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THE MAN ON MY BACK

THE MAN ON MY BACK

An Autobiography

by
ERIC LINKLATER

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TO
THE LAND AND THE SEAS
AND THE PEOPLE
OF ORKNEY

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I

THE ISLAND LAKE

THE lake is subject to the sky, and about these northern islands the sky, from day to day, is a drunken hooligan, a dance of Cupids, a rout of silver-breasted Cuirassiers, a weeping savage, or a temple for the Princess of China. The lake replies. As well as water may, it echoes gaiety and gloom, youth in its morning rage, beauty in her pride or naked in her innocence. It has no constant quality. In winter it will drown its green islets, in summer its banks are hidden by meadowsweet and flags.

It is quick with many birds, with mallard and merganser and the black-headed gull. A tight rabble of coots, rising in sudden alarm, with staccato clapping of their wings will scuttle in a crystal storm from the shelter of a bay. In June comes idly sailing a fleet of swans, and that exquisite warrior, the Arctic tern, hangs like a hawk in the unmoving air. A few pairs of eider-duck prefer its sweet water to the sea, and while a cormorant on a rock holds out heraldic wings to dry, redshanks with indignant whistle patrol the shore.

Three arms of the lake stretch to the north and south and west. The southern arm, which is the longest, divides an antique burial-ground, called Maeshowe, from a circle of standing stones that long ago was raised in honour of the breeding sun, or to gratify the mysterious fertility of the moon. In the beginning the stones may have been

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alternately male and female symbols: among antiquarians there is stubborn opinion and fierce belief, but no certain knowledge ; and I have a mind as open as perfect ignorance can make it. No one knows who drew the circle, or for whom Maeshowe was built with such gigantic labour and mathematical precision. The masonry is heroic in scale, the plan was drawn by a geometer ; but it lies between moorland and the lake, in a simple country that has little wealth except the colour of its sky. What queens or gods forgotten were buried in its three chambers, and who were the people that closed their tombs with massive blocks of stone ? No one knows. The country is very old, and in these small and distant islands age seems the more remarkable. In Babylon and Crete, in the middle of the world, antiquity is natural, and the oldest human tales are domesticated there. But here in Orkney we are beyond the perimeter of ancient knowledge. Britain itself is barely on the fringe of history — a shadow-story of Palaeolithic men, some finger-prints of the noble Age of Bronze — and from Britain our neighbour-island we are separated by the whirlpools and Atlantic-muscled tide of the Pictland Firth. Yet there are graves and subterranean dwellings that feel as cold as Nineveh. Four thousand years ago, perhaps, men stood where I live now, and in the evening-mirror of the lake—a thunder-blue reflexion—saw the round hills of Hoy.

The western arm of the lake goes bluntly to within a couple of miles of the sea. A line of low hills divides it from the Atlantic, and westward of those hollow cliffs there is no nearer land than Labrador. The shores of the lake are heatherland, green banks, or cultivated fields. Its northern arm is shallow, and good for trout-fishing. A rushy stream enters the farthest bay, and here, about fifty years ago, the trout swam ashore in such numbers that near-by farmers brought down their carts, and with dung-forks loaded them full and counted their catch by the hundredweight.

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On a heathery knowe, by the northern arm of the lake, my father built a house ; and when I was eleven or twelve years old he bought me a boat. The lake and the boat became my partners in a game of doing nothing that lasted for many summers. Day after day I spent, solitary, idle as a dog at sea, or fishing with a mind intent only on the dropping flies and the bubble of a rising trout. My chief talent was for idleness, and to lie in a drifting boat was a pleasure that did not grow stale. There was the wrinkled water to look at, the sky in lofty vacancy or wild with smoking cloud, the merganser with its tail of tiny ducklings. There were the terns that came always in the same week of the year, and always a pair of them sat on the same flat rock at Grutness, resting after their flight from Africa. There were the hills with the old names — Hindera Fiold and Syradale and the Kame of Corrigall — and beyond them a thought of the lesser islands with their sprawling shape and circling tides.

Northward, in level country, lay the parish of Sandwick, much of which in old time was Linklater land, but none of which remained long enough in Linklater hands to enrich my father or myself. A heritage of the Norse invasion, when the best men in Norway sailed west over-sea to colonise Orkney and Iceland, it was subject to the ruinous division of odal law, and later to the villainy of Scotch earls, and always to the folly of the human mind. Long ago, therefore, it was spent and scattered, fought for and lost, drunk and sequestered ; till my paternal grandfather had nothing left but what was known as *a coos keeping*.

His name was Magnus, but it did not suit him ; for he died young, and when the surviving old remember him they describe him as a bonny wee man. He did something, however, towards mending the family's fortune by marrying a woman of such force of character that the whisper went she was a witch. Her maiden name was Marwick, and

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her father had been a famous harpooner in the whaling fleets that fished the Davis Strait. She fell in love with Magnus Linklater, and when he married another girl she put on her witching frown and stared at her with burning eyes. At that time the country women in Orkney used all to work at straw-plaiting, and whenever Magnus's first wife went by the house where her defeated rival sat, with fingers busy in the yellow grass, she turned, against her will, and looking through the open door, shuddered to see malevolent dark eyes that burned a path into her mind. Presently she fell into a decline, and died. But Magnus had not yet realised his destiny and took a second wife who had no better luck than the first. She also was ill-wished by my grandmother, and died in childbed. Then Magnus for the third time married, and now took his proper wife to church. But whether he wooed in innocence or came submissively to an unwilling bed, I do not know. He fathered four sons and a daughter, and then he died.

My grandmother sent her elder sons to sea, or drove them to such anger that they ran from home ; but my father, who was the youngest, was to be cosseted, and given learning, and become a schoolmaster. The parish minister was a rare old man, a classical scholar and eccentric to such a degree that he became a legend ; later he was given a Chair at the University of Aberdeen and had to be removed from it by Act of Parliament. He offered to teach my father Latin and Greek, and indeed began to teach him ; but my father rebelled, and borrowing money from an elder brother, left Orkney in great speed lest he should lose his way in a labyrinth of Roman grammar, and got himself bound apprentice in a sailing-ship instead. He was a good seaman, and did well in his profession. He got his first command at twenty-two, a brig called the *Corisande*, and sailed her to and fro across the Atlantic.

He was a man of great breadth of shoulder, very fat as I remember him, with good bold features. He was quick-

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tempered, and once, on the China coast, got into trouble when a Chinese comprador attempted to bribe him into authorising unnecessary expenditure. Unhappily for the Chinaman, my father had not merely an antic conception of honesty, but quite unusual strength. He took the comprador by his pigtail, twirled him around as if throwing the hammer, and hurled him overboard. He also showed the remarkable independence of his mind by refusing to command passenger steamers. He made a trial of it, but discovered that he could not bear to see so many idle people aboard a ship, and told his owners that he would prefer, in future, to carry cargo.

He was, of course, almost a stranger to me — he would come home for a week or two every second year — and though he had at sea the hard name of a disciplinarian, he had little or no knowledge of how to deal with children. He was enchantingly open-handed, and much embarrassed by any occasion for showing paternal authority. Once, I remember, when I was perhaps eight or nine years old, I was ordered from the room for some vile offence, and my father followed to reprove me. I was badly frightened by his bulk and his brown, angry face ; but he was utterly at a loss. He shook a furious finger at me and exclaimed : ' If you behave like that again, boy, I — I — I'll pull your nose, sir !'

It was an astonishing threat, and I have never forgotten it. Nor can I forget how, by his familiarity with sea danger, he rebuffed my adolescent delight in Joseph Conrad. I had read *Typhoon* with rapt excitement, and I asked him what he thought of it.

' Nothing in it,' he said. ' A book about a storm.'

' But what a marvellous storm !'

' It's all right. He doesn't make mistakes, he was a sailor himself. But what's the point of writing a book like that ? Everybody's seen a storm.'

In 1916, after a running fight with a German submarine

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in the South Atlantic, he fell ill of pneumonia and died in Ceylon. At the outbreak of war he was spending, in Orkney, his first long leave for many years, but as soon as war was declared he wrote to his owners offering his service in any capacity. For some time he piloted ships through the Channel and round the English coast, and thereafter carried munitions for the Russian army to Vladivostok. For most of his two years of war service he was in dangerous waters; and his fatness diminished till at last he wore an oddly handsome look, austere and grim. He was a Conservative in politics, orthodox in religion; jovial, hot-tempered, and most generous.

The wages of a master mariner have never been high, but a seafaring life lets a man buy many things that, in home markets, would be beyond his purse; and so in our house there was generally some store of foreign produce that gave out a little fantastic air of riches. A Mediterranean voyage brought always some cases of champagne; and for a year the larder shelves were stacked with brown cardboard boxes of most exquisite Persian dates, gathered on the stalk and so meticulously packed that every fruit was isolated from its fellow. In alternate seasons we grew sick on Turkish delight and Chinese ginger, and at school I smoked fat straw-tipped Egyptian cigarettes. We were never within a hundred miles of wealth, but we had occasional luxuries that touched the imagination.

My mother, in a supernumerary way, had also been a sailor — as she tells in the book she wrote, *A Child under Still*. Her father was Swedish, but running from home at an early age, he served all his active life under the British flag, and for many years commanded clipper ships out of Greenock. In part, I think, he may have owed his advancement to the wreck of the barque *Eugenie*, 252 tons register, in February 1857. Eastward-bound from Newfoundland, she ran ashore on a reef off the coast of Mauritius, and my grandfather, swimming ashore with a rope, was instru-

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mental in saving all hands. One of the owners was aboard at the time, and he was probably not ungrateful to the young Swedish sailor ; who, indeed, served him well and was much respected for his seamanship.

He was to marry a girl called Sarah Dodd, whose father, and several grandfathers, had been farmers in Northamptonshire. Great-grandfather Dodd was a happy man, and died in as pleasant a way as anyone could choose. He was sitting in the Laurence Sheriff Arms at Rugby on market day when, with a tiny crash, he let fall his churchwarden pipe ; and looking round, his friends saw that he, like it, was arrant clay. He had a sister who went to London and became, it was said, an actress; but also, and more certainly, she did more for herself than that, by marrying well the first time and better the second, so that she had a house in Brighton, another at Hyde Park Corner, and came riding into Northamptonshire in her own coach. A little painting of her shows, between enormous sleeves and a high-pitched coiffure, a rubious lip, a ladylike long nose, and a primly calculating eye.

Great-grandmother Dodd had a first-cousin called Boys who, having been a civil engineer, retired in middle life and devoted his remaining energy to the discovering of his ancestors. He laboured long, and finally — except for a worrying lacuna during the War of the Roses — he succeeded in tracing his descent from the Countess Judith, a niece of William the Conqueror ; and then disaster fell upon him. He got a new housekeeper, a tidy woman, and while he was away from home searching in graveyard and parish register for the innominate Boys who should fill up the hole in his argument, she made a fine spring-cleaning in his house. He came back to find that she had burnt all his papers; and a little while later he died of a broken heart. My great-grandfather Linklater, in Orkney, had a simpler hobby, and left behind him a rather noisier tale. In some forgotten capacity he served aboard whaling ships ;

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and when the whaling fleet paid off its crews in Stromness he always became an object of lively interest, for he set up a standard of speed in going home that was held remarkable in all the countryside. He had about ten miles to go, but there were many ale-houses by the road, and he never did the journey in less than three days.

But my mother is waiting to be born, and to bring that about, Sarah Dodd, from Northamptonshire, must marry Erik Ljung, the Swedish sailorman. It was, on the face of it, an unlikely marriage, but it came about; and great-grandfather Dodd was very proud of the Brazilian parrot and the jaws of a great shark, with eight rows of teeth in them, that his son-in-law presented to him. My mother was the only child of the marriage. She spent much of her youth at sea, and from her memory of it made nursery tales, for my sister and myself, out of Rio de Janeiro and the wooden streets of Astoria, out of rice ports in Java, Cape Horn, and cooly children in Calcutta.

Such is my ancestry : a diminishment of odallers — not a trace of grandeur since 1420, when old Cristie of Linklater appears for a moment as a minor chieftain — into Magnus the bonny wee man who married a witch ; and her I remember, sitting up in bed like the wolf in ' Red Riding Hood,' a cap on her head and her dark eyes shining in a wrinkled yellow face. And on the other side yeoman farmers out of England and a Swedish grandsire, a brave old man whose father had a sawmill a hundred miles north of Stockholm. There is my spear-side and distaff, with ploughland and sea for their livelihood ; but I renounced the succession. I had a lake for my companion, and in the looking-glass of sheltered water I saw another world.

There can be little doubt that I was an unattractive child, for among the earliest of my memories there is one that remains in signal prominence : the memory of my persistent and impossible wish to acquire the likeness of some other little boy, more easy-mannered and better-looking

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than myself. How eagerly I would have exchanged my appearance and my habitude with some facile child ! And so I deduce that I was either truly unattractive or pathologically modest. For long, indeed, my head was too big for my body — physically, not metaphorically — and my hair grew in such witless profusion, so thick and harsh and wilfully forward, that no brush could persuade it into decency ; with such wanton exuberance that by my twenties it had exhausted its follicles and left me bald.

I was short-sighted, and soon bespectacled. I was timid, and sometimes in my early nonage the prey of bullies. I remember being assaulted by two boys, one smaller, the other bigger than myself, and while the former held my wrists behind a tree, the latter criticised my relations, my appearance, and slapped my face. I remember a boy who, by his effortless superiority — at twelve years old he was sophisticated, his clothes were beautiful — so filled me with boiling humiliation that I hated him ; and at last, provoking him to fight, I threw him down in a deserted bicycle-shed, and taking in both hands his essenced hair, hammered his head upon the concrete floor. A year or two later I acquired more muscle and a different temper ; I was sometimes guilty of bullying other boys who to me seemed disagreeable or ridiculous.

But enough of this denigration : it is well warranted, but the resultant picture may not be wholly true. I have a photograph of thirty little boys, the second form of a municipal high school, and in the centre of the third row is a face that with difficulty controls ebullient laughter ; that is bent in lines which hardly can be held from a loud guffaw. I do not know to what irreverent thought I had given birth, or what trick I had played on the boy in front of me ; he was a glowering and a solemn creature. But in my school report that year there was the comment : ' On the whole he is doing fairly well, but is handicapped by a sense of humour.' A handicap indeed, but I set it

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against my physical unattractiveness : **the** world is not averse to it, because perhaps a sense of humour must always keep its owner on common ground. It is no more likely to raise a man to power than honesty to wealth. It is, in its way, an ingredient of the lowest-common-multiple of mankind. It is nothing to be proud of, being merely a faculty for seeing different things, and different sorts of things, at the same time ; a faculty that may also be a characteristic of millipedes and centipedes, whose eyes have many facets.

It is solely on the strength of a school report and a discoloured photograph — and to curry favour — that I claim a sense of humour ; if I were to rely, quite honestly, on my recollection, I would say that I was merely a timid child who found pleasure in solitude and compensation in romantic visioning. My chosen companions were a rowing-boat and a lake. At eight years old my favourite book was a rendering for children of *The Faerie Queene* : Britomart was my first love ; Sir Artegall, in armour of the Renaissance, my earliest hero. At ten years old he was displaced by the gallant people of *The White Company*: Sir Nigel Loring of most gracious courage, the two archers, Samkin Aylward and John of Hordle, and Black Simon of Norwich : how lovely was their bravery ! And then at twelve I read with the most profound admiration a novel of Disraeli's, though whether it was *Vivian Grey* or *Contarini Fleming* I cannot now remember. Two years later I went to the Grammar School of Aberdeen, whose most famous pupil was Lord Byron. Before the school there was a statue of him in robes of flowing bronze : I read *Don Juan* and *The Vision of Judgment*, and my affection for romance was cut in two, and the other half of my mind fell far in love with wit. Dirty-fingered, we sat at our desks — rough with deep-cut initials — and gave glum attention to *Samson Agonistes* and *The Cause of the Present Discontents* ; but Byron, through the window, undid the

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schoolroom teaching that literature must be a solemn thing.

I go back to the lake. . . . Our neighbours on the shore were two old men called Billy Pin-leg and Tom of the Mill. Billy Pin-leg was a retired farmer who had lost a leg by consumption of the bone, and replaced it, once a year, with a stick that he fashioned for himself out of a fencing-post, and slung across the opposite shoulder with a broad leather strap. He was a Plymouth Brother who read his Bible through and through, maintaining that he found spiritual instruction even in the Book of Numbers; for that recital of tedious generation, he said, was proof of God's care and providence. He had a country-wide reputation for meanness—which is not an Orkney characteristic—and in his farming days had often been seen hurrying home, in anxious haste to obey a call of nature on his own land lest the richness thereof be wasted on another's field. He had a sister who kept house for him, and even in summer wore three shawls about her head and never spoke but to bemoan, in a low sweet voice, the unkindness of human life. He was a fisherman, and so was his neighbour, Tom of the Mill.

But there was a difference between them. Billy Pin-leg fished by trolling minnows that he made for himself out of old cocoa-tins; but Tom was a gentleman and never used any other lure than flies. It was Tom of the Mill who taught me to fish, and if I had had any sense I could have learnt much more than that. He was an old man with a large flat face, as brown as a saddle, and silver-rimmed spectacles with small oval lenses that sat on a twice-broken nose. He had a sparse beard whose long white bristles he shaved once a week, and his heavy jaw had the amiable recessive angle of Palaeolithic man. His legs had shrunk, his walk was shambling; he had a genial temper, a sweet patience, and how he could fish! He used a heavy twelve-foot rod and cast his line with apparent clumsiness; but the flies fell softly as moonlight on the water, he knew

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where fish would be lying and played them with easy confidence. His large thick-fingered hands were as clever as a jeweller's, he had trout-flies stuck all over his hat, a swarm of Zulus, Butchers, Grouse-and-Clarets on the lapels of his jacket, and whenever he was making up a cast, a couple more in his mouth that I always feared he was going to swallow ; for he never stopped talking.

As a young man he had been a servant of the Hudson Bay Company, and among his stories of frost and storm, of trapping and sailing and trading with the Huskymoos, there was a savage tale — but told with rough good-humour — of a factor of the Company who fell in love with a trader's wife. The tale began with the voyage of a schooner northward-bound along the coast of Labrador to a distant station, where they found the trader's body, emaciated and frozen in his bunk. He had been sent to winter alone, a pioneer, with little food and less ammunition. So Tom and the rest of the schooner's men brought nothing back but the news of his death ; which was what the factor wanted. He, in the meantime, had sent his wife south — his first wife, that is — and by a strange mischance she had been drowned while crossing a swollen river. He was free, therefore, to marry the trader's widow ; and Tom, as a reward for good news from the north, was best man at the wedding, for which the biggest store in the trading station was hung with the skins of beaver and seal and silver fox, while the whisky was so plentiful that all the marriage company, save the bride and groom, slept in their boots below the table. And the groom, said Tom, eventually became a millionaire.

He had another tale about a parliamentary election in Orkney some seventy years ago, when canvassing was made difficult by wintry weather, and the candidate and Tom and a parish minister were snow-bound in the latter's manse ; which became the setting for a Chaucerian story of much ale and some confusion at bedtime. It was a good

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story, and I wish I could properly remember it, or had written it down after one of the many times I heard it. But I have never been much good at note-taking or at any kind of fore-looking and methodical labour. In idleness my pleasure lay, and that was my common ground with Tom of the Mill and Billy Pin-leg, who were idle old men.

Another of our company was Johnny of Tiveth, whose left eye lay as if in a pool of blood, so sorely inflamed and so deeply everted was the lower lid. He drank a good deal and had a fierce impatient temper. He would come down to the lake and push out his boat, but if he caught nothing within half an hour he would return with swift and savage strokes, and pulling his boat ashore with indignant strength, defame the lake in violent words, and swear there was never a trout left in all its waters. He had an uncle, a few years older than himself, who had risen to a position of eminence and acquired a title ; and sometimes Johnny stood on borrowed dignity and resented criticism. Tom of the Mill would laugh at him for having broken his rod — which he was apt to do — or Billy Pin-leg would rebuke him for profanity ; and Johnny, pulling down his cap with a violent gesture, would exclaim, ' The dirty thing ! To say that to me ! Me, that's a niece of the great Sir Thomas ! ' And mounting his bicycle, he would ride home in dudgeon, muttering still, and glaring at all he passed from his bloody eye.

And then there was Peter Clean the shoemaker, and proud white-bearded Jock of Coyneear, who in cold weather went to church in a grey dressing-gown. No ordinary dressing-gown, but a long and heavy garment so thickly belaced and frogged with black braid that it looked like the greatcoat of some unknown regiment of artillery ; and Jock, with his square-cut snow-white beard, carried himself with a soldier's pride. He was beadle in the parish church, and as soon as the minister had begun his sermon Jock

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would rise from his seat below the pulpit, walk to the iron stove across the aisle, poke it furiously and spit with a sizzle into the burning coal, then placidly — proud and placid — go back to his pew. But Peter Clean, the shoemaker, was never seen in church. He lived alone in a one-roomed stone house, about thirteen feet by sixteen outside measurement, in a happy confusion of dirt and leather, old newspapers and tattered books. He had a minimum of furniture, and only one teacup, black with age save for the white ellipse from which he drank. But he was an admirable shoemaker, and a man of knowledge, of sturdy and enquiring intellect. A sceptic to the bone, and therefore scornful of such men as Dan Stephen and Billy Fraser, who were not Orkneymen, but came out of Scotland and believed in fairies.

Dan Stephen saw visions, and more than once had met the Fairy Court. He described the death at sea of an uncle of mine who, with his wife and little boy, sailed from the Clyde in the autumn of 1912 and was heard of no more ; nor was any wreckage found of the unlucky ship he had bought. But Dan saw clearly the manner of their death, for the ship, he said, had rammed an iceberg on the night of the *Titanic's* loss, and only a few miles from the scene of that catastrophe ; and the little boy, tied to a railing on the bridge, was the last to drown.

No one believed him, however, because he had talked too much about fairies in green frocks and the hogboy with his treasure of illusive gold ; and Orkney had grown out of its belief in such things, though not by many years, I think ; for I was once in a farmhouse, sitting by the wide peat-hearth with the farmer and his wife and one or two more, and someone spoke about fairies, and the farmer — a scraggy laughing man with red hair — opened his mouth in a guffaw and said there was no point in telling suchlike stories, for neither man nor woman nor even the bairns believed in them any longer.

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' It's **all** very well,' said I for the sake of argument, ' **to talk** so bravely when you're sitting here in the lamplight with your friends on either side, but suppose you were up in the hills, alone at midnight, beyond Lubaday or by the Toooin o' Rusht, or somewhere like that : would you be so bold about it then, and say out loud in the darkness there were no such folk as fairies ? '

He laughed at me again and wagged a triumphant finger. ' Man,' he said, ' it's little you know about the peerie folk, though you've been to college and learnt God knows how much about God knows what. There'd be no harm in denying them up there in the hills, for they never went into the hills, and no one ever heard of them there. They bade in the meadows and by the burnside and the loch-shore ; but never in the hills, no, never that I heard tell of.'

So bred in the bone is a certain kind of belief that the mind, though it reject, can rarely extirpate it. Once, on **a** stretch of moorland by a rushy pool, I saw a flickering faint-blue light dancing in the darkness low above the ground. I thought it a will-o'-the-wisp and set out to chase it. But then I heard a little tumbling tune of four or five notes, many times repeated, and the slow-stepping light was dancing in time with them. I had a couple of dogs with me, an Irish setter and a casually bred Irish terrier. They also heard the tune, and stopped, and softly whimpered. The hair on their necks began to bristle, their tails went down, they turned and fled. I was not so much frightened as overcome by **a** feeling of impropriety, of indecent intrusion, and half a minute later I too retreated. From **a** hundred yards away I could still hear the tune, very small, but clear as **a** voice carried over water on **a** calm evening.

Do I believe this story ? It is perfectly true, and yet I reject the supernatural hypothesis that would, in **a** way, explain it. I am like the red-haired farmer, content to be illogical.

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He had another attribute : a graceful strength in using a scythe, and a knack of finding in the grass the honey-full nests of wild bees. Till a few years ago the Orkney farmer always mowed and gathered the natural meadow-grass, odorous with thyme, and kept it for a relish to his cattle's winter feeding. But meadow-grass grows in rough ground, in corners by a stream, and so it had to be cut with a scythe, and the custom was to invite all one's friendliest neighbours to come and help. And meadow-mowing made the loveliest evenings in all summer. The meadows were never cut till the dew had fallen.

The mowers, swinging together, moved in line across the meadow, and the grass fell in tidy swathes over the sharp edge of their blades. The noise of their progress was sharp and soft, and every minute or so someone would stop to whet his scythe with rough stroking of a harshly ringing stone. The air was heavy with the scout of thyme and meadowsweet and wild bees' honey, and whenever they found a nest the mowers would stoop and dig out the little handful of brown wax and give it to us children, who, sucking and chewing the sweetness of it, would follow more closely and risk our bare legs between the scythes. Then from the farm the girls would come out with ale in buckets, and great china mugs, brimming with brown foam, would pass from man to man, and like an echo a shout of laughter would follow a rough joke, and the mowers set to work again. And over the reeds of Bosquoy the moon would rise and climb the slope of the Old Kirk hill, and with the colder air would mingle a rich smell of beer and sweat and fallen grass.

Then supper, and a table so crowded with food that no one could find sugar for his tea until he had lifted from the bowl a great dish of butter or platter of cheese. There would be plates of mutton, half a dozen chickens stewed in a pot on the open fire ; a plum pudding in a coat of fat, like a cannon-ball in a flannel vest; and bere bannocks

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and floury bannocks and pancakes broad as a dinner-plate and wafer-thin. To sharpen their appetite the men were given whisky when they came in from work, and after supper there was more ale, and then into the richly scented lamplight rose tobacco-smoke and jesting and old stories told with loving mirth.

There was little enough money in Orkney in the days before the war, but no lack or stint of well-being. Hospitality was less a virtue than a habit, and of all the stories told three out of four were joking. Men worked hard, but not grievously hard ; and the women, perhaps, worked a little harder than the men. There was anger and passion in their lives, and natural grief; but the sum of life was happy, and in the air a quality of innocence. But then came the German war, and Orkney was the battle harbour of the British Fleet. In Scapa Flow, that wide and lovely expanse of sheltered water, there lay at anchor a dark crowd of battleships and cruisers, and all was busyness and staccato speech where before had been the simple traffic of the lobster-fishers, with none to watch them but lean and philosophic herons in the ebb, and the inquisitive eye of a gentle seal. But when the harvest of 1914 had been cut and gathered the land lay open to a different sky. With the next year's seed a new vitality was sown, money came in to the islands and brought much that was worth having. But much that was worth keeping did not survive.

There was fine weather in the summer of that crucial year, and about the beginning of August I was in disgrace for having stayed out till after midnight with a tall and very pretty girl some two or three years older than myself. We had rowed to the other end of the lake to see the Standing Stones, and then, visiting a little island, had got lost, when darkness fell, among the shoals that surrounded it. When at last we came ashore we expected warm and sympathetic interest in our adventure, but got instead the most unfriendly reception. And so on the following

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evening, when we were all sitting in front of the house — the pretty girl and her parents were staying with us — I was still sulky, and paid no attention when my father suddenly demanded silence.

But then I heard the sound that his ears had been the first to catch. The deep vibrating sound of sirens braying. For a long time we sat and listened, and knew that the ships were moving, sliding greyly past the cliffs of Hoy and rousing the herons, frightening the seals. The Fleet was going out.

Scapa Beach, on the following morning, was littered with boats and furniture, with wardroom pianos and surplus stores. The Fleet was at sea, stripped for action.

THE HAPPY RECRUIT

THE first chapter of my military service had a ludicrous beginning and a conclusion in pure farce ; but in the middle I earned, very honestly, a private's pay by killing several Germans.

In 1914 I was in the Classical Fourth at Aberdeen Grammar School; a strenuous, ancient, and sensible kind of school. It was nearly seven hundred years old, it taught Greek and Latin, played Rugby football, and supplied the Fourth Battalion of the Gordon Highlanders with half a company of young soldiers. In April of 1914 there was throughout the country a recruiting campaign for the Territorial Army, and one of its most eager apostles was the Grammar School's gymnastic instructor. He was a little hard-fleshed man, magnificently chested, with ingenuous brown eyes and movement like a ballet-dancer's. He told us of the rare delight and glory of a soldier's life, and in the Classical Fourth — conspicuously more military than the Modern side — there were half a dozen of us who heard and believed. I was below the average age of the form, and only a few weeks past my fifteenth birthday when I enlisted. My first uniform tunic was conspicuously too big for me, and the sleeves hung down to my finger-tips.

We used to go to afternoon school with our rifles slung on our shoulders, and stack them noisily, with a clump of

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the butt like a puff of pride, in a corner of the classroom ; a splendid gesture. Then drill on the football field, and the discovery that in a disciplined response to orders there is a curious pleasure — submission is a feminine thing, a Christian thing, an aspect of perversion and a military necessity, and being all these is perhaps a normal thing — but also there was the little pleasure of exhibitionism, because often our friends were watching us. So proudly we slapped our rifles and blew to their full extent our exiguous willing chests.

But then came humiliation — humiliation my shadow, my sweet cousin — for one day at drill a lean and sinewy boy called Garry Ritchie, who was my rear-rank number, made *sotto voce* so many biting comments on my appearance that I lost my temper, and turning, swung a heavy punch at him. But he threw up his rifle to protect himself, and on the back-sight I cut my knuckles to the bone. The sergeant shouted. I stood stiffly at attention, blood pouring from my hand. And then, in dreadful publicity, fainted.

Garry was only a few months older than I, but despite his youth went to France in the following year, and once, while on leave, came back to school and sat for a little in his sheepskin trench-coat, smelling most vilely, but leaving us all with the feeling that our lives were a dull vacancy compared with his. He fought throughout that war, and in the winter of 1918 died of influenza.

We fired a musketry course, but my finger would hardly reach the trigger, and my shooting was erratic. We did a Night Attack, a romantic exercise and extremely painful. It meant, to begin with, the assembly of all the straps, buckles, belts, pouches, and knapsacks of Full Marching Order ; and no jugglery would keep my pack where it was meant to be. I had fizzy lemonade in my water-bottle, and for some reason it tasted horrible. My hips were too narrow to hold up my kilt, I was wearing new shoes and a pair of thin socks, and after we had gone a little way my

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rifle grew heavy as a siege-gun. But in spite of discomfort I was very happy.

We marched a few miles out of Aberdeen, and when night fell we were rearranged in some fashion that I have forgotten, and began our attack. The enemy, for no apparent reason, was holding a hill-top. I believe we drove in some outposts before, in the darkness, we began to climb the hill. The heather was long, the advance was mercifully slow, and perhaps a company or two got lost. We slept for a little while, and woke stiffly, with aching feet. The advance was resumed, and on the forehead of the hill, in a light like grey ashes, we saw the enemy moving. They had vanished before we got the command to fire, but we discharged our blank cartridges at nothing, and got our reward. We saw a gallant sight : such a brave and warlike sight as none of us ever saw again. For our Captain drew his sword, and waving it in the morning air — that now a bar of dullish rose illumined — cried in a high voice : ' Charge !'

What followed I cannot say, whether hand-to-hand fighting or sudden surrender, for I was late *in*, arriving, and when I came to the top of the hill, all was friendship and congratulation. But I had already seen what was truly interesting, and that was the narrow light that flickered for a moment on the Captain's sword. It was the latest gleam of the romantic sun that gilded battlefields in the nineteenth century.

A month or two later the first of the series of modern wars began, and in Orkney I got my mobilisation papers." There was some disturbance of communications, and a day or two passed before I was able to leave, in a boat crowded with commercial travellers and Naval Reservists, with Territorials and herring-gutters. We were escorted by a destroyer. I remember a sergeant of the Scottish Horse who was going to war in his beautiful full-dress uniform, with slouch hat and yellow piping on his tunic ; and when

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it grew rough the fisher-girls were noisily sick, but in the intervals of nausea sang more loudly their favourite hymns. My own feelings were blurred by wealth : my father had given me five pounds, and being so rich I thought mostly about my money.

I found the battalion billeted in a school, and doing little, so far as I could see, but cleaning equipment and eating indifferent stew out of mess-tins. Everyone seemed to have settled down, and nobody admitted that there was anything unusual about sleeping in a couple of blankets on the floor. The School company was already infiltrated with a rougher sort of patriot, and at night a few of these got mildly drunk and broke a few desks. Within three or four days of mobilisation my companions had all become old soldiers, and I was bewildered by the mysterious routine they so naturally accepted or cleverly evaded. Nor was I to grow acclimatised to it till much later, for presently there was a medical inspection, and because of short sight I was rejected.

There came an hour of misery. In marching order, now mote expertly adjusted, I stood in the playground of the school and wept. The Colonel, a lean and elderly red-faced gentleman with a kind and quavering voice — a Territorial colonel of the older sort — was walking to and fro, himself perhaps a little bewildered by all that had happened. He came towards me, and I struggled to salute. 'Never mind,' he said. 'Never mind. Tell me what's the matter ?'

I sniffed and said, 'I've been expelled, sir.'

'We must all go where we are told,' he said sadly. 'We must take the rough with the smooth.' And patted me on the back.

So I returned to school, shame-faced and sulky, and for a couple of years the sight of soldiers marching was a taunting and a bitter thing, the source of blackest envy. Several times I tried again to enlist, but was always rejected.

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Once I succeeded in memorising the chart by which vision was tested ; but a sergeant, suspicious, turned up the other side and I was defeated. I remember fighting with a boy — older than myself but no bigger — because he had been fortunate and was about to become a soldier. A few weeks later he came back from his Cadet battalion, the vestal band about his cap, and took me to tea: cream-puffs and chocolate eclairs, a schoolboy's feast. Before the year was out he was killed, fighting twenty yards in front of his platoon, and for an hour of impassioned admiration I had no other ambition.

It was a picture-postcard that first put into my head the idea of becoming a soldier. A glossy brightly coloured picture of a private in the Black Watch standing magnificent upon the parade-ground in front of Edinburgh Castle. I was seven or eight, not older, when the seed was planted, and it lay in a cupboard of my brain as if in a bowl of wintering tulips, not often noticed but never forgotten, till the time was propitious for its flowering. Then it put forth an imperative bloom and coloured all my being.

At sixteen I had the purity and strength of unadulterated silliness. Not only was I blindly patriotic — the war against Germany was a glorious crusade — but a fervid imperialist. I would brood upon a map and colour with my heart's red the wilds of Africa, the wilderness of Central Asia. I would limn with the rose of might-have-been all the territory that England had ever held and lost, from Aquitaine to Massachusetts. But not in greed only, or for glory, but because I believed most passionately that Britain held all the virtues in one hand and most of the world's destiny in the other. News of the battle of Jutland, where our ships did not wholly support my faith in their invincibility, nearly broke my heart; and conscription, that doubted the ever-willing valour of my countrymen, was like a glass of poison. I lived, at that time, in the blazing innocence of a light so dazzling that I could see nothing save my faith.

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But the introduction of conscription was a useful medicine, for the idea of compulsory service so darkened my romantic view of war, so grievously insulted my personal responsibility for Britain's honour and security, that I turned cynic overnight, and woke in the morning with the taste of bitter freedom in my mouth. If I must fight as a conscript, I thought, I shall. But *pas d'enthousiasme*. No more wretched and humiliating attempts to volunteer. I shall wait comfortably now till I am called.

The transformation was made easier by the fact that I was by then of the proper age to be falling in love ; which I did with fearful regularity and the assistance of a friend called Bonner. I have always been handicapped by a stupid shyness, a state of being that consists of a thorny and sensitive exterior within which I lurk in dull ineptitude. When I was a child, with the honesty of a child, I used to run away from children's parties, and I could not bear to be seen with more than one member of my family at a time ; for three was more conspicuous than two, and I thought there was something rather disgusting in the family tie. As I grew up I had to overcome my feelings, to some extent, but for many years the most ordinary circumstances of life were likely to become, at any moment, a torture-chamber in which the horrid consciousness of my own existence racked and twisted me ; and there are still moments when I grow dull and tongue-tied with embarrassment, or near to panic in the fearful jungle of an alien room. And so I have always needed a catalyst: one who will break down the tiresome barriers of myself, and by his own composure in it familiarise what company I may have wandered into. For such catalysis there was, in Bonner, a natural genius. He had a gaiety of spirit that coloured the world about him like a fine morning ; and a very pretty talent for the sort of conversation that is used in dalliance.

This was invaluable to me, for I was extremely desirous of female company, but unable to secure it by my own

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endeavour ; though I could get on well enough when the ice had been broken. The war, in this matter, was on our side, for there were many girls whose time was unoccupied — because our immediate elders were in France — and shavelings like us might go walking with mature young women of nineteen or twenty. They were apt to treat us with a certain air of patronage, but even so they were more exciting than schoolgirls. We knew some charming creatures who were in their second or third year at the University, and occasionally took them to dances ; but one of our dearest conquests was employed in a milliner's, and, by a series of recondite signs, used to make assignments with us through the shop-window.

She was tall and brilliantly pretty, and had a great faculty for laughing. We used to go out with her together, and though she preferred Bonner, she was very nice to me, and would kiss in turn with seeming impartiality. It was a measure of our friendship that Bonner and I never disputed about her, that I admitted the higher favour in which he stood, and that he took no advantage of it.

We had both left school and gone up to the University for a term or two before joining the Army. Bonner, for no particular reason, had decided to go in for Medicine, and I did the same because I was tired of Latin and Greek, and because the Medicals had a livelier reputation than Arts students. We did little work, but shared our books as we divided the affection of the delightful milliner, and were entirely happy. It was a glorious winter, and we had no fear for the future.

Then early in the new year — there was snow on the ground and the sky was the old colour offish-skin — I went down to the barracks and surrendered my liberty. Bonner was a few months younger than I, and had so much more freedom ; he made use of it to become friendly with three or four new girls, each more wonderful than the last, of whom he wrote full descriptions. I envied his good

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fortune, **but** was sorrier to have said good-bye to him.

I was again rejected for foreign service, but by the goodwill of a doctor, with whom I was friendly, I escaped the ignominy of non-combatant duty, and was posted to a battalion engaged in home defence: the second line of a Yeomanry regiment, now dismounted and more safely riding bicycles. It was stationed in the north of England, and when, with five other recruits, I took train thither, I was given the warrant for our journey, being the only one who wore collar and tie.

A mining village, slightly depressing, and a deserted school for barracks. Raw khaki serge chafing the neck, and rough meals off the splintery wood of a trestle-table. The smell of boots and button-polish and bianco. Fatigues that one tried to escape by going to the lavatory and staying there as long as possible ; and foot-drill, infinitely repeated in a windy playground, under a short, pursy, active, ginger-coloured sergeant with a dexterous tongue and a mind of remarkable obscenity. It was the ordinary pattern of a recruit's life.

I was discomforted, for a long time, by the ginger sergeant and his knowledgeable use of filth trope, scabrous illustration ; and I had not expected to be so upset, for at school we had taken pride in our knowledge of all the lewder words and our repertory of dirty stories. But our schoolboy bawdiness, I now perceived, had been pale and academic stuff. The sergeant, by the relish of his lewdness and the startling occasions that he found for it, showed how well he knew its meaning. There was a force of lubricity in his words that I had never heard, and now was shaken by it. In English, of course, there is some paucity of bad language, and as in Chinese everything depends on the inflexion. There was an old regular soldier, whom I became acquainted with some time later, who could put into certain monosyllables all the filth and bestiality that lie like sludge at the bottom of the world ; but a friend of his,

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a depraved and witless youth who was singularly smart on parade, would give to those very words the meaningless sound of a sleepy little belch. And a sergeant, who came from Aldershot to instruct us in bayonet-fighting, made of blasphemy and bawdry something so strikingly histrionic as to be almost operatic.

He was a large man with a chest like the side of a hill, a baying voice that sometimes rose to a scream, and a look, at rest, of moonish melancholy. He spoke, with ranting fervour, of the delight of pushing bayonets into other people's bowels, and over the assault-course — scattered with straw-filled sacks to represent the enemy — went hurtling with rare abandon and foam at his mouth. He used often to pray, and when his class could put no devil into their *long point*, *short point*, and *jab*, would kneel in the midst of them and summon God to come down and punish them in a very improper and, perhaps, impossible fashion. His prayers and stormy adjuration were quite horrifying to begin with, but slowly their theatrical quality became apparent, and they defeated their purpose by rousing admiration, not for bayonet-fighting, but for his virtuosity. He was really, I think, a kind-hearted man ; for once, when I broke a practice-stick in duello with him and won his approval, he patted me on the back with fatherly emotion.

Among our officers we had an elderly lieutenant who wore habitually the anxious and disapproving look of a maiden lady called upon, by death, to care for a sister's large unruly family ; hating the obligation but doing her Christian duty with irritable fortitude. Another lieutenant was large, red, sombre, and given to drink ; and there was a willowy tall subaltern, with pince-nez and smoothly pretty cheeks, whom we called Myrtle. The major was an iron-grey handsome man, of aristocratic appearance, who was said to have been, at one time, a trooper in the Blues, and subsequently a commissionaire. Wherever he

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went he kept calling, in a petulant way, for his sergeant-major : a tall man with compressed lips, who would hurry towards him and salute with a large flat-handed gesture and a slight inclination of the body. Sometimes, in a wearily confiding way, the sergeant-major would say that he was seriously thinking of applying for a commission himself.

The colonel cannot have been as old as I thought, but to eighteen years he had the curiously remote appearance of an aged vicar. The regimental sergeant-major was rather like him, though his moustache was much larger, down-drooping in a grey swag-bellied curve before it rose again to brushy ends. On the parade-ground he would sweep it aside before issuing a command ; and then his voice would ring like a belfry. A pealing note, with churchly overtones.

It was a pleasant battalion to be in, and as soon as I had gained some confidence, and become inured to flannel shirts and the obscenity of the ginger sergeant, I began to enjoy myself. For a week or two there was some likelihood of my being bullied, but a lucky chance removed the danger in a bright effusion of blood. Not mine, but a lanky fellow's with whom, at physical training one morning, I was told to box.

To begin with he seemed a perilous opponent. He had obviously had boxing lessons, and in his posture imitated the flashy movement of some minor professional. He held his left hand high, his chin snugly behind his shoulder, and with his foremost foot made a curious motion like a pawing horse. He hit me several times, and growing thoroughly alarmed I resolved on forcing the fight in order to get it over, one way or another, as quickly as possible. So shutting my eyes and rushing forward, I rammed in a short left-handed punch that by mere fortune landed square on the lanky fellow's nose and sent him sprawling. In the moiety of a second before he hit the ground, I saw the heavenly gush of blood, and when, bedazed, he tried to

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wipe it away with the back of his glove, he spread it over his chops and made the most hideous spectacle of himself. And then appeared the elderly lieutenant.

'Sergeant !' he exclaimed with querulous agitation, 'what's been happening here ? You're supposed to be giving these men physical training, not encouraging them to maul each other. It doesn't do any good to let them knock each other about like prize-fighters. Take the gloves off that man, and don't let him box again till he has learnt to keep his temper !'

So I was saved from further punishment, and given, without the smallest reason for it, the pleasing reputation of being a dangerous person. I continued to box whenever I got the chance, and by showing that I was fond of fighting in gloves, I avoided the peril — which I have always dreaded — of having to fight without them. Because few amateurs know how to hit, I retained for several months the illusion that boxing was an agreeable pastime ; but then, in one of the prehminary bouts for a Brigade tournament, I met a curly-haired youth with arms like a blacksmith, who was said to have been a sparring partner of Tancy Lee. He was certainly not my sort of boxer, and in the first round hit me so hard on the solar plexus that, retching for breath, I toppled forward ; whereupon he landed a nice uppercut to the jaw, and knocked me out. With my first-waking breath of reason I determined to leave pugilism to the rougher sort for whom it was intended, and box no more. . ,

This early period of my service was, I think, one of the happiest seasons of my life. With the coming of spring we went under canvas, and for several months enjoyed what was really a well-arranged picnic with intervals of factitious excitement. The camp was situated on a high sloping field with a distant view of the sea, and behind it, running deeply through a wood, was a stream with green and sunshot pools where — though they were out of bounds

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— one could swim in slow-running water beneath a far high roof of cathedral beeches, or lie warming on white pebbles under a ferny bank. There was rifle-shooting in a desert of sand-dunes, pudding-basin hillocks rough with wiry grass, and beyond them a misty sea crumbling on the shore ; and deliberate fire was a slow delight, the serious exercise of muscle and eye and tender finger, with the grave reward of a bull, a bull, the tight-lipped annoyance of a magpie, and then — oh, bliss ! — another bull ; while rapid fire was a sensual ecstasy in which the rifle, well cared for and cosseted with oil, became an almost living thing, its butt-plate firm and faithful, its bolt flying quickly with an eagerness like the soldier's own.

Because we were dismounted Yeomanry, and had bicycles instead of the discarded horses, we enjoyed unusual mobility ; and being under a Brigadier who believed in the value of large-scale exercises, we were constantly engaged in mimic warfare over a wide area of woodland and high-rolling country and cliffside villages. Once a week we were in action with blank cartridges, making hurried forays into hostile territory, or reconnoitring in the first light of dawn ; and sometimes, in angry excitement, shooting through a hedge and burning the eyebrows of an enemy's scout. It was, perhaps, of dubious worth as a preparation for trench warfare, but it was very good fun.

There were, naturally, recurrent periods of boredom and alarm : periods before a General's inspection, when, in a storm of conflicting orders, chaos descended on the camp, and order came at last with the flatness of utter exhaustion. There was the yawning tedium of Sunday's kit inspection, and the usual bad temper on Monday morning, but life, on the whole, went smoothly, and discipline, that one had dreaded so much, became a kind of soothing syrup. Responsibility being so small and so clearly defined, one ceased to worry ; and because one was in the army, the continuation of the war was merely the normal back-

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ground to one's existence. A nuisance, but inescapable, like the persistent menace of Euripides so long as one was at school. We rarely read a newspaper, and not till several years later did I learn what happened on the Western Front in the summer of 1917. We hurried to the post-corporal, not for news, but for the parcels that came from home with cake and jam in them ; the Army fed us well enough, but we were always hungry.

Once, on a warm sleepy Sunday afternoon, the ammunition tent went on fire, and some of us burnt our hands carrying away the heavy brass-bound boxes. Once, in the river pool, I nearly drowned through rescuing from drowning a fat lance-corporal who thought he could swim by nature ; it was not heroism that made me do it, but fear of the guard-room where I would have gone had the evidence of a dead body convicted me of being on forbidden territory. And once, in our friendly tent, we passed a hazardous night when a long-legged six-foot corporal, leaving us to take a commission, got very drunk, and with lachrymose reiteration of his affection desired, though booted and spurred, to share our narrow blankets. . . . These and like simplicities are my memory of the summer when there was mutiny among the French, and the menace of the submarines was at its height ; when Russia was making its last weak offensive, and Haig was throwing his doomed armies into the mud at Passchendaele.

Autumn came with morning frost and hail-showers that beat on the tents like forty machine-gunners firing together. Sadly we struck camp, but with almost immediate return to cheerfulness discovered that our winter quarters were to be of the most superior sort. The squadrons were separated for coast defence, and mine was lodged in what had been a preparatory school, where we slept in the decent seclusion of two to a cubicle, when not abroad in the lonely coastwise huts from which we watched for submarines, mysterious lights, and armed invasion.

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Scarcely had we started this half-nocturnal life when there came the good news that three German naval officers had escaped from a prisoners' camp in the south of Scotland, and were thought to be making for the coast. They were described, minutely or perhaps imaginatively : large and ferocious men, it appeared, much scarred by duelling swords. There was a bustle of excitement, and with tremulous importance I got orders to take four men and occupy — I am almost sure that *occupy* was the word — a tiny fishing village some eight or nine miles away. We rode through autumn woods, with ears wide-open for the sound of a naval officer in the undergrowth, and eyes astare at all who passed for the white seam of a sabre-cut that might betray disguise. But when we came to the village, the corporal whom I was to relieve took me aside, and sitting in a ditch, began to laugh. I was surprised, and a little hurt. But he went on laughing, and for a long time could not stop.

On the previous night he had posted his sentries, and about midnight, going to visit them in utter darkness, heard one of them challenge in a loud voice. There was no reply. ' There's somebody crawling along that hedge,' said the sentry. He challenged again. Silence. And then a rustling, cautious, softly dragging sound. The alarm was given, and the patrol lined the hedge. Again the rustling noise, and someone shouted ' Here he is ! ' Everyone, pointing his bayonet, stabbed and thrust into the hedge, and in wild excitement a private yelled, ' I've got him ! '

A moment later he corrected himself: ' Well, anyway I've got a bit of his shirt.' Then the corporal struck a match, and perceived the truth of the matter. For some poor woman had draped her washing on the hedge, and in the cold air it had half frozen, and the breeze was moving it with a scratchy sound against thorny branches. His patrol, said the corporal, were most indignant about the deception.

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No excitement of any sort perturbed my occupation of the village ; though at four o'clock in the morning we annoyed the local fishermen by insisting on searching their boats before they put to sea. Poking a conscientious bayonet into a pile of nets or a dark corner, and dreading lest there should come an answering squeal; in the darkness before dawn there is little relish for man-hunting. The unhappy prisoners were recaptured a few days later, after one of them, weak from starvation, had stopped a country baker's van to beg for a loaf.

And then I found a spy at work, or thought I had ; and' made a nuisance of myself in consequence. I am willing now to admit that he may have been no more than a cloud on the imagination, but he wore a suspicious look, and my companions of the time — as old as myself—were all agreed that he was very like a whale. I first saw the light — not of truth, but of espionage — when returning one evening from a watch-hut with four ill-tempered privates bicycle-riding behind me. They were disagreeable youths, Glasgow-born, and suspect members of a street-corner gang called the Redskins ; they were ill-tempered because, being slum-bred, they were afraid of country darkness and had refused, the night before, to stand sentry where I posted them ; so taking away their rifles, I sent the four of them out together, unarmed, and kept them on the cold cliff all night. I was looking forward to getting rid of them, and when I first saw the light, paid little attention to it. It was shining seaward from the attic window of a big house built high on a jutting point of rock.

The light, most regrettably, reappeared on successive nights. I was moved to investigate, and worse than that, to submit reports. They were long and circumstantial reports, and everybody but myself grew very tired of them. There was relief on all sides — and the light continued to shine — when my name was added to a draft for France.

III

85831
PTE. LINKLATER
THE BLACK WATCH

IT was not without forgery and finesse that I got to France ; and twenty-four hours after landing I was heartily sorry for my cleverness. It was December, and the camp on the hill above Boulogne was cold and crowded. We slept seventeen to a tent, not including a fat sergeant who, being very drunk, had lost his way, and tumbling in by chance, lay where he fell. But he gave out a lot of heat, and paid for his accommodation. In a cranny between his stertorous body and a boy who, in his sleep, was softly yelping, like a setter dreaming on the rug, I lay and cogitated the realisation of my ambition. I was in France, and we had been sent to the regiment that from infancy I had desired. I was in the Black Watch, and I had only myself to thank for it.

Certain obstacles had had to be cleared before I could go on active service. Weary of coast defence, I had made careful preparation for the next move, and one day, when I was orderly corporal, and for a few minutes alone in the orderly room, I found in a drawer a pile of those brown double-foolscap forms on which are entered all the details of a soldier's health and circumstances. Hurriedly I looked for my own, and with a knife and a pen made a couple of alterations in it. I changed the year of my birth from 1899 to 1898, so that I became of age to go abroad ; and

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amended my vision. I had no scruple in doing this, for with spectacles I could see very well, and wore on my sleeve the marksman's badge of crossed rifles.

Having thus become eligible for foreign service, I begged to be included in an early draft; but was refused, because recruits were coming in, and I was mildly useful as a musketry instructor. I asked a second time, and was fobbed off. But then one day, when again I was orderly corporal, I had to report the sickness of a man detailed for a draft that was going, it was said, to a battalion of the Black Watch; and made a strong plea that I should be allowed to take his place. By this time I had established myself as a spy-hunter, and therefore a bore, and perhaps my zeal for counter-espionage had some relation to the alacrity with which my third request was granted.

In the sergeants' mess I was given a glass of port, and the sergeant-major said sadly that he also was weary of his present surroundings, and had been thinking for a long time of volunteering for France; but perhaps he would be wiser to secure a commission first. I was touched by his confidence, and said good-bye to him, and to most of my friends, with much pity for their tedious life at home. But presently, finding myself at Passchendaele, thought otherwise of their unhappiness and mine.

In bitter cold, an old man in the trench beside me knelt down to pray for release from his agony; but through a hole in his upturned hose-tops his knee froze to the icy duck-board, and when he rose the skin ripped off, and welling blood shone darkly. A few months later, having been wounded in the head, I came rather unsteadily towards an aid-post, and among a group of soldiers, gathering for a counter-attack, I saw him again, grave and greyly thin, but hale. He must have been fifty, but he lasted better than I did.

For a few weeks we occupied the lonely and abominable mudpits that made a front-line at Passchendaele, or laid

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duck-boards at night and saw them shot to pieces in the morning. Thaw came, and nearly drowned us. The first dead men I saw, I stopped and stared in open-mouthed astonishment. So that was what happened. It was very surprising, but to begin with, not alarming. The wretchedness of living and working in the mud was so great that fear could find no room. Fear came later.

We moved southward, to the Somme, where the mud was shiny-grey and handsome, and in deep untidy trenches near Gouzeaucourt found an easier existence. Nothing happened of any importance, but I discovered, to my great distress, that I was not nearly so good a soldier as I had thought. I was, in fact, a very poor and useless soldier, bewildered by the savagery and squalor of my surroundings, and ill-at-ease among my fellow privates, who were a far rougher sort than the bicycle-riding Yeomanry at home. I was so miserable that I scarcely had the heart, if I was detailed for a ration party, to steal an extra loaf of bread or tin of jam. I did ; but there was no pleasure in the theft. It was a furtive snatch, not bold-eye freebooting as it should have been. I was dismally constipated until a blest pair of bullets from a German sniper so frightened me that a sudden cure was effected ; and being multitudinously lousy, I could get no proper sleep.

Most of my original lice came from a barn where we had slept after leaving Passchendaele ; a barn fronted by a turtle-green slimy pool, but in the light of suspended lanterns, that threw warm light on yellow straw, a comfortable and pleasant place with old black rafters in the upper gloom. Beside a rusty nail, whereon I hung my helmet, I read by matchlight a name carved in flowing script: *Joannes Baptiste Vansteene, 1816*. A barn of decent age, and Joannes, I thought, in the gliding minutes before sleep, may have talked with Wellington's men, the valiant of Hougomont and cat-scarred veterans from the Peninsula. Perhaps, I thought a little later — waking to scratch — diese

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lice that are afflicting me were bred in primogeniture from a pair in Joannes' armpit that were young when Picton hid his wound at Quatre Bras, and the Grenadiers of Napoleon's Guard stood firm in the rout of France and dissolution of their world.

I sat up, and in the half-light of the dimmed lanterns saw the carpet of straw moving like a restless sea between the uneasy hummocks of men writhing in their sleep. Joannes' lice had been prolific. The whole floor was alive. The new straw, that had so pleased us, lay thinly on a dark-brown compost of vegetable decay, throbbing with life and rich with teeming age, that housed more crawling things than forty times the twice ten-hundredth power of all the stars in heaven. Dormant when first we came, our warmth had wakened them, and now they fed on British beef, and the coverlet of clean straw was shaken by their movement. Old soldiers, tough as saddlery, rose cursing and afraid, and we youngsters were ravished more deeply, and far more often, than Lucanian girls by Spartacus' insurgent gladiators.

When morning came, the gluttoned lice fell fast asleep or found cover in the rotten deeps of the straw. We sat up, shaken, and the orderlies, bringing tea and bacon, scooped with their filthy hands from sooty tins the fragments of greasy meat, and gave us, uncritical, our ration breakfast. We rose, and in a drizzling rain walked to a stream that scarcely moved between its naked willows; washed, and scraped our beards. The rain grew thinner, and through its haze a tearful sun shone fitfully. We drew upon our shoulders the intolerable weight of pack and ammunition-pouches, rifle and haversack and helmet; and in the rubbing heat of the march the lice awoke, and plundered all from collar to groin.

My quota multiplied, and I could not be rid of them. But eventually they did me a good turn, for by infection from them I fell ill with trench fever, and got sent to hospital

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in Rouen. There, a little while later, to be clean and convalescent was to know what heaven meant in the dreaming of the Middle Ages. It was to breathe, like Adam, the airs of a primal spring. And my companions in this paradise were a Whitechapel Jew of the most engaging humour, and a ham actor, a rakish thin fellow of lecherous but amiable temper who was for ever spouting irrelevant fragments of twopenny melodrama.

'Curse him !' he would say, pointing to the fat proprietor of an estaminet, 'the fellow's got no shame ! To ruin the Lady Muriel and then come so brazenly to her father's house ! I'll call her brother — why, here he comes !'

And before the towers of St. Ouen he suddenly exclaimed : 'How beautiful the old place looks in the morning sun ! I wonder, will it ever be mine ? There is nowhere on earth I love so dearly. But my brother, Sir Jasper, is the heir, and I am dependent on his charity. Oh, how I hate him !'

He had more experience of the war than I, and was determined to stay in hospital as long as he could. But I left as quickly as possible, and going to Calais became, for a night, a warder of Chinese coolies. They were Annamcese, I think, and several hundred of them were in camp. When German bombers came over — as they were in the habit of doing — the coolies in most resolute panic would break out and scatter in all directions. The night after my arrival, warning was given of an approaching raid, and two men, armed with rifles but no ammunition, were posted in each of the Chinese huts with orders to inspire confidence and prevent escape. Fortunately for me, my companion warder was a large man, of burly frame and phlegmatic temper.

There were about fifty coolies in the hut, and all so thickly wadded with clothing, so wrapt about with indescribable garments and old sand-bags, that their apparent bulk was enormous. They had fat round faces that appeared, at one moment, the mirror of immutable calm ;

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but the next were twisted and writhen in a maniacal hysteria. When the first bomb fell, a few hundred yards away, they let out a chattering yell, and in a suddenly massing herd ran up the floor of the hut; but stopped a few yards away from us. The next bomb was much closer, and a third, almost simultaneously, roared against the iron walls and set them deeply vibrating. Like madmen the coolies rushed, and my fellow warder, putting his rifle behind him, dropped three of them with accurate long punches. I, being much smaller than he, retained my rifle and hammered their toes with the butt. We kept them off; but in many of them fear had produced a simple physiological effect, and by the preternatural smell that arose we were nearly stifled. It seemed a long long time before *All Clear* was sounded, for though by then the Chinese were sitting happily on the floor, and discussing their private affairs, we were faint and queasy from the extravagance of their inenarrable stink.

A few days later, coming plump and full-skinned out of the canteen, I found all about me in that state of purposive and dynamic confusion known as *wind-up*. The Germans had pierced the Fifth Army's front, and reinforcements were being hurriedly equipped to be sent as patching for the broken wall. We went up the line again, and like a ball rebounding, joined the March retreat.

The first two or three days, the bloodiest and most feverishly distraught of that magnificent rearguard action, were finished before myself was added to it; and though I was involved in some disagreeable episodes, my roundest recollections are of consuming, with great relish, a bottle of looted champagne and a jar of the best plum jam I have ever tasted; of sleeping very comfortably between two convenient graves in a shattered churchyard; and of listening, during a whole day of battle, to an Irishman discussing his next war.

Fragments and wandering details of many regiments

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were fighting together, and by chance I found myself in company with two men of the South Irish Horse. A plump and rather surly young trooper, and an elderly leather-skinned band-sergeant, a talkative fellow with a single mind. His opinion of the war, in which we were then so closely engaged, was simple and instructive : it was useful training for the approaching conflict with England. Even without their presence it would have been an interesting day, for we were retreating across open country, and behaving exactly as we had been taught: two platoons going back while others gave covering fire, and the latter retiring under the shelter of the rifles and Lewis guns of those who had preceded them. It was an admirable picture of the benefits of education ; but to the Irish sergeant it was still a schoolroom exercise.

' Now stop shoving about,' he would cry to the trooper, as we settled into a fold of the ground. ' Haven't I been telling you all morning to run like hell when you mean to run, and He like a bloody rock when you're down ? It's open country we'll be in when we're fighting the English, and now.'s your time to learn how to behave, and not make a target of yourself by thrusting your great round bottom in the air like a porpoise under the Old Head of Kinsale. What arc your sights at ? '

' Four hundred,' shouted the plump young trooper, puffing and blowing.

' God Almighty ! Give me patience ! They were four hundred, weren't they, when you were down in the ditch beyond ? And now you're a hundred yards nearer the sea, God help you, and by the same extent farther from Jerry, you fool, so put them up, you devil, and remember the wind that's blowing.'

I lay on his other side, and turning his head he spoke earnestly to me. ' If there's one thing I hate to see more than another,' he said, ' it's wasting good ammunition, and the waste that goes on here would frighten a millionaire.

It breaks my heart to see the boys throwing off a bandolier because it's too heavy to carry, and to think what we could do with it in Ireland.'

' So you're going to fight the English ? '

' We are that.'

' When ?'

' As soon as we get finished with this blasted pigsty of a war, though I shouldn't be speaking against it, for it's good practice for boys the like of that lad there, who didn't know the touch of a trigger from the toe of my boot when he came out. But he's learning. He's learning every day, and he'll be a good boy yet.'

We retired again when a couple of light field-guns, motor-drawn, opened fire on us; and the Irish sergeant and I lay side by side in a stony gully.

' You ought to come in with us yourself,' he said. ' Scotland and Ireland together : we'd knock the bloody English to hell.'

' I haven't any quarrel with England,' I said.

' Ach, everybody has a quarrel with England, if they'd only the bloody sense to see it ! It's England that has spoiled the whole world with its scheming and money-making and the righteousness, God save us, that says England knows the way of it, and all the rest are niggers or talking nonsense like children. Let the Scotch and Irish join together, and give England what Cromwell gave Drogheda, the bastard.—And what in hell are you thinking of, Michael James ? Can you not see that bloody machine-gun there ? And for the love of God put your sights up. Now all together : three rounds rapid — fire !'

It was, I think, in the vicinity of Morcourt that these conversations took place ; but I have forgotten the sequence of events, and remember only isolated occurrences. A night-march after we had been almost surrounded ; writing a letter for a dying man, but stopping in the middle of it when I saw we had been left behind, and Germans were

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coming over the opposite hill; counter-attack from a chalky ridge, and the battalion in support — young soldiers with only a few weeks' service — breaking in disorder when the enemy lifted his barrage.

According to the official history of the Black Watch, the remnant strength of the battalion, when the retreat was over, was one officer and thirty men. But we had two or three more than that, I fancy, and one of them a piper. The next day, marching peacefully in the morning light of France along a pleasant road, we encountered the tattered fragment of a battalion of Foot Guards, and the piper, puffing breath into his bag and playing so that he filled the air like the massed bands of the Highland Division, saluted the tall Coldstreamers, who had a drum or two and some instruments of brass that made also a gallant music. Stiffly we passed each other, swollen of chest, heads tautly to the right, kilts swinging to answer the swagger of the Guards, and the Red Hackle in our bonnets like the monstenance of a bruised but resilient faith. We were bearded and stained with mud — the Guards, the fifty men that were left of a battalion, were button-bright and cleanly shaven — we were a tatterdemalion crew from the coal-mines of Fife and the back streets of Dundee, but we trod quick-stepping to the brawling tune of *Hielan' Laddie*, and suddenly I was crying with a fool's delight and the sheer gladness of being in such company.

They were brave comrades, but they could not speak French. A day or so later we were in a poor little village, and for some reason more hungry than usual. But the villagers were as hungry as ourselves, and though there was a baker's shop in the muddy street, the baker would give us no bread. His people, he said, were rationed like soldiers — the French were a nation of soldiers — and therefore not a loaf could be spared. Absolutely and definitely, he refused to sell. But he had a daughter, a plump girl with fair hair, with pale fat cheeks and little dark brown eyes

that looked quickly from one to another of the kilted troops, and saw in them some recondite cause for often giggling.

'Here, you !' exclaimed a lean and hardy private. I turned obediently. 'If you can parly-voo the old man, you can parly-voo the lassie. Away and ask her for a promenade the night, and gie her a bit cuddle, and see what you can do. You'll maybe get twa-three loaves out of her the morn's morn.'

'But I'm on guard to-night,' I said.

'I'll tak your guard. Away you and clean your buttons, and see if you ken the French for square-pushing.'

So in laborious and schoolboy terms I made love to the baker's daughter, and an hour before dawn I was at the bakehouse door, and she came hurriedly, and without another word put half a dozen crisp long loaves into my arms.

I prided myself on a conquest, but so apparently did she, and spread the news of it. For in the afternoon I was walking down the street, and passing two thin and dirty little boys, I heard one say to the other in solemn tones, 'Voilà l'Ecosais qui parle francais !'

It was a very gratifying moment.

We continued marching westward and came to Arques, where we were billeted in what seemed to be a deserted factory. I threw my kit into a corner — the farthest corner from the door — and went out for a stroll; but when I came back my belongings were in the middle of the floor, and in my chosen corner was a black-avised and surly man with a short pipe in his mouth and an air of possession.

'That was my place,' I said.

'Weel, it's mine noo,' he answered grimly.

Everybody, with happy anticipation, was watching us ; and sadly I realised that I must challenge him to fight. I was clearing my throat — for the words were curiously slow in coining — when a sergeant shouted through the

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open door, ' Stand to ! Get your kits packed, and on parade. Full marching order.'

' What's the matter now ? ' they asked him.

' We're going up the bloody line again : that's all ! '

It was true, and I was thankful to hear it ; for the order came just in time to save me from a thrashing.

For the next two or three weeks the war was in a state of singular confusion. We were in the neighbourhood of Ypres again — at Zillebeke and Voormezeele — and wherever we went we were digging trenches and fighting off an enemy who generally appeared from some entirely unexpected quarter. It was the season for low-lying fog, and on one occasion we refrained, in the nick of time, from opening fire on a battalion of Cameron Highlanders who, in the most mysterious fashion, came charging towards us out of what we thought was the German line. We were now a composite battalion, made from Cambridgeshires, Cheshires, K.R.R.s, Black Watch, certain Welshmen, and other remnants of the 39th Division ; and when, about this time, Haig issued the celebrated order in which he said we were fighting with our backs to the wall, there was laughter from one end of the country to the other ; for we had no such illusion of support, and were more likely to be fighting with our backs to the enemy, since the Germans often appeared on both sides of us.

Nothing occurred of any military importance — though a good many lives were lost — but to myself there happened something of startling interest. I nearly became a good soldier. It began with a gumboil and outrageous toothache that swelled my cheek to the likeness of a dumpling, and put me into the vilest temper. When the gumboil subsided, I discovered to my amazement that I had acquired not only confidence, but a new capacity of enjoyment. Rations were plentiful : I ate with good appetite, and swigged my rum with enormous pleasure. I was still afraid, especially of being taken prisoner, and of heavy

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trench-mortars that shook the earth with the close violence of their explosion ; but my fear was under control, and far less tiresome than toothache.

It is true that I never learnt to handle pick and spade very cleverly, and as many of my fellow privates had been miners, my ineptitude was the more apparent by contrast. Once, while we were digging a new line, the Commanding Officer came to inspect our work and stood for a long time behind me. Compared with the deep excavation of my comrades, I had made, I confess, but a shallow hole ; and his voice, when at last he spoke, was recognisably unfriendly.

His first question was insulting. ' What are you doing ? ' he asked.

I turned and stood rigidly at attention : ' Digging a trench, sir.'

' My wife,' he said, ' has a small dog, a Pekinese, that goes out every morning to do its business in the garden. And that little Pekinese dog makes a bigger hole than you do.'

Glumly, amid sycophantic laughter, I waited for the inevitable conclusion. It came. He turned to the N.C.O. beside him and said coldly, ' Take his name, sergeant.'

But I found compensation when, in a rather casual way, I became a sniper. Because of the composite nature of the battalion, organisation was a little sketchy, and appointments were made in a somewhat perfunctory fashion. At stand-to one morning the company sergeant-major enquired for marksmen, and though others kept a prudent silence, I stood proudly forward, exclaiming ' Here, sir ! '

' All right,' he said, ' you're a sniper. There's a hole about twenty yards in front of that sap that'll give you a good field of fire. You'd better get into it before the mist rises.'

And then I earned my pay, and in a taut unrelenting way enjoyed myself. I had found a rifle that was unusually well balanced, and I got the nose of the sear so filed that little

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more than blood-pressure on the trigger would fire it. It was a good rifle. Twice we were attacked, and the attacks were beaten off; and there were German working-parties within easy range. I earned my rations, and for a few days lived at the full pitch of strenuous excitement.

But my little while of active service was nearly over. Early one morning we were driven out of the ruined village of Voormezele and, in a most unwilling counter-attack, recaptured it an hour or so later. Pressing hard, and vastly outnumbering us, the Germans came back. They turned our flank, and my platoon was left in an unfinished trench that thrust like a tongue into their midst. I was at the extreme end of it, because from there ran a sap I had used for sniping. They were very close. One could see the agitation of their features, and the shape of their helmets appeared more sinister than ever. I had used all my ammunition — I had been shooting badly — and in any case my rifle was too hot to hold. But I had a box of bombs, already detonated, and I threw one that fell short. I was swinging for the second when I heard a wild shout behind me, and looking round saw the trench was empty save for one man, who had come back to warn me that we were retreating. He was an old regular soldier, and had also been a nurse in a lunatic asylum. He was a big good-looking man, but his cheeks had strangely fallen in. He must have lost his false teeth, I thought.

I threw my second bomb, more usefully than the first, and turned to run. I ran so very fast that, although I was the last by a long way to leave the trench, within two hundred yards I had passed several of those who preceded me; including an officer who was looking back with an expression of reluctance that, in the circumstances, appeared strangely ill-timed.

I continued to run till in a mingling of righteous indignation and utter dismay I felt on my head a blow of indescribable force. It was a bullet, and probably a machine-

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gun bullet; for the rifle-fire of the German infantry was poor.

When I recovered consciousness the surrounding landscape appeared entirely empty. But I could not see very well, and perhaps I was mistaken. A few shots, that were evidently hostile, gave me a rough direction, and with clumsy fingers I took from a pocket in the lining of my tunic a little package of field-dressings. I could not undo it, but stuck it whole on the back of my head, where I judged the wound to be, and kept it in position with my steel helmet, that a chin-strap held tightly on.

Scarcely had I made these arrangements when, my sight growing more foggy, I fell into a water-logged trench. It was deep, and full to the brim, and the sides were so well revetted that I had great difficulty in getting out. I was nearly drowned, indeed, and lost my good rifle there. But the cold water revived me, and now my only feeling of discomfort was extreme weariness. So I threw off my equipment and my tunic, and found progress a little easier. Presently, after walking, as I thought, for many miles, someone came to help me, and I saw a cluster of men in kilt and kilt-apron, who looked familiar. I waved my hand to them. It was the very last, the ultimate remnant of the battalion, and already they were forming for the counter-attack. In the afternoon they recaptured Voormezeele.

My wound was dressed and I was given a coat. I lay for some time among dying men, and grew so displeased with such company that I got up and, joining a party of walking wounded, found something to eat. I was ravenously hungry. Then we were put into an ambulance, and the jolting of that was an agony that drove one nearly mad. The ambulance stopped, and we had to get out and walk to a train. Watching us were thirty or forty men of the Chinese Labour Corps. Moon-faced, thickly wadded coolies like those I had been warder among in the long hut at Calais. The same men, perhaps.

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They began to laugh at us. We were a ludicrous company, tottering and misshapen, roughly bandaged; but only the dreadful sanity of China could have seen the joke, I think. Thin of voice, the coolies tittered with laughter ; then as their mirth grew, doubled-down and held their sides, or clapped each other on the back. Peel upon peel their laughter rang, and they pointed to the saviours of the western world.

V

SOLDIERS IN BED

OVER tall white pilasters a frieze of rosy nymphs, straddling small clouds or coyly fingering their resilient breasts, looked down upon four rows of beds, and through enormous windows the misty Channel showed, the sunlight came to dazzle gilt mouldings and pucker the eyes of American nurses. Such charming nurses, with swift and gentle fingers, with friendly voices. They were skilful and methodical, they had time and the humanity to sit and talk with their patients. They had authority, being in a military hospital, but they felt no wish nor found the need to show it. They pampered us. We got tea in proper china, not army mugs, and buttered toast instead of hunks of bread. They medicined the wounds of war and mitigated remembrance of its brutality.

Though ill fortune had clouted me on the head, good fortune did its best for comfort by taking me to a hospital that the people of New York, by voluntary contribution, had established in the Casino at Boulogne. To a private soldier it was a remarkable experience. The sudden translation from dug-out and Nissen hut to the luxury of those huge painted rooms was fantastic, but more significant was the change that American democracy made in one's status. From the rank of an army number, one was promoted to human being. The orderlies were cheerful and sympathetic,

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and meals were actually served on a cloth : a tray-cloth was an extraordinary luxury. The surgeon, a major no less, would stand at the foot of one's bed and talk like a man, not an officer. One ceased to be regarded as government property, and became a wounded ally. Previously, of course, one had been very scornful about the dilatory fashion in which the United States had added themselves to the war, but this happy experience of transatlantic methods inclined one to believe that all American policy must have a wisdom and benevolence beyond the scope of British understanding. Fondling a tea-cup and following with devotional gaze a nurse as pretty as a magazine-cover, one concluded that America knew best.

It is permissible to laugh at sentimentality, but about this time I was profoundly grateful for it. I was being prepared for an operation, and the sister in charge had a difficult task. It was two or three days since I had been wounded, and the blood about my fractured skull had formed with my hair, which was long at the time, a mat of some thickness and hard consistency. This had to be removed with a razor. But all my head was bruised and singularly tender, and try as I might, I could not submit calmly to the process of chipping and scraping. To be more honest, I howled like a child with broken knees. And the sister, who might well have been merely impatient, was full of sympathy. She told the orderly with the razor to stop his painful work, and to another she said : ' I've got an idea ! Do you know where Nurse So-and-so is ? Well, go and look for her and tell her to come right along.'

And to me she said : ' How would you like to see a nice Scotch girl ? Would that make you feel better ? Because I've just remembered that we've got a Scotch girl in the hospital, and we won't do another thing till she's right here beside you. She's a very lovely girl, and I know you'll like her.'

The Scotch nurse came, and joined the conspiracy of

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comfort. She held my head in her hands and made sweet soothing noises while the shaving continued. She had the sort of strength that is capable of giving solace, and her voice was peaceful. I was thankful indeed that the sister was American, and not ashamed of sentiment.

After this dismal antecedence the operation itself was a trifling matter. A strip of bone, some two and a half inches long, was removed from the outer table of my skull under local anaesthetic. The sensation was comparable to that of cutting a finger-nail that had become a quarter of an inch thick, and elicited only a mild anxiety. But there continued to be some undesirable pressure on my brain, and for a considerable time I had to be given morphia before I could sleep. The effect of this was curious. The area of pain grew gradually less until it shrank to the size of a small pearl, which for a moment was brightly illuminated, and then vanished. But coincident with the shrinking of pain came a sensation of fear, for I knew that I would shortly be asleep, and I was afraid of my dreams, which were horrible and alarming.

They began in various ways, with confusion of one sort or another, but always proceeding to a landscape such as might have been painted by the douanier Rousseau. A thick tangle of forest-growth, the leaves very carefully drawn, and everything brightly coloured. Then from the jungle would come a troop of fearful gnomes, more vegetable than human in their kind, and strangely maleficent. Their bodies were a rubbery green, and swelled as they came nearer. My brain expanded, like an enlarging picture-frame, to accommodate their growing size, and finally they burst and I was drowned in an effluence of viscous fluid. I could not arm myself against terror of this dream.

Compared with many people in the ward, however, I was only slightly wounded, and I remember my astonishment when the sister told me that I would never see the

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trenches again. I was even disappointed, for during my last week or two of fighting I had been very proud of the fact that I was adapting myself to trench life, and thought I had become a good soldier. It was depressing to realise that all my training would now be wasted. The sister herself was in a mood of gentle melancholy, and sitting beside me she spoke of a very dear friend of hers who was a major in Paris. Under the evening light the Channel was honey-hued and calm. It seemed intolerable that her heart should be so unprofitably bestowed. She left her autograph-album on my pillow, and I composed some bashful verses for her.

In rather less than a month I was transferred to England, and travelled in a style of my own choosing. A ticket was attached to one's bed that indicated whether one was a stretcher case or walking-wounded. Stretcher cases were carried below, but walking-wounded stayed on deck. My nearest neighbour was labelled for the deck, and as he was sleeping at the time, I changed our tickets and saw a pretty sight in consequence. A German aeroplane, flying very high, aimed a couple of bombs either at the ship or the harbour, and promptly a fleet of little scarlet seaplanes, like a whirlwind of red roses, went up to the attack and drove him off. An exciting and a gallant spectacle, and the last pleasure I had for some time.

From the Casino I went to a workhouse on the eastern fringe of London, and though I recognised how appropriate was the transition, I could not pretend it was agreeable. It was a dismal hospital, and the ward sister inspired no poetry. She was elderly, not beautiful, and her hypodermic needles were always blunt. They were so marvellously and obtusely blunt that whenever she came to thrust one into my arm, she must stoop and lean upon the point with all her strength. She would lose her footing with the effort. *Slip-slap*. Her large flat feet would slide and shamble on the polished floor as she felt for another grip

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and fought again to push the needle in. . . . I had a second operation, and a strip of the inner table of my skull was removed. The sister, who was kind in her own fashion, kept the bone to give to my mother ; who did not appreciate the gift. Prior to the operation I was starved for a day, but no one told me why, and when a visiting member of the Salvation Army offered me two penny bars of chocolate, I took them gratefully. So I was disgustingly sick during the operation, and the surgeon was angry.

There were several other head wounds in the ward, who died of meningitis. But I was too young to suppose that my life was in any danger, and presently the night sister, a strapping red-haired creature, formed the amiable habit of waking me at two o'clock in the morning and taking me to her room, where we used to enjoy a hearty supper of sausages and strong tea and cigarettes.

Mending rapidly under this treatment, I was transferred to a voluntary hospital near Birmingham, where my mother was a member of the staff. This change was effected by friendly influence, and for a month or two I lived as pleasant a life as I could desire. My sister, who at the age of seventeen was driving a car for the W.R.N.S., was also in the neighbourhood, and sometimes at the week-end she would entertain me very handsomely. Her pay was thirty-five shillings a week, whereas mine was one and twopence a day.

But such happiness could not last. The friendly hospital was closed for repairs or alteration or some such thing, and I was sent to a similar establishment in a small market town in Staffordshire. Similar in constitution, that is, but not in spirit. Our new Commandant was a haggard martinet, a long grey woman wearing South African medal ribbons, and her hospital was full of premature veterans. Many of them were oldish men, and all had a quiet and slippered look. They treated the Commandant with great deference and were continually saluting her. They might have been

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her tenants, all in arrears with their rent, and desperately anxious to preserve her favour.

Every hour of the day was ring-fenced with rules and regulations, and meals were eaten, in the silence of a dreadful gentility, under the chill and rheumy eye of the Commandant or the cold gaze of her jackal the Quartermaster. A furious female discipline prevailed.

There was a red-haired Cameron Highlander called Macgregor, a professional runner in civil life, who by the irony of war had been wounded in the ankle and walked slowly upon crutches. He and I had both come from the friendly hospital — where we had collaborated in reducing the temper of a sergeant by threatening to drown him in an artificial lake — and were conspicuous in the old woman's wardship because we were the only Scots. We attracted her attention the second morning we were there, when on a bench in the market-place of the little town she found us with our arms about the plump and friendly waists of a pair of Waacs. 'Good morning, Commandant,' we said in the most amiable fashion, but without modifying our position; and later in the day were utterly astonished when she reproved us for undisciplined behaviour. We should have discarded the Waacs, and leaping to our feet, saluted her in drill-book fashion.

A week later we were again in trouble because we omitted to salute a very young and beautiful Staff officer. He rushed across the street and in a shrill indignant voice demanded our reason for neglecting the compliment to which he was entitled. Macgregor, leaning on his crutches and smiling most charitably, said that he was a nervous wreck and dared not salute for fear of losing his balance; while I, with a certain wildness of invention, explained that having been wounded in the head I had lost my memory. The memory, in particular, of military principles and a soldier's duty. These excuses led to more trouble, and new disgrace accrued with every day.

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The end came when the Commandant — **her long upper** lip was deeply wrinkled, the lonely hairs upon her chin grew stiff with rage — discovered Macgregor and myself, with two charming nurses, in one of the bedrooms at half an hour before noon, when no patient was allowed to be above stairs. Macgregor and his crutches were being taught to dance, while I with the other nurse held innocent hands on a bed. A laughing and a harmless picture, but the old woman thought otherwise, so Macgregor and I were returned forthwith to the depot hospital with an evil reputation, and we said good-bye, in the garden after lights-out, to two nurses whose temper was like fulminate of mercury.

In the depot hospital Macgregor's ankle broke down and he returned to the operating theatre. But I was discharged with a few days' leave and orders to report to the Reserve Battalion of the Black Watch in Edinburgh Castle. The bandage was removed from my head, and I left with the wound still raw.

The Castle was too cold for an easy convalescence, and I was neither well nor happy there. And there I was assailed by farcical misfortune : both barrels, and simple tragedy for a chaser.

Among the last remnants of the battalion in France had been a rough and raw-boned lance-corporal with a history of nearly three years' active service and a Military Medal. Some time after I was wounded he had been recommended for a commission, and was presently posted to an officers' training battalion. But despite the country's fearful shortage of officers, and the commissioning of almost anyone with straight legs and a trace of literacy, he was found too rough and hairy about the heels to be disguised as a temporary gentleman, and so was returned to his battalion. I met him one morning in a place where civilians never meet, but where soldiers are habitually sociable, because the military construction of *usual offices* is very different from civil practice ; being communal, not solitary. I listened to his news, and

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then as I was going he stopped me and asked : ' Where's your D.C.M. ? Why haven't you got the ribbon up ? '

I was startled and very much confused, and desired an explanation. It had been common talk in the battalion — in the rump of the battalion — that I had been given the Distinguished Conduct Medal, he declared. What for ? I asked. Well, I'd been doing some sniping before I was wounded, he said. I'd been out on my own for a night or two, hadn't I ? And I was the last man to leave Voor-mezele, I had held up the attack for a while. . . .

I wished I had never seen the fellow, for his talk poisoned me with a wild and hopeless longing. There is nothing, I suppose, that an ordinary coward would more delight in having than a medal for bravery, and I was tormented by the thought that I had got within gossip's distance of such an award, but no nearer. I would have given much for the medal, and to hear the false news of my having won it — to hear it in a latrine—was bitterness barbed with aconite and mockery. It was a long time before I recovered.

And then I was befriended by a Medical Officer, and mocked again. He was a big man with a broken nose, who had been an amateur boxer of some repute, and he said I should have been discharged from the Army, and he would help me to get out of it, if that was what I wanted. It was. So he described the symptoms I ought to have, and put down my name for a Medical Board. But enthusiasm undid me, for I committed to memory every possible symptom and swore to the lot of them with such detail and sincerity that the Board was very rightly suspicious and discounted my statement by something like ninety per cent. Instead of returning me to civil life, it put me in a lower medical category and insulted me beyond measure by sending me to a Labour Battalion.

This was an appalling translation, and I left Edinburgh in a state of unmitigated rage. My destination was a small and dismal town — or village, a kind of hobbledehoy and

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overgrown village — in the middle part of Scotland, where some dilapidated companies of the Labour Corps were billeted in a ruined factory.

It was the very rubbish-heap of war, a dump for the too-often wounded and hideaway for warped and coughing cripples of the slums. There were men there with mutilated bodies and limping minds. Criminals and broken men, the refuse of a weary country. Two or three nights after my arrival I was on guard : there were eighteen prisoners and five sentries to watch them. A sentry at every side of the guard-room, and one in the loft above. I was in the loft. These men were criminals, not in the Army's use of the words, but old lags and prison-breakers. Some of them were desperate, and the guard-room did nothing to reconcile them to imprisonment, for it was wretchedly small, unheated, rat-infested, lighted and ventilated only by two narrow windows crossed with iron bars.

One glance at the camp had decided me that I could not stay there, so I reported sick, and when the Medical Officer asked what was the matter with me, I answered, ' Nothing. I'm a fit man and I want to go back to my battalion.'

' Strip,' he said, and when I had undressed he could find nothing wrong with me ; for my hair had grown and covered the gutter in my head, of which I now made no mention. So he marked me as able for General Service, which automatically released me from the Labour Corps after an attachment of something less than twenty-four hours; and all I had to do was wait until my swift recovery was registered by the appropriate authority, and orders came for me to return to the Black Watch.

In the meantime, however, this despairing and dissolute camp was stricken by a wave of that epidemic of influenza which swept the world in 1918, and suddenly I became a medical orderly in a hospital which had to be guarded by two sentries with fixed bayonets, because among the

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patients were some criminals from the guard-room. One night when I was in solitary charge — the doctor was on leave and Sergeant Bottle of the R.A.M.C. was drinking again — a deserter who had just been captured grew delirious, and his temperature rose to 105. So with the help of one of the sentries I laid him on a rubber sheet and sluiced him with cold water till it went down again ; and he lived to go to prison after all.

In this dismal company I celebrated the Armistice ; and celebrated it on the parade-ground, doing punishment drill in full pack. A false rumour of peace, two days before, had provoked a riot, of which a serious view was taken because an obscene and drunken hooligan attacked the sergeant of the guard and his command with a loaded rifle and bayonet. I entirely agreed with the authorities in deprecating this behaviour, for I was on guard at the time and sorely frightened — the sergeant ordered me to disarm the fellow, but as my nerve was unequal to the task he had to do it himself— yet I and my small coterie of friends were agreed in thinking that it was monstrously unfair to punish the innocent with the guilty, and assemble us to welcome peace in full marching order.

These friends were two elderly men, one Irish, the other Lowland Scots, the former having been in the time of his greatest prosperity a rubber in a Turkish bath, and the latter a night watchman : he was almost entirely without speech, but smoked a short pipe in a manner which indicated a friendly nature. Then there was a Lancashire man, a puddler by trade, whose legs were horribly scarred by the molten iron with which he had worked, and who, on being asked if he was married, blushed to the eyelids and answered modestly, ' No, but I'm courting.' And finally a recruit, a decent and bewildered ploughboy, round as a barrel, who had been called-up and thrown at once upon the rubbish-heap because he had only a couple of fingers on one hand. . . . These were my friends when I heard

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of the death of him who had been my inseparable friend.

Bonner was dead, with whom I had laughed all through a winter of the war, and whose gay spirit I had breathed like mountain air. He had been killed in France, in the last weeks of the fighting, thrusting forward against a nest of German machine-guns.

V

GAUDEAMUS

EARLY in 1919 I returned to civilian life and Aberdeen, where for a week or two I affected a romantic solitude. This studious singularity was to be a memorial to Bonner, whose death had been such a heavy blow to me that my sorrow demanded the most extravagant manifestation. By a wilful loneliness I would proclaim my loss, and keep it fresh within a bitter pride. I had in mind, perhaps, a Byronic hero. Lara, it may have been :

As if the worst had fall'n which could befall,
He stood a stranger in this breathing world.

I was still a month or so younger than twenty at the time, and my grief was quite genuine. But my exposition of it lasted no longer than might be expected, and when one evening I met two former acquaintances who had lately been demobilised — the one a subaltern in the Gordon Highlanders, the other a Gunner — I acquired with the flexibility of youth another disposition, and after two or three drinks in the nearest pub perceived that a certain gaiety would blend with cynicism and the flavour of remembered misery to make a more interesting philosophy.

A disingenuous philosophy ; but in the atmosphere of the immediately post-war period there were conflicting and quite irreconcilable elements. There was a feeling, barely

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suppressed and every now and then emerging with volcanic force — and a shadow of volcanic smoke — of holiday and triumph. There was anger, too, with pride and contempt. Anger against the folly under which we had suffered, contempt for all authority because authority was still impotent to banish folly, and pride in what we had been and the regiments we had marched in. We wore a kind of skin that was made of harsh and gloomy memory, but being young the skin was not very thick, and beneath it was a mere schoolboy, undefeated, and as ready to jump out as a jack-in-the-box. The University was full of men who had lately been soldiers, and now with certain condescension were students again. They had been given a new tenancy of life, and were resolute to find pleasure in it; but they could not altogether control a darker temper which, whenever there was talk of the war, would come pat, like the devil in an old play, to speak its share of muddle and grisly fun. There was conflict between a bloody knowledge of the world and hunger for enjoyment; conflict between urgent flesh and a grudging acceptance of responsibility; conflict with the conservatism of age and the rottenness it propped, and conflict with the revolutionary ideas that threatened to destroy what was left of the poor world. Anger was abundant and conflict ubiquitous, but while it lasted youth was the victor, and everybody took the maximum of enjoyment out of a life whose precarious nature was made perfectly clear at intervals of a couple of months or so, when someone or other would die of gas in the lungs or an unhealing wound.

I resumed, but not very seriously, the study of medicine. I had no great interest in the matter of it, but I found many engaging friends among my fellow students, and I calculated that few professions would more readily provide me with means to travel about the world. That was my real desire: to see the variety of Asia and America, and the seas around them. I never regarded the practice of medicine

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as an end, but only as the means of a vagrant livelihood ; and that, of course, was the principal reason why I never came in sight of the necessary degrees. But the years were not wasted, if enjoyment is any measure of success.

There is much to be said for Aberdeen as a place to live in. It has good neighbours, the sea on one side and hills on the other. On a fine October morning the sea lies glimmering, a milky turquoise, under a bright haze that sea-gulls break with their hard white wings, and crumbles on a mile of pale gold sand. Inland are solid farms, their stackyards full, the smell of turnips and of dung, and empty stubble-fields climbing to the west, from whose upper slopes can be seen a brown range of hills, and in the distance, blue but with a streak of early snow, the broken blade of Lochnagar. The city itself is built of a rough and shining stone, a white city, rigorous and clean. As gay a sight as any town can offer is Aberdeen drying itself after rain, the sun shining, and every house glittering with felspar, quartz, and mica. But the inhabitants, though nearly as stubborn as their granite, are less brilliant. They are rural at heart, and live' privately in their strong houses. They are void of intellectual curiosity, and without passion.

Such disabilities, however, made little difference to us. We had our own society, and paid small attention to the bourgeoisie until the time came to join it. We lived nearer to Bohemia than Aberdeen. Like the Bohemian king of the history books, we had gone blindly into battle, and our finances were always in that state of shallow flux that characterises the Bohemian exchequer. A flood-tide would take us swiftly to a pub, the last of the ebb carried us philosophically to the pawnshop.

The normal poverty of a Scottish university, however, was at that time alleviated by a subsidy. The Government, in return for services rendered, had awarded to ex-soldier students an allowance of about thirty pounds a term, and the arrival of this gratuity used to be celebrated with much

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enthusiasm. But continuance of the dole unhappily depended on proof that we were advancing in knowledge : on the passing of examinations, that is. And when, after two or three terms, I could give no such evidence of progress, my dole was stopped. This was a tragic disappointment.

I did what I could to soften it by pawning a gold medal that I had won at school for the composition of Latin prose. It was a good medal, and I got four pounds for it.—This when gold was still reasonably priced at twenty shillings to the sovereign.—Now the pawnbroker's interest is a ha'penny per half-crown per month, so the annual debt on my medal came to sixteen shillings. At the end of the first year I was unable to redeem it, but I managed to pay the interest, and so preserved my title to it. But by the end of the second year I found that even sixteen shillings was difficult to come by, and deciding that so large a gold reserve was too expensive to maintain, I let it go. Most of the European governments found themselves in a similar predicament, and came to a like conclusion, some years later. It was early in 1922 that I went off gold. 'The poet — I was writing a lot of turgid or trivial verse at the time — even the poet *manqué* is always ahead of the politician.

There was poverty, of course, more serious than mine. With a blink of the mind I remember P., an amiable and slow-witted creature, with melancholy eyes and great red knuckles, who had married young, and whose wife kept him with her sewing-machine while year after year he bewildered himself with books that he could never understand, and made clear to everyone but her his utter incapacity. There was a Highlander with a heart made for childish enjoyment and no brain at all, whose parents in the Outer Isles maintained him at the University because their vanity would never let them confess their mistake in sending him there ; though they had to scrape the pot for every penny piece. And he, poor devil, grew so ashamed of his stupidity

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that for half the term he would hide himself from others¹ sight. There was D., good-looking and more smartly dressed than the majority, who rode thirty miles home on his bicycle every Saturday to have his only couple of shirts and handsome chequered stockings washed for another week. There was L., who had won a D.S.O. in the war, and had to help his widowed sister with her domestic washing, and oversee her unruly children at their homework, before he could sit down to work himself. There was poverty that showed itself in a stiff ungracious abstinence or curious outlandish clothes, and poverty that concealed itself with a Castilian pride. The Highlanders hid their poverty as if they had been Moslems and their indigence a virgin like the young moon of summer.

But give the Highlanders a chance and the transient means to show their hospitality, and they discovered a princely manner. There was a Celtic Society that met with pomp and circumstance for an annual dinner, but never met twice in the same place, for no hotel would twice endure the conclusive riot. The best speech I have ever heard was at one of these dinners, the speaker a thickset man from the island of Lewis. He was dark-haired, going bald in front, and had a stiff immobile look unless there was excitement or a little drink in him. But then he moved as if quicksilver ran in his veins. When he got up to make his speech he spoke three sentences, and then with a leap was on the table, as nimble among the glasses and decanters as if he were dancing the sword-dance. His voice had a wide range, from husky gloom and sinister innuendo to pealing scorn, a great shout of laughter. His thick body was shaken with tides of feeling, his arms were rhetorical, and phrases scattered from his finger-tips. His large pale face grew lively as a lake in the wind, reflecting storm or sunlight or the shiver of ice, and all his listeners laughed or grew black with hatred as he chose to make them. And when like a man who is speaking his last words upon earth

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he came hoarse and breathless to the coda, they rose to him as if he had been a national hero announcing victory after a decade of savage war.

This, I say, was the very best speech I ever listened to ; though it was in Gaelic, and not a word could I understand.

It was a loquacious period, and speech-making a popular activity. Not only were there innumerable societies for the discussion of all manner of topics — sociological, political, scientific, religious, and literary — but meetings were always being summoned, by some lonely enthusiast or sudden coalition, to utter indignation or expound reform, to propose the constitution of yet another society, convene a dance, or organise a dinner. And every dinner was an excuse for a toast-list of inordinate length.

It was in the Union Debating Society, however, that argument and oratory reached their full enormity. Week after week the hall was crowded to its farthest corner, and any matter from the lightest whimsy to the darkest bruise of politics would rouse ingenious approval or fiery censure. It was in these surroundings that I first found publicity, the occasion being a debate with some of the other Scottish universities.

In the political cant of that time *the New Jerusalem* was a common phrase : a title for the better world that was still being promised to workmen, former soldiers, victors in the war, or the world at large — I forget which. And among the much-touted remedies for social injustice or economic stasis was the Capital Levy. So when a speaker rather tiresomely began to fiddle on both these strings, I interrupted to ask if his New Jerusalem was to be exclusively inhabited by Capital Levites. Newspapers all over the country quoted this simple joke, and most of my friends assured me they had thought of it for themselves, but had not considered it worth uttering. I believe them now. To take for one's own what lies on the tip of other people's tongues is a certain road to fame.

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I was an eager politician — a Liberal for most of the time, if my memory is good — and I developed a style of hearty criticism that fills me now with admiration. In a manifesto written in 1921 I find the formidable assertion that throughout Europe and the Near East — as well as at home — our Government had 'scratched on the grave-stones of British diplomacy its own proleptic epitaph of incompetence.' In 1921. . . .

To win permission to speak my thought with so large a freedom, I had served a difficult apprenticeship under a remarkable man to whom, elsewhere, I have given the name of Garry Duncan. When the Debating Society was reconstituted after the war, Garry was its first president, and I was secretary. The ordinary functions of a secretary are the writing of letters to prominent citizens, inviting them to become vice-presidents of the Society for the price of a guinea subscription, and apologising to one's committee for having had no time to write the minutes of the previous meeting. But Garry discovered a new duty, and insisted that the secretary should act as chucker-out. At ten minutes past nine — the pubs closed at nine — there was sometimes an influx of members who believed that shouting was the soul and the whole of wit, interruption the life and the purpose of discussion. If these heresies became intolerable, Garry would suspend the debate and desire the secretary to remove the authors of offence.

There was a psychological difference between those who came into the body of the hall and those who went into the gallery. The former would listen to persuasion, but the latter had to be thrown downstairs. It was all very trying. Indeed I found the whole business of the Debating Society a torture as well as a delight. I would wait my turn to speak in a livid distress — often I lost the latter half of a sentence, and even of a word, in the black void of aphasia — and I never really enjoyed the necessity of tussling on the stairs with inebriated members of the Third

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Fifteen. **But** fright, whether physical or stage, was not enough to keep me from talking ; and Garry Duncan lured me as irresistibly — if the recipe is true — as the bait of a young elephant in a trap for unicorns.

Garry's appearance made him conspicuous, his character added fame. He wore generally a suit of greenish tweed, with right knickerbockers and a tweed hat of sporting shape. His cheeks and upturned nose were the colour of a geranium, his eyes were little and bright blue, his hair a golden fire. His energy was unceasing, and he was ever stirring and prodding those about him to some new enterprise. He was generous beyond measure, radiantly kind, but in his cups a sly fantastic rogue. And his weakness, that magnified his fame into legend, was an excessive and recurrent thirst.

He was not a regular but a periodic drinker, and whenever he began to drink he sloughed sobriety completely, and for several days would live in a world of images that he had created for himself. He was strangely fond, at such a time, of visiting post-offices, his purpose being twofold. He would send abusive telegrams to Lloyd George, and go shopping among the stamps and postal-orders. He would buy, for no discoverable purpose, large quantities of penny, twopenny, fourpenny, or ninepenny stamps, selecting them with great care from full sheets : stamps of all values, and sixpenny postal-orders. And it was dangerous for a girl with pale stockings to walk in front of him, for declaring that her legs reminded him of farmyard geese — for which he had no liking — he would pursue her with his walking-stick to knock them down.

There was an occasion when he caused us great anxiety by starting to drink a few days before a ceremony known as *the Kirking of the Council*. This was the official attendance, in the University chapel, of the students' governing body, and Garry, as an office-bearer, had to read one of the lessons. We formed a small committee to look after him, **but** the

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task was almost impossible. He knew the interfering way of friends, and had prepared his bout with foresight. We searched his rooms and took away all the whisky we could find. But he had hidden half-bottles in drawers and suit-cases, under his mattress and up the chimney, and though we confiscated an enormous quantity, more remained, and Garry continued in a state of malign and jeering intoxication. Then we removed him to a pub, whose proprietor was a common friend, and lodging him in a room where there was no hidden supply, kept continuous watch over him.

I was on duty one afternoon, and Garry sleeping. I left him for half an hour, locking the door behind me. And when I returned I saw a man kneeling in the corridor outside his room, a genial but sodden fellow, a rubber-planter come home on leave, who was spending all his holiday in the pub where Garry had been imprisoned. Garry, by luck or cunning, had summoned him to the door, which was pervious. That is, it had a keyhole. And the planter, on his knees, held a large tumbler of whisky-and-soda that Garry was sucking through a straw.

But he read his lesson on the following Sunday, in a voice strained like an E-string, his nose above the engulfing waters of Isaiah as if he were a swimmer on the point of drowning, and all the choir full of the malted perfume of his breath.

Then he became a teetotaller, and stood by his resolve with a zest and stubbornness equal to his previous thirst. At a dinner, while everyone else grew louder of voice, more confident of soul and confidential too, more lavish at the wrist and dewy in regard, Garry would drink his quart or so of ginger-ale, and laugh in high pleasure at the antic spectacle which sobriety permitted him alone to see. Nothing more clearly showed the singularity of his genius than his ability to find a robust malicious pleasure in total abstinence. He never drank again; yet by the gross

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humour of the gods, he died of a liquid superfluity. He went for a year or so to West Africa, and by a river in sudden spate was unfairly drowned.

Our world had not quite recovered from its swollen habit of death, and I had other friends who died too young. There was Meldrum, with whom I used to box, and to whom I was once grateful indeed, because in a competition he beat a man who, if the match had gone otherwise, I should have had to fight; and I was frightened of his uncouth style. Meldrum, when the time came, beat me soundly, but in a decent manner that could have offended no one. He was a light-hearted, genial, most friendly creature, but when he was fighting his expression would change to the hard and single stare of a zealot.—A northern zealot, perhaps a Covenanter, rigid in his faith, his spirit burning on a narrow hearth.—He was not, I think, really fond of boxing, but let his friends persuade him, and then for a few minutes would put all his mind into it.

He was my second when I fought for the last time : a miserable occasion, for I had reached the final match in a local tournament, I was painfully excited, got badly beaten, and falling heavily so hurt my head that its war-time fracture was discovered, and I was forbidden to put gloves on ever again. Meldrum was then a most tender help ; and once again he supported me when my spirit needed a companion.

I had written a poem which looked, in new print, far better than it was, and to open every pore and light to this creation we got drunk together, and sitting on a hidden stair Meldrum, with generous praise and occasionally a hiccup, read some eight or ten times my lovely verses till even I had had enough of them.

His hair grew in a thick and densely curling mat, and when the German wound in his lung dissolved its cicatrice and let death poke in his beastly finger, the wave and curl went out of his hair; and while he still could speak, and

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laugh in a rueful way, it hung straight and lifeless, dull of hue, upon his forehead.

And there was Bill Johnston, who played three-quarter in what was, perhaps, the most highly accomplished Fifteen the University ever had; who found and unfolded, as a bright new thing, the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins when Hopkins was new indeed; who painted pictures, drew portraits, and with Clive Bell in the other hand would show how ill-done they were; who could discourse with learning upon claret, and prove it by his choice, when whisky and a mixed grill was all the scope of one's ordinary world.

He was the nearest our rudish company ever came to the complete, the civilised man, the humane ideal. Apt in war, cultivated in peace. He had proved his gallantry — on the night he got the wound that was to kill him, storming with the Cameron Highlanders a German stronghold, he won also the Military Cross — but better than that was the fortitude he wore so lightly, as if it were a cloak put on with a shrug of the shoulders. In his painting he tried to achieve significant form, but achieved it sooner in his life. And having shown it, died.

He wrote occasional verse, but there was little remarkable in that. It was a fashion of the time. I would not care to say that we made a nest of singing-birds in Aberdeen — for some of us had rather the rough and gawky look of young herring-gulls — but a covey of poetasters could any day be flushed in the Union at Marischal College, the Pavilion at King's, or the grimy-windowed office of *Alma Mater*, the University magazine.

In the south, about this time, a new sort of poetry was stirring, a serious and disintegrated kind that reflected, but failed to synthesise, the spirit of the time: the broken thread, the frosty perception of wasted soil, the grim colloquialism, the bright skin of a scar new-healed but aching. The fashion, however, did not reach Aberdeen.

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We were remote from the contagion of intellect, and remained unserious, old-fashioned, and conventional. As if to exemplify the compensation theory of Alfred Adler, we atoned for the irregularity of our lives by the orthodoxy of our writing. We might drink too much, and work too little, and barely afford a sufficiency of clean shirts; but our rhymes were tidy, our metre impeccable.

Nor did we affect the haughty singularity of a true poet, but filled each other's uncompleted sonnets when the need arose ; or patched a rondeau, darned a lyric, for the common good. I was editor of *Alma Mater* for a year, and discovered not only pleasure but profit in literature : we made over seven pounds on the year's trading. But this was with the help of a committee that always, on demand, could cap each other's rhymes, or find in their waistcoat-pockets, on a Monday afternoon, the last half-column that the printer waited for.

And yet I was dissatisfied. I could string verses, but I wanted to be a poet. I had a light hand for triviality, but broke my knees whenever I essayed a nobler leap. To express and find rhymes for a whimsy became easy enough, but never could I set forth in clear, compulsive, inevitable, and comely lines the emotions that made their transitory home in me.

As often as I was invaded by fragments of the eternal doubt, despair, and bliss of youth, I tortured myself in futile effort to give them articulate expression. I barked my knuckles and bruised my heart against the fine hard themes of rebellion, friendship, the slope of a hill drawn clear against an empty sky, the metastasis of drinking, and total love. It was intolerable to be in love, yet powerless to immortalise the cause.

But once I had the courage to state in action what I could find no words to prove. Once I made a poet's gesture, in deeds, not ink. I had fallen in love with a girl who provoked a similar wildness of emotion in a good

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many other young men ; for she was uncommonly lovely, and not aloof though always virtuous. By some stroke of luck, some happy juncture of choice and chance, it came my turn to be favoured, and in the very top and splendour of delight I took her out walking, and bought her trifling presents, and took her to the theatre, and to lunch in a country inn, and lived in the fulfilment of imagined bliss. There is only one way to be whole-hearted, and that is to give one's heart wholly away.

But there was a bias to my luck, a chip out of the side, a heavy corner to it; for all this entertainment needed money, and presently I was penniless, broke to the wide, and without a friend who was any better off. It was the devil of a problem that I then confronted.

But I solved it, with the narrow logic and nonsensical heroism of youth, by selling my books, the tools of my trade : there was Gray's *Anatomy*, forty-two shillings new, and Ellis's *Practical Anatomy*, that smelt of the dissecting-room, and Halliburton's *Physiology*, and Schäfer's *Histology*, and what else I forget. I was about to re-sit — having failed the first and second times — my Second Professional, and these tedious volumes were the key to that terrible examination. But I sold them — with a qualm, I admit, but without regret — and for a little while prolonged my daffodil harvest. . . .

I would probably have failed to pass the examination in any case. That was a consoling thought.

In the dissecting-room — a yellow glaze on the taut skin, the severed muscles rust-red and friable — the human cadaver makes fascinating scenery. The slim flexors of the arm, the gross display of gluteus maximus, the pale whorls of the brain, and the fine confusion of the belly : all these, and the nice arrangement of a joint — exquisitely machined and lubricated with such care — comprise a mechanism of infinite delight, a source of wonder and excitement far deeper than the calculable ingenuity of the purely com-

mercial adding-machine or internal combustion engines of more recent design.

But to look is one thing, to learn is another. *Some is plenty, enough is too much*, as the Maltese sailor so wisely said. And to memorise in total detail the geography of the human body is a task of brutal tedium. Two years are given to it. Two years of muttering the contiguous relations of the carotid artery, the *flexor carpi radialis*, and the fifth cervical nerve. Two years of learning with a tooth-comb the dispersion of the brachial plexus, and committing to memory with a perpetual hammer the contents of the popliteal space.

I could not do it. Inertia rose to flat refusal, mere idleness to glum rebellion. I failed four times my professional examination in Anatomy, and twice the sister trial of Physiology. I passed Physiology at the third attempt because, I think, I once arranged, for the Professor's wife, an academic tea-party in the Union ; and to a lesser extent because I took some pleasure in the prose style of Halliburton, who wrote the standard work. I remember one of his sentences that describes some process of digestion. *When the bile, says Halliburton, meets the chyme, the turbidity of the latter is increased by the precipitation of unpeptonised proteins.* An ample brothy style, more satisfying than the sandy content of Gray's *Anatomy*.

I would like to pretend that I suffered failure without a bruise ; but the truth is otherwise. I maintained a care-free look, but I grew more and more worried, and the leniency of the University authorities increased my anxiety. The ex-Service student was allowed to take new subjects though he had failed to show mastery over the old, and so to my debts I added Surgery, Pathology, Materia Medica, and practice in Midwifery. I liked none of them save midwifery and surgery-in-theory ; but in actuality the sound of a rib cracking in the shears drove the blood from my cheeks. Pathology and Materia Medica were competitors

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in dullness : the latter a *hortus siccus* without bloom or interest, the former a microscopic search for the infinitesimal evidence of cellular disaster that I could never see. Tedious subjects, both of them. But in Midwifery there was action and drama. There was excitement, there was handicraft and awe. I attended my so-many confinements, and if I am ever wrecked upon a desert island with forty pregnant women, I shall be of real assistance, I dare say, to all of them who do not elect a breech-presentation.

The growing burden, of uncongenial work and examinations that could not be passed, grew at last unbearable, and by a narrow margin anticipating the decision of the Faculty — its patience now as strained as mine — I decided to abandon Medicine. I decided ; but the strength of my decision lay in my mother.

It would be meaningless to speak of my mother, in this connexion, without some reference to her economic theory. It was, and is, a simple theory built upon faith and a bad memory. My father, when he died, had left no more money than might be expected of a master mariner, and of this my mother had lost some seven or eight hundred pounds that she lent to the French on the advice of a well-meaning lawyer. With the remainder she bought a few houses, whose tenants on the average proved far more honest than the average government; and by mixing hard work and domestic sapience with every shilling, she kept me in flesh and comparative idleness for half a dozen years. I had moments, even weeks, of shame, but she maintained unbroken her peculiar financial confidence, and her belief in the value of a University education. So when I confessed that I could no longer endure my *fainéant* study of Medicine, she said at once that I must take a degree in Arts. I muttered, in shabby humour, that I might get a job as an apprentice planter of tea, rubber, or some such eastern vegetable.

Nonsense, she said ; and when I spoke of expense, declared her theory. It was built upon the story of the Widow

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of Zarephath. Never in all her life, she said — her temper high — had she had money enough to know security, or money to buy what she merely wished for. But she had never lacked money for what was necessary, and since my father's death her money, for such purposes, had most certainly been replenished from unaccountable sources. By arithmetic she could prove that we should all have been starving eighteen months before. She did her arithmetic in illegible handwriting on the backs of envelopes, and from it could prove anything but wealth.

'That,' she said, 'is what we ought to have, according to calculation. Practically nothing.'

The ink was an illusory gleam on her undecipherable figures. It was impossible to dispute them.

'But have we ever been hungry? No! And we never shall be hungry. I can't afford to buy you luxuries, or any new clothes, but that doesn't matter so long as you have enough to eat, and something for your books. I've always been determined that you should have a University education — the only reason for our living in Scotland is that a University education is cheap here — and I'm not going to give up a lifetime's resolution because you can't or won't pass Anatomy. You'll take your degree in Arts if it costs me my last penny. But it won't! I'll always have plenty to live on. I can trust God for so much!'

I entered, then, upon a new curriculum, and found content.

Like all creation I had been hungry for life, and like most of my generation I had expected too much of it. I had expected more planets than the little sun of my existence could possibly attract; but in my new curriculum, in the swim of English literature, I could watch the planets of all human experience. I found a full table for my hunger.

Life, in human context, is the consciousness of life — the bull for all his potency is not yet born — and consciousness was unknown before the art of speech, the art of speech is

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but the alphabet of writing. If life is your appetite, go to a library. Even the fox-hunter, the lordly in scarlet, will read Surtees to fill the flavour of his riding. Even the six-year child, the imp of nature, spells on a pictured sheet the playtime of imaginary childhood to get the significance of his. Even the instinctive cowboy builds from indifferent ballads his notion of a dogie's proper attitudes. Life goes into good print as surely as virtue to an epitaph, and comes out again as strong as a falcon from the egg.

I was lucky in that the Professor of English Literature at Aberdeen was a rosy man with wondering eyes, a clear high voice, three waistcoats in winter, and a heart in love with Wordsworth and Shakespeare's panegyric tongue. He had the innocence, the capacity for pure amazement, that is the key to Wordsworth ; and a learned delight in the compact imagination of Shakespeare. He could impart both knowledge and delight.

He was a bookish man who would have wrinkled with deep laughter to be told there was any belittlement in such a title. His touch was delicate, but his mind robust. In his own house, where every wall was clad with books, his conversation was incurably peripatetic. He would go from room to room, reaching with eager hands to upward shelves — his tail-coat lifting oddly as he stretched — for book after book that would fortify or confirm an observation ; till his visitor at last went home with Elzevirs and octavos in all his pockets, three quartos in roughened calf under one arm, and a folio of steel engravings below the other. His regular visitors never arrived without a knapsack or small suitcase.

Most of his own traffic, he admitted, had been with the printed word, but he liked his students to have known the elements of life. A useful beginning to the appreciation of literature, he implied, was to have been in love, in battle, and in debt. Even the inlay of a Tennysonian phrase or the excess of virtuosity in Euphuism took living stuff for its material. It was as well to see that. Major comedy and

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Shakespearian tragedy, of course, required a reader who in human dealing had had some experience of ratiocination and despair. Literature might be the magnification, the microscopy, or selective reflexion of life ; but whatever it was, it required for its proper reading some small apprenticeship in living.

He could pollinate unlikely blooms. There was a medical student, a cheerful solid creature with the sly strength of Aberdeen, who casually attended a lecture or two, and went home to read *King Lear*. It was a June evening, warm and sunny, and presently the chiming of a clock reminded him that he must keep a rendezvous. He put a marker in *Lear* : the old man was shivering and cursing in the storm, poor Tom was a-cold, and the pages roaring with the loudness of the gale. The medical, going out to meet his girl, put on a winter coat and tied a muffler round his neck.

There was a thick-shouldered, sallow-faced Hungarian, a man of early middle-age, a solemn fellow, who by some minor extravagance of the Peace treaties had been sent to Scotland to study English literature. He listened to our rare professor, took his degree, and was ordered to return to Budapest to teach what he had learnt. But he could not bear the mechanic thought of teaching. He wanted only to do one lordly and simple thing. He wanted to open the hearts, of boys and girls and all Hungarians, to the wisdom, the majesty, the ineffable beauties of William Shakespeare.

I myself, on the night when he learnt that he had won his Doctorate, had just passed some trifling examination ; and was, perhaps, not much more sober than he. We stood at Queen's Cross, in the western respectability of Aberdeen, where five roads meet and two churches look down upon a great empty space circumferential to a granite monument that seems as stiff as Cleopatra's Needle ; but one New Year's Eve it was shifted three-quarters of an

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inch by a motor-car, a very small one, driven by another friend of mine, a Highlander.

We stood there, I say, at that time of the morning as if in dead Nineveh, beneath a sky thinly clouded, and here and there a wildly fluttering star, and there the pale face of the church clock frowning towards three ; and cried, he most bitterly and I but for company's sake, as I pretended, because Shakespeare had justified all God's creation, and we, knowing our felicity, had touched the corner of his cloak.

Then, having wept enough, we sat upon the curbstone that encircled the monument, and sang together, he in a rough accent that must have been Magyar :

Gaudeamus igitur,
Iuvenes dum sumus,
Post iucundam iuventutem,
Post molestam senectutem,
Nos habebit humus.

VI

THE EYE OF HEAVEN

IN 1925 I went to Bombay as assistant editor of the principal newspaper in Western India, my apparent qualifications for the position being three in number. I had been educated in Aberdeen, and two members of the editorial staff were Aberdonians, whose common virtue is local patriotism ; I had had a couple of poems published in the *London Mercury*, which may have revealed incipient ability to write about Hindu-Moslem politics; and being summoned to an interview in London, the editor took me out to lunch, and yawning, protested that he could not be bothered with the deciphering of so large and ill-written a menu, and would I order lunch for both of us ? I did, and got the job.

Returning home, I tried the *sortes Virgilianae* on the complete *Works of William Shakespeare*, and the point of my knife lay on the lines:

All places that the eye of Heaven visits,
Are to the wise man ports and happy havens.

There was, I thought, little chance that the eye of Heaven would fail to visit Bombay.

To a young man about to make his career in any part of Britain oversea, the most immediately useful equipment is some skill in golf, tennis, bridge, and horse-riding. Such qualifications may, in the long run, be found secondary to

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others; but on first appearance he will be judged, and during much of his service esteemed, for the dexterity of his paces upon these roads of escape.—The more crowded they are, the brighter the illusion of their going somewhere. — But I had never been rich enough to ride, and in my youthful arrogance I had despised the other three. They were popular, and therefore debased amusements ; so buttressing a natural inclination with wilful singularity, I had taken most of my pleasure, and spent all my money, in bookshops and in pubs. I had not eschewed violent exercise, but I had deliberately avoided those kinds of sport which were socially of use ; and I went into India with a serious handicap.

I found immediately a very kind and winning hospitality; and my response was a monumental incompetence on the tennis-court, a tedious ineptitude on the golf course, and the dull admission that I did not play bridge. My social prospects vanished in a fog of mutual bewilderment; and my appetite, which was wholly for India, was never satisfied.

I saw in Bombay the parrot-aisled, the orchid-hung, the zebra-haunted glades of an undiscovered jungle ; but people took me to their clubs. Of the Brahmin's ritual and the Bora's breakfast-table, I was equally curious; and my neighbours passed the madeira. To the majority of my European acquaintances India was little more than the means of making a living and a source of endless irritation. Their wives enjoyed it, because they had nothing to do and many servants to assist them ; but their talk was all of their own kind—they knew no gossip of their Indian neighbours — and their knowledge was slight of Karma, Dharma, and the Brahma behind Brahma of the Trinity.

But would I like to see a snake-charmer ? they asked, or a conjurer, the dusty conflict of snake and mongoose ?

Very much indeed.

The cobra spread its beautiful and deadly hood. A

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vagrant from Trichinopoli conjured his disciple out of a basket on to the feathery top of a little palm-tree. A mongoose — steel-spring and tireless ferocity beneath a coat of shabby brown — grappled a slow grass-snake, was wrapped in its tormented coil, shook it and worried till the coil became a frenzy, and then grew tired and fell apart, and victory was made manifest in two dark drops of serpent-blood.

The conjurer had a friend, a fortune-teller, black-silk-bearded, whose dark eyes were swollen with opium. I would live, he said, to ninety-two. I was pleased, but not persuaded. I would make plenty of money. Good again. But I would never be rich. I was disappointed. With incomprehensible malignity he said : ' Your friends will always get more from you than you from them.' I grew angry, and told him to go away. My friends were very agreeable people — I was drinking their whisky-and-soda — and I wished only that they could show me more of India than a few snake-charmers.

But disconcertingly another obstacle appeared. Anyone who had lived in the Punjab, Madras, or the Central Provinces would say contemptuously : ' Of course, Bombay isn't India ! ' With the same conviction, but a different accent, I later heard Dixie and the Middle West declare that New York wasn't America. But nobody could deny the presence in Bombay of numerous Indians, or in New York of some Americans.

Many of the native inhabitants, however, were no more helpful than their European neighbours. Intelligent young men from the Indian universities would speak only of politics and complain that Government did not do enough to provide employment for graduates. An educated Parsi would maintain that his community was very like the English — they were colonists and traders — and with inverted pride pretend that, as the English, they were foreigners in India. An elderly Rajput, a charming old

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man with upturned whiskers, the former Diwan of a Native State, emphatically averred that the social life of Rajputana was exactly the same as that of Scotland ; where, as he knew well, the people were divided into clans and domiciled among mountains. But he was drunk at the time.

There was another Rajput, one of the minor princes of his race, who told me something of their feudal state and the ancient ceremonial of their courts. He was a burly and delightful man, with a capacity for whisky that did something to support the Diwan's belief in consanguinity with Scotland. Cheerfully he said : ' I shall, in any case, have to do *pūja* for the sin of associating with you. I may as well do a little more *pūja* for the sin of drinking too much.' So I opened another bottle. But then he grew melancholy, and began to complain of the restrictions of his life. He was the guardian of a jewelled sword and a pair of spurs with which, when the time came for a coronation, he would invest the new Maharajah. It was a tedious occupation, he said, and he would much prefer to live in London.

One day in the office, unexpectedly, I found myself in India while I was dictating a letter that commended some proposal for the restriction of child-marriage. My typist, a charming and intelligent young Brahmin, burst suddenly into tears. I was abashed, and apologised for my clumsiness. I had hurt his feelings, and insulted the custom and religion of his country. I begged his pardon. ' But no !' he exclaimed, and furiously wiped his tears. ' You are right, and we know you are right ! To marry little children is a great scandal and a blot, and I am ashamed of it. I am crying for shame !'

I talked to Laloo, my servant, a tiny man with narrow shoulders, a miniature dignity in his bearing, a kind and honest nature, and a sinister expression. He came from Gujerat, north of Bombay, where on a small scale he was a landowner. He had thirty-two mango-trees, and enough ground to grow, in a good year, sixty maunds of rice. He

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had a wife, and a daughter for whom he hoped to provide a superior education. She was going, some day, to a high school.

From Laloo Bhika I might have learnt a little about village India, had I known more than twenty words of Hindustani or he more than forty words of English. But in Bombay few people bothered to acquire anything but a smattering of Hindustani; and presently I became afflicted with the *morbus Indicus* that reveals itself in shortness of temper and an irritated withdrawal into the society of one's own kind and colour; so I talked no more with Laloo, except to complain about the washing of my socks or his dilatory bringing of another drink; and by and by he went back to his own country to see to the harvesting of his rice.

I met a Moslem artist and his wife who were full of enthusiasm, he for a new school of painting that should learn afresh the purity and formalism of Moghul art; she for revival of the ancient music of India. They lived in a house built of Agra stone, by Agra masons, after the fashion of Moghul architecture. The garden, austere and geometric, was patterned with little water-channels, and from it one looked down at the crowded tongue of Bombay, at Chaupattie Beach aswarm on holy days with devout Hindus setting afloat propitiatory coconuts, or giving to the sea clay images of Ganpati; at the Towers of Silence, and palm-trees bending beneath the full-fed weight of sleepy vultures; at the scimitar-line of the evening lights, pale as celandines against a sky of dusky red. In the morning, when day comes flamingo-hued out of silver vapour, and in the evening, when the sun goes down to the dark sea with gonfalons of gold and crimson, India is the magnificent land of one's imagination; it is the brassy sun at noon that beggars the scope of fancy.

Like birds, that never sing their morning song at midday, the Indian musician has tunes that may not be heard except

in the proper season of the day. In the house of Agra stone I once listened to Indian music, at first in angry bewilderment, but at last with a strangely excited pleasure. I had gone to a party there. It was a literary party, and young Indians read poems of their own making that were thinly charged with a memory of the opulent *Gita Gobind*, and faintly reminiscent of the English Nineties ; or played upon the violin without charm. There was, too, a professional musician of much local repute whose instrument was a sort of miniature harmonium. He fingered its faintly squeaking keys, while working with his other hand a little bellows, and throwing back his head sang hoarsely a wailing dirge that rose to a high note of distress. A love-song, we were told. But Atiya Begum, our hostess, disliked his performance, and abruptly dismissed him. She was truly a musician, and had written an exegesis called *The Music of India*.

Among the improprieties, she said, for which the master should reprimand his pupils were *karagi*, or singing with the mouth wide open ; *kagaj*, or beginning with tumult and confusion ; *karaba*, or craning the neck like a camel ; *namiluti*, or singing with shut eyes ; and *bhikan*, which is singing in a voice like a donkey's. Our banished harmonium-player had committed more than one of these faults, I think.

Then the Begum took us on to the roof of the house, that overlooked the dusk of Bombay and the lights like a golden scimitar, and sang three or four songs that were proper to the hour. They were charming, and their idiom was beyond all comprehension. They woke no sympathetic emotion, but started a pleasantly bewildered excitement. They were, I thought, the expression of a world that lay, not merely remote from mine, but tilted at another angle. They were accents in the voice of India, but the language was more incomprehensible than Cretan.

I was mistaken. The songs, and every note of them,

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were easily translatable and strictly purposive. Indian music, in its infancy at least, was severely practical. A kind of flute called the *nai* was invented by Omar Aiyar to captivate maidens. The mythical *bansri* was contrived by Krishna to enslave the fabulous dairymaids of Brindaban. The *pungi* was made for snake-charming. And the intense vibrations of the *dipaka raga*, the fire-tune, were explicitly incendiary. It was last played, said the Begum, by Tan Sen, a court musician, to the Emperor Akbar, whose palace promptly went up in flames. But luckily a girl was passing who knew the *raga megh*, the tune of the Land of Rains, and with a proper sense of responsibility she began to sing it. Immediately rain fell in torrents and put out the fire.

Aurangzebe, the last of the Moghuls, disliked Indian music ; perhaps because he was a foreigner and could not understand it, perhaps because he feared for his palace. In his reign music was discouraged, and musicians fell into poverty. But the people grumbled, and to show their displeasure made ready a funeral procession that passed below the Emperor's window, the many mourners beating their breasts and tearing their hair.

' Whom are you mourning ? '. asked Aurangzebe.

' The goddess of music,' they said, ' who has died of the lack of royal favour.'

' Dig her grave so deep,' answered the unrepentant Emperor, ' that no sound or echo shall ever come out of it.'

Nearly ten years later I returned to India and found the Begum and her husband rather sadly dispirited. They complained that no one had any time for the arts, because everyone continually thought and perpetually spoke of politics. Politics, they said, was the curse of their country.

In the meantime I had been to America, and encountered in that omnibenevolent land a small but instructive example of the social complexity of India. Among the students in the university to which I was attached were half a dozen Indians with whom I sometimes ate my Sunday breakfast.

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There was a young man from Laloo Bhika's country of Gujerat, a politician by nature and heredity, who cried with shrill hatred against the British raj, and would never have lived so long had his tongue not wagged in the safe-keeping of *pax Britannica*. There was a thin, simple-minded, humorous and truculent fellow from the North-West Frontier Province, whose male relatives were mostly in British service, though an uncle or two served in the Afghan army ; he was very scornful of the Gujerati. There was a Madrassi Christian, gently mannered and mildly unhappy, to whom the Gujerati and the Frontier men were simply foreigners. There was a young Bengali zemindar, long and lean as a lamp-post, who owned thousands of acres and tens of thousands of human beings; the Gujerati and a man from Amritsar used to frighten him and make him angry by saying that very soon they were going to drive the British out of India, and then they would cut up his wealth and divide it among his poor neighbours; the zemindar believed devoutly in the Tightness of British rule, and wanted nothing better than its safe continuance. The man from Amritsar had been in the mob at Jallianwallabagh when Dyer's soldiers opened fire on them.—He was a scientist who for several years had kept himself in America on scholarships and exhibitions. He hated but did not despise the English ; he loved India, and was contemptuous of it.—The last of the six was the son of an hereditary official in one of the largest of the Native States ; he would have to return and spend the rest of his life there. He dreaded the prospect. His idea of freedom and happiness was to live in British India.

Once, after we had been arguing with some heat but in good temper, I said to the man from Amritsar, ' It's absurd to think of India as a single country. You're no more a nation than Europe. India's a geographical expression, and its people are all foreigners.'

' No,' he said. ' We are all Indians.'

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'What have you in common with these other people?'

'Just India. But that is enough.'

'If you had stayed in India, you would have done all you could to avoid meeting each other. A Pathan, a Bengali zemindar, a Gujerati Nationalist, a Hyderabad official, a Madrassi Christian, and yourself, all in a room together — it's unthinkable.'

'Not really. But it *would* be difficult, in India, to imagine your being with us.'

I tried, but with small conviction, to deny this. He shrugged his shoulders. 'You would have no time to meet us. Before he goes to his office in the morning, the Englishman plays tennis. When he leaves his office, he drinks and plays bridge. That is the proper thing for him to do, and therefore he does it. Because if the English have one fear that is greater than all others, it is fear of not doing what is correct.'

'That is also the Brahmin's fear,' I said.

'The Brahmin will not do certain things, because he has been told that God does not approve of them. The Englishman will not do many things, because the English disapprove.'

'That shows how practical they are.'

'But why are you so damned superior about it? We do not mind your being practical. It is very useful if there are some practical people in a country. But why do you behave as if we were fools and children, because we have different ideas about things, and different ways of doing them?'

'British administration has been of enormous service to India : you can't deny that.'

'I don't deny it. The English have done many good things, but they have not done the best and wisest thing of all, which would have been to make friends with the Indians.'

I thought of the ruins I had seen at Kennery Island and

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Bassin, on the coast of Bombay, where in the sixteenth century the Portuguese built with giant black masonry enormous forts to guard their Indian empire against the world. Out of invading jungle and the mild sea their massive walls and half-moon or mushroom bastions, broken now, rise like the remnant of some dark titanic culture, and on the floor of their broken chapels, overgrown with lush creepers or sibilant with the sudden warning of a snake, are the names of an adventurous nobility. The Portuguese, at the start of their empire-building, resolved to make friends of the Hindus, and commerce was to be nurtured by an amiable relationship. But as their prospect of trade grew larger and richer, their hope of friendship was forgotten ; they took wealth instead. And among those who discovered the Marquesas, Hispaniola, Zululand, and the Red Men of America, many were filled with admiration of the gentle-mannered and the happy, the noble and the honest people they had found ; and doubtless had pleasant thoughts of making them their friends. But friendship, with a groan, was crushed by the enormous weight of their desire for profit, and all the scattered offspring of the Golden Age were destroyed by the grim voortrekkers of the Iron Age of commerce. The man from Amritsar was being absurdly ingenuous if he thought that interracial friendship might coexist with imperialism.

He made an impatient movement. ' But I have no country now,' he said. ' I have put away national feeling, and I take no interest in politics. Politics are a curse ! '

VII

OFFICE HOURS

AMONG the *dramatis personae* of my first nine months in India were dysenteric amoebae, some streptococci, and a mild accidia. They sent the editor home on sick-leave ; the senior assistant editor, who was also very ill, to the Western Ghats; another assistant editor, weary of a sedentary life, to Mesopotamia; and the chief reporter, with an abscess in his liver, to hospital. These casualties brought some irregular promotion to the survivors, who were myself and my colleague Francis.

Francis was an Aberdonian of country stock, dark and handsome ; a soldier who had done well in the war, a good newspaper-man. Before the breaking of the monsoon, he and I were alone upon the editorial deck ; though close behind, breathing whisky into the hot air, was Ostrich, the chief sub-editor.

For some time I lived with Ostrich in a flat over the office. It was a flat that looked rather like a remittance man : seedy but robust. It had a sulky, raffish, you-be-damned appearance. A wedge of hot sunlight thrust its way in through an open door ; a lizard clung motionless to a wall, then flickered out of sight; and a high chattering of servants entered loudly, till someone shouted at them. Below it was a room rented by a pearl merchant, and by leaning out from a stone balcony one could sometimes see

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a milky translucence, a tray of pearls healing in the sun.

Ostrich had many agreeable qualities, and I was very fond of him ; but he drank too much. His normal allowance was just over a bottle of whisky a day, with a little brandy in the morning, and on this he did his work not merely well, but admirably. There were periods, however, when his consumption of whisky went up to a bottle and a half, and then his digestion began to trouble him, and for the sake of his digestion he would drink rather more brandy. He never got drunk, but at such times he would talk a good deal about a play he had written. It may well have been a good play, for he was a man of real ability. But as one of the characters in it was Christ, there had been difficulties in the way of its production. There were also difficulties in the way of its publication, for the only complete copy of it had been destroyed in the post, or mislaid by an agent, or lost in the liquidation of a publisher : I forget which.

Poor Ostrich was naturally unhappy whenever he remembered his lost play, but he would never try to rewrite it. At the time of its composition he had been in love with a Burmese girl, with whom, on the other side of India, he had lived for some considerable time. I saw many photographs of her ; she was very beautiful.

Now the bedrooms in our raffish and sulky flat were rather carelessly constructed, being separated only by wooden partitions some eight feet high ; and one night, after long discussion of the missing play, I woke to the sound of a curious metallic click. Ostrich had turned on his bedside light, and a patch of ceiling above his cubicle, brightly reflecting it, showed clearly the faint shadow of a mosquito-net and the dark decisive shadow of the rods that supported it. The little metallic noise had knocked against a sleeping ear, and once awake I could not be sure whether I had really heard, or dreamed of hearing it. But as I listened I heard it again : *click-click*. In a kind of panic

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of anticipation I got out of bed — it was a cheap affair and the springs went squawk as I moved — and hurried next door. Ostrich had pulled up the outer side of his mosquito-net, and as I went in he pushed something under his pillow. The butt-end of it protruded, however, and a cartridge still lay on the bedside table.

He looked at me with an embarrassed smile. I felt uncomfortable myself. Whether he had really been about to shoot himself, I neither knew nor liked to ask. But I was glad that I had not stayed in bed to find out. I had probably turned rather pale, for when I said I felt ill, and would he give me a drink — it was the first excuse for my intrusion I could think of— Ostrich sat up immediately, and showed great concern for my health; he had the kindest and most generous of natures. A tumbler and a bottle of brandy stood on the table beside the cartridge, whose presence we ignored. I got another glass, and we drank a couple of early morning pegs. We talked for a long time about the effect of a tropical climate on the intestines, and sympathised with each other's delicate colon. Then, when I saw that Ostrich was nodding, I went back to bed. There is no great likelihood that a sleepy man will commit suicide.

Some weeks later we both abandoned the raffish flat, and Ostrich went to live in a more domesticated house. Under its influence he became nearly respectable. He drank no more than seven-eighths of a bottle a day, he bought a dog, and took it out walking. For some time he never mentioned his missing play, nor showed me photographs of his Burmese love. But then came a relapse. He spent a month's pay in a couple of nights, and on borrowed money drank more heavily than ever. He acquired a persistent cold, and to his familiar odour of whisky and brandy added the irritating fumes of eucalyptus. He was still capable of work, however, and of good-humour. He would play like a schoolboy with his terrier, and through

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his spectacles of imitation tortoise-shell — the lenses were convex and magnified his mild brown eyes — he often beamed with a simple pleasure that dissipated the surrounding fog of alcohol and disinfectant.

He died a couple of years ago, and before his death he had recovered the lost play. But it was never published, I think. I had seen scraps of it at one time or another, but the only piece of his handwriting I now have is a quatrain he scribbled for me one day, a quotation from I don't know where or whom :

Las, si j'avais pouvoir d'oublier
Sa beauté, sa beauté, son bien-dire,
Et son doux, son très doux regarder,
Finirait mon martyre.

Ostrich was delighted when circumstances thrust Francis into editorial control of the paper. He was sentimentally a rebel, and Francis and I pursued a policy that noticeably differed from the views of our directors, who were in England, and therefore diminished in authority. It was the year of the General Strike, and we were on the side of the strikers.

Our senior assistant editor — by then dying in the hills — had committed us to this policy. He was a big man, yet physically frail. The seeming power of his body was only a symbol of the power of his mind, which was strong, well nourished, active, and stubborn. He was a Liberal whose political ancestry was Scottish Radicalism, and he was full of scorn for what he considered was a disingenuous endeavour to paint the Strike in the colours of political revolution.

'Morally,' he said, 'the striker is generally right. Economically he's often wrong, and politically he's always a nuisance. But even when you've got a couple of million nuisances to deal with, there's no excuse for dishonesty. And to call the Strike a revolution is flagrantly dishonest.

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Its aim is economic, not political; and we'll stick to the truth.'

And so, according to our lights, we did. David, our leader, went to the Hills, where slowly he grew thinner and more feeble. He went home, looking like a tent collapsed about its leaning pole, and presently died. But we fought his battle, which had become our own, and while the miners continued their struggle against privilege and greed, we hotly and often rudely upheld their cause.

Now the policy of the paper, in regard to Indian affairs, was a liberal policy. For many years it had been ruled by an editor of strong resolution and hardy independence, whose generous attitude to India's political aspirations had often been unpopular with his English readers. It was, therefore, nothing out of the way when the European population of Bombay thought the tone of our leading articles subversive, and declared their anger ; but none the less we found it exhilarating. The Chamber of Commerce sent us a long letter of protest, signed with a round robin. The letter was heavily phrased, and there were some grammatical errors in it. We printed it, and happily drew attention to the solecisms.

We had some difficulty in dealing with copy that came from England, especially a London Letter, a weekly article, that very strongly took the Government side. We could not afford — we dared not — throw these articles away, for they were written with authority, and in any case we were always so hard up for copy that to put anything of that sort into the waste-paper basket was unthinkable. But it was equally impossible to publish a London Letter that said the strikers were miserable traitors, beside a leader which patted them on the back and wished them luck. A lot of tactful re-phrasing was necessary in our contributed articles, and once, confronted with a particularly dogmatic specimen, I fortunately perceived what a difference could be effected — with little trouble to myself — by turning all

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the affirmative statements into negatives, the negatives into affirmatives. Our behaviour drew continuous rebuke from home ; and we answered by drawing attention to increasing circulation.

There was a great deal of work to do — I once wrote all three leading articles in a morning — but we were rarely bored. Francis was an admirable chief who accepted responsibility without a qualm, and showed his authority without diminishment of humour. He sat in the editorial chair as though by natural right, and every day perceived some new piece of comedy with which to enliven the evening.

It was helpful, indeed, to find comedy somewhere, for the hot weather was lasting too long, and there was no good-humour in the brazen sky. To go into the office in the early afternoon was to enter a breathless oven. The punkahs were still, the shutters enclosed an odorous hot darkness. Sweat started on your forehead, your arms, and round your waist. Violently you shouted for a sepoy, who opened the shutters, turned on the punkah with a rattle and whirr. Like a blast of trumpets the blazing sun came in, the down-draught of the fan struck momentarily cold on your damp hair and chest, and down you sat to the lead-weighted little heaps of cablegrams and proofs, to the typewriter whose keys grew slippery with the sweat of your finger-tips, and the half-empty tin of cigarettes.

Slowly the mercury climbed, and from the hot sky blew a sultry wind. From the north there was news of furnace-heat, and from Ceylon of storm and high-raging seas. But between the north and the south lay a damp suffocating warmth that daily grew worse.

The hard bright sky became a sullen obscurity in which vague clouds hung lumpishly. Toward evening the light grew coppery, and the clouds were shadow-hued with umber and grey and a dismal purple. Morning broke stale, hot-skinned, and we lived in a warm fog. The be-

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sieging clouds came nearer, and with them a false hope of the rain. The sky broke one evening, and a greenish light looked through, so that trees and flowers and white buildings put on a new arrangement of colour. There were contending tones of green. Green leaves shone garishly, the flaming gold mohurs were bleached to brick-red, and the golden cassias were pale. Grey walls stood gaunt and naked, and against a background of jade and dull lilac a heap of cloud glared like a vast splash of Chinese white. A restless wind roused little dust-storms on the pavement. But the light faded, and no rain fell, and in a cloak of stifling darkness the night came down.

Then the monsoon began to break over the small seashoard towns to the south. The rains were coming, and we heard of their approach with almost hilarious relief. There was rain at Ratnagiri, rain at Trivandrum, and a fleet of lurching clouds was beating under purple canvas up the coast of Malabar. But in Bombay the heat still held, and the draught of a punkah did no more than keep it circulating.

Rain came at last, after an almost intolerable evening. As night fell the southern sky was a mere vulgar pink in which wallowed huge clouds of indigo ; while to the west, circled by dull red and ragged braids of gold, there was a hole in the roof that showed a farther heaven of lucent green. Pale sheets of lightning and growling thunder heralded the rain, and as darkness grew the thunder came nearer, lightning crackled round the blazing verges of the clouds. Then the rain fell. Solid and ponderous, it fell for hours, with no wind to ruffle its vertical cascade. Sometimes the lightning showed it as a glimmering curtain, but for most of the time one only heard it. It grew almost deafening, so thickly fell its soft insistence on the ear. But the air was cool, and to be deaf was no affliction after stifling.

The rain stopped before morning, and the world shone

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like whitely sodden fingers in a watery sun. Here and there the streets were smartly carpeted with the fallen blossoms of the gold mohurs, and cassias stood stript of their bloom. Roads and roofs were shining, and predatory crows hopped uneasy in bedraggled feathers. There a tree was split by lightning, and beyond it the sea — tumbled and muddy — was streaked by white lines of breakers. And like black mushrooms a monstrous crop of umbrellas had grown in the night. Everybody except the poorest coolies carried them : fat men in dhotis and thin men in trousers, Hindus and Mahomedans, priests and Khojas, and all the solemn herds of Parsi school children. Marching to their morning posts went a squad of police sepoy, each with yellow cap perched cockily on the side of his head, and each with a rolled umbrella at the slope on his left shoulder. The monsoon had come, and umbrellas were the triumphal flags that greeted it.

For a couple of months we looked across a dismal expanse of dirty roofs and weeping trees at a sea which rolled flat and grey beneath the blanket of an imminent horizon. Then we saw again shining white walls, and the vigour of the soft mop-headed palms, and a sea of polished sapphire. And there were sails on it again, for the fishermen, whose boats are laid up during the monsoon, go out after Coconut Day, which is in the bright half of Shrawan in the Hindu calendar : a day of holiday and worship, when the pious Brahmin — for a consideration — ties the yellow *raksha* on the wrist of his spiritual inferior, and when the excellent but unfortunate King Bali is perfunctorily remembered in the name of the day ; which is properly Balev.

Bali was a man who was too good to live, and the gods, who were young and jealous at that time, said to each other, ' Something should be done about this.' So Vishnu disguised himself as a dwarf and went to see the King so improperly renowned for charity and good works.

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' You might give me some land,' said Vishnu.

' Certainly,' replied the unsuspecting King, who **never** refused a request of that sort. ' How much would you like?'

' Only as much as I can cover in three steps,' said the humble dwarf who was Vishnu ; and the unsuspecting monarch at once agreed, for he had been born too soon to profit from the works of the brothers Grimm. Vishnu, of course, immediately began to grow, and when he had grown sufficiently, took two steps that covered Heaven and Earth.

' Now where can I find land enough to take a third step ? ' he said to the King.

' Wait till you have a third leg to cover it,' answered the King, tartly now.

A third leg came immediately out of the giant's navel.

' Put it there,' said the humiliated monarch, indicating his bowed head as he knelt before the god ; which Vishnu promptly did, and pushed the still unsuspecting King into the middle of the earth.

So that is one reason why Coconut Day is a holiday, and another is that it used to indicate the beginning of the farmer's new year.

The country is green again by then, after the burnt hues of the hot weather and the colourless mist of the rains. The jungle is densely green — so green that the black mud underneath is unsuspected unless by the nose — and the paddy fields are green, with the white paddy birds showing brilliantly against them : birds like attenuated and rather aggressive Aylesbury ducks. The roads are filled with the procession of grass-cutters' carts, and often one is hedged between the oxen of the carts and a driven herd of water-buffaloes, with their slate-dark hides and great backward-sweeping horns that were made for defence in jungle warfare.

It used to be said in India that ' two monsoons are the

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age of a **man**' : but manners and medical practice have both improved since then, and such has been the advance of science that now the same patient can be used again and again for many years. Nevertheless death is likely to be a more familiar neighbour in India than in England, and the newcomer may well be appalled by the suddenness with which it comes, as though casually round a corner. With the unscrupulous habit of those who write, however, I found in death a useful character, and borrowed it for the neater conclusion of a couple of short stories.

There was a picnic that the proprietors of the paper gave to their European staff. It was an elaborate affair. Two motor launches took the party across the Bay to a beach called Mandvi, a big launch for the members of the staff and a smaller one for the lunch hampers and collapsible tables and attendant servants. There is nothing much at Mandvi except a long white beach to play cricket on, and the sea to bathe in, and big trees to sleep under ; and as soon as we landed everybody changed into swimming costume.

The oldest man there was the junior employee. His name was O'Halloran and his age was fifty-eight, a small man, red-faced and brilliantly bald. He had a tough hard-weather look that did not quite conceal his unhappy diffidence, for he was an incompetent old man, and wandered about the world from one brief job to another. He came to Bombay from Perim. He had been in the Navy and in the Chinese Customs Service, and he spoke of Hong Kong as another man might speak of home. For several months he had occupied, but insecurely, a little niche in the commercial structure of the paper, but he had muddled everything he touched, and exhausted all patience. At the age of fifty-eight he was about to look for a new job. On the day after the picnic he would draw his last pay and disappear.

He had, however, the proper instinct for a holiday, and

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it was he who created the first diversion. He swam out forty yards or so — a little plump man in a striped bathing-suit — and produced a bottle of beer. He tilted it to his mouth, as he lay floating, and drank easily and with audible satisfaction. The attention he attracted flattered him, so he swam in for another bottle, loosened the cork, and swam out again to drink, treading water in the centre of an admiring circle. Happy now, and boasting a little, he told us of a friend of his who had dived under a battleship and come up safely on the other side. No one believed him, so he went ashore to talk to the caterer and drink more respectably out of a glass.

The tables were set under a large banyan-tree, and lunch proceeded. O'Halloran ate prodigiously from the beginning. He reduced to bony ruin a cold fowl, and went through a solid rampart of fruit salad — gleaming as though it were Aladdin's jewels — like a steam-navvy. His glass was always full, and he was very happy. His face shone like an old scratched ruby, his bald head like the inside of a shell.

Someone proposed the health of the Proprietors, and the Managing Director replied. Then O'Halloran jumped up and exclaimed, 'Gentlemen all !'

'Gentlemen all !' he repeated. 'This is my farewell speech. To-morrow I shall sever my connexion with the firm, and I wish to express my gratitude, and gratification, and — and — gratitude.'

'Gentlemen all !' he began again, and despite interruption spoke for a long time. His voice took on a magnificent brazen quality, the tone of a trumpet in the morning, and his incoherence, his infinite repetitions that returned again and again to gratitude and gratification, were like the notes of a trumpeter practising in a lonely place. He hadn't had so much to eat and drink for years, he said. Not for three years, he confessed, had he been decently drunk, never having been rich enough to escape

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sobriety. To-day's memory would be worth cherishing ; for another three years if necessary.

After lunch we played cricket: Old Hands versus Juniors. The Old Hands went in first, and rapidly came out again for a score of 26. The Juniors put up 21 for one, and then O'Halloran — technically a Junior — was sent in. He took off his topi and handed it to the umpire. He surveyed the field with searching care. The first ball he ignored, not having seen it. But he ran out to the second, and hit it into the sea for 6. It won the match, and O'Halloran took his topi and gleefully kicked it across the sands.

During much of the afternoon he slept, but once he was seen dancing a few steps by himself on the beach. Then he got another bottle of beer and went to sleep again.

As soon as he set foot in the launch to go back across the Bay, he grew apparently sober.—Had he not once been in the Navy ? — But before long he was drinking a large whisky-and-soda and making another speech.

' Gentlemen all !' he began. ' Seeing you all clustered round me like pigs in a sty . . . '

He fell to laughing. His red face creased and crinkled, he chuckled and wheezed and gurgled, and we all laughed with him. ' Pigs in a sty,' he said, and laughed again. Then the launch heaved to a wave, his hand on the rail slipped, and O'Halloran sat down rather heavily.

When he got up there was an odd unhappy look on his face, and he said, ' I want to go to bed, boys — pigs in a sty — I want to go to bed. . . . '

I made a story out of O'Halloran's picnic, and at the end of the story he was taken to hospital, for the sun, being jealous of his shining old head, had smitten him with a calenture. He lay quiet and speechless, but once he sat up in bed, and his voice was like a morning trumpet, and he sang out, ' Ay, ay, sir !' When the nurse came to him he lay down quietly, but ten minutes later, when she passed again, he was dead.

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That was the story, but the truth was less simple. O'Halloran didn't die, nor had he taken a sunstroke. On the day after the picnic he quietly drew his last pay and disappeared. None of us ever saw him again. He went back to his wandering, for at fifty-eight the inconclusiveness of his life was yet incomplete.

I ought to have told the truth about him. Had I been an artist, I suppose I would have done. But I am a carpenter.

VIII

A DIVERSITY OF PEOPLE

STANDING with his back to the bar, in one of the largest of Bombay's clubs, was a short, square-jawed, immensely broad and square-shouldered man with a tweed cap raking to one side of his forehead. The bar was three-sided, the size of a small paddock, and he stood in the very middle of the longest side and spoke in a high, rather throaty, and widely audible voice. 'The trouble about this damned club,' he said, 'is that there's no one in it one cares to associate with.'

To my innocent eye the members all had the enviable appearance of men who were masters of their environment, men versed in affairs and athletic exercises, who controlled their lives with impressive ability ; so I was much taken by this pejorative criticism, and seeking the acquaintance of its author, eventually had the happiness of sharing a flat with him. His name was Colquhoun. His character had been fortified by New College and the Highland Light Infantry ; his experience covered financial traffic in India and cricket played for one of the English counties ; his spirit was a core of zest within a toughened envelope of generous contempt. His happy scorn of persons and institutions, allied with unshakable belief in the virtue of his friends, had a very tonic effect ; and one of his chief pleasures was the choosing a finely ordered meal, not merely

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in the suspect service of hospitality, but for honest purpose of private enjoyment. He had a liking, too, for a well-turned phrase, and a healthy delight in scoring off his enemies. But his outstanding quality was an eighteenth-century assurance, and I have seen him behave with such lordly rudeness as can seldom have been committed since the close of that happy and high-tempered era.

The scene was a public dinner of inordinate dullness, of such brutal tedium as should have moved a door-mat to resentment. But only Colquhoun had the spirit to show his feelings. He, after the first two or three courses, pushed away his remnant cutlery, told the waiter to bother him no more, and comfortably spreading his arms on the table, laid his Roman head upon them and fell fast asleep.

Once, when we were buying some sherry, Colquhoun rebuked a paltry suggestion of economy on my part with a superb and pontifically enunciated opinion. 'Well,' he said — frowning a little, lips pursed, a slight boom in his voice like the echo of a voice in the Perpendicular halls of New College — 'Well, if you're going to drink at all, I always think it's worth while to drink the best you can get. For the best doesn't hurt you, you don't drink so much of it, and you get infinitely more pleasure from it.'

He was the best of companions, and I was sorely grieved when he left Bombay to go to East Africa. His vacant place in the flat was filled by an Englishman of mild and equable temper called Raven. The flat was on the top storey of one of two brand-new buildings, to the north of Bombay, that overlooked a fine stretch of sea and wind-fluttered palms. In the other building lived Purvis, a friend of ours, who had recently got himself married. Someone had given his wife a mongrel puppy whose growth had been rapid.

One Saturday afternoon we all drove, through a hot little village and by a road that Kipling once wrote about, to a pleasant beach where we bathed, and had tea, and

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played with the dog. It was a dog of dubious origin, perhaps a mixture of Aberdeen and Sealyham ; for his neck was thick, his coat dense. But he was good company, and no one suspected the horrible thing that was in his mind.

That night, between one and two o'clock, I was wakened by Raven's hand on my shoulder, and his question — very disturbing at such an hour — ' Have you got a gun ? '

I hadn't; and till Raven explained, I was more than a little frightened by the prospect of there being any need for one.

' Purvis's dog has gone mad,' he said. ' His boy came across to tell me. The rest of his servants have cleared out. We'd better go across and see what's happening.'

We put on dressing-gowns and, crossing the compound, found the door of Purvis's flat wide open. We went in, very gently, and rather nervously peeped into the bedroom. The scene was apparently peaceful. Purvis and his bride — her blushes prettily veiled by the mosquito-net — were sitting up in bed, while the dog lay quietly in the middle of the floor. Purvis waved to us, cautiously raised the side of the mosquito-net, and tentatively put out a foot. Immediately the dog roused and made a frenzied dash for it. Purvis, without delay, returned to the safety of the bed-clothes, and the dog with remarkable speed ran round in small circles. Then it retreated under a table, and swung its head from side to side in obvious distress. It whimpered miserably, and barked in a curious broken way.

' It's no use,' said Purvis. ' I can't get out of bed without being bitten.'

Raven said, ' We must find something to hit it with.'

' There's a bag of golf-clubs in the hall,' said Purvis.

Raven and I looked at each other uncomfortably. The dog was running round again, faster than ever, and Raven and I had seen each other play golf. As we both found difficulty in hitting even a stationary object with a club, there seemed little hope of our cracking a skull so rapidly

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gyrating as the poor dog's. Purvis, on the other hand, was a reasonably good golfer, and I hated to betray my incompetence. So to avoid a lot of unpleasant argument I took off my dressing-gown — it was made of thick towel-like stuff — and with a very diffident imitation of a bull-fighter's movement, swung it in front of the dog.

He seized a flying corner of it. I threw the rest of it over him, and grappled him through the safe thickness of the folds. Everyone told me to hold on tight. I did.

'What are we going to do now?' asked Raven.

Nobody knew. A suggestion was made to tie it up in the dressing-gown, but this, unfortunately, could not be done; for already, with desperate strength, the poor beast had escaped my first grip, and I dared not shift my second. Under the dressing-gown I had a hand round its throat. Then somebody went into the bathroom and filled the bath. Luckily the taps were generous, for my hands were getting tired. We carried the dog through, and held it under water till it drowned.

It was a sickening task, but the necessity for it was clearly shown on the following day, when, at a Pasteur institute, sections of its brain were cut, and we saw through a microscope the broken cells that the virus had attacked. The demonstration, however, comforting though it was — for the dog's death was troubling us — was followed by the realisation that we must have protective treatment; we all had small scratches on our hands, some of which might have been got when playing with the dog in the afternoon or wrestling with him at night. So on fourteen successive days we had to submit to inoculation with anti-rabies serum, and the tiresome humour of our friends, who barked when they saw us. The abdominal wall of the average human being is a large expanse, but after it has been punctured a few times it appears to contract, and shrinks from the needle like a bruised thumb; while humour, like a gun, should never be pointed at oneself.

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We grew surly, dumpish, avoided the beastly jocularly of the crowd, and hid in dark corners as though rabid indeed.

From a high window in another part of Bombay I saw one night some tantalising glimpses of a curious scene. A room in the servants' quarters of a neighbouring house, full of yellow light, was partly visible behind a fluttering curtain. There were four people in it; a seated figure whom I never clearly discerned, a young man dressed only in a loin-cloth, and two others in the white clothes of servants. The seated figure was in control of whatever was going on, and the naked youth was being hypnotised, or bewitched, bedevilled, medicined against fate or the exercise of his own will. He was lively enough to begin with, and fought against what was being done to him. Then, mysteriously stilled — his head drooping, his body apparently lifeless — he was lifted and laid down again in a corner. A few minutes later the yellow light went out.

Another night, from the same window, I heard the fearful cry of passion let loose in hysteria. A young woman was screaming in anger against her lover, and he was shouting at her in harsh and irrepressible hatred. Then — metallic counterpoint to human rage — came the noise of a motor-car viciously started, gears grinding, wheels gripping the smooth road with sudden reckless speed. The woman's voice changed in tone, and grew louder with fear. A few neighbours, alarmed and curious but above all scandalised, ran out to see what was happening, and persuade her, if they could, to be quiet.

He would kill himself, she cried. The road was steep, the corner at the foot of the hill notoriously dangerous. He would kill himself, she was sure of it. The normal politeness of her enunciation had disappeared, and she wailed in her distress in a vulgar voice that maltreated every vowel and took no heed of aspirates. Her whole presence was distasteful, her face distorted and smeared with grief, her hair in such wretched disarray that it looked

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like a heap of garden rubbish ; and I was much surprised when I saw her, a few days later, on the lawn of one of the clubs. She was smartly dressed and perfectly composed. Her companion, calm also and quite at ease in her company, was the man whose wrathful departure had created such havoc a night or two before. They were talking amiably together, and I happened to overhear her voice. It was charmingly smooth and polite again, like a newly manicured finger-nail.

Some time later another voice, and a congruent appearance, led me into making a strange blunder. To the office one morning came a tall lean man, his black hair strawed with grey, his eyes blue, his thin face sun-yellowed, his nose a bony scimitar. He was an imperial type, he might have been a proconsul, but apparently he was in business of some sort. He had come to say that what we were writing about the Indians in East Africa was arrant nonsense. We were, at the time, keeping a motherly eye on the welfare of Hindu traders in Kenya ; but my proconsular visitor roundly declared they were a pack of scoundrels whose deliberate aim and object was the ruin of the simple decent African. He had lived for twenty-five years in Kenya and Tanganyika, he said, and he knew what he was talking about. He spoke with the conventional loud carelessness of an Army mess, and his sentiments were those of all the outlying scions of England's governing class. He mentioned, presently, a few of the people whom he knew in Kenya, and spoke warmly of someone with whom he had been friendly for a long time ; who was, he said casually, a Wykehamist.

Idly enquiring, ' Were you at school with him ? ' I asked.

' At Winchester ? ' he exclaimed. ' Me ? Good God, no ! I'm an Afghan ! '

He found his card among the half-dozen still on my table : it was, indeed, a name of the Ben-i-Israel that I read.

We lived a sedentary life, but to the noisy office where

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we sat came every day visitors of many sorts, and letters by the hundred arrived from all the western parts of India.

My morning duties once included the listening to a jeremiad from the High Priest of the Parsis. He was a noble figure, bearded like a prophet, clad voluminously in white, and with dolorous anger he spoke against the iniquities of Parsi youths and maidens. They ignored, he said, the teaching and the teachers of their religion. They danced, and drank cocktails, and were careless of the stern and simple faith of Zoroaster and their fathers.

That, I said mildly, was a common complaint all over the earth. English bishops and Scotch presbyters alike bewailed the backsliding of their younger flock, while in America and on the continent of Europe —

It might well be so, he interrupted with some impatience, but British and foreign delinquency did not worry him. He was concerned with the faith and morals of Parsis only. That young Parsis should fail in their duty to themselves, their community, and their church was a dreadful thing, and it was surely our proper task, who daily composed a great newspaper in the metropolis of the Parsis, to inaugurate a campaign that should purify and puritanise their communal life.

I said that I would see what could be done about it, and we stood up ; but now something else was troubling his mind.

Would I let him out by the back door ? he asked. He himself was broad-minded, but among his co-religionists were those who would be scandalised if they saw evidence of his hob-nobbing with the heathen, and in the circumstances some inconspicuous exit would suit him best.

So I led him by long corridors past the lavatories, and old workshops, and packing departments, into a loading-yard that was thronged with odorous and staring coolies, and so to a door in an unfrequented lane, where solemnly he blessed me, and nimbly skipped out of sight.

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Among our more persistent correspondents was an amateur of Yoga who lived in Bikanir, and would have us patronise a sadhu whose accomplishments included the controlling of moonlight and the rays of the sun. The sadhu was an austere but playful man, subsisting entirely on milk, living alone in the jungle, and defending his stubborn reluctance to make public exhibition of his powers by the example of Jesus Christ; before whom, he said, even Satan had pleaded in vain to be shown one of his miracles. But to a friendly and devout enquirer he might be complaisant beyond all expectation. Our correspondent, walking with his Yogi in the jungle, became aware of a sweet smell that accompanied them, a smell that emanated from the holy man as though from a flower. Then the Yogi darkened his face by intercepting the sunlight. He grew to double his stature, and shrank to the size of a child. He put on the likeness of a Hon, then of the God Shiva, grey with ashes, with serpents about his neck, and the fore-knot in his hair.

His disciple related these metamorphoses with a mounting reverence, naming his master progressively Jogiji, Yogi Raj, and Yogi Deo ; Sir Yogi, King Yogi, and Yogi the God. He was an honest man, our correspondent. He had resigned some public appointment to go to his master, and he described his first journey to him, and the scornful crowd he encountered at the little railway station half a dozen miles from the ashram. They jeered and laughed at him when he told his purpose, and a man in the forefront of the mob cried loudly, ' There is no dearth of fools ! '

To substantiate the opinion of the man in the crowd, I bought a book on Yoga, and made trial of some of the exercises. I held my breath and contemplated the tip of my nose. The result was unpleasant. The earth revolved — my search for truth was so far gratified — and I went spinning with it. The sunlight was shot with blue, and a multi-coloured switchback made a puzzling appearance.

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Then I heard Death penny-flute an almost visible high C, and decided that my constitution was not suited to so exacting a ritual. When, moreover, there was so much of interest within the ordinary confines of life, it was unreasonable to try and go beyond them.

There was, for instance, a Cockney stereotyper called Wickenden, a great beer-drinker but thin as a bone because of the profusion with which he sweated in the hot machine-room, who with Shakespearian quotation made of his daily speech a richness like plum puddings. I met him first by overhearing him address a gross, tub-like, dingy-looking Goanese barman as a bolting-hutch of beastliness.

' You trunk of humours !' he said bitterly. ' D'you call that beer ? You don't know what beer means. And take your 'ands out of the ice, you — you swollen parcel of dropsies !'

Wickenden showed me an application, written by a letter-writer in the bazaar, for employment under him in the machine-room. It read in part : *My lord, kindly appoint me upon this work; afterwards see my work. Be kind enough upon this poor; I have no source of bread except your honour's lotos feet. . . . Your most obedient servant, Juma Khan son of Tawoos Khan Pathan, nowadays living with Mahomed Khan Pathan, who has honour in your service.*

What a noble genuflexion is here, with what courtly abasement does the son of Tawoos Khan, Pathan, beseech the favour of hard work ! And with what proud assurance he exclaims *Afterwards see my work !*

There were thirty or forty Pathans employed in the machine-room, where a sturdy physique was needed. Most of them were big men, and all had that look of strong individuality which, if not dignity itself, is at least the foundation of it. They came from a wild, a poor and lonely country where individualism was fostered by the fewness of the people and persistence of the blood feud ; which gives, for compensation to cruelty and gross injustice, a

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rare value to personal strength and resourcefulness. Their appearance was in startling contrast with the smaller, milder, and obviously more communal Hindus. To the superficial observer the urban Hindu is curiously like the evening passenger in a London suburban train. He is generally tired, and looks to be imperfectly integrated. He is part of a multitudinous people, the little unremarkable member of a countless working-party. But the Pathan, though you see him labouring in a gang of navvies or striding through a crowd, is obviously himself, and seems to live, not in a tied community, but only in a brief and voluntary association with others. He wears freedom like a garment, and freedom puts a little space about him even in the most numerous throng.

Wickenden used to regard his Pathans with pride and affection that he concealed with denigratory reference. ' Ugly lot of beggars, aren't they ? ' he would say. ' Not meant to court an amorous looking-glass. Nor strut before a wanton ambling nymph — she'd do a bit more than amble if she met a couple of them on a dark night, wouldn't she ? '

When they leave their hills and settle in a large city, many of them reveal that opportunism, which, from a certain point of view, is such a credit to human nature. The majority find honest employment, but a considerable minority become pimps and money-lenders, and some more frankly take to simpler crimes, for which a big city offers infinitely more scope than a range of naked mountains. They retain a tendency to violence, and in Bombay the annual police report used always to include, in its catalogue of irregular deaths and estates unclaimed, several such bare obituaries as this : *No. 30: Unknown Pathan. . . . One cane stick.*

The cane stick was a lathi, a five-foot staff, iron-shod, that may in its time have birled about the ears of upstanding opponents, or merely given comfort to its owner when

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out walking. It was, in any case, a fine bequest for anyone to make to a hard world in which he had not gently lived.

Every year some two or three hundred men and women used to die of starvation in Bombay, and being homeless, they generally died in the streets.—Early one morning I saw a corpse on a pavement. Its most remarkable feature was its enormous dust-whitened feet. Those great road-stained soles stood up as though their owner, lying down to take a rest, was sheltering behind them from the morning sun.—The number of street deaths would have been much higher had it not been for a municipal Beggars' Camp, where mendicants were housed and fed until they decided to escape the tedious confinement of benevolence.

The Camp had a shifting population of several hundred, and half of them looked like first cousins of Death. They lay motionless on their charpoys, little wrinkled heaps covered by a grey blanket in the half-darkness of a hut. Odiers, squatting in the sun, were like small pyramids on the dusty earth, their blankets sloping from the apex of the head to the triangular base of widespread thighs and interlocking legs. The children, except those who were blind, were lively enough in spite of cretinism and deformity. Naked and brown, between the yellow sun and the grey dust they ran about on misshapen stick-like legs, their swollen little bellies bulging over scanty thighs. I saw a small boy, with a rag round his breech and a bent stick in his hand, whose legs were like a turkey's, scaly and thin, the knee-joints pointing back; he walked with a dungliill strut, his body thrown forward for balance.

I saw two girls sitting together, one plump and merry, a good-looking cooly who seemed to have no business with so many caricatures of life and cartoons of decay. It was only on looking closer that I saw she had no feet. She held a wisp of a baby ; but the baby belonged to the other girl, who was an imbecile. The idiot's hair was cropped close, and she had enormous breasts. The rest of her body was

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ludicrously meagre. When she stood up you saw the great idiot head, and the bust of a mothering giantess, precariously balanced on the puny hips and legs of a child. Her baby was no bigger than a rabbit, though it had nourishment that would keep a calf satisfied.

At the door of one of the huts a dying man sat in the sun. He was a pilgrim, and he cried in a high-pitched voice that he was going to Benares. Nasik he had been to, holy Nasik, and Brindaban and Dwarka, Gaya and Pandarpur, all holy places. But on his way to Benares — which is a long way from Bombay — he had fallen into the impious hands of municipal charity, and was ending his pilgrimage in the Beggars' Camp. He would go no further on his feet. It seemed that rigor mortis, impatient of stubborn life, had already set in, for his head was tilted back on a straining neck whose tendons stood out like wires. His flanks were wrinkled and thin, but nearly hidden by a tumescent belly: the hungry pilgrim had eaten twelve fat *chaupattis*¹ that morning, and the dying ascetic was thrown ludicrously out of drawing by the stomach of an alderman.

On the floor of one of the huts the Queen of the Camp held miserable audience for four or five shrivelled crones. Her hair was a gleaming white, and her teeth shone white and strong in the wrinkled darkness of her face. But where her hands should have been were yellow bulbs, and her ankles came to an end in bony knobs. She whined in the professional key when I spoke to her, but after leaving the hut I looked back and saw her giving lively instruction or entertainment to her old and broken subjects. The stumps of her arms were whirling in the air, her body swaying, and all the life of the streets animated her story. She was Queen by virtue of vitality, which was a rare thing in the Beggars' Camp.

Her Prime Minister — the resident physician — was a

¹ A sort of pancake.

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plump and cynical Hindu. ' They will all run away,' he said. ' The *chokras*¹ make *bidis*² for them, and yet they are not contented. We teach some of them to weave, as Mahatma Gandhi orders, and still they are not happy. That is funny, is it not ? They eat their rice and *chaupattis* when they come in, so greedily they almost burst. And when they are full, they run away — unless they have already died.'

For the beggar's home is the pavement, and the nostalgia of the streets is too strong for mere comfort to kill. In comparison with other animals, indeed, the human being is curiously scornful of comfort, and has little genius for it. He may protest a strong desire for it, but is always willing to throw it away, and often eager to learn from others new modes of discomfort. I found, for example, that Indians had taken to boxing ; and with at first a sense of incongruity I saw fighting between pugilists with such unlikely names as Oomrigar and Pochkhanawalla. The best of the boxers in Bombay was Milton Kubes, who did not look like one, for he had deep-set gloomy eyes and full pre-Raphaelite lips. I remember the first time I saw him fight.

The tournament was held in a theatre, and the ring and ring-side seats were on the stage. The audience was mixed. There were soldiers and sailors, excited Goanese in the gallery, Hindus and Englishmen, a Parsi lady in a mauve and silver sari, a solid array of white shirts and dinner-jackets, a paradox in the person of a senatorial-looking Hindu in khaddar and Gandhi cap — a Swaraj man, an apostle of Non-co-operation — who inspected the ring, knowingly enough, through a gold-rimmed monocle. An audience of engaging contrasts.

The first three fights were between Parsis and country-born Europeans, and were unremarkable except for the fantastic play of light and shade on wet, swiftly-moving brown bodies, and for the Anglo-Saxon stolidity with

¹ Boys.

² Cigarettes.

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which one of the Parsis stood up to heavy punishment. These yellow-and-brown, light-work, initial harmonies were followed by the more sombre opposition of Jack d'Souza and Kid Charlie. D'Souza was a Goan, a tall frowning fellow, black enough, with protruding ridges above the eyes and a small upturned nose ; a well-built man except for too little bone below the knee. The other was a San Franciscan negro, broad, with great pectoral muscles and inclined to fatness; his teeth were as white as peeled almonds, and his woolly head was bald on top.

The fight opened with tremendous gestures. From the perfunctory handshake Charlie leapt back, one foot drawn up, and throwing out his left hand, with elbows close, held his right glove high to guard his face. D'Souza paced cat-like round him, left arm as stiff as a rod, an inky scowl on his face. Nothing could have been fiercer than the way in which they feinted, side-stepped, tentatively measured their distance, and poised for a murderous right. But for the first two minutes no blow was struck. They had fought each other twice before, and were in no hurry to be hurt. Then suddenly d'Souza was in with a long left, a right, and a left again, but Charlie took most of it on his gloves and hooked his man smartly as he was going away, so that the Goan returned, scowling more fiercely than ever, to his menacing gestures and graceful footwork.

Gradually the fight became more lively. Several times d'Souza succeeded in hitting Charlie hard on the face, so that below each eye was a puffiness, an ecchymosis that would have been a notable black had not the periphery been so uniformly sable. And Charlie was angry. The grin had gone from his face, and his eyes were monkey-like with baffled rage. He smashed punch after punch at d'Souza's head, swung two vicious rights that missed badly, and left himself open to more punches on his battered cheekbones. His muscles stood out like little dark hills

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and dissolving ridges under the are-light, and between them were shadows and depths of fleeting darkness. His back looked terrible in action, and d'Souza's face, still scowling, grew slowly frightened.

Eventually Charlie won on points, and the Goan left the ring with temper and indignation distorting his eyes, his unruly mouth, and even his snub nose.

The house emptied quickly at the interval, and the big electric punkahs churned the pit of hot air. The next fight was between welter-weights, Milton Kubes and a hopeful challenger. Tall and grave in his demeanour, Kubes looked over-trained, for his muscles were set and round. But he moved quickly and hit hard, watching sombrely out of his deep-set brown eyes. His mouth was such as Rossetti painted, a sad and sensual crescent, happily unbruised. His opponent was no match for him ; wherever he turned he found the Miltonic ' two-handed engine at the door,' and long hard punches shot unerringly to unguarded face or swung suddenly to open ribs. The end came soon. Kubes gravely sent a snaky left to the jaw, hooked his man with a terrible right to the heart, and dropped him with another left. He walked slowly back to his corner, meditating. He was a simple soul, not very clever except with his fists, modest, and always ready to fight. A long white scar across his ribs showed that he had fought in a sterner war, when bayonets, not gloves, were weapons of attack.

A red-headed boy came after, fair-skinned, chewing gum, and called Clarry Neil; a cheerful name. He was fighting a Parsi, a dour-looking man with a broad hooked nose and a head that he carried to one side like a regarding bird. It was a hard fight, and for a while the Parsi looked to be winning. But Neil chewed his gum, and bled where the Parsi pleased, for he knew that fortune was on his side and he would win in the end. He looked almost gay in his livery of white and red, danced to the attack, slammed in left and right, banged his man's ears, hit his flat beak of

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a nose, and then hit it again for luck. And his luck held, **for** the last two rounds were his by a big margin.

Then, as after a long while at a Christmas dinner, comes the massive and unchallengeable supremacy of the pudding, then came the heavy-weights. This, it was felt, was the real thing.

First into the ring was Petty Officer Bob Ruffit, Champion of the United Services, Champion of This and That; a rocky-looking man with a head hewn of granite, his face expressionless except for little quick-moving eyes that revealed his perdurable energy. His opponent was a Gunner, taller than Ruffit, but softer than the stony-fronted sailor. When the latter stood up and took off his wrap, he disclosed a whole gallery of pictures. Fair ladies and delicately tinted flowers, tattooed in soft colours, made a garden of his arms and shoulders, and on his chest two butterflies poised their opalescent wings. But all his back was canvas for an allegory. A stork rose from his waist and half-spread its wings toward the stretch of his shoulders. Curving in the groove of his spine, its head and neck turned and looked down to a nymph forlorn upon the broad champaign of the sailor's lumbar region. She was beautiful, and the stork's expression enigmatic ; but its significance can only be surmised.

The stork's wings flapped mightily as the sailor swung round-arm punches into the Gunner's ribs. The Gunner, moving fast for so big a fellow, danced tempestuously in and out, his too-long hair waving a banner of defiance, his mouth wide open, a gaping O of endeavour, like that of a swimmer turning for breath. His great fists landed on Ruffit's stone promontory of a head with no apparent effect. The sailor, like an unbelievably active bear, waddled round after his man, punching his face, punching his ribs, punching hard and fast and unceasingly. It was magnificent, though scarcely boxing. The Gunner could not keep him out, and soon ' from head to foot, now was he total gules.'

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Still his hair waved defiantly and still he rushed bull-like to the circle of those whirling fists.

Between rounds their seconds worked furiously over them, flapping towels, slapping and massaging their legs, wiping their besweated necks. The Gunner bit convulsively at a large and dirty sponge, and spat a stream of water over his shoulder. His chest heaved and fell with his deep breathing, but the butterflies on Ruffit's decorated breast rose steadily and gently sank. When the gong sounded they were on their feet again, wasting no time, the sailor stocky and solid and indomitable, and the big Gunner tumultuously formidable. Now they stood foot to foot and hammered each other with no thought of defence. Here, one thought, is the Zeebrugge touch. This is what took the Hindenburg Line. And the audience, sailors and soldiers together, were roaring their delight, and the thud of blows was unceasing.

But it could not last. The Gunner was beaten, and if he did not recognise it himself, in all the audience there was no one to share his ignorance. His seconds threw in a towel after the fourth round, and still waving his great banner of hair, he went over to Ruffit, shook him tremendously by both hands, and leaping the ropes went light-heartedly to his dressing-room.

Putting a wrap over his shoulders, Ruffit shrouded the desolate lady and the tall blue stork, as at night the domestic love-bird may be hooded. The punkahs in the roof slowed and stopped almost as one, and the theatre collapsed into the spiritless vacancy which is the peculiarity of empty theatres. The audience ceased to be an audience and became Parsi ladies and sailors again, soldiers and club members and Goanese again ; and by the next morning the only visible harvest of the night's work was a few black eyes and bruises here and there. And bruises, like beauty, disappear quickly enough.

X

THE FREEDOM OF BAGHDAD

' GIVE me a battalion of British infantry, sir, and I'd go through China like a hot knife through butter !'

The port was coming round for the third time when the Colonel made this grandiose assertion. He was a guest of the Bombay Light Horse — an amiable corps — and I was another. I remember nothing else about the dinner, partly, perhaps, because general conversation was below the Colonel's thrasonical high level; but largely because my host and I were planning a journey.

I had resolved to leave India. My reason was unsimple, for a strand was mere restlessness, another the tiny chance I saw in a far distance of going to America, a third the temptation of my friend Radcliffe, and the strongest a feeling that if I was ever to find satisfaction in work, it must be work more certainly creative than leader-writing. That a tourist's view of Baghdad, Persia, and the Caucasus was essential to the hatching of a novelist, I shall not maintain. Baghdad and Persia and the Caucasus were the lures that Radcliffe threw to me, most gullible of fish.

At twenty-eight I was belatedly discarding the last of my adolescence. Reluctantly I had been forced to admit that life was more than being ; it was also doing, and doing, for all but youth and the smallest minority of the adult world, was the bigger half.

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A couple of years before, I had taken the opportunity of going to India without thought or hesitation, because I wanted to *be* in India, to exercise my five senses upon it. I had given no consideration to the fact that *being*, if I was to get paid for it, must be qualified by *doing* ; and though I found journalism an agreeable occupation, especially while it was new, it was not wholly satisfying. That particular sort of egotism which is a preliminary condition of authorship was beginning to look for a field of its own. I was already on the fringe of the dreadful obsession which, for the last dozen years or more, has sat upon my shoulders, governed my life, falsified my hopes, ruined my digestion, and given me more pain and pleasure than anything else on earth. The need of making from homiletic imagination a series of visible and articulated things called novels: that was the boot that kicked me, yard by yard, from *being's* blissful state.

Self-knowledge, however, was still obscured by self-indulgence—I mean the indulgence of writing verses. With passion in my heart and seven topics already in my head, I was going to be a poet. Not yet a novelist, but something with more fire in his heart than prose. To-morrow or the next day would bring the annealing flame to fuse desire and notion and the beating wings of invisible but lovely words. (I have always had a great belief in to-morrow—it weakens with the years, but yet persists—and even now I have not quite learnt to cut my folly according to my cloth.) I had saved a hundred pounds, perhaps, and that was enough to live on while I became a poet. Or so I thought.

Indeed it might have served, had the faculty been there. But failure, recurrent and ever more loudly reiterated, to write anything better than competent versicles, persuaded me at last that I had overrated my ability. I could hardly believe the evidence, but there it lay, in wooden lines and the shipwreck of a putty-fastened epic. Bitter was the

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knowledge, and when I tried to tramp it down by writing yet another poem, the pain was like walking with a broken leg in a foreign land. My function, I then admitted, was not poetising, but only mythopoetising. I might spin a yarn, but I could weave no garment of light, nor rug against the inner cold. But side by side with humiliation I discovered mercy, and the repeated anguish of failure was presently comforted when I found that I enjoyed the spinning of a yarn even more than the agonising pleasure of writing ineffectual verse.

But all this knowledge was yet far off, and my resolution to leave Bombay had not easily been achieved. I had made friends there, I had persuaded my employers to treat me well, my income had been doubled, and to support myself elsewhere I had only a hundred pounds. There was the frail and distant possibility of going to America ; but to sober thought, that had little more substance than marsh-fire. Common sense said: Stay where you are. But inclination, a volition deeper than common sense, and my engaging friend Radcliffe all exclaimed : Come with us. Come to Baghdad !

Radcliffe was my host at the Light Horse dinner : a tall, broadly built, black-haired, humorous and irritable man, chronically foot-loose, who took all that India had to offer in the way of social life, and yet was superbly discontented with it. He dined with everybody, danced assiduously, hunted with the Jackal Club, and now and then essayed pig-sticking, from which he would return in splints and bandages, still to complain that India was a dull place, and Bombay a yawning emptiness on its most tedious board. Having been promised a few months' leave, to which he was not entitled, he conceived a plan for going home through Afghanistan, the Uzbek and Turkoman republics, the northern provinces of Persia, the port of Krasnovodsk, the Caspian Sea, the bleating pastures of Astrakhan, the river Volga, and so to Moscow : that, I

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think, was the route, though I cannot remember how we were to get to Krasnovodsk. But whatever the details of the plan, the whole was exciting and impracticable, and I was captured by it.

Afghanistan was the scene of our first defeat: we were refused visas. Then we compared more closely the probable cost of the journey with our available resources, and found some disparity between them. I made some money by writing a series of pamphlets for one of the Indian railway companies : brochures that described in brilliant phrasing, and with a wealth of picturesque detail, the charms of Delhi, Lucknow, Agra, and other places that I had never seen ; while Radcliffe was earnestly selling a couple of horses, saddlery, books, the portion of a motor-car which he jointly owned, and most of his clothes. But all our efforts were insufficient to finance the tortuous and magnificent journey we first had contemplated, and we had to straighten the route. We would go, by way of the Persian Gulf and the desert railway, to Baghdad, and thence by car across Persia to Tehran. We hoped to sail the Caspian and cross the Caucasus to the Black Sea and Constantinople ; but we could not get visas for the Soviet Union in Bombay, we should have to wait till we arrived in Tehran before we knew if our hope was worth anything.

In Radcliffe's manner there was, at times, a careless insolence that often made me nervous; though he minimised offence by a small stammer. He nearly stopped our journey before it had begun by his behaviour in the Persian Consulate. It was a very hot day and we had had to walk some distance in blazing sunlight before we found the Consulate. We were shown into a room where an official, neatly dressed and greenishly pale, sat behind an enormous table. We took chairs at the opposite side, and Radcliffe, swinging his feet on to the table, murmured, ' F-f-frightfully tired, old boy,' and yawned prodigiously.

Like an angry cat the Persian receded, arching his back,

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the muscles of his face contracting ; while his leafy pallor grew deeper and more green. Radcliffe, seeing his agitation, obligingly removed his feet, and with a charming smile apologised. Then he whispered to me, 'I should have taken my b-boots off f-f-first, old boy. Like going into a m-m-mosque.'

Despite this unhappy prelude we were given our passports and presently boarded a ship. At Karachi we were joined by a Mrs. Rodney, a friend of Radcliffe's, who had announced her intention of coming with us. I was, to begin with, rather frightened of her. She had spent the cold weather in Lahore, where she hunted. She carried a shooting-stick, and *Within a Budding Grove*, and she was very angry about some missing luggage. Her manner, buttressed by horsemanship and a predilection for superior literature, was at first meeting alarming ; but soon she proved an ideal companion, and I acquired a most affectionate admiration for her. Wherever we went, she demanded the rigorous maintenance of impossible amenities, but accepted without dismay discomfort of many sorts ; while her shooting-stick seemed always capable of growing into a flagstaff from which at any moment the Union Jack might be broken with bugles blowing beneath.

Dark as indigo, the foreland of Omar rose abruptly from the sea. Here pirates used to wait for the pearling dhows. Night and a storm came suddenly together, and we entered the Persian Gulf in a thunder-squall that filled the air with cannonading and tore the black sea to a lace of hissing foam. The Ifrit Dahnash, perhaps, flying to a land beyond China for the sumptuous young princess Budur ? — Pale shapes of flaming lilac pranced madly on a sky of ebony. The flying cavalry of the Jinn, patrolling the seven islands where Splendour lay, the wife of Hassan of Basra ? — But a world-encircling commercial traveller from Cincinnati, as resolute as any Ifrit of them all, gathered three of our other six saloon passengers, and settling them round

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a small table, domesticated the Arabian night with bridge.

The saloon was scantily occupied, but we carried a great crowd of deck passengers most of whom were disembarked in the utmost confusion at Bushire. We anchored about three miles off the shore under mountains that were sharp-toothed, yellow and white in a golden haze. Out of this peace came three or four clumsy sailing-boats, and a crowd of boatmen swarmed into the ship in a desperate hunt for booty. In the stern-sheets of the last of the boats was an aged and seemingly decrepit man with a tin pail full of eggs, who with rusty agility came scrambling over the intervening craft and climbed aboard. As if to prove that his goods were authentic pullet-sperm, he carried in a fish-frail on his other arm two dirty fluttered hens.

Metal trunks and bedding-rolls were thrown with thud and bang into the waiting boats. Quarrels arose out of nothing and were instantly forgotten. The most trivial remark was delivered in heat and heard in anger. Passengers, shrieking advice, were hoarsely shouted down by the raging boatmen.

A hugely fat Hindu in a night-shirt stood blocking the accommodation-ladder. He had no concern with the unloading, but was enjoying the bustle. Tiptoe behind him, a meagre fellow thrust a rat-like chin over his warm shoulder and screamed entreaty to a stout violent boatman. The latter's face was twisted to incredible fury ; his eyes were dilated, his teeth bared ; palms outspread, gesticulating, he danced on a thwart and yelled to the man his strident arguments. A tall prognathous negro with yellow teeth and earthy hands came carrying an orange tin trunk, and pushed all obstacles aside. A thin Bushiri with a brown tarbush howled like a dog in a trap, and still the clamour grew, and still the fat Hindu — between swollen chest and tumescent stomach his night-shirt dipped into a moist valley — looked down upon it all with simple pleasure. And so did I.

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Then slowly the noise grew less, the boats were loaded and one by one set sail for the shore. An old woman, muffled in black, half crawled and was half carried into the forward part of the last of them. Beside two bright-green parrots in new cages a sick man lay on the little after-deck. His face was grey and his stupid eyes wide-open. And then, as the boatmen were pushing off, there came a strange eruption from the ship. An oldish man, half dressed, in dirty shirt and slippers, burst like a clown on to the top of the ladder, shouting furiously. Wildly flourishing his hands, in one of them he held a curious hoop. An answering chorus rose from the boat. He chopped the air and flung furious words into the silky shimmering hot breeze. It was a truss that he carried, tied round with ancient bandages, and the reason for his excitement was clear. It took him a long time to dress for the shore. Still shouting, he dived into the ship again, and the boat waited.

In return for the passengers so noisily discarded, we received a Persian Commissioner of Police and a police sergeant. They came aboard with a boatload of friends, mullahs with crape-bound hats and transparent black abbas. The Commissioner was a tall man of impressive appearance. He wore an olive-green tunic, well-cut boots, and carried an amber rosary. The look of severe indifference on his harshly cut features was partly due, no doubt, to his ignorance of any language but his own. To an attempt at making conversation with him, he returned only a deprecating little note of guttural incomprehension.

The most embarrassing result of his inability to read English was a stubborn preference for the ladies' lavatory. It was impossible to remonstrate, to explain his mistake.

He listened politely, bowed, and said, ' Chlk !' Then with a firm hand he pushed open the wrong door.

Again one was urged to protest.—' That man,' said Mrs. Rodney, ' *must* be kept out !'—So with a certain diffidence one tried to put a difficult explanation into French.

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'Monsieur,' one said, 'c'est un faux pas que vous faites. Vous vous trompez, monsieur.' And pointed to his proper destination.

'Chile,' he replied, but now with no friendship in his voice, and bowing stiffly. He beckoned to his sergeant, and banged the door. Then, so long as his master was engaged, the sergeant patrolled the corridor with the stern and swollen mien of a man to whom had been entrusted a heavy charge.

The sea grew muddy with the yellow effluence of Tigris and Euphrates. In dug-out canoes and flimsy huts of grass we saw the black amphibious people that take their meagre living from the Shatt-el-Arab. Oil-tankers in the vaporous heat went heavy-laden to the sea, and regiment after regiment of date-palms, marshalled in line and depth, grew in dismal fields with the dreary precision of vegetables condemned to Prussian discipline. But beyond the river the desert was clean and cool, and a breeze sang lightly above its vast untidiness.

There was a notice in the railway station that read : *Change at Hilla for Babylon and Kish.* But we did not believe it. We were in a foreign land, and we might be the fools our friends declared — for the common-sensibles sat at their desks and went home by P. & O.—but we were not so foolish as to believe that a railway ran to Babylon. To Babylon by candlelight, or not at all. Would wanton Semiramis, with her doves about her, be waiting in a First Class Refreshment Room ? Change at Cherbourg for the Hy Brasil and the City of Is ! To Babylon by candlelight, that would throw a gleam on Alexander's dying face, or budge from some lettered wall the palpable thick shade of Tiglath-Pileser. By candlelight, whose narrow smoke would be like the smoke of Babylon afire, far off, when the shipmasters who saw it burning cried with dismay in their hearts: 'What city is like unto this great city !' But to go First Class would bring into your compartment the horrid angel who cast a millstone into the sea, praising

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violence and exalting destruction. We turned to another platform, and took train to the City of the Caliphs; and that was sufficiently improbable.

We shouldered a mirage from the dancing air, and in the early morning came into fields of moving green, clear as a shallow sea, and beyond the rippling corn were white walls and towers, and tufted palms that bowed and shook their feathery tops in the desert breeze. The river ran full, and on its tawny flood were white arabesques of foam. It split the open town like a discoloured scimitar.

In a doorway a porter lay sleeping. His mouth was open, and flies had invaded it. They had settled on his strong teeth and the tip of his insensitive tongue, and like black bees a cluster was swarming in his ear. A beggar crawled past in grey fantastic rags, and three silver-grey donkeys trod delicately in the road's thick muddiness. Down a side street there was another glimpse of the river. Swollen by distant snow, the Tigris tore at its bridges and sang a loud and rollicking, gay and rushing song. But louder than the river was the heavy murmur and beating din of the bazaar. The colour of the river was sunlight on tarnished metal, but in the bazaar was a luminous and smoky blue, a twilight that subdued the glowing and many tints of the crowded stalls, of fruit and jewellery and bales of cloth, of Arab kaffiyehs and brown abbas, of copper and silver and the patterned hues of carpets. Porters, bent below enormous burdens, thrust their way through the moving crowd with rough cries of warning, and donkeys with mild eyes sedately carried into the confusion their hugely swollen panniers. In a shaft of light, that from a hole in the arched roof pierced the crepuscle, an Arab sat on a fretting horse and chattered with a merchant over the heads of passers-by. Kurds in sackcloth, with wild locks escaping their pointed caps, jostled well-tailored Iraqi citizens, and hooded women, like blind shadows, threaded a silent path through the bustle and the noise.

The Man on My Back

In the street of the coppersmiths there was a fiercer light and louder din. Beaten copper shone red as autumn in the bluish haze, and restless hammers filled the lane with clamour that vibrated in a metallic glare.

Three smiths, their naked arms and shoulders burnished in the glow of a brazier, beat rhythmically on a copper tray that another held with long iron pincers. In their workshop, that was like a little cellar, the hammers rose and fell with clattering precision, and the flames darted from shining metal to gleaming arms and the sweaty face of the child who blew the fire. Red light and the punctual echo of hammers in a narrow cavern. The smiths put down their tools, and the boy looked out into the bazaar with sweat runnelling his brown face.

There was a young man who worked in a bank and doted on Persian rugs. He took me to a tiny shop and said we wanted to see a certain blue carpet that he knew of. It was far too dear for us to buy, but we would like to look at it.

The proprietor and his two assistants brought for our pleasure a score of lesser carpets ; saddle-bags and a dozen prayer-rugs, old and new, all the colours of the earth, and patterned in the styles of Turkestan and Bokhara, of Ghiordes, Kirman, and Tabriz. But for the best of reasons we had not come to buy ; only to admire. And where was the great blue carpet ?

Arguing hotly, the proprietor bade his men bring more of his wares. Carpet after carpet was spread upon the growing pile, and other bales of prayer-rugs opened and scattered on all sides. Leaf-green and rust-red lay neighbourly, and arrant cheapness consorted with great wealth. But where was the blue carpet ?

There fell a brief silence. With a shrug, the proprietor muttered instruction, and at last we saw it.

Nobody spoke. The three shopkeepers, squatting together, brooded over its beauty. We stooped and felt its smooth surface, tough and yet soft as down. It lay like

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a vast and ruffled turquoise, mildly rich, **and** in **the** formal intricacy of its pattern were stiff flowers and a geometric pursuit of suddenly poised gazelles. But its blue colour was the miracle. Silky but not shining, a cloud of harebells, sky-clear, and yet opaque. A heavenly carpet.

A lane between high walls, cramped and blind, led us back to the street. A door in the wall, guarded with wrought-iron hinges and half open, revealed a triangle of fountained garden. Like Moslem women and Persian carpets, Baghdad lies hidden — Baghdad of the Arabs. But the new Baghdad was eating baked meats in public and dancing to the luscious harmonies of a Syrian orchestra. Syrian girls, clumsy of figure and their faces painted like old miniatures, with conscientious undulation assisted the enjoyment of young and enlightened Baghdadis. Two or three English nurses, high-coloured and strongly built, danced in a brisk yet rigid movement with officers of the Royal Air Force. In the middle of the floor a small grey man, like a German caricature of Jewry, agitated himself in desperate mimicry of the Charleston — then in vogue — with a tall Jewess whose white excessive nose hung over his right shoulder like the young moon of Ramazan. Neat of limb, a red-haired Russian girl swayed and marched with her partner as if marriage of their minds had made of their bodies one rhythmic flesh. And a little waiter, with dank black hair and servile cunning eyes, shuffled on swift ungainly feet — his feet turned out and his toes turned up — to a corner table with a white-wrapt bottle of bad champagne.

Now the broad scimitar of the river reflected, on its tarnished blade between the bridges, the ragged image of desert stars. King Feisal's policemen were asleep, and a short march away the high arch of Ctesiphon stood lonely under a dark and lonely sky. Now the dusky lilac of the bazaar had turned to utter night, and the ghost of Scheherazade, still fearful of the Caliph's yawn, looked through **the** window for another story. . . .

X

THE PERSIAN ROAD

BEYOND the Iraq border lay a desolate and lovely land, a billowy vast expanse of dewy shade and hills below a sky of pearl. A flock of little hills, ring-straked and yellow-pied, all browsing on the enormous plain, and a herd of taller hills behind. Mountains, perhaps, but minified by distance. The road was a dry seam in a flat meandering valley, that lost itself round easy corners.

A caravan was halted at the frontier post. A dozen laden donkeys, sleepy-eyed, stood patiently, their sturdy heads a-nodding. On one of them, perched on a sacking pad between two coloured panniers — a paraffin lamp hung behind — was a woman completely hidden in a loose black garment that covered her like an untidy tent. The men of the caravan were turbaned, long-coated, hugely bearded, and barefooted. The oldest of them was gay and voluble. So early in the morning, he was already telling with eager gesticulation a laughing story. His beard, dyed red, was grey at the roots.

The frontier was oddly real. It was more than a political division between two countries. It was a geological boundary beyond which persisted an older pattern of life, as if the flow of time had been dammed by invisible cliffs and lay quiescent in a lake of calm antiquity. The air was savourous of an archaic freedom, and the life of the few

The Persian Road

people that we saw — merchants with their long caravans and sturdy camel-hinds, eastward heading — was whole and strong and simple, and filled us with a wild nostalgia.

It was Mrs. Rodney who first confessed it. Proust and shooting-stick and hunting were all forgotten, and on the second day of our journey she said : ' We're coming back to Persia. We must come back ! We'll go home and get all the money we can, by selling things and writing things, and begging and borrowing. And then we'll fit out a proper caravan, with camels, or donkeys, or a three-horsed wagon. And we'll go eastward as far as we can, or south to Isfahan and the Baktiari country. And slowly. Not in a motor-car, but slowly. Oh, we must come back ! It would be more like real living than anything else we could do.'

With loud but false enthusiasm we both agreed. We never did go back, of course, and whether we were wise in not returning, or merely weak and foolish, I cannot say. We might have enjoyed a chapter of life incomparably rich in simple and deep sensation ; a life of slow progress over unmeasured plains and across wind- and snow-embittered mountain passes; a life to gladden the flesh with movement and the whole sky, with the river-music of plashing camel-bells. But afterwards we might never have accepted a civilised way of living. We could not have journeyed for ever, and the strong flavour of primitive life might have poisoned us with unceasing regret, as civilisation for its own sake has poisoned all simplicity. We never returned, and with the years the paradox became evident that real living — as Mrs. Rodney and all romantics have seen it — was merely ideal living, and therefore impossible.

We travelled in a motor-car that carried Government mail, and had for escort a strong and jocular Punjabi trooper. Pains, the driver, was a wanderer. He had been born in a shabby townlet in the middle of England, but gone as a youth to the North-West of Canada, and thence to a

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pearling schooner that worked off the west coast of Australia. The war had taken him to Gallipoli, to Mesopotamia and Persia ; where he stayed for seven or eight years, but later, so I heard, tried his fortune in South America. He showed usually a light and cheerful temper, but once, after we had been drinking together, he told us that he had given up all hope of settled happiness, and would care nothing though he had to die on the morrow. He kept a woman in Baghdad, another in Tehran. He was a bold and skilful driver.

The caravan season had begun, and long camel trains — cautious of foot, their proud heads swaying — were on the road before us. Their Kurdish drivers, wild black locks dropping snakily from round caps, were wrapt against the cold in scarecrow fashion, with sacking and mats of cloth, their feet bound thickly in muddy rags. The nearer hills rose to a mountain range, and we left the grassland for bare and sterner views, and dull-discoloured distances. We climbed a precipitous road, wet rock to the one side and a grey hollow full of moving cloud on the other. This was the Paitak Pass, and when we neared the top, snow was falling.

A mile or so from the summit we stopped with a sudden jar, slid greasily, and by luck were held from the chasm below on a spur of rock that halted the off-rear wheel. Ahead of us two caravans were in difficulty. A procession of hooded carts, each drawn by three horses abreast, had become entangled in a camel train, and a team of frightened horses had suddenly swung round and bolted. It was to avoid their furious charge that Pains had come so abruptly to a stop. The minutes were slow in passing till the confusion on the road was quelled, but none of us cared to get out and leave Pains to overhang the precipice alone. At last he started the engine, and cautiously engaged the gears. The wheels churned mud and snow, gripped and slid again, and then with a lurch we regained the road.

Far down the mountainside, a half-dozen yelling Kurds

The Persian Road

were still pursuing the runaway wagon. Ahead of us were twenty hooded carts, the horses still uneasy, their drivers quarrelsome ; and forty camels, fretful with a high disdain, to every head-rope a Kurdish hind hanging like an anchor. Slowly we passed them, on the outer edge of the treacherous road, and came in a little while to the crown of the pass.

We were lost in grey cloud, but swiftly descending, we slipped beneath it and came into tenuous sunlight and saw far away a warm and level land. Poins, to show that his nerve was unimpaired, cut out the engine, and in the odd silence of a free-wheeling car — that makes speed so much more obvious — we went hurtling down the looping, twisting road to a country where, in sheltered corners, sparse orchards were in bloom. We slept in Kermanshah, in a curious inn that smelt of smoke and ammonia ; but the view was of mountains, snow-topped, and cherry-trees coiffed with a cloud of blossom no less white than snow.

On our second day we met with an accident. We were passing, very slowly, another train of cumbrous three-horsed wagons, when suddenly an old man, stooping in his haste, came stupid as a hen from the back of a cart and tried to run across the road. It was impossible to avoid him. He fell, and we stopped with a jerky thud. The old man scrambled to his feet, his back to us, and his bald pate was split across. He swayed and stumbled, lifting his arms, and toppled into a ditch.

Immediately a swarm of men were on the road, brandishing sticks and shouting furiously. Poins clapped his hand on the horn. Its vibrant savage note set all the horses dancing, plunging in alarm, and the angry carters, hesitating a moment only, ran to their heads. The car leapt forward, and dodging like a trout in a stream, reached the open road beyond. We did not stop again.

Looking back, we saw the carts tangled together, and a dozen men, waving their sticks, vainly pursuing us. The Punjabi trooper laughed hoarsely, but Poins was silent.

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One of us said weakly, ' We ought to stop.' ' We'd be beaten to death,' said Poins, and drove a little faster. In the cage of self-preservation conscience still chattered, but not loudly enough to make any difference.

Fifty or sixty miles farther on, we came to a small huddled town and were halted by a couple of policemen. The accident had been reported. Reza Shah, in his campaign against the brigands who till recently had infested the country, had established police posts along the caravan road, and linked them by telephone. The savage-seeming cart-drivers had found a more useful weapon than their sticks, and Poins and the Punjabi sowar were taken into a gloomy-looking police station to be questioned. We, the passengers, were completely ignored. We waited in a dreary courtyard, thinking of what Poins had told us about Persian prisons. Justice was slow, he said.

The courtyard was empty except for ourselves and the grey-stained car. We got out and walked about in mud that was many inches deep. We looked at our luggage, that was lashed round the car, and fiddled with the ropes. Then with dismay I saw, stuck fast on one of the side lights, a round grey cap. The old man's cap whom we had knocked down, and whose bald head, with the red split in it, had risen again to shock our sight. Poins was a good fellow, and mortally afraid of gaol. He was not to blame for the accident. I pulled off the cap and trod it into the thick concealing mud.

After a long time, Poins and the sowar came out, policemen in attendance. They had to go elsewhere, to be questioned by another official. I said the car showed no sign of having been in an accident. Poins nodded and went off, and we waited in continuing apprehension. But when they returned there were no policemen with them, and the Punjabi was chuckling as if well pleased. There would be no more trouble, said Poins.

The weather grew warmer, and we drove through flat-

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bottomed valleys, dark brown and green, that were walled with lion-coloured hills. It was a desolate but strangely charming country. A village, flat-roofed and crowded together, was hardly visible from a mile away, so closely it resembled in colour the fields in which it was built, and so near the ground it lay. Here and there was a tumbled caravanserai, and in the evening we saw unloaded camels bedded in a wide circle, heads to the centre, while the smoke of cooking-fires rose in the dusty air.

We crossed the Asadebad Pass in highland weather, and came into Hamadan — Ecbatana, the treasure city that Alexander robbed — and there, in growing darkness, we wandered through a half-subterranean bazaar, fuliginous, dim-lighted, where leather-workers sat in little caves that opened off a winding tunnel. In Hamadan there is a tomb with a dome on it where, it is said, are buried Queen Esther and Mordecai, who would not do reverence to the wicked Haman. Here also died the philosopher Avicenna, who learnt arithmetic from a grocer, had the *Metaphysics of Aristotle* by heart at seventeen, and hastened his death — but not till the late fifties — by his immoderate love of wine and women. Avicenna, it seems, came near to living a full life, but on his deathbed suffered from remorse.

Again we slept in a curious inn that smelt of smoke and ammonia ; but again there were mountains, snow-hooded, and cherry-trees beneath a coverlet of snowy blossom.

At Kasvin, a town of many ruins, we were surrounded by a horde of weeping children. They wept because their trade was beggary, and tears their weapon of extortion. They were as wretched in appearance as the ungainly dead of a battlefield, and their insistence on charity was like the attack of a snarling dog. Their faces were small and haggard, pinched with the cold, and through their rags showed meagre limbs, knees bruised and muddy, bluish ribs. And still they cried. With wild and furious importunity they wept, and pointed to their tears, that dropped like rain

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from a roof and channelled their filthy cheeks. We threw them coppers. Sobbing, they picked them from the muddy road, and howled for more. Stamping their bare or bandaged feet, they cried in pitiable wrath. We gave them more money, all the lesser coins we had, and they began to quarrel among themselves. But in comparison with the manner of their sorrow, their quarrelling was mild and gentle. Their tears stopped running, and their faces, wet still, regained composure. They turned coldly from us, counting their spoil as though we had already gone. They did not trouble to dry their cheeks. They wore their tear-stains like a miner his coal-dust; a sigil of the trade.

The road grew duller as we came near to Tehran, but Tehran itself had a quality of excitement in the anomalies of its life. There were signs of luxury, gathered from a bare and mountainous land. The stone gateways, blue-tiled, were harbour entrances to many streams of traffic. The city was a port on the Golden Road that took its toll from the highlands of Asia, and bought with its profit the trifling gay produce of western factories. In the bazaar, beside the fabrics of Bokhara and Isfahan, were goods from Pittsburgh and Prague, and women in the streets, clothed all in black and veiled according to the law, drew down the yashmak to show cosmeticked eyes, and raising the skirt revealed their ankles in European silk, their feet in smart French shoes. Within the city were grove and planted messuage, a pretty cultivation; beyond it, the savage heights of Asia—

Here are white walls, and ease, and falling fountains,
Obedient trees, and gardens neady planned.
Beyond — why, mountains, desert, and more mountains,
And the eternal road to Samarkand.

Here's chatter of bazaar. Beyond the hills,
Great Asian names, Bokhara, Khorassan —
Tumultuous rough-singing syllables
Like echoes of a brawling caravan.

The Persian Road

The hotel where we stayed for a few days was **built** round a quadrangle, and the first night we were there I was kept from sleep by a curious noise in the next room. It was a responsive, antiphonal noise. A deep voice was reading or reciting, and at intervals a chorus of other voices replied. Gradually both parties grew louder, and several times the chorus lifted, like an arching wave, to a ridge of tumult that broke into a foam of wild ejaculation ; and as the many voices rose, the single speaker magnified and deepened his tone so that he still sounded clearly through the din. I was patient for a long time, being curious, but eventually I opened my door and uttered the normal British protest. I shouted, I think, 'What the hell's all that damned noise about ?'

There was immediate silence, and I went to sleep. In the morning we questioned the proprietor or manager of the hotel, and the effect was astonishing. The blood receded from his face, his eyes darkened, and goose-flesh prickles appeared on his pale cheeks. Stammering and shaking with fear, he begged us to come into his private room, where he offered us brandy in little thick glasses that he over-filled — spilling brandy on his untidy desk — and before we had tasted it, gulped a glass or two himself. There had been a mistake, he said. He thought we had all been given rooms on the other side of the quadrangle. It was by a servant's error that I slept where I had. If I had had the room he intended, I would not have been disturbed.

But what had been going on, so noisily and mysteriously, in the next room to mine ? The proprietor was unwilling to say. He hedged and hesitated, stammered and circled the subject. But our curiosity would not go unsatisfied, and in return for an explanation, we pledged ourselves to silence. Still frightened, and most unwilling, the proprietor revealed his secret.

He was a Bahaist, and the previous night he had allowed some of his co-religionists to hold service in an unoccupied

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room. But Bahaism was a proscribed religion. It had a long history of persecution, and a recent recrudescence of it had elicited new penalties and terror. The Bahaists could assemble only by stealth, and worshipped in constant fear of discovery.

We gave new assurance that the secret was safe with us ; and indeed I was very sorry for having so rudely interrupted the service. For the Bahaists are a sensible people who hold that the Divine Unity — Very God, the Brahma behind Brahma of the Hindu Trinity — is incomprehensible to man, who can only hope and pray to recognise his recurrent Manifestations. Revelation, they say, is never complete, but a piecemeal unveiling of the truth, measured and designed for the capacity of the age in which it occurs.

Surely in this belief there is a very sturdy acceptance of the limitations of human nature, a robust humility not wholly inconsistent with the spirit of Christianity ? Nor is a faith, a movement, persecuted by worldly power unless there is in that faith, that unified insurgence of the spirit, some perception of reality that threatens to dislodge and disrupt the artefacts on which worldly power is based. The rebel, the striker, and the heretic are nearly always right; and repression is the world's weapon against the spirit and the truth. Despite goose-flesh and his trembling hands, there may have been a fragment of Divine assurance in the heart of our little Persian innkeeper.

It took us several days to get Russian visas, for the broad-beamed unsmiling woman who was in charge of passports in the Soviet Consulate was rightly unaware or any urgency in the matter. Then, being authorised to continue our journey, we hired a car and drove northward to the Caspian. To Kasvin again, where, having slept in a ramshackle inn, we looked in the morning across a ten-foot alley and saw five solemnly staring Turkomans — of the sort known as Kara-Kalpaks, the tribes that wear enormous sheepskin hats — who, motionless on a wooden verandah,

The Persian Road

watched closely our ablutions and our dressing. Then, by a corkscrew road that mountain walls continually blinded, we climbed the Elburz range, and crossing the summit came into a new world. For behind us the houses, few enough, were flat-roofed, and the country was bare and brown : a country clothed in lion-skins and camel-hide. But ahead of us the houses — not many indeed — had sloping high-pitched roofs, a fantastic difference to behold so suddenly, and the country was luxuriant and green : a country clothed in great forests, and laced with the white falling of turbulent rivers.

That was a glorious descent, down the proudly wooded giant slope of the Elburz, to the flat Caspian shore ; and there, amazingly, the country wore a nearly tropical aspect, and palm-trees grew. But before we could see much of it, we were lost in fog.

XI

THE STURGEON SEA

THE fog persisted, a double cloud, physical and metaphorical. We had reached Pahlevi, on the southern shore of the Caspian ; but the sea was invisible, and how we were to cross it and come to Baku was far from clear. On the map it looked a trifling distance of about two hundred miles, but in reality it was an intricate journey through entanglements of police regulations and the spiny thicket of the Customs. Our knowledge of the Russian and Persian languages permitted us to ask for shaving-water, but hardly to debate a by-law with officialdom. We stood in need of help.

This was our difficulty before dinner, a shadow over the caviare and fried sturgeon, the chicken and spinach and Persian oranges. But the shadow shortened as the evening passed, and eventually disappeared under the boots of a little moth-eaten kind of fellow who introduced himself as a Russian *emigre* of the old regime, now a man of affairs and acquainted with the douane, capable and willing to take all our troubles on to his own narrow shoulders. His name was something like Haemorrhage, and once, he said, he had been a rich man. We nodded sympathetically and filled his glass.

Everything would be quite all right, he said. He knew the Police and the Customs. He knew everybody, **and**

The Sturgeon Sea

everybody would assist in making our journey pleasant and expeditious.

What was the *Udarob* like, this ship that was to take us to Russia? Magnifique! he replied. She was lying at the quay now, and in the morning she would take on her passengers, and exquisite foods to tempt their idle palates on the silky calm of the inland sea. Ah, magnifique! And the Russian railways? They too, it seemed, were magnifique. Our spirits rose, and we called for another bottle of wine. In wagon-lit and in restaurant-car everything was ordered with perfect cleanliness, and splendour tempered only by surrounding cheapness.

We clapped M. Haemorrhage on his dingy shoulder and drank his health for his good news.

'My name is Humoreske,' he corrected us diffidently.

'N'importe,' we assured him, and went to bed happy.

In the morning he led us proudly from police station to Customs sheds, and to noisy money-changers, where with the mysterious aid of bobbins on a wire frame the toman of Persia were exchanged for Soviet roubles. Eventually we looked through a tall wooden paling and saw the *Udarob*, a pile of luggage, mail-bags, and a dozen or two passengers waiting with indifferent patience. Four porters, hairy men in dark smocks and long boots, demanded extortionate sums for a minimum of service. M. Humoreske regretted his inability to pacify them. They bellowed with greedy wrath and extended enormous avid hands. M. Humoreske seemed anxious to go. He accepted our remuneration and left us with inconspicuous speed, while the porters squabbled ferociously over the last of our Persian money.

The boat seemed small for the number of passengers, but we had been assured of cabins, and went up the gangway confidently. It was unpleasant to find all the cabins opening off a central saloon, but travellers' choice, like beggars', is sometimes limited, and we sniffed the stale air with dutiful philosophy.

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The stewardess, a middle-aged peasant with a handkerchief round her head, was incomprehensibly explanatory in Russian, but with nods and becks made it clear that the lady's cabin was here and the men's there. Mrs. Rodney looked through the door of hers. It was very small, completely airless, and already occupied by a melancholy-looking Turk and a stout Frenchwoman, whose fingers glittered with splendid rings as she stooped comfortably to take off her boots.

'Take my things out of there immediately. I insist on having a cabin to myself,' said Mrs. Rodney, and scorning the seats in the saloon, sat resolutely on her shooting-stick to await a more happy disposal. The stewardess was puzzled. Misunderstanding, she showed Radcliffe and myself to our room. In it were two Circassian girls, one plump and painted, the other like a dishevelled and dissipated Madonna. It looked embarrassing, and our Puritan inhibitions took us by the elbow and led us out again. The stewardess was now puzzled enough to be unhappy ; and Mrs. Rodney sat on her shooting-stick and coldly demanded that the captain should be summoned immediately.

When the ship pulled out we, with all our baggage, sat aloofly on a hatch, insular even under the Hammer and Sickle. The flag of the Soviet floated overhead, and packed in stuffy cabins men and women, Russians, Persians, Georgians, and Turks, accepted its red protection. We decided to sleep on deck. Our berths, once disowned, had quickly been claimed by others ; but we had bedding-rolls, and the weather was mild. A night under the Caspian stars might not be unpleasant.

By and by a bell rang for dinner and we returned to the saloon. At the head of the table was a Belgian official in Persian service, and his wife ; next to him there was a little dark-skinned man wearing a Soviet badge — an enamel flag lettered C.C.C.P. — and a remarkably pretty girl ; the Madonna — her hair framed lankly the long oval of her

The Sturgeon Sea

face — and her luscious friend; the brown-faced melancholy Turk from Mrs. Rodney's cabin, and a bald oldish Persian ; several nondescript Russians and a vivacious fair-haired girl; the fat aquiline Frenchwoman with the rings, and ourselves.

A shuffling grey-moustached steward carried in an enormous soup-tureen and set it laboriously in the centre of the table. On each side of it a plate was piled with vast ragged slices of bread. There was communal passing of soup plates and ladling of thick meaty broth, and the meal started with a clatter of spoons and babble of talk. The Russian girls were cheerful and noisy, and their voices were rich with laughter, but the two Circassians ate silently, their heads bent low over their plates. They bit hungrily into their bread, and put it back on the table with little circular stains of red on it from their painted lips.

When the soup was finished the steward brought two flat dishes of sturgeon. That, too, was divided, plates were cleaned and the meal was over. We thought of M. Haemorrhage, and regretted his second bottle of wine.

Morning came white and windless as we awoke in our blankets on the boat-deck. Slowly the sun climbed a colourless sky, but never showed himself clearly, hiding all day behind a thin curtain of mist. The sea was calm and expressionless, a glazy bottle-green, opaque, and looking deadly deep. Faint far-away hills seemed to keep pace with us, so alike were they and so slow was our speed, for, in spite of the *Udarob* being a mail-boat, she had taken in tow a lighter filled with a week's sturgeon fishing, and the black hulk hung heavily on our tail.

Each meal was like the first supper, communal bowls of soup and massive wedges of new bread. The Russians grew more talkative, the girls more mirthful; the melody of their laughter roused even the listless weary Madonna. We exchanged polite phrases with the Frenchwoman, who was going to Paris by way of Moscow, and we enlisted the aid of the whole table when we tried to ask the steward for

The Man on My Back

beer. The pretty dark-haired girl with the Soviet official was the first to take our meaning. ' Peeva !' she shrilled delightedly to the bewildered steward. ' Peeva ! Peeva !' shouted the company in chorus, laughing happily, and the steward shambled away, amiably gesticulating. We did our best to bow all round the table. This at last was magnifiqu.

The melancholy Turk and his Persian friend did not come down to lunch. They were standing by the shoreward rail, looking unhappily at the hazy outline of land.

' We don't seem to have gone far,' Radcliffe remarked.

' No,' said the Persian a little tremulously. ' It is difficult with this boat. She is so old, and they are frightened of the engines. My friend here has just been talking to the driver.' He pointed to a large quartermaster standing woodenly at the wheel.

' He told me that they have gone down now to see how much she is leaking,' said the Turk. ' They dare not go out of sight of land in case she sinks.'

We looked again at the quartermaster; he had the solemn air of a constitutional jester, and we felt relieved.

There was another diversion in the afternoon. A small bear cub escaped from its home in the fo'c'sle and, pursued by the ship's boys, padded clumsily aft. It climbed a ladder and disappeared through the open door of the captain's cabin. Unhesitatingly the boys followed it, tumbling over each other into the sacred stateroom, and finally retrieving the bear from the captain's bunk. With a cord round its neck the cub sat unhappily on the deck, shyly hanging its overgrown head and considering the spectators out of side-long eyes.

Attracted by the sound of the chase, a boy in knickerbockers — a hitherto unnoticed passenger — appeared with a kind of attenuated and half-grown beagle, a fierce little dog, which immediately attacked the bear. The cub was unwilling either to fight or play, but clipped the dog neatly

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on its ear ; infuriated, the pseudo-beagle bit savagely, and the bear fled in ungainly frog-hops, whining pitifully. It was caught and taken back to the fo'c'sle, where the baiting continued.

About this time the stewardess came out to sun herself in a yellow dress, brightly flowered. All morning she had been busily working on deck, polishing brass. The crew took life easily, sleeping or talking, and one serious-looking seaman spent half the day on the boat-deck reading a work of apparently devotional literature. But the stewardess polished brass and carried soapy water incessantly, and forward an ancient cook could be seen slowly and interminably cutting meat and baking bread.

The colour of the sea changed gradually from bottle-green to a hueless grey, and a wet sunset smudged the haze with half-hearted dyes. We should have reached Baku early in the afternoon, but the fish lighter in tow had delayed us, and now it hardly mattered when we arrived, for Soviet regulations did not permit passengers to be landed after sundown. Night fell and brought a cold wind with it. The black shape of the sturgeon hulk relentlessly pursued us through the dusk. Northwards a crescent of lights faintly broke the darkness. This was Baku ; and in an hour's time we anchored to wait for dawn and permission to land. . . .

A smell of oil blew out on gusts of cold wind from the dingy grey town that clung to the side of a mean little hill. An officer of the Soviet Political Police in a long drab great-coat and green cap stood at the head of the gangway. At the inner end of the wooden pier porters, Customs officials, and droshky drivers battled with calculated anger over our luggage. We drove through dingy untended streets to a hotel. The houses were colourless and shabby, with broken windows and gaping patches on the walls where plaster or cement had rotted and fallen away. Baku, the Caspian gate to Soviet Russia, was a dismal portal in 1927.

But the hotel was more cheering. Mrs. Rodney was

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given a room with a genuine European bath and crowded happily, and in a little while we went down to a breakfast that consisted mainly of nobly heaped dishes of fresh caviare. We meant to go on to Batum, across the Caucasus, by train that evening, and after walking for an hour or two by cold roughly-cobbled streets and through desolate public gardens, we again gave ourselves, body and soul, to the flesh-pots. For both soul and body need sustenance in Baku, the one for the harsh winds and the other for the drab town and the sight of white-faced, hurrying, miserable-looking citizens. There were big well-made men to be seen, and the soldiers in their long greatcoats were like massive moving statues, but there was a bleak look in their faces; there were few women, and no children played about the streets.

'Happy comrades,' said Radcliffe thoughtfully, and hurried us back to lunch.

We looked at the menu. 'Caviare !' he said decidedly. 'Bortsch !' cried Mrs. Rodney ecstatically. 'Sucking-pig,' I replied. The waiter inclined his head and produced a wine-list. In the inspired manner of the Virgilian lots — for they were all Georgian wines, and we did not know one from another — Radcliffe pointed a finger at a name which looked like a series of pothooks and treble clefs, and we waited expectantly. In time and order they came, caviare, crimson bowls of bortsch, with thick seasoned cream, succulent pig of ethereal flavour, and a pleasing golden wine — a gastronomic parade that would flatter an empire, so that we began to think kindly of the Soviet and its brotherly ways.

'I told you that it wouldn't be so bad as people said,' declared Mrs. Rodney. 'This is the best coffee I've tasted since we left Baghdad.'

We drove to the station happily, thinking of our Pahlevi *émigré's* description of the magnificent Russian trains. The station was very crowded with green-capped policemen,

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railway officials by the score, and hundreds of citizens. They stood in patient queues at the ticket offices, or sat with Oriental stillness on their bundles and boxes. Our guide — a Russian who spoke some French — disappeared for half an hour and returned smiling. We picked up our rugs and prepared to follow. ' There are no places on this evening's train,' he said. ' It is unfortunate, but you will be able to go by another train to-morrow.'

Our happiness vanished. Baku for one day was not too bad, but Baku for two days was unthinkable, for we were proud then, though our spirits were humbled before we left Russia. However, there was nothing to do but reserve soft seats for the morrow — First, Second, and Third had been abolished with all class distinctions, but there was still a financial barrier between Soft Seats and Hard Seats — and inform the Police, who were interested in all such details, that we should be staying a little longer than we had anticipated.

Our interpreter led me to the local headquarters of the Political Police. A green-capped official, whose remarkably handsome features were slightly obscured by three days' growth of beard, continued to read his newspaper while the interpreter explained our unfortunate position. After a minute or two the interpreter whispered that perhaps it would be better to wait a little. We waited. Then I suggested that he should try again ; and this time Green Cap condescended so far as to jerk an informatory thumb at the room opposite. We were approaching it when the door opened and a superior clean-shaven Green Cap came out and began a muffled conversation with Green Cap Number One. Again we waited. I ventured to interrupt, and both stared coldly at me for half a minute before continuing their exchange of official secrets.

A slight commotion outside at last attracted them, and through the open door we saw an old woman and a hatless good-looking girl arguing with the sentry on duty. Green

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Cap Number Two shouted an order, and the girl was pushed into his room ; the old woman called something to him, laughing, and Green Cap followed the girl, shutting his door behind him. I nudged the interpreter, who stated our humble case again and more acceptably, so that we were told to go upstairs and consult the proper authority there. I was shown into a room where two more Green Caps sat silently examining papers, and to one of them I gave our passports. He reached for a large volume, apparently containing instructions, and I sat and waited while he began to read carefully through it. By and by I heard a clicking noise behind me, and turning round I saw the other policeman fondly spinning the chamber of his revolver. Six cartridges lay on the table. He cleaned them with his pocket-handkerchief, and carefully reloaded. A cold little breeze seemed to stir in the short hair at the back of my neck, and a gentle dew of apprehension broke on the palms of my hands. So this is Russia, I thought. The policeman closed his revolver decisively, and rose noisily to his feet.

The other one, who had patiently been reading his book of regulations, began to talk in indifferent French. It seemed that we could remain for another night in Baku — it would have been difficult to refuse us permission — but should we stay for more than twenty-four hours it would be necessary to report our presence once again. I thanked him, and looked nervously round for the one with the revolver. But he had gone.—I had, however, enjoyed my *frisson*.

They dine late in Russia, and at ten o'clock we began to eat in a gradually filling restaurant. To our surprise, the Belgian Customs official and his wife who had been fellow passengers in the *Udarob* were sitting at the next table. They had been going to Moscow, but they too had been unable to find seats, and were condemned to wait five days for another train. We shuddered, and thought with secret thanksgiving of our own departure on the morrow.

Slowly the tables filled with their nightly customers.

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Russians in dark blouses, with unshaven cheeks and ludicrously manicured hands (it seemed to be fashionable to leave the nail of the little finger long in the Chinese manner), crowded the restaurant. No one wore anything but the roughest sort of working clothes, but all had plenty of money, being employed on the oil-fields. So we enjoyed the spectacle of the proletariat taking its ease at last, pouring bortsch down its hairy throat, while the constant popping of corks was like a comradely echo of long-ago machine-guns in the streets of Moscow. By midnight the scene was getting noisy, for more and more men and a few more women came in from the streets, rankly scented women and rough-clad men. Half of them were prematurely bald, and other half thatched with long unruly hair.

In the morning we heard vague sounds from a curtained room, and looking in saw a game of baccarat in progress with fairly heavy stakes on the board. Round the tables, haggard and red-eyed, sat many whom we recognised as having been among the previous night's diners. By and by they came into the restaurant to breakfast on bread and wine and caviare. Then they went back to the baccarat table and settled down to another session of impassive gambling. It might have been bricklaying for all the interest they showed in their cards.

Like emigrants we and the Belgians clustered together, our imprisonment now shared by a large hearty Frenchman who had served as an interpreter with the British forces during the war, and who retained as a legacy of that great comradeship an impressive use of 'Quite !' and 'Awfully,' and the demoded encomium 'Perfectly good.' He had lost a perfectly good suitcase, it seemed, and had been charged a prodigious number of perfectly good francs for reporting the loss to a rotten kind of R.T.O. Awfully bad luck, wasn't it ?

'Quite !' we answered, and sympathetically redirected the conversation to Arras and older memories.

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Soon it grew time to expect our guide with the promised tickets, and we gathered all our luggage in readiness. The minutes passed and no guide arrived. The hotel staff showed us their watches, and indicated when the train would go. We nodded impatiently, and went out to look for the missing Russian. By the pavement were two droshky drivers who shared the secret of our intended departure, and who, with loud explanatory cries, showed us more watches, and made it desperately clear that we were about to miss our train, for without the Russian guide (who had our passports) we were helpless. We went inside again and thought the long thoughts which fill the evenings of Siberian prisoners.

At last the Russian came.

'There were no seats to be obtained on this train,' he said.

'But we had reserved seats,' we reminded him.

He stammered a little, and groped for his broken bits of French. 'But later they were all required *pour des gens soviétiques*,' he explained.

'I knew all along that that is what would happen,' said Mrs. Rodney, and sat down on a shooting-stick planted so firmly that it seemed an English oak rooted there on alien soil.

'Will there be seats to-morrow?' asked Radcliffe.

'Not to-morrow, I think,' said the guide.

'The day after?'

'They say that they cannot promise you seats for any day.'

'I told you they were all liars,' remarked Mrs. Rodney illogically, while we began to consider the prospect of long months spent in Baku, waiting for a Soft Seat on a train that would never arrive.

'What about going back to Persia?' asked a doubting heart.

'You cannot,' replied a sinister-seeming German who

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had joined our counsels. ' Your visas are for transit from Baku to Batum, and so you cannot go from Baku anywhere except to Batum. You must wait.' He paused. ' I am not surprised that there is trouble made for English people in Russia. It is the fault of your Foreign Secretary, is it not ? '

For a fortnight we had seen no newspapers, and an awful doubt crept into our minds that meanwhile Sir Austen Chamberlain had been writing notes to the Soviet on black-edged ultimatum paper. With a hollow laugh the German left us.

' There is a slow train which goes as far as Tiflis,' ventured the guide. ' Perhaps you may find seats on that.'

' When does it leave ? ' we asked in chorus.

' About midnight; but perhaps it will be late.'

There was no certainty that we would find seats at Tiflis any more readily than at Baku, but Tiflis was half-way and more across the Caucasus, a capital city with a reputation for beauty ; and to stay at Baku was like staying with beggars at the back door of a great house. We decided to go to Tiflis. . . .

A Russian railway carriage is like a cabin on a small ship, a slender wall of space between narrow bunks at night and abominable confinement by day. The Tiflis train lay moored at a dark platform, and cautiously we sidled down the black tunnel of a corridor to our cabin. In one of the lower berths a Soviet official lay fully dressed ; he was young and white-faced, with thick lips and wide-open gloomy eyes, and on his blouse he wore the Soviet medal for bravery. A little later he pulled off his long boots of soft leather, unbuckled his revolver, and put it beneath his pillow. He ate a crust of bread and prepared to sleep.

About three o'clock in the morning the train — which should have left at midnight — pulled out of the station, and labouring through the last hours of darkness at length came to a bare plain, white in the morning and stretching to the distant snowy wall of the Caucasus. All day we

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rode slowly, parallel with the great jagged range, across long flat fields here and there flooded so deeply that the water was level with the track. At intervals of an hour or two the train stopped at little wayside stations where all the passengers hurried down to buy bread and pieces of cooked meat, oranges, and glasses of tea. The only excitement came in the afternoon, with a jarring sound as of brakes suddenly applied, and when the train came to an uneasy standstill we found a foolish buffalo dead and tangled among the wheels of one of the coaches. It was pulled out and left for the crows, and we continued our bloody path to Tiflis.

It was evening when we arrived, and, knowing three words of Russian, prepared to interrogate, argue with, and ultimately persuade Russian railway officials who knew no English. It was easy to find out that a train left for Batum in two or three hours' time. It was easy to indicate that we wanted to go by that train. And then came a check. A council of workers assembled to discuss the question of arranging accommodation for us, and a long debate ensued, full of interest for the participants. At last it was decided that there was no room for us, and heads were shaken decisively at our renewed request for tickets. Producing a watch and raising our eyebrows to dizzy heights of interrogation, we endeavoured to find out when there would be a train able to take us. Regretfully, so it seemed, they gesticulated the impossibility of giving us any assurance. We began to grow desperate, for our funds were incapable of supporting us indefinitely in idleness in the capital of Georgia.

And then Radcliffe rose to heights of dramatic art. He addressed the Workers' Council in English, French, and Hindustani, and they, though all uncomprehending, were impressed by the passion of his words. He pointed longingly to the west, he showed one empty pocket and the other holding only a few poor coins; the hearts of the workers were

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clearly touched. This was the crucial moment. **He pulled** out a notebook and pencil, and in a few lines drew a steamer leaving a lonely quay. ' Batum !' he said, again looking westward ; and pointing despairingly to the ground beneath him, ' Tiflis !' he said. He stretched longing hands to the distant town, and again drew a picture, a house on the far side of an angry sea. ' Our home,' he said simply and quite incomprehensibly.

We stood silent as slowly the debate began again. There were plainly two parties in the council by this time, and it seemed that our party was winning. Finally a red-faced man like a butcher smacked a clenched fist into an enormous hand and decided in our favour. He led the way to a ticket-office, and after saluting the Council we followed gratefully.

Another night in the train took us into a great open valley, into vineyards and rich meadows rolling down to a river from huge wooded heights, while in the distance snowy peaks scarred with their dazzling spears the blue expanse of a cloudless sky. This was Georgia, a gracious country nobly inhabited, for at the little stations enormous broad-built men, like giants in their hairy boorkas and astrakhan caps, strode magnificently or stood and laughed in open mirth with handsome, rosy-faced girls. All the way to the sea were wooded mountains and green meadows, flowers and orchards and rivers, and every league, it seemed, taller men and more handsome girls. Batum came at last, on a green point curving slowly out into the Black Sea, and, as happy as schoolboys on holiday, we climbed down to the sunny platform.

The only flaw in our happiness was that we were hungry, for we had been compelled to economise even on wayside bread and meat. But a hotel was not far away, a bank where we could draw more money, and a droshky ready to take us to both. Our surviving roubles were just sufficient to pay for transport to the hotel. There the first person we

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saw was the melancholy Turk who had been our fellow voyager on the Caspian Sea, and who had succeeded in leaving Baku a day before us.

He looked more melancholy than ever. 'The ship was gone,' he said. 'There will not be another for ten or perhaps twelve days.'

We stared at him, and the sun seemed to go behind a cloud. 'Oh, nonsense,' we said half-heartedly.

'It is true,' said the Turk.

'Well, I'm hungry,' said Mrs. Rodney impatiently, 'and ship or no ship, I want something to eat.'

'There is no food here to-day,' said the Turk.

'What !' said Mrs. Rodney awfully.

'It is Easter, and everybody is drunk,' said the dismal Turk.

We had forgotten the Russian Easter, which lags a week or two behind our own, and the Turk's information was correct.

Two servants of some sort appeared and carried our suit-cases upstairs, staggering from side to side. Laughing happily, they brought a second bed into the room which Radcliffe and I were to share, and gazed blankly at Mrs. Rodney's immediate order for a bath.

'Bath ?' she demanded. 'Bain ? Hot water ? Hammam ?'

'There is no bath,' said the Turk, who had followed for company's sake.

The elder of the servants asked for our passports — they had to be given to the hotel-keeper, who would communicate with the police — and, grinning at the photographs, they carried them away.

In a little while we went down to investigate the matter of food. The boots and his friend — whom later we knew as George — were sitting at the foot of the stairs.

'Passports ?' said the boots.

'You've got our passports,' we answered.

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He held up two, counted them, and pointing to Radcliffe, repeated ' Passport ? '

' I gave you my passport,' said Radcliffe angrily.

' He has lost it,' said Mrs. Rodney. ' I knew he would. It was ridiculous to give it to a drunken creature like that.'

The boots only shook his head dumbly, and George took up the tale, repeating ' Passport ?' in a high-pitched voice.

' Better leave them till they're sober,' I suggested, but Radcliffe said no, and felt in the boots's pockets to see if he could find the passport for himself. It was not there. Then he searched George, and George being ticklish began to laugh. George had a squint and a magnificent moustache, and when he laughed his eyes and the tips of his moustache all converged to a central point on his nose. It was an attractive laugh, but it disappeared when Radcliffe pulled a passport from his trouser pocket. George's chin dropped, and he looked at the missing document with the amazement of a child watching the flags of all the nations drawn inexplicably out of a conjurer's mouth.

The boots laughed hoarsely. ' Passport !' he said. ' Ho, ho, ho !'

George's spirits returned and he giggled, ' Hee, hee, hee ! Passport !' This was excellent fun. ' Hee, hee !' he said.

' Ho, ho, ho !' replied the boots.

Both laughed uproariously. ' Passport !' they said at intervals, and dug each other in the ribs. It was a champion jest, a proper joke for a Georgian Easter, and they took their fill of it.

But we were hungry, and borrowing some roubles from the miserable Turk, we set out to look for food in this town which was enjoying itself too much to worry about trade.

XII

BLACK SEA PRISONERS

GEORGE was a kind of chambermaid. The morning after our arrival in Batum we saw him on the dirty verandah outside our room — there was a view of dingy roofs on one of which a yellow cat lay dying — looking pale and ill. With one hand he pressed his aching head, and cupped in the other lay two white tablets at which he gazed suspiciously. He had just taken Mrs. Rodney her morning tea, and she, properly diagnosing his condition as the natural sequel of a Russian Easter, had given him aspirin. Doubtfully he placed the tablets on his tongue, and with a shuddering effort swallowed them.

There was a dim air of pain about all the hotel staff that morning ; and the waiters, burly men in Russian blouses, considered the breakfast they dilatorily served with sour distaste. And then we went to look for a ship.

The harbour was beautiful, a deep-blue bay lying below wooded hills, while to the north a chain of snow mountains reached, ragged and gigantic, far into the sea. Along the water-front were tables at which the workers of Batum sat and drank their coffee. And in an Italian shipping office there was a man who confirmed the patient Turk's information that there would be no ship to Constantinople for another ten days. We thought of our letters of credit, once so fat and confident, and now shrinking to meagre old age ;

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we thought of our leave, how 'time flyeth and slippeth marvellously away,' and all three of us blanched.

'But there are oil-tankers and cargo ships; perhaps one of them will take you,' said the shipping agent. 'If you go to the Soviet Shipping Company's office they will tell you there. They speak English,' he added reassuringly.

The personnel of the Soviet Shipping Company appeared charming. There was Mr. Rakovsky, who had been an officer in the old army, and had survived the dawn of revolution to become a water-clerk at a hundred and fifty roubles a month; there was Mr. Balin, a sailor with a sailor's cap stuck resolutely on the side of his head and an air of happy truculence; and Mr. Levinsky, who was pale and had a humid eye. They gathered round us, and summoning a fat man with a shaven bullet-head and an unpronounceable name to assist, they gave us advice and encouragement.

It was quite likely, they said, that the captain of one of the oil-tankers would take us to Constantinople or perhaps to Alexandria. There was a German ship leaving the following day, and an Italian one the day after. And there was Captain Fletcher, an Englishman, whose ship was now discharging and in a few days would go on to Novorossiisk and Odessa to load cement and wheat — a voyage round the Black Sea might not be unpleasant. But they would enquire of all these ships whether it would be possible to give us a passage.

Our spirits rose past Fair and Set Fair, and being in the neighbourhood of Very Dry we invited Mr. Rakovsky to dine with us that night. He came and told us stories of the war on the Austrian front; how the Russian infantry advanced fourteen or fifteen deep, only the leading two or three ranks being armed, so that those who followed had to wait for men in front to fall wounded or dead before they got rifles and could fight for themselves. He told us, very cheerfully, of the communal houses which had superseded private property, and spoke with apparent gratitude

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of the eighteen square yards of floor space to which every adult worker under the Soviet was entitled. He told us of his wife who had been making Easter pies and entertaining her neighbours — out of his salary of a hundred and fifty roubles a month — and of her attendance at medical classes in her spare time. He spoke charmingly, as a survivor of the old order, of the new régime, and he made it seem a very gallant adventure, so that we forgot broken houses and dirty streets, and forgave the youthful crudities of Soviet rule.

But life, like Marjorie Daw, has continual ups and downs, and after dining with Young Russia on top of the see-saw, we spent the following morning with disappointment in the depths. George had recovered from his Easter potations, and was no longer amenable to discipline. We rang and shouted for tea.

' Si chas,' said George, and went blithely on his way.

Si chas is the Russian for *Anon, anon, sir*, and its promise of immediacy is never made except to be obliterated by the encroaching tides of postponement.

We rang for shaving water.

' Si chas,' said George, and returned to crack another joke with Hubert, his fellow chambermaid.

We summoned Hubert, and very determinedly said ' Chai !' holding three fingers erect beneath his nose, indicating by word and action that three glasses of tea should be brought.

' Si chas,' said Hubert, and wandered dreamily away.

We knew before we left the hotel what would await us at the quay. The German captain would be unable to take us. The morning was foggy, and the cobbled streets were slippery with rain. It was inevitable that greyness should dominate that day, and inevitably it did.

The German captain was not prepared to take the risk of adding passengers to a cargo of benzine. We suggested that what risk there was was really ours, but the captain, it seemed, had been quite definite. We could not interview

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him personally, for his ship now lay out in the harbour, and, unfortunately, the Russians said, permission to go aboard could not be granted. It was contrary to regulations.

' And the Italian ? ' we asked.

Mr. Balin shrugged his shoulders. ' I have seen him too,' he said, ' and he does not like passengers; and besides, it is not easy to land people in Constantinople from a cargo ship or an oil ship. I do not think he will take you.'

Could we not see him ourselves ? we asked. It was difficult, said Mr. Balin, to know just where to find him. It would be better to leave everything to himself and Mr. Levinsky.

' I don't trust that man,' said Mrs. Rodney decisively as we walked round the harbour.

We walked as far as the *Don*, Captain Fletcher's ship, an Arcos vessel trading between the Black Sea, home ports, and the Baltic. At the foot of the gangway stood a Russian sentry — every ship in the harbour was similarly guarded — and a lean red-faced man in stained blue uniform.

' Is the Captain aboard ? ' asked Radcliffe.

' No,' said the lean red man, ' he went ashore an hour ago. But what d'you want ? I'm the Chief Officer here.'

' We thought we would like a talk with the Captain,' said Radcliffe a little vaguely.

' If it's tobacco you want, try mine,' replied the Chief. ' I know what it is to be in a town like this, where you can't get anything fit to smoke. And the beer's rotten too. But have you tried that wine of theirs ? You get a bottle with 66 on it; that's the best, and it's not half bad.'

We took the Chief Officer — his name was Merrick — into our confidence, and told him of our plight and the hopes falsely raised by our Russian friends.

' Don't you trust 'em,' said Mr. Merrick. ' I know Russia, and I know the Russians. He's all right' — he indicated the sentry, a cheerful-looking peasant in ill-fitting uniform — ' and all the ordinary people are all right. But

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the officials !' And Mr. Merrick spat, as though his opinion could be safely represented only by an asterisk. ' Go and see the captain of that Italian ship yourselves. He'll take you all right if you pay him, but if the others get at him first, why, they'll probably put him off.'

' That's exactly what I feel myself,' said Mrs. Rodney. ' I distrusted those people from the start, and I still distrust them.'

' But what's their idea ? ' I objected. ' Why should they want to keep us here ? '

' Got shares in the hotel perhaps,' suggested Radcliffe gloomily.

' You never know,' said Mr. Merrick. ' That's what I always say about Russia.' He looked warily over his shoulder at the empty quay, and repeated darkly, ' *You never know !* '

Again there seemed a lurking suggestion of Siberia in the air as we went to search, and search in vain, for the Italian captain. On his ship a steward said he was ashore, and in the office they told us he had gone back to his ship. And, as we played hide-and-seek in this way, the thought came again that perhaps Sir Austen Chamberlain had been writing tactless notes to the Soviet.

By morning the German tanker had gone, and the Italian lay out in the harbour ready to go. But while we sat and drank our coffee on the quay, discussing the advisability of learning Russian to aid us in our prospective internment, Mr. Rakovsky came towards us smiling pleasantly. ' I have good news for you,' he said. ' Another English ship is coming in either to-night or to-morrow morning, and will be sailing again in forty-eight hours. One of the English captains will be sure to take you.'

Marjorie Daw's heels left the ground again, and we soared deliriously into thoughts of freedom. There is more than romance in that phrase ' an English ship ' — there is solid comfort in it. In England you are in Kent or Northumber-

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land or Devonshire ; you are local, or even parochial. But in an English ship abroad you are in England itself, which, for all that pessimists may say, is relatively a blessed thing.

We went through the town to a long shingle beach that afternoon, and joyfully played ducks and drakes on the Black Sea. The routine visit to the harbour on the following morning was crowned by the magnificent spectacle of a Red Ensign hanging modestly over the stern of a black but comely tanker. We had grown cunning by that time, and divided our forces. Radcliffe went to the shipping office ; Mrs. Rodney was sent to drink coffee a little farther down the quay, with orders to halt anybody who looked like an English shipmaster ; and I took a droshky and drove round to the ship.

The driver, with the native courtesy and camaraderie of Russia, offered his cigarettes and struck a match for me, and then lashed his horses to a sudden gallop. Swaying and jolting, we roared through the cobbled streets with a sound of shouting and smitten iron, but at the end of a superb progress I drew blank at the ship, for the Captain had gone ashore. Returning to the office, I found neither him nor Radcliffe, and rain had driven Mrs. Rodney from the quay.

While I was considering what to do, a bootblack, whose stance was near by, called something in incomprehensible Russian, and pointed round the corner. I followed the line of his finger, and came to a little wine-shop. Sprawling on the counter, a bottle in one hand and his pipe in the other, was Radcliffe. With unerring precision he filled brim-full three glasses, and the three glasses passed into the hands of Mr. Balin, Captain Fletcher of the *Don*, and Captain Archer of the *Tamarisk*, the tanker which had just arrived. It was a hearty scene. The sides of the small dark tavern were lined with shelves on which stood rows and rows of bottles; long lines of tall bottles and companies of squat bottles, old bottles and clean new bottles; bottles with

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curious Georgian labels, and sinister bottles without any labels at all; bottles of wine, beer, cognac, and vodka. It was difficult to believe that in such an atmosphere as this any request could be refused, any hope fail to fructify.

Radcliffe introduced me to Captain Archer. The Captain pushed his hat farther back from his broad red forehead and said, * Now, what the devil made you come to Russia ? You've come from India, your friend says, and you're going home. Well, then, is this the sort of way home that any sane man would choose ? '

It is always a difficult matter to defend one's sanity, and Captain Fletcher, recognising the delicacy of the situation, tried to turn the conversation to easier paths. But Captain Archer was one of the bull-dog breed. ' I've got to know something about you before you come aboard my ship,' he said. ' Tell me why you came to Russia.'

' Curiosity,' answered Radcliffe, ' idle curiosity.'

' Then you're a Nosey Parker,' said the Captain triumphantly. ' That's what you are. A Nosey Parker !'

' Have some more wine, Captain,' said Mr. Balin tactfully.

Mr. Balin's seafaring cap was recklessly on the side of his head, and there was a twinkling light in his blue eyes. He was enjoying himself as a Russian should in a wine-shop. He was hopeful too, and made laborious jokes at which Radcliffe and I laughed heartily.

' There's a lady with you as well,' said the Captain. ' Now, what's she doing in Russia ? Russia's not the sort of place for a lady to come to.'

' Oh, Captain !' said Mr. Balin.

' That's all right, Balin. You know me and I know you. But I don't know these people. Now just tell me why the lady came to Russia.'

' Curiosity,' said Radcliffe again.

' Women are like that,' Captain Fletcher remarked knowingly.

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' And they make things difficult in a ship,' added Captain Archer.

' Very difficult,' corroborated Captain Fletcher.

This was deep calling to deep, and we sat in stricken silence while the master mariners condemned the ways of woman at sea and swore that the ocean should be kept free of her and all her whims and vapours.

' Once, when I was young, I took my wife a voyage with me,' said Captain Archer.

' Ah,' said Captain Fletcher non-committally.

' Now if it hadn't been for this Mrs. Rodney I might have taken you two,' Captain Archer continued, ' but she complicates things. And besides, what's she doing in Russia ? That's what I can't get over. Mind you, I'm not inquisitive, but I like to get to the bottom of things. What's this Mrs. Rodney doing in Russia ? '

' Having a holiday,' I answered forlornly.

' Where's her husband ? ' asked Captain Archer sternly.

' In India,' Radcliffe replied.

' Ah !' said Captain Fletcher.

' Let us have another bottle of wine,' said Mr. Balin helpfully, and handed round the platter of brown bread, radishes, and cheese which properly accompanies morning drinking in Russia.

Like the wine in the glasses hope ebbed and flowed. Captain Archer's difficulties were one by one countered and overcome, and again, like importunate ghosts, came indefatigably to the attack. Captain Fletcher was on our side, and yet could not overcome his sympathetic prejudices against women at sea. Mr. Balin laughed and made cumbrous jokes, and Radcliffe paid resolutely for more wine.

At last sentiment seemed to win. ' I'd like to help you,' said Captain Archer. ' Honestly, I would. I don't want to leave fellow-countrymen stranded, if I can do anything to assist them.'

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' Especially when one of them is a lady,' added Mr. Balin.

' H'm,' said Captain Archer. ' Well, it's time to be going, and I'll think things over and see what can be done.'

We went out into the street and down to the harbour. The Red Ensign still hung limply over the stern of the *Tamarisk*, a dingier red than the fiery face of her captain.

' Til help you if I can,' he said, ' but all the same I'd like to know — to really know — what you're doing in Russia ?'

Radcliffe swallowed visibly, and replied, ' Holiday-making, travelling, rubber-necking, seeing the world,'

' Nosey Parkers,' said Captain Archer, and walked away indignantly. . . .

We returned from our inconclusive morning's work to find Mrs. Rodney writing letters. Sublimely indifferent to the depressing view from her window — the yellow cat still lay a-dying on the flat red roof — she was interweaving colourful descriptions of Russian scenery with rattling denunciation of Russia's policemen.

' We are going to the theatre to-night,' she said, after listening to the tale of our endeavours with philosophic detachment. ' I met Mr. Rakovsky, who said it would be good, and the seats are only a rouble.'

A stock company, having come to the end of the Caucasian season, was giving selections from its repertory as a farewell performance, and there was a pleasing air of intimacy between actors and audience. The star turn was a woman, a comedienne, a singer, a dramatic artiste with an astonishing range of expression. She tore passion to rags, she sang folk-songs with a kind of wild emotion and despairing sympathy, she dropped tumultuously into low comedy. And the house rose to her. They shouted for their favourite songs, and she, with a favourite's impatience, snapped her fingers and consented to sing them. Now it was something with a tremendous revolutionary lilt in it, a song of broken

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barricades and triumphant insurgence, now something of lewd winking and innuendo that speared a way for rollicking laughter. She had Marie Lloyd's trick of hanging the end of a story on her thumb, and discolouring a moral with a wink. She was a Marie Lloyd of the steppes, a sansculotte Bernhardt of the streets. And the audience loved her.

It is a little alarming to find how adventitious words are to the simpler forms of humour, to discover that the scribe is a mere appendage to the tumbler, and how miserably the librettist trudges in the proud wake of the clown. Words fill an empty space — like progressive citizens adventuring into new suburbs — but they are not really necessary. The performance concluded with a sketch of the familiar errant-husband-plus-exasperated-wife type, a crude thing in which a bearded Cossack, gorgeously in his cups, hid behind a tree while his wife, at the door of their cabin, told us what she would do to him when he came home. Not a word did we understand, but the pantomime, stripped of verbal explanation and aided only by onomatopoeic noises, was extravagantly funny. The woman alternately wept and invented fresh vengeance, and the Cossack behind his tree blanched and groaned and spoilt his groaning with a hiccup. Common stuff, but done with a riotously full spirit, and without the words — which were probably cheaper than the story — it was purely and irresistibly a piece of that hilarious mockery with which man, in his wiser moments, knows how to treat his shortcomings and his minor tragedies. The sketch finished with a reconciliatory duet and a dance of sheer abandon to the joy of stamping feet and whirling limbs.

Closer acquaintance with mockery came the following morning. Captain Archer was red and stern and reserved in manner. He had thought things over very carefully, he said, and the difficulties in the way of taking passengers from Russia were too many and too grave for him to overcome. Port authorities could make things very unpleasant for a shipmaster who failed to observe their wishes.

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' Does that mean that the people here have told you not to take us ? ' asked Radcliffe bluntly.

' It means that I might have my ship delayed if your passports were found to be irregular,' said the Captain, and blew his nose in some embarrassment.

' But our passports are perfectly in order,' indignantly exclaimed Mrs. Rodney.

' And it's difficult for a merchant ship to land passengers at Constantinople. It's difficult to land passengers from Russia anywhere except at a home port. I should have to sign you on as members of the crew, and then take you to a British consul to sign you off wherever I landed you. They don't like people who come from Russia anywhere on the Continent, and I might have trouble. Trouble would mean delay, and delay means money, especially with an oil boat; and then I'd get more trouble from my owners. Honestly I'd like to help you, but it can't be done.'

So there was an end of that; and the next day, sitting on the water-front with a cup of Turkish coffee and a glass of water, I watched the *Tamarisk* slide quietly out of the harbour, moving westward to open sea. The Red Ensign over her stern shook itself for freedom after having hung in draggled obscurity for two whole days in Russia, and an hour of sunlight lit up the great snow mountains to the north. It was a pretty sight, but a prettier would have been Batum disappearing behind the broad white wake of the outgoing ship.

By and by a ragged youth, drifting aimlessly along the quay, sat down beside me. After a minute of speculative silence he said, ' Sprechen Sie deutsch ? '

I shook my head.

' Alors, vous parlez francais ? '

' No,' I replied, to save trouble and the embarrassment which always followed a pretence to fluency.

' But I speak English too,' he countered eagerly. ' I am a student. I was a student at Leningrad and then at Moscow.

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I studied Oriental languages and art. But now I can study no more.' He shook his head and stared glumly at the sea. His coat was in tatters, and the soles of his boots were tied to evasive uppers with string.

I asked him why he could no longer study.

'I wanted to go away, to go to Persia and India, and see those places. But they would not let me. And then I said I would go to Tiflis, to the university there, and they let me come away from Moscow. But now I do not want to study any more.'

'What are you going to do, then?' I said.

He looked over his shoulder, but no one was behind him. He looked up and down the quay, and no one was within a hundred yards. And then, 'I am trying to escape,' he whispered fiercely.

'To escape from——?'

'From Russia! But all the ships are guarded, and every road is guarded.'

That was perfectly true. A sentry was posted on every ship in the harbour, and a mile out of the town picquets watched the approach to the Turkish frontier under the frowning encouragement of hill-top forts.

* There are thousands of young men trying to escape from Russia,' said the student with miserable satisfaction.

A day or two later I met Mr. Merrick, that suspicious man, the mate of the Arcos ship — which was still unloading — and told him about my student.

'He was probably a spy,' said Mr. Merrick encouragingly, 'set to watch you and try to make you talk. That's the sort of thing they do in Russia. First they've got the Political Police, those fellows that wear the green caps. Then they've got spies on the Police — everybody knows about them. And then they've got other spies spying on the spies, but nobody knows who they are. They don't even know each other. I've got my suspicions about one or two people in this very town, though.' Mr. Merrick

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closed one eye slowly and significantly.

'I know Russia,' he said with grim pride, and told of certain things he had seen in Leningrad during the early days of revolution ; of street murders, seemingly unprovoked and certainly unpunished ; of sudden anonymous threats and their ghastly fulfilment; of desperate escapes, and of a midnight battle fought by moonlight on the ice.

That day, as it happened, the streets of Batum were dressed in red, for the morrow was May Day. Red flags hung from every window, and a scarlet flush filled the mean little streets, darkly reflected in cracked window-panes and in the stagnant gutters. May Day fell on a Sunday, and from Friday night to Tuesday morning the people held holiday, drinking, singing, and adventuring in charabancs. The parade of soldiers and workmen was impressive, though the spectators were animated more by idle curiosity than enthusiasm. The troops filled three sides of a square, and untidy processions with banners crowded behind them. The soldiers chatted amiably and smoked cigarettes, while the workers sang occasional choruses. At the appointed time an officer of high rank, attended by one orderly, rode up on an ungroomed horse. The parade put out its cigarettes, and came leisurely to attention. In the centre of the square there was a small raised platform on which a large ginger-coloured dog had been sleeping. Roused by the sound of several hundred pairs of heels coming together, it sprang up and barked. Then, in the way of dogs, it sat down again and began to bite its loins for fleas.

The general rode round the square and put some question to each side in turn, a question which was answered by a deep-voiced shout. He dismounted and strode to the platform. The dog jumped down. The general read aloud some message of May Day, some manifesto of brotherhood or vindication of the Hammer and Sickle. (Later we were told that the announcement to the troops included reports of a twenty-four hours' general strike in Britain and a

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sweeping Cantonese-Communist victory in China.) The general remounted his horse, and the dog returned to the platform to roll contentedly on its back. Recruits affirmed in unison their allegiance to the Soviet, and the workers sang a cheerless song. Policemen moved a company of spectators to make room for the fire brigade in brass helmets; their tardy arrival was greeted with another song, and then the parade dissolved into its component parts, and the dog lay down to sleep again.

Slowly time passed. The regular passenger steamer which serves the Black Sea ports was nearly due now, and we waited patiently. The hotel was saddened by the sight of George, the chambermaid, suffering from a raging tooth-ache. His superb moustache no longer swept proudly upwards but sadly drooped, one side distorted by a swollen cheek. His squint was fixed in the introspective misery of pain, and he took orders with such dumb helplessness that one never had the slightest expectation of their being executed. Hubert, his confrere, stuck his tongue in his cheek to simulate an enormous gumboil, and laughed at him heartlessly. But George was past the sting of ridicule. Even the mockery of being offered a lump of sugar failed to move him. Even our Flit gun ceased to interest him.

The Flit gun belonged to Mrs. Rodney, and was popular throughout the hotel. Being warned before leaving India that parasitic life abounded in the beds, curtains, walls, and public vehicles of Persia and Russia, she had had the forethought to buy a metal spray and a tin of insecticide called Flit. With Flit we had come scatheless through Persia and across the Caucasus without a scar. Now in Batum the common house-fly is an intolerable plague. In black battalions it swarms on foodstuffs and window-panes, on walls, and on the offal in the gutters. Our bedrooms were noisy hives, and the restaurant by day was a buzzing cloud. First we cleared the bedrooms. Thousands of flies, massed in dense formations, fell before the deadly spray. Then we

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settled the stragglers. High fliers were picked off with masterly lefts and rights, and cheepers were beaten out of their corners to be driven to the same ineluctable doom.

At breakfast-time on our second morning in Batum we attacked the restaurant. In the windows we enfiladed long lines of flies, and on stale bread we massacred their vast reserves. The Flit gun slew its thousands, while the waiters stood by and applauded. At first they were open-mouthed with astonishment; then interested ; and finally rapturous. They borrowed the gun and set out to slay flies on their own. They stalked fugitives and stood on chairs to reach high roosters. They brought the cook up from the kitchen to see their prowess, and they blew venturesome sprays against the wondering faces pressed to the windows from outside. The Flit gun became an institution and in the end it saved our reputation, for on leaving we found ourselves without enough Russian money for tips ; and Mrs. Rodney, calmly and masterfully, sold the gun to the syndicate of waiters for ten roubles.

Our ship arrived, and the hour of her departure was published. The melancholy Turk, who had followed us all these days growing visibly older and more dejected, laughed aloud for relief and offered us innumerable cups of coffee. We paid five roubles each for a certificate that we were free from infectious diseases — apparently the mere possession of five roubles was sufficient evidence, for we saw no doctor — and bought, for seven roubles apiece, police permission to leave the town. We packed and waited. And then we had to unpack, for the ship decided to lie in Batum for one more night.

In the morning we filled a droshky with our luggage and another with ourselves, and drove, for the last time, to the quay. The entire staff of the hotel stood on the pavement waving good-bye. George, still holding tightly to a bottle of aspirin (a parting gift), wept a little — his toothache

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inclined him to tears — but Hubert laughed enormously, while the waiters proudly held aloft their new fly gun.

A last trial awaited us. The Customs shed, where officials went through our baggage like a cyclone hitting a jerry-built model town, was some hundreds of yards from the ship, and between us we had thirteen separate pieces of luggage. There were porters in plenty, but the price they demanded, one rouble per package, was about eleven roubles in excess of our remaining resources. We said, not proudly but quite decidedly, that we could carry our luggage without assistance. Mrs. Rodney went aboard, and Radcliffe followed carrying two suitcases. Surrounded by wrathful growling porters, I stood and guarded the remainder.

Radcliffe took his burden aboard, and set out to return for more. But scarcely had he left the ship when a loud shout stopped him. A burly, surly-looking Green Cap at the head of the gangway bellowed something incomprehensible, and angrily beckoned Radcliffe to come aboard again.

Radcliffe shouted, ' What for ? '

Green Cap roared a third time.

' Pourquoi ? ' shouted Radcliffe. ' Kiswaste, you jungly ? '

Green Cap came clumsily down the gangway and along the quay. Radcliffe took out his passport, showed the police exeat, and said, ' Is that what you want ? '

Green Cap shook his head, and Radcliffe, his patience exhausted, turned to go. The policeman immediately seized him by the arm, swung him round, and threateningly drew his revolver half out of its holster. Radcliffe expostulated, and the policeman called to three more Green Caps in the vicinity. They surrounded Radcliffe, and a spirited conversation began in an ill-fitting mixture of broken French and German. He had infringed the laws of Russia by doing a porter's work and carrying his own luggage aboard.

' Es ist verboten,' they told him — ' aux voyageurs d'apporter les bagages — aus, nach den Schiff.—II y a des

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ouvriers qui font cela.' And they marched him back to the Customs shed, called four porters, and pointed to our remaining baggage. The porters carried it off, and we followed in silence. Once aboard we offered them our remaining Russian money, one rouble eighty kopecks. We had no more, and Green Cap scratched his head in bewilderment. The Chief Steward approached, and Green Cap turned to him, volubly, explosively, and convincingly, for the steward pulled out his pocket-book and gave the policeman a ten-rouble note. Green Cap went ashore, and the steward explained in Italianate English that he was happy to be of assistance to us; the policeman had told him that we wanted to borrow money to discharge our just debts, and the ten roubles would accordingly go down in our bill at an equitable rate of exchange. Were we travelling Saloon or Second Class ?

' Second,' we said dejectedly ; and watched Batum and Russia fade slowly and sink beneath the broad white fantail of the steamer's wake.

XIII

TEMPORARY PEDAGOGUE

I WANTED to go to America, and for some time I had had in my desirous eye the fellowships recently established by the Commonwealth Fund. These fellowships, most generous of their kind, promised two years at an American university and the opportunity of much travelling. But in order to apply for one I would have to secure some sort of academic connexion, so I looked for a minor appointment, and hearing of a vacancy in one of the English provincial universities, I offered myself as assistant to the Professor of English Literature.

But having made of the application a fine parade of virtue, I grew ashamed and sought forgiveness in the company of friends who had never been guilty of such affectation. There was a tea-planter, home on leave from the farther side of India, a man whose constitutional gaiety was a better solvent of time and responsibility than strong drink ; there was a botanist with a stammer, fair and broadly built, who had lately returned from a wildly incompetent expedition to the Arctic ; there was a persistent student of medicine, whose studies had so little interfered with his pleasure that neither had much progressed from the innocent enthusiasm with which, many years before, he had begun them both. . . . We drank too much for the liking of Common Sense, that tedious chaperon, who soon

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deserted us; but not so much that I could be content with nothing more than drinking. So I said that I would join a man who was going to walk for a few days in the Cairngorms, the mountainy land that rises above the springs of the Dee and the fount of the Don. A land of boulder-strewn heights, cold in the clouds, but in fair weather commanding the winding course of the Spey, and woods beyond, and the blue sierras of the middle highlands. A country to thicken the legs and elevate the heart.

But before leaving there was another party, and after a long dinner we went to the house where I was living, and found among more convivial apparatus some half-dozen letters. A sheer impertinence, I thought, the tedious intrusion of sober busybodies. Who could read letters at that time of night? A foutre for the world and worldlings base! Unopened, I threw them into a corner.

The next morning, in a painful state of dissociation, I packed a few clothes — a pair of socks in one hand, my aching head in the other — and hurriedly set out to find the cold blissful air of the highlands. The smell of the pines at Inverey; the water, solid and dark as peat, then a golden curve, then whiteness filling with thunder the Linn of Quoich; curtain closing coldly upon curtain of mist on Ben Macdhui; the two of us sitting bare to the waist in a hot blue stillness, legs dangling over the precipice, on the rock-and-mossy top of Braeriach — I forget where we went, but for a week or so we lived in strenuous grace, and then with reluctance went back to Aberdeen.

Among the letters I had thrown into a corner was a command to come at once and be interviewed by Professor X, of the Chair of English Literature in one of England's provincial universities. The Professor had been quite taken by the cunning self-praise of my application and a couple of too-friendly testimonials: he thought I would suit him very well indeed, so would I come and see him immediately?

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I looked at the date on the letter and the dust on the envelope. I had lost a job.

But a few weeks later, by great good fortune, a like position fell unexpectedly vacant at Aberdeen, and because there was little time to spare before the autumn term began, it was offered to me, and very thankfully I accepted it. The greater part of my duties was the marking of innumerable essays and countless examination papers written by members of the Graduation Class, who numbered two hundred and fifteen that year. About ten per cent were quite illiterate, and perhaps fifty per cent insensible to the art of writing ; incredulous that among the functions of literature is the exact, alarming, or ennobled focussing of life ; incapable of drawing from their minds more than a still-born opinion about anything at all — and therefore wasting their time on the long road that leads from *Beowulf* to *Finnegans Wake* ? By no means. English literature was a compulsory subject for their degree in Arts, and degrees have a commercial value.

Of the better half of the class about twenty-five or thirty revealed a high competence, and half a dozen had minds of their own and the faculty of individual expression. At that time I was not so fervent a believer in democracy as I am now. I had not realised that freedom, to be worth a fig, must include the freedom of being deaf to Shakespeare. It is a hard lesson to learn.

I had occasionally to lecture to the Class, and that was both difficult and dangerous. If one became excessively dull, the audience showed its weariness by shuffling four hundred and thirty feet; and if one grew immoderately stimulating, it showed approval by stamping. Now immediately below us was a classroom where Professor Terry lectured, the illustrious biographer of John Sebastian Bach ; and in Professor Terry, a noble and warm-hearted man, there was hot temper, command of stately invective, and a musical ear that could not suffer the trampling noise of

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feet above his head. So one lectured in a narrow strait between a doubled anxiety. If one grew tedious, four hundred shoes protested, and a minute later Professor Terry — gown billowing, face incarnadined — flung wide the threatening door. But if one made too sprightly a remark or some allusion peculiarly happy, then all the feet abominably applauded, and Professor Terry — a galleon under sable canvas — came storming through the narrow port. Deficiency and excess brought the same penalty, and so one trod the *via media* as nervously as Blondin on his rope across Niagara.

I had also to lecture once a week, on English poetry, to forty young women in a teachers' Training College. They were for the most part plain and friendly creatures, country born, who for the two years of their training were crammed like Strasbourg geese with all manner of instruction from domestic economy to freehand drawing, from psychology to eurhythmies and the history of European thought. They had far too much to plague their memories without my adding tedious elucidation of the political allegory in the *Faerie Queene* or notes on the prosody of Milton, so ignoring its scholastic interest and saying nothing of its vatic speech, I began by declaring that of the several purposes of poetry the first was entertainment — on a different level from basket-ball and the moving-pictures, but entertainment none the less — and as it appeared anomalous to make entertainment utilitarian or compulsory, I did not propose to call a roll, and I could not promise to teach them anything. These remarks were well received.

I wish now that I had thought of serving tea and small pastries, for my lectures were the merest gossip, and the tinkle of spoon upon china would have been a proper accompaniment. Poetry for pleasure was my motto, and we tattled about such oddities as Skelton, and cantered through the Ballads and romped with the Romantics.

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Likely enough I did no good to my young women, but neither did I do anything to fortify their association of English literature with the smell of the schoolroom and fear of the examination hall. I had indeed to examine them on their knowledge, but as the ordinary method would have disclosed not only their want of doctrine but my lack of instruction, I was compelled to make a certain emendation in the manner of it. To put it briefly, I told them, a week or two before the examination, what questions I was going to ask ; and they all conducted themselves with much credit.

I was momentarily embarrassed when the Principal mentioned his surprise that in a class not distinguished for brilliance, the lowest mark was sixty-four out of a hundred ; but I showed him the papers and he admitted that the marks, though unusually high, had apparently been earned. ' They were so interested in their subject,' I murmured.

They were nice girls, and it would have been grossly unfair to make them learn a great dust-heap of facts that I myself had always refrained from learning.

About this time I was writing my first novel. A misleading exercise, for the maiden book is easy going and the sudden appearance, on a sheet of paper, of emotions that have long clamoured for expression is too exhilarating. It offers the milk-fed novelist a prospect, not of increasing labour, but of gratifying self-indulgence. I have made no boast, I think, of moral qualities — I long for virtue, yet am tongue-tied by memories of vain pursuit — and so without shame I may confess that what finally provoked me into novel-writing was a fit of indignant jealousy.

I had been meditating the novel for a long time, but there were obstacles in the way of getting to work on it. Laziness, for one thing, and another was ignorance of how to go about it. A formula was what I wanted, a mould of visible and certain shape that I could fill with my story, sentiment, and theme ; but nowhere could I find the

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vehicle I required — or was it a recipe, a theory, a blueprint? — and so with perfunctory regret I deferred the execution till I could find the image. Then one morning came a letter from an old friend of whom I had heard nothing for several years, from the girl for whose charming sake I had sold my books when I was a medical student. And she — she the despair of her teachers, living on her looks, who had never read anything but a dance programme — she had written a novel ! Her publishers, moreover, praised it highly and promised her a large success. She herself, she added modestly, thought it had some slight merit, and hoped I would read it.

I was enraptured to hear from her again, and furious to find she had forestalled me. Well really, I said to myself, if that flighty, flipperty, lovely but light-minded four-fifths of a fathom of whimsical femineity can write a novel, I'm damned sure I can too ! So I sat down on the instant, and after composing five or six versions of my first chapter, I found one that seemed a little less clumsy than the others, and the rest of the story fell into line with relatively little trouble. But without provocation I might have continued searching for the formula, the magic incantation, till this very day ; and never finding it, for there is none.

My critical apparatus, when I started writing, was small enough, and most of it out of reach. It consisted of a few sentences in a commonplace-book — or rather in what was meant to be a commonplace-book, for it never passed seven pages — that I had copied from some essay on Flaubert:

Phrases should hold blood, not lymph. . . .

A phrase can only live when it corresponds to all the necessities of respiration. I know it to be good when it can be read aloud. . . .

Charles went up to the first floor to see the sick man. He found him in his bed, sweating under his blankets, and having thrown off his cotton night-cap. He was a fat little man of fifty. . .

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Suddenly a flight of birds passes across a patch of light, forming a triangular battalion like a sheet of metal of which only the edges vibrate. . . .

Had I always been able to obey the injunctions, and never to be less precisely expressive or selectively observant than the examples, I should now be a good writer ; though still, perhaps, an indifferent novelist. I have, at any rate, the satisfaction of knowing that I set for myself a high standard, and in a world where so much is difficult to explain, it is comforting to know that I can attribute my failure to three simple shortcomings : lack of genius, want of application, and insufficiency of physical energy.

The *little more* in my critical apparatus was a remembered dictum of Professor Jack. ' A writer,' he said, ' should remember his manners, and for a writer the best of good manners is clarity. Clarity is also the debt he owes to his readers.' An admirable piece of advice, and I have tried to follow it. But even clarity has many sorts, from the bi-focal lucidity of Jane Austen to the multi-coloured, church-window-coloured magnificence of Doughty ; and I have sometimes been led astray in the matter of illumination by a liking for fine phrases. I drank deeply of the Elizabethan writers, and the fumes of their prodigious eloquence hung in my brain for years. Even the fumes were so agreeable that I had not the heart to let them blow away.

The novel I had written grew soiled and ruffle-edged as it went from publisher to publisher, and before it was accepted I was in America. I got there by telling the truth, and that was a gambler's throw and a reckless thing to do.

I had sent in my application for a Commonwealth Fellowship, and went presently to London to be interviewed by the Selection Committee. It was a very distinguished Committee, and I was made nervous by their eminence and the weakness of my plea. A candidate had to put forward a suggested course of study or research, and

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I had had great difficulty in thinking of anything that would be scholarly enough to satisfy the Committee, yet not obviously beyond my capacity. I proposed after much thought a study of the growth of middle-class comedy in the Jacobean theatre, and did all I could to arm myself with the conviction that desire to explicate this matter was dominant in my mind and decisive to my future.

The interview began with small talk and some friendly gestures to put the candidate at his ease. Then someone asked, 'Do you consider it necessary to go to America in order to study Jacobean comedy?'

'Not necessary,' I said, 'but a Fellowship would give me opportunity.'

'Perhaps you know of certain material, not available to you here, but accessible in some American university?'

The candidate's reply was inaudible.

Another of the Committee asked, 'Is there anyone in particular under whom you wish to study?'

'Not really. I think I could do the work without much assistance.'

'You know the recent investigations of Professor So-and-so and Mr. Such-and-such? Wouldn't their research be helpful to you?'

The candidate was apologetic. He had never heard of the gentlemen in question.

The sound of a pencil tapping the table was unhappily reminiscent of coffin-nailing, and the candidate began to perspire a little. Then in a smooth soft voice a white-haired inquisitor said, 'Tell me, Mr. Linklater, about your primary motive in applying for a Fellowship. Which is more important in your mind, the desire to do this particular piece of work, or the desire to see America?'

I hesitated only a moment, and hoarsely answered, 'The desire to see America.'

O blissful honesty! There is nothing in life so good, no lordliness like truth, and the pity is that to see the truth

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one often needs a mind like a razor — like a philosopher, a microscope, like a dowser or litmus-paper — and to speak the truth may demand the heart of a hero. But once, when the choice was given me, simple and straightforward yet more than a little dangerous, I plumped for honesty, and my reward was two years of liberty in the vast morning of America.

XV

THE GREAT ROMANTICS

CALVIN COOLIDGE was making notes for his autobiography. ' We have seen the American people create a new heaven and a new earth,' he wrote. ' The old things have passed away, giving place to a glory never before experienced by any people of our world.'

It was my second day in New York, and I was riding on top of a Fifth Avenue bus with a young Englishman, pink of cheek and Cambridge in his warbling voice. We were full of fear and wonder, the breasts of guinea-fowl, of cantaloup and iced water. We had been entertained to lunch in Wall Street, we had been lost for an hour of clamorous darkness in the Subway, where no tongues are heard but Yiddish, Gullah, and Neapolitan. Our hearts, enraptured, had flown to the immeasurable height of towers that trembled in the midst of the sky ; our bowels were yet straitened by the galvanic hold of a New York theatre.

In the European is a kind of innocence, a wistful but a dense virginity, that only America may pierce ; we were newly ravished and, though proud of the experience, could not yet say we liked it.

In the matter of language our disadvantage was enormous. In England, among an illiterate people, unimaginative and lazy, one could live very comfortably on a vocabulary as shrunk and faded as an old school-coat;

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but America was full of new fashions, and some of the words were stately as morning-dress, some violent as beach-pyjamas, or as precise as an elastic bandage. And month by month the fashions would change, new words would be invented—casually, as if they were the *obiter dicta* of a firm of wholesale poets—and the wisecrack would gather more ammunition for its catapults.

Somebody named us dumb limeys, and I could not dispute it. Dumb limeys: the brand was there. Analphabetic in this new world, I was labelled large and clearly an alien, an immigrant with Polacks and Slovaks, with Swedes and Dagoes and gesticulant offspring of the Dodecanese.

There was, moreover, the War of 1812. Already we had been told something about it, and the longer we lived in America the more numerous we counted references to it. It is a war with which American school-books deal very fully, and of which English school-books make no mention. Britain, it appeared, had been heavily defeated by America in this mysterious campaign. History was also against us.

'Was that,' I asked, 'the war in which the *Shannon*, a British frigate under Captain Philip Broke, took the *Chesapeake*, Captain Lawrence, in sight of the citizens of Boston?'

My American acquaintance could not say. He had never heard of the *Shannon*.

We stood also in the shadow of India. We, the lieges of the King-Emperor, held in subjection, by bayonet and prison-camp and machine-gun, some three hundred and fifty million people whose only desire was freedom, whose dominant characteristic was an intensely spiritual apprehension of reality that obviously we could never share. We therefore, being oppressors, were repugnant to Americans born in liberty. The kindlier sort avoided all reference to India, as they would avoid the subject of high voltage if any in the company had lost a relative in the electric

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chair. But more ardent and less tactful citizens would roundly tell us that our simple duty was to give India its freedom now. Now, or at the very latest, next week.

We tried to explain some difficulties in the way of an immediate separation, but all were swept aside by the magnificent assertion that every nation has the right to work out its own destiny. The chasm between us grew even deeper when we discovered that many of our critics were complacent about the solution of their own Indian problem ; of which we had been careful to make no mention, lest we should hurt their feelings.

We were in a foreign land. Manners and ethic and the interpretation of history were different. We stood not merely upon alien soil, but in another dimension of the world. On Fifth Avenue the shop-windows announced it, that like an Arabian tale of luxury revealed improbable splendour in almost impossible profusion. In these shops there was no longer any trace of kinship with the market-place. Their divorce from utility was absolute, and the merchant, having risen from his primitive duty of wrapping-up what a man might need for his belly or his back, displayed with ritual and devotion what a man by riches might acquire. Shop-keeping had been raised by fervour to a state of bliss. Shopman had been translated into priest, and purchase to the higher orthodoxy. We came down from the bus and dulled the windows with our breath. Wealth, that for centuries in the older world had been recompensed only with responsibility and a clumsy paraphernalia, was offered here its due reward.

Night fell, more decisively than at home, and New York apparelled itself in a nearer galaxy. On Broadway the flensing lights disclosed in forty thousand passers-by — thick-crowding, slow of foot — the passionate and stubborn bone beneath their skin. Rouge and mascara were shadows on the rock of life, and rolling cuds of spearmint-gum made pulses in their cheeks.

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It was not for several weeks that I saw clearly the essential difference between America and Britain. The exuberance of the United States obscured it even more than the shallow sobriety of England. But slowly it emerged and I perceived the crucial disparity. The Americans were a serious people. Their life was dominated by purpose — or purposes — to an extent that made England seem as frivolous as Papeete. In their minds was yet the challenge of the frontier, and like summer lightning a desire for virtue flickered over all the land.

Their serious mind was apparent in their humour, which was largely a discovery of the absurdities which underlie so much of human seriousness, and the resulting exclamation of relief. It was evident in their romantic temperament, and the romantic temperament was obvious in nearly all their public figures, from Jefferson to the bitterly-crusading Mencken. It showed itself in the passion, like that of a Rajput widow throwing herself into the flames of her husband's funeral, with which they hurled themselves into the furnace of industry ; in their ability to seek a championship at golf as if it were the Holy Grail; in the curious habit of flagpole-squatting, a minute reflexion of the historical insularity of America, which was born of a stylites' vision of the crimes and folly of the older civilisations, and a romantic resolution to avoid infection. Their initial advocacy of the League of Nations and the reckless experiment in Prohibition both sprang from a romantic belief in their power to cure, by a sudden decision and before morning, the ancient sin in the minds of men. Their abandoning the League, their return to whisky, were confession of their failure to count the cost of reformation : a romantic weakness.

They were prophets, not shopkeepers. Not accountants, despite their statistics and technologies, but priests. And being human they were, of course, inaccurate prophets and uncertain priests.

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The obvious and most unequivocal statement of an aspiring temper was their architecture. This was so naked a confession of their faith that many were mildly apologetic about it, and pretended to excuse the amergothic splendour of New York on the poor ground of expediency. Manhattan, they said, was a small island, but very busy, and therefore accommodation had to be found in a vertical way. But all the expediency in the world would never, of itself, contrive that arrowy magnificence, that soaring palisade, in which the stars entangle and clouds may roost upon a window-ledge.

A native, then, of Great Britain — whose normal air is frivolous, quiet, prosaic, and flavoured with indifference — can hardly escape some discomfort before he becomes acclimatised to the serious, exuberant, and romantic atmosphere of America ; and my first few months there were not without embarrassment and tribulation. I was attached in the first place to Cornell University, which in the northern part of the State of New York sits on a plateau between two ravines that descend to a long and narrow lake, whose hilly sides in autumn wear a bright rough cloak of scarlet maple-trees and crimson sumach. In a large number of reasonably handsome buildings, and in innumerable subjects, instruction was given to several thousands of young men and women ; for whose convenience, under the slope of the hill, existed the small town of Ithaca, where they could buy neckties, peaches in season, bootleg liquor, sixty-five cent Sunday dinners, and go to the pictures. Football was a major passion in their lives; the many Fraternities gave dances and in a slender way established class distinction; bootleggers added to the excitement of drinking, and aggravated its perils.

Once I was wakened by a pair of friends who, at two o'clock in the morning, decided that it would be a kindly thing to offer me a drink. I got up and put on a dressing-gown, a dark green garment. The man with the gin had

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a generous but unsteady hand, and in the morning there was a pale yellowish mark, like a map of Scandinavia, on the patterned green silk. The gin had bleached it.

The professor under whom I was supposed to work took a liberal view of his responsibility, and let me do as I liked. I used to spend the greater part of the day in the library, reading in luxurious freedom ; and in the evenings I sat down to write a novel. The air was conducive to work, and so was the solitude created by my bashful diffidence in the alien world.

By early spring, however, I had made some friends, acquired understanding of American football, the hardihood to cut-in at dances, and was more at home. Among my acquaintances was a good-looking young man who had been rusticated from some other university, and was on the verge of being rusticated from Cornell. By a fortunate speculation on the stock-market — buying on Friday and selling on Monday — he made enough money to purchase a new car, and proposed that we go to Washington to see the Presidential inauguration of Mr. Hoover. The third in our party was an amiable but more serious person who was studying for a higher degree in philosophy.

The roads were winter-white when we started, and snow lay thickly on the Pennsylvania mountains. It was about three hundred and sixty miles to Washington, and by inadvertence — the owner of the car had been dining with some friends the night before — we did not leave Ithaca till noon. It was therefore at a late hour we entered the capital, and I was afraid the party which had been arranged for us would be over. But my friends knew better. The party was only beginning, and indeed did not come to an end for several days.

There were three young women in the party, one of whom had lost her fiance in a motor accident; another her religion in the Smithsonian Institution; and the third a husband in the divorce court. They were quite frank

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about these misfortunes, which in the aggregate produced an extraordinary impression of carelessness. We took them, one day, for a short voyage by aeroplane, and when we came back to earth we discovered that the excessive vibration of the machine was almost certainly due to its being held together by fencing-wire and some leather bootlaces. At intervals we ran short of liquor, but there was a bootlegger in every block, and only once were we seriously unlucky in the quality of the stuff. We planned one evening to attend the Inaugural Ball — we had cards that bore the inscription *Representing Governor Roosevelt of New York* — but learnt, on arrival, that it had taken place the previous evening ; so we attended a less formal dance. And the following day we went sightseeing.

Our open car was so absurdly crowded that one rarely knew whose leg it was that one clapped, in a friendly way, from time to time. But in spite of distractions that might have embarrassed Laocoon, we made manifest our interest in the city, and put intelligent queries about such features of it as the Library of Congress and the Government Printing Office. So many queries, indeed, that someone presently exclaimed, * Let's do this thing properly. Come on, Al ! Get out and do your stuff.' Whereupon a smallish, taut, and serious-looking person emerged from the confusion of bodies in the back seat, and swinging himself over the side of the car, stood on the running-board and in a confident loud voice began to narrate the life, death, and cost of commemorating General Sheridan, whose statue at that moment we happened to be passing.

Al was magnificent. He knew the number of rooms in the White House and the price of building the Post Office. He could identify the allegorical figures on the portico of the Capitol, and he knew the height, weight, and circumference of its dome. He was intimately acquainted with the abundant statuary of Washington, and a mine of information about cherry-trees. Throughout the

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tour he maintained, with unbroken gravity, the mechanic brightness and shallow pedantry of a professional guide.

I was not merely invaded, but conquered by laughter. It affected my diaphragm, agitated my legs ; and after betraying some anxiety, the girl, of whom a large part was sitting on them, twisted herself about and demanded to know what was the matter.

' It's Al,' I answered. ' He's marvellous. Never in my life have I heard so perfect an imitation of a guide.'

' Imitation ?' she repeated. ' What d'you mean, imitation ? He is a guide !'

Of the Inaugural ceremonies I remember only the honest but indecent haste with which Mr. Coolidge abandoned his high office, and a naked Indian, riding a grey pony in the rain, who struck a fearful discord in Mr. Hoover's triumph ; an impenitent redskin, light glistening on his wet shoulders, and a feather in his hair as brash and all as untimely as the cook who gave the He to poor St. Peter.

Few other countries would have let him ride so publicly, but America will suffer much for freedom. America could start a crusade every Tuesday and Thursday, and let it be killed with native laughter on Wednesday and Saturday. America will endure the most deadly criticism — from her own people — and therefore admitted the lonely feathered horseman to Mr. Hoover's procession, where he commemorated the older cultures on whose destruction were built the new heaven and the new earth that Mr. Coolidge was hurrying home to write about. A heaven and an earth that came no nearer, despite their cleverness, to reading the dark riddle of Manitou.

More explicit criticism I once heard, or overheard, from a German tourist on the rim of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado. He was youngish, and handsome in a square-headed, yellow-locked, and sunburnt fashion. The prosperity and simple happiness of the native tourists who surrounded him had wakened his jealousy, and picking a

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conversation with the nearest Rotarian, he assailed the whole fabric of American society. It was mannerless and vulgar, he said, and substantiated his charge with Teutonic detail and the rage of inferiority. He boasted of his poverty and the poverty of all his German friends — ruined by a war that he spoke of with a kind of snobbery, as if the war had been a very exclusive club to which only Germans had had the entree — and because poverty was a condition one did not mention, at that time, in America, his circle was made humble, as though he were a poor priest.

His American audience bowed their heads and heard him in sorrow. But Bill and I — Bill, with whom on my second day in New York I had ridden on top of a Fifth Avenue bus — were indignant and faintly envious. We were indignant because by that time we were warmly philamerican, and our feet being still dusty after clambering out of the Canyon, we felt that we knew a good deal more about the United States than the German did. We were envious of him because we knew that a similar freedom of expression would be dangerously unwelcome in an English accent.

On the following day we again descended the Canyon, having decided that it would be interesting to spend a night at Phantom Ranch, some four or five thousand feet below the ordinary surface of the world. The day was uncommonly hot, and to escape the ardency of the sun — reflected and reiterated from the glowing rock — we undressed and sat in a rushing pool of a stream called the Bright Angel. By moving slightly we could sluice our upper parts under a waterfall, and by wetting every few minutes the boulders against which we rested, it was possible to lean against them without scorching our backs. Our only company, for some considerable time, was a swarm of dragon-flies. The white boulders were too hot for them to sit on, so they perched upon our arms and shoulders, enveloping us in the opalescent vapour of their wings.

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Presently, walking briskly along the dusty path and gleaming like salmon-skin with sweat, we saw the German critic, and waving to him, suggested he should join us. He refused at first, despising such luxury, but then relenting came back, and having taken off his clothes, introduced himself with a very respectable formality. Soothed by the running water, he became increasingly friendly, and when he told us of his family's poverty, we made him feel at home by admitting that in Britain also there was some lack of wealth.

' America,' he said, ' has never suffered. It makes me angry to think they have not suffered.'

He mentioned the war, and after some gossip of battle-names we discovered that we had been in the neighbourhood of Zillebeke Lake at the same time. It was an entertaining coincidence, and we shook hands across the pool, dislodging some half a hundred dragon-flies that shimmered in a many-tinted haze above our gesture.

' We know the meaning of war,' said the German portentously. ' It may have been that we fired against each other. We were front-line soldiers !' He grew quite happy and began to sing in a very pleasant voice. ' But in the next war,' he exclaimed, ' we shall be on the same side.' And to show his readiness for such an alliance, sang the chorus of *Tipperary*.

In the late afternoon we left the pool, but when night came down the heat of the day was imprisoned in the canyon, and we could sleep only by wrapping ourselves in wet sheets. We woke as soon as they dried, and after re-soaking them two or three times, resolved on returning to the upper earth. The moon was shining when we started, and before we began to climb the wall of the main canyon, the sun appeared and lighted mile upon mile of rose-red cliff. While the river was still dark and running loudly in the shadow, the gigantic sides of the canyon were flaming with the dawn, and lordly buttresses returned the glowing salutation of the sky.

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I travelled a good deal with Bill, and our philamericanism became so true that it showed itself in dogmatic preferences; in various exhibition of parochial affection. He defended Boston when I stood for Philadelphia, and Charleston inspired a common fondness. We went there for a weekend, and remained for nearly a month. The beauty of the little town so drugged our senses that we lost count of time ; the gentle air demoralised us.

We neither sought nor felt the need of any active amusement, but slowly, strolling slowly, we regarded old and exquisite wrought-iron gates and balconies, and gardens full of azaleas, white and purple irises, jasmine and wistaria, and Malmaison roses. We considered with enjoyment the statue of William Pitt that had its nose knocked off by an English cannon-ball. We loitered to hear negro laughter, and small niggers singing *Beef-steak and mutton-chop* while they danced a monotonous small dance. We took tea with old ladies who told us charming stories. Such as the story about the old gentleman who wept so often, and when he was asked why he wept, declared it was because he was so happy. 'I had such a beautiful and loving wife,' he said. 'She's dead now, but she was so beautiful and so loving while she lived. And I have a splendid automobile and a wonderful chauffeur. Why, that fellow can get me a bottle of whisky any time I want one.'

Through the silence of a Carolina swamp we thrust a canoe, and from the grey-curtained roof of over-arching branches woke white egrets that splashed the dark water with their luminous reflexion. We saw the vast and gorgeous array of colour that is the Ashley River Gardens. A landscape of lovely colour, with azaleas and camellias filling the greater part. Tall bushes, seemingly without foliage, clothed entirely in a cloud of pink blossom. A shower of bright coral beside a tower of bloom the hue of mellowed brick in sunset-glow ; but the softness of the

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petals insistent above all comparison. In front of them a dead tree, the bole as pale as smoke, and snow-white azalea beside it. Beyond and above the brightness, the upper branches of a live oak, hung as with dense grey cobwebs with Spanish moss.

The coral and snow of the azaleas was reflected in a windless pool. The water, like thick green glass, mirrored the flaming pyramids and showed again the dead tree like a column of still smoke. It reflected long aisles of colour, burning bushes that burned with a cool flame. There was deep velvety-red blossom against dark-green leaves, and cold starry dogwood. And in the shallow water of the pool were tiny turtles with an archaic Chinese expression, fixed and unwinking under the stony hood of their carapace.

But often our pleasure was more idle even than walking through a garden. We would sit on a park-bench and drowse a sunny morning in the company of palm-trees and a milky sea, of scarlet tanagers and mewing cat-birds, of fat nigger-mammies who gossiped and laughed and took easy care of small white children. We became loafers, and to prolong such happiness we economised on razor-blades, laundry, and shoe-cleaning. This neglect combined with an expression of peaceful inertia and a growing carelessness about our buttons to make Northern visitors imagine we were natives of the place, poor whites of the very sort their prejudice had led them to expect, and sometimes they would stop and ask us the way to the Miles Brewton house, or to St. Michael's.

Half-opening a sleepy eye and spitting thoughtfully at the nearest red-bird, we would answer in the local drawl that we affected : ' Broad an' Meeting, colonel. You-all got a cyar ? Won't take you moh'n three-foh minutes. No, suh !'

Captivated by this contact with the Old South, the Northern visitors would linger and make bright uneasy efforts to prolong the conversation. They would ask us

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about hoe-cakes and beaten biscuits, corn-liquor and cotton-mouths, and other features of the Southern landscape. But when we had satisfied only a fragment of their curiosity we would yawn a little, scratch our ribs, and they would leave us. Then we spat again, and murmured without rancour : ' Dam' Yankees.'

On my way back to Ithaca the train met a landslide which carried most of it off the rails into a small creek. I had just finished an early breakfast when suddenly I was thrown against the edge of the table, and a large array of crockery and artificial flowers, leaping absurdly into the air, fell with a crash on the palpitating floor. The train with a few convulsions came to a halt, and I got out to see what had happened. There was a foot of half-melted snow on the ground, and the air was full of escaping steam. The train was fantastically disarranged, and half the coaches would certainly have crumpled and collapsed had they been made of wood. But they were steel, and no one was seriously hurt. The driver had a shell-shocked look, a plump little man was mildly hysterical, and a conductor who had been in the mail-van complained bitterly about a god-damn box which had fallen on his god-damn softest corn. But that was all.

I returned to the dining-car and found the radiant transformation of a frightened old lady. The accident, so early in the morning, had shaken her a little, and before leaving I had given her my flask. When I got back she was drinking a stiff whisky-and-water and had gathered an audience of eight or ten other passengers. She was entertaining them, I discovered, with a description of her meeting with the Prince of Wales, whom she had encountered on a recent visit to Europe.

I have great liking and esteem for elderly indomitable ladies, and I remember with admiration the reproof of such a one delivered over a tea-table in Rhode Island. A girl, a well-behaved and pretty girl, got up to go, and thanking

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her hostess, observed in a mannerly but vacuous way, ' I've had a perfectly marvellous time !'

' My dear,' said her hostess, ' don't be ridiculous. You have had a cup of weak tea, a piece of bread-and-butter, and a slice of poorish cake. You have listened to some indifferent conversation, and that is all. If you describe that as marvellous, then you have no capacity for wonder, or no acquaintance with the English language. Which is it ?'

There was an older woman to whom I listened in a day-coach somewhere east of Chicago. She was very old, thin-faced with drooping cheeks, a little flushed with the excitement of travelling, and a bonnet on her head. She was lecturing two young women, both plump and dressed with a slattern's trial of smartness. They were uncomfortable as they listened to the high quaver, the moral cackle, of her indignant voice.

' I was left alone at fourteen, when mother died, and I had to look after the whole family,' she declared. ' The year I was sixteen I made twelve hundred pounds of butter — and it didn't kill me !'

One of the younger women, with uneasy laughter, essayed defence of herself and her time.

' No,' said the old woman. ' We weren't meant to live on flowery beds of ease. I've got no patience with people who're frightened when they have to put their hands to anything. . . .'

Like a fruit-knife, bright but not really sharp, a nearer voice cut through this condemnation of our modern sloth, and looking round I saw a pair of youngish matrons whose conversation had grown louder with the rising pressure of their loquacity.

' It was my birthday,' said one of them, ' and she had the loveliest dinner, and a cake, and wine of some kind or other. I know I got awfully silly, and we all had such a good time. I don't remember much about it, but she had

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stuffed peaches, and I just couldn't figure out how she **got** the stuffing in. . . .'

Someone had left a paper on the opposite seat, and on the back page I read the following advertisement:

Why are the sporting pages of a newspaper so popular ?
Because they deal with success and achievement !
Because they take us to the heights where the
failure has no place in the sun,
and
where the also-ran receives scant notice !

Another train, a Chicago local, and negroes from the stockyards smelling of blood and gin. . . . The Santa Fé express, and a drawing-room whose ever-open door revealed a glowing-dark and regal woman, so lovely as to steal one's breath, but exigent and domineering, a plague to porters and her husband. A woman who reminded one of Edward Arlington Robinson's poem — of Gawaine, I think — where Gawaine or some other, regarding such a creature, was duly grateful that he

Had found in her dark way of stateliness
Perfection providentially not his
To die for. . . .

A train that ran slowly through the swampy woods of Louisiana, and an earnest voice declaring : ' We don't even try to understand. We ask the wrong questions. All the time we're asking how — how does it work ? how do I get rich ? how does an eel know its way home ? — and that's begging the question. I say, the hell with how ! I want to know *why* !'

I spent a lot of my time in trains, which for any considerable journey are much preferable to a motor-car. Trains are admirably adapted for observing the strange features of one's fellow-men, and they present a more **formal and** coherent view of passing landscapes than a car.

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The only disadvantages are the abominable contact with Pullman plush and the exorbitant price of meals. Ten years ago, if my memory is accurate, two lettuce leaves cost thirty-five cents, and to offer casual entertainment, for an ordinary person, was quite impossible — unless, of course, one had the hardihood of the commercial traveller whose method of reducing expense once roused my admiration.

He was entertaining a young woman. Their acquaintance was brief, and she was insufficiently good-looking to have confidence in herself or rouse much enthusiasm in him. Having ordered a steak for himself, he enquired of his friend, ' You hungry ? '

' Not very,' she answered, pathetically aware of the frailty of her claim upon him.

She ordered spinach, baked potatoes, and a glass of milk. Her host enquired if she were sure that would be sufficient. She said she was sure. Then he said that he wasn't really hungry either, and wanted no vegetables with his steak. But when hers arrived she offered to share them, and he took rather more than half. A most ingenious way, I thought, of discounting the cost of hospitality.

They got off in Chicago. A brisk wind was pointing the lake, and beneath a bright and cloudy sky the city's tall facade was magnificent. It hid completely the miles of dull and dreary streets behind. I took train for the Pacific.

Black soil, small creeks, farm buildings in a cluster of nondescript trees. Then the land grows rougher ; the corn does not grow so close, it looks wilder, with whitish leaves blowing. Then grasslands come, and rolling country. Nebraska goes by under the night, and with the morning we are in Wyoming, climbing a long slope. There are mountains on the horizon, pale blue and dark blue, and in a gap between them a glistening mountain-mass streaked with snow. Wyoming flows in proud and lovely lines, unstopped by trees or buildings. There is a lambent sky

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and the air is clear as spring-water. Clouds of diverse and amazing shape — waves and heraldic animals, crowns and capes and white peninsulas striped with ivory shadows — go their comely way upon a clear and soft blue sea.

West of Laramie the grass begins to disappear and sagebrush takes its place. There are no mountains here, but lines are harsh as mountain-ridges. This is half-desert country, and nearly waterless. It rises into bare little tablelands with scarred sides and jagged promontories, shading from dirty chalk to brown, and seeming to have been clawed by giant finger-nails. There are crumbly-looking cliffs with isolated pinnacles and ragged bastions. A few yellow-painted wooden shacks, a muddy road, a deeply-scooped river-bed with a thin stream, and dwarfish trees and shrubs. Here is a little shabby town in a semicircle of cliffs, shut in by railway sidings full of box-cars and oil trucks.

Night falls again before we reach the long narrow causeway across the Great Salt Lake of Utah, and a curious voyage through dark and clouded water that seems interminable. In the morning a blue Nevada sky, and on all sides the multi-coloured Nevada hills. Some of them, as the day grows, take on a mulberry hue. A canyon leads to a green and pleasant land among mountains, which is Reno. We climb the steep side of the Sierra and descend to the hot plain of California, then leaving the train at Oakland, cross the bay to San Francisco. The city rises in a pyramid of lights.

I spent my second winter at the University of California, which suited me very well indeed. Its library was fortunately deficient in Jacobean literature and offered no temptation to academic work. I was therefore able to begin a novel which, for some months past, had been taking shape in my mind. It was to be called *Juan in America*, and its pedigree was by Byron out of the United States ; or if not Byron himself, his statue outside the

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Aberdeen Grammar School. As originally conceived, it was to have been written in verse — Byronic stanzas — **but** having begun to take pleasure in the looser and more variable rhythms of prose, and flinching when it came to the point of finding thirty thousand rhymes, I unhorsed the infant poem in its first canto and bade it walk. Its steps were slow.

I am a laborious worker, and must worry myself into a state of pernicious excitement before I can write with an appearance of ease. I have an active imagination, and in a modest way I am capable of invention. I have also an interest in words which is like an honest carpenter's interest in wood. Bring together these two conditions, and you have an incipient novelist. Bring to his experience the rapture of conception, and you have a novelist condemned to work. Rapture, I said. The finding, development, and first rough shaping of an idea are among the most compulsive and overwhelming pleasures under the sun. But then comes work. Then come the finer shaping, the forcing into a pattern, the bending of thought, the ferreting for words, the discarding of words, the comparing of two good words to find the better. This is labour, and the brain will take heat like a blacksmith's iron in the blown fire, and the heat may sometimes, about midnight, engender a paragraph that gives a little pleasure to the novelist before he stumbles into bed. But in the morning he must blot and banish and scribble anew. Hard labour.

I had already written two novels, a typical first and a deliberate second. The first a romantic and unsuccessful treatment of matter with which I was fairly well acquainted; the second a small and artificial comedy that I undertook with the set purpose of instructing myself in the management of a story. *Juan in America* was a more ambitious project, and I lived in a state of penal excitement that naturally I concealed from those about me, being commonsensibly aware that my febrility could be justified only by

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results, and having no great confidence in the result. Concealment may have aggravated my disease, for presently I fell ill. I shall not assert, however, that I went to hospital with a literary psychosis, for it is possible that bootleg liquor had something to do with it. The Washington party, with which we celebrated the inauguration of Mr. Hoover, had produced an aftermath of suffering.

I was removed to a nursing-home in San Francisco which had the fame of providing its patients with the most exquisite viands on the Coast; a reputation that mocked me bitterly, for starvation was my cure. Then for convalescence I went to a pleasantly artificial townlet by the sea, and stayed in a straggling hotel which was said to enjoy much favour among honeymoon couples. At that time of the year, however, there may have been a close season for virgins, for only one such couple came ; and their enjoyment was vitiated by the fact that they did not know each other very well.

Their clothes were uncomfortably new, the soles of their shoes still white, and they had nothing to talk about. Her voice, of a meagre quality like a split reed, had a lonely sound in the almost empty dining-room as she tried to keep conversation going. Her husband gave her no help.

' Do you remember last summer, up at the lake ? ' she said, ' when Ernest was there, and Ruth said to him, " Don't you think a man would appreciate having a woman like me marry him ? " I thought I should have died. She is a scream, isn't she ? — You mean you weren't there ? Oh, of course you weren't. You couldn't have been, could you ? Isn't it funny me forgetting a thing like that. But I've got the silliest little memory. You know, don't you ? '

There was an aching silence, and then an old and greedy Airedale came into the room. She was delighted to see someone else to talk to, and summoned him to their table.

' Oh, come, boy. Come here, then. Good dog.

The Great Romantics

That's a good dog, isn't he then ? Good boy. Good dog. Such a clever boy to know that I like big dogs like you . . . '

My friends in Eastern America were scornful when my fluid affection began to find channels in California. San Francisco, they admitted, might have some valid attraction, but the disequilibrium of the Coast, they said, was too excessive to permit a liking for any other part. They spoke of it with genuine distaste. They deprecated its posturing and false quantities. They were like patricians on their Sabine estate discussing the excess, the vulgar ease, and oriental nonsense of Antioch.

So I praised, not merely the scenery of the Western states, but the admirable way in which it was used. The establishment of a great chain of National Parks, from Glacier to the Grand Canyon, was enlightened and salutary legislation of a most rare and laudable kind. And in this contention I was on unassailable ground, for my Eastern friends had never seen the National Parks, while I had spent one of the most pleasant interludes of my life in Yosemite Valley and on the roof of the High Sierra beyond. It had indeed, at one point, been nearer to epilude than interlude, for accepting the assertion of an enthusiastic Park Ranger that he knew the way up Mount Lyell, and that the way was quite easy, I had consented — and so had Bill, who was with me — to climb it. So after crossing a ten-thousand-foot pass where we were bloated beyond recognition by mosquito bites, we slept in a mountain hut, and rising at four, attacked the hill, which is, if I remember, nearly fourteen thousand feet high. The way was far from easy, and having reached the top, we could not discover how to get down again. So we endeavoured to cross the root of a glacier, kicking holes in the crumbly ice that the afternoon sun had softened, and before I had taken a dozen steps a foothold failed, and down I went at a great pace and in some anxiety. For at the foot of the glacier was a *bergschrundt*. I reached a halt, however, in a ridge of snow,

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and while I was pacifying my startled mind I heard a cry, and, looking up, saw Bill come tumbling after. He came head over heels, travelling faster and going farther than I, but he also stopped short of the *bergschrundt*. We suffered no hurt, indeed, save a little scorching of the hands, knees, chins, and noses; and leaving the Ranger, found our own way down the hill.

This small mishap, however, could not spoil my memory of most noble landscapes, and the lofty freedom of the great Sierra.

And in the South-West, I continued, there was country of incredibly fantastic shapes and colour, geography like a lunar rhapsody, and tame Indians to play for tourists the most delightful anthropological games. In Santa ¥6 I had seen a Navajo sand-painting — artists with square impassive faces, with rag-bound coarse black hair, but neckleted in silver, clad in crimson and purple. Heavy with rings, their dark and deliberate fingers sifted the coloured dust on the levelled ground. Like a brilliant shadow that followed their unerring hands — turquoise and silver on the wrist — the elegant pattern slowly took shape. They drew round it a narrow frame, which was the Navajo rainbow. They scattered the sanctifying pollen, and stood back. Intricate, formal, austere, the polychrome drawing lived only for an hour, and then, before the sun had set, another came to rake and destroy it with a ritual hand.

My friends admitted that Navajos were probably quite interesting, but for their own amusement they preferred Europe.

So I went on to praise the physique of undergraduates in the universities of California. Except for the disgusting clothes they wore, they were like young gods, I said. And the girls, though inclining too much to a standardised type, were very trim and pretty.

The soil and the climate of California, said my friends, were certainly conducive to growth ; but they would grant

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no other virtue. They had such a fastidious pride in the tradition of an earlier America that they would exclude from serious consideration anything which might impair that tradition. They knew the sagacity with which their country had been brought to birth, and they were well aware that its largest contribution to the world had been of a spiritual kind. From a Europe for ever disintegrating but always re-apparelling itself in some new creative form — at its worst intolerable, yet fertile even in distraction — their forebears had turned in reasonable aversion, but, keeping their heads in spite of the hatred in their hearts, had taken for their better comfort in the New World an equipment from the Old as prudently selected as the stores that Crusoe rafted ashore. They had taken the traditions of Greece and Christendom and the Renaissance of Learning. Colonists by the necessity of their independence, they were humanists or they had never known the vital need of freedom, and with their seeds and mattocks they took their humanism to plant in a new soil. It flourished, and America made one of those timely assertions that renew the poor world's faith in destiny.

But this happiness, said my Eastern friends, was the gift of the Atlantic states only. There they had fed the mind and nurtured man's spirit, but in the West a larger freedom had turned to anarchy, and, losing judgment with discipline, had fostered an extravagant materialism and the bizarre standards of Hollywood. One of them, in the ardency of an exclusive faith, declared : ' When I speak of America, I mean the thirteen original states. They gave the world a new and splendid gift: not only the ideal, but the visible fact of freedom. But the rest of America has pandered to its body.'

California, on the other hand, quite simply said and believed that the Eastern states were effete. They were, indeed, half-way to Europe. Comedians made the same jokes about New England as, a generation or two before,

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New England comedians had made about their older eponym. Culture and civilisation and the American tradition, unpacking themselves from a covered wagon, had made their home in the West.

No suggestion in the world, however, would be more unpopular than a proposal that these differences of temper and opinion should be given opportunity to develop. America is so spacious and full of various energy that it could easily nurture, instead of one vast amorphous culture, a quinary of more natural, exact, and local cultures: Atlantic, Pacific, Northern, Central, and New Orleanist, for example. But not for a moment would any American consider, or even admit the possibility of such a benevolent dissociation, though you laid before him a Madonna of Botticelli and the Urbino Venus of Titian to prove the double riches that came from lack of union between Firenze and Venezia; the temple of Madura and the Jama Masjid at Ahmedabad to show the huge extent to which art is created by its particular faith; *The Witch of Fife*, by James Hogg of Ettrick in Scotland, and the essay on *Grace before Meat*, by Charles Lamb of the Inner Temple in London, to explain the benefit of cultivating a native genius. A thousand such examples would have no effect on their profound conviction that happiness may only reside in a complex of forty-eight states, upon whose many borders there is no *douane*.

Americans have a holy fear of all but two domestic differences: that which God established between man and woman, in which they take much pleasure, and the more recondite disparity between Republican and Democrat, which provokes only a quadrennial oestrus.

XV

PACIFIC VOYAGE

THERE are many advantages in being comparatively poor, especially when travelling. The third-class carriage on a train, and the steerage in a ship, are often more interestingly populated than dearer compartments and the cabin de luxe ; or perhaps the interesting qualities of the humbler traveller are less guarded from observation than the mind and eccentricities of the wealthy. One can pay too dearly for the comfort of first-class travelling, and had I been rich — and therefore tempted to be weak — when I was returning from America, I might have missed some valuable acquaintances : Elise and the amorous Germans, the suicidal Swede, and the clientèle of Kelly's Ritz, for example ; as well as the acrobat, the manicure girl, the ornithologist who slept in his underclothes, and the steward who had been a six-day bicycle-rider.

The voyage began in San Francisco. I went steerage — or Tourist Third as they more politely call it nowadays — for the sufficient reason that I could afford no better. Dick Etive, a most pleasant fellow who thought everything rather a joke except Proust, Stravinsky, and highjumping, was travelling with me ; and the third person in our small and stuffy cabin was an elderly farmer from Nova Scotia, whose hobby for many years had been bird-watching. He was taking the first long holiday he had ever had, and already

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he had filled several note-books with observations on bird life in Western Canada and Oregon. He was looking forward to the rich variety of the tropics with great eagerness.

We called at Los Angeles, and there Elise came aboard. She had been studying geology at the University of California. California, she told me, was a splendid place in which to learn geology, because all the oldest kinds of rock had become readily accessible owing to volcanic action ; and the climate was agreeable for field-work. She had probably appreciated the climate as much as the proximity of eozoic schists, for her arms and shoulders and much of her back — which the kind of dresses she wore very generously exposed — were coloured by long exposure to the sun. She had fashionably blond hair, with a wave in it, and her skin was of that smooth and healthy kind that seems to absorb the sunlight and hold its colouring as naturally as a ripe peach. She was by far the prettiest girl on board, and I would gladly have spent more time than I did in conversation with her.

We had in the Third Class Saloon, in addition to a large and somewhat rough assortment of Americans, two old Etonians who rather conspicuously avoided each other ; an old Harrovian who spoke to neither of them ; and a reputed Wykehamist who wore sun-glasses and a manner of impenetrable reserve. It was a little strange to find so many representatives of famous schools in the steerage, but their presence there indicated, I think, an adventurous spirit rather than the general impoverishment of England. All of them, even the Wykehamist, attempted to establish friendly relations with Ehse, and all were defeated by the pertinacity of the Germans.

The Germans were a small, dark, very energetic Prussian called Kruse, and a magnificent Bavarian whose name I forget. But Ehse called him Siegfried, which was appropriate enough, and in a way prophetic ; for it was Siegfried who won Brunhilda — or Ehse — for his ugly little friend.

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She was naturally attracted to the handsome Bavarian, who responded by monopolising her. This he did in the accomplished and easy fashion of a man who not only knew all about women, but valued their company more highly than anything else. His manner was superbly confident, his manners most courteous. Elise was flattered and captivated, and her English admirers admitted their defeat.

But in a day or two the duet became a trio, for Kruse joined it, presuming on his friendship with Siegfried and forcing his attentions on Elise under cover of that convenient cloak. And then, in another day, the trio became a duet again, but a different one ; now it was Kruse and Elise. Siegfried, with but little diminished bonhomie, joined the more enterprising of the Etonians in a circle that included a French acrobat, an out-of-work manicurist, and two noisy young women who said they were going to live with an uncle in Havana.

Kruse's success with Elise was due to zeal and determination, to his perfect selfishness and his very thick skin, and to the fact that he was quite genuinely in love.—Siegfried was prepared to be a charming and enthusiastic lover, but Kruse was in love as an octopus is in the depths of the sea, submerged and rapacious, and, like an octopus that seizes a diver, he seized Elise and dragged her down.—She was bewildered by what had happened to her, and Kruse's unremitting wooing gave her no chance to recover.

He took an interest in her geological studies, and read her note-books. Not only did he read them, but he translated her notes into German and made her repeat his guttural mouth-filling words, laughing at her mispronunciations while, with a shameless hand, he stroked her bare sunburnt back. As well as some geological text-books, Elise had with her a popular exposition of philosophy that was common reading in America at that time.—It was called *The Story of Philosophy*, and consisted of rapid and readable chapters on the more notable philosophers from Plato to

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John Dewey.—This also became Kruse's property, and with tireless energy he lectured to the poor girl on Hegelian metaphysics and *Also sprach Zarathustra*. He had a way of talking, jerking his bullet head and stabbing at the page in front of him with a blunt red forefinger, that reminded one of a famished hen pecking corn. There was also something birdlike in his eyes. They were round, black, and bright; and his voice was rough and meagre as a hen's, his movements had just such a brittle energy. One night, about midnight, I happened to go on to the small space of upper-deck reserved for third-class passengers, and there was Kruse, with Elise in his arms, kissing her with the hard peck-pecking movements of a farmyard fowl. It was a strange sight; and in the intervals of kissing he probably talked philosophy with as little grace. He may have said to her, like Nietzsche, 'Lo ! I am weary of my wisdom, like a bee that hath collected too much honey. I need hands reaching out for it.'

A night or two afterwards I was again on the small upper-deck. It was late, and I was quite alone. It was a beautiful night, warm and silky, under a sky blazing with stars. The cloven sea looked as though it were wearing sequins and white lace, and the ship, shearing the calmness, made little musical noises and the susurrus of wind in high grass. Then I heard a limping step, a normal footfall and the wooden sound of an artificial foot, and looking round I saw the huge figure of an ill-humoured Swede called Olssen.

He had reason for his ill-humour. He had lived a hard and adventurous life in ships and lumber camps, till one day, falling from a train on which he was taking a free ride, the hobo's accident had befallen him, and his left foot was cut off at the ankle. After some months in hospital he was accommodated with a wooden foot, and found a job as a barber. But he resented such a menial existence, and could not forget the mutilation which had driven him to it. He

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nursed a poisoned feeling of injustice, and he wanted to revenge himself on the world that had treated him so badly. It must have been an alarming experience to be shaved by him, and I do not think he had been a barber for very long. He was on his way home to Sweden, and though no drink was openly sold on board — for America was still dry — he had twice been so violently drunk that the Chief Officer had had him locked in his cabin.

The sound of a piano and a woman's voice rose from the saloon, where most of the third-class passengers were attending a concert. Olssen stood beside me and said, ' If a storm should come, they would soon stop all that singing.'

' You don't like it ? '

He did not reply, but muttered a moment later : ' A storm that smashed their pianos, their tables and chairs, and rolled all those damned fools off their feet ! That's what I want. Not this sailing in calm water like a lake in a park. This is no good. It is no good ! I want the wind to howl, and the sea to come smashing on deck, and the waves to be like mountains. Then all those damned fools would scream and be frightened, and think they were going to be drowned. But I would come up here, and laugh, and shout to the wind, " Blow stronger ! " and say to the sea, " You can drown me if you like, for I do not give a damn ! " '

Olssen, it was clear, had been drinking again, and making some excuse I attempted to leave him. But he put a ponderous arm round my neck, and gripped my further shoulder with a fierce and heavy hand. ' You must stay and listen to me,' he said, ' for maybe I am going to get drowned.'

' But you're going home,' I said. ' Don't you want to see Sweden again before you drown yourself?'

' I have no friends there now. They have all gone away, and other people will laugh at me because I have only one foot. I will hate them as I hate everybody here.'

He stepped on to the rail and leaned clumsily over. I

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tried to pull him back, and in a sudden temper he tightened his grip on my shoulder and hauled me up beside him. He was very strong, and I had a moment of half-panic. We looked down at the lacy patterns on the dark sea.

' You **are** frightened,' said Olssen. ' But it would be easy to get drowned.'

Then he grew wilder, and told me of his desire for revenge, on anyone and everyone, and how he had left the barber's shop because of his recurring temptation to cut the white soapy throats that stretched so tautly beneath his razor. He walked me up and down the deck, leaning his weight on me, and hurting my shoulder with his grasp. He shouted to the sky to bring tempest quickly, and again he climbed half-way up the rail and spoke of suicide. I had a miserable time with him until, with sudden inspiration, I remembered that Dick Etive had a quart bottle of eau-de-Cologne in our cabin. So I invited Olssen to come down and have a drink, saying I would give him a Scotch liqueur, something like Swedish punch, but stronger.

He came with childish willingness, and I poured about **a** gill of the perfume into a tooth-glass. ' Skal,' he said, and drank it down. Then he belched, with surprising sweetness, and left me without more ado.

It was on the following day, I think, that the French acrobat persuaded the out-of-work manicure girl that she might become his partner. They appeared on deck in bathing suits, and he began to teach her balancing exercises. She was no longer quite young — her cheeks were rather faded and her eyes disliked the strong sunlight — but she was small and neatly built, and she made rapid progress under his tuition. They always had a circle of critical but good-humoured spectators.

Siegfried, the magnificent Bavarian, who had joined the circle that consisted of the acrobat, the manicurist, the more enterprising of the Etonians, and the girls who were going to Havana, was now left in a *partie carrée*, the first two having

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paired off. He therefore paid court to the elder of the Havana-bound young women with the same graceful and competent assiduity as he had shown towards Elise ; and for some time she seemed pleased by his attention. Siegfried used to walk her round the deck with an air of the most courteous possession.

But then she grew tired of him and returned to the protection of the Etonian. There was, it appeared, a flaw in Siegfried's character : he was either poor or mean, and Flora, not unnaturally, had lost interest in a man who never spent a penny on her. The Bavarian sought other company, but still it was an education in manners to observe the politeness with which he saluted Flora when she passed him on one arm of the enterprising Etonian, her friend on the other, and the knowledge of Siegfried's weakness uniting all three in scorn.

As we got farther and farther into the tropics, our limited deck space appeared to grow more and more crowded. Many of our fellow-passengers were stoutly built, and when in hot weather they shed their normal attire, they visibly expanded. In wrappers, unbuttoned shirts, and bathing suits, they seemed to double their size, and one could scarcely move a yard without colliding against some opulent haunch or being breasted off by an exuberant bosom. Even our good staid ornithologist forgot a little of his natural sobriety under the influence of the tropic sun. It was very early in the morning when we slowly approached one of the islands that guard Balboa and the entrance to the Panama Canal; and seeing pelicans through the port-hole, he rushed immediately on deck, wearing nothing but long-sleeved, long-legged woollen underclothes, and, quite unconscious of his remarkable appearance, stood entranced, field-glasses at his eyes, watching a file of pelicans flying low above the muddy water, and frigate-birds sailing stiffly in the steamy air. Dick Etive, whose humour was so nicely balanced that even a pair of American trousers would stir

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him to laughter, found it very difficult to listen politely while the ornithologist explained to us the curious rigidity of the frigate-bird's flight. It was due, he said, to the coalescence of the furcula with the keel of the sternum and the coracoids at the upper extremity of the wings. He insisted on lending us his glasses, though all the time he was longing to be using them himself. He was a dear old man, and we were very fond of him.

Later in the morning Dick and I went ashore, and having driven to Old Panama we admired the scanty ruins that commemorate the destructive power of time, and the jungle, and Sir Henry Morgan. Then, in the new city, we admired with even greater enthusiasm the creative power of miscegenation. The populace was darkly coloured, but dark with a hundred differences. It seemed as though the races of half the world had mingled, and covered their ancestry with a Carib shade. The town was a black triumph, a conquest of blood, though not by the shedding of blood.

Still marvelling at the power of darkness, we went into a bar and asked for some lager. The brown barmaid, a pretty girl with melancholy eyes, could not understand even so simple a request as that. We had to point and mime to get our beer. But while we were drinking it, a tall and ruffianly handsome fellow came in, and in a loud voice and a strong Scots accent demanded a glass of water. The girl understood him immediately, and he got it at once. There was three days' growth of beard on his face, and he was simply clad in a torn shirt and dirty white trousers. He drank his water, and, looking towards us, remarked in a defiant voice, 'That's my breakfast !'

I made some comforting observation about the unsuitability of porridge in such a climate, and offered him a bottle of beer. Then I asked when he had last seen Scotland.

'I fell oot o' the front door o' Castlehill Barracks, in Aberdeen, in 1921,' he said.

'You were in the Gordons ?'

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' For fourteen years,' he said. ' Fourteen years hard, but I've been on holiday ever since.'

He had a fine soldierly face, and seemingly that rare philosophy which regards the world as its free and natural pasture. Panama, he told us, was a very easy place to live in. He had seen a good deal of the world, but Panama suited him better than anywhere else. At the moment, he admitted, he was down on his luck, for the woman he lived with had broken her leg, and so was unable to work ; but she was getting better, and he would be all right in a little while.

I gave him a couple of dollars and wished him luck. It was a cheering encounter, for a truly free spirit is a fine acquaintance to make, and despite his beard and his morals I thought him a credit to the regiment that used to be known as the Gay Gordons.

We dined that evening — Dick Etive and I — in a restaurant called Kelly's Ritz. It was a lively place. We were greeted by an American commissionaire who asked us if we would like to play poker. Upstairs, he said, there were a couple of nice little games in progress, with plenty of room to sit in. Or if we didn't like poker, there was a nice little game of craps. Or a nice little game of faro. We could take our choice.

We preferred to dine, however, and see the cabaret, which had a pleasing resemblance to village theatricals. Later, when dancing became general, the entertainment grew livelier.

Many of our fellow third-class passengers were in the restaurant, and most of the women were dancing with those of the ship's stewards who had been given shore leave, or had taken it. An American steward is often a steward by accident rather than vocation. Our saloon steward, for example, who was dancing with great agility, had been a six-day bicycle-rider. But he had so often fallen off his bicycle during the duller phases of a race — it was difficult,

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he said, to keep awake — that the promoters refused to have anything more to do with him. He was a Frenchman, *toujours gai*, like Mehitabel, and a very bad waiter. Another of the ship's company who was present was the third-class barber. He, at one time, had been publicity agent for a circus.

At a table not very far from us were Kruse and Elise. She was the brightest and most conspicuous figure in the room, for she was wearing a shawl of vivid and horrible colours. It had a principal pattern of green and purple chrysanthemums, entwined with which were rambler roses and golden buttercups. This aniline florescence was embroidered on a watered silk which had subsequently been ornamented with a heavy fringe the colour of over-ripe oranges. Never have I seen a more dreadful shawl, and seldom, except for a joke, can any decent American girl have worn so monstrous a garment.

'It must be a present from Kruse,' I said. 'Go and dance with her, Dick, and ask her what she thinks of it.'

But Dick, unduly susceptible to sartorial extravagance or ineptitude, was already laughing happily, and dare not go near her for fear of laughing outrageously. So I went myself.

Kruse was surly, and Elise, though not unwilling to dance, looked at him doubtfully, and almost timidly, as she stood up. 'I won't be very long,' she said. 'You don't mind, Hans, do you? It's only going to be a short dance, I think.'

Inexpertly on my part, but gracefully on hers, we joined the dancers. The loathsome shawl still draped her shoulders.

'You're encouraging Hans to be selfish,' I said.

'Well, it isn't as if he was an American,' she answered. 'You see, he brought me here, and he's paying, so he feels it's his evening. I guess the Germans are like that, maybe.'

*This is a very fine shawl you're wearing,' I shouted, for we were opposite the band, which at the moment was playing rather loudly.

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' Hans bought it for me,' she said. ' I wanted something a bit less gaudy, but he said bright colours were best. I wanted to take it off when we got here, because it's pretty hot dancing in it, but he likes to see me wearing it. I guess it's all right too, because he says everyone has always told him he's got very good taste.'

' You're too good-natured.'

' Oh, I don't know. Well, I've often had presents I didn't want, but you can't really say so about presents, can you ? I got a dog once, an Airedale that took fits. It used to belong to a boy I knew, but he was consumptive, and he didn't think it good for the dog to be living in a tubercular atmosphere, so he gave it to me.'

' Was that in Los Angeles ? '

' Yes. It was because of him that I went there. We wanted to get married, but his lungs weren't too good, and his family sent him out to California. So I made an excuse and said that I wanted to study geology at U.S.C. My mother didn't want me to go, but I got round father, and he let me.'

' And what happened to the young man ? '

' He's dead now,' said Elise ; and the dance concluded.

She looked round to where Kruse was sitting, and smiled to him. ' I ought to go back to Hans,' she said.

' There's going to be an encore,' I answered, and put my arm round her waist.

' I don't know why men get so jealous,' she sighed.

' Well, Americans aren't so bad, but foreigners are just terrible.'

Dancing immediately in front of us were the barber, who had been a publicity agent, and a pale, thin, rather good-looking Panamanian girl. He had previously been dancing with another of the local young women, most of whom were there for a professional purpose. Of his previous partner I remember only that her hair was black, luxuriant, and curly; and her arms were plump and lemon-yellow.

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She was also capable of that inordinate jealousy which Elisc had just ascribed to foreigners in general.

The barber was wearing a white duck suit. There was a hurried movement behind him — between him and us — which I hardly noticed ; and then, on the whiteness of his coat, on the left side, a little below the level of his collar, there appeared a red stain that quickly spread and shone wetly in the light. The barber staggered and let go his partner. We nearly bumped into him. His partner screamed, and the music stopped.

The confusion lasted for half a minute. No more than that. The barber was carried out; the young woman with the black hair and the yellow arms, who had stabbed him with a penknife, was seized by two quick and muscular attendants and rushed away; the so-called hostess or manageress of the place — a full-breasted, resolute, imperturbable, *soignée* woman of fifty or so — informed the patrons that there was no cause for alarm ; and the band struck up another tune.

I looked for Elise, but Kruse had taken her away. He had paid his bill, and they were leaving. He led her out, his arm round her in assertive protection, his white sleeve bisecting the more than tropical brilliance of her shawl.

Nor did we stay very long after that, for despite the admirable efforts of the hostess a certain disorder began to invade the scene. A drunken stoker came in, very dirty and dressed only in a filthy singlet and greasy trousers, and almost immediately threw a chair at the orchestra. Then a high-pitched quarrel began between two of the women, and we thought it time to leave.

On the way out, however, we were again accosted by the commissionaire, who still thought we should add to our amusement an hour or two of poker, faro, or craps. So we went up to the gaming-room, where some two dozen or thirty men were playing with a chattering intensity and frequent ejaculation. Most of them were Panamanians,

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but there were a few sailors, and the most conspicuous figure in the room was our acquaintance of the morning, the Gay Gordon. He had made good use of my two dollars, for he was wearing a clean white suit, he had shaved and brushed his hair, and there was a lot of money on the table before him. I was just in time to see the last turn of a game, and hear the snarl of anger as he added to his previous gains a handful of notes and coins.

He looked round the table with a boldly calculating and humorous glance. Then quite slowly he gathered his winnings together, and stuffed them, notes on one side, coins on the other, into his trouser-pockets. He stood up and said something. The snarl of anger rose to a chorus of yapping expostulation. Several of the Panamanians got up and tried excitedly to restrain the Gordon, but he thrust them off and barked — in a parade-ground voice, in the language and the accent of a barrack square — at the angry table. None of the gamblers could have understood what he said, for he spoke in broad Scots; but they understood what he meant, and sat down again.

Slowly, his face to the table, the Gordon retreated to the stairs. Then he turned quickly, ran swiftly down, and out into the streets. The others, whose money he had won, rose shrilly as soon as he had disappeared, and followed with noisy agitation. They gave tongue like beagles, but when they came to the pavement outside, they paused irresolute, none caring to lead the chase. The Gordon, it was plain, knew how to look after himself.

On the following day we went through the Canal, and the ornithologist was in a heaven of delight to see through his glasses jacamars and bell-birds and cockatoos. But in the midday heat the birds were silenced, and in the Gatun Lake there was nothing astir but sometimes a raft of matted fern swirling away from the steamer's side, and the air was odorous with a rotting sweetness.

After leaving Colon, on the Atlantic side, we came into

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grey choppy water, a foretaste of the sterner half of the world, and ran to Cuba with wetted decks. At Havana everybody went ashore to buy cigars, and a good many of our fellow-passengers got drunk. When the ship sailed again, there was singing and dancing on the third-class deck, a fight or two, and the startling transition of a hitherto inoffensive old man into a revivalist preacher.

There had been no shore leave for the stewards, but all day the ship had been surrounded by boatmen peddling local curios and Cuban brandy. A lot of brandy had come aboard — hauled up in baskets — and a few of the stewards were considerably the worse for it. Our dining-room steward, the ex-bicycle-rider, was one of them. He served dinner that night in a very spirited and *dégagé* manner, till disaster unfortunately befell him.

The ship was rolling rather heavily, and Jacquot none too steady on his feet. Several times, encumbered with dishes, he kept his balance only by the free use of his arms, in the fashion of a tight-rope walker. Then, when he was coming in with half a dozen loaded plates, poised on his arm and overlapping each other, there was a sudden lurch, and Jacquot, hooking his left arm about one of the pillars that supported the deck above — the room was low — swung completely round it, and as he reappeared the laden plates, by centrifugal force, flew off his arm in a shower of breaking crockery and fragments of mutton. It was, for the spectators, as pretty a piece of slapstick as one could wish to see ; but Jacquot himself should not have been amused. After a moment's surprise, he hung to the pillar and laughed uproariously. Then the Chief Steward hauled him rudely away, and the next morning poor Jacquot had two black eyes and a badly swollen mouth to aggravate his hangover.

We had left our fine Pacific weather behind, and off Cape Hatteras we were plunging roughly into heavy seas and the ship was suddenly depopulated. Among those who kept unhappily to their bunks was Kruse. But Elise was unaffected

by the movement, and I found her alone — an unusual state of affairs — in a sheltered corner of the upper deck.

* You must be glad to be getting near home,' I suggested.

' Why, yes,' she said, ' it'll be just fine to see it all again. But it's going to be kind of difficult too, because my family didn't want me to come just yet — that's why I'm travelling third-class, because I had to pay the fare out of my pocket-money — and I don't know what they're going to say about Hans.'

' Need they say anything ? Have you got to introduce him ?'

' Well, he wants to marry me.'

' But do you want to marry him ?'

' I don't rightly know. But he's so set on it, he hasn't hardly given me a chance to think what I want. He says if I don't marry him, it's going to ruin his whole life.'

' I expect your father will be able to help you.'

' He always lets me have my own way. Well, nearly always. He made mother take me to Nassau once — we stayed a couple of months there, it's a lovely place — because I was in love with a boy who worked in a drug-store, and they thought he wasn't suitable. But generally they let me do as I please.'

Poor Elise. It was obviously her fate to fall in love with the most unsuitable young men she could find. The boy who worked in a drug-store, the consumptive youth, and Kruse : her lack of judgment was pitiful, yet in other ways she seemed intelligent, and was certainly attractive.

I saw the embarrassed meeting of Kruse and her parents in New York. They were evidently people of some wealth, and of pleasantly dignified appearance. Her father was manifestly worried, and her mother angry behind a calm exterior. Kruse, bareheaded, was bowing like a shop-walker, talking nineteen to the dozen, and pecking after his words like a hungry hen. Elise, holding her father's hand, was trying to unite them into a family group with

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affectionate words and laughter intended to be happy. Poor Elise.

And the out-of-work manicure girl had quarrelled with the French acrobat. He had taught her to somersault off his shoulders, but then they disagreed about something, and no longer performed together. She went ashore alone, with an air of pathetic jauntness and a little wicker suitcase. But Olssen, the suicidal Swede, was in high spirits. After getting so seriously drunk that he had to be put in irons, the doctor had examined him and found that the stump of his leg had broken down and was festering. Olssen spent the rest of the voyage in hospital, and as the wound grew better, he revealed a temper of boisterous gaiety.

Dick Etive and I were also fairly cheerful. We had had an interesting voyage.

XVI

POLITICIAN INTO HUSBAND

FOR about three years my life was curiously distracted. I lived in Orkney and Aberdeen and Edinburgh and London. I returned to America, and visited Spitzbergen. I started to go round the world, and got as far as Monte Carlo. I was repeatedly ill, and more often in love. I wrote an opulent empurpled history of Ben Jonson, and the bony imitation of an Icelandic saga. I was on the very edge of penury, and then went travelling with a millionaire. In search of equilibrium or stability, I embraced both Scottish Nationalism and a wife.

There was, I think, no closer connexion than mere sequence between most of these diverse activities. Illness indeed led to poverty, but elsewhere the dovetailed neatness of cause and effect is unapparent. After finishing *Juan in America* I bore without fortitude a winter of ill-health, during which I was a dismal nuisance to my friends — who suffered me with kindly patience — and early in the New Year I was about to renew an old connexion with the pawn-brokers when news arrived that my novel had been chosen by the Book Society, then young, and a banker was so much impressed by this prospect of wealth that he accepted it as security for an unlimited overdraft. This affluence put me in a proper mood for writing *Ben Jonson and King James*, for which I had ready a suitcase full of notes, and

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when that was done I went on a voyage to Spitzbergen.

Among the passengers was a youngish and agreeable man who had no visible eccentricities save his almost total abstinence and a collection of very expensive watches. We grew friendly, and when he said that he would be glad if I became his guest on a voyage round the world, I replied that it would give me much pleasure, and returning to Scotland, thought little more about it. But a month or so later he wrote to say that he was compelled to go almost immediately to America, and as we could very conveniently start our circumnavigation from New York, he had provisionally booked cabins for us aboard the *Europa*. Accepting this arrangement without demur, I packed my trunk and had the happiness of crossing the Atlantic in extreme comfort amid enormous seas and weather of tempestuous fury.

Rarely have I taken much pleasure in Teutonic creation, save its music, the *Laokoon* of Gotthold Lessing, and a lovely stalwart young woman who, when I took her out to dinner and confronted her with an impressive menu, put it away and declared in more impressive simplicity and a hoarse contralto voice, *I like Meat!* My Germanism has been limited to these few enthusiasms, and admiration of the *Europa*, which like a shapely ness divided the storm, and through four days of frenzied seas showed no more unsteadiness than the solemn titubation of a well-trained butler with most of the decanter in his wame. A noble ship, but inauspicious. On our first day out, a wireless message came to Frank that a business partner, on whom he relied, had fallen seriously ill, and before we reached New York he was dead. So Frank was faced with work instead of holiday, and our encircling of the globe receded.

I spent some weeks in America, and with mingled pleasure and disappointment discovered that Frank was not merely rich **but** a millionaire and probably more. And none of your transient millionaires out of shallow soil, but stable

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and soundly built upon the old auriferous rock. So I was gratified, as Browning had he seen Shelley plain, and a little disappointed because he did nothing to reinforce a prevailing dislike of millionaires. He showed none of the alleged deformities of wealth, save abstinence, perhaps, and a small unnecessary collection of watches. He was not merely a pleasant companion, but pleasant in quite a normal fashion. When, therefore, he decided he must remain in America, I was sorry indeed to say good-bye, and regarded with much diminished pleasure the ticket that he gave me—a ticket from Sandy Hook to the Grand Central by way of the Pyramids and Angkor Wat.

Another enormous ship received me, and for what happened I blame only myself. Heaven lies within us, and I should not so soon have grown bored with idle luxury. Not more than a fraction of my fellow-passengers were really decrepit, in spite of their advanced age, and among the little youthful minority there were undoubtedly some whose intelligence and charm would have been apparent to better eyes than mine. But having gone shopping meekly with the throng, in Madeira, Gibraltar, and Algiers, I was so weak as to regard with foreboding the prospect of similar expeditions in Cairo and Colombo, in Bali and Borneo — in Luxor and Lucknow, Hong-Kong and Hawaii, and all round the world — so in a great hurry I deserted the circum-navigators in Monte Carlo, and momentarily was in worse straits than before.

I had eleven dollars and a letter of credit, but for some obscure reason my letter of credit was unacceptable in Monaco, and eleven dollars insufficient to take me home. There was, however, the Casino, and after some debate I played, with the utmost modesty, a little roulette, and was so happy as to make on Numero Treize enough to pay my hotel bill and buy a second-class ticket to London.

There, after some idle weeks, I was engaged by the *Daily Express* to write a series of articles on London as it

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appeared to a sort of travelled rustic. That was my role : an islander who by chance had seen something of the Orient and cities in the West, but never yet the flower of cities all. So for a fee which, to suit my rural innocence, was much diminished from the ordinary payment for that sort of thing, I tattled for a while, and then one day was taken to lunch, in the grill-room of the Savoy Hotel, by a person of much authority about the *Express*. We halted in the doorway and he laid his arm across my shoulders. ' Look !' he said softly. ' A little while ago you were quite unknown, and now all these people — many of them well known, rich, and important — look up and recognise you immediately. You are famous, and it is we who have made you famous !'

Shortly after this I went back to Scotland ; though I do not pretend that embarrassment alone occasioned my return. There was rumour of a Scottish renaissance, a national stirring both literary and political, and I hurried to the lying-in.

The case for small nationalism had first appeared to me in America, its original argument that it would make life more interesting. Small nations, as opposed to great, would produce diversity. Diversity is interesting, and so is responsibility. But political responsibility in a major state is so minified as to be invisible ; it may exist in a satisfying degree only in a little country. At first it may seem frivolous to suggest that political change should be advocated to make the world more interesting ; but the pursuit of wealth, which on all sides is most seriously regarded, has that as one of its three purposes: the others being, for a minority the achievement of power, and for the rest security. To seek a full life is laudable and sagacious. If life for the majority became more deeply interesting, majorities might lose the recurrent desire for death that lets them, once in a generation, be led to war. . . .

Uniformity on the vast American scale, and a continuing passion for uniformity, appeared both wasteful and

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dangerous. Wasteful because uniformity nullified **many** natural differences that might usefully and gratefully be developed; and dangerous because life on a dead level sometimes produces the effect of a flat and open country in the light of noon : a tendency to panic. But if difference was cultivated, ramparts would be built that might stop the spread of hysterias and epidemic fear. Disaster is inseparable from the world, but it is the ever-increasing uniformity and interdependence of the world that carry infection of disaster. . . .

And again I thought: Littleness — or reasonable littleness — for Efficiency. The megatherium, the sub-continent of India, and an army of five million soldiers were unmanageable things in comparison with a polo pony, the kingdom of Sweden, and Marlborough's men. . . .

These general ideas being already in my mind, I heard with excitement the muttering noise in the North that Scottish Nationalists were making and the nurseling cry of what was hopefully described as a literary renaissance. There, it seemed, were people of my own conviction, a country well chosen for the experiment, and native sentiment to give it force. With my friend Francis Meiklejohn, an ardent Nationalist, I dined in Soho and perceived my duty.

To begin with, we drank a little Pernod. It was after the second glass that I dedicated myself, and to mark the solemnity of the occasion we had some champagne. Not only our purpose, but our policy, grew enchantingly clear. Essential Scotland, we agreed, was represented by the court of King James IV and Edinburgh in the eighteenth century. Also of value were the Celtic ethos, the Norse propulsion, and such mastery of stock-breeding and agriculture as was displayed in Aberdeenshire and the Lothians. We must ignore, in our reconstruction of Scotland, the cultural blight of Presbyterianism and the industrial revolution.

'My dear fellow,' said Meiklejohn, 'let us admit two things : that *in* Scotland to-day there is much that will

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turn your stomach, but plenty to steal your heart. Let us be reasonable. We must extol our good qualities and admit our faults. There is nothing more horrible than Scotch meanness, but Scottish generosity is the most prodigal in the world. Our virtues are profound, our profligacy appalling. Quite appalling. We run to extremes. And that is going to be our salvation, because it means that we have unlimited enthusiasm. All we need, as a nation, is direction and a goal. To Scotland Renewed !'

Warmly I answered : ' How right you are ! And let us remember that by nature and tradition we are less insular than the English, and so there should be little difficulty in rebuilding our diminished country. We shall look to the Continent. Our tariff policy shall be : Free Trade in Ideas. Our patriotism must not be narrow. We must borrow, not money but wisdom, from France and Scandinavia.'

' Our closest alliance,' said Meiklejohn, ' must be with France.'

' Of course,' I said, ' but Scandinavia can also teach. We shall attract, indeed, all those streams of European culture that now a foolish Government in London dams.'

' The great Wen,' said Meiklejohn.

' Not only culture,' I said, ' but claret.'

' From Bordeaux to Leith,' exclaimed Meiklejohn, ' there must be a continuous procession of ships loaded to the very gunwale with claret. It's our national drink.'

' A glass of champagne,' I suggested.

' When I die,' said Meiklejohn, ' and go to Heaven, I shall ask for an Austrian to provide my music, a Frenchman to cook my food, and a Scotsman of the eighteenth century to be my host.'

' Those are the lines,' I said, ' on which we must remake Scotland. We shall be national in order to be international. Consider the New Town of Edinburgh.'

' Charlotte Square !' shouted Meiklejohn. ' But it's enchanting !'

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' Those houses,' I said, ' were designed for a gracious and a generous life. For lavish hospitality.'

' And think,' said Meiklejohn, ' think of the effect of filling them with Viennese music ! They're made for waltzing.—Deux fines, sommelier.—I implore you, my deaf fellow, to think kindly of the waltz. Our own Scottish dances are magnificent. Their brio is incomparable. But our savagery, our native savagery, our climate, and the dreadful influence of the Reformation demand, as their corrective, the music of Vienna.'

With expansive gestures he began to sing *The Blue Danube*, and the proprietor of the restaurant, making a polite enquiry as to the occasion of this exuberance, was persuaded to join us in some brandy.

' And as to literature,' I said, ' and this promised renaissance, I have, in the smallest way, a proper notion for it. You remember what Herder said ? '

' A German !' roared Meiklejohn. ' Let us not sully our thoughts !'

' *Study the superstitions and the sagas of the forefathers.* That is what Herder said — to Goethe, I suppose — and that was the vitalising seed in the Irish renaissance. Yeats and Lady Gregory and Douglas Hyde all took his advice, and Ireland prospered.'

' The Irish,' said Meiklejohn, ' are superb. You must tell me some other time about your sagas. Not now. Now, if you feel like a little walk, let us go and look at St. Paul's. It's raining, isn't it ? St. Paul's is at its best in bad weather. What a genius was Wren ! The English have no conception of his true greatness. They take him for granted, they cannot realise their beatitude in living in the very shadow of his masterpiece.'

Whatever its failings, our nationalism had not been born of a narrow provincial spirit. Its only defect, indeed, was a total disregard of the prevailing temper and the governing conditions of life in Scotland. But certain of the time, I

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crossed the Border and set to work on a novel that sprang from my long obedience to Herder's precept and Irish example. From boyhood I had read and delighted in the Icelandic sagas — *Njala*, *Laxdaela*, *Egla*, *Grettla*, *Eyrbyggja*, that splendid company — and in Orkney the native tone still rang with echoes from their speech. Though life in Orkney had changed from a violent to a most peaceful fashion, my neighbours there retained their fathers' trick of hardy understatement, their taste for irony, for a turn of phrase and a sort of fatalistic humour that often reproduced the very note of saga dialogue. I could write, therefore, the imitation of a saga without much affectation, and certainly without labouring to get the style of it. Piety encouraged a natural inclination, and popular ignorance of the Icelandic tales let me borrow from them with an Elizabethan freedom. *The Men of Ness* was a good story, but so far as I am aware only five people in the Old World really liked it: Edward Garnett, a professor of English literature, a mountainous warrant officer in the Royal Navy, an Icelandic reviewer, and a schoolboy who for a whole week-end divided his attention between it and stump-cricket.

In America it was received with such extravagant eulogy that I grew feverish with delight. But unhappily it was published on the very same day as America went off gold, and nobody bought it. So my conceit was inflated but unfed.

I went to live in Edinburgh, and began to take a more serious interest in Scottish affairs. There was no denying the Nationalists' contention that the strength of Scotland was slowly bleeding out. Her revenue and population were dwindling, her industry leaking to the South. Unemployment was heavier and slums more filthily crowded than in England. Fishermen were being driven by starvation from the sea, and, in all but a few favoured places, farmers made bitter complaint. From the policy of her banks to the paint on museum benches, everything was ordered from London,

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and the allowance of paint was thin. On the material side there was shrinkage and decay, and Scotland, with no intellectual life of its own, showed little concern about this vital deficiency.

Critical ammunition was abundant, and Nationalists with much enthusiasm bombarded the unwilling majority with indisputable ungainly facts. The majority declined to listen or refused to believe. But here and there was someone who enquired : ' And what is your remedy for all these ills ? ' To which the Nationalists replied : ' Give us an independent Scotland, a land in control of its own purse and destiny, and remedies will be found.'

To further query, to a detailed questioning of their intentions about a constitution for the new state, its fiscal and foreign policies, about defence and social legislation and a dozen other problems, their answer was: ' These questions can be answered only by Scotland itself. It is not our business to give you a constitution or a policy. Our task is to give you self-government, and then you can choose whatever policy and constitution will suit you.'

The ingenuity of this answer was greater than its power to satisfy a really thoughtful enquirer. It flattered the democratic spirit and saved the Nationalists a deal of hard thinking, but to the sagacious heckler it looked uncommonly like a pig in a poke.

But my sympathy was altogether with the Party, despite its unwillingness to evolve a fiscal policy, its open mind about proportional representation and the University vote. With regard to these topics I was open-minded myself, and for a sufficient reason. My attitude was simple : Scottish Nationalism was a good idea, and therefore it should be propagated. I had not then perceived that one of the dominant characteristics of human nature is its deep distrust of good ideas.

About Christmas, or a little before it, the Secretary of the Party came to see me : John MacCormick, a darkly

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hued, compactly built, and smallish man, with a look of habitual silence on his face, but an eloquent and persuasive speaker in despite of that. There was going to be a by-election in East Fife, he said. Would I contest it in the Nationalist cause ?

' But to sit in Parliament,' I said, ' is the very last thing I want to do. I should hate it.'

' There's not much chance of your winning,' he said.

' Oh,' I replied.

' We want you to show the flag. If you put up a good show and do some propaganda, you'll help the cause in a general way. It's missionary work really.'

' You're quite sure I can't win ? '

' It's most unlikely.'

' Well, that makes a difference.'

' Then you'll stand ? '

' Yes, I think I will.'

But no sooner had he gone than I fell into half a panic and grew quite miserable at the thought of what lay before me. Nor, when it came to reality, was that any better than my foreboding of it. I had to make innumerable speeches, but found myself incapable of repeating a speech more than twice. This eccentricity revealed, beyond doubting, my utter incapacity for a political career ; in which a man, who by nature is adapted to it, will make a total of three speeches do very well for some thirty or forty years. But the sound of too familiar words, reverberating from my weary palate, so filled me with shame and a passionate boredom that I used all my energy, which should have gone to a ceaseless repetition, on the search for new things to say. As a candidate I was solemn and ineffective.

The election, however, was full of comedy. It attracted a great number of candidates, each of whom adopted whatever seemed most striking in the others' promises, and pledged himself to do more for the electorate than all his rivals put together. There was a Government candidate,

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somewhat handicapped by the fact that the Government had no policy of its own, and a candidate who represented Lord Beaverbrook and his agricultural policy. There was a Socialist or Labour candidate, much embarrassed by his party's record, and myself who was earnestly trying to discover what I really meant by Scottish Nationalism. And lastly there appeared, with joyous irresponsibility, an Independent Liberal who had a very fine policy indeed that everybody else had long ceased to believe in.

Confronted with so great an array of candidates, the electorate grew somewhat bewildered, and for a long time the issue was in doubt. For a few days there was an excited and uncomfortable feeling that anyone might win. At one point, in a fevered gloom, I even saw the possibility of a Nationalist victory. Compton Mackenzie had come to speak for me, and we had a series of meetings in the little fishing towns on the pleasant coast of Fife. Our audiences there consisted only of men. Men in dark-blue jerseys, new-come from the sea. Their sleeves were swollen with their strength, and there was valiance in their eyes. I was ill-at-ease, wishing only that in Scotland there were ten times as many such, and their prosperity ten times as great. But Mackenzie met the challenge of their hardihood, and with his oratory whipt them to enthusiasm. Their applause was like the breaking of the sea on a stony beach, and for an hour or two I feared that such a storm might carry me farther than I wanted to go.

I was quite safe, however. As polling day came nearer, it grew obvious that the Government candidate was winning, and when the votes were counted it was found that I had a hundred or two more than the joyous Liberal, and everybody else had a much better score than mine. So I went back to Edinburgh and resumed work on a short biography of Mary Stuart in which I was much interested.

The popular Swinburnian view that Mary was a great and tragic lover had been my own till the original draft

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of the book was half completed, and then to my dismay I found that I could not sufficiently distort the evidence to maintain this reading of her character. All the evidence, save the counterfeit Casket Letters and the testimony of known perjurers, pointed to the unsuspected fact that she was not merely chaste, but by constitution averse to love's embraces. She was a politician, like Elizabeth except in fortune, and her nearest thoughts were of her dynasty. Out of this discovery I remade the book.

A friend of much worldly experience, with whom I discussed the problem, agreed with me entirely when he learnt that Mary was full six feet in height. 'Women of that size,' he said, 'are, almost without qualification, sexually cold. I would not have it otherwise.' And John Buchan, to my pleasure, called the book the best and truest thing that had ever been written about Mary; while Rebecca West, saying it was the only life she had read that paid due regard to human nature, approved its contentions that Mary was under-sexed, that fear had driven her into marriage with Bothwell. An immense repression, she said, had been exercised in literature about the part fear played in human affairs; and as to sexual incapacity, there must have been much of it in times when women married so young. But in spite of such critical approval I do not suppose that my interpretation of the poor queen will ever be widely accepted. As a politician she would excite less heated interest than as tragic wanton; and fear is less flattering to our common humanity than such love as sweeps away a throne.

Edinburgh, save my few weeks in the Castle, I have always found a most pleasant place to live in, and this winter was further enlivened by a relationship that was to have a more lasting influence than my adventure into politics. I first met my future father-in-law in the atelier of a young sculptor called Thomas Whalen.

He was a man of rather more than sixty, very broad and square of shoulder, with a clip of silver curls under his

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hat and an expression, that afternoon, of an almost ferocious energy that accorded nicely with the taurine strength of his body. Indeed the pugnacity of his mood, the rose in his buttonhole, and clothes that were cut by a perfect academician of a tailor, somehow combined to suggest a bull dressed for the arena ; and with no sense of incongruity one perceived that he was carrying an African knobkerry.

He had recently returned from a visit to Kenya, where he owned a large unprofitable farm, and the knobkerry was a souvenir of his travels. In the purlieus of Nairobi, he said, he had found it very useful indeed for clearing the road of Kikuyus, Masai, and such ; and to demonstrate his favourite strokes he made a drive to the off, a swipe to leg, and a round-the-wicket shot that narrowly missed the plaster cast of a Madonna and Child. Poor Whalen regarded these exercises with visible anxiety, and, sidling to the door, I could find no better comment than a nervous laugh.

The vigour, the alarming vigour of his nature, was equally apparent in his hospitality. He set, as I later discovered, a standard of conviviality that recalled the hard-headed exuberance of Edinburgh in the latter end of the eighteenth century ; and my friend Meiklejohn evolved the theory that he was indeed an atavism of that noble epoch. ' He is typical,' said Meiklejohn, ' of that virile and enlightened era, when men were ashamed neither of their intellect nor their appetites. I dined with him the other night, and for half an hour he explained to me why Alcibiades was his favourite character in history. And then he took me to see his pictures. He has Gillies, the young M'Taggart, and Sivell on his walls, and he demonstrates modern art by waving a glass of port at it. Pure eighteenth century, my dear fellow. We went, after that, to the Havana, and I got home about three. I was a little tired by then, but he was still dancing.'

My own acquaintance with him was small, however, when I called one day at his office to broach a matter of

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some delicacy. He regarded me with a slightly bloodshot eye, and the following conversation ensued.

' Good morning, Mr. MacIntyre.'

' Morning.'

' I have come to tell you that I have asked your daughter Marjorie to marry me, and she has agreed.'

' Well?'

' I should like to have your consent to our engagement, and subsequently to our marriage.'

' No !'

' Why not ? '

' Because I don't know anything about you.'

' I'm prepared to answer any questions you care to ask.'

' I've no intention of asking you any questions, and I've no intention of being dictated to ! If you think you're going to march into my office — *my* office ! — and bully me, and tell me to ask you questions, you're mistaken. Profoundly mistaken ! I don't want to ask you questions !'

' I thought——'

' I don't care what you think. . I know my own mind, I've given careful thought to the whole situation, and I'm prepared to make you a fair offer. I'm prepared to welcome you to my house, at any time you like to come, by day or night, and receive you as a friend of the family. But nothing more than that ! And then, after a period of some months, we can review the whole question.'

' That doesn't suit me at all, I'm afraid. I don't like the idea of a long engagement——'

' There isn't going to be an engagement ! '

'— and we had thought of getting married quite soon. In about six weeks' time.'

' Now take care ! Take care what you say ! I tell you again that if you think I can be bullied, you're wrong. You're absolutely and totally wrong. I've never submitted to being bullied yet, and I'm not going to start now. So don't provoke me. Don't go too far or you may be sorry

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for it. Do you realise that when I was a young man I played Rugby football for Scotland ? '

' I used to do a good deal of boxing when I was a young man.'

At this juncture my prospective father-in-law approached me in a very menacing fashion, and from close range made an appraisal of my physique.

' What's your weight ? ' he demanded.

' I was a welter then, but I'm rather heavier now.'

' I weigh fourteen stone. More than that. You wouldn't have a chance if we came to close quarters.'

' I think I'm faster on my feet than you.'

' That wouldn't help you. Not for long. If I got my grip on you . . . '

He scowled at me for an anxious second or two, and, then returning to his desk, began suddenly to laugh. As did all his activities, his laughter revealed his violent energy. His mouth opened as if to engulf the most enormous of jokes, and his laughter rang like the battering of prison-breakers on an iron gate. It was, however, a welcome sound, and after a more amiable discussion we parted on friendly terms. Or terms approximately friendly, for his last remark was : ' Well, you can do anything you like, but don't imagine you've got my consent. Because you haven't !'

He enjoyed the wedding ceremony more than I did, however.

For a year or two we had no settled home, and in the winter of 1933 we went to Italy, to a cottage in Lerici. It was charmingly situated on a slope of olive-trees that descended steeply to a little bay, but it was designed for summer living, and the weather was bitterly cold. We sat down in overcoats to our pasta and chianti, and rarely made much use of the bathroom that was situated in a corridor down which the icy tramontana whistled. But Marjorie, I discovered, was a hardy creature. She had

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inherited her father's vitality, and something of his unpredictable humour. In London, shortly before our departure, I had suddenly grown anxious about my financial strength, and telephoning to Jonathan Cape, I asked him the amount of my November royalties. By airy calculation I counted on getting a couple of hundred pounds or more, and I was sorely taken aback when he told me seventy. But Marjorie, opening her mouth as expansively as her father had done when he decided not to assault me, laughed with all his abandoned gaiety and found in my lack of money and arithmetic a very fair joke.

It was a disconcerting family into which I had married. My mother-in-law, in appearance and her usual manner a most gentle woman, had a core of steel. Almost my only quarrel with her — but that was bitter — had been about Wagner, whom she admired and whom I abominated. And when, on the day of my marriage, I stood distraught and miserable in the church, awaiting with liquefaction in my knees the arrival of the bride, I heard a false and swollen music, and turning to my oldest friend, who stood beside me, muttered : ' In God's name, Douglas, what is that ? '

He, his mind in full composure and a little note of malice and amusement in his voice, said : ' Wagner. The Meister-singer. Triumphal march.'

' My mother-in-law,' I whispered. ' She wanted to bury, in a hole among her roses, my charming little tract called *The Crusader's Key*. I stopped her. This is her revenge !'

Most of our friends and all the doctors we consulted, both Scots and English, had strongly advised us not to go to Italy. A baby, they said, could be born in safety only under the auspices of the British Medical Council. Foreign gynaecologists were by no means reliable. But Marjorie replied that as the Italian birth-rate, stimulated by the *passo Romano*, was notably increasing while the British rate was falling, the Italian obstetricians must have far more practice than ours, and she was prepared to trust them.

Politician into Husband

And how right she was ! For when her confinement was newly over, her doctor, coming to see her, observed on a table a rose of exceptional beauty, and with an operatic gesture of delight exclaimed : ' Ah ! che fiore bello ! Mai ho visto nulla di piu grazioso !'

Marjorie, a little piqued by this diversion of his interest, remarked : ' I thought you had come to see me, not a rose.'

' Sono venuto a vedere due rose, Signora. La e quest'altra, e qual' è la piu amabile non so dire,' he answered ; and this gallant reply was so invigorating that she recovered her strength in a very short time. Italy, indeed, is full of encouragement for young women.

This, however, was not in Lerici. In Lerici we had found a patron who offered to lend us a villino in Fiesole. Gratefully we removed, and arriving after dark entered through enormous doors a spacious hall, and with embarrassment exclaimed : ' But surely we have made a mistake. Surely this is not the villino, but the Villa Medici ? '

But in truth it was our promised residence, and in the grounds of the lovely house that Michelozzo built for Lorenzo the Magnificent, we settled down to a life of enchanting luxury. High above Florence, we looked down upon the coloured city, dark cypress groves, and the far unfolding of the Tuscan plain. The villino stood on a terrace below the great wall of the Villa, with a garden laid out in formal patterns. Beds of tulips grew — darker than the blood-hue of thorns on a young rose-tree and lipped with white, or thin scarlet flames on yellow petals, like imperial ensigns that were too stiff to wave, but would spread majestically against the sky — and over the high wall came tumbling in purple foam cascades of soft wistaria. Trees in the gentle air stood tall and still. By day the sun shone hotly, and the dark was loud with nightingales.

I did no work. It would have shown a most lamentable taste to pursue my own weak fancies when an hour away stood all the rich creation of the Renaissance. Here, in these

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glowing days amid this gathered opulence, one felt that men had justified mankind, and left no need for longer thought. Our heritage was golden idleness.

There were some difficulties, however, in the way of continuing this sort of life. Even doctors who talk about roses remember to send their bills, and in surroundings so noble one could not live without a certain increase in the ordinary expense of housekeeping. One day when my arithmetic made pessimistic sums, I began a letter of thanks to our patron : *Dear Lady Sybil, Owing to your very great kindness, we are now entirely destitute. . . .* But that was unduly sombre an estimate. We preserved our solvency, and even though we had not, such happiness would have been worth a trial of bankruptcy.

We went home to Scotland — three returning whence two had come — and as if to prove that life was not all a Tuscan idyll, I found myself immediately involved in a libel suit. A fantastic sum — a thousand pounds, two thousand pounds, heaven knows what — was demanded from me to mollify a slander which, it was alleged, I had in malice uttered. But even this was a minor worry in comparison with the toil I presently undertook of building a house. The law indeed is a labyrinth where light fails, but to wrestle with masons, plumbers, and joiners is to enter the very jungle of the world.

Apart from these activities my existence, for a couple of years, was uneventful. It consisted of hard work and contented domesticity, in which there is no tale.

XVII

RETURN TO BOMBAY

I NEVER go aboard a big ship without a mingling of reverence and delight; without elevation of the spirit and a dancing heart. Luxury ashore is often dull and wearisome, but luxury at sea has the look of triumph, and the comforts of a great ship are victory won by the noble breed of mariners from the most fearful of the elements. Consider the perils of ocean, from the trial by typhoon of the *Nan-Shan*, to the Elizabethan ship whose salty planks gave birth to worms, and to the Greek bottom that by a flock of quail was sunk in the Libyan Sea. Study the force of a wave, that hollow ridge with dragon-teeth and hissing mane : new-born from the Atlantic womb, its infant strength will lift a trawler to a sunken reef and break its back upon the rock. Perpend this rolling fog, this wet and groping nothingness within whose shivering coils is blind-fold death. Let your thought go deeply to the shearing ram of an iceberg, fathoms down, its Arctic pallor in more temperate green like the turning belly of a megatherian shark ; or reflect upon the tideway in a narrow strait, where, maddened by the moon and writhing with desire, it runs in frantic speed or leaps in fury at the lunar sting. Cogitate the unknown, when maps were **but** a little scrawl of land in immensities of water that, for all men knew, might fall beyond a starlit ledge in vast Niagaras to the

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chasm of a nether sky ; but mariners in tumbling boats set sail and found the truth. No jungle nor Himalayan range has any danger like the perils of the sea, but men with tarry hands and simple hearts have battled with its storm, and tamed the denizens of every latitude, that we may take our pleasure on the oceans of the world. Taste luxury at sea, drink deep, feast richly as an Eastern king, make love in silky nooks, but do it all in remembrance of Greek fishermen, Magellan and Sir Francis Drake, and the master mariners who ran their Easting down with Indias in the hold and every stitch of canvas set. This luxury is from their blood and salty strength. . . .

There was, however, a little flavour of guilt in my pleasure while we overtrod the sea. I was going to India again, and so to China, for a reason that would have been sufficient for a bachelor, but was frail for a married man with a family. I had told Marjorie : I must go to Shanghai to find material for my new novel. And that was no He, but neither was it the bottom and the essence of the truth. Had she demanded : Which came first in your mind, the impulse to write this book or the desire to see China ? — I should have been driven to brusque and tetchy equivocation, for the two were as closely joined as the Siamese twins that later became characters in the novel, and the Creative Impulse could not seriously have disputed the alias of Self-Indulgence. Nor could I properly afford to travel first class, as I was doing, but I had made the excuse that I wanted to observe the English on their way to imperial vocation and the weird of government. For such a purpose there could be no better environment than the upper deck of a P. & O., and had I stuck to my purpose I might have learnt a little about the natives — the subtle, lovely-surfaced, Episcopo-Confucianism of the upper middle-classes — of our mildly wicked island in the sea. But I have no strength of purpose, and so far from observing them, I made friends with a few and forgot about the rest.

Return to Bombay

An island rose, a shapely cloud with yellow light upon its crest. Malta was white walls and ghostly ramparts in the darkness, Port Said a medley of advertisements for whisky and Nestlé's Milk and beer, the Red Sea a steamy ditch between torrid desert and reddish hills that broke with their ragged edge the incandescent sky ; and in the Red Sea I touched a dangerous low level in moral dissolution when I became slightly intoxicated in a bathing-suit.

The corporal sensation was pleasant enough, but my intellectual appreciation of the condition — when I had time to consider it — was delicious. Within half an hour or so I realised the whole lure and benefit of beachcombing, the essence of which is the assertion, in idyllic circumstances, of one's total irresponsibility. An ordinary drunkard may pretend to some degree of irresponsibility, but unless he is in a state of bestial inebriation he must be mindful of his buttons at least. But on a bathing-suit there are no buttons. The lingering flavour of salt water on the tongue, moreover, adds a piquancy to the taste of pink gin that does much to console one for the contempt of his betters.

It was charity, however, not sensual appetite, that led me into this eccentricity. Charity, I take it, supposes an interest in the affairs of one's fellow-men, and often gin will usefully make a way through the barriers that shyness or reticence erect between us. There were, in the swimming-pool that morning, three soldiers with whom I had already had some conversation, and wanted more. One of them was long, lean, and ruddy. The second was square, silent, and sallow. The third, an Irishman, was dark and lively, his eyes twinkling. They had all spent many years on the North-West Frontier, and they had been speaking of a punitive expedition which the newspapers had recently reported ; but so baldly reported that injustice was done to the men concerned. I wanted to hear the story in full.

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The actors were three hundred men of a regiment famous for its skill and bravery in Frontier fighting. The regiment, being part of a punitive force, was ordered to occupy a certain ridge, about four thousand feet above the mean level of the surrounding terrain, in a range of hills that sheltered and concealed an unknown strength of Mohmands. Regimental orders indicated, with dry precision, the steps by which the attack should be advanced, and the times at which intermediate points must be reached. They said nothing about the difficulty of climbing a rocky and precipitous hillside with speed sufficient to disconcert the waiting Mohmands. They did not refer to the necessity of keeping one eye quick for cover where cover was scarcely to be found, the need of advancing with heart still bold and lungs still sound enough to carry the fight to close quarters when the top should be reached. In these matters the regiment had been well drilled.

So the attack began, at dawn, uphill as though up the side of a roof, among boulders that were sometimes stationary and sometimes not; for the enemy was trundling rocks down the slope. It soon appeared that Intelligence had under-estimated the tollmen's numbers. A strong Mohmand reserve appeared from the blind side of the hill, and the odds against the attacking force grew heavy. Yet the advance continued according to the regimental timetable, and a rocky point at one end of the ridge was successfully occupied.

Six platoons were detailed to clear the ridge. They were small to begin with, eighteen or twenty men in each. The total strength of the Mohmands was about seventeen hundred. But the platoons went forward, using butt and bayonet. It was hand-to-hand fighting, a heaving, scrambling, bloody affair. But the ridge was cleared, and its farthest and highest peak was occupied at half-past one ; which was the time stated in orders.

By then, however, the regiment was down to two-thirds

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of its original strength. Of the six platoons that had won the ridge there was only a handful left. Some forty men were suffering from what were officially described as injuries : they had been bruised by stones, they had had bones broken by rifle-butts. All the officers, British and Indian, had been either killed or seriously wounded except the regimental doctor. The doctor found himself in command.

Now although the Mohmands had been driven off the heights, and the battle won, the regiment was too weak to hold the ridge, and with only a few hours of daylight left, the retiral had to be organised at once. With so many wounded to carry, and the Mohmands still lively, it would not be easy.

At this point, however, romantic improbability stepped in. A subaltern, coming fresh from England to join his regiment, heard at Brigade Headquarters what they were doing, and hurried to find them. He climbed the hill, and found their victorious remnant. He took command of them — the doctor and the wounded must have been glad to see him — and made his dispositions to withdraw. As the advance had been, so was the retiral. Both were conducted according to plan. They went back, I was told, under covering fire from alternate platoons, as steadily as if the occasion had been a Brigade field-day. The dead, of necessity, were left on the hillside and on the conquered crest of the hill, but the subaltern brought back the living.

Nor was there any more fighting, for the Mohmands had had enough. A day or two later they brought in some prisoners they had taken, and accepted whatever terms were offered.

But the regiment was not wholly satisfied with the way things had gone. They were angry at having had to leave their dead, and still more angry when the newspapers described the affair as an ambush. They had fought a battle according to plan, and reached their objective against

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heavy odds. Was that an ambush ? The last regiment on earth to walk into an ambush would be the Guides.

And as I listened to the story I saw again that the hero was a kind of artist. He gave to human behaviour the finish and the full design of a work of art. Judge conduct by an aesthetic standard — as in the Icelandic sagas it is judged — and heroism becomes life in significant form. The hero is not admirable because he has saved his Colonel's skin, or held the bridge to Rome, but because he has been willing to accept a conclusion to his life that is in conformity with his character or function. He has achieved a pattern. *Decorum est.* . . . Perhaps life in all its activities should be judged by an aesthetic standard. The moralist imposes too close a regimen, and fails to perceive that what is sauce for the gander may be venom for the goose. The stoning of stray cats and the repetition of dirty words are venial in little boys, but disgusting in a quinquagenarian spinster. It is a matter of consistency, an aesthetic problem. Let the wanton perch on any knee, but fidelity in a wife will show more prettily than a Peruvian emerald in her ear. Should a burglar steal and a policeman chase him, it is proper in them both ; they shall be judged on their merit. Let a Prime Minister endanger the Empire to win election for his party, and he shall not be regarded as a good man, a wise man, or a statesman, but as a politician. Virtue must watch its figure lest it grow ungainly and thereby lose its virtue, and a man, though he should avoid promiscuity — which is squalid, and therefore reprehensible — may find consistent with his humanity a course midway between that and the bigoted monogamy of the rhinoceros, the parrot, and the Patagonian cavy.

Then should I call the steward and order again three, four, no, six pink gins, and swim a little longer in the greenish pool to keep away the world and all its moral load ? But no ; for beachcombing is not my pattern. My peasant blood is idle by seasons only, and thickens

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then to work. I wear too grave a look to idle gracefully, and should anyone be more curious about the fashion of my features he may find an exact description by James Joyce, in the opus called *Finnegans Wake*. Here is the entry : ' He was sair sair sullemn and chairmanlooking when he was not making spaces in his psyche, but, laus ! when he wore making spaces on his ikey, he ware mouche mothst secred and muravyingly wisechairmanlooking.' Only a dying beachcomber would look like that — or a vagrant anhydrous in the morning after debauch — and though I would dearly like to live upon some idle strand, I know my incapacities. So I dressed again, and to harden myself against the world, provoked discussion with a politician from the Antipodes.

Australia, I said, reminded me of Giotto's O, though it was not so well drawn. A circumference of patently sincere endeavour that enclosed enormous emptiness, I explained.

The politician grew righteously indignant, and told me all about it. Australia, he said, so far from being a desert, was the richest country on earth. Once, it was true, it had included some small patches of comparatively arid soil, but even these, as the result of irrigation and scientific farming, now produced a few million bushels of wheat; a multitude of pure merino lambs ; pedigree cattle of every description ; silkworms and wallabies in still-increasing profusion ; jackaroos and brumbies of the handsomest variety ; bushwhackers, wattle, and dingoes in gratifying abundance.

' Do you employ much Japanese labour ? ' I asked.

Then he expounded the doctrine of White Australia.

I am relatively white myself— especially after a succession of late nights — but such exaltation and amplification of whiteness, as then I heard, created a faint revulsion. In America, in a train climbing slowly the Sierra Nevada, I listened once to three Californians, a Texan, and a gentle-

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man from Indiana. Their conversation hovered easily above superlatives, and I grew a little jealous of the splendour in which their lives were cast. But then a tall Australian joined the group, and presently all but he were silent. With the bounce and flourish of his hyperbole, the fanfaronade of his patriotism, no one might compete. In common ties of inferiority, fidgeting now and then, we digested the awful flavour of his magniloquence, and toward the Californians, the Texan, and the gentleman from Indiana my heart grew warm, as to modest little men who lived quietly in a plain and humble land. . . .

The sea was smooth, the Indian Ocean a ruffled plate of lapis lazuli upon a smooth round shoulder of the sunlit world. Pervading the ship was another warmth, of growing friendliness. A girl exclaimed, 'I could marry and be happy with almost any man I know.' An exaggeration, perhaps, but with a good core of truth in it. For with the majority of people, when you have come to know them, you can live on amiable terms. Not with all, of course. Not with Braggadocio from the Antipodes, or the woman with rings on her fingers who leaned across the table — revealing her full slack breasts and bony sternum — and fixing me with swimmy eyes declared in a hoarse voice, 'I can read your every thought !' Not all, but very many of the human race are pleasant creatures, though condemned to futile occupation. And a ship's company, strangers in Europe, becomes in a few thousand miles a society of friends from which one is loth to part.

Yet to see Bombay again was a pleasure, the Caucasian variety of its architecture, the white-shawled throng, and Bori Bunder splashed scarlet with the spitting of betel-nut juice. The first to greet me was Laloo Bhika, who had been my servant ten years before. I had not told him I was returning to India, nor could I discover how he had learnt of my arrival. With a familiar movement of his head and hands — a sideways movement of his leanly

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modelled head, a downward thrusting of **the hands** — he put off enquiry, and declared with finality in his voice, ' It was known.' So I enquired for the health of his wife and daughter, the well-being of his mango-trees, and said that I would probably see him again before I left Bombay.

I did. For when in the evening I went to the house where I was staying I found my clothes unpacked, and Laloo laying out a shirt. How long, he asked, was I going to remain in India ?

' About two months, I think.'

' Here in Bombay ? '

' No, I'm going to Jaipur, and Agra, and then to Assam.'

' Very good.'

I sat down and Laloo unlaced my shoes. He looked up and said with a deprecating smile : * I need a little money. Not much. Ten, fifteen rupees, to buy other clothes.'

' There's nothing wrong with the clothes you're wearing, is there ?'

' It is more cold in Agra. I need one warm suit.'

' But who said you were coming with me ? '

' You will need a servant, sir. I said in my country, " I go to meet my old sahib. I shall be with him all the time he is here. There is no one else who knows him so well." '

' That's all very fine, but——'

' Yes, sir. It is all right.'

I had meant to travel economically, without a servant, but Laloo's will was stronger than mine. I let him adopt me, and boasted of his fidelity. Someone suggested that his mango-trees might not have been bearing well of late, but I answered, ' Fidelity has many roots,' and turned to my other neighbour at the dinner-table.

She was an Indian girl, a film actress, her beauty drawn with the certainty of Ingres, but with more delicacy. Her colour was the perfection of Oriental pallor, her eyes a luminous brown and gently quick. Her lips were exquisitely modelled, precisely painted, and her chin the

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nonpareil. She wore a sari of rose-red silk with a silver braid ; and she was intelligent. She lamented two things : the lack of a respectable tradition in the Indian theatre, and the affection of Indian audiences for mere verbosity. You may not indicate a sentiment, she said. You must plainly state it, and then so largely amplify it, repeat it, elaborate and enlarge it that you have no time left for action ; by the excess of words alone, a film might last for three interminable hours.

Comedy, she said, was not appreciated in India. Her audience was incurably sentimental and addicted to romantic tragedy. The most popular of recent films had been built upon the story of Radha and Krishna ; to which, in European literature, the nearest parallel is, perhaps, the story of Patient Griselda. A woman, whose husband treated her with unceasing brutality and elaborate contempt, continued most stubbornly to feed her love on cruelty and neglect ; and after two and three-quarter hours of masochistic devotion was rewarded—upon the death of her husband—by the mystical union of their souls. This agonising drama, she said, had opened the heart and purse of all India.

But she had hated the playing of such a part, and was reconciled to it only when she fell ill, and in the misery of post-malarial depression could simulate, without much effort, the necessary meekness. She was very sensibly concerned with the problem of how to enliven and improve the taste of her audience without incurring the reformer's likely reward of poverty ; and she described her studies.

I listened with all my eyes. She spoke well and prudently of other matters, and had she been less lovely I might have remembered more of what she said. On the other hand, I might not have listened so long.

There were two young men who appeared to be her devoted friends. One was a Mahomedan, the other a Hindu. I spoke to them, rather heavily at first, about India's new Constitution, and platitudinously remarked on

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the need for good-will. 'But between you **and** us,' said the Mahomedan, 'there will never be good-will.'

'No, never !' said the Hindu, and offered **a** match for my cigarette.

'We are entirely different, and we must always be antagonistic,' exclaimed the Mahomedan. And calling **a** waiter, begged me to have another drink.

'But surely,' I protested, * we can learn to understand each other, to be tolerant——'

'No, it is impossible !'

'The differences between us are too deep. They are spiritual.'

'They are chemical.'

'In any case, they are ineradicable.'

They surrounded me with kindness, and the longer we talked about our mutual ill-will, the friendlier we became. I said I was going to Jaipur, and immediately they offered me introductions to this person and that, who would look after me while I was there. They disputed about measures for my comfort, and finally promised that a Minister of State should be my guardian ; who with Oriental hospitality lent me a motor-car and a riding-beast: a Rolls-Royce to be exact, and to be boastful, an elephant.

XVIII

RAJPUT WEATHER

THE city of Jaipur is like a scene from an Oriental masque, set with gorgeous but slightly faded properties, and peopled by an expert multitude of actors — leisurely moving and gaily costumed — who play their piece in such rude innocence that none requires an audience. But should spectators come, their first impulse will be to exclaim and clap their hands; which is an effect that cities and their citizens do not often produce.

Between rose-red buildings the streets are very broad and dense with sunlight. There is a constant procession and passing of little tented carts, a meeting of citizens rainbow-hued, the flamingo flame of a pagri between camels loftily undulating. Here are three women in dull red garments, and two in rose and dusty violet. There is a group as splendid as orange-trees and toward them come others radiant in lemon-yellow. Bearded and comfortable, a peasant with a blue-and-white turban sits on the tail of a thick-wheeled cart that is drawn by a pair of humped and dove-grey bullocks. There, walking proudly and alone, is a young man in tight white trousers and a flower-brocaded tunic. On the pavement, sleepy and secure, stand the sacred bulls among innumerable small hillocks of golden grain, green vegetables, and scarlet peppers. The little pony-carts, like tiny pavilions, seem from a distance to be

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carrying, not men, but a loose-tied bunch of red or yellow peonies, or cornflowers bright as the sky. There a tall camel, his head swaying high above the moving colour, looks down with supercilious eye on goldsmith and silver-smith and a poor man whose shop is spread between the roots of a tree. And over all is the burning blue of the sky and the dazzle of the sun.

A land of chivalry, of careless opulence, and poverty plumed like birds of paradise. Tales of stubborn fighting, of soldier's pride and woman's beauty, are the staple of its history. *A wall may give way*, says the proverb, *but a Rajput stands fast*; and with more inclusive arrogance, with a simplification of pride that bursts like a cannon-ball from bombastic muzzle, they will exclaim and explain: *I was suckled by a Rajput woman*.

Monuments to their pride are desolate cities and dusty palaces that enclose innumerable courtyards, halls of audience, temples and fountained gardens and lesser palaces. Swordsmiths you may find in them, still at work; drowsy attendants in armoury and library; in the shadow of a garden musicians playing idly on flute and drum; guardians of the royal carpets asleep on a mountain-pile of rugs from Turkestan and Persia. Their princes have not always ruled well, but in their minds was nothing meagre or basely utilitarian. Their common thought was characterised by a splendid nimety, and their happiest inventions were naturally extravagant. Fantasy came as godmother to all their flamboyance, and so upon the land, over strength and much virtue, lies the charm of fairy-story. At Amber in the morning, on the ramparts of a castle that diadems a hill with towers and terraces and marble courts; in the street at noon, before the Hall of the Winds, that miracle of soaring balconies and masonry more intricate than lace; on the maidan when the dry turf drums to the gallop of the polo ponies, and the night comes swiftly, and the jackals howl at the setting of the sun — here is a kind of

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sorcery, a splendour like the brightness of the moon, that puts out all other stars. Had I seven lives, I think I would live three in Hindustan.

But to all parts of the earth progress comes like a storm of fertile dust, to propagate the future and obliterate the past. From the dead magnificence of Amber I returned on my elephant — riding in lonely grandeur and acute discomfort—and the Minister to whom I had been recommended took me to see Boy Scouts in camp. As Boy Scouts they were good. Their tents were neat and clean, they had made a lot of ingenious utensils out of old tins, and bits of stick, and pieces of string. They ran hither and thither, and gave the Scout cry, and jumped over poles. They could recite the Scout's law and promises; and the Minister, with a mixture of dignity and affability most proper to the occasion, congratulated them on their performance. As Scouts they were good, but as Rajputs incongruous. Their mothers, in the saffron robe of death, had leapt into the flames rather than fall into the hands of their enemies ; their fathers had made *Rajput* a synonym of reckless chivalry ; but the children held hands round a camp-fire and sang a chirrupy little song about doing good deeds with a smile. They would make better neighbours than their ancestors, but leave posterity a duller story.

And then I found myself in a club which was so exactly like any one of forty English clubs that there would be no point in mentioning it, except for the curious fact that all its members were Indian. I was the only European there, and in a little while I began to wonder whether my Aryan blood had not been vitiated by Europe; for my Rajput hosts were far more nicely habituated to club life than I shall ever be. They had not only the manner, but the mannerisms. There was the senior member, plump and easy, who detached himself from a conversation with the apologetic murmur, 'Bridge, I think.' At which a couple of his juniors made polite but laughing reference to

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his luck at the table, and he, stooping a little to light his cigar, said with a smile, 'It gets more and more expensive to live up to my reputation.' There was the hearty member, whose entrance was hailed with a calling of waiters and a great dispute as to who should pay for drinks. He was a famous shikari, newly back from the jungle, and he told his story with a jocular description of discomfiture in the chase, submitting with loud good-humour to the ragging of his friends. There was the member in a hurry, who came in and picked up a paper and put it down again without reading it. He made three remarks: one courteous; one irrelevant; the third, 'I've got to be at So-and-so's in half an hour,' and refusing a drink, went out again. There was a young soldier, a subaltern in the cavalry of some neighbouring Native State, who prettily concealed interest in his profession by self-depreciation. There was the member with a conviction, a charming person, gentle and mildly melancholy, who took me into a corner and told me what was wrong with the world. The basic fault, he said, lay in the confusion that existed with regard to education. There was education on the one hand, instruction on the other. These were entirely different things, but in the vulgar mind they were identified, and by the official mind they were not differentiated. The result, of course, was intellectual chaos. Did I not agree that the sooner a dividing line was drawn between education with its principles, instruction with its proper system, the better it would be for everyone ?

I did indeed. By that time I was in the mood to be appreciative, and his discovery shone with the light of revelation. I applauded him warmly, and we pursued the topic with growing animation. Illumined by it, we explored the whole world, and in no time healed the ancient wounds that Britain had inflicted upon India. Our conclusion was generous : there had been faults on both sides. We drew breath, and were prepared to continue

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the discussion, when we discovered that except for ourselves the lounge was empty. Our fellow-Rajputs had all gone home.

A day or two later I went to Agra, and to Fatehpur Sikri, that explosion of imperial vanity which reduces the exhibitionism of modern plutocracy to the trifling display of a yokel dressed for market. Akbar, the Great Mogul, built Fatehpur Sikri to celebrate the birth of a son. With magnificence too multiform to catalogue, in beauty too intricate to describe, he built it at none knows what cost, but unhappily chose a site where there was no water, and within fifty years it was deserted. It is nearly four hundred years old, and looks like new. It has hardly been used, and sandstone is perdurable.

Shah Jahan, the grandson of Akbar, built a new city at Delhi, plating his roofs with silver and enthroning himself on solid gold. He built also the Taj Mahal, to entomb his queen. It should be looked at from a little distance. To examine it too closely is to become weary of chrysolites and cornelians and all the pretty stones with which every wrinkle in the over-wrought marble is conscientiously inlaid. But from a couple of hundred yards away, in the early morning, the Taj is unafflicted by its wealth and hardly dimmed by all the guide-books. Look at its reflexion in cool water, between the cypress-trees, and you may still see in it the epicedium of all women who were beautiful, were loved, and died. It must not be thought, however, that Mumtaz had only beauty to recommend her, or that the Emperor's passion was an indication of any tragic brevity in their life together. She bore him fourteen children. . . .

A lean and filthy Mahomedan, snivelling and snuffling, bubbling vilely at the nose, besought me to watch the antics of some little brown birds that sat on a pole he carried, like starlings on a fence. On the ground beside him was a small brass cannon, and I hoped they could fire it.

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I was foolish, of course, but I had never seen a cannon fired by a Java sparrow, so I said I would watch their performance.

They were well-trained birds, and flew hither and thither to retrieve small sticks that the wretched Moslem concealed in a rose-bush. They made a nice pretence of knowing something about arithmetic. Then their insanitary owner stuck a wafer on my forehead, breathing pestilence as he did so and spraying me with the germs of Mahomedan influenza. He threw a sparrow into the air. It fluttered down and neatly detached the wafer. But the germs were more active than the birds and I could feel them already at work. They were colonising my pharynx, they were breeding in their millions in the tender hinterlands of my nose. With decreasing interest I watched a sparrow fly, with a fuse in its beak, to the loaded cannon. There was a reasonably loud bang, but the birds and I heard it with indifference. Gloom assailed me, and hatred of the Moslem.

In India the most trifling distemper may show extravagant symptoms, and I fell ill with a violent fever, with cold water in the marrow of my bones, with aching of the joints and nausea and defluxion of the bowels; but a doctor said there was nothing much wrong with me, and yawned when I told him of prodigious sweating and the curious disflavour of my mouth that made even soda-water taste like hot grease. Laloo Bhika looked after me, and was more sympathetic. He had been in Agra before, he said, with a sahib who fell ill of dysentery, and lay six weeks, and was supposed to be dead before he grew better. I had, as I thought, a good many symptoms of dysentery, and I found Laloo's conversation dispiriting. Though very fond of India, I did not want to die there, where death is apt to be a more violent dissolution than in the gradual climate of my own country. I would rather a slow thickening of the arteries than the sudden concourse of all my vital spirits through the interstices of inflamed intestines. And thinking about death I recalled a paragraph in a newspaper which

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told of the finding, by certain villagers, of a dead bull in a canal. They hauled it ashore, and sent for the chamar, the flayer, to remove the hide, which might be worth a few annas. Having stripped the animal, the chamar perceived that its stomach muscles had been carefully stitched together, and further investigation disclosed, in the body of the dead bull, a human corpse. A simple village murderer had found a new way in which to get rid of the evidence.

But ingenuity and pretty devices have always been characteristic of India. There was once a king of Golconda who entered the town of Masulipatam riding on a sort of pantomime horse — or rather a pantomime elephant — and within its framework were nine prostitutes, four for the legs, four for the body, and one was the trunk.

About the second or third day of my distemper I began to wonder if it might be due to ill-will of the goddess Kali, whose shrine I had visited in the old palace of Amber. I had for long thought frowningly of Kali, for she is represented as wearing a necklace of skulls and dancing on the chest of Shiva. But in Amber it had suddenly occurred to me that she might be the symbol of Rebel Woman jumping on the corpus of the Ever-Conservative Husband, and because it is a good thing to dance on Conservatism — once a year or so — I followed into her shrine a man who was about to sacrifice a white cockerel to her. And when he struck off the cock's head, I deeply salaamed. But Kali, perhaps, had resented my interpretation of her character? My temperature went up again.

But I recovered in time, and went thinly to Calcutta, and thence to Shillong, which is the seat of provincial government in Assam. From the windows of a leisurely train I looked at Bengal, and felt the sensation of having seen it all before, of knowing by heart this rich green landscape, with its palm-trees and lush crops, and hornbills on the rail of a bridge. Those tiny hamlets, brown and populous, half hidden by the glowing jungle, had from

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boyhood been familiar. . . . In a book, of course. A book with spidery lithographs and brightly coloured plates of India in the days of John Company, when the English with nothing in their hearts but greed and bravery went out to shake the pagoda-tree, and died at the second coming of the rains or lived like nabobs to a ripe and purple age. Colours were brighter then, before the twilight of social conscience and hypocrisy, and their pictures of Bengal were vivid as nature itself.

To make an empire is like wooing a wife, an occupation so enthralling that the mind has no time to think about the heavier days of marriage and imperialism. Job Charnock founded Calcutta with the help of three families of weavers and a money-lender ; a simpler and more agreeable occupation than ruling with justice, or some appearance of it, a population of one and a half million people.

We crossed the Brahmaputra in the early morning, a fish-eagle flying slowly above the cumbrous ferry. Then uphill to Shillong by a winding road that all day climbs through jungle and over the bald brow of a mountain, with a halt at noon for beer in the dusty village of Nong-poh, where, as the guide-book says, *the famous buildings are the Nong-poh Restaurant, the P.W.D. Inspection Bungalow, and the Telegraph Office.* By day the jungle is like intricate green walls or a wind-tossed sea that breaks on a precipice and falls, an emerald flood, into vast ravines; and by night a blackness lit sparsely, as though with green or yellow jewels, by the watchful eyes of wild animals. But the forest grows thinner, and the trees change, as though you had climbed into northern Europe, from jungle-growth to conifers. Near the summit of the range, on high downs, Shillong is built among pine-trees ; and the roads are populous with hill coolies insignificant beneath their enormous loads of cut grass or wood, with Gurkha soldiers, and blue-mantled Khasi women bearing great cone-shaped baskets full of oranges.

XX

HOLIDAY IN ASSAM

THE most interesting person in Shillong was in prison. Her name was Gaidi Liu. She was a hill woman from the great ranges in the eastern part of Assam, a member of one of the many tribes called Nagas, who are brave and merry people, and were lately head-hunters. Gaidi Liu was in prison because she had been a rebel and the priestess of a new religion. With two other women — mean and petty malefactors by their appearance — she occupied a room that was scrubbed hideously clean, and naked but for three wooden beds. Its emptiness must have tormented her when she remembered the rich and smoky plenishing of her Naga hut, with its rack of spears, red blankets, and the mithun heads, the full cupboard, and the cooking-pots.

I had seen photographs of her, taken by a political officer before her crimes were known, and they showed a tall and handsome girl, with eyes looking boldly at the mountain light. She had full lips, a gallant face with good bone beneath, and black hair cut in a heavy fringe, bare to the sun. She stood straight and slender as a young tree.

But when she came into the prison-yard she stood heavy and without movement. She was fat, she hung her head. She wore a white cotton shawl, caught closely round her head and covering her to the ankles. Her face was visible only as a flat triangle. Its native brown had paled to a dull

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yellow, and her once-bold eyes looked at the ground or lifted in a quick frightened slant. Her spirit was cowed, her body heavy as a stalled beast. But her stillness, as she stood, was a tragic stillness, not bestial apathy, and in her eyes, when they fluttered open, was the look, not of a wild animal caught and caged, but of human misery. She may have loved her scarfed and painted gods; she had certainly loved freedom.

Her story began when a man called Jadanand, in the high hills above Manipur, made out of clay an idol that he named Bishnu, and another that was known simply by the Naga word for Goddess. Gaidi Liu served in their temple. At that time there was disquiet in the hills, and the tribes were quarrelling, for the Kabui Nagas had remembered an old prophecy that said a great king would arise among them, and in the plains it was common talk that the British raj was waning. Jadanand the god-maker was ambitious. His idols grew more exigent, their appetite increased, and in surrounding discord their fame was magnified. The present of a few eggs had been enough to please them in the beginning, but in a little while sheep and goats were being sacrificed. Presently from the neighbouring villages Jadanand demanded a tribute of mithun, the broad-fronted hill cattle that among the Nagas are not only cows, but currency, and currency of the highest denomination. Some of the villages grumbled at the levy, but Jadanand got his mithun, and fear of his gods spread far and wide.

British authority was by this time uneasy about Jadanand, but uncertain as to what charges could be brought against him. There was no law against god-making, unless the gods opposed themselves to civil power. But authority took a chance and, arresting Jadanand, detained him for examination. Then tongues were loosened, for a priest in prison is no longer terrifying, and witnesses came forward to prove that Jadanand was a murderer.

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Some months before his arrest it had been reported that three Manipuri traders had disappeared in the hills. They had gone out to gather betel leaves and never returned. No trace of them could be found, and it was thought they had been drowned in a flooded river or killed by a tiger. But now the truth was told, and the manner of their death described in detail. They had slept in Jadanand's house, and wakened to find their murderers at the door. Bishnu and the Goddess, grown powerful on the flesh of cattle, would be stronger still on the meat of human sacrifice. That was logic. The murderers, moreover, were a little drunk at the time, and therefore had enthusiasm as well as logic to inspire them. The Manipuris were chopped up small.

When Jadanand was made prisoner, the political officer who accompanied the column had seen Gaidi Liu — and taken photographs — but had not thought there was any reason for arresting her. She was young and pleasing to the eye. The boldness of her gaze was very like the bravery of innocence, and the political officer did all that anyone could expect of a man when he gave her some good advice and warned her to keep better company in future. But now the witnesses against Jadanand declared that Gaidi Liu had assisted at the murder of the three Manipuris, or at least been privy to it. So while preparations were being made to hang Jadanand, another column was sent out to look for Gaidi Liu, and her long flight began.

The column consisted of a company of Assam Rifles, who are Gurkhas, a hardy, skilful, and very mobile force. They are adept alike in mountain and jungle warfare. They will march for a week without transport, they are swifter by far than any regular troops. If they could not catch her, then no regiment on any Army List in the world would make her prisoner. They set out with easy confidence, quick-stepping on the uphill paths.

But Gaidi Liu was a shadow in the hills, an echo of

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defiance in the valleys. For months they pursued her, and the sweating soldiers, panting up narrow and precipitous tracks, bending under a roof of wet green branches, found nothing but innocent villages and tongue-tied Nagas who would scarcely admit they had ever heard of her. But all the hills, save that on which the column halted, were alive with her name, and dreams of rebellion rose where she had hidden like the steam of their cooking-pots. There could be no peace so long as she was at liberty.

The long months of her pursuit became a year, and still she was not caught. Column after column went out, and came back weary and defeated. Then news was brought that she was on her way to a certain village, and yet another company took up the chase. They climbed a hill, and threaded a tunnel through the trees, and came to a tall stockade. The village was walled with stakes of sharpened bamboo, the gate was barred. Gaidi Liu was there.

The officer in command, though wary of ambush, elected a bold policy, and when his Gurkhas had broken an entrance through the stockade, he led them forward. The place was a warren of intersecting narrow lanes, but almost deserted of people. They found the populace gathered round a house at the far side of the village, in the doorway of which stood Gaidi Liu. No one moved, no one spoke, and in utter silence the officer went forward to arrest her. Not a spear was thrown, but all waited, tautly expectant, as though for a miracle to happen, and Gaidi Liu cried something in her own tongue. But no miracle ensued, and dumb with amazement the villagers saw her surrender.

She had told them that the soldiers were powerless against her, and if she pronounced certain words their rifles would fall and their strength vanish. But no rifle clattered to the ground, no Gurkha swooned. Her power was disproved, and Gaidi Liu led captive from the hills. She was tired and travel-stained from her last flight, and her only request was to be allowed to bathe.

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She was a rebel, and in all likelihood a murderess; but she was a gallant creature, and the hills she lived in, the green slopes down which she fled, are spacious and very lovely. The prison at Shillong is ugly and most gaolishly clean, the meagre yard in which she is allowed to walk is blinded by a wall. And Gaidi Liu is fat, her companions are not rebels and god-makers, but sneak-thieves and petty brawlers. Her eyes are afraid, as what eyes would not be afraid that had no more hope of seeing roads reaching to a far horizon and water ruffled by the wind? Jadanand, who was hanged, was luckier than she.

The Nagas meet death with equanimity and live with gusto. Their appetite is remarkable and their palate curious, for among their considered delicacies are flying foxes, white ants, and dogs. During the last war they supplied a Labour Battalion which went to France, and on its way across India ate every pariah dog in every station at which the troop train halted, and a washerman's donkey as well. If an elephant dies near a Naga village, they leave it for a few days, to let the flavour improve, and then the whole village surrounds it and they eat till everyone is exhausted.

This diet, of flying foxes and elephant well-hung, may contribute not only to a fine physique, but to a bold and humorous temper. To us whose lives are purposive and haggard with desire of some lame effigy of virtue, it seems unnatural that a people who won their notoriety by head-hunting, and whose minds must shudder with the incessant fears of animism, should be plump and jocular, loud-laughing and unafraid of death; but the Nagas are a merry folk, though admittedly their idea of a joke is primitive. I nearly got broken bones to satisfy their humour.

I was staying in Shillong with my brother-in-law, who took me thence, through tea-gardens and the Naga hills, to the Native State of Manipur, on the edge of Burma. A downward journey to alluvial plains out of which, like

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islands, rose abruptly the wooded crests of the hills that had been drowned. It was rice country, with here and there a tea-garden or wattle-and-daub village of tin-roofed huts and a slovenly drab bazaar where scores of children, pot-bellied, played in the dust, and tiny cattle stood listlessly. All the children suffered from enormous spleens, and the pretty little fawn-coloured cows had been diminished by the ceaseless attention of scrub bulls. The Assamese were once a vigorous and warlike people, but they have either degenerated or discovered in opium and inertia sources of contentment as deep as the illusion of endeavour and the hope of progress. In A.D. 640 the Chinese traveller Hsuan Tsang described them as fierce in their demeanour, but upright and studious. Nowadays the Assamese farmers work no more than two months in the year, and I heard no mention of probity as a feature of the race. They are much troubled with internal parasites; and perhaps the climate has deteriorated.

In a village called Nowgong we walked for a little while on a river-bank in a slight odour of assorted excrement, and dined off a ropy chicken in a dak bungalow whose caretaker was an opium addict with a cleft palate. On the following day we came into tea country, into low-pruned level plains of bright-green bushes interspersed by villainous roads, lurching bridges of logs and brushwood, and a population of coolies from Orissa and Bihar, who are well paid at six annas a day, for they grow their own rice and find no need to work more than half the week. Their employers, the Scotch or English planters, lead a harder life than they, in solitude that now is bludgeoned by the sun and now a swamp in the cascading rain, with surly-secret labourers at their side, malaria in their blood, and little enough pay to compensate their disabilities. But they have their clubs, where once a week or so they gather — coming twenty miles over roads as rough as winter in the English Channel — to mate their gossip and circulate brave

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bawdy tales and *boire bien par toute la compagnie*, like Sir Christmas in the carol.

We arrived at such a club, and drank heartily with fat red-faced men, or lean men as red as the others, in a bar that was little better than a shanty under a whitewashed tin-and-beam roof, decorated with photographs of polo ponies, advertisement of ponies for sale, and a classical picture of three callipygian nudes on the right-hand wall. At the other end of the building was a room more comfortably furnished, and there sat the planters' wives, five or six of them, discussing plans for the celebration of Christmas, which was only a week or two away. Voices in the bar grew louder, till conversation was like the surge and reverberation of waves in a windy cave, while in a corner were three members singing lustily a homely song. *Brrurp !* came the rollicking sound of an eructation, and someone shouted in mockery, *Hum-ne do seer khaya*, the Indian's grateful comment after belching : I have eaten four pounds. I caught fragments of one story and another : the dog with the coldest nose in London, the man who raised his typist's salary. The barman sweating, high light on his brown face, but ice clinking coldly in the glass. Someone was telling me about two band-boys of the Assam Rifles, mere children, who made a little money carrying golf-clubs for their officers, and gave a party in a Naga village, drinking Naga beer out of bamboo till they staggered home like veterans. Said the sergeant at the quarter-guard : ' You're drunk ! '

' Nothing of the sort,' said the band-boys.

' How many fingers do you see ? ' asked the sergeant.

' Four,' said the boys.

' Stand on one foot,' said the sergeant; and stiffly they balanced like cranes in a marsh.

' Who's on sentry at the gate ? ' asked the sergeant.

' Rifleman Bhim,' said the children.

' Who did you pass on the road ? '

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' A man on a bicycle.'

' Did you see the Maharajah's elephants ?'

' See them ?' exclaimed the band-boys. ' See them !
We've been riding his bloody elephants !'

More whisky. One for the road, a tiger-frightener, and the damnedest last. But the trio in the corner had become a choir, and their song was spreading wider and more loudly, till from the other end of the building came the cool water-dropping notes of a piano and women's voices in a carol:

The first Nowell the angel did say

Was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay. . . •

A moment of silence in the bar, heads turning to the music and eyes astonished. Then with voices leaping like hunters at a fence, in a ferment of emotion, the planters joined the chorus. Heads back, a light on their scarlet faces, the whisky starting like fountains from their waving glasses, they roared against the heathen night :

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, NOWELL !

Born is the King of Israel !

Burra pegs all round, and join the ladies. A tiger-frightener and one for the road. *On the road to Mandalay, where the flying fishes play !* Dicky drove his car into a nullah and a herd of wild elephant came and stamped it flat. Going home next year, home the year after, home when I can afford it and God knows when that will be. Here she goes ! Racing at Jorhat, fever in Tezpur, the pujas in Shillong. A heartache, a headache, and a bellyache of a country, but if you've got to live in India you can't choose better than Assam. It's the damnedest last, the very damnedest last. There's a fellow in North Lakhimpur, he comes from Aberdeen. ' Aiberdeen and twelve miles roon' ! *By the banks of the silvery Dee, You can see my lassie and me I'* See you at Christmas, see you in Dibru, see you at Golaghat. Happy Christmas, happy New Year. *They*

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lookèd up and saw a star, Shining in the east, beyond them far.
That was the time I drove eleven miles in bottom gear
because there was a tiger in front of me and he wouldn't
get off the road. Buvez bien par toute la compagnie !
And the dawn comes up like thunder out of China 'cross the
bay. . . .

Like thunder indeed, like the vertigo of an earthquake,
but the night was worth it; and the morning took us
nearer to the hills, and climbing into the hills was like
swimming upward into a green shade.

The road steps loftily over a river whose pools are full
of leaf-reflexion and dappled light, whose pebble-reaches
glimmer in a verdant dusk. It rises under a canopy of
trees, steeply and boldly swerving, through a green twilight
and over dazzling intersections of the sun, to a mountain-
level, stilljungle-walled, from which are visible range after
range of hills in their rough bright coats. It is a road so
splendid that you lose desire of any destination. To arrive
becomes superfluous; it is enough to go slowly on and a
little farther.

At a corner of the forest, between the trees and a river,
we overtook a pair of Nagas running swiftly with long
tufted spears in their hands. They were tall and muscular,
naked but for a small black apron and a twist of cane below
the knee. We passed a score of them sitting under the
trees, drinking, with spears about them and red-and-white
blankets. Then a group of runners, and one man solitary.
They were going to Kohima, a Naga village of eight
hundred houses packed closely on the top of a hill, to cele-
brate their harvest festival.

We stopped in a small cantonment near the village, and
the following morning set out on foot. The Deputy Com-
missioner for the district, when we told him where we
were going, shrugged his shoulders and said : ' Keep your
heads down when you get there. There's going to be a
bit of a riot either to-day or to-morrow.'

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'What sort of a riot?' I asked.

'They generally throw spears about,' he said.

The path grew narrower and climbed the hill. Unhappily I said to my brother-in-law: 'About this riot, Freddy. Do they throw spears at strangers, or only among themselves?'

'Oh, just at each other,' he said. 'A year or two ago there was a D.C. who got hit, but he saw the fellow who'd thrown the spear, and collared him and gave him a tremendous hammering. So then the fellow apologised, and explained that he hadn't meant to hit anyone, but he was a bit excited at the time, so the D.C. got a couple of bullocks and killed them, and gave a feast, and they had a regular party. They're very good fellows, the Nagas, and we've never had much trouble with them since they stopped head-hunting.'

We had with us a scarlet-blanketed dubashi, a two-tongued man, who halted to gossip with everyone we passed. On the lower part of the road there were a good many people, women laughing and men asprawl on the turf. Their harvest had been good and they were all in holiday spirit. There was going to be some fighting, they said, because of an old quarrel between the three clans of the village, but the general opinion was that nothing would happen before the morrow.

The path became a steep and stony climb, a gutter in the hill that deepened to a small ravine. Dense jungle on either side, and a canopy of green branches. Then we clambered up a rocky staircase that narrowed to a tunnel as the over-arching trees pressed closer and more thickly, and emerging from the tunnel we were suddenly confronted by a massive wooden door in a stockade of tall bamboo. The door was carved in high relief to show a Naga warrior, and, in a row above him, the heads he had taken.

The village was a labyrinth of dusty little paths between a confusion of houses, the most of them built of timber

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and grey thatch with a long overhang at the gable-end ; but others were wattle and daub, timber with a roof of corrugated iron or beaten-out kerosene tins. The outer half of the village was deserted except for little hairy black pigs that came charging down the lanes, and a few hens scratching in the dust. But suddenly we came into a crowd of people, men, women, and children, a cheerful noisy throng, who followed us to the house of an old man called Zeppely.

Zeppely had been many years in Government service and was a person of consequence. His house that day was *ginna*, or tabu, having been prepared for the festival, so we sat outside in a compound as richly untidy as the backyard of a slum cottage. Strips of meat, drying in the sun, hung from the eaves, and neighbour women held their children over the wooden fence to look at us. Four or five little boys were spinning tops on the hard ground, and a thin pretty girl crouched on a step and suckled her child. We were given stools and red blankets to sit on, and Zeppely squatted on a day-bed in the sun. He was enormously fat, and naked but for a blanket held carelessly round his rolling belly. His rough grey hair stood like a brush, and his eyes were wrinkled and puffy in a large Mongolian face. A simple vain old man, urgent in hospitality. We drank with him a cloudy liquor called zu. It was very strong and not unpleasant.

In another house we were received by a talkative plump woman, who gave us more zu, and parched grain. We sat in a kind of ante-room, whose walls were decorated with the heads of mithun and long racks of spears. Some of simple design for hunting, many with a heavy ornament of red woollen tassels, and others the elaborate shape of a tiltyard lance. In the inner room was a very good furnishing of chairs and cupboards, and black pots on a brander in the middle of the floor. The house was clean, but the inner part full of smoke.

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Then the crowd took us to a rickety bamboo structure in the middle of the village, and suggested that we climb to a lofty platform to enjoy the view. With some trepidation we mounted a dangling ladder, and from a narrow stage that swayed and trembled with our weight we admired the tremendous vista. All the country fell steeply from us, and rose again beyond enormous valleys to a vast circumference of hills, crowded together, rough-coated to their peaks with the bright jungle. It was magnificent, but we could have seen as much from the ground.

I said to Freddy : ' Why were they so insistent on our coming up here ? '

' It's their sense of humour,' he explained.

' I don't see the joke.'

' Well, they've given us a lot of zu — that stuff of Zeppely's was the strongest I've ever tasted — and now they hope we're going to fall. Stand still !'

' I'm all right.'

' Then try to look as though you're enjoying yourself. We'll stay here for a minute or two, and let them see we can take it. Are you sure you're all right ? '

' I'm having a splendid time.'

It was a long minute, while the Nagas with earnest up-tilted faces watched patiently for our downfall. They were still polite when carefully we made the descent, but visibly disappointed ; and the crowd dispersed.

Freddy is one of the creators of modern Assam, for he built the strategic road that links the two great valleys of the Surma and the Brahmaputra. A spectacular road that midway in its course evokes the kind of response more often associated with a work of art than with feats of engineering.

It begins in wildish country a few miles south of Shillong, in a highland landscape of pine-trees and granite boulders and a talkative brown stream. But in a little while the view is aggravated : great depths appear and far distances, the valleys deepen, opposing hills recede. Then the valleys

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are green gorges and tremendous chasms, the road a whip-lash cutting the dark cheek of a precipice. It turns a salient, is tilted against the sky so that its outer rim is a pencilled curve across the clouds, and swooping as though to gather speed, it leaps to the proximate mountain over a broken saddle that in fear and by multitudinous labour was built up with wall on successive wall of broad-laid masonry. On either side it looks down two thousand feet to green and misty glens so steeply sided that from the bottom the stars are visible at noon ; and beyond the saddle it cuts the solid rock to make a ledge that lies dark in the shadow of the chiselled mountainside.

Then it soars to a wild table-land, sour and savage, on which in their season the rains break with fierce extravagance. Cherrapunji, the wettest place on earth, lies twelve miles away across a black ravine, and when from the Bay of Bengal the monsoon drives its overladen clouds against the hard burnt edges of the mountains, the whole sky is split like a water-skin. Between April and September there is a rainfall of four hundred and thirty inches to flood the road and try its strength.

From the sullen table-land the road dips down, dropping and coiling, into warmer climates and green twilight of the jungle. Through an embrasure in the trees you may discern the watery plains of Sylhet, and jhils like a breathed-on silver. The air is still, an orange-grove is a dapple of gold among the leaves, and tall grass with an ostrich-plume stands motionless on the lip of a glen whose farther side is furred with the innumerable forest. The road has a roof of glimmering branches, and as though diving into a tropic pool you hold your breath against the air's warm pressure. Then, blazing white through the leaves, the pebble beaches of a river, and the narrowed stream as translucent as emeralds sliding snakily in their midst. High above the gorge an airy bridge carries the road to a huddling village and down to a steamy plain, a swamp of a country where the grass

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grows in a silver feather to the height of an elephant's head, and the houses are built on long stilts to hold them dry above the monsoon-flood.

The road that carved a cloudy ledge on the mountainside goes south on a broad embankment above the lapping water of a shallow sea.

It is a road that ties together an epic range of scenery like a skilful narrative, and in the serving of its purpose has already forgotten the labour that made it. Yet the labour was heroic. Near the summit, on precipice and bare rock, it was mountaineering to begin with, and men with plane-table and theodolite crawled gingerly on bamboo galleries that overhung the echoing gorge, the valleys full of moving cloud. An army of six thousand — hill men from the Khasi hills, from the highlands of Nepal and the North-West — laboured for half a dozen years, and every year were battered by the rains and thinned by cholera. Once in the worst of the monsoons four feet of rain fell in two days; and when cholera came, panic loomed behind. Tunnels were blasted in the rock to anchor the suspending cables of the aery bridge, and the rumour spread that they would be sealed with human sacrifice : that roused another panic. The rock-drillers were Pathans, and they were afraid of nothing, but their freedom with the wives of lesser men caused trouble enough. Malaria was a seasonal foe, and technical problems were of every kind and variety. But the road was made, and throughout Assam it is known, not proudly by some high-sounding title, but by the friendly name of Freddy's Road. In the army of six thousand who built it, Freddy and his bull-terrier were the only Europeans.

XX

THE TIBETAN BORDER

FROM the road I went north to the frontier, to the edge of the tribal country whose matted hills, where leeches hang as thickly as the leaves, make a no-man's-land between Assam and Tibet. Railhead is the little lonely station of Rangapara. The morning was white and misty when I got there, the station empty but for two or three figures shawled against the cold and still sluggish in their movement. Presently a car arrived, and we drove northward on a primitive road, bumping in the ruts and bucking over ridges. I heard a groan from the back seat, and looking round saw my diminutive Laloo — close-coiffed against the morning air as if he had toothache — crouched among the luggage with a witless look on his face. He had been thrown against the roof and stunned. I rode my seat as though it were a half-made pony. We were crossing a fog-shrouded plain, dark-shadowed with the crawling shape of the jungle.

The day cleared, and when the sun was high we came to the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow, a house standing pleasantly with groups of trees in a wide parkland. Near it are a couple of villages with long communal huts and a feral smell, their inhabitants a people called Daflas, whose language is spoken by two Europeans only, of whom the Deputy Commissioner is one.

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The Daflas are forest people. They have a jungly look, and carry the smell of wood-smoke and grease and a tiger's cage. Their features are Mongolian, many being merely brutal, some curiously androgynous, while others have the strange aspect of a faun. Their faces, from broad cheek-bones to narrow chin, are triangular, and their eyes, rising boldly from the inner canthus, sweep outward to the other corner in the shape of a tiger's claw. When they laugh, which they do readily and often, their expression is very anciently sylvan.

The men wear a skull-cap of woven cane, with a feather drooping to the rear, and their hair plaited into a fist above the forehead, skewered by a long brass pin. Some of them decorate this beak or fist of hair with a plume of glossy black feathers. The skull-cap is hard enough to be a serviceable helmet, and the bun of hair may also be protective. But its primary function is to make a home for the Dafla's spirit; and should it be cut off, his spirit will die.

Their clothes are makeshift, but their weapons admirable. They carry a dao and a dagger, often a bow, and arrows in a cylindrical bamboo quiver. The dao is a short straight sword whose everyday service is the cutting of wood and the clearing of jungle ; but it is equally suited for war or private homicide. Its two-handed grip is covered with closely woven cane, and a flat cane sheath contains it. Their small store of clothes is supplemented by necklaces, the commonest kind being a string of dirty yellow beads which appear to be heirlooms and are believed to be of ghostly manufacture. Each necklace has a fixed value, which everybody knows. I bought a particularly dirty one for twelve rupees. Its owner showed no reluctance in parting with an article of spiritual origin, and there was no bargaining ; its price was as definitely established as that of a five-pound note.

On the second day of my visit the Deputy Commissioner held a court of law and enquiry. I sat with him behind a

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large table, somewhat above the general level of **the room**, and partly enclosed by a wooden railing. An Indian clerk with an expression of fretful self-importance brought a pile of documents. He was followed by a handsome fat Bengali with very fine eyes.

Speaking in a great hurry he said, 'I have come, sir, to pay you compliments of the season. I also wish to offer some explanation of the summons I have received——'

'Wait till you're called,' said the Commissioner.

'But, sir, I have perfectly valid excuse——'

'I'll send for you when I'm ready to hear it,' said the Commissioner. The Bengali went out. 'We'll see some of the Daflas first.'

A village headman, with twenty-two followers, had come down from somewhere across the frontier, seven or eight marches away. They all came in. Daflas from the neighbouring villages, crowding the verandahs, leaned into the room over broad low window-ledges. Every window was packed with spectators, and the room held as many people as it could. Some were smoking a very rank and filthy-smelling tobacco. It was raining heavily, and their wet clothes were odorous.

The Commissioner talked to the trans-frontier villagers about their crops, their neighbours, and the incidence of disease in their country. Their crops were good and their people healthy, they said. They had come to buy salt, and iron, and necklaces ; and hospitably they desired the Commissioner to return their visit. Conversation grew general. The headman was a lean, yellow, nid-nodding old fellow with heavy wrinkled eyelids. His second-in-command, reddish brown in colour, stout and cheerful, wore a couple of broad green leaves skewered to the fist of hair above his forehead to keep off the rain. He looked like the Widow Twankey in a pantomime. Other men had pinned a little **tent** of newspaper over their top-knots. They closed in upon us as talk grew livelier, and came in behind the railing,

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and leaned across our shoulders. Some local notabilities, with red hornbill feathers in their caps, joined the party. Two or three times my right eye had a narrow escape from the long brass pins in their hair.

The Commissioner had told me that a Dafla who dies a violent death, who is killed in fight or the jungle, is thought to go to a heaven rather superior to that reserved for those who die in their beds. All of them, after death, have a long journey before them. Their paradise is seven marches away, and every march is beset by demons and much danger from wild animals, landslides, a sudden precipice, and the like. But a man who is moderately hardy and reasonably clever can outwit the demons and overcome the other perils, and has a very good chance of reaching one of the large and comfortable villages which are heaven. The warriors' village is furnished more richly than the other, but the difference is not so great that dwellers in the latter feel much envy.

It seemed to me that in this arbitrary division the Daflas who died in battle were going to suffer a great hardship in their after-life : there would be very few women in their heavenly village, for a woman's death is usually a domestic occurrence. So the Commissioner put this point to his visitors, and when, after much interruption, some of them understood our difficulty, they began to laugh. The quick-witted told their slower friends what the argument was about; and some were still puzzled. There was a lot of expostulation, of amusement at our expense, before they explained that my difficulty was no difficulty at all. A woman, they said, had as good a chance of being killed by a dao as any man. There was, indeed, a signal merit in killing a woman — a woman of a rival village — for women's work lay near the houses, and only a brave man would hunt in the shadow of his enemy's wall. There was, therefore, no reason to suppose that celibacy was a condition of the warriors' heaven.

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When this matter was settled, and the trans-frontier Daflas had gone, the fat Bengali reappeared, again importunate, but no longer confident. His voice was shrill, his gestures tremulous. Again he was dismissed, and I thought the Commissioner was being a little hard on him. But he was merely being paternal. The Bengali, a contractor, had ignored certain regulations governing terms of employment in a Frontier Tract, and was liable thereby to a heavy penalty and expulsion from the district. ' But he's not a bad fellow,' said the Commissioner, ' and if he gets a proper fright it'll do him more good than punishment; and save a lot of trouble. I'll let him sweat for another hour, and then give him a talking-to. That'll teach him.'

The first case was a wrangling affair, a complicated dispute about the responsibility for clearing a patch of jungle. The jungle had not been cleared, and both parties denied their fault and protested the negligence of the other side. Patiently the Commissioner heard their evidence, and then asked if they would be willing to take an oath ; and if so, what oath would be agreeable to them. They and their friends conferred, and having agreed that the matter might well be decided by an oath, retired to think of a suitable one.

This taking of an oath is a modified form of trial by ordeal. The litigants swear their complaint or denial on steel perhaps, or a tiger's tooth, and trust that supernatural power will reveal the liar. Once, when administering an oath on steel to a young woman suspected of adultery, the Commissioner had a narrow escape from the instant reaction of her conscience ; having bitten the blade she suddenly creamed and pitched the dao full at his head. ' But women never throw straight,' he said, ' and to save trouble I just pretended she had dropped it.'

I was told of an actual trial by ordeal. A Dafla, accused of killing his wife, said she had fallen off a bridge. The informer declared she had been pushed off. They agreed to put their stories to the test of boiling water, and arrangements

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were made for a public trial: ceremonial arrangements by the Daflas, precautionary by the Deputy Commissioner then in the Frontier Tract. Water was boiled in a thick section of bamboo, and into it the informer plunged the full length of his arm. He held it there for an appreciable time, and withdrew it none the worse. The water was re-heated, and the accused came forward. Before his hand had touched the water, it appeared to leap out and rush up his arm. He was badly scalded, and in spite of medical attention — a doctor was present — he subsequently died. On the following morning the informer admitted that his arm had been itchy during the night, but it was unmarked, unblistered, and he suffered no further discomfort. The account of this trial, its truth attested by the Deputy Commissioner and the doctor, is in the files at Charduar.

On the present occasion, however, the litigants elected a milder test. They were prepared, they said, to eat a little earth from a newly occupied grave. But even this trivial contest could not immediately be essayed, for they must wait till the sun was shining ; and the sky was low, the rain fell heavily. So I was spoiled of my chance to see some quiet ghoulishness, and truth emergent from it. A pity, for the opportunity is unlikely to recur.

After granting some applications for gun licences — flintlock and gaspipe guns — the Commissioner heard a dispute between women. One of them, grey-haired and thin, said the other had entered her house while she was engaged in a religious exercise, and the house in consequence was *ginna*, or *tabu*. The defendant, a little pert pan-chewing creature, said briefly there was nothing to show that the house was *tabu*, and how could she guess what the old woman was up to ? Then a third woman, plump and pretty, said a good deal about it. She had a baby on her back, which presently began to whimper. Deftly she brought it round to the front, and pushed its head under the cloth that covered her breast. The baby was silenced,

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but the mother talked on. Her prettiness was spoiled when she opened her mouth, for her teeth were blackened with betel-nut.

'What is her connexion with the case?' I asked.

'None at all,' said the Commissioner. 'She's merely an interested observer.'

He spoke to the women, and they went away in apparent satisfaction.

'I suggested a village council to settle the matter,' he said. 'The offence was admitted — the girl was probably a little drunk at the time — and all they have to do is decide what compensation the old woman should get. It won't be much, and they'll enjoy talking about it.'

Then came in a dismal company, a shabby group of jungle-dwellers, charged with poisoning a river for fish. Their accuser was a Forest Guard, a little gnome-like man with a slouch hat. His witnesses were an opium addict with pin-point eyes, as lean as a skull; a nervous man whose hands were shaking under the cotton shawl that concealed them; and a village headman who, to begin with, was very reluctant to speak.

The Commissioner's voice grew stern, his manner unfriendly. 'This is a put-up job,' he said. 'The Forest Guard says these two villagers saw the other fellows poisoning a river, and came to him and reported them. Why? Because they're public-spirited, honest sportsmen, and can't bear to see anyone breaking the law. They look like it, don't they? And did you ever hear of anyone showing public spirit in an Indian village? There's perjury on the surface of this business and persecution in the background.'

The six accused found a spokesman in one who looked like a natural. His hair was cut in a heavy fringe, he was wall-eyed, and his clothes were a few grey rags. But he spoke earnestly and well. Then in the prosecution's unwilling witness, the village headman, the dam of silence

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broke, and out came a flood of words and some unpleasant facts. It was he who had written the complaint, at the Forest Guard's insistence, and he related by what threats he had been frightened into misfeasance. He had been very thoroughly frightened. His fear was still apparent, but his anger had got the better of it. The Guard maintained a look of mongrel assurance, but his opium-eating witness spoiled an appearance of skeletal calm by nervous licking of the lips, and the third of the liars was visibly trembling.

' Case deferred,' said the Commissioner. ' The perjury's clear enough, but I'll have to make other enquiries to find out what's at the back of it all.' He spoke harshly to the Forest Guard ; then mildly asked, ' What's next ? '

A young and amiable Dafla desired permission to go to a certain village with three cows. A year before he had bought a wife, and promised eight cows for her. It was the second instalment of her purchase-price that he was now going to pay.

' Honest fellow,' said the Commissioner, and gave him his permit.

' She must be a good wife,' I suggested.

' Sometimes they'll pay as much as twenty cows for a woman,' said the Commissioner thoughtfully.

He was a bachelor. It is easier, perhaps, to be a bachelor in such circumstances as his. His district is enormous, and when he goes on tour he leaves civilisation behind him as soon as he crosses the border. For a month he may be marching in the wild confusion of the Himalayan foothills, on a track that overleans a precipice, fords by a dubious ledge a flooded river, goes darkly through a forest with leeches on every branch, and comes to its goal in a village that possibly is debating treachery. The danger and hardships are variable, only the leeches constant in their attention. They fall down the neck of an open shirt, insinuate themselves between the folding of a man's puttees, penetrate the eyes of a boot; and wherever they fasten are stubborn

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in their attachment. The Gurkhas of the Commissioner's escort have a way of scraping them off with a kukri. Salt and nicotine will also persuade them to loose their hold. The Daflas smoke tobacco-pipes that have a little bowl for collecting nicotine, which ordinarily they keep to use against leeches ; but sometimes, in a merry mood, they drink it.

Despite his celibacy the Commissioner's bungalow — and even his justice-seat — had a homely atmosphere. His mother and sister lived with him, and whenever his mother encountered some insuperable domestic difficulty, she brought it into court. A brisk voice would interrupt the legal argument, the group of spectators filling a window would be dispersed, and in the embrasure would appear a pleasant kit-cat of the Commissioner's mother. Would he come and rebuke the cook, in stronger terms than she herself might use, for his unpardonable extravagance in the matter of hens ? Had he remembered to write to Calcutta for his new shirts ? And what was the postal rate to France, for a letter and a small parcel ?

She was a charming woman who had spent most of her life in India, and whose vitality the years had nourished. Her memory was long. She had known Kipling as a young man in Lahore. Not a very popular young man, she said. He had no skill in social activities, and his appearance was unprepossessing. The officers of the regiments quartered there were horrified by his intimacy with private soldiers, and senior Civilians thought his stories and verses in the worst of taste. ' But after all,' she said, ' if he had been popular he wouldn't have had any time for writing, and if his aim had been to please a lot of elderly Civilians he would have bored everybody else. A young writer needs an irreverent mind and a bad complexion if he's going to do anything worth while.'

I left Charduar by a road of remarkable asperity. Driving-time was again the early morning, and under chilly

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clouds, low upon the earth, we bumped and banged, pitched, plunged, and heaved over such a pot-holed, tortured, and berutted track as I had never seen before. After ten or twelve miles I felt a strange uneasiness, a sensation of disorder that I could not diagnose. My stomach was unquiet, my head swam, there was a sombre taste in my mouth. I could not understand what was wrong with me.

Then, approaching us on the abominable road, I saw a battered and rickety bus. It rose and sank, and rolled from side to side. It wallowed like a trawler in Hoy Sound. And then I knew what the matter was. I was sea-sick.

I looked round and saw that my poor Laloo was worse than I. Much worse. And seeing that, I remembered the White Man's Burden. To the stars on your bugles blown — England, my England ! — I refrained from ejecting it. For the sake of our prestige I even lighted a cigarette, and smoked it to the end. Over a core of terrible unhappiness I held a front of arrogant though greenish complacency. 'Twas a belch on your bugles blown, England, my own !

In time we came to Tezpur, on the large undisciplined Brahmaputra, and after waiting two or three hours on the sandbank that serves as a quay, I boarded a river steamer. It was commanded by a white-bearded Mahomedan serang who looked uncommonly like a child's painting of Noah. He wore an orange coat, green trousers, and a white shawl. I was the only European passenger, and the view, like the steamer, was empty. After leaving the little bluffs at Tezpur we advanced into vacancy. A few pale shreds of land intruded to separate the broad uncoloured expanse of water from the colourless and enormous sky. There was neither fog nor sun. There was simply an absence of colour and an almost total lack of anything to be seen. Somewhere behind the viewless air the Himalayas thrust their enormous peaks into the sky. Somewhere there were trees, and people in bright mantles. But the sunless sky, falling like a curtain, concealed all.

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Now broad and now in narrow straits, the river ran between sandy shoal and benty dunes. Later in the day, the sandbanks showed more clearly. They were fawn or grey, the grey of an old donkey's hide. It was a desert scene. I looked for camels, but only ruminating buffaloes were visible. Here and there we stopped, for cargo and cooly passengers, at a black and lonely hulk anchored to the shore. The passengers were a chattering, dark-skinned, earthy crew. A few fish-eagles were hunting the water, and here and there a cormorant held out its wings to dry. Like shadows on the tawny sand were a few poor huts, some cattle, and their mortal keepers. On the skyline a growth appeared of low blue jungle, but we came no closer to it. Night fell as suddenly as though we had tumbled into a cellar.

I told the khitmutghar to bring a new bottle of whisky, for the dregs that he offered me had been watered. I dined off a hen that looked and tasted like damp wood, and cheese out of a piece of silver paper.

XXI

CATHAY AND THE WAY THITHER

THE Hooghly was the colour of new-cut lead, and the air above it a nacreous mist. We lay at anchor in the drowsy heat of early morning, and I stood by the rail to watch a country-boat come floating like driftwood on the making tide. A lean and delicate old man, in a cassock that hung loosely about his long thin legs, spoke with soft but eager invitation in my ear : ' Would you play a game before breakfast ?'

His voice had the rich accent of southern Ireland — an echo of youth that defied his pallor — and when I accepted the challenge he clapped his hands and exclaimed : ' Come on, then ! We'll have a great battle to start the day !'

We played a game of shuffle-board as earnestly as though we had been on the centre court at Wimbledon, and whenever the padre sent my puck spinning from the circle, his haggard face was creased with irrepressible delight and the melancholy of his eyes unhooded as though round the corner he had heard a fiddler bowing. From Calcutta to Shanghai we played twice a day ; at anchor off Coconada, in butterfly weather in the Bay of Bengal, under the Nicobars and the cloudy-amber shape of Sumatra, in the South China Sea, from the Paracel Islands to the Pescadores and the yellow mouth of the Yangtze, we played as if shuffle-board was our chosen love and elected office — the padre

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and I, the fat man, the captain or his chief officer — and so long as a game lasted the padre forgot his illness and thought he was regaining strength ; while the fat man, melting like a sudden thaw, wiped his sweat and with equal vanity believed that such mild exercise would reduce his weight.

The ship was not large and the passengers were few. The fat man might have held the balance against all the rest, for he was a magnificent figure of exceptional height and prodigious girth, scarlet of face, and curving like the green hill of Morven from neck to waist-line. Beside him the padre — who was really not a padre but a Christian Brother — was like a spirit housed in tissue-paper ; but when he was excited his rolling Irish voice was far louder than the fat man's, which had a squeak in it, a dubiety of note and temper. The padre had been forty-six years in India, teaching in a mission school, and thought himself lucky that in so long a time he had twice been home. His health had broken down at last, and a grateful pupil, grown prosperous on Catholic teaching, had paid for his voyage to Hong-Kong and back, to give him a holiday. He mentioned with youthful pride the money in his pocket, for he was not wont to have anything to spend on himself. Nothing but illness, white hair, and the deep lines on his face made him seem old ; his heart was young, and his heroes were the Irish rebels who had fought for liberty and shamed oppression with their wit. His nature was compact of innocence and warmth ; charity and mirth ; a simple devotion and a theoretical hatred of pride and cruelty. His hatred was theoretical because, I think, he had not often come into contact with the proud and the cruel. He fought against the weariness that afflicted him, and could not understand the slow diminishment of his meagre weight.

The fat man changed his shirt three times a day, and walked furiously round the deck in unavailing war against his corpulence. He talked a lot of the financial status of commercial firms in Calcutta, and was heartily humorous

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about a variety of commonplace topics. But his amiability was unfailing, and his enthusiasm for shuffle-board almost equal to the padre's.

The other passengers were a party of four : a Hindu pundit, an English friend — a theosophist with a collapsed and crumpled look — and two Indian ladies of melancholy appearance and a silent habit. None of them was sociable except the pundit, who was indefatigable in conversation. He wore a white flannelette shirt that overhung jodhpur trousers of the same material, and the prominence of his teeth combined with the unusually high polish of his spectacles to give him a curiously mechanised appearance. His conversation was didactic, the style of it reminiscent of a hearty young cuckoo for ever pushing eggs out of another bird's nest. A clockwork cuckoo with metallic voice.

For twenty-four hours we lay off Coconada, loading cotton from lighters that came slowly across a glassy swell out of a shallow harbour almost invisible in the heat. The ship was full of noise, the chattering of coolies, the rattle of the derricks, and the scream of the fall-rope. At night, when their work was done, the coolies lay like corpses in the black hull of a lighter, emaciated by the unnatural glare of an arc-light overhead. But another loading-party came aboard, and work went on, and the unceasing noise grew wearisome. I was so foolish as to complain about it within hearing of the pundit, whose immediate response was the display of his own superiority.

'Why should you let a little noise upset you?' he demanded. 'I am never inconvenienced by any noise. If it is a small noise I pay no attention to it, and if it is a great noise I keep it out. Like this !'

From a trouser-pocket he pulled some cotton-wool and stuck in each ear a flamboyant tuft. 'Now I can hear nothing !' he said. 'And if I should find myself in some place where was a bad smell, I would keep that away by a similar device : I would plug my nostrils with tissue-paper.'

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You English are all so wrong in your attitude to the world. If you encounter something which you do not like, you first grumble at it and then try to remove it. But that is childish, a waste of time, because the world is incurable. If you are wise you try to cure yourself, you try to make yourself immune to the world, and then it will not worry you. When I see unpleasant things, they do not disturb me, because as soon as I have detected them, I look the other way. But you have no real wisdom in Europe. You talk a great deal about freedom, and yet you have never realised that you cannot possibly be free *in* the world, you can only be free *from* the world !'

With a smile of insufferable triumph he turned away and strutted along the deck. The cotton-wool fluttered proudly from his ears.

His favourite topic was the Vedas, the Holy Writ of the Brahmin, and we were often told of the superior quality of these writings that made all other scripture seem trivial in comparison. He was tireless in proving to the padre that Catholicism was a poor sort of religion, and he scored heavily in a discussion about the Creation of the World.

'In your Bible,' he said, 'the date of the Creation is said to be 4004 B.C. But that is manifestly absurd. The Vedas were already written in the year 4000 B.C., and they are evidence that in India there was by then a very high degree of civilisation. So from the beginning, you see, your scripture is founded upon error.'

Very mildly I asked : 'Is there any proof that the Vedas are as old as you say ?'

His teeth were suddenly bared, like the rushing emergence of bones on the Day of Judgment, and with devastating scorn he declared : 'It would be redundant to offer proof for what is so widely known. Proof is only necessary to bolster up those scientific theories of which Europe is so prolific!'

He was also at pains to discredit Catholicism on the

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ground that it was idolatrous, and therefore contemptible beside the pure spirit-worship of the Brahmin. It was, indeed, a degenerate offshoot of Brahminism. He had no desire, he protested, to undermine the padre's faith, but he ought to know these things. The padre, however, was distressed by such talk, and I met him one day with a hunted look on his face and his cassock blowing behind him as he fled.

He stopped and asked me : ' Have you seen the pundit ? He's after me again. Oh, he's an awful man ! Do you know what he said this morning ? He told me that the Blessed Virgin was nothing but a painted idol and we offered sacrifices to her ! He did indeed ! And here he comes ! Keep him away, like a good fellow, till I get to my cabin and lock the door, for I can't stand hearing things like that !'

Only the fat man was fully armoured against the pundit. I tried to argue with him, and went down before his assurance like a rowing-boat in mid-Atlantic. Once I said something about Greece, and he tushed the classics out of existence. ' The Greeks ? The Greeks were mere babies in comparison with my countrymen who wrote the Vedas in 4000 B.C. !' But the fat man defeated him. ' The Vaders ?' he exclaimed. ' Never heard of them. Who are they ?'

His face ruffling to a frown, the pundit explained, and the fat man interrupted : ' Books, are they ? I don't know anything about books. I thought they were some people you knew in Calcutta.' And walked away, a free citizen.

Among the deck passengers were a couple of Tibetan lamas who wore, in tropic weather, clothes lined with sheepskin; two stalwart Sikhs, black-bearded, tall and handsome; and with them a delectable pair of young women. The girls spent most of their time in bed, on charpays on the deck, under quilted covers, from which occasionally they thrust a slim coquettish hand or blinked a

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dark seductive eye. Their bearded lovers did all the work : cooked their meals, washing and cutting vegetables, baked bread. Sometimes the young women shared a couch, and below the shaken coverlet, tumultuously embraced each other. I observed one day the lamas regarding this amorous scene with grave attention. It was indeed an interesting *menage*.

The padre clapped his hands to see the verdant harbour of Singapore. The islands, he said, were as green as Killarney. On the second or third morning of our sojourn there he went ashore to visit the convent of the Little Sisters of the Poor, and came back like a boy who has kissed his sweetheart for the first time. He waved to me from the quay, and danced three steps of a jig before he came up the gangway.

' Did you ever hear the like ?' he exclaimed. ' I asked the Reverend Mother where she came from. " From Limerick," said she. " Have you ever been to the Fair ? " said I. " Many a time," says she, and laughed out loud.

Well, God be praised," said I, " and isn't that wonderful ? For it's Limerick where I lived when I was a boy, Reverend Mother ! "

Then for God's sake don't call me Reverend Mother," said she.

No," said I, " but I'll call you Very Reverend Mother, because you come all the way from Limerick, and you've been to the Fair ! "

' And then,' he said, ' she took me in, and gave me cake and lemonade, and we talked nineteen to the dozen. Oh, I've had a fine morning, and now we'll go out and have a celebration. We will, won't we ? '

So the fat man, the padre, and I had lunch at Raffles', and the padre was overawed by its splendour, and the fat man grew unexpectedly skittish. He embarrassed the Chinese waiters by facetious comment on the menu, and thereafter woke a number of sleeping rickshaw coolies by

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tickling them under the chin. We went to a cinema, and when the faces of the hero and the heroine were magnified so that we could more closely study the passion of their kiss, the fat man made a schoolboy noise of derisive appreciation. He was sixty-three years old, a bachelor, and had reduced enjoyment to a manageable size.

Only two events interrupted our pleasure. The fat man and the padre both weighed themselves, and to their dismay the padre had lost a pound and a half, the fat man had gained another four. And while we sat in the wide and breezy lounge at Raffles' and drank gin-slings, the padre looked earnestly at the people sitting all about and then fell silent. He whispered to me presently, ' I've never seen such dreadful faces in my life ! '

' Do you mean the Chinese boys ? '

' No, no. The people at the other tables.'

They were ordinary people. There were some tourists from a world-encircling liner, but the others were residents of Singapore, natives of provincial or suburban England for the most part, transplanted to the tropics and rather more smartly dressed than they had generally been at home. Their faces were not unpleasant — a social composure that stretched like another skin, the red-rubber look of too much lipstick, were the obvious faults to find — but the padre had gone from boyhood in Ireland to the innocence of teaching children for forty-five years, and to him, I think, they were faces of the living dead. They were the footprints of the world on the death-mask of men and women who had been made in God's image. I felt the current of his horror, though not sharing it, and the gin-sling turned to water in my mouth. I had another, to fortify myself against our common lot.

A day or two later I saw more alarming faces among the new passengers we embarked. The majority of these, some three or four hundred, were Chinese of plump and benign appearance, who travelled on deck ; but a hundred and

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fifteen came aboard in handcuffs and lived under an armed guard in one of the holds. They were all criminals of one sort or another, and Singapore was getting rid of them. The police officer in charge took me below to see them, and pointed out the most notorious. Some of them wore the snarl of an orang or the cunning brutality of a wild boar, but many were simple creatures who had found the rules of civilisation too difficult to comprehend. A few were neat and tidy, agreeable to look at, and seemingly intelligent. These, I was told, were the most dangerous of all. They were either forgers or Communists.

* What will happen to them ?'

' They'll be handed over to the Chinese authorities.'

' The Cantonese government isn't very fond of Communists, is it ?'

' No___.'

Poor disciples. They must have known their almost inevitable fate, yet they had preached according to their belief, and in captivity they retained their dignity. In comparison with their fellow prisoners they were intelligent. In any comparison they were brave. They went ashore at Hong-Kong, where the policemen who escorted them had some jocular conversation with the policemen who received them.

In Hong-Kong we said good-bye to the padre. He had again lost weight, and the fat man was glum because he had put on another two pounds. We went ashore with the padre to have a last drink with him, but shyly he said, ' Would it offend you if I took ginger-beer ? '

Every night on board he had drunk one small whisky-and-soda with us, and insisted on paying when his turn came round. But now he confessed. ' I hate the taste of it,' he said, ' but you'd have thought me proud, and standing apart from you, if I'd refused it when we were all living together in the ship. So I just thought of something else and drank it down quickly. But if you want to please me

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for the last time we'll be together, you'll let me have a bottle of ginger-beer.'

We got in exchange for him a French governess who was going to Amoy. She came aboard in distress and a great hurry, for some fool of an agent had booked her passage in the wrong ship, and she had barely had time to transfer herself and her baggage before we sailed. She was slender, below medium height, and very neatly dressed in a dark-blue costume. Her pale oval face might have become beautiful had her life been lived in secure and happy circumstances, but her features were pinched by years of a timorous discipline. She had lovely hands, most primly manicured, and there was a little scurf in the parting of her modestly brushed hair. She used no aid to beauty but soap and water, and this lack of sophistication combined with her lonely need for self-reliance to make her a gallant and appealing figure. She was afraid of Amoy, because it was so far from home. Much farther than Penang, where she had lived for the last three years.

Her native town was Chinon, but she had never read Rabelais; which was forethoughtful in a governess. Her father had been killed in the last war, and when little more than a schoolgirl she had gone to an English family in Cairo. She had meant to return to France in two or three years, but the family went to India, and she with them. She had lived in India for a long time, with different families and in different places, but somehow or other always getting a little farther east. And the farther she got from home, the more difficult it was to return, because she never had much money, and out of her small salary she continued to help her mother. But quite often, she said, she had found employers who were agreeable and sympathetic people. She had had only one really unpleasant experience, and that was in a Native State in Malaya, where she had been governess to some of the rajah's children.

He was a very wicked man, she said, who treated his

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wife most shamefully, and beat his concubines. It was whispered that he had beaten a girl to death. So one day, when she heard a girl shrieking and crying in the royal apartments, she had gone in and told him to stop it. He was very much surprised at being spoken to in such a way, and she had seized the opportunity of his bewilderment to take the girl to her own room and lock her in. Then the rajah recovered his senses and came to demand that the girl be given up. But the governess stood in front of her locked door and defied him, and the Resident came just in time to save her from violence. She had sent a message to the Resident, and knew that she could trust him to come. But it had been a dreadful ordeal, and she had nearly had a nervous breakdown, she said. She would never go to a Native State again. In Penang she had been very well treated, and it had saddened her to part for ever from the children she had been teaching there. They had had to go home to school. That was what always happened.

Her voice was quiet and thinly musical, her English fluent, and her accent no more than a charming precision with caressive attention for the letter r. She spoke with a mild and rather melancholy detachment of her experiences, but recurrently was anxious about her employment in Amoy. It was so far away from France, and if anything went wrong she didn't know what she could do. She had saved a little money, of course, but it would be such a waste to spend it on steamer tickets, and in any case she didn't know where she could go from there. Except for the rajah, she had always been with English people, but the family in Amoy was American.

'If they are nice Americans, they will be the nicest people in the world,' I said.

A breeze came freshly, the sea was like green grass blown by the wind, and painted junks lurched fatly athwart our course. The land rose like pale fruit on a sunny wall and we entered a wide bay. The port of Amoy was a cluster of

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dolls' houses on the two humps of a bare island, but already the French governess had her luggage packed and she was waiting for her new employer. We anchored, and were surrounded by a furious fleet of boats and clamouring boatmen. The governess would have gone ashore immediately, but I persuaded her to wait a little. And presently a launch came out with a tall man in the stern, the Stars and Stripes flying behind him. She clutched her hands with excitement and hurried to meet him.

I saw her again before she left. There was a faint colour in her cheeks, and her eyes were shining. ' Oh, he's nice ! ' she said. ' I'm sure he's nice ! And his wife — do you know, he says his wife has been to Chinon ! She has seen my town, and she speaks French. Quite well, he says — he doesn't know any at all — and she's got a lot of French books, and she thought Chinon was lovely. Oh, it's going to be quite all right. I am going to like Amoy ! '

The weather grew cold, the sea rough, and we met the brown flood of the Yangtze. Under a sleety rain I went ashore in Shanghai, where I had work to do : I had to find material that would fill the background of a novel and energise a story, so like a collector of vertu I amassed views and gossip, the grimace of a passer-by, the smell of a cook-shop, the squalor and bravery of the town.

It is a monstrous city. More loudly than any other town I know, it howls to the unfriendly sky the cunning, cupidity, the helplessness and fearful injustice of human-kind. Consider the solemn magnificence of the banks and financial houses on the Bund, and retire from them by thoroughfares whose insecurity grows yard by yard more manifest, to miry slums — but slums is too proud a word — where under roofs of tattered sackcloth, starveling coolies and their knife-ribbed offspring scratch with all their strength a crow's living from the dirt. Come out of the Cathay Hotel, all heat and luxury, and step into a rickshaw whose pulling-cooly will live, at the outside, some five

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years more; such **the** poverty and hardship of his days. Go to the Chinese City, a crowded gay metropolis within the sourly striving international area, and look in the picture-shops to see how hideous aniline paintings from Japan are ousting the exquisitely drawn and delicately tinted scrolls of China. Look at this degradation of a people's taste, this wasting of a people's strength, impoverishment of honest country folk, and curse the fingering greed that calls itself imperialism ! Taut bullies in their tight blue uniform, I saw the Japanese police and hated them. Foul brightness of the dreadful oleographs with which Japan was ousting the perfection of Chinese art, I looked at, and damned in my heart the whole essence and the state of Nippon. — But three weeks later I went to Japan, and wandered through its towns, and there, analphabetic and a stranger, met with courtesy, kindness, good-humour. There is little wrong with the people of Japan, I suppose, but ignorance, stupidity, and want of strength ; but their rulers are evil, like the rulers of all the world, who thwart and mislead the many that luxury and profit may drug the vestigial souls of their scanty friends. Anarchism's the only law. Give me bombs. . . .

The cure for this mood lay in China itself. In a temple in Soochow — a filthy city, famous for the beauty of its women — I saw a vast array of brassy gods; and two of them were laughing. One, with a twisted diabolic grin, tore to ribbons the solemn pretension of our world, and the other was Mi-lei-fo, a Redeemer that none but Rabelais or China could have conceived, who promised against all likelihood a future of fatness and the gross delight of innocence at grass. The Chinese were stronger than I, and I lay down my heart. And Chinese girls, in their slim frocks that fitted them as neatly as the skin of a bulrush, had laughing voices and a precise and delicate beauty that made the long-nosed, the curvilinear and ebullient charm of other femininity a gross display, allurements overheated.

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But Chinese women, I was told, often make poor wives. They are wilful and intelligent as well as lovely. The recipe for perfect happiness is to eat Chinese food with a Japanese wife in a foreign house : for Chinese food is the best in the world, a Japanese wife is clever and wholly subservient, and a foreign house keeps out the rain. Chinese chow for the tongue ; Indian chow for the nose ; Japanese chow for the eye ; and English chow for the indiscriminating belly — that's the classification.

So with Chinese gods, girls, and dinner on the periphery of my mind, I conceived a high comedy that was set in the misery of war ; which offended many, but was inoffensive to the spirit of the Middle Kingdom. And I, who am no poet, made by the virtue of China one line of it poetry ; for thinking of the old China that was being ruined, I wrote of the poet's vision, *the wine and the wedge of geese and the girl behind a vermilion screen*. No one saw it as poetry save an old friend of mine, a Highlander, and he was half drunk at the time. But he swore it was second only to the Hellenic spell of *the apple-tree, the singing, and the gold* ; so I was well paid for my trouble.

I fell in love with China in spite of Shanghai. The bravery of the country and its silliness both flaunted themselves ; as they do in America, but not in England. In Soochow I saw a beggars' market. It was spread upon a pavement, and consisted of some rusty nails, the lid of a cigarette-tin, some dirty coloured paper retrieved from an ash-heap, a few shreds of cloth to patch a scarecrow's coat, a broken key, and three links of a discoloured chain. Behind this merchandise sat the vendors, a leash of ragged outcasts whose ingenuity was such that they could imagine a coin small enough to buy their stock of rubbish. Nowhere but in China is there such poverty, or such indomitably useless shifts to overcome it. And on every waterway were sampans or little junks with a crew of sturdy, red-cheeked coolies who were undismayed by toil or the insecurity and

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the filth in which they lived ; their talent for survival was an inspiration. I fell in love, I say, with China ; but in the same breath I realised that I would need an iron robustitude to stay in love.

I had to leave. I had promised to be home in time for a domestic occasion, and my new novel had taken shape in my head. I was full of a feverish desire to begin writing it, so I booked my passage in a vessel bound for Japan and Vancouver, and set to work on ship's notepaper. But there were other passengers on board, and I could not work all day.

There was Ta Shu, a very agreeable, good-looking young Chinese, of soldierly appearance and nervous temper, who closely attended a Japanese girl. He introduced me to her : Madame Zenaku. She was dainty and vivacious, and she had been living in China with her husband, who was in the diplomatic service.

Ta Shu was in love with her, and though he was known to the Japanese as an airman who had fought against them in Manchuria, he was going to Tokio to be with his love in despite of enemies. He thought a good deal of the possible danger into which he was going, but Zenaku made light of it. She would look after him, she said.

I was talking with them on deck one morning when she let fall her handkerchief. On purpose, I think, for she was constantly making provocative little movements. I stooped to pick it up, and she saw the crack in my head that a German bullet made.

' Oh !' she exclaimed. ' You have had an operation ! A very big operation.'

' That was a long time ago.'

' Was it very sore ? I have just newly had an operation, and it was terrible. It was in Shanghai. I had been feeling ill, and when I went into hospital they said it must be appendicitis. So they cut me here.'

She undid her coat, and down her stomach, that her thin

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dress tenderly covered, she drew with a slim forefinger the line of the incision.

' But when they had opened me, they saw that my appendix was quite all right. So they were very puzzled and did not know what to do. But presently the head surgeon exclaimed : " It must be womb ! " So they made another cut, like this, and looked at my womb. And it was all wrong. But now they have done something to me, and I am feeling beautiful, though it is very sad that I must leave my poor husband behind me while I go to Tokio to have a holiday. But Mr. Ta said kindly that he would come with me to keep me company, so that is making up for my disappointment. Have you been to Japan before ? '

She was a friendly little creature, and in Nagasaki she made me buy a lot of ivory birds that I did not want, because the merchant, she said, was a poor man with a large family, and it was right to help him. She and Ta Shu went ashore at Osaka, but a few days later I met them again, by accident, in Tokio.

I went into an hotel and saw Ta Shu sitting alone. I joined him, and he asked me to have a drink. There was nothing in his demeanour that even distantly suggested the imperturbability of China. He was restless and ill-at-ease, and three times apologising for leaving me, went to the door to see if anyone was coming. ' I am waiting for Madame Zenaku,' he said.

' I should like to see her again.'

' Then you will stay and have lunch with us ? That will be splendid.'

I was surprised by the invitation, but it was obviously genuine, so I waited. Presently Zenaku appeared, and Ta Shu welcomed her with agitated relief. She was wearing Japanese costume, which suited her far better than European clothes. She was quite enchanting in her own country.

We had a drink, and then she said : ' It will be much nicer if we take Mr. Linklater to have a proper Japanese

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lunch. There is a little place that I have often gone to, and perhaps I can remember where it is if we go to look for it. It is a little bit dirty, but the food is very good, and proper Japanese cooking. We shall go there.'

We got up, and I held for her acceptance a cloak of fur-lined silk. But she paid no attention, and walking a little way, stood in the middle of the lounge, her arms outstretched, and over her shoulder she said in her clear little voice : ' Oh ! it is so nice to be here again ! Once I knew this hotel very well indeed, and everybody here knew me. But now I have been away so long, they have all forgotten.'

I was permitted to adjust the cloak. She smiled sweetly round the room, and then at me. Everyone in the hotel had become her audience. ' They have forgotten me,' she said. ' It is very sad, is it not ? '

We drove a long way, turning and re-turning, halting to ask the direction from unhelpful passers-by, before we found the restaurant we wanted. It was my car — or rather I had hired it — and Zenaku very earnestly told me : ' You must not let the man charge you any more for going all this distance. It is quite a mistake, so you need not pay more than you said you would. You will explain that to him, won't you ? '

The restaurant was not very clean, but had an appetising smell. The food was interesting though difficult to eat, and I had a poor lunch in spite of Zenaku's assistance. I was getting a little worried, for my ship sailed that afternoon from Yokohama, which is eighteen miles from Tokio. My driver kept poking his head round the door to say it was getting late, and Zenaku would impatiently dismiss him and say there was plenty of time for one more tiny course. And with strangely prehensile chop-sticks she would seize another anonymous morsel and lay it daintily in my bowl. A delicious creature, but maddening. Her family was well known in Tokio, and I was sorry for Ta Shu in his perilous adventure. I said good-bye to them with

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regret, and got to the ship as the last gangway was being taken away.

There was a storm in the North Pacific — a hurricane blowing under the Kurile Islands — and there were floods in the eastern states of America. I had a wild journey home. But I wrote two or three chapters of *Juan in China* and reached Edinburgh in good time for the domestic event that I had promised to attend.

A week or two after my return I took Marjorie to the theatre. I have forgotten the name of the play, and we did not see the concluding act. At the last interval she said, 'I think we ought to go now.' So I got our coats and called a cab, and drove her to a nursing-home, where, an hour later, my second daughter was born.

XXII

JOURNEY

BEING hard-up as the result of a voyage round the world and the birth of a daughter, I listened with polite attention to a proposal set before me by a firm of brewers. The suggestion was that I should write a fable in which might be set forth, in a plain but engaging manner, the especial merit of their beer. The proffered remuneration was very generous, their beer quite admirable. I could praise it without dishonesty, and with their fee discharge a menacing bill or two. So I composed an agreeable anecdote that mounted, by mobilising many examples of the virtue of their ale, to the crisis that worried Omar when he wrote : *I often wonder what the vintners buy, One half so precious as the goods they sell.* I answered that by a description of logical and thirsty brewers, emerging with their week's pay from malt-house and office and hurrying across the street to the nearest pub, where with one voice they demanded quart after quart of their own beer. For they knew that money could buy nothing better.

The directors of the brewery, I thought, would be delighted with this tale. But I was wrong, for they were indignant and alarmed. My story, they said, would create a most lamentable and false impression. Their employees were all sober and industrious citizens who would never dream of squandering their money on beer. I must not

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malign them by any suggestion that brewers went a-brewing for the love of drink, so would I please contrive at once another and a different climax ? Let logic hang itself, but keep the tale respectable.

A regard for some form of respectability is, of course, essential to communal life, and unless one is a realist, one can have no quarrel with it. In Scotland respectability is measured against a domestic standard, and for this the weather is probably responsible. The sterner the sky, the more important the house and the more is life lived within it. To achieve domestic comfort is victory against a malignant climate, and therefore virtuous. Indeed the hostility of a Scottish winter should not be underestimated, and though when the blood runs strong its atlantic enormities and polar virulence may be exhilarating, they are misery to one whose habit is sedentary and his circulation slow.

That winter, in the butt-end of November, I was in Edinburgh and preparing to go to Orkney when I received a bright uncalculating notion to spend first a few days in Barra, that jewel of an island which dangles on the string of the Outer Hebrides. The coming of the aeroplanes had brought it marvellously near, and proudly I said : I shall go there for a long week-end. I forgot that winter was older than flying-machines, even older than ships.

Renfrew was the port from which the aeroplane put out, and Renfrew, at ten o'clock in the morning, lay in a sullen twilight. Wisps of fog floated across the aerodrome like weeds in a pool, and the circumference of the pool was the dreary and apparently endless mist. But three minutes after leaving the pool we came curiously into broken air, into clouds that were charging us like snowy mammoths; and on their shoulders were gleams of light. Then we surprised the sun, and caught him naked in the sky.

The earth was nowhere to be seen. It was hidden by a huge coverlet of clouds, dirty enough on their under-sides, but so glorious above that to be immaculate would seem

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the chiefest joy. As far as vision could reach were these candid valleys and silvery heights, this shining and mountainous land of vapour that looked solid as the Alps, and was more soft than wool and as white as snow. This was the sun's domain, immense and beautiful and strictly private. We were delighted trespassers.

Then to the north and north-west we saw clouds of a new kind, as white as the others but more carefully drawn, with arrowy heads and sides like the flaky edge of a flint. These were the snow-clad hills of Scotland, as tall in the sky as we, and disputing with the clouds for loveliness. Here the clouds were less dense, so that, looking down, as though through an alpine chasm, we could see the slate-blue water of a narrow loch and the pale-green fields of a little valley. Ben Nevis stood over Scotland like the frozen blade of a Lochaber axe, and beneath us the slim island of Lismore was swimming like a trout into the ruffled waters of Loch Linnhe. Then we turned westward over the Sound of Mull, and suddenly we had left the sun's calm cloudland and were in brawling boisterous weather.

Above the Sound — which is a deep and narrow gulf between Morvern and Mull — we fluttered like a wind-blown leaf; but with every slip and lurch one felt the stability of the aeroplane as though it were a boat heeling to a squall and luffing-up again. We came to the open sea, and here we flew low, because the upper wind was strong and contrary ; and the sea, so near beneath us, was angry as the dragon-teeming waves of a Japanese drawing.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour there was nothing to be seen ahead but the dim horizon. Then faintly there rose some little shadows that slowly took a more certain shape, a seeming of solidity, a bold high-rearing aspect; and I recognised the rugged lines of Berneray and Mingulay, the southernmost islands, and Ben Heaval, the high hill of Barra. Presently we crossed the coastline — ragged as an old comb — and circled over the huge white beach that is

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Barra's natural aerodrome, and came gently down upon the cockle-shell crunching sand. There was a freshness in the air like the brisk and delicate flavour of spring, and the pale bright hues of the island might have misled a careless traveller — one who had long lost his calendar — into thinking the year had already turned.

I felt the resurgence of joy, the heart's excitement of one who, meeting after years an old sweetheart, sees that time has not diminished but enhanced her loveliness. I live in Orkney, and for the islands of Orkney I have as deep affection as anyone may have for the land of his fathers, but I have never gone to Barra without committing a kind of territorial adultery. The difference between them is the difference between prose and poetry. Orkney is prose — the best of prose, with its variations of rhythm and sturdy utility — but Barra lives in perpetual music and breathes a magic air. Nor can the eye grow weary there, for when it turns to the west there are white strands and the wide immensity of the Atlantic, and when it turns inland there is Highland scenery miniaturized in twenty rocky shapes; look to the north, and there is a tall archipelago in a peacock sea; look inward to your heart and discover a wild belief that beauty is worth all other things.

So in the length of a summer afternoon went my four days of intended holiday, and packing my suitcase I waited for the returning aeroplane. But no aeroplane came, for the mainland was lost in darkness. From Glasgow to the south of England there was a brown impenetrable fog, and all the aeroplanes sat still as hooded falcons. I stayed in Barra four days longer, waiting till the fog should rise and let the aeroplanes go free. And in Barra we had springtime weather, and at night a full moon silvered ten thousand ripples on the full-moon tide that flooded the Cockle Strand.

Then I said I could wait no longer, and would go back by ship, in the older and more certain way. But that night the gale began. It came with all the weight of winter and

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the Atlantic behind it. It thundered on the solid roof as though that were the skin of a gigantic drum. It lifted the surface of the sea in great curtains of spray and flung it cliff-high, and over the cliffs and far inshore, and the heather grew salt as seaweed. It lifted the sand from the long beaches — the air was prickly with sand — and drove it through window-frames and the joints of the doors. To walk face-forward into the gale was like forcing your way up a swollen breast-high mountain torrent, while the wind poured chokingly into your lungs and played the British Grenadiers on your ear-drums. But to walk before the wind was to be bowled along like an old hat on a gusty pavement. So I remained yet another four days, because no ship could cross the Minch and come into the difficult harbour of Castlebay in such hurricane weather.

I was staying with Compton Mackenzie in a house he had newly built, which, like all good houses, had found organic life and grown beyond recognition from its original design. A mere cottage to begin with — I had seen him drawing the plan of it, and half a sheet of notepaper held it all — but then came the need to find room for gramophone records, some ten thousand or so, and a chamber was built for them, while book-shelves led a wide corridor far beyond the prime intention, till it turned a corner, and for the entertainment of island friends, the crofters and their priests, opened into a billiard-room that was walled with books, books uncountable, the diversity of the world in battered calf and many-coloured buckram, their close array pierced only by small round windows that looked upon the sea. A charming house, with a troop of Siamese cats in the kitchen.

The toil of making books is so heavy — a persistent autogamy, the imagery of the male meeting twice-nightly female organisation in the one system ; the begetting, the load of pregnancy, the father's anxious fear, and parturition all burdened on a brain conceiving still while still in labour

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— the toil is heavy, and few authors can spare for their own lives much of the colour, the adventuring, and vivacity of their work. There are exceptions, however : Byron the most redoubtable, Blunt in his Arab saddle, d'Annunzio well known, Graham the hidalgo, and like a plume on Scotland's dusty bonnet, Compton Mackenzie. As Byron fetched from the wild blood of the Gordons his excess of spirit, so I think could Mackenzie claim from the Seaforths a nimety of Highland fervour. I have seen portraits of their chiefs that reproduce the dark and birdlike quality of his countenance. The broad but eager brow, the jutting nose, the blackness, and the lean asperity of the jaw were there. But in Mackenzie — what the Seaforth portraits lack — is the actor's gay but enervating mobility. To see him weary is to see a lean and anguished priest; to see him well and in unfriendly company is to see him harsh and arrogant; and to see him as a host, when entertainment is his aim, is to see a varying mask of all the emotions he may elect to show, the many characters he may choose to mime. To all who admit his virtue and his charm, he is the very top and flourish of good company.

His habit, however, is disconcertingly nocturnal. He sleeps by day because to be awake in sunlight would be, for him, an irresistible temptation to botanise, zoologise, nephelologise, and do no work. When I arrived in Barra he woke before his usual time — indeed quite early in the afternoon — and I saw him first in a lounging-suit, old rose in colour with lapels of a darker hue, of a thickened silk material. But this was not dandyism, for beneath it were pyjamas and a Fair Isle tunic most violently moresque; he was two days unshaven, and his hair hung like a mother raven shot upon the nest. His clothes resemble the adjectives in a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins: chosen for their texture and colour, and often most arbitrarily joined.

He works with the persistence of a fanatic in circumstances of considerable luxury. In a high-backed padded

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chair in the corner of a room, a mere closet of a room but papered with gold, he will sit through the night under a funnelled lamp, the rest of the closet an aureate dusk, a hundred or so books of reference within easy reach ; while in the adjacent room, the connecting door wide open, one of his secretaries — Chrissie with her soft voice and lovely eyes, Nelly with her London kindness — will feed a pair of enormous gramophones with continuous records, progressing in a single night, as may happen, from a symphony by Brahms, through a little César Franck and a few Beethoven quartets, to a Mozart concerto, and before the dawn an hour or so of Sibelius.

This arduous but mollified routine he will maintain, if he is alone, for weeks on end ; but company is a temptation to which he yields. His conversation, like the delta of the Brahmaputra, flows from enormous reservoirs and will cover unpredictably far tracts of country. He was writing, while I was storm-stayed on Barra, a life of Pericles, and often he would come out from the golden closet with some fragment of Athenian gossip too good to keep ; and the Ten Years' War led easily to Gallipoli, Theban treachery to German spies on Mytilene. Mackenzie, in the last war, was in charge of counter-espionage in the Aegean, and, retaining individual ideas about the Allied aims, succeeded in harassing both sides.—On both sides, he explains, there were so many bureaucrats.—Then from Lesbos to Capri was but a stride between sentences, and D. H. Lawrence the stepping-stone to an archbishop or two, and London in the eighteenth century. One night he fetched from the billiard-room an armful of Admiralty pilot-books, and by felicitous example demonstrated the excellent prose in which they are written. And from the atolloed sea between the Nicobars and Norfolk Island he found a canal to water-gardens, Covent Garden, the Edwardian theatre, and English accents.

' Cockney,' he said, ' is a dead speech. Dead as Etruscan.

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It rose in the world and got genteel, and died of debility like everything else that goes away from its own soil. I listened the other night to a young man in the B.B.C. trying to impersonate Sam Weller. He was no more like Sam Weller than a marmoset's like a two-toed sloth. You remember the trial, Bardell versus Pickwick? Well, this is how it ought to be done.'

He got up, and after a false start recited with astonishing virtuosity the exchanges between Mr. Justice Stareleigh and Sam Weller, the anonymous interruption, the questions of Mr. Buzfuz, and Sam's response. He made Sam speak in a husky constricted voice that was like a London fog.

'But it's meant to be a fog!' he exclaimed. * Not the shallow fog of to-day, but a regular pea-soup London particular. Fog in the throat. That's how Dickens used to read the trial scene.'

'How do you know that?'

'Because my father heard him, and imitated him, and I learnt from my father. My father was a first-class mimic, and I'm a good one. So what you've just heard was practically the voice of Charles Dickens himself. As well as a piece of authentic Cockney.'

'And now,' I said rudely, 'will you let me hear William Wordsworth?'

'Yes, if you want to. Wait a minute. . . .'

Again he rose, clasped his hands behind him, tilted back his head, and in a mouth-filling voice that made a kind of melodious hooting, he recited :

Who is the Happy Warrior? Who is he
That every man in arms should wish to be? . . .

'And that,' he said, 'is the voice of Wordsworth.'

'My dear Monty,' I said, 'you are the father of all lies.'

'My dear Eric,' he answered, 'I am one of the few people now living to whom you may look for the precise undifferentiated truth. Wordsworth made a habit of reading

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his own verses. Wordsworth had a great-nephew who in appearance rather resembled him, and who **had** copied very exactly his uncle's style of speech. This great-nephew lived to be an old man, and more than once I listened to him reciting William's poetry. I can perfectly remember the way he did it, and his way was Wordsworth's.'

'All right,' I said, and added thoughtfully, 'I should like to have heard Pope reading *The Dunciad*.'

'No,' said Monty regretfully, 'I can't do that. But I might have been able, because I remember very well indeed an old lady — she was over ninety — who was a friend of my grandmother, and her grandfather, who had lived to about the same age and used to tell her the story, had been taken as a boy of fourteen or so to visit Pope at Twickenham. But though she could describe the occasion, she couldn't reproduce it. A pity. I should like to read *The Dunciad* in its native accent. It's so full of contemporary figures. . . .'

He has malicious laughter for the quiddities of other men, especially for the limitations of Whigs, prigs, and bureaucrats ; to whom his natural aversion was fortified when, as a young man, an Oxford undergraduate, he visited Tetuan, and, buying there a pretty slave-girl, was refused a licence to export her. But bureaucracy is only an item in the catalogue of his scorn, that blows against all belittlement of mankind. His faith, whose ardency would destroy a stronger man but nurtures him, is a romantic humanism.

He is a passionate Hellene, a curious scholar, and has been a man of action. He has the romantic ardour that sees as still living the cause that held Leonidas and the Three Hundred in the pass where Lacedaemon bade them stay ; and he is a Jacobite because he discovers in the Young Pretender and his Highlanders the men who fought a losing battle against the Persians of a new materialism, another flattening of the gallant world of individuals. In his Rectorial Address to Glasgow University he said : 'Too

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many attempts at reformation have been made either in a spirit of hate and destructiveness or, what is ultimately more deadly, in a spirit of constructive utility. Desire the good of your fellow-men, but desire it because you love them, not because a well-fed, well-clad, well-housed creature will be an economic asset to the state.'

There is no wall round his house, but a great girdle of affection, and on a Sunday evening the billiard-room that was built for many books and a little company is full of Barra men who come, intent as if to holm-gang or a horse-fair, to play snooker. There will be Crookle, who was a sailor and once a Turkish prisoner, and Father John, a minstrel and a poet; Father Dominic, the Red Scholar, the Cuddy, and a dozen more; and the room will be warm with jollity, clamorous with Gaelic voices. And in a corner of the room, in a lull of the game, they will tell you, 'He is a great man, Compton. And he is a kind man too.'

At last the weather moderated, and in the darkness of a cold wet night I crossed the Minch with a following sea and a lurching jovial movement. In Oban it was raining, a ponderous unremitting rain. The Glasgow evening papers were on sale, bannered in large type with the news that King Edward wanted to marry Mrs. Simpson.

My own desire was to go to Inverness, and thence fly to Orkney. But there is no railway from Oban to Inverness, and the daily bus had departed. So I went to Glasgow, and learning there that another gale was interrupting all communications, I remained for a day or two and went slumming.

I visited stinking tenements and poverty so dire that it could furnish but a single room with rags and pieces, and eat but one meal in the day. The floors of the dirty little rooms were rotten, the walls crumbling, and bugs infested them. Nauseating fragments of a meal lay on greasy tables, and the whole meal, I think, may often have been more sickening than its cold orts. The butchers' shops in the

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neighbourhood displayed for their customers a choice of darkened knuckle-bones, offal, and carrion. In a still deeper abyss of squalor and dreary sadness was a doss-house for poor prostitutes. The most sympathetic of the people with whom I talked was a receiver of stolen goods.

At intervals there is talk of gangsters in Glasgow, of the menace to the city's peace of organised hooliganism ; but the gangsters and the hooligans, being half starved from infancy, do not grow much taller than five feet, and I cannot think they are very dangerous. Were I compelled to live in the Gallowgate I should use a weapon more dangerous than razors or a cosh, and that is petrol. There would be a Great Fire of Glasgow, and a very good thing too. But the slum-dwellers are too listless to think of that.

It was in something like the discomfort of the slums that I resumed my journey to Inverness. The train left at half-past four in the morning, and that is an ugly hour to wake and smell the acrid perfume of a railway station. The train was cold, it stopped for tedious long periods at unknown halts, and daylight came reluctantly. We climbed slowly through the central Highlands, and the darkness was broken by the grey light of falling snow. There were fir-trees, dark on one side, white on the other. The hills were roughly blanketed with snow, and the stormy air was full of it. My spirits, low already, sank like mercury in an arctic thermometer, for there seemed little chance of flying in weather like that.

But suddenly, half an hour from Inverness, we came into bright sunshine and the glory of a winter landscape all white and cut by steel-blue firths. My spirits rose again, a June thermometer, and most cheerfully I thought: I shall be in Orkney in ninety minutes. But the pilot looked grim when he got his weather report. There was heavy snow at Wick, it would be impossible to land there, and in the farther north conditions were still worse. He was sorry, but it was useless to start, for he would only have to come back.

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The train again, I thought, and hurried to catch it. But as we steamed leisurely to the north — the Highland Railway is hardly faster than a stage-coach — I felt uncomfortably that the pilot had made a fool of me. The day was brilliantly fine, the air a pale and cloudless sapphire. That lovely and half-desolate land of Cromarty and Sutherland was a miracle of beauty, and the sea in long ruffled firths came gently into snow-white valleys. It was a perfect day, flawless on earth and flawless in the heights. And then we saw the storm.

The outermost part of it was a belt of darkness that lay on the boundary between Sutherland and Caithness. It seemed as though a segment of night had never lifted. One heard the noise of the train more clearly, as one does at night, and a furious rain assaulted the rattling windows. This darkness endured for several minutes, and beyond it was a twilit wilderness of raging snow. The whole sky was an agony of conflicting winds and the whirling leaves of some stript and frozen forest. It was a scene that chilled the blood, not with snow, but with primal fear of the warring sky. Here was Winter the Murderer, and the white-hooded winds were his cold assassins.

Darkness, whether of night or the storm, lay upon Thurso, and there fell from heaven discoloured snow, black rain, and some sleety distillation of malignant icebergs. The streets were a marsh of melting snow, a mere of confluent gutters that babbled blackly. But change and contrast are the characteristics of northern weather, and Scotland's climate, that one day is a giant's robe and the next a beggar's rags, may turn as suddenly to the plumes of a bird of paradise.

In the morning I stumbled along a frozen ice-roughened road, and looked north over the Pictland Firth to the great island of Hoy. Often I had seen it as black as peat, as red as clover, and in the early morning the colour of a pigeon's breast. But now, beyond the dark sea, it was all unbroken white. It lay on the horizon like a white lion *couchant*, like

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a watch-dog for the hard-weather islands beyond, and the sky above it was the soft and faded blue of an old battle-flag.

Later *in* the day I went aboard the 5/. *Ola*, and presently with old friends to talk to — the good Captain and his stalwart Mate — we were rolling along with a strong tide under us, bowling along with a stiff breeze behind. In Scapa Bay, in darkness and a rising wind, I went ashore and set out on the last stage of my journey. I still had fifteen miles to go.

The road was villainous with icy ruts and drifted snow, and here and there the fallen telegraph wires lay in great coils or hung upon the dykes in wide ungainly loops. We lurched and slithered, but I did not care much though the car should go into a ditch, for I could walk the rest of the way. Though half the sky was dark enough, the north was lighted by the long stiff petals of a flower that was rooted at the Pole. The Northern Lights were up, the Merry Dancers were afoot.

XXIII

A HOUSE IN ORKNEY

' I HAD been shooting,' said my father-in-law, ' uncommonly well. Especially after lunch. There were two drives after lunch, and during the second the light was beginning to go. A bird came over, and I thought to myself, That's the highest pheasant I've ever seen. It was so high it looked more like a starling than a pheasant. But I put up my gun and had a shot. I hit it, and down it came. And by God, it was a starling !'

When I regarded the house I had built, I felt something of the same surprise and disappointment. It was not really a house, but only a building, and not a very good building. Part of it was the smaller house we had always come to for our hohdays, which my father had built some thirty years before. To this I had added a wing, new-shaped the interior, and so upset its economic balance that as soon as we began to live in it, the need became apparent of another wing upon the kitchen side. Faults were apparent also in the construction of the chimneys, the windows let in the rain, and some part of a new wall was frankly porous.

During the process of building I had had violent alterations with the mason I employed, but the only effect of all my remonstrance was to give him material for the entertaining of his neighbours. When anger provoked me to some expression, or series of expressions, of unusual

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colour and exceptional heat, he would memorise my words for the subsequent regalement of his friends. His repetition of my more vigorous protests was apparently admired, for he made no effort to hasten or mend his ways, but by dilatory or slipshod work continued to exasperate me. So before we had lived a year in the house I had to engage another mason to repair the omissions of the first, and restore a domestic balance with more building on the older side. The new mason, a bearded man of sixty or so, was a most admirable workman who had no fault except his good-nature and the charm of his conversation. He would often leave me for some weeks, while he built a stable or patched a roof for someone whose need he had decided was greater than mine ; and when he returned, and I asked him where he had been, he would begin to talk of the other people for whom he had been working, and recount so many pleasing anecdotes of their fathers and their grandmothers, that I would encourage him to go on talking, and so we might waste the greater part of another day.

The old house had stood nakedly upon a little knoll that descended to the lake, and growing all about it were heather and wild lupins. It had looked well enough in these surroundings, but the larger house demanded some arrangement of the ground, a terrace here, another there, and walls within which a garden might be planted. Without protection from the wind, no taller flowers than heart's-ease, tormentil, or sea-pinks can be certain of their growth in Orkney, and my house by the lake had no more shelter than the boss of a shield.

With acknowledgment to Russia, I essayed the preparation of a five-year plan, and having thus loaded myself with the future, found sadly the secret of happy living in the Christian precept, *Take no thought for the morrow*. A five-year plan is not merely a symptom of godlessness, but part of its punishment. At night I lay awake, I fretted the day's serenest hours, with rival thoughts of what must be

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done, what might be done, and what should be done. I was excited by the prospect of completion, as one is towards the middle of a novel, when the imagined shape looms clearly in the mind, and one longs to clap the roof upon it. Like a juggler filling the air with Indian clubs, I stood beneath a rain of ponderous enterprise, and with the royalties of my next book but one, and a slight overdraft, kept circulating my walls and terraces, a new roadway, a water-supply, a windmill and a reservoir, a deeper and more reliable drainage system, a kitchen range that was to cost as much as a good second-hand motor-car, and God knows what less appurtenances.

Not for a year or two did I see clearly how ridiculous was this enervating enthusiasm, and remember the greater wisdom of my youth. In my youth I had declared that material possessions were a burden that none but a fool would choose to carry, and a man should go lightly through the world. And now, juggling a windmill, a kitchen range, and a septic tank against my unearned royalties, I knew how right I had been. . . . Therefore I would disoccupy my brain of its nonsensical ambition, and spurn possession. I had some books that I valued. The one I mostly cherished was a mere pamphlet, the first edition of *Tarn o' Shanter*, and for a gesture, to prove sincerity, I gave it to a friend who doted still more fondly on such things. And with a clearer mind I perceived that in the country one cannot hope to build a house in the perfect sudden fashion of buying a pound of butter. Even though one could afford to do it all at once, it would be impossible. It was not merely a commercial transaction, but an occupation, and therefore completion should not even be considered. A measure of peace returned.

I had decided to live in Orkney for a number of reasons, and one of them was my belief that Scottish writers should live in their own country. My political adventure on behalf of Scottish Nationalism had been ill-judged and ineffectual,

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but my belief in Scotland, my fondness for it, were **none** the less genuine, and from the slow exodus to the South, that was draining it of strength, I could subtract at least one. Another reason, which may discount my patriotism — but I wish to be honest — was that in Orkney, as I thought, I could work without much interference at my chosen trade, which above all else was what I wanted. I am in truth a weak-willed and gregarious creature, a temptable thing, and solitude was the only guard I knew against easy amusement and the voice of friends. In Orkney as in a monastery, I said, I shall not easily be seduced.

But the best reason was the simplest. All my life I had been in love with the islands, and now Marjorie admitted her affection for them. There is, indeed, a power in the land, or in the broad sky enclosing it, that may take perpetual captive those who are rash enough to open their eyes to the endlessly flowing line of its hills, their ears to the curlew's cry and the burdoun of the sea, their hearts to the northern peace. On a fine morning, when the winds are still and the lakes relume an azure sweep of sky, vacant but for a curd of cloud, a mallard and its mate, there is a hush like the drifting of the young earth, not wakened yet, in the innocence of time. There looks to be no movement on the land but smoke rising slowly from a cottage hearth, the peewits dancing, the deliberate pace of a ploughman and the horse straining stiffly against its collar. There is silence, as it seems, without note or cry to break it, till you too fall silent and catch with livelier ears the small bright talk of linnets in the heather, the creaking fall of a lapwing, the tentative voice of a plover, or the thresh of a rising swan, and far away the Atlantic rolling its organ-tongue in a cavern of the western cliffs.

Nowhere are gales more loud and furious, nowhere is peace more deeply spread on lake and hill and the inland sea. I have sailed my boat out of Stromness, on a regatta day, with four turns of the mainsail round the boom and

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my heart convulsive as a dying cockerel in my throat. The boat to weather with its mast leaning over my weather side, and my lee deck smothered in a furious sea, the tiller pulling like a bull on a rope. To the harbour-mouth in a black yell of the wind, and pointing to the squall — main-sheet in — across to the tide on Graemsay shore. Tide and wind in opposition, a maniac stream with the strength of the moon in its whirly flood, and so to the lighthouse and a new course to the Ireland shore. Open water, a grim beat to windward and the pump sucking dry though water was washing deeply in the lee belly of the boat. Then round again to meet the squalls that came screaming from the hill. Once I was slow in luffing and over she went till the sea covered the lee deck and like a weir came pouring in. This delayed us, and at the next buoy there was an angry scuffle with the boat that till then had been behind, but turning on the northward leg we set the spinaker, steadied and pumped her dry, and then like a homing gannet, but hissing louder than a lair of dragons, raced the curling waves. A broad reach then, the tiller so heavy that my breath came sobbing with the pain of holding it, and into the tormented harbour. Then out again, another round, and now we were doubly drenched, with spray and sweat, and the squalls on the Ireland shore were fiercer than ever, the homeward run more swift and splendid. But before we crossed the line the gale was already whimsical, and though we passed the mark-buoy in a flurry that laid us nearly flat, a moment later, like a stare of surprise, there was a minute's calm and we stood upon a level keel.

The start of the evening race was leisurely as old ladies playing croquet, and an hour later every boat was becalmed. They floated like feathers on a village pond, the islands lay at anchor to unmoving shadows, and the sky stood in a breathless trance. When the slow twilight came, the dreaming water met the light of stars without a quiver.

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In such weather, in a boat that soared lazily and softly fell upon the sleeping pulse of the Atlantic, I have lain below the great cliffs of Hoy, that rise eleven hundred feet sheer above the sea. In the evening light they were red as a wine-stain, and flowing from their pillared walls, a tropic air, came the gathered warmth of the day.

Such a day I have spent on Scapa Flow, when the surface of the sea was like polished marble, in the distance reflecting light, but overside impenetrably black. Save the engine-throb, there was no sound but the liquid falling of the bow-wave, a crystal semilune that cut the stillness like a plough, and heaped upon it a sparkling ridge of rough translucent water. On the one side, below a nacreous sky, were the round hills of Hoy, and on the other a coloured shore that stained the reflecting sea with pale red, and yellow corn. Rounding a low point, the boat came into shallow water, a green transparency that showed a bottom of pale sand on which tall seaweed grew. A shoal of little fish fled from the shadow of the boat. A flock of kittiwakes, startled, rose from a stony beach and doubled their number in the mirror of the sea. The stiff and sudden clamour of their wings was clearly audible, and the down-draught of their flight struck the wet beach like a breeze from the hill. A mile away, in a ripe field, a reaper clattered softly through yellow straw. A cormorant, with reaching neck and sluggish wings, flew past us with a jarring noise.

We crossed to the island of Hoy, and in a shallow bay anchored on a glittering shore. Here and there, in a submarine dust-storm, a small flounder was put to flight, and presently in the floor of the sea we could discern, like tiny yellow jewels, the eyes of cockles buried in the sand. A seal, with mild inquisitive gaze, swam slowly round. Two or three miles away, on a shoal called the Barrel of Butter, lay a whole rookery of seals, somnolent in the afternoon, and like lean philosophers a few herons pondered in the ebb. The southern isles stood on a ridge of light

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above the sea, and to the north-east, above the town of Kirkwall, rose the cathedral spire of St. Magnus.

This great red church, that was built eight hundred years ago, is the heart of the islands, but the Earl who bequeathed his name to it was an unhappy creature, subduing the lusts of the flesh by immersing himself in cold water, and earning a fame unique in the annals of the Norsemen by submitting meekly to a violent death. Earl Rognvald, who built the Cathedral, was a livelier man. Rognvald, having fought for his earldom and dedicated a church, set out on the gayest of crusades. He was a poet, as were some of his companions, and the story of the crusade is also an anthology of their verse. They stayed in France awhile, to fall in love with a lady called Ermengarde. They stormed a castle in Spain, fought against Moors and great ships of the Saracens, got drunk on Imbros and bathed in Jordan. William the Old, a clerk of Paris who had been Bishop of Orkney and a cunning politician for half a century, was their spiritual adviser. In pride and splendour they sailed to Istanbul, to feast with the Emperor Manuel and his Varangers, and turning west again, left their ships in Italy, took horse, and rode to Norway. It was a triumph and a holiday more than a crusade.

This was the golden age of Orkney, when Sweyn Asleifsson wintered in his drinking-hall on Gairsay — a heather-hill of an island, a mile across, like a man's head on a neck of green fields — and had eighty men-at-arms about him. Warrior, seaman, silver-tongued ; reckless in a crisis but calm in council, shrewd and forethoughtful ; inured to foul weather and hating treachery ; a faithful friend ; a greedy, unjust, and valiant man — Sweyn was the epitome of northern virtue and a catalogue of northern iniquities. He breaks into history, a mere boy, like a murderer through the arras, at the Yuletide feast of Earl **Paul** in Orkney, when he kills the drunken formidable champion of the Earl, Sweyn Breastrope ; a few years

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later he kidnaps Paul and opens the succession to Earl Rognvald the Crusader ; he uses two Kings of Scotland, David and young Malcolm, as instruments in his diplomacy ; he goes a-viking in the Hebrides, takes Man and harries in Wales, and plunders the Scilly Isles; he juggles earl against warring earl, and raids in Ireland, carries home from English ships fine cargoes of ale and mead and English broadcloth. For nearly forty years he stirs the broth of northern policy and skims the fatness of the sea. Then sowing a last crop in Orkney, takes ship again to reap his latest harvest. He captures Dublin, holds it to ransom, and then by treachery, but fighting still, is killed in a Dublin street; and in his death there falls the last and greatest of the vikings.

Thirty years ago, when I was a boy with bloody knees and a head of hair like a winter rick, a girl of my own name, a school teacher on Gairsay — but now there are neither school nor children there — told me of a ghost that still haunted the ruins of Sweyn's drinking-hall, making a desolate cry. A woman in a yellow gown of soft thin stuff that moulded her body when the wind blew and she walked against it. Now saffron was the royal colour of Ireland, where Sweyn had often raided, and if ghosts there are — which then I could believe with no trouble — then this was an Irish princess, keening unconsolated her lover who had rotted so long ago to make a little bitterness in Irish soil. I could have wept, and perhaps I did, for the poor ghost, and yet I thought her grief most laudable, and none too great a compliment to Sweyn of Gairsay.

North of his island rises the hill-land of Rousay, where history, with a shudder for the coldness of time, goes back to the Stone Age, and the dust of men who lived four thousand years ago blows in the crannies of their rough masonry ; and eastward thence are the Green Holms of Eday, where no men live, but stormy petrels make their nests in deserted rabbit-burrows ; and north of them is

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the island of Westray, where Jacobite gentlemen hid in a cave by the sea, and the gigantic ruins of a great castle stand empty and mysterious.

There are fifty islands, more or less, in the archipelago, and some are no bigger than a field with a fringe of red seaweed, but the Mainland, the greatest of them, is twenty-five miles from Greenigeo Taing in Deerness to the Earl's Palace of Birsay. They tell different stories, of saint and viking, of seafowl and shaven priest and Pict and trader, but all have a common tale of misery and destitution after they passed from Norseman and Churchman to the Scottish Crown. A yoke of villainous Scotch earls, with gall in their hearts and a taste for French architecture, so squeezed and pared them to the quick that the sons of the Norse odallers for generations lived in mean and sordid poverty, and in this diminishment of their state, witchcraft grew rife, and superstition preyed upon the minds of the people as eagles did upon their lambs. Life was cut down to the water-line, to the mere subsistence level. A vast unmanageable superfluity of women remained when the press-gang and despair took many hundreds of men into the Navy during the Seven Years War and the war against Napoleon.

But through decade upon decade of tyranny and following hardship, the people kept their vitality. James Wallace, a Fellow of the Royal Society who wrote *An Account of the Islands of Orkney* in the year 1700, declared that the women were lovely and of a beautiful countenance, and very broody and apt for generation ; one Marjory Bimbister, in the parish of Evie, was in the year 1683 brought to bed of a male child in the sixty-third year of her age. And the men of the islands, in Dr. Wallace's discovery, had a corresponding virility, for in the parish of Holm there was a man who had lived with the same wife for more than eighty years, while a gentleman of Stronsay, having begotten a son at the age of a hundred, lived long enough

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thereafter to see his son's children. Fertility, and the convivial temper that Boethius noted about the year 500, continued to be characteristic of the islands till fairly recent times.

This vitality took advantage of the changing world, and presently began to make a little money. It was first encouraged to do this by the Hudson Bay Company, which in the middle of the eighteenth century began to hire boatmen and artificers in Orkney, and soon from sixty to a hundred men were annually embarking in its ships, and for long enough the rank and file of the Company were nearly all Orkney-men. They saved their money, came home, and bought farms. Sometimes they bought back the land from which their forefathers had been driven by the Scotch earls, the uneconomic odal law, the enmity or cunning of immigrant Scots. Later the Davis Strait whale-fishing fleet recruited seamen and harpooners in Orkney, and again their wages went into land. For the Orkney-man, though he has used the sea as his own from Pictish times to the present day, has always been a farmer at heart.

Less than a hundred years ago there was a decisive turn for the better when the old runrig system of agriculture was discarded, the common lands divided, and Orkney, seeing a chance to reap its own harvest, settled down to work. Unlike the people of many rural areas, the Orkney-man takes a pleasure in novelty, and this characteristic served him well when science was added to the traditional lore of farming. He fed his land, made grass of heather, and bred from the stud-book. He grew taller crops, multiplied his cattle, and improved their quality beyond belief. In a small and modest way the islands found prosperity, and fields that once were moorland, rank with weeds or wet as marsh, now grazed a pair of tall and silky-feathered Clydesdales, a little herd of blackly gleaming square-sterned cattle, close-coated sheep, and every household gathered spending-money from a fertile multitude of hens. The

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average farm was small, from twenty-five to forty acres, but nearly every farmer owned his land, and the pride of ownership will make a man use wit as well as strength. The land belonged to the people who worked it, so they ploughed it deep and kept it clean. But the ripest crop they grew was independence and security.

We found it very pleasant to live in such a community, where manners were unconstrained and there was neither wealth to pervert nor poverty to corrupt. It was, of course, no Utopia — the weather alone was enough to frighten away any thought of perfection — and the lack of indigenous culture was unfortunate. There was no literature in Orkney later than the Saga, no native style of music or dancing. The lean dark centuries had killed the Norsemen's faculty of story-telling and poetry-making, and the recapture of a small prosperity had not been long enough to bring it to a second birth. There were signs, however, that an appetite was growing for such things, and the eight hundredth anniversary of the founding of the Cathedral offered a chance to encourage it. The octocentennial birthday fell in 1937.

Storer Clouston and I wrote a pageant, and some hundreds of our neighbours enacted it. The Cathedral looked down upon the field where we played it, and our backcloth was the lovely ruin of the Earl's Palace. We showed the coming of the Faith to Orkney, the establishment of Norse power, the murder of Magnus, the triumph of Earl Rognvald, and the inception of the Gay Crusade. The fowls of the air collaborated — seagulls came swooping down to carry away the fragments of a feast — and Norway, Iceland, and the Faeroes were officially represented. The Norwegian Government lent us an actor and a singer, whom I was asked to entertain at Merkister. The structure of my new house was severely tested.

Mr. H., the actor, was a tall, handsome, very stalwart man with iron-grey hair and a dominating manner. Mr. K., the singer, was even larger, barrel-chested and far above

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six feet high, with a great red face and a loudly ringing laugh. Both had voices of enormous power. It was late in the evening when they first came to Merkister, and Marjorie was alone. A cold supper was ready for them, and Mr. H. roared like a Hon when he saw it.

'Ham !' he shouted, seizing a large pink flap and folding it into his mouth, 'I am fond of ham !' Mr. K. as promptly drank a bottle or two of beer, and Mr. H., turning to Marjorie, bellowed, 'Aah ! You should never have let us come here. We are mad, quite mad ! We are not like ordinary people. We are artists !'

Having swallowed another slice of ham, he suddenly embraced her, and before she could recover from the shock, Mr. K. clasped her in a bear-like hug and declared his lavish admiration of her charm and hospitality. They returned to their supper, and when I came in there was a great deal of noise — Mr. K. was singing one of Schumann's lyrics, and Mr. H., in a voice to frighten cannibals, was explaining to Marjorie the strange temperament of the artist — but the table was bare.

Then Mr. H. told us the story of his life. He had been an actor for many years, but slowly he had grown disgusted with the poor conventions of the stage. There was no meaning, no vital force, in contemporary drama, and he rebelled against the belittlement of his spirit that was necessary before he could fit himself into a modern part. These Lilliputian disguises grew at last intolerable, and with the violence of his accumulated scorn he said good-bye to the theatre.

His friends were aghast. They pleaded with him to be sensible. He was no longer quite young, and how, they asked, was he going to live ? He did not know. He had, of course, no money, because an artist has never any money. But he had his spirit, which would not bow down, and now he had regained his independence.

'So what,' he shouted, 'what do you think I did ? I

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went to the house of one of my enemies, and I stole ! *I stole*. I stole a typewriter ! And then I went into the mountains. I took my rifle, I took my axe, I took my typewriter. I killed a deer, I built my fireplace, I lived in the mountains. I made my home there, and alone in the winter, in the snow, in the cold wind, I wrote my book. I wrote my book ! I wrote it in the true speech of Norway, the speech of the people, the *landsmaal*. I wrote it from my heart and walked upon the mountains. And when the snow melted and the spring came back, I went down from the mountains and I gave my book to some people who said there was a competition for the best book written in Norway. And then I went away, and when I came back, they told me — what do you think ? I had won — I had won — I had won the First Prize !'

He got up at six in the morning and went out to shoot rabbits. I lent him a gun, and strapped to his waist was a useful sheath-knife. The rabbit, apparently, is a rare beast in Norway, and he set off with the wary stride, the resolute demeanour, and the watchful eye of the big-game hunter in a perilous land. He was a good shot, and he would, I think, have assaulted a tiger with no less assurance.

Later in the day I drove him to Kirkwall, and before the Cathedral we saw a slim, good-looking young man in conversation with a girl. ' My Damn'd Secretary !' exclaimed Mr. H.

He had some reason for bitterness, because the secretary, who in truth was no secretary but another actor, had joined the Norwegian party by impudence and chicane. In Oslo, it appeared, Mr. H. had been dining one night with a lady to whom his future secretary laid claim. Entering the restaurant, the latter had strongly protested against what he described as piracy, and to avoid a scene Mr. H. had placated him by the offer of a trip to Orkney, with the nominal occupation of a secretary. The younger man at once agreed, but Mr. H., with many other tilings on his

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mind, forgot all about his bargain. Boarding his ship in the morning, he was much astonished to find his cabin already occupied.

'Who was there,' he exclaimed, 'but my Damn'd Secretary ! He was wearing hunting boots that came up to his thigh, and in a belt round his middle there was a pistol for eight persons ! I told him to go on shore, but he would not. I argued with him, but it made no difference. He must come to Orkney, and at last, because I had promised to take him, and I could not get rid of him, I said all right. He could become my secretary. But now, when I do not pay him any money, he will not do any work. He is a damn'd fellow !'

The secretary, however, made himself agreeable to many people and enjoyed his visit. Mr. H. threw himself into preparations for the pageant with the greatest vigour, and Mr. K. practised his songs in a voice that would have made Chaliapin sound like a crooner. As performers they were invaluable, but as guests they were slightly exhausting. One evening, when we had some other visitors, Mr. H. recited, in the most dramatic style, a long passage from one of Björnson's tragedies. It was apparently a death speech, for he concluded by staggering across the room and falling heavily to the floor. Such were the weight and shock of his fall that the lamps went out.

When they were relighted, Mr. K. stood up, and clearing his cavernous throat announced, 'I shall now sing *Die beiden Grenadiere*.' He did, and the ceiling trembled. In the nursery the children woke and began to cry.

A young German who was present — he had come to photograph birds or collect non-existent ballads, I forget which — then offered to entertain us with a Tyrolean dance. This he did in great spirit, slapping his legs with admirable agility, and finished by jumping into the air and landing with a thud that shook the room. The lamps again went out.

Mr. H. caused some embarrassment by conceiving a

A House in Orkney

romantic passion for a charming lady who lived in Orkney. If he happened to see her while he was being driven to a rehearsal, he would immediately fling open the door of the car, and without waiting for it to stop, leap out and greet her with voice grown husky, a trembling hand, and eyes most eloquent. When talking of his love, and its high impossible condition, his soul would almost visibly expand, as if he were exercising it in a spiritual gymnasium. Emulous of his companion, Mr. K. also declared that he was in love, but as he could not decide with whom, his protestations were unconvincing. The secretary was more practical than either of them. Whenever he was introduced to a girl, he would anxiously enquire, ' Is she kind ? '

But the pageant was a great success. Mr. H. indeed complained when his secretary added to the script a wholly unauthorised part, and, costumed as a mediaeval jester, fantastically pranced before Earl Rognvald, whom Mr. H. portrayed most nobly on a gallant horse. The audience was pleased, however, and Mr. K. sang louder than ever. At a service in the Cathedral he sang magnificently, his voice filling the nave and soaring splendidly to its broad arches. But Mr. H. was once more annoyed.

' I was being much impressed,' he said. ' I am not a devout man, but I was behaving devoutly. The Bishop was praying. The Bishop of Nidaros, a Norwegian like me, and I was listening with all my heart. I was very much moved by what he was saying. And then I looked up, and all was spoilt. I looked up, and there above me, standing in front of a stained-glass window, a picture of St. Magnus himself, who did I see ? Who did I see but my Damn'd Secretary ! '

At Merkister we had another dinner-party. Because the Norwegians were still with us, the atmosphere was extravagant and slightly unreal. A bright colour, of sunset or the glow of history, seemed to fill the room, and everybody was talking very loudly, rather boastfully. Mr. H. and

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Mr. K. declared that they were artists, and therefore mad. Most enviably mad. I also wanted to make myself heard, but my voice was powerless against the Scandinavians. For a week, indeed, I had been overshadowed by these gigantic men who loomed above me and drowned in their sonorous tones my scrannel piping. I was beginning to resent the insignificance to which I had been reduced, and when I saw how they were treating the port, my inferiority became even more complex.

I went out, and returned to the dining-room with a gun. I threw up a window, and fired two shots into the outer air. This produced a momentary silence.

'I ask you to fill your glasses,' I said firmly, 'because to-day is the nine hundred and twenty-third anniversary of the death of Asgrim Bareback, my ancestor, who fell in the calamitous battle of Clontarf, fighting with Earl Sigurd of Orkney and King Sigtrygg of Dublin against Brian Boru and the host of Ireland. It is an occasion that in this house we never forget, and I call on you to drink to the memory of Asgrim and the virtue of the North ! '

Most of those present regarded me with a fearful perplexity, as though I had suddenly become insane, but the Norwegians, rising with generous enthusiasm, drank the toast with loud acclaim.

How pleasant, I thought, to be an artist and revel in the broad freedom of madness.

XXV

CONCLUSION IN IRONY

I HAD caught a glimpse of the truth — of the little truth that concerns oneself— while I was lecturing in Glasgow, to a scanty and not enthusiastic audience, on Robert Louis Stevenson. Half-way through a sentence about the nature of artistic integrity, my lower jaw refused to close on some tedious phrase or other, and all the muscles of my face and neck, responding to a more vital need than platform enunciation, pulled open my mouth to a gaping oval that I had barely wit enough to conceal behind a handkerchief. To be brief, I yawned. And in that unexpected revelation I suddenly perceived that my acquaintance with Stevenson and everybody else was tiresomely superficial; that my conception of artistic integrity was doubting and jejune ; and that I did not really want to be talking about them. Vanity and laziness, and nothing more, had brought me to the rostrum : the mild and intermittent vanity that now and again impels one to exhibit some little store of knowledge, opinion, or authority ; the good-natured laziness that makes it easier to accept an invitation than turn cross-grained and refuse it.

I saw, then, through the wide-open window of my yawn, what I was not and did not really want to be : and that was preacher or teacher. I had made trial of both. No great or lengthy trial, but from time **to time** I had

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mounted a pulpit or printed a sermon to tell the world its more recent faults. To anyone with an eye in his head the temptation is ever-present, and those who yield to it often find compensation for the pain of living in such a world, in the pleasure of chastising it. In my youth it had given me the greatest delight to point his faults and scorn another's folly, but as I got older my enjoyment grew less. My occasional pulpiteering, even on matters so innocent as the art of Robert Louis Stevenson, gave me hardly any pleasure at all, because I was ever more conscious that in the great army of supporting or contradictory facts there were many of which I was totally ignorant; so that I never had the assurance of knowing I was right, and very seldom the defiant joy of being certain I was wrong.

The suspicion, moreover, had nested in my brain that even if, by a miracle, I acquired a fully documented case, I should not care sufficiently about its proof to endure the tedium of repeating it a thousand times ; which is what the preachers and teachers and politicians must do.

Youth, that knows all else, is ignorant of itself. At forty a man has forgotten nearly everything he knew at twenty, but learnt a dismal little about his own character. He has discovered his limitations — or a good many of them — and if he is wise he has taken a pruning-knife and lopped from the main branches the bright but unproductive shoots. I had not yet acquired such ruthless wisdom, but I was aware of it, and had marked the shoots.

Two positive facts I had learnt : I knew what I wanted to do, and where I wanted to idle. My taste in pleasure had been dictated by a long chain of peasant ancestors and the occasional link of one who had become a sailor. I took a peasant's delight in the earth — but great tracts of the earth that not I, but only my memory possessed, from beechwoods in southern Sweden to the bright edges of the Sierra Nevada, and Orkney in the midst — and yoke-fellow with this was a timorous passion for the sea. Of all I could

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remember, the sun had chiefly warmed the days I spent on hillside or salt water. And such were the days I wanted for my future idleness.

Fully as clear was what I wanted to do. I had a batch of stories in my mind, and with them a lively realisation that without more discipline, more knowledge of men, books, the English language and foreign thought, I could not tell them properly. I wanted to learn my trade, and practise it. This was a mighty simplification of my life, but in the solitude of Orkney I had the chance to bring my waters into such a fine, smooth, and trimly-willowed stream. Solitude was an admirable estate with a single flaw : it would keep me in my own company.

It can, I suppose, be entirely agreeable to a man who likes himself. I did not. I was eager, of course, to ensure my comfort, and resolute to protect myself from inconvenience, hardship, and physical pain. But I did not like myself. I was ashamed of the vast and dreary spaces of my ignorance. I deplored my diffidence, I despised my timidity, I abominated my false disguise of these indecencies. I deprecated the impacted layers of repression that prevented me from being frank and free and emotional; and when repression loosened a little and out I came, free, frank, and too emotional, I was covered with confusion to hear the horrid noise I made. I gave house-room to all the common sins that once were accounted deadly — before psychology dismissed the hangman — but to no original or splendid vice that like a moon might blind their murky light. I was, in short, by no means the kind of person I should have liked to be, nor with free will have chosen for a companion.

But that, I thought, was a disability of solitude that might be cured. I had found that I lost all interest in the people and circumstances of a novel almost as soon as I had written it, and therefore it seemed likely that I could banish most of myself from my thoughts by writing an autobiography. The pen more surely slays than the sword, and *Finis* is a

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fine disabling wound. So I began, about three years ago, to compose some sort of record of my life that should reduce my ego to a little *i* with whom I could live and never notice him.

I could deal, I thought, with solitude's intrinsic foe. What I could not guard against was the world's artillery, and no sooner had I raised my aery ramparts than they began to quiver at the sound of guns in Spain. The meaning of the guns was plain. They meant that evil was not only positive in the world, but that evil had mobilised and become aggressive. The world was again at war, and sooner or later we should have to choose our side. My pretty notion for diminishing myself, and so enlarging my capacity for work and happiness, was ruined when I also became a battlefield. The remnant of my youth, my sense of decency, and a civilised palate for justice suggested that I should go to Spain and help fight the black invaders ; but self-knowledge and my more critical parts refused. I had reason to doubt my quality as a rifleman—the trade of writing does not, I think, encourage fortitude or develop a soldierly muscle—and I could not quite stomach the thought of fighting for Communism, even though Communism in Spain was in the right. In the end, of course, I did not go, but the decision weakened me and left a scar.

In my weakness, and to comfort my scar, I subscribed to a heresy popular at the time. War, said the heresy, could prove nothing and no good ever emerged from it. History demonstrated a hundred times the untruth of this, but the belief was current, and because writing had become my form of action, I sat down to write a novel against war. Borrowing a plot from Aristophanes, I imagined a European conflict and a woman's revolt that stopped it. This story, which I called *The Impregnable Women*, was made of the world's new anger and distress, but I packed it into the shape of a comedy because that was the shape I knew best. It was not a good novel.

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It was ineffectual in manner. The revolt of the women should have been described with the bawdy vigour of Aristophanes himself—only that sort of vigour could have made the comic scenes a match in violence for the scenes of war—but I had not, at that time, the heart to be bawdy. In matter also it was unconvincing. It was a novel written against war, and the war that in reality we feared was war against Germany. But despite my pacifism I could not persuade myself into drawing a heroine who would want to make peace with the Nazis. Evil as war might be, it could not be more evil than modern Germany. Bondage in that prison-house, where the windows were sealed against the truth and cold perverted cruelty held the keys, was more intolerable than death in battle. So with some ingenuity I contrived a situation in which France became the aggressor, and that made the revolt more feasible, but gave the war itself a cardboard look.

And lastly, the novel was illogical. Its theme was the waste and futility of war, but to end a war the rebel women declared another. Against all intention I had created a situation in which war became rightly purposive and serviceable to humanity. This was an embarrassing discovery.

In my youth, when anger and grief had been partners with a certain exuberance, I had taken a romantic view of the world, but when my life ran into broader waters, much of the traffic that I saw was stuff for comedy. I shall not claim that the comic view of life is either whole or ultimately satisfying, but it has no less validity than the tragic or romantic view, or what is known as realism. And in the years between the two German wars, the matter of comedy lay upon the world as thickly as forest leaves after a storm. But now, against my habit and hostile to inclination, my younger and less comfortable perception was beginning to return.

There was good in the world, though worldly goodness

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was much blemished ; there was evil in the world, though evil could whimper excuses for its birth ; and when evil menaced the very existence of good, a man must put away the richness of comedy, the luxury of doubt, and stand with the angels. If victory were won, he could wear his conscience among the battle-ribbons on his coat; and if good were to be defeated, let him go down with virtue. In the mythology of the Norsemen, in the heroic age, there was prophesied a last battle, called Ragnarök, and in that fighting the gods would be vanquished. But a good man would have his reward. He would be summoned to fight and fall with his gods.

Now such an opinion, in the view of the comic years, would have been romantic and therefore ridiculous. In the comic years it was permissible — it was almost obligatory — to sympathise with the dragon and denigrate St. George. Dragons, one said, were wily and amusing creatures, while George in very truth was a Cappadocian war profiteer. But now the romantic view wore strangely a utilitarian look. Through stress and battle we must pursue a vision of justice, liberty, and peace, and in the realisation of that vision we should find our safety. We must do battle for the right and save our skins. To the query *Am I my brother's keeper ?* one must answer Yes ; for his back is bare who has no brother.

To be romantic, and ride against the dragon to the rescue of fair peace, was to be hard-headed and common-sensible. There was only one difficulty in the way of accepting this identification, but that was a wretched one. The romantic view of life includes, among its principal characters, death. And so to adopt the romantic view, in spite of its coincidence with common sense, entailed some consideration of the possibility of dying for one's faith. In all one's baser part, which is by far the greater part, one very much regretted this discovery.

Anger, that good servant, came to my rescue when

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argument was merely distressing me. Germany gathered its damnable array against Czechoslovakia, and I rejoined the Territorial Army in a unit that was being raised in Orkney. Mr. Chamberlain went to Munich. I went first to Cromarty, where delivering an oration on Sir Thomas Urquhart, I dedicated a memorial to him in the parish church ; and then to Edinburgh, where I ordered two suits of khaki and some other military paraphernalia. I was far from happy, but happier than I had been while yet irresolute.

Winter came. Blowing like a strong wind, anger cleared my mind. I wrote a novel called *Judas*, and read my drill-books. For some years after the first German war I had amused myself in the Territorials, but though I knew the simple matters of the parade-ground, I was utterly ignorant of the newer weapons, such as diesel engines and high-current-density searchlights; nor indeed was my brain of the sort to establish an easy acquaintance with their mechanism, or with the labyrinthine ways of Army accountancy. But for part of the time they released me from the deeper problem of rehearsing myself for the comedy which had redressed itself in romantic attire, and let death into the cast.

The winter was dreary and drenched with rain. Then snow fell, and made of the islands an immaculate archipelago shining under a bright and bitter sky. I was shooting one evening in a little wood. In the more sheltered parts the thin black branches were ridged with twice their thickness of snow, but the outer trees were bare and their slender twigs cross-hatched the western sky, which was the porous blue dusk of early evening. The ground was covered with dry crunchy snow, and the still air seemed brittle with frost.

We were shooting pigeons, or hoping to, but the pigeons gave no assistance. They came leisurely to the wood, circled high above the opening in the trees, and spiralled widely down. They nearly always caught sight of us in time to save themselves, and swerving suddenly,

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their wing-beats loud, fled wildly to the hill again or hurled themselves into cover. A week before, the wind had been blowing gale-strong, and the opening in the trees was like a patch of calm water in the tidal dance of the branches. Pigeon had come diving into it without care or caution, and we had shot about a score of them, fine fat birds well fed on corn-stooks that had stood in the fields, too wet to cart, till the first week in December. But now the pigeons' luck was in and ours was out.

It grew darker quickly. To the south-east, in a pool of sky that was gull's-egg green, a star with quivering edges shone molten-bright. High overhead a company of wild-duck flew swiftly to the sea, or to the little rushy tarn on Damsay. Three hoodie-crows, grumbling as they came, flapped above the opening as though looking for something they had lost, and still hoarsely arguing, flapped away again. A pair of swans, uncommonly high, flew westward in the direction of Stenness, their wing-creaks faintly audible. But no more pigeon appeared.

The laird had gone to another part of the wood, leaving his game-bag crumpled at the foot of a tree, and a couple of dead birds like smoky blue shadows in the snow beside it. There was neither sound nor movement in the air, and the frost came welling out of it. I had got used to the coldness of my hands and feet, but now a frozen candle-flame was flickering in my belly and chilling the floor of my chest. The cold was inside me. I had been standing still for a long time, and immobility had become a kind of small and temporary habit. I could have shaken out the cold by moving, but I did not want to. Because I knew that I could dispel it whenever I cared, the sensation was rather pleasant. It was the coldness of death, but death in a gossiping holiday mood, not death on business. But the actual process of dying, if one is reconciled to it, I thought, may not be so unpleasant as in normal mood one must suppose it. If the heart is at peace when death approaches. ..

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When I was sixteen I saw it, for a moment, in my own image. I had a revolver in my hand, that I had just found in my father's sea-chest. When he died, in Ceylon, his steward had packed all his belongings, and they had come home to be stowed in an attic room that my mother avoided. But with a boy's inquisitiveness I began to plunder them, and to my great pleasure found in the chest a pair of revolvers. There was a dressing-table with a large mirror in the room. I held a revolver to my ear, and assuming a stern expression, admired my reflexion. With an exclamation of theatrical despair, I tried to press the trigger, but to shoot oneself through the ear is not so easy as it sounds, and happily the trigger was stiff. So aiming instead at the image in the glass, I shouted 'Die, you dog !' To my intense surprise there was a deafening explosion, the mirror splintered in a thousand lines radiating from a hole in the middle, and above the revolver floated a wavering plume of acrid smoke. My father's steward was evidently a careless man, and had omitted to unload the pistols before packing them.

About this time, too, I was summoned in the gulf of the night to a bed where an old man lay in ivory pallor. A kind old man, beautiful in death, who had lent me many books too scholarly to read. His wife was unwilling to admit that he was dead and I could not bear to tell her the truth. So I prised open his mouth and poured in some brandy that ran out again, and rubbed his icy hands till the doctor came. And a year or two later, in France and then in the aftermath of war, I saw death in many shapes. Had it not been for a bison's thickness of the skull I should have been dead myself—though in the months I lay in hospital I never contemplated such a monstrous possibility—and the death of friends had opened a drain of sorrow that seemed, in those tender years, as though it would never heal.

I was not unacquainted with mortality, but for a long

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time I had scarcely come within arm's-length of a coffin, nor given funerals much thought. **But** now again I had to admit that death was not beyond the scope of life — as it is in comedy — but part and parcel of it. In a romantic revaluation of the world, such as dire necessity was driving to, it seemed probable that a good death might be considered almost as desirable as a good life. A shivering admission.

Yet in the freezing silence of the wood, with the cold groping my umbles, I found for some two or three minutes a little comfort in the thought that if death came like this, it might not be so fearful as I expected. Were the heart at peace — and so it should be if the mind were satisfied with the rightness of what one was doing — then death might be as gentle as the frozen fingers of this winter air. But the heart, alas, is quite illogical, and like Europe needs a mort of pacifying. And I had no great skill in spiritual diplomacy. . . .

It was too dark to see more pigeon, and the invasive cold was coming too deeply in. I was about to move, and thrash my arms to and fro for warmth, when from the shadow of the undergrowth in front of me there came a bird in quick squattering flight, low above the ground. It was too big for a blackbird, and for a moment I could not think what it was. It passed close to me, so close that if I had held my hand out quickly enough I might have caught it. Then in a clumsy way, as though hurt — but it was not — it settled in the snow not a yard behind me.

I turned my head and looked at it over my shoulder. It turned and looked at me. It was a woodcock, and with its head askew and its long beak over its wing it strangely resembled a schoolmaster who, exploring a Euclidean mystery on the blackboard, looks round with startled eye to see who has thrown a paper pellet at him. It was tremendously astonished and could not think what to do next. Nor more could I.

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I had no wish to shoot it, but suddenly in my mind there leapt a great desire to catch it alive. To take in my hands that wild elusive thing, to feel its heart against my fingertips and see the living pattern of its close-feather coat, and look nearly into the frightened obsidian of its eye. But I could not contrive a way to do it. So we stared at each other, necks astrain, for a couple of seconds, and then the woodcock found common sense before I did. Suddenly it was on the wing again, and in a wavering line it fled to safety in the black shadow of some thorns.

So I whistled to the laird, and presently, with heavy feet in the snow, he came out of the darkness of the wood, and after I had told him of my encounter with the woodcock, we gathered our pigeons and went home.

East winds blew instead of spring, and summer was late in showing, but tall-skied and lovely when it came. We went to camp and learnt a little more of soldiering. When we returned to Orkney I was in command of my Sappers.

On the twenty-second of August I was alone in the house. It was a shining day, brilliant with an early harvest — the corn a pale bright gold, and root crops a deep-sea green — but in the afternoon the clear sky narrowed to a wedge that laid its apex on the blue dome of Hoy, and was threatened by rain from the north, while to the south-east a region of white cloud unfolded. Marjorie and my sister were somewhere on Scapa Flow, having gone to lunch and stayed to gossip aboard a friendly destroyer, so I had tea alone and read the papers. The postman used to arrive about half-past three, an agreeable time to get one's letters and better than the morning for bad news. But no hour of the day could fortify one against the news that Russia and Germany had signed their monstrous pact. Now was cynicism made bankrupt, and the world no better than a quicksand. If the Nazi could He down with the Communist, then words must be devalued and half the currency of human intercourse was counterfeit. At first I felt a

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purely intellectual dismay, and then I realised that war was now inevitable, and dismay grew more embracing.

A few minutes after six the telephone rang. One of my sergeants worked in the post office in Kirkwall, and a War Office telegram had just arrived. The message was short. A single word. Marjorie had the car, so I rang up the local doctor and asked him to drive me into Kirkwall, where I made the appropriate arrangements, and presently went home.

At midnight the telephone rang again, and this time the code word was shorter and more decisive than the first. I had to call up my Key Party, which was widely scattered throughout the Mainland. When I returned to Kirkwall the Northern Lights were shining over the housetops like a greenish hand with long flickering fingers. Shortly after two the last man reported, and having done what was necessary we slept in greatcoats on the floor.

The morning was fine, and there was no news on the wireless. Only a choir singing *O God of Bethel*, which seemed an appropriate comment. I mobilised a few men and sent tiny parties to their war stations. The subalterns in charge of them were both schoolmasters, conscientious and capable of initiative. I visited them on the following day, and found them well established.

Then in the late afternoon came the third and last of the code words, ordering the mobilisation of Coast Defence units, and my Key Party set out. We had men in every parish in the Mainland, in lonely farms, at work on the fields, in bakehouse and smithy and village shop. The Key Party had to find them all. Then motor-cars would take the lesser groups from remoter corners of the island to points where buses waited, and subalterns with a nominal roll could check arrivals and post them to their proper station. It was a complex scheme, and though I had drilled the Key Party and ten times pondered the transport arrangements, I was anxious till I saw the men come in. But they

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all came. We have, in Orkney, a system of communication like the bush telegraph, that works in a mysterious way, and in many places the messengers found their men already uniformed and waiting.

I marched the main body from Kirkwall to Scapa Pier, where we boarded a little steamer. It was a dark night with a fresh wind blowing. An hour or so later we lay off a lesser island, at the entrance to the Flow, and the men, burdened with pack and rifle, broad figures in the darkness, were boated ashore. At half-past twelve, eight hours after we had received the order to mobilise, I reported that mobilisation was complete, our war stations manned.

Though not in the way I intended, I had indeed got rid of my ego — if only for a measured time — and reduced myself to a very little *i*. I had become nearly anonymous, one of many, bound by oath and subject to discipline. But on the cliff where the guns pointed against Germany, I stood with the angels. And warmer company than angels were my fellow Orkneymen, awkward as yet in their unfamiliar khaki, but honest and kind, shrewd and strong to endure, whom I loved more than any people on earth. We had lent our islands and ourselves to the service of the two countries that were busking to fight against a perverted barbarism ; whose cause and faith, that now hid their many faults, was the dignity of man.

The sea was matching its waves against the stubborn cliff, and a fresh wind blew from the Pictland Firth. The sensation of the hour was exhilarating, though I did not suppose it would last.

THE END

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