Viennese musical comedies across the pre-war stage. There was no obvious reason why they should be there - she was not particularly beautiful, although she was exceptionally well-dressed. She did not even look particularly wicked. And yet, there she was, like the young women in the advertisements who have learnt to play the saxophone, or have read the latest book of the month, or have sprinkled a few drops of alluring perfume on their handkerchief.

I turned to my companion, who was a very ancient

and adorable Frenchwoman, with white hair, a sense of humour, and a monstrously painted mouth, and asked, 'Who is she? Is it Royalty? Or what?'

'It's *savoir-faire*'

'But she isn't doing anything.'

'She never does. That is why they all love her - because she does not ask them to do so. *Mon enfant*' (you see, she was very ancient), 'that is the secret which only one woman in a thousand ever learns. I learnt it.' And she chuckled, and fingered a superb *collier* of diamonds as though to prove the practical value of the lesson.

Well, it was while I was listening to more details of this very ordinary woman's very extraordinary success that I gradually evolved the afore-mentioned historical theory. The theory concerned the world's greatest - if you will forgive the word - courtesans.

I have known, during my long and depraved existence, several brilliantly successful courtesans. Judging from my correspondence it would seem that I am usually credited with no other female companions. But that is beside the point. I can see these women now - sitting bored and beautiful in the casino at Le Touquet, with immense piles of *mille francs plaques* in front of them; gliding down the corridors of the Ritz in Paris, glittering with diamonds; undoing parcels of purple orchids; alighting from shiny Rolls-Royces in Mayfair, leaving a tiny trail of priceless perfume hovering over the little strip of pavement that leads from Bond Street to the Embassy Club. There is a family resemblance in all these ladies, they always walk proudly, as though they were showing a bold front to the world; they are always incredibly *chic*. But these again are only details. For the one really deep and significant trait which they all share in common is this, *that they never ask a man, directly or indirectly, to make love to them.*

There is a rather novel interpretation of history.

Supposing that all these women of the past who have swayed empires with a smile, conquered kingdoms with a frown, sent armies to the slaughter with a flutter of their fingers - supposing that all these women gained their power, not through their endless capacity for love, but through their endless capacity for forgetting it, not through their carefulness in preserving their beauty, but from their complete indifference (real or assumed) to it! The epigrammatists have observed that if Cleopatra's nose had been one inch longer the whole history of the world would have been different. I don't believe it. *But I do believe that the whole history of the world would have been different if Cleopatra had been unable, like so many modern women, to utter two consecutive sentences to Antony without reaching for a powder-puff.*

This somewhat startling conclusion will be made more apparent very shortly, but meanwhile I should like to illustrate the truth of it by a contemporary example from life. A little while ago, in London, I was dining with a man who had achieved a certain reflected glory by his reputed connection with - here is the wicked word again - the most celebrated courtesan in England. He had given her a house and a string of pearls, and two motor-cars and all the rest of the paraphernalia which seems to appeal to these women. He was reputed to be completely infatuated. That surprised me exceedingly, for he looked the type of man who could be infatuated by nothing but a beef-steak. He was stolid and amiable, and his digestion worked as well as engines in the Ford advertisements. It was guaranteed to meet the most arduous tests without muttering. And so I tried to discover, without delicacy, what was really the basis of this grand passion - was it her eyes, or her hair, or her voice, was it, even, her sweet, sad soul? No, sir. It was none of these things. It was because she was the sort of woman - to

use my friend's own words - who could 'pour out a cup of tea without doing the usual sort of Salome dance round the teapot.⁵

Now, in those few words are contained enough wisdom to straighten out endless tangles and tragedies of sex.

Think of the picture those words imply - the picture of a man sitting down before a charming woman who looks him straight in the eye, without a flutter, who listens to what he says without groping desperately for a double meaning, who gives love when it is demanded of her, but waits until it is demanded, and does not consider herself slighted if it is not. And, as a reward for these qualities, *not* as a reward for an exquisite face or a yielding disposition, my friend was prepared to pay and pay and pay.

I believe that it has been like this since the world began, and if you will bear with me for a moment, I think that I may be able to prove it.

I cannot throw any new light on the habits of Helen of Troy, although I have always found it difficult to believe that a *face,perse*, could launch a thousand ships. But we do not have to go back as far as that, if we care to apply a little intelligent psychological research to more recent history. And a superb illustration awaits us in the period of the French Revolution with Madame la Pompadour, concerning whom more nonsense has been written than about any other woman in the world.

Look at the facts. Louis XV was a perfect example of a rather weary Babbit. He was the tired business man *in excelsis*, for business was always bad with him. His employees, i.e. the French nation, were always discontented, and showed ominous signs of banding together in unions. His managers, with the exception of Turgot, were specious and incompetent. And so he sought consolation in the arms of la Pompadour. Now most

historians are infuriatingly sentimental, or they would not be historians.

As a result, the Pompadour has been endowed with the usual halo of sex attraction, she has been given the old, old allure, magnetism, 'it' and all the rest of it. But do you seriously imagine that this is what Louis XV wanted? Can you for a moment believe that every time he shut the door on a howling mob, or a trembling minister, he desired only to open another door leading to a woman who curled and cavorted and sighed and simpered and drooped before the ecstasies of love? Can you? A good many women can, I am sure. I once went to a fancy-dress ball where there were no less than four Pompadours, each of them breathlessly endeavouring to appear more like a courtesan than the other three.

If Louis XV had discovered any of those young women in his study he would have sent for the nearest tumbril and had them safely interned in the Bastille. For they were not like Pompadour at all, as you will observe if you take the trouble to study the picture which Boucher painted of her. It shows a woman with a comely face, whose chief characteristic is common sense, the sort of woman who, to use that vivid phrase quoted above, 'could pour out a cup of tea without doing the usual sort of Salome dance round the teapot.'

Such women are as rare as four-leaved shamrocks, and when they are found they are snapped up by the first man they meet, who, like all the rest of us, are weary of the perpetual necessity of assuming a love-lorn expression. Think, for instance, of the joy of taking such a person to the theatre! To take the average woman to the theatre is positively unsafe, because she identifies herself with the comedy or the tragedy to such an extent that one is never quite certain what she is going to do next. Twice I have watched *Romeo and Juliet* with such women by my side, and, as a result, I had to pretend'

to continue to play Romeo myself, during supper, which is exceedingly difficult when one is fond of asparagus.

Maugham's *Our Betters* is even worse, because this play has the effect of making all women wish to feel *diclassee*, so that they leave the theatre wearing six times too much lip-stick, and clinging to one's arm with heavy abandon.

Ibsen is better because he usually sends them to sleep, and Eugene O'Neill is a little too full of physiological details. But a play like *Romancel* If you are a fairly young man, without any obvious physical defects, and you take a fairly young woman, without more than the normal equipment of sense, to see *Romance* you might as well give up the idea that you are merely going to *see* a play. You are not. You are going to *play* in one, the old, old play in which woman has never learnt to wait for the cue.

That seems to be the essence of the whole thing, waiting for the cue. Women will never wait for it. They will not realize that making love, for a man, is akin to a hunt for a wild and swift-limbed quarry, over the hills of time and through the woods of the world. It is not always that he would be hunting, there are other things; pauses to be made, dreams to be dreamed, songs to be sung. But for woman, even though she knows it not, there is only the one thing. The incense before her particular altar must always be burning. Otherwise she stifles in the clean atmosphere of common sense.

This doesn't sound at all like the leading articles in the newspapers lauding our modern youth. It doesn't fit in, at all, with the pretty pictures of long-legged, fresh-eyed boys and girls, scampering about arm-in-arm through the co-educational colleges, like a big family of brothers and sisters. It doesn't tally, either, with the proud boasts of parents Who hand out latch-keys by the fistful, confident that because we are living

in the year 1931 their daughters are 'sensible, and that, somehow or other, human nature has changed.

Human nature hasn't changed. I wish it would. Because then, perhaps, the men might be given a rest.

A rest! Don't women realize what infinite dividends in goodwill and in kindness they would earn if they allowed men to have that rest? For love-making is a tiring thing, from the man's point of view. It needs energy, skill, poetry. It has to have the divine fire. Yet, apparently, women expect us to turn it on like a tap. You see, for them it is an easy matter. There is nothing exhausting about lying among the cushions listening to compliments. No great intellectual effort is needed in order to say, a few hundred times in an evening, 'Do you?' or 'Am I?' or, as the atmosphere grows more intense, 'Would you?' And physically, one imagines, it is not nearly so fatiguing to lean upon something, as to be leant upon.

However, I might as well be writing on the sand, with the tide coming in swiftly, to wash away my words. As long as the sea has washed the shores that vast tide of feminine prejudice and passion has been drifting back and forth, obliterating criticism, effacing common sense. And whatever personal conceit I may have, I haven't forgotten the story of Canute.

Sex with a Small V

LIKE most of my irritating generation, whose thoughts are blown hither and thither like withered leaves swept by winds of doubt, I find it easier to disbelieve than to believe. And when confronted with the accepted truisms of love and marriage the winds of doubt rise to a positive hurricane.

It is usually accepted, for example, that pretty women have a greater chance of being married than plain. How can I believe that? The shortest walk along the promenade of a seaside town will show you long processions of female Calibans, leering amiably behind perambulators which contain, undoubtedly, their own offspring.

It is also assumed that 'motherly' women are deluged with offers from good strong men. (The word 'motherly' has been so mauled about by Hollywood that it is apt to call up a vision of silvery wigs against a background of herbaceous borders. But you know what I mean.)

How can I believe that? The briefest peep into a night club will show you an array of sleek, hard masks: women who have been married once, twice, three times before they are thirty - women who would be bored to death by the thought of having children - women who would leap away from a baby as though it were 'a snail without its shell on.' (That was the pretty little description given me by one such woman the other day.)

And on the other side of the picture, a turn in almost any London park will show you rows of silent, withered women, watching other women's children play, and as they watch they keep their hands very tightly clasped

in their laps for fear that their arms may prove too strong for them and may hold some child and fold it very close.

No. There appear to be no rules of any sort. A female, however twisted in mind or body, may obtain a male, while beauty and wit may go single to the grave. It seems inexplicable. And yet I believe the mystery can be solved, for if you exclude the multitude of charming women who remain single for the simple reason that they happen to prefer it, you will find that a very large number of spinsters belong to the same class - 'The women-who-always-want-to-be-wooded.'

Such women have always existed, but men have hitherto been too chivalrous to expose them. They have merely fled, and when they were out of reach wiped their foreheads and breathed a sigh of relief. The age of chivalry having vanished in a cloud of dust and velvet, I feel at liberty to append some hints to young men who find themselves in close proximity with such women.

It is best to stick firmly to comparatively scientific subjects, such as diet. It needs a real genius of a woman to extract any passionate meaning from such a remark as, 'You ought to eat more lettuce,' though there are some women who could probably do it.

Some Pitfalls.

However, your task will be easier if you speak brusquely and enunciate your consonants with great distinctness. Remark harshly that an anti-cyclone is hovering over Perth. Observe, with a cynical smile, that the Channel Tunnel does not seem to be getting any farther, does it?

Only, in this latter instance, be sure that you do not say *Chunnel Tannel*, because that will cause her to dissolve into peals of girlish laughter, and when she does

that anything may happen. The following sentences should be strictly avoided :

(1) *Will you have a cocktail?*

This instantly suggests that you wish to render the lady completely insensible, and then to transport her to some wild place, such as St. John's Wood, in order that you may savagely crush her in your unscrupulous arms.

(2) *Are you going to the Lido this year?*

This is a remark fraught with danger. As soon as you say it, she will have visions of canals and sighing bridges and heaven knows what. Besides, any inquiry as to her future whereabouts is construed as a passionate desire to follow her.

(3) *Do you like the talkies?*

This again brings up a perilous mental image: a dark theatre erected, of course, for only one purpose - i.e. the holding of hands. It is much safer to confine yourself to the Olympic Games.

History should be avoided, because it is full of bold, bad women, drama, poetry, and indeed all the arts. Conversations, when possible, should take place in a large open space, such as the middle of the hall. It is also wise to assume a slight cold, though this is perhaps an over-elaborate precaution.

The Female Sphinx

OF all the legends with which this weary world is hagridden, none is stupider than the legend of the female sphinx, i.e. the legend that women are mysterious and inscrutable. For generations that sphinx has sat upon its pedestal and has been worshipped by hordes of inferior novelists, bad poets, sentimental bachelors, and erotic women. It helps them to avoid the trouble of thinking. It gives them a pretty picture to look at. In fact, it is one of the greatest ornaments ever invented for the decoration of an empty mind. Which is why it is no use to me.

All nice young men in all clean, best-selling novels are bound to observe, before the end of Chapter III, that, 'Of course, women are a closed book to me, old man.' This sentence is always delivered in gruff, hearty tones, with, if possible, a pipe clenched between the strong white teeth, and a large sporting dog in an appropriate attitude on the hearthrug. The only men who are allowed to admit that they *do* understand women are invariably scented gigolos, with smooth black hair, and far too large an assortment of slave bracelets.

This popular fairy tale has caused a large number of foolish women deliberately to make themselves mysterious, or at least inexplicable. When you are talking to them, they assume a Gioconda smile, laugh softly at nothing, make the most astounding guesses which they attribute to their 'woman's instinct,' and generally behave as though they were candidates for one of the more expensive lunatic asylums.

Now, in my opinion, there is far too much mystery in

the world already, and if we are to invest an entire sex with a weird, uncanny halo of doubtful obscurity, we shall only make the confusion in our minds worse confounded. And therefore it might be well for women readers to realize that there is at least one man in the world who does not regard them as sphinxes. Which does not mean to say that I fail to reverence them or worship them or do any of the other things which are laid down by popular novelists as correct emotional etiquette.

In order to prove my point, I may take at random a few occasions on which the sphinx gives herself away:

(1) *When she is trying to make an impression.* - I am not thinking of debutantes, who are so vulgarly and palpably obvious in everything they think, say, do, or wear that one can't begin to discuss them. I am referring to the subtler woman - the woman of the world who wishes to captivate some attractive or important man.

She always begins by flattering him, because flattery forms Lesson I in all the books on 'How to be Alluring.' She lays it on with a trowel. She thinks that he is drinking it all in. He isn't. He knows what she is doing, and why she is doing it - and oh, how bored with her he is!

She goes on to assume, with a positive barrage of Gioconda smiles, that she 'understands.' She looks at him from under lowered eyelids, and says: 'You needn't tell me, I *know*.'⁹ Which is enough to drive the poor man to a frenzy of distraction, because she *does* know. It isn't his soul which is sick, but the Stock Market. He isn't tortured by philosophic doubts, but by bear drives in public utilities.

She ends up by telling him that he is 'different.' This adjective, she imagines, can be applied, with the happiest results, to every man under the sun. Yet all the time, *he* knows why she is applying it, because dozens of other sphinxes have been at him before. And all the word provokes in him is a new irritation, because it sets

him thinking of the Stock Market again. If only he *had* been different! If only he'd been a bear instead of a confounded bull. However, the sphinx is too occupied with the task of being a sphinx to suspect what is passing in his head.

(2) *When she is jealous.* - A jealous woman is like a bonfire in a desert. You can detect her for miles. I am constantly reading novels in which women are concealing their raging hatred of other women behind saccharine smiles, cooing in their faces, fluttering about them like little white doves. Well, it just can't be done by a woman. Their facial muscles won't work that way. The best effort they can make is to say almost nothing - a feat which is so unusual that it is, in itself, suspicious. If one girl hates another girl for making advances to her young man, no power on earth will prevent her from showing it. Even if she only says, 'Ada's such a *darling*, and personally I don't believe that she's nearly such a liar as people say, and, of course, she can't *help* having legs like that, though I do think it's a pity she drinks, but then she's such a *darling*. . . .' Even if she only says that, it is surely enough to indicate the lie of the land.

(3) *When she is inquisitive.* - Legend has created a great many popular heroines who have a genius for worming secrets out of men. They do it in the subtlest ways. I never quite understand their technique, but the result of it is that the men are invariably captivated by the combination of a haunting perfume, a pair of bright, innocent eyes, and a few soft but shrewd interrogations. All this is arrant nonsense. If a woman wants to know something she behaves like a cat on hot bricks. If she does not dare to risk the direct attack, she dances round and round the subject, throwing out the most astounding suggestions, hints, invitations. 'Of course, I simply *don't* believe that Ada's going to marry that man.' Heavy pause. 'Still, honestly, I shouldn't be surprised,

would you?' Another heavy pause. 'Really, the things people say! Not that it's any concern of mine. But I do think people ought to be frank about things, don't you?'

And so on, *ad nauseam*.

Those are three examples, chosen at random. They are all true, and I cannot imagine why women should wish to deny them. Women are as clear as crystal, if you have the least desire to know what they are thinking. Why do they want to make themselves obscure? Why do they want to wreath themselves in mystery? They are no more obscure, no more mysterious than the Statue of Liberty.

A man is far more sphinx-like than a woman. The world would not be in such a mess if he weren't. Look at the diplomats of the world. Consider the endless councils of war or peace - there is no difference between the two varieties - whose members have gabbled themselves hoarse ever since the end of the world war. Gould you find a more illogical, wilful, petulant, inexplicable crew? Gould you match them with any feminine team? If all our international business were in the hands of women, we should at last have killed the gaunt spectre of secret diplomacy, because every country would know what every other country was thinking.

It is the old, brooding male sphinxes, sitting on the dusty archives of nations, glaring at each other with fathomless malevolent eyes, who are the real danger to our peace.

A large part of the blame for the sphinx legend must rest upon the shoulders of Sir Walter Scott, for it was he who wrote the atrocious couplet:

'O Woman! in our hours of ease
Uncertain, coy, and hard to please.'

For some extraordinary reason, this ugly piece of doggerel, which contains one insult and three lies, has

passed into the general currency, not only of language, but of civilized thought. If it were merely a harmless piece of jingle rhyme, like:

'Hey, diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle
The cow jumped over the moon/

there would be nothing to complain about. But it does not only jingle - it expresses a philosophy, or at any rate a point of view.

Now Sir Walter Scott knew nothing whatever about women. I am honest enough to admit that I have read only three of his books, because I think that to be bored more than three times by the same man would be bad for my sweet nature. Those which I have read, however, were enough to introduce me to a whole gallery of cardboard figures - women with dusty, conventional souls, agitated by entirely false emotions - the 'historical' woman, in fact, than whom there is no more monstrous illusion.

I mentioned that Sir Walter's famous - or shall I say infamous? - couplet contained one insult and three lies. The insult is, of course, obvious. It lies in the words: 'In our hours of ease.' He lived in an era when women were largely toys, to be brought out of the nursery at stated intervals, made to go through their antics, and then returned to their shelves. It is true that in the ensuing lines he admits that woman can be 'a ministering angel,' when pain and sickness wring the brow, but there is something horribly lady-like about this phrase.

Sir Walter died before Florence Nightingale captured the imagination of the nineteenth century. He would probably have written her a sonnet, had he lived, but it would have been a very bad sonnet, emphasizing all the things which Florence Nightingale was *not*, and ignoring the fact that her real greatness lay in her grasp of **the** sordid details of sanitation and interior economy.

I am digressing. Those three lies are waiting to be nailed on the head. They are in the words:

'Uncertain, coy, and hard to please.'

'Uncertain' fits in very well with the sphinx legend. But women are not uncertain. They are positive rocks of reliability compared with the average man. If they were not, there would be no homes left in England. It is their very certainty and reliability which lays them open to the ill-treatment of brutal or thoughtless men. A husband can drink himself to death, ill-treat his children, starve his wife and not be troubled by a moment's fear that his wife will leave him. You may tell me that the explanation of this extraordinary steadfastness is largely economic - that women stay where they are because, in many cases, they have nowhere else to go. Or that it is a sublimation of the animal instinct of maternity. Or a dozen other reasons. I don't care what the reason may be. I only know that the result is fine.

We need not waste so much time on the words 'coy,' or 'hard to please.' 'Coy' is a revolting word that ought to be banished from the language. It suggests a sniggering, artificial, jumpy, over-sexed flapper. The sort of maiden, in fact, whom one finds in Sir Walter Scott's novels. 'Hard to please' is merely silly. Most actresses are hard to please, and all of the ladies who sit round the gambling-tables at Palm Beach or Deauville. The majority, being far more open to the reception of emotion than the average man, are very easy to please indeed. Indeed, when I see them apparently enjoying the company of some of my male contemporaries, I am astounded by their complacency.

I hope that at least one female sphinx who reads these remarks may descend from her pedestal, wash off her Gioconda smile, and come out into the sunlight.

The Chameleon Woman

I ONCE saw a chameleon, and then it was behaving in a most unchameleonic manner. It was at Palm Beach, and I was sipping a cocktail on one of those bright pink stucco terraces which, in Palm Beach, pass for Spanish baroque. Suddenly, on the wall, I perceived a grotesquely shaped little animal. He was as green as an emerald. I asked my companion what he was.

'A chameleon, of course,' she said scornfully.

'Then why doesn't he turn pink?' I demanded.

She assured me that he would, in time.

But for a full hour he remained there, as green as green could be, regarding me with a baleful eye, as though he wished to show me that *some* chameleons, at least, had wills of their own.

This incident put me off natural history for life. I felt that if such fantastic legends could be spread about the chameleon, there was no reason for believing the story about the kangaroo and its pouch, the cat and its night-piercing eyes, the worm and its dual sexuality. Besides, why should I bother about animals in the Zoo and out of it, when the female animals that parade the street outside my window are so far more eccentric in their habits? Why, in fact, should I go to Palm Beach to study the chameleon when I have only to go to the nearest party to study the chameleon woman?

I will draw you a picture of her. She is pale, with restless eyes, and a weak but intelligent mouth. She is picturesque rather than *chic*. She makes great play with her small white hands, which flutter round her as

if they didn't quite belong to her - like two litde white birds seeking to fly away. She is as nearly a hundred per cent, feminine as it is possible to be in this age of indeterminate sex. She doesn't like other women at all. She regards them all as potential thieves - incessantly devising schemes to rob her of the man (or men) whom she may have temporarily enthralled.

I give her the adjective of 'chameleon' because she has glorified her moods into mottoes. She has read so much bad fiction, and led so selfish a life, that she really would regard it as wicked and unnatural to thwart any impulse which might for the moment dominate her. She proclaims proudly that she is not as other women - that she is periodically 'possessed' - and that she is therefore not responsible for any sin or stupidity which she may commit. Let us translate these generalizations into real life.

In countless rooms, rich and poor, all over the country, puzzled, desperate young men are facing cool and defiant young women who are defending their shortcomings by what they elastically describe as their 'moods.' The grossest infidelities, the most outrageous deceptions, are blandly admitted without any pretence of shame, on the grounds that *when* they were committed 'she' was another woman - caught up in some strange impulse which lay entirely outside her will. The argument is so glib, so feminine, that it appears to be unanswerable, and the dialogues that ensue are nearly always one-sided. And yet I should like to give you a precis of one.

HE. I don't understand. I thought you loved me.

SHE *{calmly}*. I do.

HE. And yet - last night - you and Harry . . . (*brokenly*). How could you do a thing like that?

SHE *{equally calmly}*. I didn't do that.

HE. What do you mean?

SHE (*a little contemptuously*). I mean that I am not *one* woman, darling. I am a great many women. You've got to realize that, if you want to hold on to me. Some nights I may be like a nun - other nights I may be like . . . like those women in the street outside. I am hot and cold. Sometimes I feel like a poet, other times I feel like a gold-digger. Sometimes I believe everything, sometimes I believe nothing. You can't tie me down. Vows and laws weren't made for women like me!

HE. And yet you say you love me.

SHE. I do! I do! You're really the only thing in my life, but . . .

And then she goes on with her endless description of what a grand, temperamental, interesting, unreliable, and altogether exceptional creature she is.

Now the proper treatment for such women is that they should be given first a sound spanking, then a cold bath, then a strong pill, and be sent to bed and kept on a diet of bread and water for a fortnight. Their condition is due *not* to any exceptional sensitiveness of the soul, but to the spiritual degeneration caused by over-indulgence combined, in nine cases out of ten, with a disordered liver.

Nobody wants to keep laws. *Nobody* is ever the same person. That is precisely the reason for which laws, social and political, are formed. Discipline is the basis of authority, of decency, of happiness - and certainly discipline is the basis of art. If I sat down to write a novel, and after I had written the first chapter rushed wildly to my publishers and said, 'I can't possibly finish this novel because the Beverley Nichols who wrote the first chapter is an entirely different being from the Beverley Nichols who stands before you at this moment,' I should certainly never finish another novel, and I

should probably not even finish this article (a fact which wouldn't cause much sorrow in the hearts of some of my women readers).

I once knew a young married woman who had glorified her moods to such an extent that she actually gave names to the various persons whose spirits regularly 'possessed' her. Actually, she was a quite ordinary little person with a rather bad temper. But she had been pampered from the nursery upwards, with the result that 'temper' had been glossed into 'temperament.' She was really extremely proud of the fact that she was unable to control it. And this side of her was called the 'Tiger Woman.'

I was the unwilling witness once of a most nerve-racking quarrel between herself and her husband. It arose out of a trivial discussion about a hat. He had ventured to express the opinion that it didn't become her, and out of this entirely blameless assertion she constructed a long tale of grievances, which ended in a string of vitriolic abuse. He left her, eventually, white, silent, and miserable. When he returned a few hours later, the storm had completely blown over. She was all smiles. She played about him like a kitten. I expected her to apologize - to give at least some indication that she was sorry for making a fool of herself. Not a bit of it. She showed not the least sign of repentance.

'John wasn't angry with me, was he?' she cooed. 'He knew that it wasn't I who lost my temper, didn't he?'

John muttered, as he muttered on many previous occasions, that he supposed he did.

'It was the Tiger Woman who lost her temper, wasn't it?' she continued, and then she turned to me, and with round, baby eyes she observed: 'She is a terrible woman, that Tiger Woman. I never know when she is going to take hold of me. It *wasn't* me at all - I hate her - I'd do anything if I could send her out of my life for ever,

because she's so horrible to poor John. But when she takes hold of me . . . !'

She did not finish the sentence. I can stand a certain amount of hypocrisy and affectation, but there are limits even to my endurance. I interrupted her by mentioning, curtly, but clearly, the names of several strong medicines which, in my opinion, would effectively deal with the phenomenon of the Tiger Woman. I was not asked to the house again. And the funny part of it is that the husband is even louder in his abuse of me than the wife.

Chameleon women are to be found in every rank in society. I have, for example, met a good many chameleon mothers. They have sporadic bursts of affection when they drag their unfortunate offspring down to the South of France, dress them up as though they were those quaint, velvet-eyed dolls from Paris, allow them to tumble about for a few weeks in the golden sand, and then, at a moment's notice, pack them back to England again. If their husbands dare to remonstrate with them, remarking that the children were only just beginning to get the benefit of the sun and air, the chameleon mother draws her dressing-gown irritably round her bronzed shoulders, digs a cigarette into the sand, and says, 'I can't always be a mother, Charles! There are *other* sides to me, you know. I adore the children and I love having them round me. But I do wish you would realize I have *some* instincts which are not exclusively maternal!' And her eye rolls a little distractedly in the direction of a coffee-coloured bathing instructor whom she first noticed twenty-four hours before.

Her argument sounds perfectly plausible. Especially when one doesn't remind her that, apart from this one week on the Riviera, she has not set eyes on her children for more than twenty-four hours in the entire year.

One could continue the list indefinitely. We live in

an age of muddled values, where loyalty and steadfastness, either to principles or to persons are increasingly rare. To what extent this is due to the increasing influence of women, I would not care to guess. But, in their own interests, I would like to utter a word of warning to the chameleon women. Moods are dangerous things. Once they begin to control you, they may lead you farther than you imagine. They may lead you indeed, indeed, to the same police court which was occupied only a few days ago by a charming young woman who belonged to one of the best families in society. She was convicted of shop-lifting from a great London store. 'Something came over me . . .' she sobbed. 'Something came over me. It wasn't *me*?

The judge, unfortunately, was unable to agree with her. He sent her to prison for six months. One day, perhaps, husbands may begin to act as the judge acted, and then . . .

Some Unknown Heroines

PEOPLE who accuse me of 'baiting women' are unable to distinguish between a woman and a freak.

If that is obscure, put it like this. I write an article expressing the modest observation that it seems to be slightly unnatural that an ageing woman should take her face to a beauty surgeon, allow it to be chopped and changed, and then parade the world as a smooth-skinned flapper.

The moment those words appear in print, some perfectly natural and probably charming girl writes a white-hot letter which makes me almost afraid to open the front door.

'The average woman *isrit* like that,' she rages, and underlines *HsrCf* three times - or (even if she is Scotch) at least twice.

I know the average woman isn't like this. If she were I should commit suicide. So let us leave the freaks alone for a moment and pay tribute to those women on whose altars no flowers are ever laid.

Here, then, are the heroines whom I salute:

(i) The plain girl. - Her whole life is a magnificent battle. The heroism of some plain girls whom I have met, and revered, is enough to make any man feel ashamed. Owing to the ridiculous organization of Nature (and Nature beats even a Communist in supreme disregard of human psychology) the plain girl is born in a pillory. And society keeps her there.

I have watched these girls at dances, neglected and almost hated because their features were irregular or

their bodies unshapely. And I have gone out into the night air and cursed the stars because of the injustice of it all. Yet - the plain girl fights on, and often she wins through.

(2) The mothers who sit round the wall while their daughters dance. (In case this sounds old-fashioned, I venture to state that it isn't. During the present season every mother of a debutante daughter has chaperoned her.)

It may not appear an heroic procedure, but unless you have blind eyes and a withered heart it is. Nobody likes growing old. You may write smooth, complacent poems about age - may wrap it up in pretty draperies of sweetness and respect - but age remains intrinsically terrible and frightening.

And those mothers - sitting there smiling - even happy in a way - they are facing it, if ever a woman faced it. Thirty years ago . . . like yesterday, it seems . . . and they were dancing . . . in trailing skirts of silk long faded, to melodies that are a memory. The world was theirs then, and outside the distant window there was waiting a carriage and perhaps some incredible romance.

Oh, yes . . . I know that life has treated them well . . . that there is a family, and love, and all that. But to me those women who sit smiling round the walls of a ballroom are heroines one and all. For they are smiling in the face of the arch-enemy - age.

(3) The Companions.' - Of course, there are happy 'companions.' But some! Read Osbert Sitwell's superb study of this tragic anachronism of society in *Before the Bombardment* - a book which was greeted as a cruel satire by many critics who were unable to perceive that it was drenched in pity.

It wrung my heart - though I must admit that my heart was ready. I had seen these brave, frayed little

women walking up and down beside the bath-chairs of rich and irascible old ladies - twittering feebly in a faint effort at making conversation - so desperately eager to please - clinging with thin, tired fingers to the only refuge which a hard and brutal world had afforded them. I had seen the utter weariness in their pale eyes, that always seemed to contain in them a staring fear of the end of it all . . . 'the home for gentle-women.'

I know that they may be superfluous women, that the modern State can afford no pity for them; but once at least they were girls, with hearts that beat high on a night in spring, and dreams . . . the dreams that you and I cherish and smile over. . . . And now!

(4) Mothers. - I write that word—just by itself—partly because 'mother' is the most beautiful word in the English language - a word that is like a caress - and partly because I cannot in one phrase characterize the mothers who *are* heroines.

A great many mothers, of course, are fools, and a few are criminals. The fools are those who do not realize that motherhood is a tremendous battle in which the only rewards are the secret rewards of a mother's own heart. The criminals are those who resent the fact that they must give way to Youth - who watch with a horrible hostility the lives which they have brought into the world. However, these are the grim jests of Nature over whom it is not wise to linger.

But the heroines . . . and how many of them I know - these are the supreme proof of the world's essential goodness. I'm not thinking (and, I hope, not writing) in grand, spacious terms. I am thinking of tiny little things - of tactful silences at family meals, of unknown self-denials when somebody wants a new suit, of flowers placed on dressing-tables when somebody comes back from the holidays, of sweet, foolish endeavours to be

interested in things which must bore her - oh, to distraction - of letters abroad which sound so happy but **are** written with an aching heart, of great stretches of loneliness and neglect, in which, with miraculous faith, she praises God for the son who has forgotten her. . . .

Household Gods

SOMEBODY who is very dear to me has just passed out of the shadow of death. The experience has taught me many things - a consciousness of the futility of much that I thought precious and the importance of much that I thought trivial - and all these things have swept to me, as it were, on a tide of memories, bearing with them souvenirs too sad and tender to be written, of daffodil mornings, and lengthening twilights when thrushes sang, and somebody's laughter echoed on the lawn.

•

I am trying to write simply, because it was a sentence of such exquisite simplicity that made me write at all. In order that you may hear it as I heard it, you must try to call up a vision of a darkened room and a woman lying there with a white face and drooping lips. A sickly, cloying smell hangs over everything, for only a few hours earlier the doctors have been forced to inject ether and strychnine in a desperate effort to rally a failing heart. The effort is successful.

The crisis has passed. And now, at length the patient has been left alone, and has been told that she may take a little - a very little - lukewarm milk.

It has been brought to her by the cook, who warmed it herself, and would not allow anybody else, nurse or housemaid, to carry it to her mistress. She stands there, at the foot of the bed, hesitating, hardly knowing whether she ought to offer it. It would seem that the patient did not see her - that she was far too exhausted

to see anything at all in that mournful, shadowy room. But she did. And what she saw was not a human figure, not a bowl of milk, nor, indeed, anything that you would possibly expect a woman to see who had the flutterings of the wings of the angel of death still beating in her brain. She saw a collar. And this is what she said:

'Smith - your collar is not clean.'

•

The words were said in a voice which carried in it all the world's weariness, and yet all the supreme courage with which some women are still lighting the world. The tones may have been faint and drooping but the old doggedness was there - that quality which has made Englishwomen carry on in the face of disaster - the quality which made queer old maids in Kensington straighten their backs during an air raid, and march fiercely to the china cupboard, and dust, and dust, while the universe toppled about them.

'Smith - your collar is not clean.'

Perhaps I am making more of those words than they merit. Perhaps, having in imagination died so many glorious deaths - as you, in your dreams, have also died - perhaps the naked, almost fierce simplicity of that sentence shines with an undue lustre. To her, one may be quite certain, the words were of no particular significance. In her tired brain some such argument as this must have passed: 'I am ill, but I am alive, and while I am alive things must go on properly. I cannot go downstairs to see if the flowers are nicely arranged nor if there is dust on the tables, nor if the carpets are swept. While I am lying here I cannot see that everybody is comfortable, and that everything is tidy. But at least I can tell Smith that her collar is not clean.'

And, as she reaches this conclusion, she tries to tell Smith, and the words will not quite come . . . tries

again . . . and with a supreme effort the sentence is pronounced.

To me that is as fine a sentence as came from the dying lips of a certain tragic comedian who turned his head, and coughed with a twisted smile, 'I appear to be dying beyond my means.'

You yourself know - whoever you may be - sentences that throw an equally glorious light on the spirit of a woman who has worshipped, and worshipped proudly, at the shrine of her household gods.

They are unfashionable gods nowadays. They dwell, often enough, in humble places and in places far removed from the noisy thoroughfares of life. But they are true gods, all the same, with a quiet beauty that comes not only from themselves but from the incense which true women are always burning at their shrines, even though they burn it in secret and in silence. They are the gods that could tell many strange and poignant tales, of sacrifices which they alone could see and heroisms of which they were the only witness. They have seen battles waged not for an hour or a day but for year after year, grimly, doggedly, in order that their shrines might be kept sweet and fragrant. In order that some little house, in some grey street, in some dull town might be worthy of the name of 'home.'

'Smith - your collar is not clean.'

*

I could write it again and again, but you would be bored with me. And since I am in that mood which takes no account of boring other people, I will merely, as a parting gesture, put in a word for Smith. I do not believe that Smith's collar was unclean at all. A tiny smudge perhaps - an infinitesimal speck. But, then, some women, thank God! will always see the infinitesimal. For them it is the same as the infinite.

' *Afraid of her Children. . .* '

I DO wish that the majority of ballads about mother-love had not been written by large, nosy gentlemen hailing from the flashier quarters of New York.

Those ballads give a false, tinsel touch to it all. I hate to think of silver hair being twisted to commercial purposes - of the thin, sweet plaint of the cradle-song (and whenever a mother talks to her son there is the echo of a lullaby there, even though you may not hear it) being played on a raucous saxophone. It has made mother-love unfashionable - and those who have it seem to cherish it almost as a guilty secret.

Which is, perhaps, the explanation of the following letter, written to me to-day:

'I am a woman of fifty, and I am always in a state of fear. I am afraid of my children. I feel they think I am old and boring. I expect I am, though I try so hard. I dread family meals. I dread . . .'

And there the quotation must stop, for fear that I betray the confidence of a very remarkable, and certainly a very lovable, woman. She wrote because she felt terribly lonely, and useless, and tired. Thousands of mothers to-day feel exactly as she did. Apparently their sons never seem to suspect it. I wonder why?

I suppose it must be because most children, whether they are four years old or forty, always think of their mothers as antiques.

I can't quite understand that, because my mind works the other way round. When I see an old woman,

in a shabby skirt and a ridiculous hat, standing tremulous at the edge of a pavement in Piccadilly, I think, 'Once, perhaps, she stood there, proud and erect, in all the ardour of youth, and men, instead of pitying her, found their hearts beating more quickly because she had passed them by.'

When I look into the faces of the women who have given children to the world, I do not see that they are worn, nor that the eyes are weary. I only see that there was a beauty once - though the world has forgotten it. After all, why should the world remember? It knows nothing of the countless, petty details which have gone to mar it.

Consider that sentence: 'I dread family meals.'

It is a commonplace sentence, but there is a tragic ring to it. Children find family meals boring. When one is a young man, it is not particularly exciting to sit down to cold chicken and white wine and salad at half-past seven with a woman of fifty on one side of the table and a man of fifty-five on the other.

But then, have the young men ever considered that it is no more exciting for the woman of fifty? Rather less, in fact! For she, after all, has been conscious of the advent of the cold chicken for the last twenty-four hours. (And in these days it is quite possible that she may have had to mix the salad herself.)

She, too, is usually doing her best to give the meal some sort of *elan* - however pathetic her efforts may be. She is saying:

*I saw such an extraordinary woman in Hyde Park to-day. She was . . .' Then she tells her little story. It is greeted with apathetic grunts.

'What a silly thing to talk about,' thinks the son.

Quite. But what is *he* talking about? What effort has *he* made to illuminate the gathering? None. He would make an effort if he were dining with a girl in a

place where there was a band, and popping corks, and figures dancing. He would rack his brains for the best stories and the wittiest observations.

But he is only dining at home, with an old woman and an old man, in the shadow of a mouldy picture of somebody's great-aunt.

She knows what is passing through his mind. Oh, yes, she knows only too well, and the consciousness of her dowdiness, her antiquity, is always with her. Even as she arranges the flowers she thinks, 'Now, they can't say anything against *these*. Flowers can't grow old-fashioned, can they? But then . . .' and she pauses, while her wet fingers twist slowly together . . . 'perhaps they can.'

And she remembers how her younger daughter said that she was 'sick of wallflowers because they reminded her of Marcus Stone engravings,' and how that very alarming niece, whose lips always seemed to drip with scarlet paint, had sneered at the little pot of pink geraniums which always stood in the window on the landing in June.

She bites her lip, and stands very still, and her son, who passes her on the way out, thinks:

'Mother's getting vague, nowadays. Still, at her age . . .' And he whistles, and slams the front door.

Somebody once said that the tragedy of Age did not lie in the fact that one grew old, but that one remained young. Every ageing woman knows that tragedy, and if she is the mother of a family it is terribly enhanced. For the coming of winter is made only the more bitter by the memory of spring . . . especially if it is a spring-time that all the world has forgotten, that only blossoms, faintly, waywardly, in your tired heart. . . .

Women who Let you Pay

AT some seasons of the year one hears a great deal about confidence men-those blue-eyed, hearty, ingenuous creatures who approach American business men in the Strand and pour into their ears tales as fantastic as the Songs of Araby. The story always ends with the sad spectacle of the American standing disconsolately at the corner of the street waiting in vain for the blue-eyed one to return with the thousand pounds which he has lent him.

I have never been able to understand this apparent willingness to part with a thousand pounds at a moment's notice, but I imagine that if one has lived for some time on Wall Street the practice becomes second nature.

Nobody, however, has called attention to the alarming phenomenon of the confidence woman. She too is blue-eyed and ingenuous, and though she may not be quite so expensive, she is really more dangerous to the average man because one meets her in every sort of situation - even in the houses of one's friends.

She is the girl who says, 'Let's dine together - fifty-fifty, you know.' (A loathsome expression, but gladdening to the heart.) She makes this proposal in the true spirit of the new economically independent woman. And then, when the bill arrives, she suddenly reverts to the complete Victorian miss, lowers her eyes, and becomes intensely interested in the contour of her nails. \

Or when there has been a party and people are going home in taxicabs she says, 'Couldn't we all share this

one?' Idiotically you say, 'Yes, that would be perfect.' You then find that she lives at St. John's Wood, and that her friend lives at Lancaster Gate, two localities which may have charm in themselves, but are not seen to their best advantage on a rainy night when one's whole body is yearning to go to bed in Chelsea. And, of course, at the end of the drive there is fumbling in the bag. You cannot let girls fumble in the bag in the rain. In other words, you pay.

It all makes me very angry. If women take men's jobs they ought also to pay their share of the bill. Instead of which, quantities of women are putting up a false bluff about paying their way, at the same time clinging desperately to all the old privileges. I do not think that confidence women is too hard a name to give them. In a cocktail bar the confidence woman should be shunned like the devil. One goes in and finds her there, sipping the remnants of a dry martini and digging blood-red nails into inoffensive olives.

Out of sheer boredom one invites her to have a drink, because such women, consumed without alcohol, are insufferable. She says 'Yes' and orders a side-car, which is sixpence more than the other sort. Various other girls with blood-red nails materialize from odd corners, drink and depart, after a perfunctory introduction. And then she slowly slithers from her seat, clasps her bag, looks one firmly in the eye, and says, 'Good-bye, and thank you for the divine drink.'

Had she been accurate she would have said, 'Good-bye. Thank you for two side-cars, the bronx, and the dry martini, consumed by self and friends before your arrival, and also for two side-cars, three white ladies, and one *champagne nature* consumed by self and friends during your presence, at a total cost of twenty-four shillings.'

If you really wish to see her, however, in her full

glory, on her native heath, watch her at Le Touquet or Deauville, or at any place on the Riviera where there is a Casino. She may be staying at a villa or at an hotel - it makes no difference. She will find some friends - vague London acquaintances who are all transformed by these exotic surroundings into 'dearest' and 'darling.' She meets them at the Casino, and follows the most prosperous-looking male into the *salle de jeu*. (The most prosperous-looking male is usually myself, owing to a pair of gaudy dress-studs left me by an eccentric relation.)

She then stands behind the wretched man, breathes heavily down his back, and, just as he is about to take a bank, whispers in his ear, 'May I put in a hundred francs with you?' Chivalry prompts him to say, 'Of course,' and while she is fumbling in her bag he pushes forward a hundred-franc plaque for her, as there is no time to waste. If the bank wins she puts out her hand and smiles sweetly. If the bank loses she smiles sweetly. She never pays. And the man, being a 'gentleman,' can do nothing whatever about it.

I have seen this shoddy little trick played over and over again by women who would be horrified if you told them they were dishonest, by women with large incomes and blameless reputations. They seem to think it a feminine privilege. There are many women, of course, as scrupulous and sporting as any man - women with whom it is a pleasure - and often a profit - to gamble. But they are out-numbered by the confidence women.

PART 4
CHILDREN'S CORNER

A Child's Guide to the Seaside

Q. Mother, may I take off the top of my bathing dress?

A. No.

Q. Why not?

A. Because it is against the local regulations.

Q. Who makes them, mother?

A. Mr. Inglenook and the other town councillors.

Q. Doesn't Mr. Inglenook like to see little boys without tops to their bathing dresses?

A. It isn't only little boys who would take them off.

Q. Doesn't Mr. Inglenook like to see people's tops at all?

A. Mr. Inglenook has a very - er - delicate mind.

Q. Would *you* mind if I took my top off, mother?

A. Not personally . . . of course not.

q. Then, have you a very indelicate mind?

A. (*harshly*). If you go on shaking the mineral water it will explode,

q. Are the tops of French little boys different from the tops of English little boys, mother?

A. Certainly not. Why?

Q. Because Francois says that he's allowed to take off *his* top at Nice.

A. That's quite different.

Q. And Franois says that he'd jolly well take his top off wherever he was.

A. (*A sigh.*)

Q. Supposing Mr. Inglenook went to Nice and saw Francois without his top on, what would he do?

A. He would not be able to do anything.

- ft. Supposing Napoleon had come to England and had taken his top off, would Mr. Inglenook . . .
- A. (*sharply*). Unless you stop nibbling that seaweed you will come out in a rash.
- ft. What else does Mr. Inglenook do besides seeing that little boys have their tops on?
- A. He arranges the local attractions.
- ft. Did he put up all the iron railings, mother?
- A. I expect so.
- ft. Are iron railings a local attraction?
- A. They are to prevent people falling into the sea.
- ft. Would people fall into the road, too, mother?
- A. What do you mean?
- ft. Then why do they have iron railings on both sides of the promenade?
- A. That is - er - for decoration.
- ft. If the iron railings weren't there, would Mr. Inglenook fall into the road, mother?
- A. Do not be ridiculous.
- ft. If Mr. Inglenook saw a little boy sitting on the iron railings without his top on . . .
- A. (*sharply*). Unless you let that crab escape I hope it will bite you hard.
- ft. What else does Mr. Inglenook do, mother?
- i. He sees that the local regulations are enforced.
- ft. Does he put out the lights at eleven o'clock?
- A. I suppose so.
- ft. Why?
- A. It is . . . it is the custom of the country.
- ft. Why ?
- A. It is . . . it is better for people to go to bed.
- ft. Why?
- A. There is nothing else to do.
- ft. Why?
- A. *Stop saying 'Why?'*
- ft. Mother, when the lights have been put out, how

- can Mr. Inglenook be sure that nobody has taken his top off?
- A. *{desperately}*. Do not crunch your bull's-eyes so loudly, or I shall send you home.
- Q. What else does Mr. Inglenook do?
- A. He sees that the town is kept up to date,
- q. Has Mr. Inglenook ever been on the pier, mother?
- A. Of course. Why?
- £. Because only three of the penny-in-the-slot machines work.
- A. In that case, you will not be able to waste any more pennies.
- Q. Has Mr. Inglenook ever been in a taxi, mummy?
- A. Why do you ask these ridiculous questions?
- Q. Because only one of the taxis can go more than twenty.
- A. That is quite fast enough,
- q. Has Mr. Inglenook ever been to the Pavilion, mother?
- A. Why do you ask *that*?
- Q. Because the man who leads the band hasn't ever heard of *The Love Parade*.
- A. A good thing, too.
- Q. He could only play 'You're the Cream in My Coffee,' and Francois said that if anyone played that now in France he'd be guillotined.
- A. Francois is a silly little boy.
- Q. *{suddenly}*. Supposing ten thousand people suddenly took their tops off all at once . . .
- A. *{through clenched teeth}*. If you go on picking the almonds out of your nougat people will think that you are a guttersnipe.
- Q. Why do people come to the seaside, mother?
- A. To enjoy themselves and to gain health.
- Q. Do you enjoy yourself?
- A. *{doubtfully}*. Yes.

- Q.** Then why did you tell daddy that you were bored stiff and were longing to get back to London, where you weren't treated as though you were in the nursery?
- A.** You are a vulgar litde boy to listen outside the door.
- Q.** Do you gain health, mother?
- A.** Yes.
- Q.** Then why did you tell daddy that if it was healthy to sit on damp rocks for hours on end you'd rather die a natural death?
- A.** For Heaven's sake, *stop!*
- Q.** Do you want me to enjoy myself and to gain health, mother?
- A.** Yes.
- Q.** Then may I take off the top . . .?
- A.** (*in a tragic voice*). Next year we go to Nice!

A Child's Guide to Seances

IT is the morning after the seance and the abominable infant has been cross-examining for nearly an hour.

q. But, father, what *happened*?

A. (*exasperated*). The tambourine was thrown up to the ceiling.

Q. Who by?

A. By Madame Cuckoo, who died in a circus fifty years ago in Havana.

Q. Is that why she threw the tambourine up to the ceiling, father?

A. No. She wished to communicate.

Q. Did you know Madame Cuckoo, father?

A. Certainly not.

Q. Then why did mother say that it was very funny what an attraction you had at seances for mid-Victorian chorus girls?

A. Did your mother say that?

Q. (*beaming*). Yes, lots of times.

A. (*icily*). Your mother has not seen the light.

Q. She said she tried to find it last night but somebody had covered up the switch.

A. I was not referring to that sort of light. And you have jam on your chin.

•

Q. What else happened, father?

A. Your great-aunt Nellie produced a protopod.

q. That's about all she ever did produce, isn't it, father?

A. Do not trifle with the dead.

Q. Well, father, isn't it trifling with great-aunt Nellie to ask her to rattle a tambourine three years after she's been buried?

A. She did not rattle tambourines. She delivered a message.

Q. Was it the same message that mother said she always delivered when you used to telephone to her?

A. What was that?

Q. 'Go to the de . . . !'

A. (*hastily*). Your great-aunt Nellie is now on a higher plane.

Q. Has she come into money, father?

A. (*loftily*). There is no such thing in the after-world,

q. Is that why great-aunt Nellie wants to come back?

A. Certainly not. She wished to meet with us again,

q. Did she wish to meet Madame Cuckoo, father?

A. Of course not. That is to say. Ahem! You have left the door open, as usual.

•

Q. Father, what *is* a protopod?

A. It is a spiritual limb.

Q. When I die shall I have protopods?

A. In certain conditions, you might.

Q. And could I still kick Vivian *on* the . . . ?

A. You will not wish to do such rude things in the after-life.

Q. Why not, father? —

A. Because you will be purified.

Q. Is a protopod solid, father?

A. It has a certain substance.

Q. Then if I forgot Fd been purifieb would it hurt Vivian if I still wanted to kick Mm on the . . . ?

A. You are being grossly irreverent.

Q. Ought I to be reverent, father?

A. You should love the departed, as *I* do.

Q. Is that why mother said that *if* she heard any

more about Madame Cuckoo she'd go to the lawyers?

A. (*fiercely*). Will you stop rattling that blind?

Q. I wasn't, father. Perhaps it was Madame Cue . . .

A. (*fortissimo*). Be silent!

•

Q. What else happened, father?

A. (*with resignation*). A table was lifted from the floor, ft. Why?

A. Because the spirits moved it.

Q. Didn't they like it where it was?

A. That is not the point.

Q. Did Madame Cuckoo come all the way from Havana to lift the table?

A. She did not lift it. We believe that it was lifted by Dr. Johnson.

Q. Who is he?

A. He was a great scholar,

q. Did he lift a lot of tables, father?

A. Not to my knowledge.

Q. Shall I lift tables when I am dead, father?

A. Perhaps.

q. Couldn't I leave that to Dr. Johnson?

A. (*loudly*). Do not gnaw the buttons on your sleeve.

•

Q. What else happened, father?

A. We were touched by spirit hands,

Q. Did Madame Cuckoo touch you?

A. Yes.

Q. Did you like it?

A. Yes. No. (*Pompously*.) It was an experience.

Q. How did you know it was her?

A. (*complacently*). I recognized the feminine touch.

Q. Was that why mother said that sometimes she thought you must have a past?

A. I am not concerned with the past, but with the future.

Q. Is that a good thing?

A. A very good thing.

£. Then can I forget about the five shillings I owe you and think about the ten shillings you promised me for Christmas?

A. No, you may not.

Q. I think you'd better let me, father.

A. (*outraged*). You think . . . what?

Q. I was in the room last night.

A. (*baffled*). You were . . .

Q. Yes, father. I'm sorry. The protopod was difficult, but aunt Nellie was easy, and so was Dr. Johnson. But I liked being Madame Cuckoo best of all. So could I have the ten shillings, please, father?

(He gets it.)

A Child's Guide to Pleasure

SCENE - *Outside any smart French Casino. It is tea-time. People are dancing. There are quantities of striped parasols, gigolos, and Pekinese dogs.*

Q. What is pleasure?

A. It means doing things that make us happy.

Q. Is it good for us?

A. Yes, if we don't overdo it.

Q. Then may I put poison in nurse's tea - if I don't overdo it?

A. Certainly not. That would be wicked.

Q. Then is pleasure wicked?

A. No. But that would not be pleasure,

Q. Oh, yes, mummy, it would!

A. Then you have no right to say so.

•

Q. *{looking around her}*. Is this pleasure, mummy?

A. Certainly.

Q. Does it make you happy?

A. Of course.

£. Then why did you tell daddy that it was drearier than Hampstead?

A. I did nothing of the sort,

Q. Yes, you did.

A. *If you contradict I shall tell the waiter to take your ice' cream away.*

•

Q. Is this sort of pleasure good for us, mummy?

A. Well, there are higher forms.

- Q. What is the highest form?
 A. Doing good to others.
- q. Is that why you gave that gold cigarette-case to the young man you dance with?
 A. (*hurriedly*). *You have a hole in your glove.*
- Q. Were you doing good to others when you gave that gold cig . . . ?
 A. (*sharply*). Two holes. What *is* nurse thinking of?
- Q. I don't know. May I pois . . . ?
 A. No, you may not.
-
- Q. Is pleasure expensive, mother?
 A. No, the best things in life are free,
- Q. What things?
 A. Well, we don't have to pay for sunshine, or for laughter, or the song of the birds.
- Q. Don't we have to pay for gold cig . . . ?
 A. (*loudly*). This tune is horrible.
- Q. Is dancing free, mother?
 A. Of course.
- Q. Then why do the ladies put bank notes on the plates of the young men they dance with?
 A. Because they are professionals.
- Q. Who . . . the ladies or the young men?
 A. The young men.
- Q. Do the young men like being professionals, mummy?
 A. (*sentimentally*). Sometimes . . . when they dance with the right people.
- Q. Do they like it best when they get gold cig . . . ?
 A. (*sharply*). *Stop biting your nails.*
- Q. What is the lowest form of pleasure, mother?
 A. Doing something which pleases you but gives **pain** to others.
- Q. What do you mean by others?
 A. People. Animals. That is why **I took away your** catapult.

- Q. Are you going to Scodand soon, mother?
- A. Yes. What has that got to do with it?
- Q. Are you going to stalk?
- A. Of course.
- Q). Then won't you be doing something which pleases you but gives pa . . . ?
- A. No.
- Q. Then aren't you going to hit *any* stags?
- A. *Your stocking has a ladder in it.*
- q. Then may I have my catapult back, mother?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Shall I have lots of pleasure, mummy?
- A. Only if you are a good little girl,
- Q. Is that the best way to get it?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Shall I have a pearl necklace like Princess P . . . ?
- A. If you are a very good little girl indeed.
- Q. Was Princess P . . . a very good little girl indeed, mummy?
- A. (*slightly confused*). I don't know Princess P . . .
- Q. Why not, mummy?
- A. Because - er - we do not care for the same friends,
- Q. If Princess P . . . had not been such a good little girl, wouldn't she have had a pearl necklace, mummy?
- A. *Do not stick your wafer into your ice-cream like that.*
- Q. But, mummy . . .
- A. It is extremely ill-bred to discuss one's elders.
- Q. Is Princess P . . . your elder, mummy?
- A. (*with considerable heat*). She is old enough to be your granny.
- Q. Does granny get much pleasure, mummy?
- A. Of course.
- Q. What sort of pleasure?
- A. Well . . . the pleasure of a well-spent life.
- Q. How much has granny spent, mummy?

- A. Do not be ridiculous. I mean well-conducted.
- q. Is that why she has so much pleasure?
- A. Of course. She has happy memories.
- Q. Is that why you wrote 'happy memories' on the inside of the gold cig . . .?
- A. *Do not scrape your chair on the gravel.*
- Q. *{with a sigh}*. It's very difficult to be good, mummy.
- A. *(with a deep sigh)*. Yes.
- Q. Is it more difficult for grown-ups than for me?
- A. Much more. But one tries one's hardest.
- Q. Were you trying your hardest when you gave that gold cig . . .?
- A. If you are very good, and do not mention that silly thing again, you shall come down to dessert tonight.
- q. Only to dessert, mummy?
- A. *(with resignation)*. *Very well, then, to dinner.*
- Q. Thank you, mummy.

A Child's Guide to Diet

Q. Mother, may I take a marshmallow now?

A. No; you have already had a sufficient amount of calories.

Q. What do calories do?

A. They provide heat for the body.

Q. If I ate a hundred marshmallows would I get very hot?

A. Your blood would be heated, certainly.

Q. Then if I ate ten thousand marshmallows would I start to boil?

A. Do not be ridiculous.

Q. Then how can you say that calories provide heat for the body?

A. Because . . . How many times have I told you not to blow bubbles in your sterilized milk?

Q. Need I finish this salad, mother?

A. Yes.

Q. Why?

A. It cleanses the blood,

Q. Is granny's blood very dirty, mother?

A. How dare you say such things!

Q. Because granny doesn't like salads.

A. She belongs to an older generation,

Q. If granny had eaten lots of salad, how old would she live to be?

A. Very old indeed.

Q. Did Methuselah eat lots of salads, mother?

A. How should I know?

Q. Did Abraham eat . . . ?

- A. Stop worrying me.
- Q. Mother, there's a slug in the salad.
- A. Then remove it.
- Q. If I had eaten the slug, would you have let me have a marshmallow?
- A. Perhaps.
- Q. (*a pause*). I've eaten it, mother. May I have a marshm . . . ?
- A. (*exasperated*). You are very disgusting. And, for the nineteenth time, you are *not* to make pellets of your wholemeal bread.
- Q. If granny ate a lot of marshmallows would her blood get very hot?
- A. Certainly,
- Q. Then why didn't it get hot when she ate a pound yesterday?
- A. Because . . . because your grandmother has a remarkable constitution.
- Q. Then why did she say it was lucky you were as strong as a horse or Doctor Smythe would have killed you long ago?
- A. Granny said *that*?
- Q. Yes. And why did she say that if *her* granny had spent all day worrying about proteins the family would have been extinct?
- A. Really . . . she . . .
- Q. Yes. And why did she say that if she could only stay alive by eating grass she'd rather die and go straight to . . .
- A. (*agitissimo*). You have spilt your hygienic salt all over my best rug.
- Q. Must I eat an apple after lunch, mother?
- A. Yes. (*Brightly*.) An apple a day keeps the doctor away,
- Q. Do you want to keep Doctor Smythe away?
- A. Not if he is necessary.

- Q. Does daddy want to keep Doctor Smythe away?
A. *{sharply}*. Why should he?
- Q. Because he said that if an apple a day would do it,
he'd eat an orchard.
A. *(changing the subject hastily)*. Your father eats too
much meat,
- Q. Aren't there any proteins in meat, mother?
A. Yes. No. I . . . well, that is not the point,
- Q. Are there a lot of proteins in the cold yellow things
with cherries in them that you always drink when
the young man comes to teach you dancing?
A. *{confused}*. You . . . you should not be so inquisitive.
- Q. If there are a lot of proteins in the cold yellow things,
could I have one instead of finishing the salad,
mother?
A. *(snappily)*. Unless you stop smearing your nut-butter
on your jersey, I shall stop your pocket money.
- Q. Does Doctor Smythe look after Jackie Brown,
mother?
A. *{shortly}*. Nobody looks after Jackie Brown. He is a
young barbarian,
- Q. Is that why he eats so many marshmallows?
A. His parents would let him eat anything.
- Q. And is that why he won the hundred yards last term?
A. There are exceptions to every rule,
- Q. And the quarter and the mile, after eating lots of
marshmallows?
A. One day he will die of convulsions,
- Q. What are convulsions, mother?
A. They are the result of excess,
- Q. Would you have convulsions if you drank six of the
cold yel . . . ?
A. *{desperately}*. If you continue to make rabbits of your
napkins, I shall send you to bed.
- Q. Shall I have to eat things like this when I'm grown
up?

- A. If you wish to be well and happy.
- Q. Isn't daddy well and happy?
- A. (*irritably*). Your father has the constitution of an ox.
- Q. Why did he say that since you took to dieting you'd lost all your pep?
- A. I forbid you to use such vulgar words.
- Q. And why did he say that it was no wonder you couldn't keep a cook when you gave her nothing to do but chop up grass?
- A. Your father does not understand these things.
- Q. And why did he say that if you stopped smoking and went to bed early and stopped drinking the cold yel . . . ?
- A. *Will you be quiet!*
- Q. Yes, mother. (*A pause.*) I've finished the salad. Can I have a marshmallow?
- A. No. Don't you want to be healthy and live long?
- Q. Yes. But, mother . . . ?
- A. Well?
- Q. If Methuselah had eaten a whole lot of marshm . . .
- A. Bother Methuselah.
- Q. Yes, mother. May I have a marsh . . .
- A. (*desperately*). Take the whole dish. And I hope they give you a pain.

A Child's Guide to Long Skirts

ft. Do you like long skirts, mummy?

A. Of course.

ft. Then why did you tell daddy last year that you'd be found dead before you put one on again?

A. I don't remember doing that.

ft. And why did you say that women were never going to give up their freedom?

A. Really . . . er . . .

ft. And why did you say that if you had to choose between dignity and dust, you'd sacrifice the dignity?

A. (*severely*). Your pear-drop will stain the carpet if you do not pick it up.

ft. Do men like long skirts, mother?

A. Yes. They think that long skirts add to the dignity of womanhood.

ft. Then why did Sir Arthur say that he couldn't understand why women with legs like yours should want to cover them up?

A. (*confusedly*). Sir Arthur was-was not speaking seriously.

ft. Doesn't Sir Arthur want to add to the dignity of womanhood, mother?

A. I have no idea.

ft. Supposing Sir Arthur wanted to add to the dig . . .

A. (*sharply*). Unless you stop spinning that penny on the piano I shall take it away.

ft. What *do* you like about long skirts, mummy?

A. I have told you. They are more womanly.

ft. Why?

- A. Well - they leave something to the imagination.
- Q. Is it a good thing to leave anything to Sir Arthur's imagination, mummy?
- A. I know nothing about Sir Arthur's imagination.
- Q. Why don't you cover up your back, too, mummy?
- A. What has that to do with it?
- Q. If you covered up your back Sir Arthur would have to do a lot more imagining.
- A. (*harshly*). How many times have I told you not to make rabbits out of your handkerchief?
- Q. Do women *have* to obey Fashion, mummy?
- A. (*pompously*). Women do not *have* to obey anybody. They decide as they think best,
- Q Did *all* the women *all* decide they *all* wanted long skirts?
- A. Most of the women.
- Q. How many women?
- A. I don't know.
- Q. Billions and trillions?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Why?
- A. Because . . . I have told you why.
- Q. Did billions of women all decide they all wanted to make men imagine things?
- A. *No*. They . . . they . . .
- Q. Did trillions of women all decide that they . . . ?
- A. Do not keep asking me the same question. It is a matter of the gradual realization of the dignity of womanhood.
- Q. Then did millions of *men* all decide that they . . . ?
- A. (*bitterly*). You have not been the same child since you had your adenoids out.
- Q. Do you look nice in long skirts, mummy?
- A. I hope so.
- Q. Then why did you tell Antoinette that you felt like a fright in that long skirt last night?

- A. I . . . er . . . I had a headache.
- £. And why did you tell Antoinette that you supposed you'd feel even more of a fright if you wore a short one?
- A. You have no business to listen to what I say to my maid,
- Q. Would you have felt a fright because you'd have been different from all the other women?
- A. (*off her guard*). Yes.
- q. (*triumphantly*). Then why did you tell me that women decide as they think best and dorCt have to obey rules?
- A. (*in anguish*). Because . . . because . . . Unless you stop chewing your pea-shooter I shall throw it in the fire,
- Q. Do men have fashions, too, mummy?
- A. Of course.
- Q. Then if daddy came down to dinner in shorts, would that be a sign of fashion?
- A. (*grimly*). It would be a sign of something very different.
- Q. Why shouldn't daddy come down to dinner in shorts, mummy?
- A. Because . . . it . . . it would look hideous.
- Q. Why should it look more hideous than when women used to, mummy?
- A. Because men look absurd when they show their legs.
- Q. Then why have you got that picture of Sir Arthur in shorts on your mantelpiece?
- A. Because . . . because . . .
- Q. Are Sir Arthur's legs absurd, mummy?
- A. If you wrinkle up your nose like that it will stick.
- Q. Shall I wear long skirts when I grow up, mummy?
- A. Judging by the way you have been behaving you will wear trousers.
- Q. . Would you wear trousers if they were the fashion?
- A. (*outraged*). How dare you suggest such things?

Q. How much would you bet me that you wouldn't wear trousers, mummy?

A. I will not consider it.

Q. Sixpence?

A. *(in desperation)*. Very well.

Q. May I have a penny on account, mummy?

Tableau.

A Child's Guide to Modern Art

- Q. Is it a lady or a gentleman, mother?
A. A lady, of course.
Q. Why?
A. Because the composition is essentially feminine.
Q. Is that why the lady has seven fingers?
A. It is - er - all part of the design.
Q. If the lady had eight fingers would she be a gentleman, mother?
A. (*loftily*). The artist is not interested in fingers.
Q. Then why did he give her two extra ones?
A. He was probably carried away by his inspiration.
Q. Was the lady's nose carried away by his inspiration, too, mother?
A. What do you mean?
Q. Well, where *is* the lady's nose?
A. (*harshly*). If you breathe so heavily on the canvas, it will crack.
- Q. Who painted the picture, mother?
A. Mr. Rakowski.
Q. Is that the young man who cries whenever he comes to tea?
A. (*quickly*). Look at that lovely tree in the background!
Q. Does Mr. Rakowski cry because he's sorry for the lady with seven fingers?
A. (*tensely*). Do you think you could climb that tree, Cyril?
Q. Yes, mother. Could you?
A. (*with a sigh of relief*). No, I don't think I could.

- Q. Not even if Mr. Rakowski lifted you up? Like he lifted you when . . .
- A. (*with agony*). If you drop another caramel on the floor, you will be sent to prison,
- Q. Does the lady feel sick, mother?
- A. Do not be disgusting.
- £. Then why is her face so green?
- A. That is as the artist saw her.
- Q. Was she always green to Mr. Rakowski?
- A. Evidently.
- Q. Was she green to other people?
- A. To inferior souls, no. She was probably a mere pink and white doll.
- Q. Then did she always feel sick when she saw Mr. Rakowski?
- A. (*angrily*). I forbid you to say such things.
- Q. Was that what daddy meant when he said that he felt sick whenever Mr. Rak . . .?
- A. Be *quiet*. Pay attention to the picture. Look at that mountain,
- Q. Yes, mother. But it isn't a mountain. It's the lady's ear.

(*A moment's pause.*)

- Q. What is the lady doing, mother?
- A. She is stepping into a bath.
- Q. Why didn't Mr. Rakowski wait until she'd had it?
- A. Why should he?
- Q. Then the lady wouldn't have had so much mud on her knees.
- A. Those are *not* her knees.
- Q. Whose knees are they, then? Are they Mr. Rak . . .?
- A. (*embarrassed*). They are not knees at all. They are only part of the pictorial design.
- Q. Does the lady always take them into the bath with her?

- A. I have no idea.
- Q. Would the lady be sick if she went into the bath without the extra pair of knees?
- A. You must not speak like that.
- Q. Has Mr. Rakowski ever seen a bath, mother?
- A. (*bitterly*). If you eat caramels without taking the paper off, you will have a pain.
- Q. Will anybody buy the picture, mother?
- A. I expect so.
- Q. Will it be bought by one of the ladies who make Mr. Rakowski cry?
- A. (*tortured*). Yes. No. I don't know.
- Q. What would they do with it, mother?
- A. Look at it, of course.
- Q. How long for?
- A. A very long time, I expect.
- Q. Supposing they began to feel sick, would Mr. Rak . . . ?
- A. Will you *not* use that word?
- Q. If you met the lady in the bath, would you ask her to tea?
- A. Certainly.
- Q. Would she have all her fingers on? And her green face? And her knees? *Will you please* ask the lady to tea, mother, Will? . . . ?
- A. (*hoarsely*). Stop asking questions. Look at the way he has painted the grass.
- Q. Yes, mother. But it isn't the grass. It's got 'Bath Mat' written on it.

(*A slight pause.*)

- Q. Mother, have you seen the catalogue?
- A. No. Why?
- Q. It says the picture we have been looking at is called: 'Portrait of the Ex-Mayor of Gasterbridge in His Garden.'

- A. (*hastily*). Look at the pretty picture of the sea-gulls over there in the corner.
- Q. (*monotonously*). Was the Ex-Mayor of Casterbridge a lady, mother?
- A. (*trying to escape*). Lots and lots of sea-gulls!
- Q. Did Mr. Rakowski see the Ex-Mayor of Gasterbridge in his, in her bath, mother?
- A. (*no reply*).
- Q. If Mr. Rakowski comes to tea to-day, shall I tell him you thought the Ex-Mayor of Casterbridge was a lady in his, in her, bath, mother?
- A. (*with hatred*). There is half a crown. You may go to the Zoo.

A Child's Guide to Beauty

- Q. Mother, what is beauty?
A. It is a word applied to anything in Nature or Art
 Q which excites our aesthetic emotions,
Q. Are you beautiful?
A. Some people think so.
Q. Which are you - nature or art?
A. Nature, of course.
Q. Then why do you put red stuff on your mouth?
A. Because it makes it a prettier colour,
ft. Do you like people to look prettier?
A. Certainly,
ft. Then why don't you give some of the red stuff to the
 maids and make them put it on?
A. Because it would be in extremely bad taste,
ft. Why?
A. One does not look at housemaids,
ft. Some people do.
A. (*sharply*). Who?
ft. I've forgotten. Am I beautiful, mother?
A. You are too young to think of such things,
ft. Would I be more beautiful if I put red stuff on my
 mouth?
A. Certainly not.
ft. Why?
A. Because you are only a little girl,
ft. When I stop being a little girl will my mouth change
 colour?
A. Don't be ridiculous.

- Q. Then why shouldn't I put the red stuff on my mouth now?
- A. I've told you that it is a question of age.
- Q. I see. Is granny beautiful?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Is she much older than you are?
- A. About twice as old.
- Q. Then why doesn't she put twice as much red stuff on her mouth?
- A. Because it would not be becoming.
- Q. Why not?
- A. Because old people do not wish to call attention to themselves.
- Q. Do you wish to call attention to yourself?
- A. No.
- Q. Then why do you put red stuff on your mouth?
- A. Because . . . (*Testily.*) You have been biting your nails again!
- Q. Mother, does beauty change much?
- A. No, beauty is eternal.
- q. Did your mother put red stuff on her mouth?
- A. No. It would have been considered highly improper.
- Q. Then why is it considered proper now?
- A. Things have changed.
- Q. But you said beauty did not change.
- "*A. This has nothing to do with beauty.
- Q. You said it had.
- A. I didn't.
- Q. You did.
- A. Don't contradict. It's a question of opinion.
- Q. Whose - men's or women's?
- A. Both.
- Q. Do men like women to put red stuff on their mouths, mother?
- A. I really don't know.
- Q. Haven't they ever told you?

- A. (*nervously*). Your hair is a disgrace.
- q. That's because it's long.
- A. It's because it's unbrushed.
- Q. Did you ever have long hair, mother?
- A. Of course.
- Q. Was it beautiful?
- A. They tell me so.
- Q. Then why did you cut it off?
- A. Because long hair went out of fashion.
- ft. Why?
- A. Because - because a lot of women wanted short hair.
- ft. Why?
- A. Because - it was a symbol.
- ft. What is a symbol?
- A. It's - you wouldn't understand.
- ft. Did the women think long hair was beautiful?
- A. At one time - yes.
- ft. Then what made them think it was ugly?
- A. I didn't say they thought it was ugly.
- ft. Yes you did.
- A. If you contradict again you shall have no goose-berries for tea.
- Q. Mother, are modern fashions beautiful?
- A. Yes.
- ft. Why?
- A. Because they are natural and healthy.
- Q. Is that why women like them?
- A. Yes.
- Q. And is that why women put red stuff on their . . . ?
- A. I have already answered that question.
- Q. If modern fashions weren't natural and healthy wouldn't women wear them?
- A. No.
- Q. Were crinolines natural and healthy, mother?
- A. No.
- Q. Then why did women wear them?

- A. Because they lived in a foolish age.
- Q. Why was it foolish?
- A. Because - because it was entirely dominated by men.
- Q. Did the men make the women wear crinolines?
- A. Of course not.
- Q. Then why did they wear them?
- A. Because - because they were slaves to fashion.
- Q. But didn't they make the fashions themselves?
- A. (*hurriedly*). You have a hole in your stocking.
- Q. Who made the fashion, mother?
- A. It was - er - Victorianism.
- Q. What was that?
- A. It means the spirit of Queen Victoria's age.
- Q. Has every age a spirit, mother?
- A. Yes.
- Q. And does the spirit make the women do what it wants?
- A. It used to. Now we are free.
- Q. To do what you like?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Then supposing some women didn't like painting red stu . . .
- A. Don't fidget with the curtains.
- Q. If you wanted to wear your hair long, mother, would you do it?
- A. Yes. But I don't want to.
- Q. Why not?
- A. Because it would look old-fashioned.
- Q. But I thought you said women were no longer the slaves of fashion.
- A. (*confusedly*). This is - this is more a matter of health.
- Q. Then is that why you put red stu . . . ?
- A. Your frock is rumpled, your shoes are muddy, and you look generally disgraceful. Go upstairs and tell nurse to give you a bath.

A Child's Guide to the Stock Exchange

- Q. Father, why do you look so sad?
A. Because I have lost money on the Stock Exchange.
Q. How?
A. The shares I bought went down instead of up.
Q. Why did you think they were going up?
A. Because . . . ahem . . . the prospects were favourable.
Q. Isn't that what Mr. Goldenbaumer said, father?
A. (*with heat*). I have forbidden you to mention that person.
Q. Why did you buy the shares, father?
A. I expected capital appreciation.
Q. Well, Mr. Goldenbaumer seemed to appreciate it.
A. (*fiercely*). Do not breathe down my neck.
Q. Father, what is a bear?
A. A bear is a gentleman who thinks that stocks are going down.
Q. *Is* he a gentleman if he always thinks that?
A. We are not talking of gentlemen, but of financiers.
£. Can't we talk of both at the same time?
A. Certainly not. That is to say . . . What are you giggling about?
Q. How do bears make money?
A. By selling stocks.
Q. Supposing they haven't got any to sell?
A. They assume that they have them. It is just the same.
Q. Then, if I assumed that I had a bicycle, would it be just the same?

- A. It would take too long to explain these intricate details,
- Q. That's just what Mr. Goldenbau . . .
- A. [*acidly*). There will be no need for you to assume that you have a bicycle for a very long time,
- Q. Father, what is a bull?
- A. A man who believes that stocks will go up.
- Q. Are bulls nicer than bears, father?
- A. They are more optimistic,
- Q. Are you a bull, father?
- A. Certainly,
- ft. Why?
- A. Because I have confidence in British industry,
- Q. Is that why you put money in the Excelsior Gold-
m . . . ?
- A. Do not rattle your knife-chain in my face,
- ft. Father, why are Turks sagging?
- A. I am not informed about Turks,
- ft. Is it because Greeks are buoyant?
- A. I have no idea,
- ft. Supposing a Greek saw a Turk sagging, would it make him feel buoyant?
- A. That has nothing to do with it.
- Q. Supposing you saw Mr. Goldenbaumer saggi . . .
- A. [*harshly*). Mr. Goldenbaumer does *not* sag.
- Q. Did Uncle Arthur lose his money on the Stock Exchange, father?
- A. No, on the race-course,
- Q. Why did Uncle Arthur lose his money?
- A. [*pompously*). The man who gambles on the Turf always loses,
- Q. Why?
- A. Because horses are erratic animals,
- Q. Aren't shares erratic animals, too?
- A. One does not buy a share without full knowledge of it.

Q. What was the share that Mr. Goldenb . . . that you lost money on?

A. The Excelsior Goldmine Limited,

Q. Had you been down the mine, father?

A. (*tersely*). If you make such faces the wind will change, and you will stick like that for the rest of your life.

Q. Has mother lost money on the Stock Exchange, father?

A. No, she is a bear.

Q. Why?

A. She is a born pessimist.

Q. Is that why she said *she* wasn't such a fool as to listen to old sharks like Mr. Gol . . . ?

A. Did she say that?

Q. Yes, father. Nine times.

A. (*after a tense pause*). Your mother knows nothing about it. She doesn't even know the difference between a contango and a carry-over,

Q. What is the difference, father?

A. (*hurriedly, turning to the newspaper*). I see that there has been liquidation in margarines.

Q. What is the difference, father?

A. (*louder*). And a spurt in rubbers,

Q. What *is* the difference, father?

A. Eh? What's that?

Q. Can you dance the contango, father?

(To which this particular father, and every other father, will admit that, in the circumstances, there is no answer.)

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KING

GEORGE

V

No.

70

In anticipation of His Majesty's Jubilee, Sir George Arthur has revised and brought up to date his standard and authorized life of King George V. When it first appeared in 1929, its high merits were fully recognized, and this re-issue at a popular price at this time is very welcome.

'The author has wisely avoided the easy lapse into mere adulation . . . Sir George Arthur's detailed and vivid description of the King's career leaves little to be desired.' *Saturday Review*

'Sir George Arthur is an experienced craftsman, with a proved turn for memoir-writing, and an agreeable style which makes even those chapters which must have been the most difficult to invest with freshness, easy and pleasant reading.' J. B. FIRTH in the *Daily Telegraph*

BAILEY, H. G.

THE LONELY QUEEN. A Novel

No. 37

' . . . a convincing and life-like picture of Elizabeth from the little child playing with her dolls to the woman who at last realizes that whatever may have been her triumph as a Sovereign, she has failed to achieve a woman's highest ambition. The book is evidence not merely of a knowledge of the bare history of the period but of a power of expression which enables the reader to follow the girl, the woman and the queen through her lonely existence. . . . Under Mr. Bailey's capable pen the dry bones of history are revived.'

THE GOD OF CLAY

No. 49

Napoleon is the hero of this story. Not the Emperor, the master of half the world, but the artillery lieutenant of the old regime. Meet him first a ragged, despised subaltern, and leave him First Consul of France maturing his plans for the conquest of England. The strange wooing and the stranger wedding of Josephine are told. Through all it is the man and not the conqueror with whom the story is concerned. Josephine is in some sense the heroine of the book, but she is not the only woman to sway the fortunes of *The God of Clay*.

BARR, Dennis

A DOCK BRIEF. A Novel

No. 2

This fascinating mixture of the law, crime, the sea, and political intrigue might be described loosely as 'a detective story,' but such a description would do it less than justice. The author binds his scenes with a thread of detective romance that never frays until the last page is reached.

BATES, H. E.

CATHERINE FOSTER. A Novel

No. 3

'Mr. Bates is very much alive to natural phenomena . . . he can suggest slight, significant things that give reality, and he can be happy in conjunctions of nature and mood. His Catherine is a remarkable study.' *Manchester Guardian*

THE FALLOW LAND

No. 84

'*The Fallow Land* is much the best piece of work which Mr. Bates has done; and that means that it is very good indeed. It is the story of a woman's struggle against the land, conducted with courage and independence of spirit in the face of obstacles, losses, and betrayals, and of the land's ultimate indifferent victory. . . . It is full, satisfying, written with knowledge, and abounding in passages of real beauty which are not interpolated but flower naturally in their context. *The Fallow Land* carries Mr. Bates a step forward, and marks him as one of a handful who can write of the country with grace and with authority.' *The Spectator*.

BIRKENHEAD, Edited by the Late Earl of

RALPH RASHLEIGH

No. 38

'*The Adventures of Ralph Rashleigh* relates the life-history of a man transported to New South Wales for burglary; the book in its present form has been re-written from a well-authenticated manuscript, and supplies a coherent and lively narrative of an astounding career. Rashleigh endured such hardships as a modern reader can scarcely credit. . . . It is not a pretty story; but for excitement it would be hard to beat this sadistic chronicle.' *Sunday Times*

BLAKER, Richard

THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS. A Novel Jvb 25

An unusual study of English family life, depicting a man who, though living in his own family circle, is estranged from all its members, wife, daughters and son. As the story develops there is shown an improvement in the family relations, and the climax is in keeping with the man's fearless attitude and his ability to realize the full logic of his philosophy.

BROMFIELD, Louis

EARLY AUTUMN. A Novel

No. 26

Early Autumn is the tale of the struggle between life and death in a New England family, old and decayed, but of a name and tradition once distinguished in the history of America. The story, of a people who live in the past, cherishing tradition and property and respectability above all else in the world.

BROMFIELD, Louis

THE STRANGE CASE OF MISS ANNIE SPRAGG *No. 50*

Ostensibly the entire action of the novel takes place in a single night in Fiesole. Within the whole, however, a number of minor stories are interwoven: stories in which the characters in the main plot explain themselves by living their lives. They are stories in which love, religion, the supernatural, rich Americans, poor English and temperamental Italians all have a part in making this powerful and enthralling novel. The scenes both in Italy and America are drawn with a sure hand, and the publishers believe that they are fully justified in describing this book as the best that Louis Bromfield has written.

BRONTE, Emily

WUTHERING HEIGHTS. A Novel *No. 13*

'It is a very great book. You may read this grim story of lost and thwarted human creatures on a moor at any age and come under its sway.' *From the Introduction by ROSE MACAULAY*

BROWN, Alec

GREEN LANE OR MURDER AT MOAT FARM *No. 27*

A Novel. 'An original, thoughtful, penetrating and rather terrible study of a vice not confined to rural areas . . . the vice of gossip, of ill-nature, of suspicion. It is true that the action embraces physical violence as well as spiritual corruption: there are a sufficiently nasty murder, a sufficiently convincing suicide, and an execution. But for all that the drama is played on the world of soul.' GERALD GOULD in the *Observer*

BURNETT, W. R.

LITTLE CAESAR. A Novel *No. 14*

'A well-told tale of the Chicago underworld . . . told with the greatest rapidity and dramatic punch, and the characterization is excellent.' *Morning Post*

BUTLER, Samuel

EREWHON OR OVER THE RANGE *No. 4*

'Occasionally, very occasionally, a bit of genuine satire secures for itself more than a passing nod of recognition. . . . *Erewhon* is such a satire . . . the best of its kind since *Gulliver's Travels*'
AUGUSTINE BIRRELL

BUTLER, Samuel

THE WAY OF ALL FLESH

No. 28

'It drives one almost to despair of English literature when one sees so extraordinary a study of English life as Butler's post-humous *Way of all Flesh* making so little impression. Really, the English do not deserve to have great men.' GEORGE BERNARD SHAW.

CANFIELD, Dorothy

HER SON'S WIFE. A Novel

No. 15

'Mrs. Canfield shows us, at considerable length, and yet with no lapse into dullness, a mother struggling against the selfishness of her son and the almost imbecile self-indulgence of her daughter-in-law.' *Observer*

'A beautiful piece of intricate work.' *Illustrated London News*

THE BRIMMING CUP

No. 78

'I have just written my name in very big letters on the first page of *The Brimming Cup* because I should like to feel as sure as possible of getting it back again when I lend it. Miss Dorothy Canfield's book is something quite out of the common . . . *The Brimming Cup* is a book for idealists; I cannot remember to have met in recent years with more than one or two novels as finely inspired by faith in life and human nature or that offer as nobly and wisely some answer to our questioning.' *Punch*

COLLINS, Wilkie

THE MOONSTONE

No. 39

The Moonstone was stolen from the forehead of an Indian God and, after many strange vicissitudes, came into the hands of an English girl. The idol's priests had sworn vengeance upon anyone possessing the gem, and they followed it to England. It is a story of love and jealousy set in a background of Oriental mystery.

Wilkie Collins was the greatest master of the detective novel, and *The Moonstone* is his masterpiece.

DAVIES, W. H.

THE ADVENTURES OF JOHNNY WALKER, TRAMP

No. 5

Johnny Walker should be read straight off as a story of adventure. It is the relation of true experiences, and all its characters have or have had a real existence.

DE SELINCOURT, Hugh

THE CRICKET MATCH

No. 16

'I think this the best story about cricket or any other game that has ever been written.' SIR J. M. BARRIE

DE SELINGOURT, Hugh

THE GAME OF THE SEASON

No. 79

A book about village cricket by the author of *The Cricket Match*; the scene and the characters are both the same as those of the earlier book, which Sir James Barrie described as 'the best story about cricket or any other game that has ever been written,' When *The Game of the Season* first appeared *Everyman* said of it: 'Mr. de Selincourt knows his cricket. Even more, he knows his village. The combination of the two, with a dash of philosophy and a good sprinkling of humour, makes a salad no gourmet could resist. The book is a most authoritative, amusing and exciting addition to cricket literature.'

ERTZ, Susan

NOW EAST, NOW WEST

No. 80

'This is the most ambitious and satisfying work that the author of *Madame Claire* has yet given us. She has succeeded uncommonly well in two things. She has given us an intimate and convincing picture of the marital relationships between a highly emotional, selfish and snobbish woman and a simple, steady and sincere man; and she has admirably contrasted American social standards and customs with our own. . . . The story is rich in varied characterization and is written with an ease and charm that merit the highest praise.' *The Spectator*

FALKNER, J. Meade

MOONFLEET

No. 67

A stirring tale of adventure in the eighteenth century. Moonfleet, a Dorset village by the sea, is the chief scene of this exciting story, in which smugglers, hidden caves, shipwrecks, and a missing diamond play their part.

When the book first appeared the *Spectator* wrote: 'In *Moon fleet* Mr. Falkner has given us what in the present writer's opinion is the best tale of fantastic adventure since Stevenson's pen was prematurely laid aside.'

FLAUBERT, Gustave

MADAME BOVARY. A Novel

No. 29

'. . . It remains perpetually the novel of all novels which the criticism of fiction cannot overlook; as soon as ever we speak of the principles of the art we must be prepared to engage with Flaubert. There is no such book as his *Bovary*; for it is a novel in which the subject stands firm and clear, without the least shade of ambiguity to break the line which bounds it.' PERGY LUBBOCK in *The Craft of Fiction*

FRASER, Ronald

ROSE ANSTEY

No. 81

'*Rose Anstey* must be read to be believed. It makes its own world, and justifies it. . . . It can safely be said that nobody who reads *Rose Anstey*—and everybody ought to read it—is likely to forget it. The sustained beauty of the prose is the just expression of beauty in the conception.' *The Observer*

GRAVES, Robert

LAWRENCE AND THE ARABS

No. 60

A full and intimate account of Lawrence's life and adventures. The author, a personal friend of Lawrence, had his permission to write this biography as a discouragement to possible misleading and inaccurate ones. He had also the advice and assistance of many of those who were with Lawrence during the Arab campaign.

'In a work of exceptional clarity and quite absorbing interest it outlines the whole marvellous business in a manner which could not have been bettered.' *Sunday Times*

GREENWOOD, Walter

LOVE ON THE DOLE

No. 71

'*Love on the Dole* is a devastating picture of unemployment . . . Several novels have been written lately on unemployment with hatred as the driving force; one has felt about them, as about so many War novels, that the occasion has made the novelist. But *Love on the Dole* is not a tract; it is a novel beautifully constructed by a born novelist, written with hatred, but also with excitement and humour; one is amazed that the humour which created Mr. Price the pawnbroker, the chorus of old tipling women, Sam Grundy the bookmaker, could survive the horror of unemployment in Hanky Park . . . Mr. Greenwood writes with vivid clarity; a gesture, a turn of speech, a cough, and the whole man lives. Judged by the highest standard, this is an impressive, a deeply moving book.' *Spectator*

HALL, Radclyffe

ADAM'S BREED. A Novel

No. 42

Adam's Breed, the strangely moving story of the life and death of an Italian waiter, is the novel which won the Femina Vie Heureuse Prize for 1926, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for 1926 and also the Eichelberger Gold Medal, and which before the appearance of *The Well of Loneliness* showed Miss Hall to be an author of power and sympathy.

HALL, Radclyffe

THE UNLIT LAMP

No.

51

This is the earlier 'problem' novel which made the literary reputation of the author of *The Well of Loneliness*.

'A brilliant study, handled with ruthless sincerity.' *Liverpool Courier*

'Strong and quiet—a very moving picture of a character refreshingly fine.' *Observer*

'A novel of uncommon power and fidelity to life.' *Daily Telegraph*

HEMINGWAY, Ernest

A FAREWELL TO ARMS. A Novel

No. 30

'A *Farewell to Arms* is more than a realistic war novel. It is a notable addition to modern fiction, showing how poignancy and horror can be heightened by leaving out instead of heaping on detail. It is a masterpiece of imaginative omissions, and the ending is quite unforgettable in its pathos.' *Daily Telegraph*

HOLTBY, Winifred

POOR CAROLINE

No. 72

'Miss Holtby's characters in *Poor Caroline*, rounded, objective and independent, are as firmly embedded in life as plums in cake. Though she understands each one of them with extreme thoroughness, she presents them without comment or reflection, a detached, impassive observer . . . This is a living book with an astringent flavour.' *The Times Literary Supplement*

'*Poor Caroline* is a novel alight with cleverness in every sentence. Miss Holtby has a sense of character, of sympathy, of fun and of the English Language.' SYLVIA LYND in the *News Chronicle*

HORN, Alfred Aloysius

TRADER HORN

No. 6

The book from which the film was taken

'This is a gorgeous book, more full of sheer stingo than any you are likely to come across in a day's march among the bookshops of wherever you may be.' *From the Introduction* by JOHN GALSWORTHY. Edited by ETHELREDA LEWIS

HORN, Alfred Aloysius

TRADER HORN IN MADAGASCAR

No. 31

'The new Horn book is as fascinating as either of its predecessors. The book is not merely the record of mild doings off the East Coast of Africa "in the Earlies." It is also a vigorous indictment of the Mahomedan slave trade which provides the inmates of harems and their keepers.' *Morning Post*

'You must buy it and keep it, for whenever and however often you dip into him, Aloysius Horn will hold you as surely as the Ancient Mariner gripped the wedding guest by the lapel of his COat.' DR. J. M. BULLOCH

HURST, Fannie

LUMMOX. A Novel

No. 7

The Saga of Bertha, maid-of-all-work. A tale of stark realism and frank revelation that lays bare a human heart. With character and drama on every page, *LummoX* is a book that will live.

BACK STREET

No. 66

This is the story of a girl living in the poor quarter of an American town in the 'nineties. Ray Schmidt was immensely attractive, and, left to run wild by her father, was regarded as irretrievably 'lost' by her step-mother. But although Ray was ready to go out with any man, and listened to their proposals without offence, she did so because of the generosity of her nature, and because the experience was so common to her that it made little impression. She herself remained care-free and whole-hearted until she met Walter Saxel. Her generosity and kindness to a worthless step-sister spoilt her chances of happiness; how her life was passed in the back streets of Walter's life is Ray's life-story and the substance of this book.

LEWIS, Sinclair

BABBITT. A Novel

No. 17

'A fascinating book. A novel which is as remarkable an achievement in town painting as Arnold Bennett's early renderings of the "Five Towns." ' *Daily News*.

THE JOB

No. 63

The Job is one of the novels of Mr. Lewis's earlier period, written and published in America before *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. It tells the story of Una Golden, who goes to New York to see the world, and sees it as a worker of the great army of girls who go back and forth on the Elevated every day.

'A strangely penetrating and human story.' *Spectator*

'It contains all those qualities which made *Babbitt* a best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic.' *Observer*

LEWIS, Sinclair

DODSWORTH

No. 73

'*Dodsworth* is a tract if you choose (so was *Babbitt*), but it is a tract in the form of a truly first-rate story. It is "good reading." Embark on it, and you are carried away on a swift tide, and you exult in the swirling stream under you. Sinclair Lewis has few equals as a master of rushing narrative - I can't at the moment think of any. He possesses also a wonderful style, in which he employs not only slang, but thousands upon thousands of picturesque and accurately descriptive metaphors and similes.' ARNOLD BENNETT in the *Evening Standard*

OUR MR. WRENN

No. 85

The story of a meek little bachelor, a person of inconspicuous ready-made suits and small unsuccessful moustache. With a hunger for adventure stimulated by the moving pictures and the work of Mr. Kipling, he revolts from the routine of office, visits England in a cattle-boat and finds adventure and romance there.

LINKLATER, Eric

POET'S PUB. A Novel

No. 18

'Mr. Linklater is really the greatest fun. Even at his absurd est moments he is genuinely witty, so witty, indeed, that one can forgive him anything, even the dolorous barman. . . . The story, of course, is one long series of improbabilities, but that does not matter in the least. The book is first-rate entertainment.' RALPH STRAUS in the *Sunday Times*

LOOS, Anita

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES

No. 52

The expressive term, 'a gold digger,' describes the writer of this diary. Here we have her in all her glory, in an amusing, astonishingly frank diary that takes her from New York to London, Paris, Vienna and Munich, in quest of an education in the foreign colleges known as Ritz Hotels. Diplomats, princes, society, big business men - she plays them all, especially men, men, men. Tiaras, state secrets, titles and Poirret models all fall into her pretty little net.

MACDONALD, James Ramsay

WANDERINGS AND EXCURSIONS

No. 8

Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has been a wide traveller and reader, and has an uncommon power of bringing an individual eye—the eye of the artist - to bear upon whatever he sees.

MAUROIS, Andre

COLONEL BRAMBLE

No. 32

The story, told by the French interpreter Aurelle, describes the doings of the Headquarters Mess of a Scottish Division in the Great War. The General himself, the staff, the doctor, the padre and above all, Private Brommit, who is the English army in one, are living human beings we all recognize and their conversation and reactions to the trials and tribulations of War are admirably observed and studied.

MAYO, Katherine

MOTHER INDIA

No. 19

'It is certainly the most fascinating, the most depressing, and at the same time the most important and truthful book that has been written about India for a good deal more than a generation.' *New Statesman*

SLAVES OF THE GODS

No. 53

In this volume the author of *Mother India* follows through her appeal for the release of India's degraded souls. *Slaves of the Gods* portrays in fiction form exactly what it means, worked out in flesh and blood, to be in Hindu India a child-wife, a Temple prostitute, a Suttee, a child-widow, an Untouchable or a Sacred Cow.

Dramatic and forceful, incredible almost, as these twelve records appear, yet each one is taken from real life and each has been carefully verified.

MORTON, J. B. ('Beachcomber' of the *Daily Express*)

THE ADVENTURES OF MR. THAKE

No. 59

A selection from 'Beachcomber's' two previous volumes *Mr. Thake* and *Mr. Thake Again*. When the first of these appeared the *Spectator* wrote:

'But Oswald Thake, that great man, that outstanding figure of our age, reads even better in a book than in a daily paper.' The figure of Thake expands and blossoms as we read, "wisibly swelling before our wery eyes," taking on a new life, a new rich humour. . . . And how convey any idea of Thake on his travels - his innocent preoccupation with the conversation of fellow travellers, and his complete failure to get anything more out of Venice than he does out of Kensington or Wimbledon? For all this it is necessary to read the book. Even Thake's most faithful readers will discover him here for the first time; and will be left wondering-as we do-why on earth he wasn't, made into a book years ago!'

MOULT, Thomas

MARY WEBB: HER LIFE AND WORK

No. 74

Mary Webb's own story is as fascinating and as beautiful as any of her famous novels. Mr. Moulton's bond of sympathy with her writings, which he has revealed in his own novels and poetry, make him a fitting biographer. Into his narrative of a career that was by no means the unrelieved tragedy it seems, he has woven recollections of Mary Webb by those who knew her most intimately during childhood, youth, and womanhood. He has painted afresh the scenes of her beloved Shropshire that provided the setting of her stories. Also, his critical descriptions of Mary Webb's writings assign them their true place in English literature.

NICHOLS, Beverley

CRAZY PAVEMENTS. A Novel

No. 10

'Mr. Beverley Nichols has given us a clever satirical picture of the wickedness that lurks in Mayfair! An amazingly original entertainment, teeming with epigrammatical brilliancy and not a little, too, of the pathos of youth's inevitable disillusionment.*
Bookman

ARE THEY THE SAME AT HOME?

No. 44

'Mr. Beverley Nichols has carried a form of witty impudence to the furthest limit of good manners, and yet succeeded in keeping on the windy side of taste. The papers contained in this collection of his brilliances are something between interviews and character sketches and they include impressions of some sixty-one personages of repute. . . . Mr. Nichols has the wit to penetrate the armour of, and the impudence to reveal, exactly what he discovers below the surface.' *Daily Telegraph*

EVENSONG

No. 62

The story of a great singer. 'With *Evensong*,' said Mr. Gerald Gould in the *Observer*, 'Mr. Beverley Nichols has taken a bold stride forward into the company of considerable novelists.' Mr. J. B. Priestley wrote in the *Evening Standard* - 'A brilliant novel. His heroine is colossal. Her egoism, her tantrums, her idiocies, her odd meannesses and extravagancies, her art - they are all there, and Mr. Nichols has exhibited his monster with the most admirable skill, now turning her this way, now that' for our delight

NICHOLS, Beverley

FOR ADULTS ONLY

No. 64

'A collection of the lightest and most amusing of this author's sketches. His subjects range from botany . . . to bridge, and from first nights to photography. Throughout they are told in form of conversations between a parent and a perfectly horrible and lifelike child.' *News Chronicle*

'Beverley Nichols, who can be more sweetly acid than almost any writer, has seen the satirical possibilities of testing our adult wisdom and folly by the touchstone of a child's clear logic. In his *Child's Guides* to knowledge of many kinds . . . he has invented a new and deadly form of satire.' *Everyman*

'A spirited and witty piece of sophistication.' *John O' London's Weekly*

WOMEN AND CHILDREN LAST

No. 69

In this book, written five years after *Twenty-Five*, and one year before *Down the Garden Path*, Mr. Nichols transfers his gay and impudent attention from the particular to the general. Women, rather than any individual woman, form the butt of his wit, which is as keen as ever. Few books can have contained so many charming taunts, delivered with a grace that softens their sting, though driving the barb deeper.

Several short stories are included in this volume, which contains, in addition, a highly controversial foreword by the author.

CRY HAVOC!

No. 82

'Here is a man who does actually feel a passionate hatred of war and the whole gang of warmongers—the devil's gambles of armament manufacturers, the Chauvinism of a commercial press, all the mean jumble of national spites and fears which are leading mankind up the next primrose path. . . . Some parts of this book are so effective, so good, that instead of being published very beautifully on good-quality paper they should have been turned out on the cheapest newsprint and dropped from aeroplanes—if the Air Ministry allowed this form of pacifist bombing.' *Manchester Guardian*

O'BRIEN, E. J.

MODERN ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

No. n

This volume is a collection designed to present a panorama of the best work published by contemporary English writers of short stories.

O'BRIEN, E. J.

ENGLISH SHORT STORIES OF TO-DAY

No. 61

A new collection of representative English short stories and a companion volume to *Modern English Short Stories*. The authors in this volume include: Mary Arden, Josef Bard, Hector Bolitho, John Collier, A. J. Cronin, David Garnett, Louis Golding, Oliver Gossman, Norah Hoult, Eiluned Lewis, Eric Linklater, H. A. Manhood, Naomi Mitchison, Edward Sackville-West, Malachi Whitaker, Antonia White, Orlo Williams, and Romer Wilson.

NEW ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

No. 75

A companion volume to *Modern English Short Stories* and *English Short Stories of To-day*, both of which have been in great demand as *Florin Books*. The list of authors includes H. E. Bates, Arthur Calder-Marshall, Roger Dataller, Graham Greene, Janko Lavrin, Orgill MacKenzie, Frank O'Connor, L. A. Pavey, Hugh de Selincourt, L. A. G. Strong, Romer Wilson and E. H. Young.

O'FLAHERTY, Liam

THE ASSASSIN

No. 76

'Mr. O'Flaherty is beyond doubt a remarkable writer, and this is in many ways his most remarkable book. I do not know where else, except, perhaps, in Dostoievsky, one would find the qualities which make *The Assassin* so coldly terrible in its savage disillusionment. Only among the Russian novelists would you find the same concentration of mental pain and aberration, until the sheer intensity of the thing becomes almost intolerable.' *The Sketch*

PARROTT, Ursula

STRANGERS MAY KISS. A Novel

No. 21

'*Strangers May Kiss* has wit, style, wisdom and a certain hard kind of beauty: the beauty of a fine thing gone wrong. It is about love, of course; but there is underneath the story an inner emotional reality which held me to the end.' *Sunday Referee*

PRICHARD, Katharine Susannah

HAXBY'S CIRCUS. A Novel

No. 34

'Often as circus life has been described, Miss Katharine Susannah Prichard must be given high marks for her vivid, sympathetic picture of a travelling troupe in Australia. The setting lends it pleasant novelty, the people have just that flavour of difference from English people which makes them interesting in themselves.' *Spectator*

ROBERTSON, E. Arnot

CULLUM. A Novel

No. 22

'*Cullum* is a moving and ironical first novel, the story of a girl's passion for a brilliant, plausible, hopelessly amoral young man . . . at its highest in the sceneries and the heroine's love passages, at its wittiest in the anatomies of Cullum, the fatal lack of cohesion between his heart and his head.' *New Statesman and Nation*

FOUR FRIGHTENED PEOPLE

No. 54

Here is a rich, queer, deliberately cold-blooded book that breaks most of the accepted rules of fiction - a violent romance told in humorous undertones, carefully unromantic - a record of swift, fierce action by detached and intelligent people. Throughout this account of an appalling journey in one of the Unfederated Malay States there runs a streak of light-hearted ruthlessness, which handles the sanctity of human life, religion, sex, and many of our Western prejudices, in a spirit that is more Malayan than English. This book is emphatically not for the sentimental. Its author's attitude is one of peculiar, unsparing honesty towards many aspects of life.

THREE CAME UNARMED. A Novel

No. 45

'The three who came unarmed are the three children, two boys and a girl, of a Norwegian mother and an English missionary who has died of drink on some vague island of the Malayan archipelago. They have grown up as savages, creatures of instinct, beautiful in body and untutored in mind . . . after their father's death they are suddenly precipitated into English provincial society . . . here is a rich opportunity for comedy and also for satire. Miss Arnot Robertson avails herself of her opportunity and has some very stinging things to say, also some very stinging caricatures to draw, but she never falls into the error of making her satire too blatant, and she is tolerant enough to realize that no character is wholly unsympathetic.' MISS V. SACKVILLE-WEST in a Broadcast Talk.

STARKE, Barbara

TOUGH AND GO

No. 68

With an Introduction by Alec Waugh.

This is the scrupulously honest narrative of a girl who hiked alone across the United States and back. It is a sensitive picture of countryside and city, prairie, mountain, river and forest, but - infinitely more interesting - it is the first unfictionized commentary on the morality of the 'open road' as experienced by a woman. Asking no favours, and inhibited by no conventional taboos, she held her course among the endlessly variegated casuals who tried to help her or hurt her, reform her or head her for perdition. With the same clear eye through which she watched others she watched herself, and her judgments on her own behaviour are just as frank. The people she met were legion, their motives, viewpoints and morals as diversified as their looks. Commercial travellers, college professors, farmers, rum runners, cowboys, lorry drivers, jailbirds, evangelists, telegraph linesmen, dope fiends, undertakers.

THORNDIKE, Russell

DR. SYN. A Novel

No. 46

'I envy those who are to make his acquaintance for the first time. I remember with a thrill the feeling I had when you first showed him to me. Here was another of those creatures of the family of Daniel Quilp (our first great love, wasn't he?), creatures that are above ordinary standards of right and wrong, - who, even if they murdered their favourite aunt would have been forgiven - they being so much larger and more lovable than afore-said aunt.' *From die Preface* by SYBIL THORNDIKE

THE SLYPE

No. 55

The innumerable readers of Russell Thorndike's earlier book, *Dr. Syn*, will remember his uncommon dexterity in the manipulation of a mystery.

To reveal that *The Slype* is a deep, dark and sinister alley with high and terrifying walls connecting the Deanery with the cathedral in a sleepy old Kentish town, is no betrayal of the secret of the book. For that eerie and disquieting chasm played an intimate part in the disappearance of a Dean, the concealment, of a Canon, and the strange conspiracy revolving about the cathedral plate.

WAKEFIELD, H. Russell

GHOST STORIES

No. 35

'When Mr. Wakefield is warmed up and his combustion is *good* he can make you believe anything. He transmits the horror and the nastiness, he gives you the shudder you deserve.'
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

A GHOSTLY COMPANY

No. 77

A new volume of uncanny tales by the author of *Ghost Stories*, well in keeping with what Mr. Christopher Morley has said about the previous volume.

WALMSLEY, Leo

THREE FEVERS

No. 83

'*Three Fevers* is a first novel about fisher people on the north-east coast, and it is done with extraordinary assurance and conviction. Everything in it is made plain, made real, and is grandly alive. Here, once and for all, are the fishermen of that coast as firmly set in these chapters as the burghers are in the pictures by the Dutch Masters.' j. B. PRIESTLEY in *The Evening Standard*

WEBB, Mary

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PRECIOUS BANE. A Novel

No. 12

With an introduction by the Rt. Hon. Stanley Baldwin.
'She has a style of exquisite beauty, which yet has both force and restraint, simplicity and subtlety; she has fancy and wit, delicious humour and pathos. She has, in short, genius.' EDWIN PUGH

*GONE TO EARTH. A Novel

No. 23

With an introduction by John Buchan.
' "Mary Webb need fear no comparison with any writer who has attempted to capture the soul of Nature in words," says Mr. John Buchan. We agree. There is mastery and magic in her writing.' *Spectator*

THE GOLDEN ARROW

No. 57

'The Devil's Chair,' a formidable rock, dominating a landscape of gaunt splendour, dominates also the soul of a man living in its shadows. The devotion of his mate, a woman of simple and beautiful character, fails to save him from a growing dread of madness. The mental struggle, born of the terrifying aspect of nature and the reluctance to desert the warmth and shelter of a single-minded love, ends in flight. Tragedy is averted by an awakening stronger than personal fear, to the supreme force of unselfish love.

WHIPPLE, Dorothy

YOUNG ANNE. A Novel

No. 47

'The charm of the story is due to its observations of the external drollery and pathos of provincial life.' *Punch*
This is an early novel by the author of *High Wages* and *Greenbanks*, a recent choice of the Book Society.

WHITECHURCH, Victor L.

THE CANON IN RESIDENCE. A Novel

No. 48

'A Whitechurch book is a cheerful thing to have about in weather that keeps one indoors.' *The Yorkshire Post*
'Canon Whitechurch's character-drawing is so good, his dialogue so true and unforced.' *The Birmingham Post*
'Few writers can give their readers the restful pleasure there is in Canon Whitechurch's books.' *The Scotsman*
'Canon Whitechurch's humour is always delightfully restrained, and he has few equals in this type of fiction.' *Nottingham Guardian*

WILSON, H. Leon

RUGGLES OF RED GAP

No. 86

One of the most refreshing humorous stories of the last thirty years. Ruggles, that perfect English man-servant, was lost at cards to a newly rich prospector from the Far West, whose wife had social ambitions back home in Red Gap. Thither poor Ruggles was taken, with all his store of social learning, all his distress at the crudeness of the American scene: and what happened to him there has to be read to be believed!

WILSON, Margaret

THE ABLE MACLAUGHLINS

No. 56

This novel, which ten years ago won two prizes and was a best-seller, has not yet lost its popularity. It is the tale of a golden moment, of the best sort of British pioneer in the middle west, high-spirited, gay, hard-working people. The Maclaughlin women have been received into thousands of American families as cherished friends. It has been called an intensely exciting book, but it ends as quietly as those worthy lives ended, and goes quietly on in the memory-as those lives go on.

YOUNG, E. H.

THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER. A Novel

No. 24

'This is a comedy of errors - and the comedy is kept up to the end with what can only be called smug satisfaction, every turn of it being savoured luxuriously . . . Miss Young is to be thanked for a novel which, without violating probability, finds rich comedy in the deepest affection of the human heart.'
Manchester Guardian

WILLIAM. A Novel

No. 36

'This is an unusually good novel . . . a charming and lasting tribute to a suburban generation that is passing, and it is a comforting book, too. For what a pleasure it is to pick up a novel which posits and affirms human values, instead of pursuing the general quest of the unseizable reality of the mythical "me"!
Manchester Guardian

MISS MOLE

No. 58

'After reading *Miss Mole* I realize how grave was my omission to read the previous works of Miss E. H. Young. It is one which I intend to rectify as speedily as possible. For this new novel of hers is a book of such wit as comes to one but rarely. *Miss Mole* is, in fact, a darling, whom we should all like to know. Her creation justifies for her author the highest recognition.'
Punch

THE MISSES MALLETT

No. 87

None of Miss Young's characters is more delectable than Rose Mallett, the youngest of the three sisters whose story is here unfolded with such rare and sensitive precision. And no less vivid, in their own individual way, are Caroline and Sophia, and the attractive Francis Sales, who learned how to bide his time and so, in the end, to win his way. The gentle country setting of their lives envelops the book with an artistry as inconspicuous as it is deft, and the turning of fate as the story develops is deeply satisfying.

YOUSSEPOFF, Prince

RASPUTIN. HIS MALIGNANT INFLUENCE AND HIS ASSASSINATION

No. 65

This is the only authentic account of Rasputin's death. Prince Youssouppoff tells how he gained Rasputin's confidence and prepared and baited the trap, of Rasputin's incredible struggle for life; and of what followed. This terrible drama throws fresh light on Russian history and Russian character.

