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A Baker's Dozen

A BAKER'S DOZEN

Llewelyn Vowys

With an introduction by John Cowper Powys
and decorations by Gertrude Mary Powys

LONDON
John Lane The Bodley Head

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DEDICATED

to Hildegarde Watson because of her love of the Hudson River, of the forests of Maine, of the mountains of Switzerland.

Hick-a-more, Hack-a-more
On the King's Kitchen-door,
All the King's horses,
And all the King's men
Couldn't drive Hick-a-more
Hack-a-more
Off the King's Kitchen door!

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OLD ENGLISH PROVERB

'Tis day still while the sun shines

Introduction

STRANGE is the magic that a real writer's words contain! How they bring back the impress of his living presence, the familiar looks, gestures, tones, the very silences! Reading **A Baker's Dozen I** *am startled as by something weird and uncanny, at the way Llewelyn's sentences seem to follow the contour of his head, the motions of his hand, the poise of his figure. Only born stylists can work this miracle. Otherwise one would simply say: 'Yes, that's how he always used to feel!' or 'Yes, that's one of his favourite ideas; and how well he puts it just here.' But with a born stylist —and in every generation we get only a few of them—it is not merely the writer's characteristic turns of thought that are conveyed to us; it is something much more intimate and personal, something for which we would be hard put to it tofnd precise words for it is indeed an invisible, though not I daresay a supernatural, communication reaching us without any physical medium at all, straight from consciousness to consciousness. The deepest mystery in the art of writing lies here; and it seems as if it were the one aspect of it that no practice can acquire and no premeditation attain.*

Stevenson used to swear he spent years in copying Hazlitt. But he was a born narrator and the other a born essayist and it may well be that this labour did him no good! Stevenson is wrong. Style is the man. It is born and **never** *made. Its very* **copyings,** *if they are spontaneous and inevitable, like Lamb's use of Milton, are part of the man. I know the truth of what I am saying by bitter*

personal experience; for comparing my own way of expressing myself with that of both my brothers, Theodore and Llewelyn, I would say unhesitatingly that though plenty of my thoughts *are my own and not a few of my* images, *this far rarer quality, which is the essence of what we call* style, *has been denied me. You could praise me as eloquent or blame me as flamboyant. You could praise me as patient or condemn me as tedious. But you would have difficulty in detecting me as the author from the transcription of a few sentences unless you had caught my name on the cover. But this is precisely what you could do at once in the case of either Theodore or Llewelyn; and to be able to do this with a writer proves him a born stylist. Who would not recognize the author at once in a sentence from Sir Thomas Browne, or* The Anatomy of Melancholy, *or* The Essays of Elia, *or* Sartur Resartus? *And the same thing applies to the poets. A real reader would recognize Shakespeare or Milton or Keats or Wordsworth from the style of a* single line. *He would, of course, detect it from the nature of the particular words; but not only from this. The rhythm and lilt play their part too; but there is something else. There is in fact the indescribable climate or weather peculiar to this poet's genius and to be found in him alone.*

There are writers, of course, whom we could *recognize by a single sentence, as long as that sentence were carefully selected to convey the peculiar train of thought that we have come to associate with the author in question. But this is not what I mean. In Llewelyn's case there would be no need to spend time or labour in selecting a characteristic* thought. *The tone and temper are enough. The man's thought is condensed in these, and what a mystery! The same dictionary is open to everybody. A real stylist*

hardly ever invents words; or if he did such words would not work the miracle. What he does is to write as spontaneously as he walks, talks, eats, drinks, breathes. He may take all the time in the world in revising. But in his roughest draft the style was there. His syntax regulates our common tongue; and jet in some imperceptible manner he has made it his own. His punctuation obeys the laws of our common language; but in his hands it is a signal, a nod, a salute, a salaam, a menace, a caress that belongs to himself alone.

The best epitaph upon Llewelyn that I have ever heard does not refer directly *to the magic of his style, but indirectly it does. I refer to the sentence 'A loving heart is hard to quench.' More than anyone 1 have ever met Llewelyn nourished a heathen love for earth-life,* just as it is, *and for all the creatures of earth,* just as they are. *This is the deepest of all the 'imponderables' in the quality of his style. And it is because of this ungodly love for living creatures that he has such a mania for the past. We shall always find that lovers of humanity whose eyes are fixed upon the future are either saints with their heads full of the Kingdom of Heaven, or Revolutionaries with their heads full of a changed world. Lovers of humanity, like Chaucer and Shakespeare and Montaigne and Lamb, are all passionate, and what Llewelyn would call* unregenerate, *lovers of the past. We know enough about* ourselves, *if not about the history of manners or costumes, to be able to imagine what human beings felt, suffered, enjoyed, and even what expressions crossed their faces in those ancient times. But how chilly, how cold and loveless, how devoid of the warm sorcery of actual life is the future as compared with the past!*

Llewelyn venerated the scriptures though he hated the church, and there is evangelical support, even if it be Pantagruelian and

uncanonical,for his penchant for our thwarted and persecuted and shameless fesh-and-blood with all its sins thick upon it I If we do not love our neighbour, says the scripture, 'whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen?' And the psychological truth is that all revolutionary puritans hate ordinary flesh-and-blood and long to trouble it, harass it, ruffle it, and change it. The more pain and discomfort they can cause by forcing it to behave itself the better is their gall satisfied! There is a close resemblance between Lamb's attitude to humanity and Llewelyn's, save that the latter loved what Frederick the Great called the damned human race in its 'unspeakable rural solitudes,' and the former in its 'sweet security of streets.' But they went to the same quarry—the broad-mouthed Elizabethans—to dig up their choice phrases; and many of the shrewd words that served Lamb to describe his 'City abounding in whores' served Llewelyn to describe his haycock pastimes, hut where Lamb teased his atheist friends with Quakerism irony, Llewelyn denounced his spoil-sport clergy with the gravity of a pagan Anabaptist; and the spiritual irritation that this moral fervour used against themselves produced in the dove-cotes of the godly is really an interesting phenomenon. But the critical enemies of my brother were by no means all of 'the cloth.' The most vicious were young 'wits' and 'wags' of an ultra-modern complexion. Llewelyn insisted on calling these gentlemen fashionable,' but they were, I suspect, just harassed and hard-working journalists, far too busy to learn the Oxford Book of Ballads by heart, or the planetary dirges of 'Hydriotaphia.'

My brother was not lacking in the zeal of the reformer. Indeed he had, as we all have, the preacher in his blood; but it was moral, or if you prefer, immoral reform, rather than political

upheavals that he preached. What he liked to call himself was 'an old-fashioned liberal,' and at an epoch when revolutionary rather than evolutionary changes are in the air such a position must strike a certain type of mind as that of a man who continues fishing in a river when the flood is already over the bank on which he stands. But Llewelyn would retort that the time is bound to come when the food has gone down; whereas the river of life, with the fishermen on its bank, will still be there. But the genius of English Prose is Janus faced and looks both ways. One face looks to the past and all its rare traditions. The other looks to the future and the throwing down of the mighty from their seats. But it must be remembered that it is always from the present, that is to say from the heavy head of the god himself, that the two watchmen meet. 'The present, the present' *was indeed the eternal burden of Llewelyn's 'impassioned clay.' To have been born into life at all, to be alive at all, was to his mind the one miracle that mattered. And it was both a puzzle and an indignation to him that on all sides the human children of life seemed striving with as much eagerness to forget this miracle, this difference between being alive and being dead, as he was striving to remember it. To be as certain as he was that there is no God and no immortality and no Moral Law, is, I think, a rarer human phenomenon than most of us realize. I take it that the normal human mood—it is certainly my own mood —is to alternate between* faith *shaken by rational doubts, and* doubt *shaken by irrational faith ; in other words, to be an illusioned or disillusioned* agnostic. *But Llewelyn had no hesitations, no half-certainties, no obscure intimations, no wavering conceptions, no metaphysical suspicions about the all-importance of the* astronomical universe. *And what makes him unique in our time is that*

he expresses this positive negation in a style as grave and weighty as that of Jeremy Taylor.

It is quaint to reflect how few modern writers treat this classical human predicament at all; They are too absorbed with their panaceas for particular predicaments; and those who do deal with these first and last things' do so with anything in their minds rather than what John Morley called 'the last appalling stroke of annihilation.' But Llewelyn is undoubtedly, like the old poetical humourists, childlike in his seriousness. Nor did our actual childhood discourage this as happens with some. In our young days we used, I remember, to take that airy fantasy, the famous 'Alice' au pied de la lettre; and one of Llewelyn's earliest memories must have been the very realistic games we managed to extract from its sophisticated excursions. One of his fashionable' critics went so far as to call his Love and Death, Jabberwokky; and this epithet is still, in this connection, as hard for me to follow as it was for him. Indeed I suspect we shall all go down to the grave without the remotest notion what subtle criticism of our innocence lies hid in this portentous sally. But 'Jabberwokky' or not, Llewelyn's peculiar genius is essentially biographical and demands for its happiest play the earth-realities of an actual life; whether it be the life of a man, a beast, a bird, or a fish. The good behaviour of his subject is entirely unessential. It may be what Homer calls 'agathos,' which means 'brave,' or it may be what Homer calls 'kakos,' which means the opposite of'brave.' All that Llewelyn requires of a living thing is that if you prick it it shall bleed. His weakest point, curiously enough, is my own strongest one, namely invention. He needed the real life of something or somebody to set his imagination free; whereas I am made uncomfortable by the eye of life. The

inanimate is what liberates my fancy, and nothing pleases me more than to endow it with any sort of an ambiguous soul. But my brother's power of giving life to past events and people is pure inspiration.

. As I read the sketches in this little volume I seem to be aware of a host of lost memories, a struggling multitude of piteous eidola, surging up from that sad Homeric Hades, where drift like leaves 'the powerless heads of the dead.' I see them struggling, these sorrowful phantoms, as to which shall be the first to drink of the blood, when the warder shall have put aside his sword. Many of the entities of memory who fail in this struggle must have been as beautiful, as quaint, as endearing as those who 'drank* and told their tale; but they had fallen back like Eurydice into what seems a 'second death.' The especial treasure of A Baker's Dozen is in my opinion 'A Village Shop'; but I think all these sketches have that wistful precision that the ideal essay demands if it is to make us float away into the 'long, long thoughts' for which such fathom-deep soundings are the signal. Small though the compass is of this little book it contains between its covers all that is required of Llewellyn's philosophy to excite fury in certain pontifical breasts. When he died a year ago it was ofthe most curious interest to note the tone of some of the 'obituaries.' Only a few were friendly; and even among these, scarce one was daring enough to declare, as his passionate admirer Mr. Norbury says, that 'a true Elizabethan had passed away.' In the case of one big 'Daily' even the kindly tradition of'nothing ill of the dead' was violated to a quite startling tune. It was put on record that many regarded my brother as 'a dangerous crank'; and some careless jest of his in the Falstafjian vein was converted into the laboured dogma that 'cowards

were delightful people.' Precisely in this sort of way did certain compatriots of Carlyle misunderstand Charles Lamb.

But agree or not as you please with Llewelyn's Lucretian tone towards 'other' worlds, he has certainly made this *world the richer by his passing through it.* Here, *at any rate, the finality that he found in the Death that dogged him transfigured with a magical beauty every curve, every tint, every leap, every gleam, every splash and dart and quiver and somersault of that crafty old fish, the Life-Force. Nor is it from the honeysuckle Shakesperean rogues for whose moral lapses he had such indulgence that we get the true key-note of Llewelyn's work. In his Life of Hudson the Explorer a note is struck worthy of our annals at the present juncture. When the mutineers had already put Hudson into the shallop in which he was to be set adrift, Philip Staffe, the Ipswich carpenter, decided to join him. 'Suddenly deep down in the heart of this rude man, born and bred in Suffolk clay, the celebrated categorical imperative of Immanuel Kant became audible. . . . Let him have his chest of tools, and be damned to them; for he chose rather for the love of the Master to go down into the shallop than with such villains to accept of likelier hopes.'*

Yes, to my thinking, the most striking thing about my brother's genius is its power to force us to note the heroic goodness of the ordinary man and woman, the sublime endurance of the ordinary beast of the field, and the heart-rending life-poignance—indescribable save by a magic turn of a master wrist—of all our fellow-travellers in this planetary shallop sailing the fathomless sea.

After 'The Village Shop' my favourite essays in A Baker's Dozen *are 'Montacute Hill' and 'A Montacute Field.' Here we catch many tones and many accents in the rich traditions of English*

prose; but the most English of them all is that rustic mingling of humour with tragedy, and of shrewdness with simplicity that in the country ballads he loved reaches its perfection. But as Lamb said 'prose too hath her cadences,' and in Llewelyn's prose this unforgettable note is still repeated—with the difference that is becoming to a later day.

JOHN COWPER POWYS

Indebtedness should be acknowledged to the following journals for allowing these Essays to be reprinted: *The Western Gazette, The Dorset Echo, The Manchester Guardian* and *The Countrjman.*

The New Year

THE NEW YEAR

THE HUMAN RACE HAS FOUND IT NO EASY MATTER TO agree upon a proper day for celebrating the beginning of the New Year. The Egyptians began their year at the autumnal equinox; the Greeks, after the fifth century, at the summer solstice; our own ancestors, the Anglo-Saxons, on December *igth.* But even when the day has been agreed upon the most involved mathematical calculations are required (such as only an Omar Khayyam of wisdom can master) to reconcile its relative human stability with the perpetual swing of the eternal stars of the heavens.

The change from the Julian to the Gregorian Calendar, belatedly effected in England during the eighteenth century,

puzzled the heads of rich and poor alike. The London rabble, being ready reckoners, judged out of hand that they were cozened of near a fortnight's life; and for this reason they up with their clubs, bawling out at the tops of their voices 'Give us back our eleven days.' It was the urbane Lord Chesterfield, who was responsible for actually carrying the Bill through Parliament, and in one of his letters we learn that the vexed subject was even beyond the comprehension of this eminently intelligent nobleman. 'I was to bring in this Bill which was necessarily composed of law jargon and astronomical calculations, to both of which I am an utter stranger. However, it was absolutely necessary to make the House of Lords think that I knew something of the matter, and also to make them believe that they knew something of it themselves, which they did not. . . . I resolved to do better than speak to the purpose, and to please instead of informing them. . . . This succeeded, and ever will succeed; they thought I informed because I pleased them; and many of them said I had made the whole very clear to them, when God knows, I had not even attempted it.'

Human beings, unless monstrously pressed, are by nature inimical to changes of any kind. Their memories are long and they are tenacious of the past. Even now after an interval of nearly two hundred years since the old-style calendar was abandoned I am asked to pay the rent of my cottage to the Weld family of Lulworth Castle on old Michaelmas Day, and all my life I have been accustomed to hear people in the villages of both Somerset and Dorset allude to January the sixth as old Christmas Day.

Charles Lamb was in the right when he stressed the close connection that exists between New Year's Eve and meditations upon mortality. 'No one,' he wrote, 'ever regarded the first of January with indifference. It is that from which all date their time, and count upon what is left.' Recently there have fallen into my hands a number of daily papers printed in the West Country during the years of 1842 and 1843. These venerable sheets are sharp reminders of our short stay here on earth. There is living at Erchfont, in Wiltshire, an old woman born in the reign of William IV, but there cannot be many such still above ground who were drinking and eating heartily when these newspapers were printed. In one of them I read a notice of the birth of my own father at Stalbridge. He lived till the age of eighty and has been lying in his grave thirteen years. In the same paper I noticed recorded the death of the widow of Charles James Fox, so marvellously close does one generation tread upon the heels of another! Singular it is to realize that out of that vast West Country population, whose eager and vigorous activities find so spirited a summary in these faded pages, all but a very handful sleep in dust—the bones of the landowner and the bones of the moonlight poacher, and the bones of the fat-beneficed clergyman and the bones of the potato-fed labourer of the 'hungry forties'—all shovelled out of sight together in our old churchyards.

There are sundry modes of spending New Year's night. A few over-curious and superstitious men and women attempt to acquaint themselves with their future fates by trials of sortilege. The Bible, Shakespeare, and Rabelais are the three

books best suited for such divinations. Many young men and lightly-laughing maidens favour dancing their way, hot of foot, into the first frosty minutes of January. Others prefer to face the New Year their heads dizzy with wine.

I remember once in France seeing a striking picture of, the earth, surrounded by clouds, tumbling about the sun. It was nailed to the church door like one of our Christmas almanacks, and below it was a table showing the exact number of pious Catholics that were likely to be saved and the exact number of infidels that were likely to be burned. In my opinion such illustrations are far too scarce. It is easy enough for us to forget our predicament as conscious mites upon a globe of astral dust, which, like any jolly hogshead, goes rolling year after year through infinite space.

In the meanwhile, let those of us who are older and wiser celebrate the night in our own manner. Let us sit in a corner close up to the fire, and, like honest hug-the-hearths, with syllabub on the trivet, and crooked knees well toasted by glowing red coals, listen at our ease to the sounds of the far-off silver bells of our childhood. No music to be heard upon the planet could possibly revive better old memories than a ringing in of the New Year from a neighbouring steeple.

Engraved on one of the bells in the Parish Church of Shepton Beauchamp, Somerset, are the following words:

Hang me Right, and ring me Well,
They'll hear me sound on Hamdon Hill.

The Village Shop

*

THE VILLAGE SHOP

THE OTHER DAY I UNEXPECTEDLY RECEIVED AS A PRESENT a large antiquated photograph of my old home in the county of Somerset. There to the life the familiar vicarage stood with its slate roof and French shutters and jasmine, rose-muffled walls, a four-square shadowed reality that seemed most worthily to represent the easy period to which it belonged. It was not, however, so much the large-, sized picture itself that arrested my attention as the two words—Deborah Sparkes—written in a bold hand on the cardboard back of the faded photograph. Though Miss Sparkes has now been dead for many years I remember the old lady well. Indeed, of all the village characters of my childhood

she perhaps holds a more prominent position than any, And even if the woman's personality had not been as dominating as it was, she must still have played an important part in the life of my father's parish, for in those days the owner of the village shop of very necessity was a person of consequence.

Although she had lived in Somerset for so many years Miss Sparkes was not, to use the proud exclusive cottage phrase, 'one of Montacute'; she originally had come from Devonshire where she had belonged, so it was rumoured, to a substantial Quaker family. Let this be as it may, while Miss Sparkes was a woman who held strong and independent views on every subject under the sun, she yet was strictly conventional, and never once can I recollect having seen her pew empty in my father's church. Her scrupulous honesty was also a byword in the village. In her accounts the unexplained presence of so much as a farthing could become a matter of the gravest concern. Miss Sparkes' shop was most fortunately situated in the very middle of Bishopston, one of the main streets of Montacute. You mounted two steps of Ham Hill stone worn uneven by I know not how much house-wifely shoe leather, turned an easy rattling door handle, and immediately found yourself plumb in the centre of what in fact was a mart of universal provision for the creature wants of the rural stone-quarrying population of the locality.

The shop contained two counters, the one on the left being devoted to the dispensing of sweets and groceries, and the one on the right to the selling of dry goods—flannels calicos, laces, tapes, and 'what maids lack from head to heel.

Both of these plain, well-worn, spotlessly clean counters were provided with pocket-knife-made slots, the one slot cut with precision for the reception of coppers, and the other for white money. To be allowed to drop payment coins through these homely apertures, and to listen for their jingling fall into the drawer below, became for me a most coveted privilege. The sweets sold were of three varieties—bullseyes, acid drops, and almonds out of a glass bottle, covered with pink and white sugar. The biscuit most in favour was called Osborne. It was a round and wholesome cracker, though one that was a trifle dangerous on the occasion of a coughing fit because of its dry crumbs.

Miss Sparkes had a maid called Emma. I never observed, however, that she was allowed to play a very active part in the salesmanship of the shop. She was a humble little woman, born, so it seemed, to receive with a silent and saintly patience hasty rebukes for petty errors, petty inaccuracies, and for leaving undone what she ought to have done. Besides Emma this small establishment maintained one other inmate —Miss Sparkes' nephew, a mysterious middle-aged man of reserved deportment who was kept very much in the background. He was never, for example, permitted to meddle with village affairs and was seldom, if ever, to be seen in the street. His duties were severely confined to the large garden that lay behind the little house, a garden that stretched up as far as the wall that separated the potato plots at the backs of the houses from Mile's Hill field.

What a garden it was over which the refined, reticent man presided! In the summer time, if the shop happened to be

empty of customers, Miss Sparkes would sometimes, as a treat, lead me into this unlikely paradise. There was a small lawn above her green water-butt yard, and at the end of this stood a modest arbor of the kind that John Bunyan might have meditated in—and wonder beyond all wonder, suspended near it, from a pear tree branch, was a large cage containing a talking parrot:

My name is parrot, a bird of Paradise
With my becke bent, my little wanton eye,
My fethers fresh, as is the emraude grene,
About my neck a circulet, lyke the ryche rubye,
My little legges, my fete both nete and cleane.
Parrot is no stamring stare, that men call a starling,
But Parrot is mine own dere hart, and my darling.

Never, never could I hope to express how exciting it used to be to me suddenly to hear the bird's Caribbean screams when it first caught sight of its mistress, slow foot after slow foot, mounting the garden steps. It was a talking parrot—and how its reiterations of 'Pretty Poll,' 'Pretty Poll' would sound shrilly out amongst the wealth of globed peonies, larkspurs, and hollyhocks all in a row. Miss Sparkes, still holding me by the hand, would open the cage door and coax the parrot to sit upon her finger, a fabulous popinjay some of whose feathers were of as pure gold as those I read about in the fairy tales, a gilded emerald bird utterly besotted with love for the old, old woman whose features, indeed, looked not dissimilar to its own, so hooked and headstrong was the

nose upon which her spectacles of shining steel were balanced.

> *Indie hath of kinde such as will counterfaite redily a mans speach: what wordes they heare, those commonly they pronounce. There have bene found of these that have saluted Emperours.*

Over the red-tiled roof of the shop it was possible to see the tall perpendicular tower of St. Catharine's, and what a striking contrast it made, this homely English garden so suggestive of long dozing Sunday afternoons, with this outlandish darling of the fo'c's'le—penants and plumes of tropical flame! The parrot was almost pilled and must have been a bird of very great age. Perhaps it had been brought to England by one of Nelson's sailors from Antigua, for I have often fancied that Miss Sparkes in her maidenhood had had a romantic attachment with some able-bodied seaman who had perhaps visited the river mouths of half the known world:

> *0 hold your tongue, my pretty parrot!*
> *Nor tell no tales* o' *me!*
> *Your cage shall be made* o' *the beaten gold*
> *And the spokes* o' *ivorie.*

One of her most valued possessions was, 1 know, a seaman's ditty box, out of which, upon occasions, when her mood was gay, she would select for me the most unexpected presents. One of these I still have, a carved ornament from China representing a hideous oriental priest astride a frog,

who, with demonic grin, thonged whip in hand, is mercilessly lashing the reptile's bulging abdomen.

Pol is a fine bird! 0 fine lady Poll
Almond for parrot. Parrot's a brave bird.

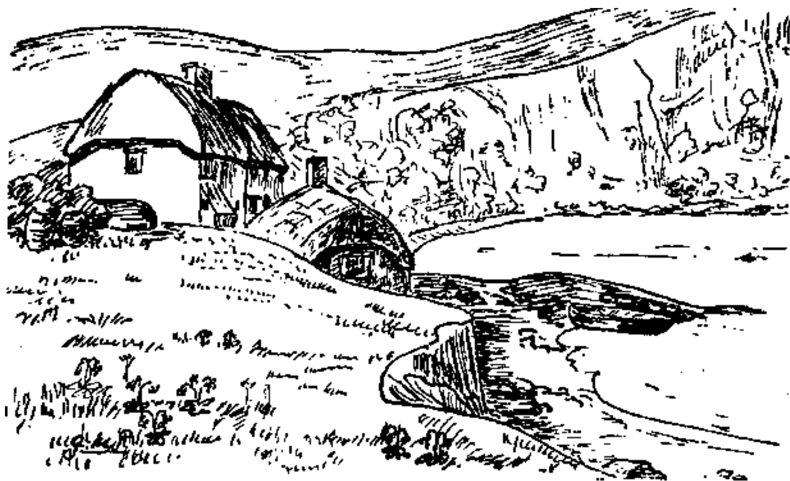
The parrot died before Miss Sparkes herself. It was buried in the quiet garden, the chosen plot of ground being marked the next summer by a carefully prepared flower-knot of London pride, marjoram, melilot, and that most lovely of old-fashioned pinks, sops-in-wine.

Under this stone
In gloom and darkess vast
Lies the green lover
Faithful to the last.

In these days the small shopkeepers are being hard put to it to make a living, and yet how excellently, and with what a sense of social responsibility, they have performed their modest offices in the past. It was the custom of Miss Sparkes each summer to undertake a journey to Bristol for the purpose of replenishing her shop with goods for a twelvemonth. She would return by the evening train, which, at a leisurely speed, would meander back to Yeovil by Athelney withybeds and through the sunset hayfields of Langport coming at last to a standstill at the Montacute station. Miss Sparkes, having first superintended the husbanding of her packages in the waiting room, would never fail to hasten along the platform past the quartz-bordered flower beds already cooled by the

first dew fall, to where, in calm dignity, the locomotive rested. With ceremonious courtesy she would awaken the good-natured engine driver from his idle dreamings by gravely bestowing upon him her personal thanks for having brought her, Deborah Sparkes, out of Sedgemoor, safely back once more to the peaceful village of her life-long adoption.

The Memory of One Day



THE MEMORY OF ONE DAY

IN THE YEAR 1899 I AND MY YOUNGER BROTHER WERE taken ill with whooping cough. This tedious sickness was possibly in my case responsible for a lifelong weakness of the chest, but at the time nothing but good fortune seemed to come of the malady. We were sent home from Sherborne, and to our great delight our father decided that the seaside air of Weymouth might do us good.

Lodgings were found in Brunswick Terrace and even now when I enter one of these happy holiday houses, so sedate Bind so unostentatious, there are revived within me fleeting shadowy sensations of that far off Easter-time, with the small hallway of our house smelling of sand, of sun-dried seaweed,

of cooking fish; and our sitting-room upstairs so safe and cheerful, where, in warm lamplight, we would listen to our sister Gertrude reading to us 'Wee Sir Gibby' as we sipped our bedtime milk different from Somerset milk—richer and more chalky white—with always the sound of the waves breaking on shingle coming in to us through the sash-window, opened a little at the top.

Our coughs did not at all interfere with our freedom. I recall, for example, looking for birds' nests on Lodmoor before breakfast and carrying my brother on my back over many of its wide shallow lagoons, indifferent to wet boots and stockings. It has pleased me to remember this service, for how often when we were in Africa together did I not take advantage of his strength and of his love for me, accepting it as natural that I could leave it to him to off-saddle my pony when, tired and stiff, at the end of a long trek, I would limp away, speechless, to some shady resting place.

Almost every day during this visit we would plan out some excursion—to Portland Bill, to Upwey Wishing Well, to the Swannery at Abbotsbury—returning in time for our tea which we used to take at a table drawn close up to the bow-window eating our eggs, honey, watercress, and brown bread looking out over the water at the undulating line of familiar cliffs stretching away as far as St. Alban's Head. White Nose especially awakened our imaginings. Many times we tried to guess what it was actually like on that grave promontory whose smooth green westward slopes were to be seen, even in detail, by the naked eye. Each evening it confronted us, patient and strong in the daffodil light, with its suggestion

of sailor boys home from the sea, of the frigates of Nelson s time tipping over the horizon, and of huge wooden merchantmen coming back to England from the West Indies, weeds from the Sargasso Sea still clinging to their carved rudders.

We made a plan to walk to White Nose, or to the White Nore, as it used to be called by the Victorian gentlefolk. The day we selected for this most adventurous of all our expeditions was fine. It was one of those supreme days of an English April that brings to everything that lives an uncontrollable sense of well-being. The sky was clear and every coach-road shimmered at its far end with sun motes; the downs smelt of gorse, the meadows of daisies; and the whole earth fainted and danced, now enervated, now awakened by the breathless allure of a spring morning. Our walk along the cliff has never ceased to haunt my memory, as if we had been treacling upon enchanted ground from celandine hedge to celandine hedge, from chattering stream to chattering stream, beneath the glancing flights of the newly arrived swallows.

We ate our provisions at the look-out at the top of the White Nose sitting under the shadow of a little stone house, the roof of which was a heavy upturned fishing boat that had long ago been captured from the smugglers and now was as soundly leaded against the weather, keel and sides, as the top of any church tower. All was strange, as strange as though we had found ourselves lodged upon some ledge of remote altitude on one of those cumulus clouds which on indolent summer afternoons would remain stationary for hours above the garden lawn teasing our childhood fancies. The view

from the great cliff was different from anything we knew about. The sea was blue, the sky was blue. The waves were white, the cliffs were white—white, blue—blue, white; and the air we breathed of a salty crystal quality, softened with fragrance of downland flowers. Far up above the sprouting cornland behind us the larks trilled with tireless ecstasy.

I was sent, I remember, to the old coastguard station to beg a jug of water. The present coastguard station had not yet been built. In its place was a row of firm one-storied wooden houses shining with pitch and white paint, each garden path bordered with white-washed stones similar in weight and shape to those that in Victorian times used to encircle the coast of England for the better safety of the vigilant excise men on their midnight assignations. Some of these stones, matted over with grass, are still to be observed on the cliff's edge.

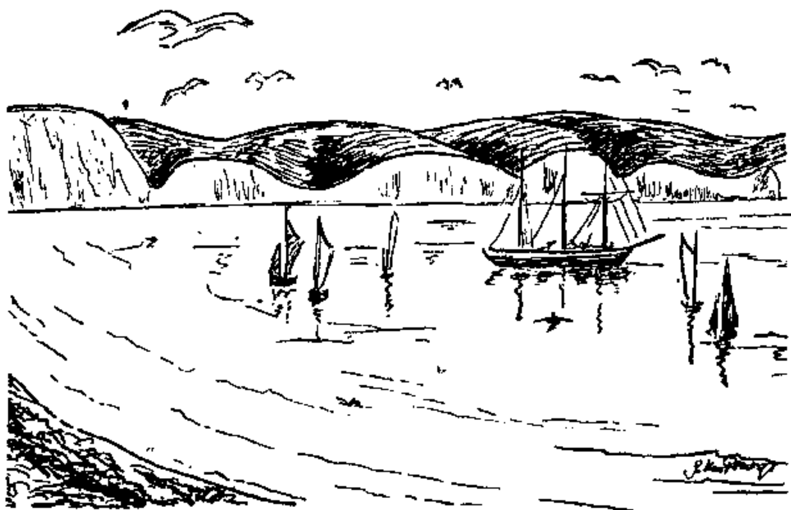
In those quiet days, Ringstead remained uninvaded and unspoilt, and I recall well how we wandered across its flat acres, amazed to find ourselves in cowslip fields, the greenness of which showed bright as in a painted picture, bright against an azure sea, whose salt waves in rough weather, must, so we judged, splash upon the grass and buttercups of the meadows. From the beech trees of the woods where the old pirate-destroyed thirteenth century village once had been, a cuckoo was calling; and in the secret gardens of the fishermen's cottages, deep hidden in furzen and bramble patch, brown nets, shining still with silver scales, were hanging up to dry. In one of the gardens crab pots stood in a careless heap near a row of murmuring straw skeps under an over-

grown elder hedge. The hedge smelt of nettles in the sun, and fast-sitting hen blackbirds.

Truly it was a legendary sea valley with its stiles built of old oars, with woods gay with butterfly orchids, and with every field thick-spangled with elfin flowers.

How footsore we were as we trudged back along the straight road towards Greenhill Gardens in the Lodmoor twilight, and yet how happy, too, completely innocent of the treasures we were bringing home with us, treasures of the memory to be in our lives more lasting than the material shells and stones that we carried in our hands.

Childhood Memories



CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

SOME YEARS AGO I LEFT MY COTTAGE ON CHALDON DOWN to spend a few weeks at Weymouth at Brunswick Terrace. It was a time when I was not strong, and I would lie in my room by the open bow window listening to the waves at short regular intervals rattle against the banks of shingle outside; and follow with idle mind each up-and-down of the familiar cliffs, green and white, of the bay that stretched on and on towards St. Alban's Head.

For some days my most enterprising adventure was to walk along the quiet pavement in front of the houses, observing with a narrow interest the little April gardens, each with its own separate individuality, that flourished so gaily beneath

the dining-room windows of that happy row of holiday lodgings. As I began to get better I became more ambitious and a desire took possession of me to see again the Backwater.

In this mood I remembered the old-fashioned Bath chairs of my childhood, and I at once made inquiries as to the possibility of hiring one of these sedate vehicles out of the past. Duly it arrived at my door, the most perfect Bath chair, more perfect than I could ever have thought possible, soft-cushioned with rose-patterned upholstery such as could only have been favoured in the comfortable years of Victorian middle-class prosperity. The attendant, Mr. Hill, with his decorous bearing and independent character, unmistakably belonged to the same great age, and as we talked together I soon discovered that he and I had a deal more in common than general memories of an enviable historic period so fast fading into a remote distance.

Twice a week, when I was at Sherborne Preparatory School under Mr. W. H. Blake, we boys received lessons in copy-book writing from Mr. Pooley, the schoolmaster of the town, and it was, so we discovered, this same kindly, grey-bearded gentleman who had given instructions to Mr. Hill in the difficult art of forming 'pot-hooks.' As a young man Mr. Hill had been a servant in one of the Out-Houses of Sherborne School.

We did not on that April afternoon take a direct way to the Backwater for the notion had entered my head to have a look, first of all, at the Alexandra Gardens. These pleasure grounds appeared gay enough to my eyes, warmed by the

primrose sunshine which poured down upon the newly mown grass and upon the nodding daffodil trumpets, and upon the pale statuary that stood so lifeless upon their pedestals.

The celebrated Weymouth lagoon, known as the Back-water, had for me many associations. When as children we were taken to Weymouth it was always an important question whether it was wiser to find a window-seat on the right or on the left side of the railway carriage. Looking towards the east it was possible to catch fleeting glimpses of the sea and of White Nose across Lodmoor, whereas looking westward there would be presented a nearer and more prolonged view of the Backwater, with its rushy islands, and hungry fish-eating birds, and snow-white swans against green distant fields. There was more mud about its margins than cement. Its flood-stakes served as fishing stations for cormorants, for cormorants that came flying each morning across the bay from their roosting places on Bats Head or on the Fountain Rock. All was wild and uncared for. In the chill twilight of the seaside dawn the splash of an otter could often be heard, along with the first calling of the cuckoo sounding from Horshoe Copse like a 'haunted bell,' or the first song of a lark, clear and tremu-lous as it rose to the heavens, its neat mottled feathers and tiny crest not yet rid of the dew of the Radipole meadows.

In those days the Backwater was rank, sanitary, and beautiful, no attempt having been as yet made to transform it into the tidy, salubrious, and efficiently developed suburb of a prosperous town that wishes to prepare easy promenad-

ing for men and women who like to look upon nature, if they look upon it at all, dry shod and from a distance. It is true that now, from the security of my Bath chair, I was in a position to watch the swans at closer range than on former times, to observe their unseemly scramble for food, with serpentine necks adapted to the novel gregarious conditions of snatch-as-snatch-can, as indifferent to the rights of the coots as if they were nothing, as if they had not been as especially created as themselves, each little head marked with white as though by the scrupulous application of the Almighty's thumb.

We returned by the back streets and I was soon to be more than ever reminded of the past. During the summer of 1893 we had all been ill of the scarlet fever and when we had recovered it was thought expedient to send us to Weymouth for a change of air. Lodgings were found for us in Invicta House, a new house that faced upon a square at the bottom of the street falling steeply down from Waterloo Place. I was hardly able to recognize the neighbourhood, or indeed Invicta House, so clearly had the passing of forty years altered the plan of the district and mellowed the appearance of the red brick building. Invicta House then belonged to, or at any rate was under the direction of, Mr. and Mrs. Bowles, kindly people who took a great liking to our nurse Emily and did all that was in their power to make our stay under their roof a happy one.

On one occasion I remember their arranging a magic lantern show for us in their parlour, and something of the excitement of the entertainment remains with me still when I think

of my happy suspense as I sat on a chair in the carefully dimmed room next to a friendly and interested neighbour who had also been invited; and the eagerness I felt when the room was once more illumined and trays of sugar biscuits were handed round, together with glasses of the best brew of raspberry vinegar that ever I have drunk in my life. Mr. Bowles was not only an expert exponent of the possibilities of the magic lantern, he was also an enthusiastic football player and I well remember beinjr taken to see him perform on some ground on the further side of the Backwater. With my sister Lucy in a perambulator our little troop had eventually made its appearance on the playing field.

We left before the game was ended, a chance that caused us to witness one of those incidents of violence so terrifying to imaginative children. A soldier in the old-fashioned red coat of his time came running headlong down the lane with an infuriated mob after him. A few yards from us he was overtaken and fell heavily to the ground from a blow on his back. We hurried on at top speed, but the recollection of that first glimpse of the animal ferocity of man had a profound influence on me, and indeed may have implanted in my mind a deep distrust of every programme of social amelioration that relies upon, or condones, periods of lawlessness for the attainment of Utopian ends.

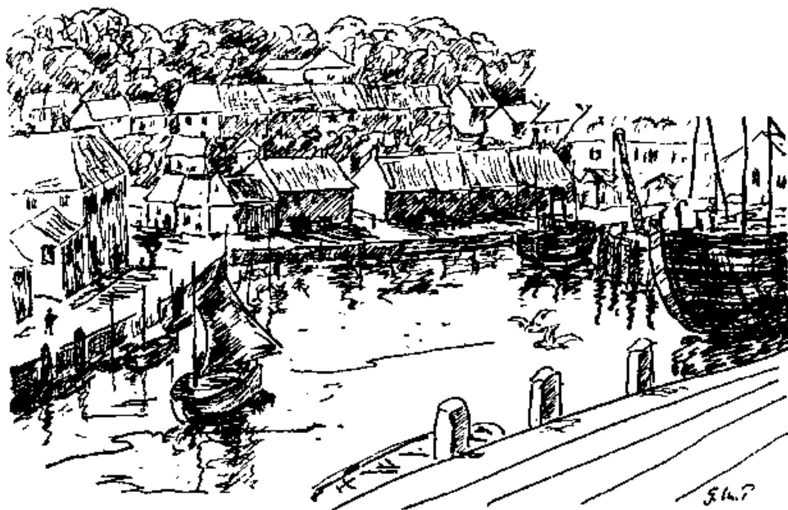
Yet in those days I was surely no pacifist. Evening after evening I used to sit at the window of Invicta House watching Weymouth boys of my own age playing at soldiers in the square. Perhaps if I had dared to run out to them I would have been welcomed. I did not know. They certainly enjoyed

themselves. How shrill their voices used to come to me in the stillness of those late autumn evenings!

Such, such were the joys
When we all, girls and boys.
In OUT youth time were seen
On the Echoing Green.

I suppose they are now men of fifty, solid townsmen, readers of the *Dorset Daily Echo,* themselves with grown-up children, and may not even remember the gleaming swords they once owned, swords that seemed to me then far more romantic than any real weapon, though it should be old as the dagger recently dredged up from the bottom of the Backwater, from the bottom of that silent floor that has scarcely for thousands of years been disturbed by anything more ruthless than the sliding abdomens of sulky eels resolutely concentrated upon their own hungry quests through fathom-deep water to which no sunlight ever penetrates.

Weymouth Harbour



WEYMOUTH HARBOUR

IF A MAN STANDS ON TOP OF WHITE NOSE AND TURNS TO the south-west he will find himself looking straight down the entrance of Weymouth Harbour, the waters of which, shining like those of the Grand Canal in Venice, wind their way to the very heart of the old town.

It is remarkable how this river mouth manages to retain its romantic quality, encroached upon as it is by so much that belongs to the more banal and coarse aspects of modern life. Any loitering by its quayside can restore the spirit of a wayfarer discouraged, on a summer's afternoon, by the indiscriminate crowds on the sands, crowds that seem often so little connected with Dorset.

Weymouth Harbour, even more than the harbours of Poole, West Bay, and Lyme Regis, is characteristic of the county. It is the homely stable door of Dorset, solid and secure. A tramp-steamer may have been beating up all the afternoon from St. Alban's Head against a west wind, as tossed about by the turbulent Channel waves as a walnut shell in a mill pond, but once she has rounded Weymouth breakwater all is snug and secure, with the lights from the taverns shining out on to muddy November streets where hungry, hardy men are hawking a few last fish in their baskets and boys are calling 'Echo! Echo! Echo!'

I recollect standing on the old Weymouth bridge one Christmas Eve and admiring the mellow glow that shone through the red blind of a Public House window. I have seldom seen any sight that looked more full of welcome. Here, the red light seemed to say, is a safe retreat where honest men can sit at ease on bare benches washed clean of all humbug—honest Dorset working men with their heads as packed with jests and old rogueries as eggs are full of meat and adept at trundling skittles and throwing darts as any this side of High Stoy.

As children we used to think of crossing the harbour by the ferry as an excitement equalled only by a donkey ride, or by bathing beyond the "Red Post." My father regarded it as a pleasure also. 1 have often heard him say to me when 1 had come to Weymouth with him for the yearly outing of the Montacute Church Choir, 'Llewelyn, I think we will now go across the ferry.'

What splendid types of British seafaring men have acted

as Charons to generations of visitors, carefully ushering them in and out of their boats with conscientious courtesy for twopence! These old sailors in well darned blue jerseys, with the undimmed eyes of gannets, grasp oars with their strong fists as deftly as a gardener will handle a potato spade—tough old men, they are of the kind that even death finds it difficult to trip by the heels; silent old men, full of proud reserves, who understand human nature no less well than they do weather signs over Portland—men who have sailed across half the oceans of the world and now rest old bones on the sunny seat under the Nothe, content to be able still to smoke shag and put bread into their mouths.

Some four or five years ago I had occasion to visit the Weymouth Customs House. It had been, they told me, in former times, the house of a wealthy merchant. From its beautiful bow window it was not only possible to overlook the shipping, but to view the White Nose across the familiar Bay. The panelling that covered the walls was considerably older than the time of the South Sea Bubble, and suggested the safer days of a more opulent and more slowly moving commerce under the direction of substantial Weymouth burgomasters, burgomasters well fed on blue vinny, and with an unerring knowledge of a warrantable port wine. A friendly official conducted me into the attic of the house where was to be seen an antique machinery which had been used for hauling up the imported merchandise—sacks full of condiments from the Spice Islands, nutmegs from Zanzibar, sugar and coconuts from the West Indies. At Antwerp I was once shown over a similar house, a tall house standing dizzily on

the edge of a dark navigable canal where men in lace collars had once sat fat by the fire, under the same roof with the produce husbanded from a hundred well planned voyages to the east.

The fine old corner house where Mr. Board teaches type-writing possesses the same atmosphere out of the past, and the laughing young girls who each morning pass under the green lintel of its door, their heads full of gay contemporary interest, tread across a threshold heavy with lost memories.

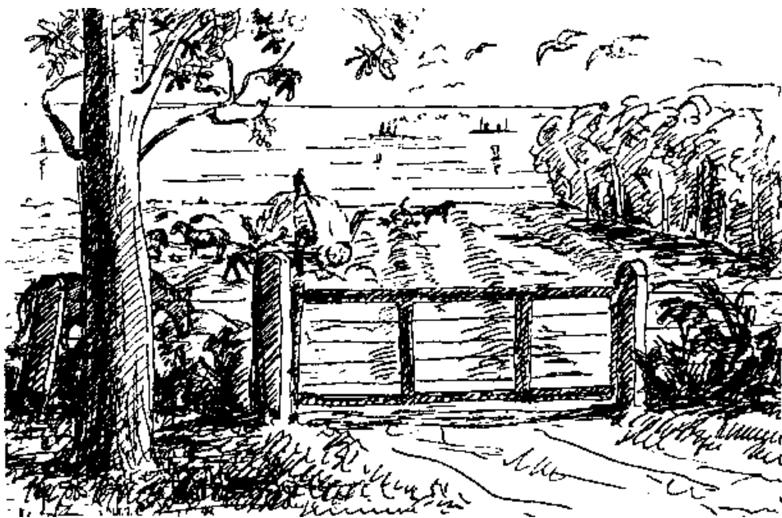
The large, seventeenth century warehouse that stands on the other side of the bridge, and which is now a furnishing store, is as firmly built as a castle, and its ashlar walls of Port-land stones have been washed grey as the lichen on an apple bough by centuries of West country sea-frit blowing in from the Chesil Beach over the dairy meadows of Wyke. There is a great room on the top floor of this ancient building spanned by enormous beams from Dorset forest trees, trees in whose branches squirrels were sleeping, chattering, and playing hide-and-seek when Anne Boleyn was suckling her baby Elizabeth behind the curtains of her royal bed. For age after age the mouth of the river Wey has been a centre about which human interest has concentrated. A dredge can scarcely meddle with its muddy floor but there are brought to light lost treasures of some remote period.

Today the fresh, brackish-smelling quayside of the har-bour constantly shelters shipping that belongs to an older world than ours, poetical hollow ships of wood coming to anchor in this windless pool whose acreage is scarcely so great as one of the smallest water meadows on the banks of

the Frome. And how many times in every year do sly old indoor spiders, and wainscot mice, in the houses in Brunswick Terrace, and in those along the Front, hear old men with newspapers held idly in their hands say, as they stand before the seaside windows, spectacles still on nose, 'The Jersey steamer is now coming in!'

But familiar to all Weymouth inhabitants as are the red funnels of these seaworthy island vessels, they do not have so close a hold upon our heart roots as does the Lulworth steamer, which, with its sturdy well balanced paddles and its cheerful juggings and churnings, still continues each summer to carry holiday subjects of the king across the waters of a bay as white and blue in colour as are the arches of the heavens.

The Haymaking Months



THE HAYMAKING MONTHS

THERE IS NO SEASON IN ALL THE TWELVE MONTHS MORE beautiful than is the haymaking season, when even the common grasses that cover the face of the earth flower. At this time the air we breathe is so richly aromatic that townsmen, going about their business along paved city streets, are constantly refreshed by the smell of fields, coming to them over chimney pots and round street corners, coming to them together with provocative glimpses of summer girls tripping past in splashes of shimmering sunshine.

On the Dorset downs, during the end of June and the beginning of July, the air is heavy, night and day, with the

perfume of drying meadow grass, although the mowing pastures of the Frome and Stour valleys are several miles distant. It is a time when sweat is upon the faces of country-men from dawn to sunset. Now it is that in the full blaze of noon these men of the fields occupy themselves with their primitive toil, tossing the grass to and fro with their bright picks, or lifting it with a deftly balanced fling on to the top of the well-loaded wagon! By the side of each haycock the burdened vehicle advances. Heavy of hoof, the old farm horse of nearly a score of midsummers remains standing placid in the sun, though ready enough, despite the neat caps that protect his ears from the flies, to respond to the familiar broad voice of the carter, and once more, with a struggle of huge haunches, to start the great work-worn wheels revolving.

In every northern country the labour of haymaking must of necessity be undertaken, for during a few short weeks it is imperative that a sufficient quantity of fodder be stored away to outlast the pinched winter months. In the harvest time of August men toil for bread to put into their own mouths, but at the earlier labour of the haymaking season it is for the filling of the hungry bellies of the horse, and of the ox, and of the ass, that arms grow stiff and the backs of old men ache.

Thomas Tusser, who at the time of the Reformation wrote of farming matters in rhyming jingles, gives this advice:

Ij meadow be forward, be mowing of some;
But mowe as the makers may well overcome:
Take heede to the weather, the wind and the skie,
If danger approacheth, then cock apace crie. -

THE HAYMAKING MONTHS

At Midsommer, downe with the brambles and brakes.
And after, abrode with thy forks and thy rakes:
Set mowers a moving, where meadow is cjrowne,
The longer now standing the worse to be mowne.

The haymaking month, though it means work enough for the grown-up people of farm and cottage, provides for their children nothing but holiday afternoons of frolic and delight. For hour after hour they are content to stay tumbling in the grass—and what more pleasant sight is there than to see victuals and drink being carried into the fields at that time of benediction when wood pigeons are beginning-to coo? The afternoon's milking is taking place on the other side of the hedge, with human foreheads pressed close to the hairy abdomens of the large domesticated beasts, who, with ceaselessly swinging tails, allow shining buckets to be filled with their sweet, warm milk.

Especially do country lovers find advantage when the grass is down. At no other season is nature more confederate with their shy desires. Slowly the moon rises excellently bright above a landscape of happy dreams that knows nothing of thunderstorms, of rain. How magical an experience it is for such entranced mortals to walk across deserted midnight hayfields! Through the sacred night they pass together, the winding paths gleaming in the moonshine, and every little bridge they come to, over ditch or stream where dog-roses and honeysuckle are entangled and wet water-plants grow high, delivering up in odorous gusts of air its own particular coolness. On such nights as these, on such faerie

nights, lovers should rest again and again under the 'tann'd Haycock.' Moments of this kind should never be held cheap and never be forgotten. It is not likely that we shall ever know better.

Rigor now is gon to bed.
And Advice with scrupulous head.

Robert Herrick represented the queen of fairies as being 'moon-tanned,' and surely, on such lunar nights, girls can be transformed to the most alluring creatures in the world, without the aid of patch or paste or swansdown powder pad.

Tom Deloney, the Elizabethan ballad maker, used to say that it marked a stage in a man's wisdom when he first discovered that although women were possessed of angel faces, yet not all of them should be judged as belonging to that chaste race. A girl in an evening hayfield can look in the moonlight very fair. With a luminous silver the moon irradiates her white wrists that lie so light, her sensitive temples of ivory.

She excels each mortal thing
Upon the dull earth dwelling
To her let us garlands bring.

The spacious beauty of the English shires during these busy weeks is unsurpassed. Everywhere on the outskirts of London the very sod of the earth is productive of incense. Across Essex flats and over the gipsy lanes of Surrey the breezes that blow are the breezes of a golden continent, of a land of Cathay, 'not here, not here, my child!'

THE HAYMAKING MONTHS

In Dorset, the grass is often mown down to the salt sea's edge, green against blue, so that on late mackerel evenings, fishermen laying lobster-pots on subaqueous rocky beds far out to sea can still smell the land of that lovely county, with its leafy lanes, its pink-campion woods, with its close-set twilight gardens, and its wide-stretching acres of fast drying prostrate herbs.

Herring Gulls

HERRING GULLS

IT IS A HAPPY THING THAT THERE STILL EXIST CERTAIN birds and animals whose fur, feathers, and flesh in no way can be made to contribute to man's creature wants. The herring gull may be included in this fortunate catalogue. Occasionally one of them is shot by some heartless gunman, but for the most part they remain unmolested. Boswell during his journey to the Hebrides complained of a bad night, attributing his insomnia to the fact that the pillow upon which his head rested was fitted with the feathers of sea-fowl. In England, however, our fat farmyards have usually been able to supply us with a sufficiency of bolster stuffing.

It is remarkable if you live near the sea in Dorset to listen

to the herring gulls at the hour before dawn, shattering with their wild wilful living cries the august stillness of the downs. It is a sound that compels the imagination to escape from its contemporaneous limitations. These ancestral, pterodactyl voices, belonging, it might almost seem, to a maniac pack of flying hell-hounds, shock the mind into a remembrance of the planet's long travail, a travail that was taking place for inconceivable ages before our moment of time, and that will continue for inconceivable ages after we are dust. As the veil of the temple was awfully rent asunder on the evening of the crucifixion, so do these outlandish cries rend asunder the grey clouds of the morning's firmament. They resound against the huge bastions of the chalk cliffs, they twang abruptly through the twigs of each wind-combed thorn-edge. If you are out on the hills at this early hour the first few sea-fowl to pass over your head will appear as black as ravens against the sky. It is only as it grows gradually lighter that their white ventral feathers can be discovered, though later, as they come to settle upon the green ground in the broad daylight, the white plumage of their heads and bodies arrests the attention as do patches of lingering snow in February.

In many ways the movements of these gulls are more interesting to watch in the winter than in the summer. In the months of December and January the downland valleys would offer prospects monotonous enough if the eye was not continually following the effortless aerial feats of these white birds coming in from the sea all day long to examine damp sods of turf for unlucky worms, and the bare platforms of the warrens for the remains of some rabbit done miserably

to death by trapper or stoat, never again destined to scratch a lop ear in easy contentment as it enjoys the last hour of sunshine.

Down at Lulworth Cove there is a notable old fisherman named Levi Miller who seldom goes out in his boat without a pair of herring gulls settling on the gunwale 'to hollo for the guts' of the fish he catches. On one occasion these birds fought so desperately over the head of a pilchard that the old man feared they would kill each other, and, leaving his pots and his oars, went to separate them, pulling them apart by their webbed feet as a market woman might separate a couple of truculent barn-yard cocks. How bright these birds can appear on a sunny morning! What a heartless, natural beauty they possess as they sit screaming for their lucent victuals under Bindon Hill. The sunlight glitters and gleams upon each rippling wave, the headlands shine, the white sails of the boats shine, and the draughts of fishes drawn up out of the sea resemble bars of quicksilver.

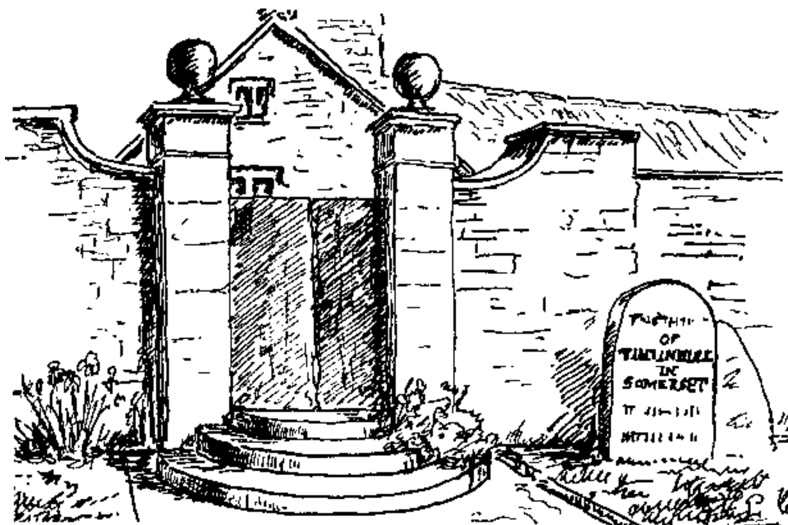
Herring gulls are prodigious gluttons. It is a common thing to see them disgorge themselves after a surfeit. A fisherman told me once this odd story. He and his mate were returning over the hills at dusk after an unsuccessful raid upon a fox's earth when he bet his companion a shilling that he would bring down a solitary gull that was returning to the cliffs after a day spent in fluttering behind a plough's tail. The merciless shot was fired and the proud bird faltered and fell. Its body struck the ground with a heavy thud and before it died, in great distress it opened wide its coloured beak and vomited. There was liberated in this way from the dark

dungeon of its stomach nearly a pint of worms, lowly prisoners who, as though they were little the worse for their singular experience, set about wriggling off into the grass.

How startling is the irrepressible vigour of life manifested on every plane! Dr. Johnson once remarked to Boswell, 'No, Sir, to act from pure benevolence is not possible for finite beings. Human benevolence is mingled with vanity, interest, or some other motive.' If such a view can be taken of our tentative altruism, what room for disinterested action could possibly remain for these birds whose wilful yelps of self-assertion break so violently each day against the ceiling of the heaven?

If the chalk promontory of Bats Head be visited in the spring at the nesting season it is a moving sight to watch the desperate swooping flights that the birds make at the approach of a human being. A new note of trouble in their crying tells clearly of the selfless anxiety they experience for the welfare of their hatched nestlings, who, with quaint grey backs humped and fluffy, stand unsteadily on precipitous ledges blinking at their immemorial inheritance of earth, air, and water.

Tintinhull Memories



TINTINHULL MEMORIES

THE OTHER DAY AS I RESTED ON MY BALCONY LOOKING out at the mountains of Switzerland glittering bright in the frosty sunshine the postman arrived with a parcel from England. It contained a photograph of the stocks under the old elm at Tintinhull which a young girl, living beneath the shadow of Ham Hill, had thought might be of interest to me. She had judged rightly for the faded picture revived in my mind I know not how many memories.

Tintinhull is situated scarcely two miles distant from my old home at Montacute, and the village, lying as it does, between the Fosse Way and the road from Yeovil, still remains relatively untroubled by the rude invasion of modern

traffic. I have visited it at all hours and in all seasons. I have visited it on cold December mornings when there was a sprinkling of Jack Frost on the backs of each one of Farmer Mead's sheep, and cat-ice about everywhere on the roads, and when the mighty hammer-strokes of Blacksmith Allen and his sons would sound through the clear air as far as Kiss-me-down Covert; and again I have visited it on sultry July noon-tides when the very ducks on the small village pond were too drowsy even so much as to dabble for their lowly viands. My brother John and I used to like to walk there in the Easter holidays after tea. It was a fancy of ours that in no other one of the neighbouring villages did the April evenings fall with so charmed a grace upon leaf and grass and tile and thatch. We never wearied of the scene presented by Tintinhull in the twilight hour, with old sun-bonnet women crossing to the Lamb Inn to fetch cider for their suppers, with tittering gloving girls idling after boys with cowslips stuck in their caps, and with the voices of children floating on the soft Somerset air, on the soft spring air that seemed to smell of opening lilac buds in unseen gardens, and of ground ivy banks, and of the warmed feathers of little hedgerow wild birds.

Tintinhull, or Tyncnell as it was formerly called, is a village redolent of the past. Traces of the ' balks,' which once divided the strips of land of the mediaeval tillage system, may yet be seen in its surrounding fields. The church was originally an Early English one and there is still to be noticed in the chancel a remarkable double piscina of that period. The porch of the church is also notable, with its ribbed roof

and ancient nail-studded door, through which so many men and women have passed to and from worship, generation after generation.

How old, how very old the churchyard seems! It is scarce possible to imagine a more suitable place for young people to come to who wish to gain instruction as to the transitory nature of human life. Anybody who loiters in this plot of ground, overlooked by the windows of the old Rectory (now called the Court House) requires no homily from the antic sundial above the porch as to the ordained terms of our existence. There are new gravestones, and old gravestones, and altar-tombs ruined by time, in this acre of memories. Very clearly they show that death, even in so sheltered a parish, seldom leaves the sod undisturbed. In June the mounds may lie bland and the churchyard sward unbroken, with bees carrying their honey bags over swaying grasses, with hayfields being mown on every side, and man and beast and fly content in the sweltering work-a-day sunshine; but behold, if visited again before Saint Swithun's, another newly turfed grave is sure to be seen conspicuously and pathetically adorned with Madonna lilies from some mid-summer cottage garden, bereft now and untended.

The village of Tintinhull is especially distinguished for the number of grassy lanes that abound in its neighbourhood. The old road that once ran between Montacute and Uchester may still be traced out of Montacute as far as the Mill, and from there to Windmill, and so on to Kiss-me-down Covert. From this lovely spinney—Badgeowljay wood as my brother John named it—it crosses the Yeovil road to become a grass-

grown halter-path, so unfrequented that it is difficult to believe that it ever represented a main trackway of the district.

There is also a lane below the churchyard wall that leads into a lovely green grove that passes between rich pastures in the direction of Carte Gate. Whenever I see dog-roses my mind is immediately carried back to this happy rural thoroughfare. I have been there when the hedges on both sides were garlanded with these delicate flowers, to be looked upon only perhaps by the preoccupied bright eyes of a predatory magpie, the hungry eyes of a snatch-as-snatch-can gypsy pad-nag, or by the blinking eyes of some drowsy dairy-man-Dick hurrying through the dew of dawn after his cows, his heavy boots not even yet laced up.

To the right of the Dower House opposite the Churchyard wall, there is yet another lane. This lane leads past the Queen Anne Manor eastward to the free fields. When I was a young man this unpretentious but beautiful dwelling house was owned by a highly endowed Doctor of Divinity and although even in those days I felt myself remote from theological controversies I found it a pleasant enough privilege to walk and talk with Doctor Price in his sheltered garden. Doctor Price was sacerdotal to his finger tips. He was an exceptional man, small and frail in appearance, but possessed of a Spartan spirit. Even his wan sensitive smile, for all its charm and urbanity, was never able to conceal the passionate partisanship that he felt for the cause of the clerical faction of his allegiance.

Of all his garden simples he loved none better than his

rue, and this romantic herb of grace grew freely along the borders of his protected paths of Ham Hill stone, yellow in the sunlight. Many a time have I sat with him and tried, as he deftly poured out tea from his silver teapot, to follow the intricate workings of his subtle mind. On these occasions I used to observe with refreshment the valerian, wilful and free, that topped the wall overlooking the lane. "Kiss-me-quick," my father has told me, is the correct country name for this lovely flower.

Opposite the old Manor there stands a little known, secluded tavern, and on a fine June afternoon, when the hollyhocks and Canterbury Bells and old-fashioned pinks called ''sops-in-wine" are all out in flower, a mug of seasoned ale drunk on the wooden bench in its garden will remove from the heart all troubles, and from the head all arguments.

'Bring us in no brownc bred, for that is made of brane,
Nor bring us in no white bred, for therein is no gane,
But bring us in good ale!

Bring us in no bacon, for that is passing fat,
But bring us in good ale, and glfe us enough of that;
And bring us in good ale!

Bring us in no capons fleshch, for that is ofte dere,
Nor bring us in no doke's flesch, for they slobber in the mere,
But bring us in good aleV

Bran.

A Montacute Field

A MONTACUTE FIELD

. . . 0 wild-raving winds! ifyou ever do roar
By the house and the elms from where Vve a-come,
Breathe up at the window, or call at the door,
And tell you ve a-Jound me a-thinking oj home.

WILLIAM BARNES

THE MINDS OF BANISHED MEN WILL OFTEN REVERT TO their distant homes. A dozen times in a day they will be haunting in reveries the fields, lanes, hills, and woodland banks of their childhood memories. I know it is constantly so with me. Often I may appear to be studiously contemplating the sun-lit snow fields of the Alps, when all

the while through the swift agency of the inward eye, I am in reality revisiting in my imagination familiar country spots in the neighbourhood of the village of Montacute.

Most of all in these mental wanderings does my mind remember every sloping contour of a certain historical field situated beyond Batemoor, on the foot-path-way towards Bagnel, the most outlying farm of the parish. The name of the large romantic field is Witcombe, and that good physician and gifted antiquarian, the late Dr. Hensleigh Walter, used to tell me that a mediaeval hamlet once flourished upon its acres. At the time of the Black Death all its inhabitants died and the steading was never again re-established. To this day it is possible, when the light falls in a certain fashion, either in the late afternoon or during the first hour after dawn, to detect where some of the old dwellings stood, cottages probably little better than rough sheds of wattle and daub, with roofs thatched with grass, straw, or reed from the marshlands that bordered the nearby stream of drinking water.

Somerset was one of the counties that suffered severely from the terrifying pestilence, possibly on account of the entertainment by the Bristol merchants of some of those wandering brigs of disaster, which, loaded down to their gunwales with cargos of richest treasure had been compelled to keep to the high seas, beaten away from every port of Europe with horror and dread and merciless ferocity. Bristol was in the fourteenth century the second city of England, and, with the exception perhaps of Norwich, it became more plague-stricken than any other town of the realm. The shocking mortality which accompanied this dire sickness from the

Orient, with its horrible symptoms of shivering, blood-spitting, and blackening glands, followed by sudden death, fell heaviest on the poor, the well-to-do being not only free to fly before the face of the scourge, but also physically in better case to resist its ravages when attacked. The Bishop of Bath and Wells, for example, prudently avoided the more populous districts of his diocese, quickly retiring to one of the smallest of his manors, his manor at Wiveliscombe. The plague, it is now believed, was communicated by the rat-carried black flea. It rapidly spread over the whole of England: 'There was no more care for dying folk than men would care nowadays for goats.' Scarcely would the Montacute death-bell cease from tolling for one departing soul than it would boom out again for another: 'All men that hear my mournfull sound repent before you lye in ground.' The poem by Thomas Nashe *In the Time of Pestilence,* though composed at a later visitation, gives us an excellent idea of the prevailing mood on the occasions of such awful epidemics:

Adieu, farewell earth's bliss!
This world uncertain is;
Fond arc life's lustful joys
Death proves them all but toys,
None from his darts can fly ;
I am sick, I must die—
Lord, have mercy on us!

The cattle wandered free upon Chinnock Ridge, the corn was left unharvested and the young man who made merry with an unexpected legacy on Monday, lay mute in the

churchyard's yellow clay by the time the sacring-bell of St. Catharine's was heard to tinkle on the following Sunday; and everywhere 'for fear and horror, men scarcely dared to practise the works of piety and mercy—that is, to visit the sick and bury the dead . . . throughout our scattered villages and homesteads the wretched labourers and poor folks, with their families: . . . died by the roadside, or among their crops or in the cottages . . . not only did the speaking or association with sick folk bring disease to the sound, or involve both in one common death, but even the touch of their clothes, or anything else which the sick had touched and handled, seemed in itself to convey the same sickness to him who had touched.'

Witcombe, the field of these dolorous memories, is situated behind Batemoor Barn a little southward of the old coaching road of the West Country, which, passing the ancient hostelry at Pye Corner, runs through Odcombe and so over Ham Hill to Exeter. The valley on its eastern side is sheltered by Horses' Covert, and on the west by Norton Covert. It is a veritable vale of springtime. In April Witcombe echoes every few minutes to the mocking laughter of the woodpecker, as in lifting flights it casts a glancing volatile shade across the green turf, close-cropped by mild eyed sheep from the Abbey Farm. On both sides of the field's steep slopes the gorse grows in dark masses rendering the air balmy-soft in this windless sanctuary of sheltered peace. No field near Montacute is better placed for hearing the cuckoo for the first time, or indeed for seeing the first swallow, fresh in from the restless wastes of sea beyond Golden Cap.

How the air of Witcombe can tremble with the songs of linnets—the breast feathers of the small birds daintily flushed —one madrigal answering another from prickly spray to prickly spray! Witcombe is also remarkable for its wild daffodils, short stalked native flowers that have made glad the hearts of I know not how many Montacute children; rejoicing also elderly village women from Bishopston and Middlestreet, good, understanding women, with a sound homespun culture that comes from reading deep rather than wide, who have walked up here by the Batemoor footpath for their first spring holiday. I have always believed these daffodils to be the descendants of those that once grew in the gardens of the ruined hamlet, and I suspect the same lineage belongs to the plants of hellebore to be found here, a flower much prized by mediaeval herbalists as a cure against headaches and all melancholy vapours.

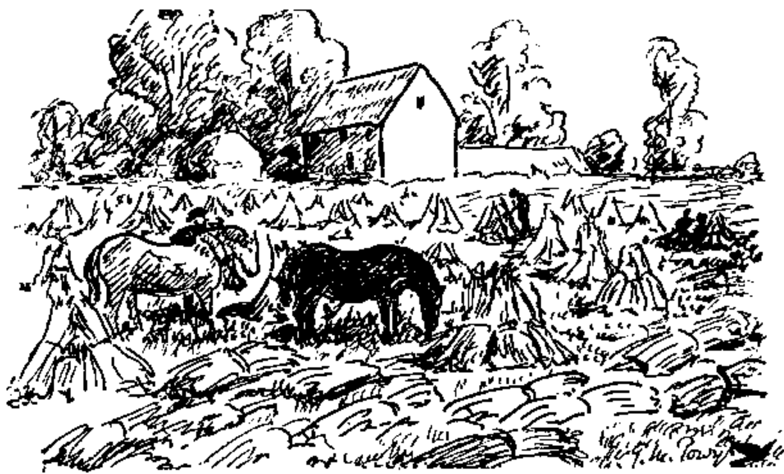
How peerless these pastoral slopes can seem at Easter time! It was in the old withy-bed below the field called on maps by the beautiful name of Bride's Mead, that our nurse Emily would gather the pussy willows she loved so much, leaving the family perambulator—a broad beamed open conveyance constructed to carry three children sitting up side by side— in the safe harbourage of some hedge-shelter; and allowing us our freedom in the jungle of moss and marsh-marigolds, thrushes' nests and newly arrived chiff-chaffs.

Gone, gone, gone, all gone, the near past, together with the far past; yet there must be even now many morsels of obdurate matter—trinkets, arrow-heads, shards—beneath the sod that would tell of the breathing country people who

laughed and wept and called and sang under these fair green hills six hundred years ago. How many generations of Montacute people must have returned to the sweet sequestered village up through these peaceful acres from Tinker's Bubble! The eighteenth century Montacute poet, Thomas Shoe], must have come this way time and again, and before him footsore monks returning to the Abbey from pedestrian visits with scrip and staff into Devonshire, and always and always the humble field-labourers of each patient age.

Surely truth is to be found in the old words of wisdom 'Oure life shall passe awaye as the trace of a cloude, and come to naught as the myst that is dryven awaye with the beames of the Sonne, and put downe with the heate thereof. Oure name also shall be forgotten litle and litle, and no man shall have oure workes in remembrance.' As insubstantial as drifting mist we pass, one and all, across earth's lucky grass, never to bide in one stay; and there was, perhaps, no little reason in that man who made himself merry at the expense of Death, calling him to naught for being but 'a foolish devourer of fretful shadows.'

The Harvest



THE HARVEST

FEW SPECTACLES ARE MORE HAPPY TO LOOK UPON THAN a field of ripening corn. It was one of the sights of earth-life that used especially to refresh the eyes of Jesus, and no man who has even the rudest comprehension of human history can fail to appreciate such a vision. It is believed that ourwheat derives from awild grass thatgrows on certain mountain slopes of Syria. Together with millet, barley, and rice this ancient cereal food is to be associated with the earliest attempts at agriculture undertaken by our ancestors after their traditional manner of life as berry-gathering, root-grubbing, wandering hunters had been abandoned.

When sown in the mud-flats of the Nile and of the Euphrates valley, mud-flats steaming and fecund under a hot

sun, the seeding capacity of the common herbage was gradually developed, until, in due time, it became man's staple food—the staff of life! Small wonder that the treasured grain has got itself so deeply lodged in the thought and culture of all races, in their speech, in their poetry, and in the most sacred rites of their religions.

A field of corn is beautiful in every stage of its growth. It is beautiful in April, when the little boys, called in Dorset 'crow starvers,' are watching over it:

An while the screamen bird-bwoy shook
Wi little zun-burnt hand,
His clacker at the bright-wing'd rook
About the zeeded land.

It is beautiful in the month of May when the plover has hatched her four mottled eggs, so explicitly arranged; and again beautiful in June, when the passage of the wind, ruffling over its green levels, becomes as clear to the eye of a wayfarer as ever it did to good Master Ascham abroad during the first half of the sixteenth century on the snow-covered heights of Topeliffe-upon-Swale. 'I might see very well, the whole nature of the wind as it blew that day . . . . Sometime the wind would be not past two yards broad, and so it would carry the snow as far as I could see.' Wheat is a god-like grass, it ever gathers its virtue from the sun. There would seem to be a strange affinity between the two—between the golden sun and the golden grain!

Harvest has always offered an occasion for human rejoicing. Our own Teutonic ancestors were accustomed to carrv

thank-offerings to their deity at this time of the year, and such impulses of gladness and gratitude survive still in many a belief and custom of old Europe. For centuries the cutting down of the last sheaf of corn has been regarded as an action full of significance. It is rumoured that, after its accomplishment, when the men and dogs have gone and the lonely field waits, a phantom figure may often be seen drifting across the stubble—the corn ghost, the corn mother, Demeter! There would even seem to be some connection between this belief and the mysterious customs of the north country that are referred to as 'calling the mare.' The reaper who cuts the last sheaf must call out 'I have her, 1 have her, 1 have her.' 'What have you? What have you?' call back his fellows. And then, as though fearful of uttering a dreaded name, he answers with the odd subterfuge of—'A mare, a mare, a mare!'

Robert Herrick, whose wise and genial spirit understood well enough the human predicament, never failed to follow behind the last wagon to leave the harvest fields of his parishioners. This wagon was called in Devonshire the hock-cart, and in it was carried a sheaf of corn decorated to represent the great Earth-mother. It was characteristic of Robert Herrick, this good Epicurean poet, to remind the jolly reapers that their yoked oxen deserved to feast as well as they:

Drink, frollick, boyes, till all be blythe,
Feed and grow Jat, and as jc eat.
Be mindjull that the laboring neat,'
As you, may have their full oj meat I

' Work bullocks.

It is most certain that these hock-cart processions, winding their way between the tall hedges already festooned with straw from previous swaying wagons, often resembled in their exultation, the older, freer celebrations of Pagan days. This at least would seem to be suggested by the lines:

While other rusticks, lesse attent
To prayers than to merryment,
Run after with their breeches rent.

Our church Harvest-thanksgiving services present mild examples of the same spirit of rejoicing, and dull are those who cannot respond to the sight of an old country chancel decked out with the fat produce of the cottage gardens—vegetable marrows of record size, prize potatoes, turnips, beet-roots, parsnips, and onions—the smell of the moss and dahlias about the lectern, mingling with the immemorial dust of divinity and the peculiar odour of black Sunday coats and of summer frocks but freshly lifted from lavender-bag-chests-of-drawers with broken handles.

It is to be regretted that the more secular celebration known as the Harvest Home should be fast disappearing. Honest good-natured farmers should see to it that this old custom is preserved, and that the sweating hours of the corn-field are properly rewarded with beef and beer, Yorkshire pudding, and dumplings hot from the pan.

Harvest-home, harvest-home,
We have ploughed, we have sowed,
We have reaped, we have mowed,
We have brought home every load.

THE HARVEST

The days of a man's life vanish away swiftly. This is a Bible lesson never to be forgotten. Life is short as a dream; when a man has learnt this he has learnt all.

Hey, nonny no!
Men are fools that wish to die!
Is't not fine to dance and sing
When the bells of death do ring?

Ambition, envy, avarice are the sneak-thieves of our hours. Because gold sparkles we must needs snap at the bait like so many sulky jack-pike with chilled bellies clapped to the mud at a pond's bottom. Life is to be accepted and honoured upon its lowest terms. If we can sit undisturbed in the sun but for one hour the drudgery of a whole day's work can be redeemed. To squander our lives in base and petty pre-occupations is but to lead apes in hell. There exists a very old harvest song of the Swiss that may be translated thus:

Reapers sing a merry tune,
Little sickles tinkle sad and soft—
The little sickles that bring death
To the ears of corn.
Spring up reapers to the dance I
Do you not hear the voice oj Love,
Love that is stronger than bread,
Stronger than Death?

Buffalo Intruders

BUFFALO INTRUDERS

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO LIVE FOR LONG IN THE INTERIOR OF Africa without experiencing odd adventures with the wild life of the country. During the five vears that I was managing a stock farm in Kenya 1 became privy to many of the secret habits of lions, leopards, cheetahs, rhinoceroses, hippopotami, hyaenas, warthogs, baboons, and zebras. There were, however, several wild beasts that 1 never had to do with, and the most interesting of them was the buffalo.

My brother William whose sojourn upon the great African plateau has been five times as long as my own, told me a queer story connected with this last animal. He has two farms under Mount Kenya and these farms are separated by

a tract of dense forest land about ten miles wide. The forest is a piece of rough country that has been little disturbed, and it abounds with creatures of every description, the most dangerous of these being perhaps bufifalos. My brother of necessity constantly rides through the dividing jungle and therefore has learned to take chance encounter with its wilder denizens lightly enough.

A year ago a native drover arrived one morning at his steading to announce that two buffalos had appeared out of the forest and had joined themselves up with his grazing bullocks. My brother at once rode out to the feeding grounds, and to his astonishment discovered that his herd had actually been augmented by the presence of these two heavy-headed strangers. Seeing that the bufifalos were conducting themselves with decorum, and not being a man to destroy life wantonly, he judged it best to leave them to enjoy the company they so much coveted. He supposed that they were two old animals who, having been driven away from one of the forest buffalo herds by younger bulls, were seeking by this unprecedented intrusion to satisfy the gregarious instinct so deeply implanted in their natures.

The confidence of the two animals, however, never grew strong enough for them to be willing to enter the cattle boma. As soon as ever the lowing herd approached the enclosure at sundown and smelt the air tainted with the blue evening smoke of the camp-fires, they would detach themselves from the shouldering company and amble oflf to some nearby thorn tree, where, as darkness fell, they would couch themselves, heavy back to heavy back, these two old animals

at rest beneath the old heavens, alone and rejected on the open plain, with nothing for them to see but stars, and nothing for them to hear save the soughing of the veldt winds through the dry ant-nests, that, fast-lodged in crooked branches, swayed backwards and forwards above their weighty craniums. My brother let the eccentric brutes have their will. He became accustomed to seeing them with his cattle. Nor did the Meru herders seem to be in any way incommoded by their presence. They continued after their manner to loll about under the shadow of scrub and rock, keeping, for all their nonchalant appearance, an alert and wary eye upon the grazing beasts for which they were responsible.

Month followed month and the two aged buffalos, now that the click of horn and tread of hoof were once more continually in their ears, improved in their condition, and because of their regular habits and regained composure, were soon in as good case as ever they had been. It might perhaps sometimes happen that an ox would nuzzle for a tuft of especially succulent grass that one of the buffalos, grazing flank to flank with it, had already marked for its own, and on such occasions the wild herbivore would playfully push the domesticated beast off with a friendly nudge of his dark frontal bone. My brother would frequently be worried by people coming to his farm to be shown buffalo and he now found himself in a position to satisfy the desires of such importunate visitors with the least possible inconvenience. Being aware that nothing lards a neat's back so well as the master's eye he had no objection to riding out to his bullocks, and, in this way, was able to convert what might have been

an irksome civility into the ordinary routine of a farmer's day.

All went well till the beginning of the present year when, within a month of the time he was leaving for a holiday in England, the two buffalos began suddenly to show signs of truculence. They never attacked the herders, but they became resentful of the presence of any native who might happen to pass near the place they had selected for their night's rest. One boy was chased and only just got up a tree in time; another was actually tossed, and though he escaped with his life, his arm was broken. It was clear that the two animals were making themselves a real nuisance on the I arm and would have to be destroyed.

My brother arrived at the bullock camp at dawn and was shown a thorn tree under which the two rogues were lying. The grass beneath the tree was tall and it was several minutes before he could see well enough to risk a shot. At the sound of the report of the gun both animals leapt to their feet and began a furious battle. It was a repetition of the old fairy story in which the little tailor throws a stone at one of two sleeping giants who, immediately suspecting his companion of mischief, fights with him to the death. The wounded buffalo, startled out of his five drowsy wits by the sudden shock of the bullet, concluded that his fellow must have been in some way responsible for the anguish he felt, and in a fit of ungovernable passion attempted to revenge so gross a treachery. Locked together in a raging combat they both presented easy targets for my brother's rifle.

When he came up to them he found that one had a broken

horn and the other was so senile as to have scarcely a sound tooth left in his mouth. He gave orders for them both to be flayed and for reins to be made of their hides, buffalo hide being famous for providing the best possible ropes, especially when it is properly worked up with the hands and afterwards softened with rubbed-in lion's fat.

My brother confessed to me, however, that it was in no mood of exultation that he returned to his homestead, for his heart had become attached to these strange monsters who had so unexpectedly taken it into their ponderous heads to end their lives on the quiet pasturing grounds of Kisima.

Pity him, this fallen chief,
All his splendour, all his strength,
All his body''s breadth and length
Dwindled down with shame and grief,
Half the bull he was bejore,
Bones and leather, nothinq more.

Montacute Hill

MONTACUTE HILL

Sweet Michael's loveliest of the hills around,
With beauty clad with constant verdure crowned
Beneath thy shade (with name from thee derived)
Sweet Atontacute, through numerous years has thrived.

THOMAS SHOEL

FEW LANDMARKS IN SOUTH SOMERSET ARE MORE CON-spicuous than is that of St. Michael's Mount under which lies the old-world village of Montacute. The hill rises immediately behind the parish church and the Abbey and overlooks Middlestreet, Bishopston, and the Borough, and indeed each cottage garden, however secluded,

of the lovely hamlet. 'After the Hill of Senlac and the vanished choir of Waltham we may fairly place the wooded hill of Montacute,' wrote the historian Freeman. Small wonder therefore that Thomas Shoel, the poet, was so passionately fond of the hill and is rumoured to have sat for hours upon its crest contemplating the life of his natal village:

The leather dresser at his perch too stands
And the keen knife employs his busy hands.
While the neat glover seated at the door
Or in the porch, employs the busy hour.

Or meditating upon the wider West Country prospects that open so spaciously to the view of the wayfarer from the summit of this green hill of legend and romance.

As children, when the floods were out in the Christmas holidays and the half of the county of Somerset would lie before us white as a sheet, there would often be good skating in the meadows of Ilchester, and I remember well when we were returning from one of these expeditions along the main street of the old Parliamentary Borough town noticing how Montacute Hill appeared precisely placed in the centre of the wintry horizon as though, in fact, it had been deliberately set to embellish the landscape outline so sharply segmented by the parallel roofs that bordered the old thoroughfare—the Roman road straight as a pike-staff, and in the exact centre of our vision five miles away the familiar pyramidal hill of our home. The form of a hill of so singular a symmetry must have been

well known to the legionaries, and later to the Saxons, especially in those dark days when the fortifications of the Conqueror's 'insatiable brother' began to show themselves upon the hill's crest. Roger Bacon must have known its shape well, as also many a gaoler from the notorious 'Den' in their off hours; to say nothing of generations of humbler folk—waggoners trudging behind wains of loaded hay, drovers at the tails of shambling water-meadow bullocks fat as butter, white-bonneted women with balanced buckets of well-water at their arm's ends, and children with marbles and coloured whip-tops in their pockets.

If St. Michael's hill has been a diurnal object of vision to the townsmen of Ilchester, how much more to the actual dwellers in Montacute! All the dead who for century after century have been gathered into the churchyard of St. Catharine's, from the oldest grave to the newest grave, must have known and deeply loved its quiet presence so strong and so unchanging. What the eternal hills of the Promised Land were to the imagination of the dying and exiled Israel, and what the Acropolis was to the Athenians, Miles Hill, this symbol of the enduring earth, has been to the people of Montacute. How many Phelipses, lying now in their family vault near the church porch, must have looked up at its lofty height from the oriels of their proud gallery; how many quarrymen and gloving women must have glanced up at it through twilight window panes. Mrs, William Phelips used to tell how a former lady of Montacute House, Dame Betty I think she was called, had herself planted the hill with the forest trees that flourished in so

much glory at the end of the nineteenth century. Every afternoon she had carried acorns, chestnuts, or nursery slips to the cherished slopes. What a splendour, if the story is true, the lady's patient task bequeathed to later generations. Well do I remember the hill in its leafy magnificence. The winding trackway that led eventually to the tower was over-shadowed with timber of enormous proportions 'enfolding sunny spots of greenery.' The hill's top was crowned with Scotch firs—lofty, haggard trees that had confronted many an autumn gale and the tallest of which, a veritable forest king, was eventually struck down, a wild cross of Leodgaresburgh laid at its length, a mass of splintered deal for fools to wonder at.

How impressive an eminence it was in those days, the green mountain which in winter and in summer so utterly dominated the village of golden stones below. The great trees offered sanctuary to every kind of bird, but especially to rooks. Montacute Hill was famed for possessing the largest King-rookery in all Somerset and perhaps in all the west of England. In the winter thousands upon thousands of these birds would come here to roost. On wild autumn nights, at the hour when lamps were being lit, it was scarcely possible to hear oneself speak in the Montacute streets so great would be the clamour set up by the hosts of birds that were passing across the sky.

How we used to watch them from our nursery window—rising and falling, crying and calling, with outstretched ragged wings. It was impossible not to believe that each single one of these fowls was experiencing through bone and

feather some strange ecstasy, each quill of them tingling to the whistling squalls, each air-filled bone of them full of the storm's frenzy, full of the frenzy of the great west wind, of the rainy wind, sweeping in from the sea, in from the Bishop rocks, and in from the uncharted wastes of the Atlantic, where masterless oceanic roarers thundered and screamed beneath a scudding sky of grey desolation. Before such tumults the huge trees would sway backwards and forwards delivering themselves of hoarse lamentations, their vexed branches thick clustered all night long with venerable hopper-crows whose beaks were polished white as silver by the constant exercise of corn-stealing from every ground between Avalon and Camelot and Babylon Hill and Pilsden Pen.

On calm evenings, when the smoke was rising straight and blue from the Montacute chimneys, the rooks would fly directly to their roosting place with scarce a caw, but should snow be falling they would be affected as much as they were by rainy winds. In such weather their voices would sound out of the sky with a terrifying resonance as the flakes fell thickly and more thickly—the multitudinous voices of these sapient birds, blacker in colour than Satan, who were performing some strange saraband of their own amidst the white falling goose-feathers from the Polden Hills.

Polden Hills are plucking their geese
Faster, faster, faster.

The magnificent timber had reached to its maturity and the Squire decided eventually to let loose the lumber men into that virginal abode of leaf and branch and bough. In a

year's time the hill had been rendered as **bald** as a **skull.** Under this abomination of desolation the winter palace of the rook tribe was utterly destroyed. The birds were dispersed and began to form inconsequent colonies wherever they could find a few high trees—in the spinney by the Mill, in the beech trees surrounding John Scott's old house, and more especially in the half grown spruces that adorned the neighbouring height of Hedgecock. I am told that the tower of St. Michael's Mount is once again hidden by timber, but for more than a quarter of a century it remained confronting sun, moon, and stars as lonely as a unicorn's horn. The lesser vegetation was altered also. In the place of the garlic, with its broad green lily-of-the-valley-like leaves which used to carpet the damp forest floor under the attic nurseries of the rooks, there suddenly appeared masses of a new and unfamiliar growth, the habit of which rivalled in height the Jerusalem artichokes that prospered each autumn at the bottom of our garden. We children were amazed by the springing up of this unexpected jungle almost tropical in its density. The stalks of the plant were large and stout and in a very especial way served our turn for lances to play with. At a loss to know what manner of vegetation they belonged to we persuaded our father to come up and inspect this new gigantic wort. He pronounced the plant to be hemlock, but whether it was the same weed out of which the poison given to Socrates was brewed I do not know.

In the immediate neighbourhood of Montacute there are many woods, copses, and spinneys. Indeed the Montacute meadows may be said to be over-shadowed, nay, embowered

by a hundred flower-growing retreats. In Summer House Wood periwinkles can be found in February. In Horses Covert on the Eve of St. Mark anemones and primroses jostle each other in mossy tree-trunk lawns. In early June the trees of Park Covert shelter wide levels of bluebells as though their trembling leaves were suspended above mirage lakes of ineffable grace. There is no one of these sylvan haunts, however, that has so strong a hold upon the imagination of the Montacute folk as Miles Hill. In a peculiar way this wooded Tor seems to belong to them and they to it. Silently, solemnly it has watched over the village through the long centuries. Club Day after Club Day it has witnessed, with the Kingsbury band playing the Kingsbury jig along the historic streets to the dancing gladness of boy and girl. On cold starlight nights the echoes of the ringers practising have drifted past its dim timber into the farthest borders of space. Each Sunday morning the bells of St. Catharine have knolled to church. On the great tenor bell these words are engraved in an ancient lettering: 'He that hearest me to sound, Let him alwaies praise the Lord.' Wedding feast has followed wedding feast, and funeral procession, funeral procession—an unceasing evidence of the fleeting nature of life in the valley below. Proud painted peacocks have screamed at the west wind and cocks have crowed at the sun's rising over Vagg Farm. Men and women have laughed and wept and hated and loved each other year after year, and all has taken place under the shelter of a hill of beauty that is looked upon every day with Unmindful familiarity by the tillers and the reapers of the most fertile acreage of Somerset.

A Somerset Christmas

A SOMERSET CHRISTMAS

IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO IMAGINE THAT OLD PEOPLE cannot enjoy the feast of Christmas. Many a grandfather and many a grandmother, seated close and quiet by the fire amid the revelries of children and young people, enter with their long, long memories more deeply into the true spirit of the night than do their light-hearted descendants for all their shining eyes, tossing curls, and merry mistletoe-laughing voices.

Yet Christmas remains, in its essence, the especial festival of the young. It is they who possess imaginations sensitive enough to respond with unspoilt eagerness to the glamour of the day. In my own case it has been most certainly so, and with the remembrance of half a century of Christmases held

in my mind, it is to the first twenty that I look back with the most joy. My brother Bertie and I would begin to be aware of the approach of Christmas even before the end of the autumn term at Sherborne. We used, I remember, to walk to a certain holly tree growing in the field to the right of Babylon Hill from which we could look across the town of Yeovil to the leafless outlines of Odcombe, Montacute Hill, Hedgecock, and Ham Hill fretted in a miniature landscape on the wintry western horizon. This last-Sunday-of-the-term ritual we performed in a mood of exultant anticipation of the Christmas holidays.

No Christmas Day could have been passed more simply and innocently than ours was at Montacute Vicarage, and yet in retrospect every moment of it seems to have been full of an indescribable golden happiness. The celebrations had their beginning on Christmas Eve with the decorating of the horns in the hall and the pictures in the dining-room. All the day long my brother and I would have been busy collecting, in two large baker's baskets, moss and fir branches for the church, and holly and mistletoe for our own home. The best branches of mistletoe in the glebe orchard we had marked down at the end of the summer holidays when the ground was still thick-strewn with over-ripe, wasp-eaten apples, but these we kept for our requirements at home, and in truth I do not think the pious ladies who were so busy with the pulpit and lectern and windows and pews of St. Catharine's, would have welcomed the strange white-berried plant, the very look of whose horned Pagan leaves is remote from ecclesiastical sentiment.

At midnight, with the appearance of the carol singers, the real Christmas celebrations would begin. The men—masons, farm labourers, quarrymen, and gardeners—would stand with their lanterns outside the front door to sing 'Joy to the World,' a Christmas carol, the words and music of which had been composed by the delicate genius of Thomas Shoel. At the first notes of the concertina, flute, and harmonium sounding along the dark rambling passage of the silent house, we children would hasten to the dining-room, and collecting on the sofa, wrapped in dressing-gowns and blankets, would peer out into the darkness to see what we might see of the dim dignified figures of old Geard, of Mr. William Johnston, of Charley Blake, of Russ, and of a score of other notable personalities familiar enough in the streets of Montacute forty years ago. How strange it was to look out upon the drive, with the tennis lawn obscurely visible beyond the wicker-work fence, and to hear the ancient strains redolent of man's desperate hopes, rise up from the secure Victorian garden into the sky, into eternity! The nativity music would be brought to an end at last with the words [4]A merry Christmas and a happy New Year,' and afterwards we would hear the opening of the window upstairs, followed by the sound of our father's voice giving the men his thanks and good wishes for the season as he stood in his nightgown by the old broad family bed.

Only a few hours would be allowed to go by in a dreamless sleep and then my brother and I would light candles at our bedside and would begin to examine our stockings—stockings that still contained scraps of lichen from the trunks of

the apple trees up which we had swarmed the day before. With our cheeks crammed, like the cheeks of monkeys, with sugar biscuits and sweetmeats, we would occupy ourselves with our presents until the moment came to hurry down to prayers in the dining-room, into which the winter sun, half-way through breakfast, would suddenly penetrate, shining between the naked beech trees that surrounded John Scott's house, from a round ball red as a ruby. John Scott acted as huntsman for one of the Squires for many years. He is buried in the Montacute Churchyard. An epitaph on his stone reads:

Here lies John Scott!
It was his lot
A huntsman bold to be
He loved his can
Like any man.
And drank like ajish in the sea.

At the foot of this ribald drinking doggerel may be read these two curt lines, said to have been carved on the disreputable stone at the order of one of the Bishops of Bath and Wells:

And now, God wot,
He has got his lot.

The old house in Dunster's Orchard has recently, I understand, been demolished. The late Mr. Wyndham Goodden could remember when it was inhabited, but it was in ruins when I knew it.

It was typical of those spacious, old-fashioned, genial decades that the first happy meal of the day should each year have been regularly interrupted by a card sent up to the Vicarage by the famous old liberal Baptist minister, the Rev. Henry Hardin, with greetings to my father. After breakfast we were free till the morning service, but on such a day, with the familiar chapter from Isaiah, 'Unto us a Child is born,' and with the singing of ' While shepherds watched their flocks by night/ even being in church was not irksome, especially if my brother Bertie and I, owing to the largeness of our family gathering, were allowed to enjoy the novel experience of sitting on the row of chairs by the Phelips' monuments, where we could whisper to each other and meditate upon Mrs. Hodder's turkey that had been hanging 'in the pride of its grease' head downwards in the larder for the last week. After we were home again and the turkey, surrounded by sausages—Maynard's sausages, thin, crisp, bursted, and sizzling, such as I have never tasted since—had been devoured, with the mince-pies and a plum-pudding decorated with a spray of holly, red as a cock's comb, we would gather to have the contents of the Christmas hamper, sent by our Norwich aunts, distributed amongst us by our father, each of us holding out our hands with eager self-interest. Then in the late evening, after our turkey thirst had been thoroughly quenched at the family tea-table, where we all sat snug around the tall oil-lamp, warm behind heavy winter curtains, the hall bell would ring to announce that the Christmas-tree was ready in the school-room.

This was the most valued part of the whole day. It was

on the Christmas-tree that we hung the presents that we gave to each other. The tree was dug up every Christmas and replanted the next morning, and seemed little the worse for its annual visit to the house. And how resplendent the spruce sapling would look, upright in its box in the centre of the school-room, in the centre of what in Mr. Goodden's days was called 'the servants' hall.' It is odd to remember that the Christmas-tree was practically unknown in England until, by the marriage of Queen Victoria to the Prince Consort, the custom was introduced from Germany, its kinship perhaps with unrecorded fire-worshipping practices rendering this primitive ritual easily acceptable, even in so conservative an island as England, used for time out of mind to the burning of a yule log.

In an hour the floor would be littered with tinsel paper and the coloured candles would be flaring low in their sockets, till, one after another, a feathered fir twig would fill the room with the incense of the wild forest. Then the moment would come when, with crossed arms, we would dance in a ring about the innocent tree, singing 'Auld Lang Syne.' I can even now, in my mind's eye, see the tall figure of my father, with child-like benedictions emanating from his good face, as our voices rose and fell loud enough to be heard out on the cold deserted allotment plots where parcels of roughed-up wintry ground were waiting to be re-dug for the planting on Good Friday of well-sprouted potato seedlings. As we swayed backwards and forwards about the tree with laughing voices, not one of us, I suppose, was cognizant of the calm processes of nature which were taking

place around the house—the grasses on the lawn sparkling as brightly as the stars in the heaven, while beneath the comfortable slate roof of Montacute Vicarage the lives of old and young were passing away under the shadow of God's irreversible ordinance.

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