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THE CHESTERTONS

By the same author

IN DARKEST LONDON
ST. THERESA
WOMEN OF THE UNDERWORLD
MY RUSSIAN VENTURE
YOUNG CHINA AND NEW JAPAN
SICKLE OR SWASTIKA ?
I LIVED IN A SLUM
THIS THY BODY
WHAT PRICE YOUTH

Plays, in collaboration with Ralph Neale
THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY
(From G. K. Chesterton's novel of that name)
THE LOVE GAME

The Author *[Photograph by Lenare,*

[Frontispiece.

THE CHESTERTONS

BY

MRS. CECIL CHESTERTON

LONDON
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FOREWORD

MUCH has been and will be written of Gilbert Keith Chesterton as poet and philosopher. But of his more human side, his playboy love of fun, unending joy in make-believe, his kingship of talk and young absurdities, little has been said. And so, while the memory of the prince of good-fellowship is yet green, I have set down something of his Fleet Street wanderings and adventures.

The achievements of Cecil Edward Chesterton can be found in his books and in the archives of the State. But what he fought for, how he triumphed, the impress of his courage and endurance, the irresistible contagion of his personality has been, till now, a tale untold.

For these reasons and because I hunger to re-visit with the brothers Chesterton the glimpses of a gay young moon I write this book.

A. E. C.

LONDON, *January,* **1941**

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CHAPTER ONE

. . . ABOUT IT AND ABOUT . . .

MY first meeting with G. K. Chesterton was at " The Moderns," a society which debated everything in heaven and on earth at irregular intervals. The proceedings used to take place at the homes of the members, which necessitated long and tortuous journeys by tram and 'bus. That evening we were at a house in Hampstead, and Gilbert, who with Cecil had recently joined, was to open. We were due to start at eight, but it was just on nine when he came in like a torrent. He was a striking figure in those days, upright and with a gallant carriage. His magnificent head had a thick mane of wavy chestnut hair, inevitably rumpled. His hands were beautifully shaped, with long slender fingers, but in sudden, almost painful contradistinction, his feet were very small and podgy, and never seemed to afford a stable base.

He apologised for being late, but insisted that the custom of giving roads and streets irrelevant and misleading descriptions was to blame. This particular house, he remonstrated, was said to be in Church Road, but not a church could be seen in its entire length, which he had painfully traversed. Had he been directed to the Hill of the Flaming Sunset he would have arrived to time, for as he walked the path rising higher and higher led right into a sky of crimson and gold.

" For this reason," said G. K., " I propose to change the title of my address, and I shall speak on the disadvantages of nomenclature.[55] So saying he helped himself to soda water from an adjacent syphon with such impetuosity and abandon that it squirted uncontrollably over everyone within reach. After this he settled into his stride and we composed ourselves to listen.

We made an audience of fifty that evening including E. G. Bentley, Charles Masterman, Cecil Chesterton and Conrad Noel. None of us was famous and most of us were poor.

It was the first time I had heard Gilbert speak and on that occasion he was in very happy mood.

" If I go out of my father's house in Warwick Gardens," he began, " and turn to the left, I find myself in what is called High Street, Kensington. It is not high, it is quite flat, and it is a long way from Kensington, three reasons why it should not bear that name. It has, however, a distinguishing peculiarity. There are seven tobacconists, each of whom keeps a shop, but they are sad because they earn very little. If High Street Kensington were called the Street of the Seven Sorrowful Tobacconists these deserving tradesmen would grow prosperous, their shops would become landmarks, and people from far and wide would make pilgrimages to buy tobacco.[55]

He went on in the same delicious vein, and insisted that London was growing dim and dingy and depressed because the nomenclature of her streets created the dullness of the houses which in their turn conjured up flat and unimaginative names. In the East End, he reminded us, Petticoat

Lane is a-flag with gay garments, while Shepherdess Walk is still the trysting place of Hoxton's lads and lasses, and Hanging Sword Alley off Fleet Street to this day wears the mysterious atmosphere of mediaeval age.

By this time everyone was keyed up for rejoinder, and half a dozen of us tried to catch the chairman's eye, but Cecil was first in the field. He had the same thick, wavy hair as Gilbert, and his head was finely shaped. He was short, but at that time slim, with a very charming smile, a plain face and highly critical eyebrows. His methods in public speaking were the antithesis of Gilbert's, who used words as pigments, colouring his phrases as he would a missal. Cecil shaped his sentences as with a rapier. He cut and thrust, steadily driving his adversary back to fundamentals, with a deadly determination which was somehow increased by his unaffected kindliness.

He looked up at Gilbert, his head a little on one side, and his eyes dancing with combative glee.

"When my brother goes out of our father's house," said Cecil, "if he turns to the left he will not find himself in High Street, Kensington; that lies to the right. There is, moreover, a distinct though slight gradient in the High Street which I contend justifies its name. As for the tobacconists, there are only five, and one of the shops belongs to the firm of Salmon and Gluckstein, a combination which suggests many things, but hardly sorrow at small earnings."

Gilbert smiled serenely at the attack, which in his rejoinder he characterised as materialistic cavilling. He was always at his best when he was pricked. He got under way slowly almost pon-

derously as a rule, but put on his mettle he rallied like a Gastilian bull, tossing his opponent to the rails. Not that he was able to dispose so easily of Cecil, who by consensus of opinion was the most brilliant debater of his time.

Conrad Noel used to flash in and out of most of the debating societies to which my brother and I and the Chestertons belonged. Conrad was—and is—a most effective speaker, with a delicious humour that can flame into a white heat of passion when he is fighting the exploitation of the poor. He is fearless and calmly revolutionary as when in the face of bitter opposition he included the Soviet flag in his scheme of church decoration for the feast of St. George. His lovely church in Thaxted is the home of many enthusiasms : music, literature, arts and crafts, communism and Christianity, all welded in a vital organism.

When I first met him he divagated between clerical dress and a costume that suggested a jockey with coloured waistcoat and four-in-hand tie. But his beautifully moulded head and flashing eyes surmounted any idea of incongruity. Conrad, I always feel, would be equally in the picture at a martyr's stake or as a leader of inspired revolt marching with his people. He retains his fervour and his courage, defeating the weakness of flesh and spirit alike. His failing sight has been surmounted ; he walks the earth in the old fearless fashion, like a warrior priest.

As curate of the late Canon Lilley, then incumbent of St. Mary's, Paddington Green, Conrad used to raise doubts among the congregation as to his theological validity, more especially as his chief was also suspect of unorthodoxy.

"But you *do* believe in God, don't you, Mr. Noel?" asked a perplexed woman.

"I should like to," said the curate, "but my vicar won't let me."

Conrad was with Cecil and me on the occasion when Gilbert spoke at a Methodist chapel in Holloway. As we were all rushed with work, there had been no time for food, and only a fugitive drink. Further, Gilbert had to go on to another meeting, so we decided that between the two shows we should have a meal.

But the meeting was unexpectedly lengthy, Gilbert was speaking on the democracy of Dickens, and the questions which followed were unusually critical and intelligent, until at the end an erratic got up and argued that Dickens was an anti-democrat in that he had foregathered with the rich, and kept house with a wealthy actress. This gave a kick to the proceedings, and by the time the speaker had been routed there were only a few minutes before Gilbert was due to start for his next engagement. He looked round vaguely for escape, but before we could reach him, the minister, an elderly, anxious little man approached, and in a secretive manner, gave him a whispered invitation.

"Will you come into the vestry?" said he, "and have a little light refreshment."

Gilbert leapt at the idea, which seemed to him to indicate sherry, if not something stronger. Cecil and I moved towards the chapel door to wait, but barely had we reached the entrance when G. K., breathless with laughter, appeared.

"Over the road, quickly," he said, and charged through the traffic to the bright lights of a pub.

Over a tankard of beer, he told us what had happened.

" The dear old gentleman took me to a perfectly empty room and produced a tin box, which he handled most reverently, as though it held dazzling rubies from India, or pure ingots of African gold. Lifting up the lid, he said : ' You must be hungry, Mr. Chesterton, may I offer you an oswego biscuit ? ' " . . .

A favourite meeting place for all of us was the Pharos Club for men and women, which used to spread the light to the uninstructed bourgeoisie. The original members were all advanced, politically, artistically, or as to morals ; subsequent arrivals were of a more conventional kind. Oddly enough, the more advanced the morals of the elect, the narrower seemed to be their outlook. I remember I had a spirited debate with a lady, who had been the unmarried wife of six men, on the subject of barmaids. She insisted that the presence of these well-behaved, obliging Hebes in a bar sped up the consumption of alcohol, and if they were abolished the amount consumed would considerably fall off.

The much unmarried wife was an ardent teetotaller—in regard to drink—and it would not have been seemly to comment upon her want of moderation with regard to other pleasures. Her motion was, however, defeated, largely I think because she was quite obviously unacquainted with the inside of any bar, its manners or its customs, whereas I took a base advantage of my knowledge of Fleet Street hostelries.

Jepson, author of " Pollyooly," gave the club a delicious evening on the subject of Mormonism, which at that time was exciting the Press. It was

alleged that missionaries from Salt Lake City were spreading insidious propaganda here. Jepson explained the ethics of their practice simply and beautifully. For every ornamental spouse, he explained, you must have two supporting spouses, who would work to keep the home for you and your delight. He quoted a number of instances in this country, where he said this arrangement was working to perfection. The system could be extended indefinitely so long as the right proportion was observed, two supporting spouses to every ornamental.

Conrad presided at the Pharos when Charles Charrington, the husband of that brilliant actress Janet Achurch, spoke on Ibsen. Among the audience was a large stockbroker, whom the chairman had brought for his soul's edification. He was a kindly creature of the mastiff type, and listened, silent and respectful, to the sex reactions of " Hedda Gabler." After the debate the stockbroker was asked what he thought of Ibsen and the address generally.

" I never heard of the bloke Ibsen before," he said, and then with a sudden lightening of expression, " You know, old chap, if I had guessed that what you wanted was a dirty story, I could have told you a much better one."

In between more frivolous discussions, we had serious debates, at which Cecil and G. K. always turned up, and amateur dramatic performances. " The Admirable Bashville," among other Shavian dramas, was played with great success, with Cecil as Mellish the trainer and W. R. Titterton as Cashel Byron. Cecil was quite a good actor, indeed the brothers revelled in any game of make-

believe. Conal O'Riordan—we used to know him as Norreys Connell—was the producer on that occasion. He was a popular figure in the debating world. An extremely witty speaker, he had a personal charm and fascination that was irresistible. I remember he took the chair at a memorable meeting on Russia—years before the war—when a defender of the Tsarist régime insisted from the audience that the prisoners exiled to Siberia were chained together on the long trek, at their own request, for company. He dealt with the interruption in a few words of deadly precision, which left the gentleman completely crumpled up.

It was a jolly club, with only one drawback. The catering, run by a Women's Committee, was very bad. I have never been able to understand why woman, who has made good meals for man for centuries, rarely seems able to arrange a decent menu for her own sex. At last, however, the Pharos arose in its hunger, a competent chef was installed, and the receipts went up. But eventually the club went into the air—or liquidation—and we were displaced.

Another debating ground we all frequented was the I.D.K. (I Don't Know). This particular society originated in Bedford Park and was favoured by Mrs. G. K. Chesterton—before her marriage Frances Blogg—who helped to found it. The subjects selected were less revolutionary than the Moderns, the members being more respectable, not to say orderly—doctors, surveyors, lawyers and the like. We had a great night once when Cecil and a select band of freebooters stormed the residence of a solicitor, host for the occasion, and under a non-committal title denounced the whole educa-

tional system of our State schools, from the choice of subjects taught to the oppression, political and economic, of the teachers. Cecil was supported by that mysterious and fascinating figure, A. R. Orage, who, starting as a teacher in a national school at Leeds, came to London with Holbrook Jackson and acquired the *New Age*. He was a deadly debater with a gimlet eye for detail. I remember he completely floored Sidney Webb and the rest of the Fabian Executive one memorable night by his insistence that the insertion of a comma in one of their tracts concerning certain Trade Union leaders had falsified the facts.

There was little opposition worthy of the name in the I.D.K. debate, and by sheer hard driving we mastered what there was and snatched the vote. The gathering, apart from our contingent, was somewhat shocked at our attitude towards education and for the next few months neither Cecil nor I was advised of further meetings.

We rallied to a final gathering, however, which by request of Frances was held at Warwick Gardens, the home of the Chesterton parents. Marie Louise, the mother who gave her sons their brains and quenchless love of liberty, was the most hospitable of women and though her domestic arrangements were continually ravaged by fierce discussions, always welcomed the incursing hordes. We did not get to grips that night. The Secretary of the society, Noel Blogg, brother of Mrs. G. K., had a queer memory, of the kind that simmers in a sea of perpetual doubt. He never knew whether or no he had read the minutes at the previous meeting, and usually tried to re-read them to make sure.

That evening, it being Cecil's home, none of us felt able to move the closure, and as a consequence poor Blogg went back to the records of months previously and read and read on solemnly for well over an hour. Gilbert, muttering something about matches, basely disappeared, and Bentley softly followed him with one or two others. We could hear their cheerful voices from the other room as we sat on grimly, Cecil trying to control great gusts of laughter which he turned into a hacking cough.

Marie Louise ended the tension with tea and cake and wine and the session broke up. We went to no more meetings of the I.D.K., which I always felt symbolically described the secretary, but other groups took its place.

The popularity of debating societies at that time was only equalled by the demand for dinners in their honour. Those were the days when Soho restaurants supplied an excellent table d'hôte for two and six including wine, and for a sovereign you could throw a gorgeous party. We all dressed ceremoniously on these occasions and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Max Beerbohm was a most successful guest of the Moderns and made a wonderful speech on our prototypes of Ancient Greece and Babylon. He was followed by Gilbert and Belloc, both at the top of their form. Occasionally we gave dinners to ourselves and disputed violently but in complete good temper between courses. Of this variety there were also the Old Bottles and the New Bohemians, both of which had their brief, glorious day.

Then we had Toy Parliaments. Frivolous in name, they were intensely serious in purpose.

Ham House, the meeting place for Hammersmith, was among the earliest which set the pace for the rest. Our particular favourite was held in the big vestry of St. Ethelburga one of the old city churches under the aegis of the Rev. Geikie Cobb. We met in the evening every fortnight, and Cecil and I came very regularly. Our set, mostly journalists, with a sprinkling of revolutionary Civil Servants, usually formed the Opposition, the Government being composed of steady-going Conservatives and Liberals. But occasionally a Private Member's Bill was debated, which gave full opportunity for the expression of all shades of opinion. We prided ourselves on observing parliamentary procedure, and duly followed the House of Commons method of applause, which appeared to be a curiously yapping pronunciation of hear! hear!

Cecil prepared his bills with the greatest possible care. He was an amazingly swift worker, with a capacity for prolonged effort which I have never found equalled. It was an invaluable training for public work, and most of his bills aiming at the restoration and conservation of political liberty were the direct expression of the demands of the working class, with whom he was on easy terms of social equality. Cecil was happy in having no sense of class distinction: such differences were unnoticed and unregistered by him. Man as man was his chief interest and concern.

Now the rule at St. Ethelburga allowed a new member to be sworn in for special debates, and strangers of ability representing new constituencies appeared in support of their particular party, thus making for surprise attacks and unexpected

victories. Such an occasion proved the end of all proceedings at St. Ethelburga.

The Rev. Geikie Cobb was to propose a bill on Education. He had sponsored several measures during the previous session, but had not met with any luck, being invariably defeated. On this occasion he was on his mettle, and a formidable following of new members appeared in the vestry, which was full to overflowing. We on our side had not been idle, but it was quality, not quantity that we were after, and G. K., Conrad Noel, Masterman—a real M.P. at that time—with Saxon Mills turned up.

The Vicar had had his bill printed on the parish hand-press and was full of expectancy and vim. It always seemed to be on the question of education that our debating societies foundered, and this was no exception. Once more Cecil took the field and tore up the bill, which he denounced as reactionary and oppressive. Provision after provision wilted under his raking fire, and when he evoked the support of right honourable members for the bill's defeat, I felt the unhappy Cobb was vanquished.

Cecil was followed by our new M.P.'s, and the feeling of the House rose in a great tide. One by one Cobb's personal supporters forsook him, and he and his bill were decisively put to the rout.

" He has failed," insisted our socialist member for Stepney, " and as he sits there he knows that he has failed."

The next day we all received notice to the effect that the hall, required for increasing parish purposes, could no longer be at our disposal. But if

we were deprived of our joyous Toy, the Fabians were still open to us. The Society, then in its heyday, had considerable influence and was able to wirepull politicians on both sides of the House. We used to meet at Clifford's Inn and Bernard Shaw and Hubert Bland were the star turns* Sidney Webb's masterly statistics were not so well attended, though the dryness of his matter was made piquant by his pleasing Cockney accent, which made me realise that in spite of his monumental gifts he was quite human. At a party at the Webbs, Cecil once enquired with interest what had happened to a conservatory that he remembered seeing full of flowers. The future Lord PassfiekTs answer was a masterpiece in economy of utterance.

" Wiste of spice," he said, and passed on to the consideration of more lofty things.

I was not present on that memorable evening, but I recall a Fabian party which included dancing, at which Doctor Stanton Coit, a well-known figure at that time, was present. He was the pillar if not the founder of the Ethical Church, and we were all awe stricken when we saw him slowly and with much state revolving in a waltz.

" I say," said Cecil to Bernard Shaw, " do look —there's Stanton Coit dancing."

" That is not dancing," replied G. B. S. " It is the Ethical Movement."

The utterances of Pease, the Fabian Secretary, had none of the approved crispness of form, and he would quell young members by describing their suggestions as futile and fatuous. He was so lavish in the use of those epithets that we christened him

after his favourite words, and he was F. and F. to our set for all time.

We used to sit in the body of the hall and irreverently note the foibles of the great ones on the platform. Some of the committee members suggested a diet of nuts and undiluted vitamins, but their drabness faded at the sight of G. B. S.'s flaming red head and general flamboyance. Hubert Bland, refulgent in eyeglass, smartly cut clothes, stiff shirt and collar and exotic tie, looked like a dashing company promoter at a Convocation of Rural Peans, or a sinister international spy at a meeting of the Junior Navy League. Sometimes we had lighter fare. I remember the glee with which we listened to Jepson's address on the Stock Exchange, where he said his idiot relations had lost every penny they possessed. Clifford Sharp, the future editor of the *New Statesman,* also made his debut as a speaker, and Orage would dash in with lightning effect. With these and other young impertinents, we formed a cave for the purpose of heckling F. and F. and the more academic of the Executive. We had some amazingly good sport, firing off a hail of awkward questions, not always easily answered. But Pease, with the help of Sidney Webb, was too much for us. The Executive ruled that notice must be given of all questions, which effectively spoiled our fun. Nevertheless our efforts were not in vain. Cecil, as representing the more revolutionary section, was elected to the Committee, and the rest of the cave, with one or two exceptions, formed itself into the Fabian Nursery, which kept a lynx eye on the pillars of the Society and gingered them up.

But in spite of caves, or, perhaps, because of

them, the Fabian debates kept to the point at issue. Any attempt at side tracking or sentimentalism roused immediate protest. Hard hitting was refreshingly persistent—the refined form of discussion popularised by the B.B.C. had yet to come. Nor was this hunger for argument confined to journalists and writers. Young men in commercial offices and banks, barristers and schoolmasters flocked to debating societies all over the country, hammering their ideas into shape, testing their theories, proving their contentions. It was a thrilling and amusing game, but more than that, it developed clear thinking and effective speaking.

In apposition—and often opposition—to the Fabian Society was the Social Democratic Federation, under the chairmanship of H. M. Hyndman, with a huge membership of workers and trade unionists, relentless hecklers and first-class debaters. There was, however, a tendency, common to so many revolutionary parties, to split up into factions and schisms which rent the fabric of the parent body. At one of the most exciting meetings I remember, the conduct of a certain Comrade G. was called in question. A member raised the point that G. had been suspended from the committee of his local branch for misconduct, the said misconduct consisting of residence with another member's wife.

This, said his champion, was not cause for suspension. It was nothing to do with the ethics of socialism, and was a private matter. H. M, Hyndman then entered the ring.

He was an impressive figure ; indeed his personality created a suggestion of height, though he

was not tall, which may account for his habit of rising on his toes at each point in his orations. He had the Victorian habit of investing fireside talks with his platform manner. I remember going to tea at his Hampstead home, when his wife, the second Mrs. Hyndman, was quite flustered by this rising and falling motion, and the spate of words washing over the sandwiches.

" My darling," she said, " I do wish you would stand still. You go up and down and up and down until it makes me dizzy—I've poured out six cups, and we are only three."

She was devoted to the great man, whom she mothered carefully and, on the whole, unobtrusively. Hyndman was always embattled in a tight-fitting frock coat, which bristled with challenge and was the most effective setting for his massive head and Jove-like beard and brow. There was nothing about his appearance which suggested red-hot socialism. He was often taken for a prosperous City merchant, and indeed he had a keen sense of business and was a most successful company promoter. But he was not rich ; he offered up the bulk of his income on the altar of Karl Marx, and the only time I think he lost his temper was when a comrade spoke, or even thought irreverently of that remarkable man.

On the matter of Comrade G., Hyndman denounced his conduct as likely to bring disrespect on the great and noble cause of socialism. Those who upheld the banner of Karl Marx must be of good repute. The S.D.F. would have nothing to do with illegalised relations, and Comrade G. must either quit the lady or the Society. A storm of protest almost raised the roof, but Hyndman

stood firm. None of his flock should disgrace the cause and remain within the federation.

He was a fine orator, albeit given to *clichis* and for ever hearing the marching of the workers of the world "a long way off" as an irreverent interrupter said. On the principle of leavening up the standard of existence he was very firm.

" Some people want a third-class socialism," he insisted, " under which everyone travels in cattle trucks. I want a first-class socialism, with everyone on cushioned seats in comfortable carriages."

The S.D.F. was pre-eminently a fighting body in favour of frontal attack, as opposed to the Fabian policy of permeation. They could always be relied on effectively to steward their own meetings or their opponents[5]. In the latter case interrupters were most efficiently and noiselessly ejected. Their organisation in such cases was quite perfect, and during the recent period of protected Fascist gatherings when the police battened down all opposition, I used to long for a contingent from the old S.D.F. who, shoulder to shoulder, would have swept the hall and taken the platform. They always worked in units, individual action was discouraged, and their cohesive methods were law. Rarely, if ever, was a member of the S.D.F. taken into custody for a breach of the peace. They were always interested in preserving it—occasionally with small but effective pieces of gas piping wrapped in copies of the *Daily Mail.* . . .

We had many interests, and our beliefs were ardent, but the world was spacious and there was plenty of time. Time to work at one's best, play at one's hardest. Time to think and talk—and

how we talked. Above all, time for that companionship which is the wine of life.

It was in the world of debate that Cecil and I became acquainted. Our friendship ripened in the atmosphere of home and the quickening adventures of Fleet Street.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HOUSE IN WARWICK GARDENS

THE Chestertons' house in Warwick Gardens, the home of Gilbert and Cecil for years, stood out from its neighbours. As you turned the corner of the street you had a glimpse of flowers in dark green window boxes and the sheen of paint the colour of West country bricks, that seemed to hold the sunshine. The setting of the home never altered. The walls of the dining-room renewed their original shade of bronze green year after year. The mantelboard was perennially wine colour, and the tiles of the hearth, Edward Chesterton's own design, grew more and more mellow.

Books lined as much of the wall space as was feasible and the shelves reached from floor to ceiling in a phalanx of leather. The furniture was graceful, a slim mahogany dining-table, a small sideboard, generously stocked with admirable bottles, and deep chairs.

The portrait of G. K. as a child of six smiled from a wall facing the fireplace. Walking with his father in Kensington Gardens, the fair and radiant beauty of the boy, the flowing curls and graceful poise, held the eyes of an Italian artist, Bacceni, who did not rest until he had transferred the vision to canvas. The picture, now in the National Portrait Gallery, reveals no trace of Gilbert the man, only the wavy, luxuriant hair for a long time remained.

The dining-room centred the interests of G. K. and Cecil all through their schooldays. Their club meetings were held there, and the gargantuan teas which with fellow Paulines they consumed between games and discussions. There also had the two brothers started their eternal and unhurried debates which occasionally overflowed into the body of the house. On party nights wide folding doors stood open and through the vista of a warm yet delicate rose-coloured drawing-room you saw a long and lovely garden, burgeoning with jasmine and syringa, blue and yellow iris, climbing roses and rock plants. The walls were high, and tall trees stood sentinel at the far end, so at least it seemed to me on my first visit—and the picture has stayed ever since.

It was in the garden of a summer evening that Cecil and I used to exchange confidences. He had a way with him that appealed to women, indeed in that respect he was like Liberty Wilkes, who claimed that, given twenty-four hours' start, he could out-compete the handsomest man in Europe for a lady's favour. Cecil had had several heart-stirring attachments, but, so he said, he had come to an end of vicarious sentiment, and in his charming voice he would tell me that I was his Ultima Thule, and that Swinburne in a pre-vision must have seen me when he wrote " none knows, none understands what flowers are like her hands," which gave Cecil the opportunity for close investigation as to what particular blossoms were concerned with my fingers.

On special occasions Edward Chesterton, affectionately known as Mister—a tiny child had given him the name—would hang up fairy lamps in

absurd and ravishing loops among the flowers and trees. He was a man of many small and endearing talents. Fretwork at one time held the field, and he would work for hours in his den at the end of the passage, turning out tables and stools beautifully tooled. Modelling was another relaxation, and plasticine cropped up everywhere. He made me a lovely ichthyosaurus, with a neck like Arthur Balfour's, and the same metaphysical eye. Mister was a clever draughtsman with a real gift for colour, and some of his decorative panels were delightful.

Photography and carpentry were permanent joys. He made toy theatres for Gilbert as a boy, and still carved jolly little gnomes and elves, and was always ready to entertain young people.

I remember a mediaeval head-dress Mister made me for a costume dance : every detail was meticulous and the effect gorgeous. He had time to enjoy all his pursuits, for he had retired from the firm of Chesterton & Sons at an unusually early age, with plenty to live on.

Mister had not settled down through lack of interest in the firm's affairs. He was the victim of a Victorian medical shibboleth which held that the heart, the stoutest and toughest of bodily organs, was of so frail and delicate a nature that if at any time it showed signs of weakness or fatigue, effort must be removed from life, or death would forthwith supervene. Edward, years back, had suffered from heart tremors or palpitation, and the family physician, backed by the inevitable Harley Street expert, had insisted that the patient must go out of business. Always apprehensive of ill-health, Edward grew alarmed, decided to hand

over the conduct of the firm to his brother Sidney, and arranged for a prolonged and agreeable saunter through life.

His heart, never mentioned in the family circle, was always guarded. He shrank from any enquiry or explanation as to his condition which was very bad for him, and engendered a queer atmosphere of silence concerning physical ailments, which had a repercussion upon Gilbert who had inherited or acquired his father's apprehension and always shied from the idea of illness in himself or anyone else. Edward's mental attitude on this point was responsible for greviously hurting Marie Louise. It would have shocked him inexpressibly to know that he was the actual cause of such a thing, but unconsciously he inflicted a deep wound. Their first born, Beatrice, had been a very lovely little creature who for eight years was the idol of the household. Gilbert, a small person of three, was terribly grieved at her loss and for a time pined so desolately that his life seemed threatened. But his childish anguish passed and he grew once more rosy. But his father could not recapture happiness. Unable to face his daughter's death, he drew a veil over her existence. He banished all traces of the little figure, had her portrait turned to the wall, and begged his wife never to mention her by name.

Marie Louise obeyed, but on one occasion she said piteously to a close confidante :

" I *was* the mother of three children and I had a beautiful girl. . . ."

But the portrait remained hidden from the light of day as though Beatrice had disgraced her name and been thrust Victorian fashion out of the home.

Marie Louise and " the idol of the household," (*See p.* 22)

***[Facing p.* 22.**

No wonder her mother grieved at the wee thing's banishment.

Gilbert inherited his father's shrinking from the fact of death, and when, long years after, Edward's own life was ending, it was only with real pain and difficulty that he summoned sufficient fortitude to see the dying man.

Neither Marie Louise nor Cecil ever commented on this tacit taboo of sickness—indeed the family was so deeply rooted in mutual tolerance that any individual idiosyncrasy was never challenged. Cecil and his mother had such a courageous curiosity of life that neither sickness nor pain perturbed them. He, like her, was quite fearless, with the same sunny temperament and enjoyment of simple things. They both suffered unpleasant physical experience. Marie Louise had fragile, almost brittle bones, which her sons also possessed, and went through some nasty accidents. She travelled once from the North of Scotland with a broken arm—a suitcase had fallen on it—and never mentioned what had happened until she got home, when she calmly sent for the doctor and went to bed. She showed no sign of pain throughout the journey, and had the arm set without an anaesthetic. Edward meanwhile suspected nothing. I am not sure that fear of her husband's " heart" was entirely responsible for her silence. Lavish of help and sympathy to all else, for herself she was a stoic—plus a lovely sense of humour and unfailing wit. Moreover, Mister was unbelievably absent-minded and would remain serenely oblivious of objective things at the most poignant moments.

A favourite fireside story was the account of the

return of the parents from their honeymoon. The young couple sat down to cold roast beef and salad, and with a glowing pride the fond husband addressed himself to the joint—men did the carving in those days.

"You like your beef cut thin, Marie?" he observed, and filled a plate with wafer-like slices, which he then proceeded to eat, blandly unconscious that she had nothing. Marie watched him, smiling, from the top of the table, and not until years after did she tell him what he had done. This foible was not apparent in his business. He had never mislaid a property or forgotten the whereabouts of a house, but in the ordinary functions of everyday life he was often missing, though to nothing like the same extent as his sons, who never really knew if it were freezing cold or blazing hot, being quite impervious to weather.

The unconsciousness of things objective had the oddest results. Mrs. Chesterton used to give the most delightful parties in which her own and her boys' friends were agreeably mixed. Alas! some of her most successful evenings fell to pieces under the impact of the Chesterton insatiability for argument. The brothers could—and frequently did—spend several hours in each other's company without crossing swords, but let one drop a word that challenged the other, and immediately the issue was joined and a fresh chapter opened in their life-long discussion.

They were curiously and symbolically unalike, these two perennial wrestlers. Cecil, swift moving, always thrusting for the goal, would walk rapidly from the dining-room window to the end of the drawing-room—bright with the party spirit—

talking all the while. Gilbert, starting from the other end, moved slowly, vaguely, almost hesitant, traversing half the distance of his brother. One evening when we were all enjoying ourselves particularly, Cecil made a controversial remark on the problem play. Immediately Gilbert retorted that most problem plays were as unimportant and as obnoxious as the obscene domestic habits of blackbeetles. Cecil rose to the bait and for the next two hours the brothers held the floor, walking from north to south and south to north, utterly, blindly unaware of the corporeal presence of the guests. It is not that in any sense they were intentionally discourteous, but the discussion of an idea actually blotted out all material considerations. They never interrupted one another, their voices were never raised, nor was there a touch of recrimination or the suspicion of rudeness. They just continued the duel with such zest and brilliance that the bewildered and embarrassed onlookers were hypnotised.

Marie Louise on this occasion was really worried. The party had been so successful that she could not bear the thought of its collapse. Usually nothing could induce her to interfere with the boys' amusement, but for once she turned to Frances and asked if she could possibly distract Gilbert's attention. Frances did her best, and indeed uttered a few brief words which Gilbert thrust aside, brushing off her protesting hand with a complete non-apprehension that it was there.

" Perhaps if you asked Cecil, Keith dear? " suggested his mother. But I shook my head. Nothing short of an earthquake or the last trump would have awakened either of them to an objec-

tive universe. To and fro, to and fro they surged, and gradually the guests, retreating farther and farther from the path of controversy, made whispered adieux and slithered out of the door.

"You know, my dearest girl," said the little lady to me once, "I have sat many a time in my room and almost cried because my boys had broken up a party, and then I realised how wicked I was to grudge them their enjoyment."

I forget how the blackbeetle combat was settled. I know I went from the house feeling bemused, not to say battered. Cecil, smiling in huge enjoyment of the interlude, never dreamed of the havoc he and his co-adjutor had wrought.

I first met Frances at Warwick Gardens. She had a queer elusive attraction in those days, with her pale face, quite devoid of powder or the least tinge of make-up, and curiously vague eyes. She looked charming in blue or green, but she rarely wore those shades, and usually affected dim browns or greys. We did not find much mutual ground of understanding. She and I looked at life from a radically different standpoint. She had never had to earn her living in the ordinary strenuous sense, and her experience of employment had been confined to the secretaryship of a society called, I think, "The Parents' Reform League," or something of that kind. I was out in the world at sixteen years of age learning my job as a news reporter, moreover, I loved adventure, and wanted to go everywhere and see as much as possible. Even our domestic reactions differed. I revelled in cooking and housewifery, while Frances was not interested in food and really did not mind what she ate. A garden was her delight and she had the

green hands of the flower grower. But the essential difference between us lay in our respective attitudes to Fleet Street—a difference which coloured the greater part of our association.

Gilbert and Frances were already married before I knew them, and had settled down in a charming little house in Edwardes Square, an oasis of good architecture and repose in the roar of the High Street and within a stone's throw of Warwick Gardens. G. K. used to wander in and out of the old home at all hours, gleaming with joy if he found his younger brother available for argument. The family legends include the story of the discussion which lasted eighteen hours and thirteen minutes.

The parents, with their offspring—Cecil fourteen, and Gilbert five years older—had gone to Lowestoft for their summer holidays. The boys both loved the sea, and Cecil would tramp miles along the coast, Gilbert, who disliked any form of exercise, lounging on the sands. They always met at meal times, however, and one morning over the bacon and eggs a line of contention materialised. Food was pushed aside, heaven and earth forgotten, the two were at it in a flash.

The parents tactfully crept away, returning at lunch time to find the argument still going strong. They explained to the landlady that the boys must not be disturbed and, the house being full to overflowing, ate their meal in the hall, relays of meat, etc., being pushed round the door of the debating chamber and consumed by the antagonists. A little weary, the parents went out for the afternoon, hoping that by tea time the strain would have relaxed. Vain aspiration ! The two voices

still claimed and counterclaimed over vast teapots and mounds of bread and butter, and, disconsolate, the parents retreated to the pier. Supper found no change and the parents went to bed after a few biscuits.

"And then," said Marie Louise, "at half-past two in the morning I heard Gilbert come down the stairs and go out at the front door, which he shut firmly but quietly behind him."

She and Edward showed the same amazing tolerance in every phase of family life and watched Cecil's divagations from fighting Atheism through Ritualism to the Catholic Church, with a complete lack of interference or even a suggestion of criticism. The right of the individual to liberty of thought was sacred to them, and never by implication or word did they show the slightest tinge of intolerance towards their sons' opinions.

Gilbert arrived by a less direct route towards the same philosophical goal as his brother, but in this, as in so many other mental pilgrimages, it was Cecil who led the way, and G. K., with all the coruscations of genius, followed after.

All through the years of trial and experiment, when the brothers were questing for political belief and spiritual faith, the parents surrounded them with a sense of freedom which included their choice of a career. Edward, I feel, had never even hoped that his elder son would go into the business, but I think it was supposed that Cecil might take root, more especially as he had qualified as a surveyor with the greatest of ease.

But it was not to be. He could not have fitted into the role of an estate agent, though with his quick scent for adventure he thoroughly enjoyed

the brief period of his articles, browsing in the libraries which he was sent to value, attending the sales at the London mart, and studying the ways and methods of the public auctioneers, their racy patter and adroit handling of mixed crowds. He always retained his friends of those days, indeed throughout the gradual evolution of his opinions, the changing colour of his views, he kept the appreciation—more the affection—of the particular groups which he had once joined. Long after he ceased to advocate State ownership, he was hailed by the comrades who, while they deplored, admitted the sincerity of his altered outlook. Anglo-Catholics had no bitterness against him when he became a Papist, and Tories and Liberals accepted his conversion to Distributism without rancour or reproach.

Cecil had the gift of making contact with all kinds of men and women. Human intercourse to him was a sheer delight, and he never suffered from that curious aloofness which in after years seemed to come between G. K. and the ordinary individual.

On one point, however, the brothers were devastatingly alike. Neither had any sense of money value. Gilbert never liked banks, and declared that the best place to keep your cash was under a board or in the roof, after the fashion of a peasant. Failing these methods, he would cram cheques, notes, gold—when he had any—silver and coppers in his pocket. The cheques would grow old and frayed, the notes drifted like autumn leaves, and the actual metal currency disappeared by magic. He would often find himself bereft of money—when he would dash off an article or a story to replenish his pocket.

When he was writing the life of Browning, he worked in the reading-room of the British Museum, embellishing his MS. with sketches of his neighbours. On one occasion, discovering his resources were completely null, he drafted an appeal in his wonderful writing with the drawing of a man shaking with hunger. "Pity a starving genius," said the document, "and lend me sixpence." He deposited the pica on the desk before a friend, and having collected the specified assistance, made another and another call, eventually departing with a chuckle to a neighbouring hostelry. He never forgot these transactions and would pursue a lender down Fleet Street when in receipt of custom.

This ignorance of money value was an outcome of Marie Louise's desire to keep her sons unworldly in the sense that mere cash was quite unimportant compared with the things of the mind and the spirit. One of the few restrictions of their childhood was the question of tips, which they were forbidden to accept, indeed while comfort and hospitality overflowed for them and all their friends, actual pocket money was small, perhaps frugal.

Gilbert, I think, more than his brother, suffered from this implied embargo. I remember hearing that as a senior at St. Paul's he felt the contrast between his own impecuniosity and his fellow editors of the school paper, though he made no protest. I always think that Edward's "heart" may have stood in the way—no work, no strain, no worry had sunk deep into domestic life, and Gilbert never seems to have turned to his mother for financial help.

The younger Chesterton was more happily dis-

Edward Chesterton—" affectionately known as Mister." (*See p.* 20)

***[Facing p.* 30.**

positioned. He had a sense of sex equality which Gilbert did not possess, and if he wanted anything would ask Marie Louise without the faintest sense of masculine inferiority. There are always affinities in family life, and while G. K. and Cecil had a warm affection for both their parents, Gilbert was closer to his father than his younger brother, who shared with Marie Louise a deep and enduring understanding.

When Cecil joined the Army, and his income as a journalist automatically stopped, Edward never thought that his son might like an allowance, though he was rich enough and generous enough to afford it. At the same time, it never occurred to Cecil to ask for one. He chanced his luck on his pay, such articles as he had time to write and frequent P.O.'s from his mother, who once her sons grew to manhood realised that material gain did not tempt, nor, indeed, attract them. This money business considerably influenced Gilbert's life. When at last he made a large income, he enjoyed to the full the freedom to spend his lavish earnings. It was a time of burgeoning for him, and those who met him in his full summer have an imperishable memory. And then a few years later the wheel flung full circle and once more he felt the pinch of pence.

But in the days when Warwick Gardens was still his home, this time was far ahead.

The parents generally edged out of their sons' discussions. Edward, by way of being a mild Liberal, was rarely moved to strong protest, though Marie Louise would on occasions plead a cause with such sparkling humour and vivacity that all her young admirers thrilled. She had an

ageless vitality, and was so hospitable to ideas that to the last—she lived to over eighty—youth found in her a rare and sympathetic confidant. Not that she ever trimmed her opinions, but she was intensely keen to understand contemporary views, and her prejudices, if whimsical, were very human.

"I don't like India, my dear girl," she would say, " and I can't bear Russia. I know they are very great countries, and I am sure the people are remarkable. But I don't want to hear about them. They're not like us."

G. K.'s prejudices were equally unfathomable. Certain names aroused in him extreme dislike, even though he had never met their owners and knew nothing of their habit of life or method of thinking. Raymond Radclyffe, who belonged to an old and most distinguished family, was a case in point. He was a very brilliant financial critic, with such an eye for Stock Exchange juggling that any shady transaction affected him, as a musician is affected by a false note. He was a most invaluable contributor to the *New Witness* and a close friend of Cecil's, but for a long time G. K. steadily refused to meet him, or even to discuss his articles. When at last they ran across each other in the *New Witness* office, they talked for over an hour on the best of terms and mutual enjoyment.

" I'd no idea he was like that," G. K. explained. " You see his name sounded so romantic I couldn't believe it was true."

All the loyalties, gifts and disconcerting habits that marked the Chesterton brothers throughout life were interwoven with the house in Warwick Gardens. Beyond the sitting-rooms, stretched the

hinterland of the home, kindly and protective—even the deep and badly lighted basement. Upstairs were spacious, lofty bedrooms, the nursery where the boys played at Red Indians, and funny little cubbyholes, in which Gilbert and Cecil wrote, made strange chemical stinks and enacted dramas in toy theatres. All his life Gilbert preferred a tiny room to write in. He must, I think, have associated freedom of expression with cramped space, so far as work was concerned. He was never so content as when his capacious figure was enwrapped by truncated walls. In such conditions his imagination leaped the barriers of time and space, challenging the sun in metaphoric splendour. Only at the very end of his career did he work in a sizeable place, when his secretary, Dorothy Collins, achieved a commodious apartment. I have always thought it symbolic that the big, untidy, rambling genius of a man should have stayed so short a time in his admirably appointed and file-indexed study.

One of the cubbyholes at Warwick Gardens had exclusively belonged to Cecil. As a child he had a strange affection for cockroaches, which he kept in a cardboard box, feeding them on bread and butter. They enjoyed the summer air in the garden, but at the first breath of cold he transferred the creatures to the room upstairs. This was more than Marie Louise could bear, and when the boy was on a visit to his grandparents the place was turned out and the cockroaches disappeared.

" I suppose they got tired of being here," said Cecil," and wanted to go home," and did not further discuss the situation.

The cubbyhole had a musty smell and stacks

and stacks of copybooks containing juvenile novels and political theses and economic systems—the outlines of a Cecilian form of government, which covered every phase of national life.

Gilbert had no penchant for pets, though later he made friends with border terriers, of which the famous Quoodle was the first. Cats always made friends with Cecil. Faustine, temperamental and coquettish, adopted him for a short while, when she left to reside with a black persian. The next arrival to take possession of the house was Pasht who remained till he died. His successor was mysteriously abducted, according to the legend, to be succeeded by Danton, the last of the lineage. He lived on until after the war. This was a most intelligent animal. He used to wait up every night for his beloved master, flying out of the window as Cecil turned the corner of the street to give him welcome. This was the signal for Marie Louise to descend the stairs and make tea for her boy, who with Danton on his shoulder, would dart down the passage into the little pantry where she was waiting.

Family dinner parties were part of the domestic atmosphere. There were a host of Chestertons. Edward was the eldest of six brothers, and of these one died early, two lived in England and two went abroad. My favourite was Uncle Arthur, an extremely charming handsome man, who was always well dressed with a marvellous taste in ties and literature. He was a commercial traveller, and had a gorgeous collection of humorous stories of the people and places he encountered in his travels. His get-up was the admiration and despair of Marie Louise, who would gently

endeavour to rouse Edward to a spirit of sartorial competition. Mister declined all attempt at emulation. He was untidy, but picturesque in a nice old brown velvet jacket, but his trousers were eternally uncreased.

Gilbert and Cecil were, frankly, hopeless. They had literally no pride in their appearance ; they were indeed quite oblivious and utterly indifferent as to what they looked like. Left to themselves, they would have worn a suit until it was shapeless, threadbare and incredibly ancient. Only the persistent removal of their garments for pressing and cleaning kept them fairly decent. A rigid discipline in their early youth might have inculcated a more desirable sense of fitness in these two bundles of temperament and talent, but mercury is not easily handled, and though Gilbert affected dramatic cloaks and broad-brimmed hats and flourished sword sticks and daggers, he had no more sense of clothes than a steam-roller. Cecil, I should say, had less.

Edward had a sister besides his brothers—Aunt Alice—with six children, who with Uncle Sidney's six tall sons, represented the more solid side of the clan. At St. Paul's one set of Chestertons was nick-named Games and the other Books. The Games contingent knew not Fleet Street and had little use for it. Frank, the eldest, was the exception. He was a special crony of Cecil, in whom he used to confide his complicated and innumerable love-affairs. He had a touch of genius, and had he lived should have made his mark as a brilliant and original architect. They were a jolly crowd and they all adored Marie Louise, who was very fond of them, especially Aunt Alice and her daughters.

After my marriage to Cecil I was formally introduced to the family, of whom I had only met stray members. My mother-in-law was very anxious that I should make a good impression, and tactfully suggested my sartorial line.

"Wear something pretty, darling," said she, "but not *too* smart. The Chestertons are very dear, but rather worthy."

I always felt this was an apt description of the family. It was from Marie Louise that Gilbert and Cecil got their brains.

Mrs. Chesterton had two sisters settled in Kensington. The elder, Aunt Jessie Grosjean, with a lovely sense of humour, we rarely saw. She was a great social worker and had little time for enjoyment. The other was the most delightful little person. She was called Sloper, because, according to the boys, she was always trying to slope off and leave the family to their own devices. She adored Cecil, and when he was away, would always keep an eye on his immediate cats.

The younger Grosjean generation were represented by a brother and two sisters, Jack, Nora and Violet, who for years has been a missionary in the East. Jack is a clergyman, with a Dickensian sense of humour and a rare loyalty, and Nora is a sweet woman, always cheerful and completely sacrificial. She had been a favourite playfellow of the brothers in childhood, their chum as the) grew up, and the tie with Cecil was still strong, Jack and Nora always came to dinner on Christmas Day and to other family gatherings. Marie Louise would have a huge turkey and a vast dessert ; her sons always said her epitaph should be "she gave more almonds than raisins."

Dinner on these occasions was always followed by what a highbrow once called childish games. We played animal, vegetable and mineral with great gusto, Gilbert and Jack always carrying off the prize. G. K. really enjoyed simple amusements, and loved inventing other guessing games of a more exciting description. Marie Louise never took part in these diversions ; she always said that young people preferred to play without their elders. She kept up a witty commentary the whole time, however, and was always pressing us with Christmas drinks.

The Grosjean family, of Swiss descent, were originally settled in Neuchatel, where Marie Louise's grandfather had owned large property. Her father who married and settled down here was a remarkable man. He was attached as a lay preacher to a Wesleyan chapel, but being devoted to music, divided his leisure between his ministrations and attendance at the Covent Garden Opera. He and his two sons were both dead when I came into the Chesterton circle. James Keith the elder, had held a distinguished post in Egypt, as a medical jurisprudent, and Beaumont, the father of Jack and the sisters, was, I think, a research chemist. It seems that James had been a sad flirt—I would not acquit Marie Louise of slight tendencies in that direction—and there was a lovely story of a woebegone girl with whom he had trifled, who wishing to restore his interest, knocked piteously on his bedroom door—modesty forbade an entry—and begged forgiveness for having fathered scornful thoughts of him. Included also in the Warwick Gardens circle were Lizzie and Annie Firmin, who had been part and parcel of the family since

childhood. They were Gilbert's and Cecil's close comrades until Annie married and went to Canada where Lizzie followed her. Annie had the loveliest red-gold hair which Gilbert very much admired ; indeed the fugitive heroines who occasionally flit through his stories are inevitably red-headed. I had always heard that the youngest of the Blogg sisters, who died from an accident in her girlhood, had burnished flaming locks ; but family authorities say that this was not the case. But be that as it may, red hair signified to Gilbert beauty and romance.

The Cowtans were also a family connection. Moire Cowtan, father of a large family, was an attractive person with a Bourbon nose, a flow of amazing anecdote and a presence that always reminded one of Louis Quatorze. He had an impressive notion of the status of the professional classes, and was most upset when Cecil did not apply for a commission in the Army. He quoted innumerable instances of friends and relations who had all done their duty in this respect.

" But we can't all be officers," replied Cecil, " there must be a few middle-class Tommies."

The Cowtans were very home-loving, and only one of the daughters married, which Marie Louise greatly deplored. She did not believe in girls being kept too closely by their mothers' side. Even in her young days she and her sisters used to spend hours exploring the London streets, unattended. Their favourite game was to cross Regent Street at the most crowded part, running for dear life right in front of the oncoming traffic. . . .

Cecil used to look in at my home on his way to Fleet Street. I was living at Hammersmith at that time with my mother and my niece. Come

rain, come sun, no matter how occupied or hard worked he might be, he always brought me carnations, so that friends and neighbours living near called him the young man of the carnations. He was an attractive person and I was very fond of him, though at that time I had no intention of marrying him. But, as his brother has said, there was in Cecil "a steep and even staggering obstinacy," and no matter how often I said that I did not wish to be his wife he never let go his intention in spite of opposition and rebuff.

He was a favourite with my people. He liked and admired my mother who had the beauty of her family (she was a Sheridan by birth) and the brain. He had a warm affection for my young niece and he and my brother Charles Sheridan Jones were close friends, and we would often spend an evening at my home. "Willing" was a favourite diversion at that time, and Cecil was always the star performer. He would go out of the room while we decided what we would "will" him to do—inevitably something complicated. We would resolve that he should take a book of verse from a shelf, open it at a certain page and read the first four lines of a poem, or invent an even more intricate series of actions. But whatever he had to do he always did it without the slightest hesitation. It was almost uncanny to watch him walk straight from the door to the objective we had decided, and proceed to carry out our mental instructions. It was, I suppose, a faculty for clearing his brain that enabled him to concentrate so astonishingly. But whatever the explanation, it was a queer gift, and all our ingenuity could not floor him.

I used to revel in the tales of an ancestral Chesterton, a wit and a *bon viveur,* who had sold the family estate, lost prodigious sums at cards, and generally behaved so scampishly that, despite his friendship with the Prince Regent, he wrote often from a debtor's prison. Edward used to bring out some of the letters of this fascinating person. I remember one where he described the funeral of Princess Augusta, in which pious sentiments were mingled with jokes of the most Rabelaisian description.

The parents had the gift of re-creating these family characters, so that you seemed to see and hear them in their habit as they lived.

A more recent Victorian original was Captain Chesterton, a bit of a rip, but a really genuine reformer. His relations with his housekeeper were said to have produced a curly headed boy, who he protested called him " Daddy " for no reason that he could imagine. At the same time, as Governor of Coldbaths Prison, which he ruled with great humanity, he inaugurated drastic improvements in food and general conditions, so that the barbarisms of other gaols became less cruel.

I grew to know these vital shades with intimacy and affection. No one was ever bored in Warwick Gardens ; the most domestic evening was usually the most entertaining.

Cecil, supremely adventurous, was very home loving. The house in Warwick Gardens symbolised for him complete liberty, security and comfort. No one ever found Marie Louise tired, worried or depressed. Her radiant spirit warmed the house and you. She was the flames that lit

Gilbert—" a small child of three." *(See p.* 22)

[Facing p. 40.

her sons' genius, rested their souls and consoled their bodies. The many and diverse individuals who made up the huge total of their friends shared in the well-being she gave out. I recall the baffling, the brilliant, the well-groomed and the unkempt, the eccentric and the shy creatures that crowded the house—comrades from the S.D.F. in red ties, Fabians in sandals, men who preached strange doctrines that the earth was flat, and that the secret haunt of germs was adhesive gum ; all the queer and stimulative people that men like Gilbert and Cecil gather in their stride, with a perennial crop of hard-ups, seeking what one of them described as eleemosynary aid. And to all of them was given entertainment, and while the little lady added them up with a perfect apprehension of their qualities she never flickered an eyelash of interrogation. They were her sons' swans ; it was for them to discover which were geese.

Mister would retire into his den at these incursions, while Marie Louise poured endless cups of tea and dispensed cakes, sandwiches and beer, and never even sighed at the mess on her carpet or the cigarette burns on her cushions. I do not think the brothers ever analysed what she or the house in Warwick Gardens meant to them, **but** Cecil I know realised it, and once he put it into words.

Just before he died he said : "I wish my mother were here . . . she means home. . . ."

She meant that to me long after I had lost him.

CHAPTER THREE

FLEET STREET

FLEET Street was full of colour and adventure when Gilbert and Cecil broke into journalism. There was a real diversity of opinion among the national dailies, and the standardisation consequent on the increased use of press agency matter had yet to come. The speeches of Cabinet Ministers and other public personages were reported by individual representatives, which gave scope for a variety of treatment and impression, and allowed for satire or a wholesome flick of ridicule. Nowadays, the utterances of prominent people are reproduced in a uniform monotone.

In other ways there was far more scope for individuality. Crime reporting was one of the most personally exciting things. Fleet Street sleuths frequently outpaced Scotland Yard in the tracing of clues, and their competition kept the police up to scratch and, what was more important, did much to save the innocent from misdirected C.I.D. zeal for arrest. Now the lone hand in crime investigation is impossible. Scotland Yard only delivers such information as the Heads decide. If any pressman tries to get the inside dope, the Yard shuts down on his paper, all facilities are refused, and the daily dose of news is withheld.

Papers went to press much later than they do now, and licensing hours extended to midnight, which meant that a man had a chance of rushing in

a scoop for the next day's issue and getting a drink after his job was done. Hours were longer and salaries were smaller, but the keenness for news was never greater, while the level of sheer reporting was very high. There was room also for human stories of small people, and space was always open for protest against individual oppression or hard cases. One of the greatest alterations in the Street is the almost universal use of cars. Practically every reporter has his Morris Minor or a small Ford, and whereas a story used to need the local atmosphere and entailed racy chats with neighbours and friends, to-day you nip down, get an interview and nip back—seeing little, hearing little outside your car.

Then instead of three there were six and sometimes seven evening papers ; some of them, like the *Westminster* and the *Pall Mall Gazette,* with a great literary reputation. It was a distinct score to get an article accepted by either, and an increasing contingent of young writers, as apart from pressmen, came into the newspaper world, so that the Fleet Street bars and taverns were the meeting place of a commonwealth of letters.

Gilbert came to the Street before his brother. He had already published "The Wild Knight" and was building up a big public through his articles in the *Daily News.* Cecil was not far behind him. He broke into the weeklies, numerous and witty in those days, and was soon caught up by the dailies. He had a swift eye for news, a crisp incisive style—in descent from Swift through Cobbett—Sir John (at that time Jack) Squire, always said. He could write for the most divergent public, and express in simple terms the most complicated issues. He and

G. K. revelled in the movement, the humour, the humanity of Fleet Street, the infinite variety of companionship, the sharp-edged brains and debating ability. It was a masculine period of hard thinking and hard drinking, a recrudescence of the Old Grub Street, with G. K. as the presiding figure.

He was lavish of his genius. It rippled in taverns and wine bars, cascaded in Soho restaurants, and overflowed in meeting-halls of the Free Churches and small homes and among quite simple people. It was typical of the man that he would speak for all sorts of societies, no matter how insignificant, as he would write for little periodicals, earnest, but negligible. He was a joy to meet, brimming with volcanic vitality, prodigal of his gifts as of his money, spending both with a free hand. Gilbert wrote many of his articles in Fleet Street in those first years. He was not yet harnessed to a capable resident secretary, and you would chance on him in a familiar wine bar, covering page after page in a superbly decorative writing, quite oblivious to his surroundings—but always with a bumper of his favourite Burgundy on tap. He and Cecil had an extraordinary power of concentration. They could write anywhere and everywhere, in buses, on the train, even in teashops when put to it, and much of Cecil's "History of the United States" was scribbled in the trenches of Ypres. But they were never too deeply immersed for talk. They would break off for ten minutes or an hour to continue quite happily from the exact comma where they left off.

The Fleet Street El Vino was one of Gilbert's favourite haunts, with the George and the Bodega. It was a jolly place, and in those days sported many

and noble barrels. Under the shelter of a vast cask of sherry, on the corner of an old mahogany table, G. K. would reel off hundreds of words and talk in a glowing flow of epigram and paradox. It became a custom to look in round about six in the hope of finding him. Those who arrived early sat at G. K.'s table, the others pushed in where they could. It was a mixed and most amusing crowd, with continual fresh arrivals. Belloc might rush in like a nor'easter, and expound the universe, insisting that some particular manifestation, political, social or psychological, could only happen at three places in the world, all of them widely and wildly apart—say a village in the Pyrenees, a walled city in Central China, or a fishing hamlet in Sussex. Maurice Baring, the most modest and distinguished of special correspondents, exquisite poet, famous for his Russian studies, would drift along with that brilliant essayist the Abbe Dimnet, who had a unique knowledge of vintage claret, while Arthur Machen, his scholarly face alight, would discourse on demonology. Baring had a slim figure and a long enquiring neck, with bright surprised eyes, rather like a kindly ostrich. Bentley, suave and diplomatic with a suggestion of the city magnate that in after years grew more and more defined, sometimes brought a clerihew, but after he left the *Daily News* for the *Telegraphy* then under the proprietorship of the late Lord Burnham, we did not see him. The *Telegraph* men were slightly more selective than the other dailies, and did not mingle quite so freely. We had a legend that they kept away from Gentile companionship for fear they should be the selected victims of the ritual murder which the Anti-Semites insisted was annually perpetrated in the darker

recesses of the foundry. Pengelly, one of the most brilliant pressmen the Street has known, used to elaborate the story with ghastly details, which on one occasion Will Dyson, the cartoonist, reproduced in a horrible drawing.

It was a free parliament of speech and its most vital points were that you heard the news behind the news, the actual facts behind the official statements, in Tory, Liberal or Labour papers. You learned what the politicians were gunning for, their real objective as distinct from verbal barrage. All shades of opinion were represented—imperialists, home rulers, revolutionaries, anarchists, leavened by the man in the street. The social atmosphere, a mixture of printers, men of letters, journalists and the rest, was especially satisfying to G. K. The almost exclusively masculine element appealed to him. His mentality demanded the impact of the male mind as the hammer demands the anvil. Without the clangour of discussion his spirit grew remote, almost drooping. But in the clash of intellect, the cut and thrust of an opponent equally steeled, his powers outsped his record, his imagery seemed to fill the sky.

We were not always professional or political. Someone would start a ballade on some absurdly haphazard line with the rest contributing. I challenged the crowd once with the jingle " I gave my trousers to the cause." The result was a triumph, the honours being carried off by a young reviewer, T. Michael Pope, who had a matchless gift for absurdity. He used to drift about with a heap of novels under his arm, between the office of their origin and the shop where we all sold our copies, a pretty girl in tow, a new one every other day.

Sometimes the tavern party broke up early, but often we stayed on until closing time, which in that Arcadian era was twelve midnight, or midway in the evening we would adjourn to the other side of the Street, to Peel's or the Cheshire Cheese for sandwiches. G. K. generally walked on such occasions. When alone, however, he always took a hansom, even if it were only from the *Daily News* office to the *Telegraph,* a hundred yards across the road. If you wanted to get hold of Gilbert, you could generally locate his whereabouts by the attendant hansom faithfully waiting for his disposal. He quite forgot it was there, and would chuckle delightedly when he realised it had been stationary for hours. He would pull out a handful of money and invite the cabby to take his fare and a tip, and, generally speaking, he was by no means robbed.

This was his method also of settling the score of his own drinks and those of his friends. The barman had to help himself. If, as might happen, his pockets were found empty, it would not matter, every pub within the radius of Fleet Street knew the big figure, recognised the chuckling laugh and would have given credit for so long as it was wanted. Gilbert's tip, like his zest for living, was always gargantuan.

I do not mean to suggest that the meetings of our particular set monopolised the talk of Fleet Street. There were similar groups in most of the pubs, but it so happened that I was mostly with a special crowd, to which I was given kindly welcome. The unfailing comradeship and help I have always found since my early days as a cub reporter down to the present time, cannot find adequate expression, but I never think of the Street with which my

life has been so closely bound without deep and affectionate gratitude.

There were other figures as remarkable, if not as magnetic, as the Chestertons. Broken, many of them, in shoe leather, but not in spirit, and lit with the spark of wit and the shield of invincible courage. T. W. H. Crosland, just launched on the tide of success, had fought a long, hard battle for sheer bread. He came to London from the North, penniless, but determined, and, wheeling a perambulator, walked with his wife and child the whole way. His first job was to describe business establishments for local directories. The originator of the scheme would map out an area in which Crosland would interview the district magnates—grocers, butchers—all were fish to his net. Crosland would write up the stuff and the canvasser would book orders for twenty, thirty or more copies on the strength of the descriptives. T. W. H. used to be paid at the rate of *2s. 6d.* a thousand and would work for days and nights on end.

I remember asking him how he was able to bear the irritation of turning out such piffle.

" Only by writing it as well as it could possibly be written," was the reply.

All through the career of this directory the canvassers booked more orders on Crosland's copy than anybody else's. Every Saturday morning he would dash up to the " Shark," as he named the proprietor, and plank down his stuff. When he had received the pink, beneficent cheque, as he loved to call it, he would indict the Shark and tell him in the resonant voice that held the strength, the tragedy, the endurance of the North, how he battened on the brains of men whose boots he was not fit to lick.

The Shark always remained passive, if perspiring. It was the price he had to pay for Crosland's bumper orders. T. W. H. had a seeing eye and a beautiful style, and the grocer, the butcher and the rest were steeped in his refulgent prose.

He was very kind to me, and took a keen interest in my writing, vetting my copy with humorous consideration. I remember he seized hold of the MS. of a story commissioned by a fiction weekly. I had started reporting some time before I knew the Chestertons and when Cecil came to Fleet Street I was writing articles and stories under the name of John Keith Prothero.

" You shouldn't write about lords, John K.," said Crosland. " You don't know any lords or anything about them—thank God ! "

" The editor insisted on a lord," I explained, " the heroine had to marry into the peerage."

" It's a pity. You ought to write about postmen, poets and printers. You know all about them."

We went once to the Zoo, where he insisted he recognised all his friends and enemies in animal guise.

" Don't throw buns to the critics," he insisted, pointing to the bear pit. " You see that savage Polar over there ? He tore up my last volume of poems—I hope he's got indigestion."

The mandril ape he declared was the editor of a review perennially in combat with its contributors. I urged him to write up the idea, but he refused. He was a man of ferocious prejudice, but of the kindest feeling.

" They might recognise themselves, John K.," he said, " I don't want to hurt the blighters."

Crosland had a devoted wife to whom he was

deeply attached. She had, however, something of Anne Hathaway's attitude towards the profession of letters with its irregular hours and varying receipts. During his hard-up period he came home one day bearing in triumph a copy of the *Outlook* containing one of his poems. An exquisite thing entitled " Audrey," it described how a poet after a day with brilliant people, longs for quiet simplicity and " goes home softly thanking God."

Mrs. Crosland asked how much he had been paid for it.

" Two guineas," said the poet.

" When did you write it ? "

" One morning, about a week ago."

" One morning ! "

She fixed him with a reproachful look, turned away and did not utter a word until he had chopped up two chairs and a table, the only means by which he could get her to speak. She then explained that she resented his idleness.

" If you were to write two poems a day at two guineas each we should have plenty of money, the boy could go to a good school and have a nice home. Instead of which you just won't work."

Poor Audrey !

One of Crosland's satellites was a charming and disreputable vagabond who, according to his own accounts, had done everything possible in journalism, including the post of press-agent to a circus, with the added attraction of a pack of wolf-hounds. He was on his beam ends at the time, he said, and was desperate for the job, so he enticed the pack, by some strange method, out of the kennels, led them across Regent's Park and down Oxford Street all in full cry, triumphantly winding up at the offices of

the company from whence he telephoned the story to the evening papers—and forthwith was engaged. He used to come to the George and hold the Chestertons spellbound with his gorgeous lies—" worth their weight in whisky," as Cecil said.

But it was not only in bars the brothers talked. They would occupy a large portion of the pavement, wrestling with a divergent view point, or if the matter came to a head in the roadway, they would pause in mid-stream to continue the argument, holding up the surging traffic to the accompaniment of shouts and quips from infuriated drivers and irreverent small boys. But even the traffic seemed to like the brothers, for no one ever seriously complained or even threatened them with the police.

I recall a day of torrential rain and keen east wind when I found Gilbert and Cecil in Bouverie Street, without overcoats or umbrellas, in full swing. Cecil had the floor, so to speak, and Gilbert courteously waited his turn for quite five minutes while the rain ran off his hat and streamed down his body, and Cecil stood saturated to the skin.

" Hullo ! Keith," said he, suddenly waking up. " What do you think of Tariff Reform ? Come and join us." Gilbert waved his hand encouragingly. Neither had the faintest idea they and the whole world were wringing wet.

I called out comments on the weather.

" Oh, is it raining ? " they replied, and sheered off to a friendly pub.

This lack of awareness never infringed on the realm of ideas, or copy. They were both of them up to time with the delivery of articles. It was no effort for either to write, and though their MS., once

completed, very frequently got lost, they could inevitably and speedily write it all over again.

Engagements were another matter. Time and place were frequently forgotten, and dates had a habit of getting hopelessly mislaid. Occasionally, however, a wave of recollection would sweep their memory.

" I oughtn't to be here," said G. K. one evening in the El Vino, " I'm supposed to be speaking to the Literary Society at Bletchley—I should be speaking *now ! "*

He mused a moment on the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven, ordered another glass of port and then with an effort heaved himself up. He was not heavy then, or fat, but he never moved with the quickness and decision of his brother—physically, that is to say. On the mental plane they were equally matched. We got him into the hansom, and he insisted that Cecil and I should squeeze in as well. Frances was in the country and Gilbert was staying with the Conrad Noels at Paddington Green. We arrived to find the flat locked up. We tinkered with the lock—Gilbert produced what he called his " pro-Boer corkscrew," which he explained was a momento from the stirring times of the South African war, and after shoving and thrusting at the keyhole, we managed to get the door open. Full of triumph, Gilbert went into the room he was sharing with Conrad to change his clothes. Literary societies always demanded evening dress, and shortly after he appeared in the most marvellous get-up imaginable. He had kept on his plus fours of brown tweed and was wearing a dress coat so much too small that it revealed not only a vast expanse of shirt front, but a glimpse of his braces,

while the sleeves did not reach his wrists. He insisted that some strange magic had been at work, whereby his clothes had shrunk or he had swollen. Perhaps the Mesopotamian deacon staying at the flat had put a spell on him. The clothes, he protested, had been on the bed where he was sleeping, and were obviously and patently his own, but he could not force his legs into the trousers. He would not listen to any idea of re-changing, and we saw him and his hansom off to Bletchley, and waited for the return of Conrad or his wife, hoping for some explanation.

Conrad himself turned up, somewhat flustered. He was lecturing to the Beckenham Institute and must also change his clothes. A sudden shout brought us to the bedroom, where we found him in a coat that flapped on his body, the sleeves hanging down to his knees. I felt my suspicions of the Deacon grow, but Cecil, admirably rationalistic, explained the whole thing.

The clothes of each had obviously been put on the bed of the other, hence the misfit. Conrad hastily re-robed and went off to Beckenham. Gilbert explained his odd appearance as a miracle. I never knew the reason Conrad gave for his late arrival.

Another joy some evening concerned a saga of the North Sea. I had been reporting an uplift meeting for juveniles, at which a local dignitary had heartened his young hearers by reminding them that even he, their Mayor, had been a boy—once. The information had made me hungry, and after turning in my copy, Cecil and I went to the Gambrinus, a jolly German beer-house just behind the Café Royal. The roof was oak-beamed, the walls hung with vast antlers, and you sat at good sub-

stantial tables where there always seemed plenty of room. Huge mugs of lager and mounds of sandwiches, beef, ham, gerkin and cheese were served, and the cost, judged by present prices, was fantastically small.

That was the golden age of beer halls and cafés, when human intercourse was not disrupted by an incessant wireless blare and you could hear your friends speak. There were generally a good many foreigners, mostly Germans, who ate unprecedented portions of pork and fish and onions with a kindly bovine satisfaction. But that night we were attracted by a little man in spectacles with a high forehead and straggly beard, who sat gazing enraptured at a large lady, slowly and competently devouring an enormous schnitzel. A quiet and inoffensive person, we decided he was a village schoolmaster on holiday. At that moment the door was flung right back on its hinges and in a huge sou'-wester and sea boots Hilaire Belloc came in. He paused for a moment, then with an impressive gesture, flung an arm towards the schoolmaster, who visibly shrank.

" Look," said Belloc in a fog-horn voice, " look at that brave, that gallant man ! "

Everyone looked. They couldn't help it, amazed that so mild an aspect should cover deeds of heroism.

" For fourteen days and nights," continued Belloc, " he has not slept and barely eaten. Look," he cried again, pointing an hypnotic finger, " this man has braved the wind and the sea, but storm-tossed, weary, he never gave up. He is a North Sea fisherman fishing for you."

As he spoke the little man squared his shoulders, lifted his head and suddenly, incredibly, grew bigger,

stronger. Courage radiated through his glasses, the muscles seemed to stand out on his arms.

" He and his fellows have faced death a thousand times to bring in your fish. He is a hero—give him a cheer ! " Belloc led off with a shout that echoed to the roof and everybody in the hall leaped up and cheered the little man, responsive glasses were clinked, toasts were drunk.

" And now," said Belloc, suddenly spotting Cecil, " I think I'll eat." He engulfed our table and ordered a steak and a bottle of Volnay.

" Do you know him really ? " asked Cecil. The schoolmaster was still flushed and bright-eyed.

" Good God, no ! Not from Adam," he said.

Belloc further decided on *sauté* potatoes and a green salad, and when the little man, timorously advancing, tried to catch his eye, turned such a face of brass that the hero of a moment since evaporated through the door. But as I live by bread, while Belloc spoke, the small man grew before my eyes in soul and stature.

After the steak and Volnay were consumed, Belloc suggested that he and Cecil should run over to France—if they started immediately they could catch the night train and arrive in the early morning. Luggage was quite immaterial, they could buy as they went. Cecil turned down the suggestion that evening, but I have known them on occasions set off at a moment's notice, without so much as a toothbrush and disappear into the void, *en route,* perhaps, for some interesting trees whose acquaintance Belloc had made the previous summer in Brittany or the Pyrenees.

In this fantastic vein, Belloc was irresistible. He could capture all Fleet St

But there was another side to his personality. He could at times be very difficult, and had a knack of obliterating people he did not want to recognise. When he called at the *New Witness* to dictate his copy there was always a slight tension among the secretarial staff. Would he be amiable—or temperamental. If the latter there was only one thing to do—ring up a kindly and expansive woman who had dealt with Belloc in every kind of mood for years. She was tall and dignified and very capable, and if, in the course of dictation, he showed signs of friction, she would look at him as though he were a very small and naughty child, when he would behave quite well and finish his stuff as good as gold.

Very generous, indeed quixotic in many ways, his fine qualities were discounted by his moods. He was not understood by Fleet Street in general, though a small and fervent clique always adored him.

It is often necessary to fight Belloc before you can really like him, but he is so unconscious of the feeling he provokes that the issue can rarely be joined. In the case of Cecil there could be no antagonism, the recognition of equality was quite complete.

Cecil had already published two books, " Nell Gwynn," a vivid picture of that vital cockney personality, which included a startling analysis of Charles II as a great statesman, with a superb eye for art and science. His second book on G. K. C. remains, in my opinion, one of the best studies of his brother's genius and capacity. Published anonymously, it was dedicated to " M. L. C. the wittiest woman in London." Marie Louise flushed like a girl at the tribute. She had an adoring comprehension of her younger son, but her love, quietly protective, was always unobtrusive.

Both these initial ventures had been arranged by Arthur Ransome, who had flitted into the publishing world in the intervals of roaming far off lands for the *Manchester Guardian.* He was always on the peak of enthusiasms and discoveries, some of them most unexpected, if not queer. His first visit to Russia, pre-war, brought him back in an enormous fur coat and hat, red hot with admiration for the Tsarist régime. In the interval, before his next visit, which switched his sympathies to the Bolshevists, he got married and embarked on a first-hand study of field mice, numbers of which domiciled in his cottage, overflowed into beds, cupboards, food-safes and the rest, advancing in renewed battalions until, completely overwhelmed, he and his family fled from their home.

He had an exhaustive knowledge of the farther reaches of Soho and would bear us off to wonderful meals in Armenian, Greek and Serbian restaurants, all with their special and somewhat national delicacies, which included goats' eyes ! Life was never stereotyped, work and play were varied and invigorating.

About this period Cecil became secretary of the Anti-Puritan League. It was the child of Hubert Bland, the star turn of the *Sunday Chronicle,* which at that time had a huge circulation, Bland's public ranged from bishops to stable-boys, and his articles drew every kind of support and attack. He had a supreme gift of exposition, and could write on philosophic, scientific or economic theories in language so lucid, so simple and so touched with humour that the most unlettered, as the most cultured reader, could enjoy and understand. Hubert did not frequent **the** bars of Fleet **Street,**

but, like G. B. S., he was a familiar figure on the platform, and his place at Eltham was the headquarters of enthusiastic youth, artists, writers, flaming socialists and decorous Fabians. Every Saturday evening Well Hall, a huge old house, rambling and romantic, was thrown open. We used to crowd into the long, low drawing-room and listen to a challenging speech on some vexed topic. H. G. Wells, Orage, and some of the Fabian Executive would turn up fairly regularly and contribute to the discussion. Names that later became notable in Fleet Street were familiar, Ivor Heald, the white headed boy of the *Express,* and Allan Ostler, both of them brilliant, and both killed in the Great War. Oliver Onions was another habitué, with his wife Berta Ruck.

Mrs. Bland—E. Nesbit—the popular author of " The Would-Be-Goods," was always surrounded by adoring young men, dazzled by her vitality, amazing talent and the sheer magnificence of her appearance. She was a very tall woman, built on the grand scale, and on festive occasions wore a trailing gown of peacock blue satin with strings of beads and Indian bangles from wrist to elbow. Madame, as she was always called, smoked incessantly, and her long cigarette holder became an indissoluble part of the picture she suggested—a raffish Rossetti, with a long full throat, and dark luxuriant hair, smoothly parted. She was a wonderful woman, large hearted, amazingly unconventional, but with sudden strange reversions to ultra-respectable standards. Her children's stories had an immense vogue, and she could write unconcernedly in the midst of a crowd, smoking like a chimney all the while.

Bland, detached and saturnine, sat apart on these occasions, a springtide of femininity fluttering around him, waiting for a sultanesque sign to approach. There was always an inner group of devotees, mostly of the Victorian type. He had a great attraction for the ingenuous.

With such magnetic personalities in the family, Paul Bland and his sister Iris were overshadowed, but Rosamond, the other sister, was too dominant to be obscured. Dark and comely, with a full figure and lovely eyes, she was very attractive, and many of the older men completely lost their heads over her. But Clifford Sharp carried off the prize. He gave little promise at that time of his future brilliance, though he was very controversial even then. A good-looking boy, with shining fair hair and very good nose, he was almost a Georgian type, with an inborn chivalry for woman. He and I did not hit it off at all. I thought him painfully priggish and pompous, and he regarded me as pert and flippant. Cecil, who never expected his friends to share his opinions or his tastes, had a great liking for Sharp and taught him to pub-crawl with the best. Under this humanising influence Clifford relaxed a little—but we still fought until years after we became close friends.

It was at these Saturdays and from the huge correspondence that Bland's articles provoked, that the Anti-Puritan League came into being. The era saw the beginning of the kill-joy movement that tried so hard to suppress the social life of the people and their legitimate enjoyments. The L.C.C. sent emissaries to smell out alleged indecencies on the Music Halls, and it was made illegal to sing or play the piano in public houses as such

without a licence. Herbert Samuel as Home Secretary was already trying to pass the measure which ultimately forced children to wait outside licensed premises instead of accompanying their parents inside. Samuel called it a much-needed change in the habits of *our* people. "Which people?" Cecil asked. Meanwhile, those who could afford to dine and wine in restaurants and cafés were free to take their offspring with them, so that—as is the case to-day—very often you would see small boys and girls standing at the door of a public bar, while immediately adjacent their little contemporaries pass freely into more expensive but equally alcoholic premises.

The League caught on quickly. Meetings were held and sympathisers rolled up. The Rev. Stewart Headlam, hero of innumerable lost causes, joined hands and roped in the members of his Church and Stage Guild, founded in the hope, he always said, that every chorus girl would convert at least one curate.

We had our inevitable dinner, and Louis McQuilland, a notable member of the Moderns, recited *his ballad written for the occasion, entitled, "Shall we not seek for newer ways of sinning?" We sat late that night, toasting and planning, and when the feast wound up, discussion still went on. Cecil and my brother, Charles, saw me home in a hansom, putting the case of Free Will and Determinism all the way. Having deposited me, they returned to the attack and traversed the distance between their respective abodes over and over again, pausing in between. The session only ended when at long last a weary individual thrust a sleepless head out of a window overlooking the disputants.

" Free Will, is it ? " he protested, " I want frte will to go to bed."

The Secretaryship of the Anti-Puritan League seemed to Cecil an occasion for renewed proposals of marriage. Life was punctuated by the same flattering suggestion, urgent, eloquent and made in the most unlikely places and at the oddest times. He would plead over a meal at a Soho restaurant, or suddenly suggest a special licence on a tram. But though persistent, he never lost his poise. There were moments, when, frankly, I found his devotion a little trying. There were others, who also had " intentions," but when I went to dinner with someone special, Cecil invariably turned up, having visited all my other favourite haunts, and hailed us smiling and congenial. He never showed temper or jealousy, and was always deferential to my companion, whoever he might be. Cecil's tactics were annoyingly clever. He would ask if he might join our table for a drink, and having listened to the other man's conversation, would launch out on the same topic with a devastating brilliance that inevitably reduced his rival to a chafing silence. He would call at the news agency where I worked, or suddenly appear at a meeting which I had to report, or maybe greet me outside a newspaper at which I was calling—expatiate on its atmosphere, picturesque and rambling—and seize the opportunity to fix up for lunch or dinner.

The League had a mixed press. The more Conservative papers thought the title subversive, if not slightly irreverent. But the " Evenings " gave it whole-hearted support as did Harmsworth, who was always unexpected. That was part of his

success. He had no use for stereotyped news or methods, and would scrap a feature, an editor or a building without hesitation.

Newspaper offices then were not the palatial places of to-day ; they were old and musty and rambling, and Editors were easy of access. The *Daily Mail* changed much of this. An up-to-date building, it bristled with commissionaires, and you had to fill in forms of personal data before you could hope to get an audience. We used to laugh at Alfred the Great, but, all the same, Fleet Street owed much to him. He raised salaries all round, shortened hours, and had a matchless eye for capacity wherever he found it. One of his most successful finds was a ringmaster in a touring circus. Nap, as he loved to be called, put him on the publicity side, and the circulation, as he boasted, went up by leaps and bounds. There was a legend that every week Harmsworth held a conference with his feature editors, chalking an impressive slogan on a huge blackboard for their consideration. After an experience, which gave me great delight, I felt that this must be so.

A serial of mine had been accepted by the *Daily Mail,* and the fiction editor wanted to see me about it. He was a young but impressive person.

" I like your style," he said, "it is so happy. Promise me you will never write unless you *are* happy ? "

Consideration of board and lodging stopped the assurance, but I murmured my appreciation.

" I hope," said he, " that you will do a lot of work for me. Will you remember one thing ? " he leaned forward earnestly. " Human nature is

like a piano, capable of an infinite number of transmutations."

I gulped and smiled, and he said the Editor of *Answers,* which at the time was going very strong, would also like to see me. The Editor of that profitable journal hoped very much that I would write for him, but would I realise one most important thing—Human nature was like a piano ! He spared me the infinite transmutations, and a little dazed, I went to the next floor, where the *Girls' Friend* interviewed me. Once more the piano motif was struck, but when I reached the office of that classic for boys, known as *Chips,* I utterly destroyed my chances of contributing to that immortal work. " Human nature," I said boldly, " is like a gramophone," and left it at that.

It was *Chips* that once found itself in a complete impasse, serially speaking. The paper was running the Adventures of Dirk, the Boy Detective, which was sending the sales up to a dazzling figure. The author regarded Dirk somewhat seriously, and when the Editor enquired quite casually after his next instalment of " Dirt," took umbrage and departed—with his copy. A telephone enquiry for the missing chapter the next morning informed the Editor that not until the author received a full apology for the gross insult offered to him as an artist, would he deliver another word. " That's O.K.," was the reply, " we'll write it in the office." But that was just what they could not do. The previous instalment had left " Dirt" hundreds of feet underground, tightly wedged in a sewer inviolably sealed at both ends by huge iron plates of phenomenal strength. Without so much as a peephole, he was cut off from the outside world

completely. How could the wretched boy be extricated ?

The Editor and the entire staff sat late into the night with damp towels round their heads, reviewing every possible avenue of escape in vain. Logic refuted their foolhardy attempts, and invention ran dry. Next day they went into the street and summoned the assistance of creative writers, experts on main drainage, star reporters and the rest. Cecil racked his brains for a solution, but the impassable obstacles got him down.

" You win," said the Editor to the creator of the Boy Detective. " I apologise. And now for God's sake, get Dirk out."

He did and in a most masterly fashion.

" With one convulsive bound Dirk was free "— were the historic words that left us gasping.

The end of an epoch in Fleet Street was marked by a sudden rending of G. K. from the *Daily News.* His own political creed at that time could, I think, be described by one of his most famous definitions—" That hunger of humanity, which is the true Liberalism," and there was a growing opinion that the Cocoa Press proprietors were moving farther and farther from Liberalism and humanity while concern for its hunger grew less and less. Gilbert finally decided that he and cocoa could be associated no more. He expressed his views in certain verses which subsequently appeared in the *New Witness* under the title of " The Song of Right and Wrong." Legend has it that Gilbert sent the poem direct to the proprietors of the *Daily News,* who read among other sentiments that :

Tea, although an Oriental,
Is a gentleman at least;

Cocoa is a cad and coward,
Cocoa is a vulgar beast,
Cocoa is a dull disloyal
Lying, crawling cad and clown,
And may very well be grateful
To the fool that takes him down.

The consequences were inevitable.

By this time Gilbert and Frances had moved from Edwardes Square to a flat in Battersea. G. K. disliked flats, but the name Over-Strand Mansions appealed to him. It was a sizeable place and he was able to entertain his friends who came in droves. Frances also had her special following—Charles Masterman, Saxon Mills, Wynne Mathieson and his wife were often there. Our Fleet Street contingent behaved with great propriety, remaining in the drawing-room until, late in the evening, catching G. K.'s beckoning eye we followed him into the cosy little kitchen where mounds of sausages were eaten and pints of beer consumed and the talk grew better and better. Gilbert's symbol of hospitality was always sausages and beer.

The parents, occasionally among the guests, remained decorously with Frances, though I am sure that Marie Louise would have liked to join us in the kitchen. One evening, when there was a huge crush, a literary lion brought a young American devotee to Edward and his wife, and without preface or introduction, pointed them out as the great man's father and mother.

Marie Louise smiled sweetly, " Yes," she said, simply, " we are his humble parents. . . . Who, may I ask, are you ? "

There were all kinds of Fleet Street junketing—a Johnsonian dinner at the Cheshire Cheese, where

Gilbert, in a costume of the period, enacted the great Doctor, and Cecil appeared as Liberty Wilkes. There were Pickwickian evenings, Gilbert as Turveydrop, and parties at Warwick Gardens. It was a happy time, and it was impossible to think that it could suddenly and tragically alter. But change was in the air. Frances, who rarely joined in these expeditions, withdrew even more distantly, and only rarely came to Warwick Gardens. Cecil sensed that things were not quite so rosy on the Battersea front, but none of us dreamed just what was going to materialise.

We heard the news on one of the best evenings I can remember. I was having dinner with Gilbert and Cecil, at the Gourmets Restaurant, famed for its cooking and its mascot, a great white rabbit that ate out of your hand. We sat late and drank red wine, and Gilbert smoked interminable cigars, his favourite small, black, strong cheroots, which he always carried in a paper packet. As the lights began to dim—it was after midnight—he looked up as though he'd suddenly come to a decision.

" Frances wants to leave London," he said.

And there was silence.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EXILE OF BEACONSFIELD

THE idea of Gilbert leaving London seemed fantastic. It was as though, in the heyday of his life, it had been proposed to transport Dr. Johnson to the Cotswolds. But the notion gradually assumed reality. Rumour had it that G. K. was going to retire to the Yorkshire Moors, and his friends' apprehension and excitement grew with every supposition.

Gilbert was not often faced with a direct decision. Even more seldom did he make an immediate choice, and while Fleet Street circled round, aching to know what was going to happen, he never gave any hint as to what he intended to do. In the home circle there was as great a reticence. The parents were distressed at the proposed migration. Marie Louise was never really happy away from the grey streets of London, and Gilbert had always said that the joy of travel was the gladness of return. It was from Cecil that I learned of the latest development on the Battersea front.

" Frances wants to go to Beaconsfield," he said.

" Why—Beaconsfield ? " I asked, and Fleet Street echoed the query.

It was, and is, a clean, bright place, inhabited by the wives and families of City men—solicitors, stockbrokers and the like, who return for bed and breakfast every evening and enjoy full board on

Sundays—some highbrows and Mr. J. L. Garvin, The most devoted admirer of the town which gave Disraeli his title could never claim it as a centre of mental activity or creative idea. It is a dormitory, but little more.

" Now," said Cecil, " if Frances had taken Gilbert to a village it would have been quite different. Labourers, ploughmen and poachers have a grip on fundamentals—food and marriage, God and the land ; all the things that really matter. They can think, you know, and argue. How Gilbert would enjoy sitting in a jolly local, talking to the country folk and drinking country ale."

I suggested that Frances did not like ale or locals and had no experience of village life.

" I suppose she's keen on Beaconsfield because it is like her home at Bedford Park," he said. " Not quite so arty, perhaps, but on the same lines."

" Do you think Gilbert can ever fit in entirely with that sort of thing ? "

Cecil evoked supernatural aid to prevent such a catastrophe, but he agreed all the same that Beaconsfield was the most tragic antithesis to Fleet Street.

" And we know," he added, " that Frances can't bear Fleet Street."

In his autobiography G. K. quotes a passage from Belloc's book on Robespierre. Nowhere else, says Gilbert, had he ever found any words that described his wife's unique quality. Belloc says of Robespierre :—" God had given him in his mind a stone tabernacle in which certain great truths were preserved."

Great truths were undoubtedly preserved in the mind of Frances Chesterton, but with them, I think,

were certain implacable antagonisms, against which argument or appeal beat in vain. She hated Fleet Street with an ice-cold detachment, unmitigated by her husband's meteoric journalistic success or the unstinted praise which applauded his work, or even the considerable income he made by it.

It is a world, I admit, full of irritation and disappointment to the average housewife. Hours are erratic, leisure uncertain, and whereas the business man leaves his home at a stated time and usually returns to schedule, the journalist is inevitably irregular and unpunctual. But it was not irregularity alone which affronted Frances. The whole atmosphere of the Street was alien to her. The bars and wine shops, the desultory meetings, queer associates, the perpetual, never-ending talk—why the sea is boiling hot, or whether pigs have wings—the impecuniosity, extravagance, strange championships, wild crusades : all the mean and shabby, the generous and immortal things that make up the Fleet Street world, found no chink in the stone tabernacle.

Newspapers did not interest her, and this not because of their particular shade of politics. Frances disliked the Press as such, and really only cared for small journals and parish magazines to which she contributed her quite charming verse. But she had literally no use for any of the dailies, and would, I think, have preferred to hear of world events through the medium of the town crier rather than read about them in cold print.

Frances never formulated these dislikes. It was, perhaps, unnecessary. You felt them. This attitude of mind was not new to her husband. Gilbert had always known what lay behind the renewed appeal

that they should leave London, but his unfailing tenderness and humour had shelved the issue for years. He would dwell on how in ripe old age they would retire to an oak-timbered cottage on a wold or a weald—descriptively delightful but geographically vague—and once I know they took the train to Buckinghamshire in search of such a paradise. Frances had buns and tea, Gilbert consumed bread and cheese and ale in a jolly old inn, which he always swore they found at Beaconsfield.

Cecil and I searched for that inn one irresponsible Saturday, but though we traversed the Beaconsfield roads of neat suburban villas many times and passed along the last remnants of the fine old village High Street, flanked by an extremely up-to-date hotel, we never found it.

Be that as it may, the vision seemed to have caught Mrs. G. K.'s desire, and she set afoot enquiries for a suitable house, which went on indefinitely. I do not think Gilbert would finally have yielded—he was Fabian in the matter of decisions, perpetually postponing an issue until it grew dim and far off—but forces converged upon him that he was powerless to resist.

Suddenly, out of the blue, a tragedy fell on the Blogg family which hit Frances cruelly hard. She had an engrossing affection for her people ; they were indeed the altar of sacrifice, both for her and her husband. A sister, a cousin or a niece was always about the place, with Mrs. Blogg as an awe-inspiring background. She was a lady of great force of character and high educational views, and was one of the few people from whom Cecil always fled. I have met him more than once stealing along the passage at Warwick Gardens, with an eye on

the front door as the voice of Mrs. Blogg trumpeted behind him.

Noel, the secretary of the I.D.K. and the only male Blogg of the family, was not so often in evidence at Battersea. He was never a sociable soul and was growing less inclined to mingle with his fellows when the end came. He was found dead under most distressing circumstances.

The shock of her brother's death was so overwhelming that for a time Frances was devastated. She refused to meet anyone outside her circle, and implored Gilbert to take her away. He agreed that they should go abroad for a long holiday, but that was not what she wanted. She insisted that they must leave London permanently, and fearful of the effect of a refusal on her state of mind, and because he loved her with a great and unfailing devotion, he consented, and they moved to " Over-Roads," where they remained for thirteen years. Now the consequences of a removal, even to Beaconsfield, need not vitally affect an ordinary journalist. He might, it could be argued, have continued access to his particular friends and associates, enjoy Fleet Street evenings and by catching the last train have the benefit of fresh air in the early mornings. But this could not, and did not, apply to Gilbert. From Battersea to Fleet Street was a matter of minutes, and transport barely interrupted his work. He could go at any time and when the spirit moved him. At Beaconsfield, conditioned by railway timetables, his journeyings would lose their spontaneity, and drastically upheave the whole domestic atmosphere. We felt that his excursions **would** grow fewer **and** become more difficult, **and that he would** find himself gradually **cut off from those deep**

draughts of stimulative discussion which were so large a part of his mental existence.

To the modern mind, acclimatised to the mechanical broadcasting of opinion, this desire for argument may seem immoderate, but to the particular group of which the Chestertons were part, it was the breath of life. On the occasions when Cecil and I put the *New Witness* to bed, after a severe and prolonged fight with the printers as to what legally constituted libel, feeling a little tired, I would suggest some slight relaxation, a look in at a show, or a recital at Queen's Hall. Cecil inevitably craved discussion as refreshment.

" Do you know," he would ask me, " where I could find your brother Charlie ? "

Having traced him—he was Cecil's special sparring partner—the two would deposit me at the Queen's Hall or the Holborn, and trek off to the wilds of a large and liberal debate.

Gilbert was just as omnivorous ; but in the dormitory where could he find the steel on which to whet his mind ?

" The trouble is," said one of his oldest friends, " that without a soul to talk to, Gilbert may come to believe the newspapers . . . Think of that ! "

This dreadful prophecy was not fulfilled, but the Rupert of debate, laughing, buoyant, Prince of Good Companions, went from us, and though he re-visited the haunts of his old freedom, it was never quite the glad, confident morning of his London days.

I have always felt that Frances had a deep and honest conviction that the removal of her husband from these associations would re-make, if not re-mould him, nearer to her heart's desire and his own

advantage. Puritan in temperament, she was really Manichean in her attitude to the things of the flesh. She did not like food, except cakes, chocolate and similar flim-flams, and her appreciation of liquor stopped short at tea. She was not in sympathy with Gilbert's masculine taste for succulent dishes and drink—especially drink—and would have liked it better had he consumed appreciably less of both. I always thought that somewhere in his sub-consciousness he must have heard an echo of Frances, in what he called " the eternal voice of woman summoning man from the tavern," but I am convinced that objectively he never traced the resemblance.

The struggle to induce a more rigorous régime went on, silent and unceasing, for a very long time. G. K. ate Spartan fare—or tried to eat it—washing it down with restricted claret, quite unconscious and uncritical. But when they came to Warwick Gardens it was different. The table groaned with salmon, veal cutlet, cream meringues, all the things of which Gilbert was most fond, with lashings of Burgundy and *crime de menthe.* Marie Louise would heap his plate as she had always done, while Frances looked on, concerned and really unhappy. Not until she joined the Catholic Church did the contest end. Then, by some miraculous intervention, she accepted food—for others if not for herself—as desirable, and though the cooking at Beaconsfield, to my mind, was always execrable, salt beef appeared less frequently and was of a milder flavour. Moreover, the supply of claret expanded.

I have always held the opinion that Gilbert's most vital work was done in the pre-Beaconsfield days. He will live, I think, as a poet, rather than a philo-

sopher, and his future fame will cover those superb fantasias " The Napoleon of Notting Hill," " The Man Who was Thursday " and " The Ball and the Cross." " Lepanto " must surely endure, with some of his lyrics, like " The Donkey," with its immortal sense of vision and appeal, together with parts of " The White Horse." But these date from his Fleet Street days, where " The White Horse " was first conceived—I remember the evening on which he told Cecil and me of the idea.

And then contrast the challenge, the wit, the indestructible flavour of " The Defendant" and other volumes of his earlier essays with the monotone of " The Thing," in which he always seems to me to be arguing with himself. The rabbits of paradox that used to spring full grown from his magic pen grew tired, almost automatic, with a family resemblance that became dreary. Only occasionally after he moved to the dormitory did he recapture the old *elan* as in " Magic " and his " Life of R. L. Stevenson," when he regained the schoolboy delight which discovered a new door of escape.

Gilbert always remained an adolescent, but his questing mind was never dulled until the Beaconsfield barrier largely cut him from his mental equals, and his fellow-men. After the door shut, he was for years closed in upon himself. It became more difficult to rouse his brain to fighting quality.

None of us accepted the separation easily. Cecil thought out all kinds of schemes to pluck him back. Someone suggested writing him a mysterious note in mediaeval script embellished with an Italian dagger and demanding a *rendezvous,* or " take the consequences." We favoured a plan for Gilberts

actual abduction. We were to charter a plane, fly it down to Beaconsfield where, in a sporting spirit, we would invite him to go for a short spin. Once on the wing, the plane would make for Calais, where he could be held to ransom—the renunciation of Beaconsfield or enforced liberty in France.

We even went so far as to enquire when and where a plane could be procured, and what it would cost us. But in our hearts we knew it was no use. Nothing would induce Gilbert to agree to a separation from his wife, however tempting, nor would he definitely oppose her will.

Meanwhile his Fleet Street friends had taken comfort in the thought that, though he could not come to them, they might go to him. But though many tried, few were successful—the brand still exhaled a whiff of burning and, under a quickening breath, might blaze anew. Gilbert always disliked the telephone and never used it unless he were obliged, so that to make appointments on the wire was very difficult. The maid would inevitably answer requests for a *rendezvous,* that the great man could not be disturbed, and would they ring again when he might be less busy. They did ring, many times, but without any result. Cecil was as unlucky as the rest, but Belloc refused to be shut out. He would 'phone to Frances direct, and inform her when and at what hour he proposed to come, ending up—so Cecil declared—with a rat-tat of a question :

" Have you any beer ? If not, I'll bring some with me."

Belloc was one of the few who ran the blockade. H. G. Wells was another and friends unconnected

with journalism, but Cecil, Gilbert's companion in arms, rarely got through and generally met his brother in Fleet Street or at Warwick Gardens. We used to consider the possibilities of breaking down the social barrier. I remember one occasion when Elodie Belloc, the lovely and gracious wife of the great Hilaire, was present. She was, I think, the most attractive woman I have ever known. The mother of three sons and two daughters, with a tempestuous husband, she dealt with every difficulty with a rare humour and courage. She had a genius for friendship, and was ungrudging in her loyal service for those she loved. Cecil adored her, and to my infinite pride and joy she gave me her affection. I doubt if any experience brings the same keenness and delight as the kindly welcome of a brilliant woman, who puts a newcomer perfectly at ease. She smiled at me with a radiance that warmed the world, and won from my inconsiderable self a steadfast and devout allegiance.

Cecil told her he had not seen G. K. for more than a month.

He was feeling sore as to the separation. Indeed we were both indignant at what seemed to us tragic futility.

Elodie sighed. " Poor Gilbert ! " She leaned forward with an expressive gesture of her litde hands. " I'm very sorry for Frances. It would distress her terribly if she knew how this—this ban hurt him."

We had not looked at it like that.

" Why on earth does Gilbert stand it ? " asked Cecil in an unusual burst of irritability.

" He loves her," said Elodie with eloquent

simplicity. . . . " But really he should beat her. Hilary would beat me if I behaved like that."

The most romantic stories were extant about the Belloc marriage. It was said that Hilaire had seen her—as a girl—at her home in California, but her image always remained, and when he heard that she was going to become a novice, he worked his passage out to San Francisco and plucked her from the convent doors. It may be that the tale is but a legend, yet it expresses the bond of the great romantic love that marriage forged between them.

" Frances would be much better if Gilbert *could* beat her," ruminated Elodie. But the thought of Gilbert laying about Frances with a stick, though impiously joyful, was incredible.

This was also the period of G. K.'s fluctuating typists, some of whom learned their job on poor old Gilbert, who was conditioned to a series of long and painful pauses by the absence of anything approaching speed. The two Chestertons dictated easily and clearly, rarely altering a word or a stop. They were both of them quick and steady speakers, but the drag on Gilbert's wheels told eventually so that he became slower and slower like a watch running down. His patience was phenomenal. I know of nothing more infuriating than a typist who cannot type. Cecil or I would have gone up in the air in such conditions. But Gilbert never even complained.

The typists did not stay long. One inefficient quickly gave way to another. Occasionally a capable variety would intervene, but that did not help Gilbert very much. Their time was divided between him and the dog, Quoodle the First, who

had to be combed, bathed and taken for walks. Household errands had to be fetched, and there was always a stock of woollen garments to be mended. All this held up the ordinary secretarial routine, so that carbon copies of important articles were unmade or mislaid and top copies were lost, and very frequently had to be re-dictated all over again. A new régime was instituted by Miss Collins' immediate predecessor, an experienced capable young woman who eased the strain.

There was no practical reason for any incursion of amateurs. Then, as now, indeed, there were plenty of bureaux which could supply an adequate secretary. But Frances disliked such organisations. She was an intense individualist, and as such was drawn towards local products, little shops, small industries, everything of the neighbourhood.

At first Fleet Street in general was puzzled at and pained by G. K.'s disappearance from tavern life, but gradually most of the crowd accepted, if they deplored, his exile.

But it was not only Fleet Street that Gilbert sacrificed. Frances quite rationally and fairly pointed out that regular financial provision must be made for household expenses, and in view of the chaotic condition of Gilbert's cash arrangements, suggested that she should take over the business of paying his cheques in and drawing them out, and be wholly responsible for the settlement of bills. Gilbert agreed like a bird, blithely signed the necessary documents for the bank and discovered that he had made over his rights to every penny of his earning and was a pensioner on his own bounty. Here again, I am convinced that Frances never realised the implications of what she

had done. She really felt that in removing money from Gilbert she was helping his peace of mind. He would no longer crave for Fleet Street taverns and talk, but content himself with Beaconsfield. Meanwhile he was provided with cigars and other luxuries.

Gilbert experienced to the full the inconvenience of an allowance—two-and-sixpence was the maximum dole, by no means daily—but he never challenged his monetary independence, though he continually asked for an increase of cash.

This state of things reacted in varying ways on his friends and relations.

Cecil was most unhappy.

"Think of it, kiddy," he protested to me. "Just think, he can't buy Frances a present, not even a bunch of violets, without asking for the money."

It was a typically Cecilian remark. Not to be free to give the woman he loved all that his money could buy, must be to any man, he felt, insufferable.

When Gilbert and Frances went to see the parents at Warwick Gardens, the money business became really distressing. They usually looked in for lunch, and on one occasion, I remember, Gilbert was meeting a publisher late in the afternoon at his club, the National Liberal. He suggested that refreshments might be acceptable to his guest, but that he had no money to offer any. After considerable fumbling, Frances produced the regulation two-and-sixpence.

"That's not enough, old girl," said Gilbert, pleasantly.

She tendered another shilling, and was met by renewed remonstrance. At this point the parents

discreetly withdrew and I hastily followed. It was the only time I ever heard Mister express criticism or annoyance with his daughter-in-law, for whom he had a great affection and esteem. He looked on her as a most desirable check on Gilbert's irresponsibility, whereas, I am afraid, he regarded me as aiding and abetting, if not inciting, Cecil's audacity.

" Frances should not argue about money before us," he said, gravely. " After all, it is Gilbert's money, and he has a right to what is just. I wish they would come to some sort of satisfactory arrangement."

That, however, was so far as Mister would go. Non-interference was the family motto. Marie Louise said nothing, but on this occasion when Gilbert went out of the room, she was in the hall waiting and slipped a packet of pound notes in his pocket.

It was, I think, in Fleet Street that Gilbert felt his monetary restrictions most. When, at rare intervals, he reappeared, the word went round like wildfire and a crowd would foregather wherever he might be. Over his favourite Burgundy, he would react to the atmosphere, and sparkling and combative, would hold us all enthralled ; and then with an expansive gesture of his beautiful hand, he would look round—one could feel the words of invitation hovering on his lips—until remembering that he had no money, his hand fell, almost wounded. Impecuniosity had never mattered to him in the old days. There is a freemasonry among journalists, which realises that money to-day may mean none to-morrow, and the sum total averages out, but Gilbert's cash horizon was limited by half-a-crown.

There was a finality about this sum that had the ring of death and quarter day. His fingers would stray towards his pocket, hoping, perhaps, that some wild chance would conjure back the brittle cash he used to carry. But the days of miracles were over, and he had to face the fact, that he, who loved all ritual, could not conform to the custom—immemorial in all pubs—of standing his round.

I have always thought it queer that Gilbert's fellow sufferer from restricted cash—in the writing world—was Rudyard Kipling. He earned a far bigger income than G. K., but, except for the bond of penury, was utterly dissimilar in politics and outlook. It is, I think, something of a literary curiosity that these two widely divergent men of genius should have put their necks under the half-crown yoke. Kipling, according to an old friend, had so much and no more for his lunch at the Athenaeum which painfully restricted his menu, and prevented any extension of friendly hospitality. There may be a possible explanation of the Imperialist's acceptance of thraldom. In a prevision of Fascism, he glorified the worship by the weak for the strong, whose condescension for the Indian National he lauded in the slavering lines of Gunga Dinn. But Gilbert had no masochistic longings for debasement and interiorly resented the deprivation of a just proportion of his earnings. He could have ended the money famine by a clear-cut assertion of his will. He never made it, and to the end Frances controlled his cash. But throughout all the years he gave her his complete loyalty and devotion.

It may have been that his prophetic eye saw an impending collision between the work he wished

to do and the position Frances for his sake hoped he would have achieved. G. K.'s untiring challenge to all attempts at whittling the rights of the people had stirred Liberal feeling throughout the country. It was *on dit* in Fleet Street and repeated more intimately in Warwick Gardens, that the party leaders wanted to bestow a title on the new champion. Gilbert never tolerated the idea for a moment, but I believe the suggestion was not unkindly received by his wife, who felt that severance from old associations might work a change of mind. It is natural for a woman to desire the acclamation of her man. But in consenting to exile, Gilbert was able to shut a door which otherwise might have remained open, and the notion of a title was finally shelved.

His later association with Cecil on the *New Witness* was another source of quite understandable difference. There was always an atmosphere of trouble brewing wherever Cecil was—politically speaking. And Frances in public matters was for peace at any price. It could be said of her at any time that like Mr. Edmund Sparkler, "Ma particularly wishes no row." Marriage, a man once said, is a perpetual choice between what you want and what your wife decides. The answer for Gilbert was compromise. He gave up his money, his Fleet Street liberty, and lost an entire world ; but he gained a part of his own soul, though at times it must have been sorely heavy. Meanwhile Frances in her wealth of protective affection tried to relieve him of all trouble ; she ordered the food at restaurants, settled the bills, took the railway tickets, hailed the taxis and booked the rooms at hotels.

Under his female tutelage, Gilbert grew more

and more remote to the outside world until, like the Lama of Tibet, though his name was world-wide, and he could be seen and heard on public occasions and platforms, he was rarely socially visible to the ordinary eye. I remember the shock I experienced when I found him referred to as the Sage of Beaconsfield. But this, which always seemed to me the final epitaph on the Laughing Cavalier of our idolatry, was not until years after, when Cecil had gone from Fleet Street to a wider horizon, where I and all his friends hope to rejoin him in a snug celestial bar.

The legends of G. K.'s exile have their amusing side, but its effects were significant and far reaching. Deprived of all objective responsibility, he grew unconcerned, almost indifferent to the obligations of everyday life. He so lost the sense of money value that he could not compute its importance to the normal man and woman obliged to earn their bread, so that in his personal relations with them he was often oblivious of their rights.

He was so embedded by service in his home, that out of it he took for granted sacrifices of time and leisure and devotion, to which he should have been sensitively conscious. These things militated against the success of the campaign which he took over from his brother. Leadership was never G. K.'s line of country, but in the old free days he would have set up a standard to which all lovers of liberty would have flocked. But servitude weighed down his will, and he spoke in the accents of uncertainty.

Meanwhile he dictated in infinite patience and humility and his fame grew wider, his sales greater.

In exile he ruled a literary world.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE TRIM OF CECIL CHESTERTON

IT was just after Frances and Gilbert went to Beaconsfield that Belloc started the *Eye Witness.* The paper was largely financed by one of those strange venturers who now and again break into the newspaper world. He had little experience, but blithely sponsored Belloc's idea for a weekly review, which proved a brilliant literary and political success. Cecil, as assistant editor, was hard worked but quite happy.

The *Eye Witness,* among other things, was hot on the investigation of the Marconi contract. Nowadays, wireless telegraphy so bestrides the world it is difficult to presuppose a time when it was not, but it was only about 1911 that the British Empire decided to go on the air. A considerable body of opinion was in favour of state installations under expert superintendence, but the Cabinet—the Liberals were in power—decided that wireless rights should be farmed out. Various systems competed ; but the Postmaster-General, Herbert Samuel, the present Lord Samuel, announced to the public surprise that the contract had been given to the Marconi Company. Experts held that there was nothing of outstanding superiority in the selected system, many believed that Telefunken was far more efficient, and the general element of mystery

increased as to why Marconis had been chosen. Moreover, the managing director of the Company, Godfrey Isaacs, had been connected with such a number of city failures that his name was regarded as anything but an asset. This, and the fact that Godfrey's brother, Sir Rufus Isaacs, as Attorney General, would have inside knowledge of what was happening, whetted public curiosity. It was suggested that he and others had bought shares at pre-contract price and sold at post-contract with considerable profit.

Leo Maxse's *National Review* and the *Morning Post* joined the *Eye Witness* in the attack. The financial press was keenly critical, while the most relentless enquiries were carried on in the *Stockbroker,* edited by Raymond Radclyffe, a financial writer of such high repute that a word of praise from him gave a certificate of integrity to any company undertaking. But it was impossible to pin down the charge. There seemed no way of bringing the issue into the open.

The investigations continued for a year in the *Eye Witness* when Belloc resigned the Editorship in favour of Cecil, who carried on till November, 1912. At this point the paper, financially speaking, collapsed.

It was on this occasion—I think the only one—that Cecil approached his father for monetary backing and suggested that he might put up sufficient capital to acquire the paper which his son proposed to carry on under the title of the *New Witness.*

Edward responded magnificently and Cecil rushed down to tell me all about it—I was staying in a cottage at Crowborough where I was trying to

catch up arrears of work after the death of my mother a few months previously.

"It's all arranged," said Cecil, triumphantly, "I'm going to have the paper and there's only one thing left to settle. I want you . . ."

I shook my head.

"I'm not asking you to marry me—this time," he laughed. "At the moment I want you as my assistant."

He went on to paint in glowing colours what a wonderful combination he felt we should make and how keen he was on our working together.

And as I had almost finished my particular contract, with pride and enthusiasm I consented.

Never, I should say, was a paper destined to such political influence inaugurated in such baffling and evasive circumstances. There was no hiatus between the last number of the *Eye Witness* and its successor, but, whereas the first was entrenched in well-equipped and solid offices, the *New Witness* was launched from bare boards.

We took over the old premises in John Street Adelphi, and immediately started on the forthcoming issue for which most of the articles were already set and proofs to hand. While we were deep in measuring and fitting up the bomb burst. A large man came through the door and without a word proceeded to remove the table. We clutched it tightly.

"What on earth are you doing?" Cecil protested.

"Taking it away," was the stolid answer. "Me and my mate "—he motioned to a small and scrubby individual—" have come to remove the goods, the landlord's distrained for the rent."

He pushed a legal looking document in front of us, and heaving up the table bore it triumphantly away. We watched it disappear regretfully, but there was no time to protest. There was nothing for it but to carry on from a roller-topped desk. The printers were screaming for " copy " and until the paper had been put to bed there was no chance of getting a table or anything else.

We succeeded in fixing about half the issue, when the large man seized on the desk, and we were driven to a typing slab, from whence we flitted to a filing cabinet and ultimately to the floor. And there, grovelling in the dust, we finished the dummy just before the carpet was plucked from underneath our kneeling bodies.

But that was only the beginning of the chapter. A few weeks later we received an ultimatum from the printers that they could not proceed with the issue. Now, to break the context of the Marconi exposure would have had serious repercussions on the attack. It was imperative that the bombardment should continue.

We could have threatened the printers with proceedings for breach of contract, but there was no means of forcing them to carry on forthwith. The matter was serious. Already the other side had joined issue. We were told they had given a big printing contract to the printing firm on the understanding that they shut down on us immediately. It was a tough proposition, but we solved it.

Raymond Radclyffe came to our help and, through his influence Odhams, then in the initial years of their success, agreed to take us on. Odhams himself—a very kindly man, I always found him—was a touch apprehensive, and adjured us to be

very, very careful of what we said and how we said it. But Elias—the future Lord Southwood—was younger and more venturesome. The dummy was sent up to Long Acre and the *New Witness* went to press. We had won the first round.

We felt we had done a good day's work, and, leaving the dusty and deserted office, went to the Adelphi Hotel for a long, cool drink. Members of the Savage Club and pressmen generally used to gather in the lounge. The place was very full that night, and Cecil fell into conversation with the London correspondent of a French paper, and proceeded to discuss Rousseau's Social Contract, which he had been re-reading. All thoughts of Marconi fell from him. He was deep in the analysis of Rousseau's genius, which he said had adumbrated the political theories already dividing Europe. At the mention of the word " contract," I noticed a quiet, shabby looking little individual consuming a pint of ale look up and gradually sidle closer to Cecil and his friend. He listened for all he was worth, trying hard to follow what was being said. Every time the indicative word was mentioned his face cleared, only to grow mystified again as the talk proceeded.

I felt sure he was a private detective on the prowl and I managed to convey the hint to Cecil. Before he could decide what to do, Belloc surged in and spotted the little man immediately.

" That is a spy," he said, and asked if Cecil had any important documents on him.

Cecil's pockets, as usual, were bulging with papers and tobacco, but there was nothing that really mattered, and Belloc suggested we should go and eat and make counter plans. We left the Adelphi

and decided to dine at the Mont Blanc, a small French restaurant in Lisle Street, with marvellous food at a very low price. The spy followed at a discreet distance, and Belloc, suddenly enraged, changed his plans and plunged on an omnibus. We scrambled up behind him, grinning at the spy's discomfiture, Alas, we rejoiced too soon. With a wild spurt he pursued the bus and at the risk of life and limb clung on and eventually got inside. We dashed off at the Bank and took the tube. He followed. We alighted at the next station, pelted to the adjoining platform and snapped into a waiting train. Just managing to avoid death or disaster the spy tore at the closing door and fell into the carriage almost at our feet.

But our blood was up. We left the tube and ran from bus to bus until at last we shook him off, and beetling into a taxi drove direct to Soho.

Other conspiratorial things happened of a trifling though irritating nature. Mister, who subscribed to a prominent press cutting agency, which supplied him with his sons' newspaper contributions and publicity paragraphs, was informed that the agency could no longer accept his instructions. A well-dressed, somewhat pompous representative called at Warwick Gardens and explained the danger Cecil was running in attacking public and powerful personages. But if he thought he could intimidate Edward he was no judge of human nature.

" It is your loss, not mine," said Mister. " There are plenty of other agencies only too pleased to get custom."

At this point we left the Adelphi for new offices at 22, Essex Street. The editorial room had a wide

and exciting view. From the window overlooking the embankment we could see the Temple Gardens, where the figure of the Greek athlete in a fine reproduction of the Laocoon eternally wrestled with the serpent. The Thames lay silvered and serene beyond—in summer time at any rate—and from the top of the Astor Library on the Embankment floated our mascot, a lovely weathervane in the form of a ship. It held the eyes, that slim and tossing thing, which kept aloft through every storm and tempest.

It was, I felt, the symbol of our fight. The office walls, freshly distempered in soft green, grew old and shabby as the years passed. The furniture settled into senile decay, but the ship never foundered, swinging now towards the placid Thames or pointing to the turbulent city. I can see it now—storm-tossed but never submerged became our motto.

Pigeons used to rest upon our window sill. Antony and Cleopatra returned each year to coo, and the trees on the Embankment Gardens multiplied their leaves.

But if the outlook were peaceful the office was full of stress, with interludes of comparative quiet when Cecil dictated thunderous leaders with barbed paragraphs. We had already gathered our chief contributors. Belloc and Gilbert were the star turns, with Desmond MacCarthy, not yet famous, and Arthur Ransome on the critical side. The Abbé Dimnet and F. Y. Eccles wrote on French affairs, and Jack Squire with other brilliant young men contributed satiric verse and topical articles. Desmond, slim and a little pathetic looking, with permanently raised eyebrows, was temperamental in the delivery of his

copy. Even now it is said he occasionally slips up, but at that time unpunctuality was his rule, though his stuff was so delicious that we waited until the last moment for its arrival. He used to sketch out his future prospects with pleasing optimism. We paid our contributors three guineas an article—or nothing—according to the state of the exchequer, and the *New Statesman,* which started soon after us, averaged the same rate. Desmond wrote for both journals.

" I am getting another contract shortly," he remarked one day, " so with the *New Witness* and the *Statesman* I shall soon get rid of all my debts and be financially sound. Isn't it splendid ? "

He gave his wistful, slightly cherubic smile, went away—and never wrote a line for any of us for three months.

Eccles was always up to time, but he did not write easily. His chiselled sentences were slowly shaped, and he preferred to work at home. The surge of the office was not conducive to his prose, but he had a lovely sense of humour and could be relied on to soften Belloc's more ebullient moods.

Meanwhile the Marconi brew was fermenting. Cecil launched out in the *New Witness* on : " The extraordinary history of the Marconi shares." He emphasised that " all securities which at one time had been kicking about the City at something like half-a-crown apiece within a few months of the boom were quoted at not more than *ly.* or 14s. Then came the negotiations with the Government and the shares rose with unexampled rapidity till they reached over £9 *10s.* All this time the public were told nothing. Now this was the period of the negotiations between the Post Office and

the Marconi Company. The Ministers throughout declined to answer questions in the House of Commons even at the time when the Marconi Directors were informing their shareholders that their tender had been accepted. . . . Two sets of people must have known the truth : the Directors of the Marconi Company and the Ministers of the Crown. They therefore were clearly in a position to profit by this unexampled boom."

Moreover, the *New Witness* stated that " the Poulsen Company which offered the Government better terms than the Marconi and passed the tests imposed yet was choked off for no apparent reason."

Other papers hammered at similar points, and the scandal reached such dimensions that questions were asked in the House as to whether Cabinet Ministers had speculated in Marconi shares. Herbert Samuel gravely assured the Honourable Members that : " Neither I myself nor any of my colleagues have at any time held one shilling's worth of shares in that Company." Sir Rufus Isaacs echoed the statement and Lloyd George spoke of " rumours passing from one foul lip to another."

But in spite of, or perhaps because of these denials and the form they took, public opinion was not satisfied, and a Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to enquire into the whole Marconi business. As the Liberals were in power they had a majority on the Committee which, it is interesting to note, though it summoned Cecil Chesterton three times to give evidence, never called him, preferring to leave his allegations unanswered.

The ultimate result of the enquiry was a majority report whitewashing everybody, and a minority report that included some highly critical and very scathing judgments, while even H. W. Massingham, the Editor of the *Nation* and a passionate supporter of the Government, printed in his paper the words : " Political corruption is the Achilles heel of Liberalism."

But the reports of the Committee were not published till much later, and Cecil felt it was essential at all costs to force the issue into the open. He decided to concentrate on the financial history of Godfrey Isaacs. One of our sleuths got the information that Godfrey Isaacs' enterprises had not been registered under the Companies but under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act, which entails considerably less cost. It is not only the question of fee, which in some cases is important, but under the I. and P. provisions it is possible to shelter failure from the fierce light of publicity. The shareholders are not usually rich, or socially important, so that the meetings are rarely reported in the press. As a consequence, the long list of Isaacs' short-lived concerns was not generally known, except of course to the unfortunate investors.

Isaacs' career included a large number and strange variety of activities, from gold mining in Wales to motor car companies in Australasia, every one of which had gone phut. It was further discovered that Godfrey had broken the rules of the Act in that he had not made the annual return of balance sheets, etc., required of him. Altogether his past hardly seemed to justify his position as Managing Director of a company which had won

the great Imperial Wireless Contract. Suspicions as to Brother Rufus increased.

We opened fire with the first instalment of Godfrey's financial history, written in Cecil's pellucid and damning style, with every point clarified and all leading up to the Marconi contract and the Ministers chiefly interested. The article was incisive, the method of publicity a stroke of genius.

On publishing day we bombarded the House of Commons with a squad of sandwich men who, selling quires of the *New Witness,* solemnly promenaded up and down outside the House, displaying posters in huge type, " Godfrey Isaacs' Ghastly Record." This was the spectacle that met Sir Rufus, the Marconi Ministers and all the M.P.'s on their arrival at the House.

The *New Witness* sold like hot cakes and more and more supplies were sent for. We shocked conventional members, but pricked their curiosity, while the younger Tories and a few Independent Liberals were frankly elated. The Front Bench of the Opposition had taken no part in the enquiry. Professional politicians on both sides invariably rally to each other's support at the least suggestion of corruption, and the Tory leaders lined up with the Cabinet in duty bound. But the back-benchers were more honest and tried to force the pace.

At this point I feel I should make it quite clear that Cecil Chesterton had no animus against Godfrey Isaacs, nor would he have delved into that gentleman's dusty past, but for the fact that it was only by attacking him that the Ministers suspected of corruption could be forced into the open. For there was no escaping the ghastly record ; it echoed far and wide. Isaacs was the

centre of attention in the House, and the City and the clubs buzzed with the news. Our blow had struck at a strategic point. As an elected representative of the people Sir Rufus could not ignore it.

The affair caused considerable sensation in Fleet Street. The party organs adopted an attitude of shocked astonishment. The anti-Marconi group cheered us on, and journalists generally were enthusiastic and excitedly discussed what the other side would do.

And then one morning a policeman arrived at the *New Witness*, and served the Editor with a summons for criminal libel against Godfrey. This meant that, were he found guilty, Cecil would be liable to imprisonment, whereas an action for civil libel only carries the possibility of damages. The summons was duly framed and hung up in the office—facing our ship—and we solemnly drank to the Editor's success in champagne, which could be had on draught at the *El Vino*.

The Bow Street proceedings though formal gave Cecil an opportunity of stating definitely why he had launched an attack on Godfrey Isaacs.

"I found," said he, "a contract was going through, was evidently being hurried through with the idea that it should never be examined. I examined it. I found it a very bad contract. I said so in my paper. I went into the conditions of the negotiations. I found them most suspicious. I said so again in my paper. I went into the records of the Managing Director of the Company and I found ample ground for further suspicion. I said so in my paper. That is the sole and only reason why I have taken this action. No one else would."

The next question was the conduct of Cecil's

defence, which raged in many places among many people. With other of his friends I hoped that he would appear on his own behalf, and to this day I regret that he did not do so. Cecil was never intimidated and would have faced the heaviest professional odds without a tremor. But there was a strong feeling that he might jeopardise the issue if he spurned counsel, and on that count, and because he felt the case of national importance, he gave way.

The big battalions of the law had already gathered on the other side. Sir Edward Carson was briefed, with F. E. Smith and a host of glittering juniors. There was not much remaining in the way of first-class talent, and what there was had no wish to appear against Sir Rufus, for whom, it was felt, future and great preferment waited. Meanwhile, however, a group of young Tories got together and decided to help. They approached Ernest Wild, the brilliant Tory K.C., who was finally briefed for the defence.

Wild's consent, I always thought, a little disappointed Cecil. He had been reading up the law of libel, discovering among other fascinating things, that to call a man a " bunter " was actionable in the extreme. He never found out what a " bunter " meant, but the mere enunciation of the word gave him great satisfaction. The lawyers for the defence were the family solicitors, Merriman, White and Thomson, who had acted for Edward for years, and since the *New Witness* started had arranged Cecil's business affairs. Thomson, the senior partner, admired him, but regarded his activities as being slightly dangerous to his client. The kindest and most loyal of men, I am afraid that Cecil and I,

professionally speaking, were an anxiety to him, but he was always our friend.

As the date of the trial grew nearer, the office surged all day with friends and sympathisers. Cecil welcomed them gladly, dictating his copy meanwhile without pause or hesitation. We had a big mail of encouraging letters, and our sales hopefully increased. Belloc, called to the Continent on literary business, sent inspiring telegrams, and the whole of Fleet Street wanted to stand Cecil innumerable drinks.

There was hardly a pause in the hectic preparations, until one day Cecil left the office for a few hours to be received into the Catholic Church. His decision had been taken swiftly and without any period of doubt. He sought a working philosophy of life, and, his reason satisfied, he accepted the Catholic fundamentals quite simply.

His friendship with Elodie Belloc had included long talks on the faith and it was she who had suggested he should be prepared by Father Bowdon, the Oratorian. At one time a distinguished soldier, he remained a fighter, and as such specially appealed to Cecil.

There was nothing of the convert about this new adherent to Catholicism. Cecil's religion was absorbed into his personality, and he felt perfectly at home. It was, indeed, so much a part of him that he was able to take the same objective view of Catholics as of any other body of people. Gilbert, I always felt, was so impregnated with the supernatural power of the Church over her disciples, that he credited Catholics as such with an undue impeccability of motive and purpose in worldly affairs. I have known him impressed by the most

obvious tricksters through the sheer fact of their Catholicism. Cecil's attitude remained completely rationalistic. Whenever the news came to hand that some scoundrel or other had been received, he would throw back his head with a great laugh, and tell me that the " poor old Church had got it in the neck again."

Meanwhile, the Marconi business developed a most amazing twist.

On the very day that Cecil filed his defence of justification, Mr. Herbert Samuel and Sir Rufus Isaacs issued a writ for libel in the English Courts against the French daily, *Le Matin*—on sale in London. *Le Matin* had suggested mildly what the *New Witness* had been shouting for months, though no action had been launched against Cecil's paper. The French journal had a huge circulation and financial backing. It was obvious that if such an influential organ were brought to book, the little *New Witness* with its contemptibly small capital might safely be ignored.

It was an adroit move, as the evidence at the trial of Cecil Chesterton revealed.

It was on May 27th, 1913, that Cecil Chesterton walked into the dock at the Old Bailey. The presiding judge was Mr. Justice Phillimore, and it was part of the queer incidence of things that one of our most distinguished contributors, Professor J. S. Phillimore, should be his cousin. The Professor used to send us very brilliant, but almost indecipherable articles on classical subjects. He never took any notice of proofs and, as a consequence, his copy was a nightmare to the printers and the office. He was brought into especial prominence during the Old Bailey proceedings.

There is always a fascination in the trappings of a criminal court, the mediaeval robes of the judge, the traditional ceremonies of his entrance appeal to the human love of the dramatic, heightened in the case of the Old Bailey by the remembrance of the figure of Justice on the top of the dome, with her drawn sword. Few of us felt it was likely to flash out in favour of the prisoner, who looked singularly at ease, almost happy, in the dock, his quick eyes glancing here and there to find his friends and give them greeting.

Sir Edward Carson, with his silken gown and silken voice, was impressively like a Grand Inquisitor, his yellow-ivory face sharpened by the decorative wig, his prognathic jaw softened by the cambric context. F. E. Smith suggested, as always, genial inebriety, "not exactly sober and not exactly canned," as Scott Moncrieff put it, and the juniors pressed behind in a compliant huddle. The public already filled every seat and billowed out in standing rows, while eager applicants stood in the corridors. Friends rolled up from every phase of Cecil's career. Journalists were many, and celebrities and paragraphed socialites streamed in—by favour—through the judge's door.

Two significant contrasts stood out among the spectators. There were present every day and all day long throughout the trial, the small brown figure in shabby tweeds of J. M. Barrie, shy and alert as a squirrel on the look-out for nuts, and a large and heavily-built woman whose hawk-like features proclaimed Rufus and Godfrey Isaacs as her sons. She watched every movement, each expression of the prisoner, as though she feared he might by some nefarious miracle be spirited from

the dock and beyond human punishment. Poor soul, I understood something of what she must be feeling. At the moment of supreme triumph, when Godfrey her beloved prodigal, the ne'er do well of the clan, had almost attained the prominence of his big brother, the upstart journalist in the dock had revealed the secrets of the past. The ghastly record must have hit her hard.

Mr. and Mrs. Chesterton went to the Old Bailey each morning, but Marie Louise would not go into the court, and Edward remained faithfully at her side. She regarded it as a joke that Cecil should be a prisoner on trial but, all the same, she would not see him in the dock. That there might be a serious outcome of the business she did not at first even admit ; she could not visualise prison in connection with her son. Uncle Arthur, handsome and debonair, was with them, also Gilbert and Frances. The two men took it in turns to bring back reports of what was happening to the parents, amplified by eager knots of friends.

I could only wait for the preliminaries in court the first day, the paper had to be made up, and special arrangements put in hand for our squad of sandwich men to surround the Old Bailey. Our principal article that week was by Professor Phillimore, whose calligraphic intricacy I have referred to. His copy arrived very late and was written practically in Latin, spiced with Greek. The printers' reader gave up the ghost at the sight of the proof, and not being a classical scholar, I was not much better. Belloc was on the Continent, and none of our scholarly contributors were to be found.

There was but one hope left—the prisoner, and I

rushed down to the Old Bailey and got round the gaoler to slip Cecil the proofs in the luncheon interval. Over his bread and cheese and beer, Phillimore's spider-like curves and rhomboids were disintegrated and quotations put straight. Next morning the sandwich squad announcing that the *New Witness* had an article by J. S. Phillimore circled the Old Bailey outside, while a man of the same name was trying the Editor inside.

No wonder the crowd cheered and poor Mrs. Isaacs gaped. The whole thing was impossibly like Alice in Wonderland with the Marconi Company as the White Rabbit, always disappearing and perpetually popping up in the proceedings.

Cecil made a good impression in his examination in chief. His voice had a boyish ring of sincerity which got home on jury and public alike. He reiterated that he had no grudge against Godfrey himself, but had merely used him as an instrument to focus attention on the dealings of certain Ministers of the Crown. Carson handled his cross-examination with consummate skill. His manner was deferential, his charming brogue caressing, and he used his hands and his eyes like a great actor. But he got little change from the short, sturdy figure that confronted him, and for all the elegance of his diction, the subtlety of his brain, he knew he had met his dialectical match.

Godfrey was not a great success in the box. He could not explain away his record, and his manner was diffident, almost shrinking. He had nothing of the dominance of Rufus. The Attorney General's features, " vulturine " as dear **old** Hugh **O'Donnell** always described them, had a strength **quite lacking from** his brother's.

Sir Rufus was a cast-iron witness with a polish of steel. He stated on oath that he had never discussed the Marconi contract with Godfrey, he had only learned of it, indeed, one Sunday evening quite casually at a family party. He swore, moreover :

" Never from the beginning have I had one single transaction with the shares of that company."

In the light of his subsequent evidence the operative word in the sentence is distinctly " that."

For it transpired that actually Sir Rufus had had considerable dealings in Marconi shares, but his transactions had been with the American Marconi Company and not the English.

The story, as he told it, and as it is recorded in the shorthand notes of the trial, is fascinating.

The tender for the wireless contract from Marconi's was accepted by the Postmaster General on March 7 th, 1912. Sir Rufus became Solicitor General on the 15th of the same month. On March 9th—two days after the tender was accepted, Godfrey Isaacs, as managing director of the company, went to America with Marconi. But Sir Rufus said he did not know why his brother was going, indeed, as he stated in the witness box :

" I did not know there was an American Marconi Company. . . . I had no notion at the moment that there was any business going to be transacted in America and that there was going to be any issue of capital."

But his ignorance must have been very quickly dissipated for in evidence he admitted that on March 16th—a bare nine days later—he sent a cable through the *New York Times* to be read at a luncheon given in honour of Godfrey and

Signor Marconi : "PLEASE CONGRATULATE MARCONI AND MY BROTHER ON THE SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT OF A MARVELLOUS ENTERPRISE. I WISH THEM ALL SUCCESS AND HOPE THAT BY THE TIME THEY COME BACK THE COAL STRIKE WILL HAVE FINISHED."

This message from so distinguished a Minister of the British Crown was naturally splashed all over the American press. American Marconi shares began to boom.

Three weeks later—on April 9th—Godfrey was back in England and, said Sir Rufus, told him he was responsible for half a million shares in the American Company. Of these he still had 100,000 to place.

" He was liable for them," said Sir Rufus in the box, " and anxious to place them. . . . On the 17th of April my brother Harry came to me and told me he had bought 50,000 of the shares and that the price was going up. . . . I took 10,000 shares of him at £2. . . ."

Brother Harry—in the greengrocery business at Govent Garden, sold a further 21,000 American Marconi shares at an immense profit. To quote Mr. Wild : "He got enough money to pay for all the shares he kept (19,000) and several thousand po'unds profit in addition," This statement Sir Rufus did not challenge.

In answer to a question by the Examining Counsel, Mr. Wild, Sir Rufus stated :

" I know the price at which I bought the shares was lower than the price which I know . . . they were introduced on to the London market on the 19th."

" You sold shares to the Chancellor of the

Exchequer? " asked Mr. Wild, " and to the Chief Liberal Whip ? "

"Yes," replied Sir Rufus, " 1,000 each of my **10,000.**"

" You sold for yourself and your colleagues 3,570 on the 19th at £3 *6s. gd.*—that is £11,870—and these shares had cost you £7,140 ? "

Sir Rufus acquiesced.

Eleven thousand pounds !

I remembered a curious piece of evidence brought before the Marconi Committee, and reproduced in Cecil's paper.

" Among those who had profited by the Marconi operations," wrote the *New Witness*', " was a gentleman of the name of Taylor, employed at a salary in the Post Office. He bought thirty Marconi shares when they were on the rise and sold them again, making £48 on the transaction. On November 8th he wrote to the Postmaster General acquainting him of what he had done. Mr. Samuel, we are told, took a very serious view of his action and he was reduced to a lower grade in the postal service than that which he had previously occupied."

" Did you know," resumed Mr. Wild, " that Mr. Lloyd George "—(Chancellor of the Exchequer)—" sold some more on the next day, the 20th—he **sold 1,000 ? "**

" Yes," was the reply.

" Of the 2,000 you sold to him and the Master of Elibank they had only 286 left on the evening of the 20th ? "

" Somewhere about that," said Sir Rufus.

" They sold 714 through you? "

" Yes . . ."

" Do you think that a proper thing to do ? "

At this point the Judge intervened and the question was disallowed.

Sir Rufus had already publicly acknowledged his dealings in American Marconis in the case against *Le Matin* concerning which Mr. Wild then elicited some interesting details.

Sir Rufus emphasised that he had issued a writ against the French paper because he " wanted to make a public statement on oath " in regard to his dealings.

" I put it to you," said Mr. Wild, " that the proper place was in the House of Commons because you could have been answered there."

Sir Rufus protested with heat : " It had nothing whatever to do with the British public, indeed they were quite irrelevant."

What then was the Attorney General's underlying motive in wishing to " make a public statement on oath " on a matter which " had nothing to do with the British public " ?

The answer would seem to be, as Mr. Wild suggested, that in the House of Commons Sir Rufus would have been open to a fusillade of attack, whereas in the *Matin* case he had made his statement without fear of any cross-examination. Moreover, having stated his dealings in American Marconis these transactions were thereby made known to the Select Committee before he was called before them to give evidence.

As Mr. Wild put it : " You really did it in order that the Select Committee might not be taken by surprise ?"

Though this evidence created a sensation and for ever stamped the ministerial denials and stock exchange transactions with discredit, things were

nevertheless not going too well for Cecil. In his final speech Carson purred his way through Godfrey's failures, unfortunate perhaps but ghastly no, and not in the least meriting the prisoner's savage onslaught. As for the failure to file balance sheets, etc., it was perhaps a technical lapse but nothing more. And as with the plaintiff so with the American Marconi Ministers. They were entirely honourable and quite blameless.

The Judge appeared to share Sir Edward Carson's sentiments, and the jury, painstaking but mystified, seemed obviously impressed by the imposing row of witnesses for the prosecution, which included Mr. Herbert Samuel.

There was a moment of high drama when Gilbert concluded his evidence as to Cecil's integrity of character.

With perfect phrasing and in a voice that had a trumpet ring he spoke of his brother's conception of public duty, and what he said ruffled the Judge's equanimity. Mr. Justice Phillimore, with a contemptuous gesture, indicated the accused and reminded Gilbert that Cecil Chesterton stood in the dock.

With a fling of his head Gilbert replied on a clarion note : " I envy my brother his position."

It was just after Gilbert had stepped from the witness box that Archer Thomson, tilting his chair back to its extreme limit in a momentary relaxation from tension, suddenly, alarmingly disappeared from sight. It was as though the case had collapsed, and the court held its breath. And then the Judge smiled and the bar tittered, as the distinguished lawyer crawled from underneath his seat and resumed a staid position at the solicitors' table.

The last day of the trial I was at the Old Bailey before the court sat. By this time it was generally felt that Cecil's chances of acquittal were very slender. The atmosphere of pessimism spread to the corridors and broke in waves on Marie Louise's confidence. I found her anxious, but quite self-possessed.

" Don't you think you'd better sit down, Marie ? " asked Edward. " Here's a chair, my dear, you'll be more comfortable."

I don't think she even heard the suggestion ; she wanted to know what was happening in court. Uncle Arthur explained that Wild would finish his address, when the Judge would sum up and finally the jury would retire to consider their verdict.

" There can be only one," she said, bravely, then, as her menfolk made no reassuring noises, she turned to me. " Go in, my dear girl, and see how Cecil looks."

He was looking very well, as a matter of fact, and extraordinarily cheerful. Prison had no terrors for Cecil. He had already suggested a series of articles to a daily paper on his impressions and experiences, should he be sent to gaol, and the editor had jumped at the idea and was prepared to pay a very good price. Though Cecil had no care for money when he had it, he could always earn all he wanted. He was an admirable salesman with regard to his copy, but what he made ran out of his hands as fast as it ran in.

Sir Ernest wound up his address by an appeal for consideration, in that the defendant had said what he had for the best of motives, and in the belief that it was in the public interest. But the speech

cut little ice, and we were prepared for Justice Phillimore's contemptuous dismissal of the plea.

Now one of the queer intricacies in this remarkable trial was the fact that the Phillimore Estate, in which the Judge had an interest, was administered by the firm of Chesterton and Sons, the near relatives of the defendant, and, like the rest of the family, of high repute for honour and integrity. For this reason it was difficult for his lordship entirely to divest his memory of what he knew of the Chesterton morale. As it was, leaving aside the defendant's motives, he fastened on the cruel injury that Godfrey had received, and painted in high colours the shock that tough company promoter had experienced when he found his ghastly record promenading up and down the House of Commons and the Stock Exchange—even permeating the offices of the Marconi Company, of which he was managing director.

But, all the same, the summing up definitely stated that the jury were not concerned as to whether or no Cabinet Ministers had improperly dealt in Marconis ; their verdict was quite apart from that issue. They had to decide whether Cecil Chesterton in dealing with Godfrey Isaacs' career as a company promoter had committed libel. The jury were instructed to return, and did return, a verdict of guilty, but that verdict did not and could not express the view that the Ministers were innocent.

Betting was dead against the defendant by the time Phillimore had finished. A sporting solicitor offered six to four on an acquittal, but there were no takers and the market touched bottom at eight to one on a verdict of guilty.

The news got out to the parents, and Marie

Louise quietly, but firmly, made the following announcement:

" You understand, don't you, Edward, that if my boy goes to Brixton, you must not expect me to come home to-night. I shall just walk outside the prison until the morning."

Then, as ever, there was no suggestion that her presence on the other side of the wall might help or comfort her son ; there was no touch of sentimentalism about the little lady ; she just could not go home if Cecil were in gaol, and that was all there was to it.

Edward did not argue. He took her hand and held it tightly, and his kind eyes behind their glasses said the rest.

At this moment a constable pushed his way through the crowd to where I stood.

" Mr. Chesterton would like to speak to you," he said. " The jury are considering their verdict and he'll be in the dock for the next few minutes."

I followed, feeling puzzled, and a little apprehensive. Could Cecil be going to send a last message to his mother, or was it special directions for the paper ?

It was nothing like that. He leaned over the dock, quite happily.

" I'm for it, kiddy," he said. " But before I go to chokey I must have a smoke. They're very decent chaps down below," he pointed to the nether regions of the court, " and have promised before Fm carted off in the Black Maria I may have a pipe. But I've no tobacco. Do you think you could run out and get me some Bristol Bird's Eye ? "

I flew on the errand of mercy, and returned to face an official enveloped in red tape. No prisoner

on trial, he explained, was allowed to receive anything from the outside world without meticulous examination—for poison, or probably gunpowder. Automatically I handed the packet over, and after careful prodding and microscopic search it was passed for presentation to the accused.

" Thank the Lord," said Cecil. " That's all I wanted. They're getting me some beer," he added chuckling, and beamingly disappeared.

I hastened back to the parents and, prison or no, the news made Marie Louise laugh.

" That's exactly like my boy," she said, and Mrs. Isaacs, who passed *en route* from lunch, seemed surprised at her cheerful tone.

The jury filed back to the box with that uncomfortably criminal air which seems inseparable from their duty. The foreman in a low, almost contrite voice, delivered the verdict—" Guilty "—received by the Isaac contingent with applause, immediately suppressed. Now came the sentence, and everyone moved closer to hear the best or the worst, according to the point of view. The general opinion inclined towards three years' imprisonment, though some of the more morbid spirits put it as high as five. At any rate, we all anticipated that the Judge would send Cecil Chesterton to gaol, and the astonishment, tinged in some quarters with disappointment, was considerable when His Lordship fined the prisoner one hundred pounds.

There was a moment's silence after the Judge had stopped speaking, and then the pent-up feelings of the crowd were released in a roar of cheers. The Court seethed with excited jubilation, and a huge wave of humanity swept towards the hero of the day. It was a moment that quickened

the imagination. Against the Marconi Goliath of wealth and power David had more than held his own ; he had breached the citadel of Cabinet security, and forced Ministers of the Crown to face public opinion.

No wonder Cecil's sentence of a fine was regarded as a victory for clean government.

The cheers in the court continued. Cecil shook innumerable hands, breaking off to tell Marie Louise that he would join her later and, as a final thrill—just in time for the shouting—Belloc, travel-worn and dusty, pushed his way to his friend.

There was a pendant picture to this glad ovation. Looking across the court I saw the agitated and discordant figure of Mrs. Isaacs. Torn with indignation and surprise, she seized the nearest policeman and shook him.

" What does this mean ? " she asked.

" They're cheering Mr. Chesterton," said the bobby stolidly.

" Cheering ? But he's guilty—guilty ! The jury found him guilty. It's shameful, disgraceful, why isn't it stopped ? "

But all that for which Godfrey, Rufus and their friends had stood could not stem the torrent.

We left Mrs. Isaacs in court, still protesting, though later that same day we saw her in a calmer mood. The parents and Uncle Arthur took us to a neighbouring hotel for some food. It was good to settle down in peace, while G. K. and Cecil, over vast cups of tea, launched an argument quite naturally. While we were eating—and listening—Mrs. Isaacs came in, convoying Godfrey and a few acolytes. At close range her younger son was not unattractive, his features were delicate, his effe-

minate mouth quite kindly and his dark hair becomingly etched with grey. He looked exactly like a minor poet, with the qualities and drawbacks of the type. He took a flickering glance at our table and relapsed into non-observation. Not so his mother. She fixed us with a warrior eye and drank her tea as if it were transferable poison.

The scene came back to me when long after I read that Godfrey had joined the Catholic Church. I wondered how the Matriarch had reacted.

Cecil and I went back to the office, waved to the ship, and opened the sheaf of wires awaiting him. Later, when we looked in at Peele's, Fleet Street gave him a rich welcome. I don't think he realised just how important a thing he had done. The implications of the trial from a personal point of view, his recognition as a political force, his increased journalistic prestige were not apparent to him. What mattered was that he and the *New Witness* had put the Marconi Ministers on the spot.

A little later Mr. Justice Phillimore was made Judge of the Appeal Court while Sir Rufus became Lord Chief Justice of England, ascending to the Viceroyship of India.

But the repercussions of the trial of Cecil Chesterton still go on, and the spirit of Clean Government for which he stood in the dock now and again flames up—witness the sequel to the conduct of J. H. Thomas—late Cabinet Minister—who was officially pronounced improperly to have used his knowledge of Budget secrets, and the resignation of Robert Boothby from his office of Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food, following the report of a Select Committee in relation to Czech assets in this country.

And the end is **not** yet.

CHAPTER SIX

THE NEW WITNESS

THE *New Witness* now entered on its fighting career, full of vigour and impetuosity. The paper became the rallying ground for all sorts and conditions of people and we formed new and unexpected contacts. We saw everyone who called at the office, and though this meant interviewing numerous cranks and martyrs the results as a whole were very well worth while.

The paper was read, if not bought, by influential persons of all parties, in order to discover how much we had found out and what we were going to do about it. It was the same with the general press.

" I hate you,[35] said the Editor in Chief of the *Daily Sketch,* genially waving the *New Witness* at me, " but I've damn well got to read you. You always have the dope."

He was one of many prominent individuals; indeed we enjoyed what advertising firms call a quality as apart from a quantity circulation, and even found our way into the houses of the rich.

We started off by organising a Clean Government League on non-party lines. The idea caught on immediately, for it appealed to people of the most divergent opinions, centralising all kinds of warring factions in a common cause. Tories, Socialists, Atheists, Liberals, Catholics and Jews eagerly joined, rallying to Cecil's leadership. He had the rare gift of binding alien opinions to his

own, and was the link between Workmen, Intellectuals, Imperialists, Little Englanders, Pub-crawlers and even Teetotalers.

I recall an evening when Cecil had been debating in the East End with Norman Angell—he had not then been knighted—to a crowd of pacifists and intelligentsia. Some of them came with us later to a Hoxton pub, popular with married couples. Cecil had worked with Claude Hay, the Tory M.P. for the Borough, in abolishing the slums, and the people always welcomed him. On this occasion everyone was especially friendly and in the midst of talk and drinks a tall bargee, whose size and height dominated the situation, got on his feet and catching Cecil's eye raised his glass.

" My pleasure is to be with you, Sir," and he toasted the stugger figure, inches shorter than himself.

We had great excitement over our first League Meeting, we had only a small staff and limited expenditure, and all the organising work had to be done by ourselves. We decided to open with the exposure of the sale of honours, which at that period were bought and sold like pigs and pumpkins. This state of affairs was known only to a small proportion of the public, the vast majority would simply not have credited such a proceeding.

The hall was crowded and the interest was intense. For the first time the actual facts of the secret traffic were to be openly stated. The speaker set forth prices with admirable lucidity, he might have been an auctioneer describing the advantages of a desirable town residence or a country house.

" A peerage can be bought for sixty to eighty

thousand pounds," was the opening remark, and I remember the stir that ran through the hall. It is common knowledge, nowadays, that titles have been purchased by pawnbrokers, mining magnates or any other social climber, irrespective of actual service to state or society, but it came as an unmitigated surprise to the listeners at our inaugural meeting.

The speaker continued to explain that the price of the peerage depended on the repute of the buyer : those with a shop soiled past being charged more than those with a cleaner record. To become a Baron an aspirant had to plank down thirty thousand to fifty thousand pounds, while a mere Baronetcy went for ten thousand and a Knighthood fetched five. Curiously enough, Dukedoms were not included in the Government Bargain Basement; possibly existing noble Dukes objected.

We held meetings all over the country and our membership continued to grow. The point which always roused great indignation was that the money raised by the annual sale did not go to the State, but to the secret funds of the Party which happened to be in power—Liberal or Tory. Had the transactions been above board and openly advertised, there could have been little objection to recruiting the national exchequer by bargains in peerages, etc., which would have raked in millions of pounds and reduced general taxation.

But we had more than one string to our bow. We concentrated also on the Mental Deficiency Bill, which was having a stormy passage through Parliament. No authority, scientific or otherwise, has clearly stated just what mental deficiency means. It is not imbecility—for which there is a

dictionary definition as being without control of one's natural functions—but covers a wide range of disqualifications. In its original draft the Bill included clauses empowering the authorities to sterilise these unfortunate persons, but the opposition started by the *New Witness* and strengthened by other papers was so vehement that the sterility provisions were dropped. Nowadays, the fervour of eugenists and other pseudo-scientists has waned. But at that time it raged to fever heat in the desire to incarcerate innumerable juveniles and adults who could not pass curiously academic tests. Of these the most arbitrary was the Simon Benet test of a lost ball in a round field. I remember that half a dozen of us sat in the *New Witness* office and puzzled over the answer.

" How should I find the ball ? " said Gilbert. " I should wander about in the corners of the field."

Conal O'Riordan insisted he should just walk up and down, while I favoured the principle of wandering idly until I unearthed the missing treasure, on the assumption that when you least expected to find a thing it usually turned up.

W. R. Titterton, who was by way of being a mathematician, was the only one who hit upon the correct answer.

" You start in the middle of the field," he explained, " and work by ever widening circles to the extreme edge, thus lighting on the missing object without possibility of oversight."

According to Messrs. Simon Benet, Gilbert and the rest should have been incarcerated in a mental deficiency home.

The round field theory, though still in operation

as a measure of intelligence, is now shorn of some of its terror. Quite recently it was adduced in a Court of Law that a young man was unfit to control his financial affairs because he had failed to locate the ball in the field. The Judge ruled that facts germane to such finding were not present in the text. The gradient of the ground was not mentioned, nor the character of the soil described. In clay, for example, a ball might well sink and disappear beyond the radius of the most highly efficient path finder. The case terminated in favour of the young man, and the score against the mentally deficient sahibs strengthened.

After the Bill became law, we had many and most pathetic appeals for help. One of our shareholders sent us an employee with his small boy. It seemed that the child, aged six, had been judged deficient by the school medical authorities and the parents had been informed that he would be taken to an institution within a few days. I shall not easily forget the father's agitation nor the small boy's distress.

" You see," said the father. " Jim doesn't speak much yet, but he understands all we say and is very bright at his lessons. He loves sums, but they tell us that he is so backward in his speech that he has to go away."

There was not a minute to lose, and we took quick action.

Among our supporters for clean government was that very able lawyer, Freke Palmer, who was always keen in the defence of the poor. I telephoned and told him what had happened.

" Have the boy's people any relations in the country ? " was the swift enquiry.

The boy's grandmother, it seemed, had a cottage in some remote part of——.

" Don't tell me the place," interrupted the solicitor. " Don't tell anyone, but let the father take the boy there as soon as possible. He ought to go to-night, to-morrow at latest."

Dazed but resolute the father quietly agreed.

" Next," continued Palmer, " the boy must see an expert on child psychology."

I thought a minute and recalled that Dr. Eder was an authority on children and our close adherent.

" Fix up for Eder to see the boy to-morrow and send me the report," said Palmer. " Directly he leaves the doctor the father must go with the boy to the grandmother. Meanwhile I'll get in touch with the Board of Education. They know me," he added significantly, " and are not likely to act in a hurry."

Freke Palmer had been successful in fighting similar battles for small children, and I felt that we should win the day. Dr. Eder saw the boy the next morning and his report was most illuminating. He said that Jim's intelligence was well above the average, but that his brain was so active Nature had intervened to protect him from over stimulation by retarding his speech. Armed with the specialist's analysis, Freke Palmer knocked out the Board of Education in the first round. The local authority was called off and the small boy returned to his home.

I found the other day among a mass of papers a letter of thanks from Jim's father.

" If I'd been unbefriended they'd have got him, Miss, I know that, and the little chap would never have come back to us."

Dr. Eder was one of the first and most fiery Zionists. After the Great War he left his London practice and took an orange farm in Palestine, where Frances and Gilbert visited him. I learnt from them how resolutely he had flung himself on to the land, cultivating the soil side by side with Jewish and Arab workers. But while he was in England he was a most valued supporter of the League and always ready to champion the poor against injustice—and the rich.

A favourite fireside story of the Chestertons concerned Gilbert's gift of speech, which came much later than that of a small girl cousin. It is recorded that the power of language descended on him like a tongue of flame, suddenly and irresistibly. It was the occasion of a children's party and the small cousin, somewhere about four years old, was full of conversation. Gilbert, her elder, became indignant, and seizing her arms shook her to and fro, pouring out a flood of unintelligible eloquence. From that day his vocabulary increased and multiplied, ready —as his father once said—for the arrival of his brother.

Nowadays, the first signs of an attack on individual liberty may go unnoticed, but our contacts then were so wide and so many that political moves and intentions spread to us with the swiftness of jungle news. In this way we learnt of the proposal to give compulsory powers to Health Visitors, who were to have the right of entry into the homes of the poor. The social conscience had been shocked by the appalling rate of infant mortality in the slum districts of our cities, and Welfare Centres and Clinics had been started to give advice and instruction to all. The idea caught on and an army of

visitors were incorporated in this scheme, many of them youthful and untrained and without much tact. In the majority of cases they were not welcome, and the Government were pressed to authorise their entry.

This was the moment for a spirited campaign.

We held meetings, arranged debates, published articles and gained such support and backing that the objectionable intrusion was never legalised.

The Health Visitor, nowadays, is usually popular and helpful, largely because there is no compulsion to receive her. At the time of the *New Witness* there was a growing feeling in favour of the regimentation of the poor, their families and their homes. This we checked and in some cases defeated.

We fought, too, the case of a poor mother who was summoned for cruelty to her children, the said cruelty consisting of the presence of lice on their bodies. It was a local sanitary inspector who asked us to help, for the woman to her knowledge was a most devoted mother, the trouble being that the wretched place in which she lived had broken drains, through which rats passed freely. Now rats are vermin carriers and in walking over the children at night deposited lice on the beds and clothing. We arranged for a solicitor to represent the mother and the sanitary inspector gave evidence on her behalf. The case was dismissed and the local authorities served a notice on the landlord to repair the premises.

The case got considerable publicity. So much so, that when a similar summons was heard before a local bench and the solicitor mentioned the articles of Cecil Chesterton in the *New Witness,* the Chairman took fright, fearing perhaps a press attack.

" If Mr. Cecil Chesterton likes lice, he must have them," said the old gentleman testily. " The case is dismissed ! "

Our interest in corruption extended from politics to food. One of the most vivid dramas in our history concerned some peculiarly repellent beef, exposed for sale in Smithfield. A certain firm had just won an army contract for Australian beef, at an extraordinary rate, so cheap indeed that trade papers attacked them for undercutting the market. Now it seems that Australian cattle, when they lie down in the grass, contract an unpleasant disease derived from a parasite which, burrowing into the flesh, leaves nodules of septic matter. The technical name for the disease is *Spiroptera Reticulata* and as it affects the fore and hind quarters of the animal the export of the portions so affected is forbidden by law.

Now the very name of the disease is so uninspiring that it took all Cecil's vivacity of style and energy to make an *exposé* worth reading. He treated it like a gangster story, and each chapter was a breathless instalment. We had the news from a League member, who was a salesman in Smithfield Meat Market. He told us that hundreds of quarters of " noduled " beef had arrived and would shortly be bought up by butchers in the East End for slum consumption. How the forbidden quarters had been exported or by what means the firm had obtained the contract was secret and not too savoury history.

We got in touch immediately with the officials of the City of London Corporation and informed them of the arrival of the consignment. They took action at once, and in a lightning swoop con-

demned the tainted quarters and ordered them to be destroyed.

This was really a great score. We placarded the streets round the Meat Market and the *New Witness* sales among its employees were considerable. Further, various meat companies unblemished by *Spiroptera Reticulati* advertised with us as proof of their food purity. But that was only the beginning of the drama. We discovered that a further consignment of the tainted beef was in store at a wharf in the Borough of Southwark, which we gathered was to be delivered as part of an army meat contract. The title of the article on this particular manoeuvre was inspired. It was called " The Flight into Southwark," and gave a spirited description of the dealers' strategy to conceal the beef and the Southwark Council's swift chase and final seizure.

We not only disposed of the meat but for the time being stopped the firm's Army contract being renewed.

We fought hard for our policy, which included a weekly feature entitled " Rex *versus* the Poor," dealing with those cases where lack of means hopelessly penalised the defendant, often sending him or her to gaol for an offence which would be met in the case of a moneyed person by a caution, or a fine.

The economics of the paper were against State ownership and pro-labour. We ran articles on Guild Socialism by A. J. Penty, who fathered the idea in this country, and a general support was given to the theory of distribution. The *New Witness* never went deeply into the fundamentals of this philosophy, except in the case of the land, which as an objective asset lends itself to individual or group

ownership. In regard to industry, the idea of distributism, distinct from small factories and workshops, was not formulated. Had Cecil lived, the dogma of the theory would have been thrashed out. He was too keen a rationalist to tolerate loose thinking. But without his help distributism has remained a roseate hope lacking shape or form, and quite without first principles. Neither G. K. nor Belloc seem to have made any effort to have produced a text-book formulating their belief, and in its absence distributism remains a creed without dogma, evoking sympathy but lacking support.

But while the editorial control of the paper was brilliant and effective, the business side was unsatisfactory, not to say chaotic. It is a Fleet Street axiom that while clever writers are six a penny, efficient newspaper managers are pearls of great price. None of that variety came our way. It needs considerable skill and time to lay the foundations of a weekly as of a daily journal, and the *New Witness* came so breathlessly into existence that it had not a moment to look round for an experienced man. The *Eye Witness,* from a business point of view, had been controlled by its backer, who, from his publishing office, arranged advertisements and sales.

The directors of its successor, G. K., Cecil and an ex-army officer, had not an ounce of practical experience between them, and while Cecil had an unerring sense for news, he had no eye for executive ability. The board meetings were occasions for laughter and tears. The brothers would cover sheaves of blotting paper, writing pads or anything that lay handy with fantastic sketches. Gilbert's " doodles " favoured soldiers in eighteenth century

uniform, statesmen and French revolutionaries. Cecil went in for devils and queer animals, of which his pet was a beast called "Bloppa," who fed on cocoa beans. Questions of policy or finance never held the interest of the Board, which always resolved into a spirited discussion between the inevitable antagonists, with the military member as umpire.

Meantime, it was apparent to those of more detailed acquaintance with the running of a newspaper that expenditure was going up and capital going down. Our manager had been wished on us by a friend of Cecil's, but it was difficult to get the Editor to discuss his suitability. It was the man's business to manage, argued Cecil. Why should he interfere ?

It was the Bank Manager who did the interfering. In that awful voice, specially reserved for similar situations, he informed us that the *New Witness* had overdrawn its account.

An enquiry, of course, followed, the manager left, and an advertisement canvasser, slow but reliable, took his place. There was no reason why, put on a proper footing, the paper should not have made a profit. But while the editorial side was run at a minimum cost—Cecil's salary like mine was ridiculously small—the upkeep of the other departments, canvassers, typists and the rest, was hopelessly in excess. Budge, as we called manager number two, collected some accounts and met the overdraft and fixed up a series of advertisements. Whereat the Board resumed its "doodles" and the question of adequate control took flight.

But though the Editor always declined to take an active part on the business side, he was a great asset to the financial. That is to say his qualities

of brain and character seemed to inspire belief in him and the paper in the most unexpected people.

Callers at the office were many and varied, but they all had a polite reception, and from much chaff some golden ears of wheat were rescued. One afternoon a tall, grey-haired old gentleman, wearing a top hat and shabby frock coat, asked if he might look up the files of the paper. I asked him in and gave him our back numbers. He was bearded and benevolent, in steel-rimmed glasses, and his manner was dignified and aloof. He sat at a table in the outer office and read on diligently, apparently unmindful of callers or of what was happening. He remained for the rest of the afternoon.

The next day he called again, bought six copies of the current issue and departed without a word, renewing his visits every little while. We named him godfather, because he bought more and more copies, put them in wrappers and addressed them to notable people, firmly declining all assistance. He never asked any questions and only gave the most formal greeting. But we were used to strange sympathisers, and regardless of their appearance or opinions made them welcome. He would listen, always in the outside office, to the Editor's voice in full swing, and would sometimes nod approval of his sentiments. Cecil's ideas were always marshalled, the words waiting on his lips. If, as occasionally happened, he was not immediately off the mark, it was only necessary for the typist to tap the keys for him instantly to react. "Full stop," he would say, "new paragraph," and plunge ahead.

Godfather was extremely well bred and never

turned a hair whatever happened, even when Cecil, forgetting in a sudden aberration that he had put on his hat, seized Budge's and rammed it on the top of the other, the old gentleman remained immovable while the entire staff chased the Editor and breathlessly brought him back.

Godfather had been coming for ten days when he asked to see Cecil, and invited him formally to dinner. He lived in a fine old house in an opulent square, and his wine and food were excellent. A wealthy Tory, with an almost Puritan rigidity in regard to State morality, he had been severely shocked by the Marconi business and felt the country owed Cecil a deep debt of gratitude for his exposure. He expressed himself satisfied with what he had observed during his visits to the office, and was prepared to back the *Mew Witness* in its fight against corruption. But though he helped the paper, he was chiefly keen on the Editor standing for Parliament as an Independent Candidate for Clean Government, and promised every possible support if he would consent.

Cecil held the belief that Parliamentary representation would still be effective for democracy if the Party caucus were abolished. He always contended that the electors of each Borough should themselves select the candidates for the final ballot, and that each Party by a preliminary vote should decide who should stand for Parliament.

I have always felt that Cecil would have been singularly successful in the House of Commons and, on the basis of a non-party fight for liberty and against corruption, have drawn round him a considerable following.

I have only indicated some of the exposures the *New Witness* made, together with our fights against entrenched interests and political power. We lived in a state of eternal vigilance, most certainly Cecil Chesterton did not let his sword rust, and we had the help of some of the finest spirits of the day. Bernard Shaw was with us in our Marconi fight, but H. G. Wells was never quite happy about our attitude, politically speaking, though, oddly enough, he generally flamed up over the literary side of the paper. I got into great hot water over my notice of Ford Madox Hueffer's " Zeppelin Nights." I think it was to E. S. P. Haynes he remarked that he could not understand why the *New Witness* had anything to do with that nasty little unfrocked priest, J. K. Prothero. Later, when he realised that I did not fit this description, he grew quite friendly and became most helpful and kind in my work for homeless women. Nowadays he alludes to me as the landlady of the London street walkers.

We went on with the Clean Government League right to the outbreak of war, and our meetings covered debates on the Party System, the Money Power and the Jewish Problem. I think the League could have been revived with considerable success after 1918, but Gilbert had not the particular qualities necessary to make such a challenging body a success.

It was during the first year of the *New Witness* that I became the London representative of *Everyman,* a weekly review controlled by Dr. Sarolea, a professor of Edinburgh University and by birth a Belgian. The paper, edited from his home, was a wonderful twopennyworth and covered a wide area of literary topics and foreign affairs.

Messrs. Dent largely financed the paper, and the then senior partner of the firm, the late James Mallaby Dent, had a lot to say as to what should be inserted. Sarolea had engaged a succession of women representatives for London, but one after the other they had given way under the Dent strain, and the Doctor was moved to ask Cecil if he knew anyone who could do the job, and was proof against hysterics under prolonged provocation.

I seemed to fill these requirements, and Sarolea arranged for me to meet him at a most unusual rendezvous. He used to come to London at intervals, always returning from there by a midnight train to Glasgow, and he said he would expect me at the departure platform, Euston, at 11.30 p.m., as that was the only free time he had. Later he telephoned to say he could not catch the train, and was taking one in the early morning, and would I be at the same place round about 1.30 a.m.

I have interviewed Editors in queer places in many countries, but I have never known anything so fantastic as that meeting all among the milk cans, which with incessant clatter were rolled along the platform preparatory to loading up.

Sarolea was tall and thin, with reddish hair and beard, and short-sighted eyes. He had a perpetual and sardonic grin, and looked up at me from a huddle of railway packages dopey with sleep. When he had blinked himself to wakefulness, he was most interesting on foreign politics, while porters heaved and flung vast weights, and carriages clattered their couplings. He broke off to remember that he had left some important correspondence at the Royal Society, and I had to convey him to a telephone for enquiries. The

letters were not there; they were safely zipped in the Professor's portfolio.

My duties, apart from wrestling with Mr. Dent, were to put *Everyman* to press, write the notes of the week, and to make such literary and descriptive contributions as were required. I did a great deal of work for the paper, and thoroughly enjoyed the association.

I met Sarolea many times among the milk cans, and the queer smoky smell of Euston in the early dawning is indelibly associated with him and his paper. My adventures with Mr. Dent were varied and delightful. I used to call on him in Bedford Street every Wednesday about noon, when he would produce the dummy for that week's *Everyman,* duly arrived from Sarolea, and insist on its complete recasting. We used to close down the *New Witness* on Wednesday also, and it was always a bit of a rush to get to the old gentleman in time. He was an odd mixture of philanthropy and parsimony, with a real astuteness as to what the public wanted, though inclined to pull against any innovation, and most cheese-paring in the payment of authors. He did not approve of women holding editorial positions, and told me so. I did not argue ; that was not my job. I sat and listened with a vacant but pleasing smile that suggested that I knew my own deficiencies, which seemed to do the trick. Having ramped and roared for upwards of an hour, he would quieten to acquiescence, almost docility, and agree the contents. Sometimes, however, the battle raged fiercely. One article on Germany—Dr. Sarolea always visualised her menace—so infuriated poor Mr. Dent that he stamped and somehow caught his leg in the telephone cord. He wore, I believe, a

mechanical limb, and in his efforts to get free he rolled immeasurably on the floor. It was not a suitable, nor indeed a seemly thing, to witness the patriarchal figure with the venerable beard grappling with the carpet, and I decided not to call for assistance but to free him myself.

He was very grateful, indeed as time went on I think he grew to tolerate me, and I acquired a curious regard for the irascible pioneer, who had blazed a trail for the publication of great literature at a price available for thousands.

Everyman was a very profitable concern. Before the war of 1914-18 a weekly paper at a penny or twopence could not only pay its way but earn an income, more especially when, as in the case of Messrs. Dent, a parent publishing house took over the business management. The paper had no London office ; it was put to press in a little room at the printers, Hazell, Watson & Viney, who did their work admirably. The chief compositor, like most of his class, was a prop and stay in all emergencies. If copy were short, he would bump it out, so that to the ordinary eye it did not lack length. In the same way, if you wanted to squeeze in a few extra lines, he performed prodigies of closing up. Nowadays when so many weekly journals are printed out of London this close relation between the printing staff and the editorial rarely exist. But I know of no better training in technical journalism than that afforded by continuous working with the most highly equipped craftsmen in the world.

The increase in the cost of production has practically destroyed the chances of any independent journal succeeding without large resources of capital. At one time a paper could pay on its

circulation without depending on advertisement revenue, a state of things which at the present time is quite impossible. The *New Witness* had neither large capital, nor steady backing from any political group. But, under competent management, we could have stabilised our success and gained security.

The *New Statesman,* which came into existence about a year after the *New Witness,* had the support of the entire Fabian Society, it being an article of faith that every member must take in the Party journal. Clifford Sharp was an extremely able editor, and though he differed from us on the Marconi business, he backed us up on other issues concerning individual liberty and labour conditions. Jack Squire was his literary editor, but always found time to send us an occasional contribution. His delicious parodies were among the best we ever published. He was very charming, and, when he looked in at the office, always brought a breath of humour and some delicious tit-bits of literary gossip.

That great original, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, liked both the *New Witness* and its Editor. He sent us an occasional article on Eastern problems and Cecil would go down for a short visit to his country place. On formal occasions he would dress himself in Arabian garments in which he looked, so Cecil always said, magnificently awe-inspiring. Those days brimmed with personalities, most of them characterised by fearless opinions, audacious action, and all who came to the office in Essex Street gravitated, quite naturally, to a Fleet Street pub.

It was in the autumn of this year that Gilbert made a startling literary departure. He appeared for the first and last time as a successful playwright in a West End theatre.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PLAYERS AND PERSONALITIES

"MAGIC" was produced at the Little Theatre in November, 1913. To this day the play retains dramatic freshness; the conjuror eternally appeals, and the dear old duke, Marie Louise always said he reminded her of Gilbert, has a timeless buoyancy. The story, as in the case of the "Man Who Was Thursday" and other of his fantasies, breaks down after the climax, and many loose ends are left hanging. G. K., I think, got tired of the theme after the display of supernatural power, and the changing of the light from red to green; but the strength of the opening scenes remains unchallenged.

Many stories have been told as to how and why "Magic" came to be written. The tale, as I heard it from Beaconsfield, was that a young man, clever but unfortunate in holding any permanent job, suggested that, if G. K. would write a play, he might get it placed, and incidentally acquire a salaried position under the management. Gilbert, in his large-hearted generosity, decided he would come to the rescue of his young friend. The idea of "Magic" had been simmering in his brain for months, and he suddenly decided to put it on to paper.

He found a real delight in writing the play. The mixture of metaphysics and melodrama always appealed to him, and the struggle with the powers of evil gave him considerable joy. The windows of

" Over-Roads " looked on a picturesque one-storied building designed as a studio, with a small stage, frequently used for amateur dramatic performances, concerts, lectures and other local activities. It had a small and pleasant garden in front, and at the back rolled a considerable extent of ground. The lights from the houses on a slightly rising gradient used to look quite attractive of an evening, and the coppice of trees behind the building might in fancy grow to an enchanted wood. The studio was rented by the Chestertons, and Gilbert used to preside over the performance of his wife's plays and other festivities. It was originally thought that he might use the studio as a study, but his love of small rooms drove him into the tiniest little place at the back, which might have been used as a model's dressing-room at the time a painter had used the premises. In that tiny cubby hole he thought out the story and the scenes in " Magic," his papers cascading over the little table on to the floor, a welter of envelopes, old MSS. and the usual impedimenta billowing around him.

You could always tell Gilbert's reactions to a place or a person. Beautifully polite, he never expressed liking or the reverse, but if he were not happy, he went away, metaphorically in one case, physically in the other, though the latter evasion usually took the form of sitting in the smallest possible space, which I am sure gave him an odd sense of security.

The play " presented " to the young man passed through various intermediate hands, and was finally produced under the management of Kenelm Foss. Gilbert was always ready to give away his MSS., or anything else, without thinking of his interests in the

least, and his business affairs, apart from his literary agent, A. P. Watt, were curiously nebulous.

But there was no mistaking the success of this trial venture from the stage point of view. Franklin Dyall gave an electric performance as the conjuror, whom he invested with a diabolic attraction that I have never seen equalled. Dyall has a queer hypnotic quality that, to me at least, always suggests a touch of the supernatural. It was Frances Noel, Conrad's sister, who told Cecil her experiences of Dyall's other-worldliness. They were great friends, and after a long absence abroad Miss Noel called at the theatre where Franklin was playing, on the chance of his being free for lunch. She found him at the stage door, obviously waiting for her.

" But you didn't know I was coming ? " she said, astonished. " I didn't know myself until ten minutes ago."

" That's about the time I realised you were on your way," he answered.

Gilbert turned up at the *New Witness* office about six on the eventful night. He had an hour to spare before dinner, and went off with Cecil for a drink, and as usual a crowd gathered to give him a rousing welcome. One of G. K.'s most attractive points was his complete freedom from any literary affectation. He was always quite honestly astonished at his success, and incredulous of his genius. I have never seen him more responsive than he was to the congratulations of his friends that night; and he was so pleased at the continuous stream of telephone greetings at the office that he answered some of them himself, which, remembering his aversion from this particular gadget, was extraordinary.

It was a memorable evening. Gilbert and

Frances were almost mobbed in the foyer, and at every interval were eagerly surrounded. She wore a quite charming gown of a pre-Raphaelite cut in blue and gold, and I think was genuinely overcome by their reception. The parents remained unobvious in their seats, and Cecil and I foregathered in the bar with Fleet Street critics. Bernard Shaw, I remember, told Gilbert that he had a natural sense of the theatre, and insisted that he must go on writing plays and that a great career as a dramatist lay before him. But "Magic" was Gilbert's one and only play. His later stage essay on Dr. Johnson lacked the essential quality of drama, and was very wordy.

The performance all round was exceptionally fine. Fred Lewis, that matchless actor, was supreme as the Duke, and muddled irresistibly all over the stage. Patricia was played by Grace Croft, who gave a very delicious sketch of a young girl. Most of us prophesied a great career for her. But she did not repeat her triumph and I have not seen her act since.

There was an immense ovation when the curtain rang down, and Gilbert made one of his wittiest and most delightful speeches. There were demands from the management that he and his wife should go to supper at the Savoy with the members of the company, and the author, I know, would have accepted the invitation. But it was not to be, and the Chestertons returned with us to Warwick Gardens, where a huge sheaf of wires attracted G. K.'s attention. They were all for him and he watched, I thought, almost wistfully, as Frances eagerly opened and read the messages.

Later, Marie Louise gathered the telegrams

together, and put them carefully away. She kept them for a long time, right up to her last illness, when she decided to destroy the less intimate of her mementoes. All sorts of things relating to her sons were stored at Warwick Gardens, letters from Edward and both her boys, and some from Frances to G. K. during their engagement and his to her.

" They are the letters of a poet," said his mother, " in love with love."

" Magic " had a splendid press, but, apart from *riclame,* the author's reward was inconsiderable. It was, I think, through E. S. P. Haynes, one of the backers, that Gilbert received any fees at the time, and it was, I know, years before the rights finally returned to him.

Haynes, a brilliant lawyer, and one of the most original and entertaining personalities in London, knows all the literary secrets of his time, and has convoyed most of the *causes célèbres* through the divorce court for the last five and twenty years. His offices in New Square, overlooking a green and leafy expanse, are crammed from floor to ceiling with deed boxes containing family records. The place has a Dickensian dust about it in complete variance with the outlook of its owner. Tall, loosely built, with a bland smile and introspective eyes, Haynes has a tongue which drops honey or vitriol as occasion requires. He is an astonishing friend, with a staunch loyalty and kindliness and most fascinating idiosyncrasies. He was a believer in what may be called free divorce before A. P. Herbert ever lisped its name. Indeed, his enthusiasm for this civil sacrament is such that he regards marriage chiefly as a necessary portal for its consummation. He is so keen on enlightening

possible aspirants to wedded life on the blessings of divorce that he devotes considerable time and leisure to the noble work of propaganda. Sometimes, the results are a little embarrassing. Haynes, one of our star contributors, was very particular about his proofs, and we used to send them round by our office girl, who in war time had replaced our boy. He used to dwell on the advantage and privilege of divorce, its widening influence on the mind, its clarion call for liberty. The girl, round about fifteen, came from a working-class home, and her accounts of these conversations so stupefied and alarmed her mother that she called up at the *New Witness* office and testified with great heat and volubility.

When she was a little calmer, I explained with patience and duplicity that Mr. Haynes felt the working-class was down-trodden as to divorce as in many other things, and that whereas the rich could shed a husband or a wife with ease, the poor were considerably hampered in the process. She reacted admirably to the suggestion, and asked me to thank the gentleman for taking their part.

He had other customs, equally individual. Christmas Day was a great occasion at Warwick Gardens, and Gilbert and Frances always tried to be present at the feast. The dinner was somewhere around two-thirty, but within a few minutes of our assembling at the family board, the telephone would ring.

"That's Haynes," Cecil would remark, and would forthwith reopen the annual discussion on Erastianism, to which festival-forbidding heresy E. S. P. gave his allegiance.

Sometimes Gilbert answered the call, **but every**

year one or other of them had to state the case for indulging in the heathenish ritual of turkey and plum pudding. Another article of faith which he held as strongly as divorce, was his belief in a patent body belt, the wearing of which, he said, kept his guts pure and ensured perfect health.

He explained this to me one day at the Fleet Street flat, where, after our marriage, Cecil and I had our home. Comfortably seated before the fire, his feet on the mantelpiece, he mentioned that he had called to have a bath, his club having shut down and his home being shut up. Haynes is a continual refreshment. He may enrage or irritate ; he cannot bore you.

Every day he goes to a little oyster bar in Chancery Lane, and eats two dozen natives, substituting salami in the off season. He has his own cellar of matchless Moselle and divine port, and there I have often sat and drunk celestial liquor, enjoying rare and racy talk until late afternoon. He has an exquisite taste in Rabelaisian literature and is full of pungent humour. In spite of his devotion to divorce, he has never essayed to break his marriage ; he is indeed one of the most devoted husbands to a very charming, humorous and understanding wife. That, he explains, is because she has promised that if ever he wants divorce, he shall have it.

It is inevitable that from Haynes I should turn to Charles Scott Moncrieff, whose sardonic verse and incomparable reviews helped to build up the reputation of the *New Witness.* I was in the office alone one afternoon when the door suddenly opened and a young man, almost impossibly handsome, came in. He was, I think, a little resentful

of his extreme good looks. Indeed, his appearance was really breath-taking. Deep, dark eyes blazed from a delicately chiselled face and heavy hair framed a wide white brow. He had the fine lines of an athlete, and a spirit so proudly tempered that he brushed suffering and hardship from his path. He was a devoted friend to me for many years, and though terribly shattered from the war, I never heard him make the least complaint. His genius had full expression in his matchless translation of Proust, but from the first the articles he wrote for us had the stamp of a rare personality. Like Haynes, he had the gift of caustic retort, and there were moments when, moody and disgruntled, he was difficult to deal with ; but I would not have altered him one iota. He remains with me as the expression of eternal and unfailing loyalty.

Divorce and Haynes were responsible for an unexpected visitation. The *New Witness* was opposed to granting divorce on the ground of insanity, and its attitude started a heated correspondence. But people were not content to send letters ; they protested or acclaimed in person. One such individual put his head through the window opening from the lobby into the outside office, and enacted the prophet Jeremiah. I was finishing an article at the desk and the rest of the staff were at lunch. He had a bullet head with a grey bristling moustache, and small eyes of pig-like fierceness.

" Oh, the immorality of Ealing ! " he bellowed in a great voice.

I looked up, a little startled.

" In every house, in every street," he continued, " **and** you "—he wagged an admonitory finger—" you are responsible."

I assured him, a little coldly, that I was far too busy to look after the whole of Ealing, immorally or otherwise, but it was hopeless to try and stem the tide. He went on to say that the *New Witness* had stamped him, and vast numbers of the inhabitants of that respectable suburb, with the mark of infamy, nailing them, as it were, to a cross of shame.

" My wife, after thirty years of married life, went off her head," he blared. " We have three children, one of them is married. My wife has been in an asylum for five years, and because of you Pve had to live in sin the whole time with my housekeeper."

The consciousness of guilt was heavy on him, and in his rage he decided to appeal to the *New Witness* as though it had the power of remission of wrongdoing. I calmed him—you must always calm callers at a newspaper, they may eventually become annual subscribers.

Thomas Seccombe joined us about this time; an omnivorous writer, responsible for a vast number of " lives " in the Dictionary of Biography, he lectured for the University of London, and had a sub-acid gift for ticking off portentous persons. Watts Dunton, the host and gaoler of Swinburne, he described as the " butler of literature," while Wilfrid Meynell was "a commercial traveller in genius." Seccombe was very tall and his height made him stoop. He had a swift recognition for good copy, and gave me great pleasure by praising my writings as Margaret Hamilton in *Everyman.* By this time my relations with Mr. Dent were most amiable, and I contributed under a variety of pseudonyms. Margaret Hamilton, I remember, opposed the suffragists, not on the grounds of

feminine inequality or inferiority, but because—she argued—the militants were not fighting for votes for women, but for ladies. The issue is as dead as a doornail to-day, but it was a call to battle in the pre-war period. I still feel that women M.P.'s have not fulfilled their trust. I can hardly recall their introduction of any measure designed to remedy injustice suffered by their sex as such—the denial of national health and unemployment benefit to the expectant unmarried mother is a case in point.

A devoted colleague of Mrs. Pankhurst told me of her experience in Holloway, where she was sent three times. She did not find the rules harsh, or the food unbearable, but she suffered inexpressibly from claustrophobia. She felt that if she did not catch a glimpse of the outside world beyond the exercise yard, she would go mad. In a last wild attempt to bridge the gulf, she piled everything in her cell on top of her bed, and though somewhat corpulent of build, made shift to climb up to the window. Tremulous, but triumphant, she glanced through the small round pane of glass, and glimpsed the blessedly familiar sight of a number twenty-nine 'bus careering down the Parkhurst Road.

" I cried, my dear," she said, " I cried to know that life was going on out there."

But her reactions did not stop at that point. In later days, when women had the vote, she worked untiringly for prison reforms. A whole army of courageous spirits believed in the crusade, but not many of them had the lovely sense of humour of an exquisite little friend of mine. She is a tiny creature with a vast courage and indomitable soul, and was one of the contingent who volunteered to

storm the House of Commons. Held up in the crowd at Whitehall, she was wedged in by a very tall and most fatherly policeman.

" Let me through," she protested.

The constable looked down from his great height.

" What do you want, my dear ? " he asked protectingly.

" What do I want, you fool ? I want a vote," she answered, and reaching barely past his waist, pounded her fists upon his knees.

" You don't want no vote, my dear," he answered. " Now what you really want is a nice cup of tea," and stooping he picked her up with one hand, stopped a passing omnibus with the other and deposited her on the step.

" And do you know," she told me after, " I thought to myself perhaps he is right—I do ! "

The first two years of the *New Witness* were punctuated by glimpses of Maurice Baring. He would look in with one of his " Lost Diaries," or introduce a man with a special knowledge of some remote but vital part of our oversea possessions. There were moments when whim ruled this delightful person, and he would start the wildest goosechase. He went off one afternoon with Cecil on a pawnbroking expedition. The idea was to discover what could be raised over a large and antique silver watch which Baring always carried. He insisted gravely that he was hard up and really needed cash, and the two solemnly sought the sign of the three brass balls in Fleet Street kept by Messrs. Attenborough, who turned the watch contemptuously away. The search was extended to South London and the East End where the highest offer was three shillings, out of all propor-

tion, Baring said, to the watch's personal value. They wound up at the office much later in great glee and in a state of marked hilarity.

Gilbert always said that Baring had a hand in MacCarthy's strange adventure in a West Country train. According to G. K., Desmond and his wife were travelling up to London, and in the course of the journey he carefully and deliberately wrapped Mrs. MacCarthy in brown paper and put her on the luggage rack. When the guard came to inspect the tickets, there was one too many. What had happened to the missing lady ? She had been there at the previous stop. The guard, the passengers recently arrived and Desmond wildly searched, and then, when murder or suicide seemed the only solution, the brown paper parcel stirred and laughed.

It was about this time that Cecil determined to write the History of Parliament, and in odd moments embarked on research. The Great War intervened and stopped the completion of the book, which should have been extremely interesting. He had a most extraordinary memory for those things that appealed to him, and at any moment could quote particulars of famous trials, details of far-off treaties and national commitments, while it was only necessary for him to read a poem, or indeed any literary masterpiece, for the context to remain permanently in his consciousness.

It was at a party in a studio shared by Arthur Watts and Stanley Spencer that E. Nesbit challenged Cecil to repeat Swinburne's " Dolores." The party was in honour of the dramatic performance of one of her plays for children, and she had

asked Cecil and me to come with her. Cecil repeated the poem like a bird from the first line to the last, without hesitation or break. He could reel off passages from Dickens in the same omnivorous style, and would repeat parts of Edwin Drood, when the mood took him, *in extenso.* The story had always fascinated him, his contention being that the hero had not been murdered, but had just disappeared until such time as Dickens decided to reproduce him. The topic became a favourite point of controversy, and discussion raged.

Both the brothers were members of the Dickens Fellowship, which at the moment was deeply concerned with the poverty of some of the novelist's grand-children. Money was wanted to help them, and presently the bright idea occurred that funds could be raised, and entertainment provided, by staging the Trial of John Jasper for the Murder of Edwin Drood.

The Fellowship was alight at the suggestion ; meetings were held ; the cast debated ; and weeks of preparation and rehearsal followed. G. K. agreed to preside as judge, and Cecil was unanimously briefed as Counsel for the Defence, J. Cuming Walters leading for the Prosecution. The witnesses included Arthur Waugh as Canon Crisparkle, Bransby Williams as Durdles, and my brother Charles as Bazzard, the lawyer's clerk. Mrs. Lawrence Clay was Helena Landless, and I was cast as Princess Puffer, the Opium Woman. The prisoner was that good-looking actor, Frederick Harry.

There was no written script. Counsel prepared their speeches from the novel, and witnesses looked up **the** dialogue Dickens had provided, embroider-

ing according to fancy. As usual, Cecil immersed himself in the case, and studied his brief with the same thoroughness and care that he devoted to the exposure of government scandals. Over and over again he knitted up the points in the defence and overhauled the line to be adopted in his cross-examination. We held rehearsals all over the place, at Peele's Hotel, when we could get the company together, and odd scenes were gone over in the office and Warwick Gardens.

It was all most exciting. The press gave the announcement of the trial splendid publicity, and applications for tickets were so heavy that the house could have been sold out six times over. We all took the fun seriously, but with high spirits, and carried preparations into the Christmas holidays. I remember Cecil's interrogations went on for hours on Christmas Eve in preparation for my cross-examination by Cuming Walters—he caught me out on innumerable details with terrifying accuracy.

The trial was held at King's Hall, Covent Garden, the premises of the old National Sporting Club, and associated with many theatrical as well as boxing enterprises. It was press day, both for the *New Witness* and *Everyman,* and, as inevitably happens, I was held up for hours past the usual time. The palaver with Mr. Dent was long and ferocious ; he chewed up the Editor's article on Poland with a tenacity that reduced the MS., metaphorically speaking, to a limp rag. I confess that on this occasion I took refuge in the despicable manoeuvre of compromise, or, as we should call it now, appeasement. I agreed—aching to play Princess Puffer—to hold over the disputed contribution until the

following week, and left the poor old gentleman triumphant but bewildered.

At the printers, my chief comp. performed prodigies of speed. Like the rest of Fleet Street, he knew of the oncoming trial and insisted that he must be present. Every ticket had gone, and the standing room available was filled three times over blatantly defying every L.C.C. rule. But I agreed to pass him in with his good lady and rushed off only just in time to get into my opium rags and tatters, ready to be made up.

We did things in great style. Clarkson sent an expert and wigs and gowns were supplied by barrister friends for both sides. I looked peculiarly revolting by the time the make-up man had finished with me. But the externals, blacked-out teeth, face utterly debauched, had not soaked into my consciousness, and passing the press bar I recognised some friends and hailed them. I shall never forget their look of repulsion, and, feeling like a leper, I clutched my rags and slunk off.

The Judge was magnificent. G. K. was in his wittiest and most brilliant vein. The game was played according to rule, and every possible legal point and quibble was raised and contested. He looked very handsome in his full-bottomed wig and scarlet robe, his only possible rival in attraction being the prisoner, who with a one-line part—" Not Guilty " being the sum total of his dialogue—succeeded in looking the character, sinister, suave, relentlessly and silently dynamic.

I felt the grand-children of Charles Dickens would have been heartened by the whole spectacle. Peeping round the wings, I caught a glimpse of the jury which included Edwin Pugh, William de

Morgan, William Archer, Pett Ridge, Ridgwell Cullum, W. W. Jacobs, Tom Gallon, Max Pemberton, and Arthur Morrison, with Bernard Shaw as foreman.

The prosecution was effective, but Helena Landless went down before the defending counsel's attack, and Bransby Williams, despite his magnificent humour and admirable dialect, fared no better. On the other hand, the prosecution could not break down Bazzard, while the Opium Woman, prepared by Cecil's drastic methods, was not too bad. Canon Crisparkle gave a beautiful show. The dignity of the cathedral enveloped him, and the unction of vespers was in his voice. He was, I think, the most impressive member of the company.

The drama heightened as the evening wore on. The darkness of the mystery grew heavy ; the pallor of the prisoner seemed to increase, but the odds in favour of the defence gradually lengthened. The jury were obviously swayed by the defending counsel's oratory, we were all prepared to back Jasper's chances of an acquittal very heavily.

The Judge, assuming the essential portentousness, summed up with wit and shrewdness. His analysis of the evidence was masterly, and on the tip-toe of excitement the audience waited for the jury to retire for the consideration of their verdict.

Now at last Dickensians felt that the clouds of doubt would disperse, and the actual existence or death of the missing Edwin be settled. But at that moment the verdict was snatched from the jury's mouth and the issue for ever postponed. Bernard Shaw, in his beloved r61e of *enfant terrible,* intervened. Posterity, he said, might accept the jury's

verdict as evidence as to what Dickens had intended. We did not know—nobody knew—just what fate Edwin Drood's creator had decided for him, and it would be presumptuous and, indeed, indefensible, to decide on his behalf.

Shaw's wit, charm and irresistible voice carried the day. There was indeed no possible sequel to such an anti-climax, and to the general disappointment the show ended—suspense closed down. But later, we refought the battle, with a truncated but triumphant jury, who pronounced Jasper to be innocent, and Edwin Drood alive. The vital thing about that memorable trial was the keenness of everyone concerned. The sincerity with which we all took our parts lent a glamorous reality to the whole proceedings.

The Chesterton brothers were grand playboys, nothing was too trifling, nothing too difficult in the construction of a game. The playbill—titled as Indictment of John Jasper—lies before me as I write. It conjures up the crowded hall, the eager audience, the scarlet figure on the bench, the eloquent advocates at the table, and the white tense face of the prisoner.

It was a great evening, our last joyous piece of fooling before the war.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE LATE GREAT WAR

BETWEEN the declaration of war in 1914 and its sequel twenty-five years later the B.B.C. has settled in. In September, 1939, the spinsterish tones of Chamberlain twanged the decision on the air. On the previous occasion all England had to wait for the papers, feverishly expectant of the special editions.

Cecil and I had gone to Maidenhead that fateful Bank Holiday to ease the strain of apprehension, for until the last minute we were all afraid that Grey might disregard the " scrap of paper " obligation and truckle with the enemy. Everywhere the streets were crowded, but the people were silent though jittery. By the time the news was out, all the town seemed to be converging on the bridge, and hundreds of papers flickered in tense hands. The river, gold and purple in the sunset, seemed to have an added loveliness, a deeper peace. And then the air was filled with shouting ; someone started to sing the Marseillaise, and there was an onrush to the station.

We got back to town and went to Gatti's in the Strand for food. The staff, Austrian and German for the most part, seemed unhappy. Our particular waiter from Munich almost wept ; he loved this country ; he did not wish to fight for Germany. We were quite sorry for him, not realising the particular technique which even then the enemy was

practising. On the whole, London was quiet and the people orderly, though the Café Royal was the scene of a scrap between a Belgian and a Swiss—he said he was a Swiss—in which a number of their compatriots joined. The fight set a fashion which continued throughout the war. It became a nightly feature, almost, for brave little Belgium to take on all comers, though, as the number of her nationals increased, the enthusiasm lessened. Time softens many things ; but while life goes on the memory of the Belgian occupation of our capital will remain with those who endured it.

Every allied country took their Belgian quota, and there was keen competition as to which sheltered the most trying types. As usual, we opened our homes, our purses, and our sentimental hearts to refugees, at the same time keeping a tight hold on those amenities in relation to our own necessitous folk. Any Belgian could get free lodging, excellent board, and a liberal money allowance ; and every Belgian clamoured for more. Funds were started, subscriptions raised, while soldiers' wives were awaiting their allowances, and their husbands' pay was still behind.

Each war has its special abuses and effects ; but the sum total of civil maladministration does not seem to vary. The 1914 attack on the home front began with the campaign against women married to members of the Services. Soldiers and Sailors Families' Committees were formed of which the executives were not drawn from the fighting men or their households, but recruited from those weary old nobodies who crop up in every national crisis. Committee members visited the wives entitled to a state allowance, and asked for the production of

their marriage lines—the greatest insult that a decent woman can be offered. It was not only the *New Witness* that took up the battle ; the dailies joined us in the fight, and gradually the hunt slackened, until the ultimate subsistence was not only granted to a wife, but to the woman who had kept house with a soldier without benefit of clergy.

The Civil Service was less powerful and more efficient in the late Great War than at the immediate present. Moreover, the Ministry of Propaganda was staffed by trained journalists, news editors, foreign correspondents, descriptive reporters, with years of experience and technical knowledge. The administration was under Lord Northcliffe, and whatever may be said as to his influence on politics, his Cabinet wangling and the rest, it is indisputable that as a newspaper man he knew his job supremely well. The Ministry of Information has not had such good fortune. Its chiefs have been recruited from the law, the engineering profession and the Admiralty, while earnest schoolmasters and Civil Servants form the majority of the personnel.

There was a brisk demand for outside contributions from the old Ministry of Propaganda. Specialists were welcome, indeed were eagerly roped in as contributors, and commissions flowed for both Cecil and myself. The restrictions on paper were less stringent and circulations went up rapidly. The *New Witness* shared in the boom and kept a sharp eye upon Army contracts, with a renewed interest in the purveyors of bad meat. One of our contributors, in khaki, brought us some amazing news. A consignment of meat delivered at the camp was so bad that it had to be deeply entrenched in the earth. We ferreted out the name

of the Palestinian firm responsible and launched a spirited attack. Cecil's tides were always inspired, and he called his article on this occasion " Buried Treasure at Rainham Camp." There were other instances of equally unsavoury deliveries and by the same firm, which we dealt with in a series called " The Roast Beef of Old England " with the sub-title of *Ad Leones.* The exposure had its effect, not only in the quality of the meat delivered, but in the contract department of the War Office. The name of the Palestinian firm was for the time removed.

Food arrangements from the civilian point of view were very bad. The bread was full of weevils and bristled with monkey nuts—mostly shells. Butter in London was almost non-existent—except for those whose supplies came underground—and the margarine was so repulsive that, like thousands of others, I ate my weevils raw for the duration. Until rationing came in, shopping queues had to stand for hours to get meagre supplies, and subsequently no restaurant would serve meat without a coupon. Lump sugar was so rare that its enjoyment was beyond the dreams of avarice. I remember watching a woman in the Waldorf lounge obviously waiting for her husband. He was late and she was wrathful, her anger mounting with the minutes, and when at last he entered she arose in a fury, which suddenly, miraculously, softened to a smile. He had bought her a pound of sugar and it was like a gift of the Magi.

One of our most mischievous war laws concerned the No Treating Order—which, it may be recalled, Lady Astor was very anxious should be revived during the present crisis. It was forbidden to buy a drink for anyone but yourself, and the most extra-

ordinary money-passing scenes used to take place outside every public house. Men would thrust silver and copper in each other's hands in a complete muddle as to who had which or what. As a consequence, more rounds were ordered and consumed than normally, and such nervous apprehension was engendered that women used to clutch their menfolk outside the ticket office of a station and fearfully murmur that treating was not allowed.

Then there was the really cruel restriction that forbade the sale of less than an entire bottle of spirits. The members of the vast army of office cleaners who daily surge into the city at unearthly hours used to buy a small portion of whisky, taking it home for consumption in their breakfast tea. Cut off this refreshment, groups of the poor old dears used to club together—spirits were still only four and six a bottle—to buy the legal amount. Many of them consumed their tots in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the Temple Gardens, or some far-off court to the east of the city. I have seen five or six most respectable, hard working women collapsed on a seat in a comatose condition, due to the enforced consumption of more whisky than they wanted or could carry.

Another civilian hardship was the rent ramp. London, far from being looked on as a danger centre, attracted thousands of workers. There were war factories in every industrial district, and the demand for labour sent up rent to an amazing figure. The Government shillied and shallied on the matter, and questions were asked and protests made in the House ; but it took a private individual to get things going in the way they should. A little man, with a great voice and untiring energy,

started the Tenants Defence League. A publisher by calling, Dan Rider had always been politically "left" and he took up the cause of the exploited worker so efficiently that, with hundreds and thousands of men and women at his back, he got the Cabinet to move, and the Rent Restriction Act, which stopped extortions of the owner and gave security to the tenant, became law. Had Rider organised the League which he had promoted on a small membership fee, it would have provided a permanent machinery for settling questions between householders and their landlords—cases of repair, eviction, all the hundred and one petty and heart-breaking causes of dispute which are now taken to a court of law, where lack of means is a hopeless handicap.

But Dan, though a genius, had no flair for what is known as business methods, and the society gradually disintegrated ; a fate which for the same reason would have overtaken the *New Witness,* but for Cecil's superb resilience.

War increased our weekly difficulties with the printers, who regarded criticism of the Government as high treason, and were always anticipating suppression under the Defence of the Realm Act. We used to argue with patience and kindliness, occasionally abated our descriptive epithets, and very often got round their objections. But it was an exhausting process.

We were hot on the track of a big building contract on one occasion. A member of a firm with political connections had been given a commission for munition makers' huts at a very big price. The date of completion had passed, but the huts were still non-existent, and the workers had to trudge

miles to and from their job. The copy of the article was set up and, as no objection had been taken, I was hoping peacefully to go to press when the storm burst. Elias from his country fastness rang up to say that all references to the firm's connection by marriage to a politician must be taken out, or the article could not be printed. He was impervious to appeal or argument, and in despair I telephoned to Odhams himself, who was putting his own special property, the *Holborn Guardian*, to bed. But the senior partner was adamant, and I had to get into touch with Cecil, who was being unpleasant to a meeting of conscientious objectors.

" I have called on Elias and Another," I explained, " but it is no use. We have got to be crucified. Shall I cut the article ? "

" Not a bit," was the reply. " If Odhams won't print what I say, let them black the words out, we'll try again next week."

Next week we produced legal evidence of the marriage connection and reluctantly Elias allowed the announcement to appear.

In the last war as in the present, the future of Poland loomed as the vital issue. It is odd to re-read what Cecil Chesterton said five-and-twenty years ago, for the reason that all his war arguments apply quite cogently to-day, like his insistence that enemy refugees should not as such claim liberty, but should be subject to a sifting process.

To add to our better understanding of Poland we studied her baffling minorities, varying cultures and natural wealth, so that the contours and the resources of that much partitioned land became familiar. One of our standbys in Polish affairs

was Rothay Reynolds. He knew the problems of the Ukraine, and Prysmyzl—that remote and hissing place—which dominated the first months of the war, was as familiar to him as Clapham Junction. He had been a press correspondent in every capital of Europe and spoke half a dozen languages with easy fluency. He was in Russia for the *Morning Post* at the opening of the campaign. He returned from that last excursion, but later died—like so many nameless and heroic intelligence agents—his exploits unsung.

Saki, one of his greatest friends, had been with him in Petrograd, and told a lovely story of our propaganda efforts. He and Rothay had offered their help to the official in charge of the department. He thanked them for their application, but felt that their knowledge of the Russian language and the Russian people would be a drawback ; what he wanted was the true-blue British point of view. This particular product was later superseded by Hugh Walpole, of whom Saki had a gorgeous if unsubstantiated legend. In his exquisite ideas of artistic value, Walpole ordered complete editions of R. L. Stevenson's works, hand printed and bound in white vellum, for special distribution among Russian men of letters.

Bernard Pares, then in the British Secret Intelligence, used occasionally to run across the two friends. He rushed into a restaurant one day where they were* lunching, and with great heat delivered his opinions on the hopeless administration of Russian affairs. Saki looked up pensively from his smoked salmon :

" Oh, prickly Pares," he murmured.

Rothay brought along to the *New Witness* some

of the Polish Committee, who had their headquarters at Alma Tadema's white elephant of a house. His daughter, Lawrence, was an old friend of Paderewski's and had always been a champion of his country. The committee, in the unfortunate national tradition, was split into factions. In Warsaw, it used to be said that five people made a political party and each party was different from the rest. But the various cliques over here united in their mistrust of Russia, it being very difficult to remember that the Tsar was—astonishingly—on the side of freedom. They used to meet, and talk, and argue daily in St. John's Wood.

It seems incredible to-day that any artist could have found pleasure in the hotch-potch of a place that Alma Tadema made his home. He died before 1914, but the vast mansion was kept up as far as possible in the old style. There were Roman baths, Dutch parlours, Italian loggias ; you passed from one period to another with a dazzling lack of sequence ; now in a pseudo Gothic chapel, and again in a Louis Seize boudoir.

The Poles reacted to the magnificence of the setting, with the naive pleasure in such things characteristic of their race. They held meetings on marble floors, ran up and down the monumental staircase, and gave concerts in the huge music room with the painted piano that bore Paderewski's sacramental signature. Miss Alma Tadema gave her time, her money, and her influence to the cause, and always held to the belief that Poland would inevitably rise again.

One of the intermediaries between the committee and our Foreign Office was also known to Rothay Reynolds and, like him, was a brilliant linguist

Bob—let us call him—resembled a shaggy sheepdog and always wore rough shabby tweeds, which quite frequently caught fire from the burning cigarettes he dropped around. He used to be sent on sudden and mysterious missions, generally to extremely cold climates. He looked in to say goodbye one day *en route* for Lapland, without overcoat or baggage.

"They are not necessary," he assured me. "All I need is straw; its vitally heat-producing," and he pointed to his boots, obviously full of that valuable commodity. He never returned from that last excursion, but, like so many nameless and heroic intelligence agents, just disappeared.

Rothay always remained a staunch supporter of the Poles. Indeed, he had an ineradicable devotion to all the oppressed. After the war he went to Berlin as press correspondent, and whenever I went over there on journalistic work I always found his flat full of derelict Russians, starving Poles, Jugo-Slavs and the rest. They ate his food, borrowed his money, and even raided his wardrobe. This, I think, did annoy him slightly. He was invariably well dressed, and Jeffries, the star turn of the *Daily Mail*, always swore he met him in the wilds of Ruthenia with a broken-down car, but perfectly creased trousers. Later, Rothay replaced the international exiles by German escapees, for whom he jeopardised his life over and over again.

Since 1914 we had lost some brilliant contributors. Scott Moncrieff had joined the K.O.S.B. and was already in France, Baring was a Wing Commander and Seccombe had joined the staff at Camberley Military College. Belloc occasionally sent us some notes, but he was so taken up with *Land and Water* that he had hardly time for anything else.

His success as a military expert was phenomenal, and to Fleet Street bewildering. We all knew that years before he had served as a gunner in the French Army; but when we found, to quote Jack Squire, that "he walked the mazes of the Woevre as though it were his native heath, and called upon the lesser tributaries of the Dnieper, each by name," we were flabbergasted, and watched him killing off the German reserves week after week with stupefaction.

Gilbert wrote for us regularly, but the trouble as with most other papers was the delay in the post which, however, was as nothing compared with the breakdown in delivery to-day. Gilbert's copy rarely came to time; but I do not think the war or the G.P.O. were wholly to blame. Gilbert had never attempted to cope with his correspondence, and would only write very occasional letters when the mood took him. Meanwhile, his mail grew bigger and bigger, so that Frances took it over for him. But with her other cares and responsibilities it proved too much for her. Moreover, she had not the knack of dealing with papers, which seem to have a diabolical capacity for escaping from incompetent hands. She used to pop odd letters under cushions, inside drawers, behind ornaments, none of which hiding places could be remembered. The result was chaotic, as I knew to my cost, for when editors and others failed to get any response to repeated applications, they would ring up the *New Witness* and demand a verbal answer as to whether G. K. would or would not write an article, give a lecture or attend a meeting.

In the early months of the war, Gilbert would occasionally turn up and write his copy at the

office. This pleased Cecil greatly and gave him an opportunity of getting round the cash embargo. We paid G. K. three guineas for articles, and generally sent on the cheque to "Over-Roads." When he appeared in person, the money was put into his hand. At first Gilbert feared it might not be right to accept it, but Cecil swept the objection aside and G. K., pleased as a boy, would go out and thoroughly enjoy himself. For a while we thought the non-arrival of the cheque might cause trouble, but evidently Frances did not keep accounts, nor did the temporary typist.

One week neither Gilbert nor his copy arrived, and there were rumours that he was not well. Cecil interceded with Frances, who agreed that he and I should go down to Beaconsfield in time for tea. We had to wait an hour for a train, indeed transport was generally very muddled, and the consequent shortage of milk, vegetables and fruit promoted a press campaign for home cultivation. The advantage of keeping goats, I remember, was stressed as a patriotic duty at this time, second only to the rearing of pigs. Goats, I discovered, are kittle cattle, not that I ever attempted to herd them in my home ; it was at Beaconsfield I met them in the domestic pen.

The little town was full of boy scouts, girl guides and soldiers from neighbouring camps. We were in good time and found two nice old maiden ladies and a neighbouring vicar and his wife awaiting us. Gilbert sat on a very small chair—at the imminent risk of its collapse—and listened to the local gossip with that grave courtesy which he always showed his guests. But though he tried hard to appear interested, he gave himself away to those who

knew him. His gaze would not wander; his attitude of close attention remained fixed, but his hands grew restless, his fingers searched his pockets, played with his tie, until with a courtly bow he managed to find some excuse to go to his cubby-hole. Cecil was the reason that afternoon, and it was good to hear the two voices rising and falling with the old zest.

Without the great man our conversation languished, and the Vicar's wife launched on an account of the sagacity and kindness of her Billy-goat and his attendant harem. She and her husband played a considerable social part in the district society. Their vicarage was the headquarters of all the meetings, sewing, reading, Mothers' Welfare and Girls' Uplift, in which Frances was very interested. Everybody knew at this time that Gilbert, to all intents and purposes, had accepted the Catholic Faith, but Frances had not yet come to his way of thinking.

It was Cecil who remarked that Gilbert rang the church bell to bring others in, and himself remained outside. G. K.'s final entry must have been preceded by an interior conflict, which to a man of his imagination was almost martyrdom. But martyrdom, I think, must have seemed preferable to Gilbert to that deliberate exercise of will which meant a severance of opinion from his wife ; his relief when at last she too joined the Church must have been considerable.

Meanwhile goats held the field, and I eagerly accepted the invitation to go and see them. Billy was a fine, upstanding beast with sharp horns and a vile smell. His mistress praised his docile obedience and exhorted him to bow his head as a

token of assent. But Billy was not having any. He looked at her with satyr-like eyes, and rising like a flash on his hind legs snapped the Bible from her hand and ate it viciously. That was not all. He helped himself to another course. The poor lady turned her head to lament the loss of her book, and he tweaked the roses from her hat and, before she could rally, snatched the hat too, and devoured them both.

" It was a new hat," she said pitifully, and I decided that for the keeping of goats patriotism was not enough !

We got back to London in time for the first Zeppelin raid. A taxi took us from Padding ton to the Mont Blanc, and on the way we heard the boom of guns. Compared to the anti-aircraft barrage which at this moment is rending the heavens, they were not impressive, though at that time they seemed very heavy. No one had any idea of the damage a Zeppelin would do, and the sight of the huge white slug high up in the sky was exciting rather than alarming. We had our dinner and then, like a thunderbolt, came the first bomb, and all the people rushed out to see what was going to happen. All, that is to say, except Madame, who with French *sang-froid* continued to count up the takings at the desk. There was another thud, and one of our guns suddenly sounded, and a man in the crowd—rapidly increasing—rapturously hailed it as coming from the Admiralty Arch.

That started a discussion which raged all through the raids of the last war ; each contingent acclaimed their own special artillery.

" You're quite wrong," said a prim little woman.

" I recognise the sound perfectly. It's our gun on Blackfriars Bridge."

At this moment a stout gentleman offered five to one that we should hit the enemy in the next three shots. He lost. We all lost. Every shot went wide, and eventually the white slug moved across the sky to lay its death eggs somewhere else.

London endured Zeppelin nights for weeks, and our feeble aim seemed always ineffective. We did not score one success until an airman machine-gunned the slug and brought it down. It roared and flamed like an archangel in Hell, falling near Potters Bar. I watched the fire from Putney Bridge, and the spectacle was the most heartening thing in those four years of endurance. Hitherto the people of London had felt like Hindus before a Juggernaut, doomed to extinction. Now it seemed there was at last some sort of reply.

But our spirits went down again when one lovely morning a formation of Taubes flew over the Thames, looking like silver doves. Nobody believed they were enemy planes ; indeed I remember a nurse reassuring an invalid lady who, seeing the flight from a sick bed, cried out in terror.

" Why they're *ours*," said the nurse ecstatically. " Don't you worry about those pretty things ; they won't hurt you."

Her patient's reply was not audible ; a salvo of bombs drowned her voice. The raids were in no sense comparable to the Blitzkrieg of 1940; they were not severe enough to interfere with work or pleasure, though by no means agreeable. The theatres did tremendous business and non-stop runs, and the shows were carried on, after the

warning maropns, to excited applause. When the curtain rang down, you could, if you liked, go into the tubes for shelter, no other provision was made. I used to walk home from a show, and dodge in and out of doorways between the barrages, which seemed to come at regular intervals like the bombs.

The casualties in certain parts were very heavy, but the actual losses were never revealed. Meanwhile, the general atmosphere remained gay, almost brittle. Bands played, and soldiers filled the streets. The night clubs and cabarets were thronged, and innumerable committees sat while battalions of W.R.N.S. and W.A.A.G.S. deployed.

Soon after the first Zeppelin raid, I had a commission to write up the military hospitals at Boulogne. It was quite easy for a journalist to get a visa, and there was no likelihood of any danger at the base. Cecil, however, insisted on coming with me, in case of trouble. We started from Victoria, which all through the war on any day, at any hour, was a mass of soldiers and civilians, and almost the first man we spotted was Desmond MacCarthy. It was said he had been roped in by the Intelligence Service at the outbreak of hostilities and, legend insisted, had spent laborious days and nights unravelling cryptograms and cypher codes. Then I had seen him at a Sunday evening theatre show in naval uniform—I think it was an Admiral's. On Victoria Station he wore khaki, and looked like a general. We asked him what he was and where he was going. He smiled in his seraphic fashion.

" I am a suder or camp follower," he said, " and I am transporting baggage." He never

revealed the reason for his various disguises—intelligence covers a multitude of uniforms.

It was a nasty passage to Boulogne, the boat was crowded, not with the services, but with civilians, who seemed unusually afflicted. There was no food to be had on board, and we were nearly three hours crossing the Channel. The day was grey and very cold, but Boulogne had a bustling brightness, and the cafés and restaurants were full. So were the hotels, but we managed to fix up at a small place where the cooking was excellent, and the café crowded with *poilus* and Tommies.

I was at the station when a train of wounded arrived. The men in that contingent were all suffering with trench feet. Their faces had a greenish colour, which was particularly distressing, and you could sense the agony they were enduring. Trench feet and trench fever were war products that the ordinary civilian had not visualised. I was prepared for broken limbs and shattered bodies, but the long, long line of stretchers from which looked out those death-like faces was beyond imagination. When I see a soldier of the late Great War without a pension or a job, selling matches in the gutter on his hobbling feet, I always remember that morning at Boulogne.

The war atmosphere at Boulogne was the same as in London. Feverish optimism and almost fanatical conviction of triumph. The great slaughter had not yet commenced, and people were still talking of being in Berlin by Christmas Day. The shortage of shells had not leaked out; the lack of equipment, French and English, was concealed, and everyone felt confident and almost happy.

Cecil was not so satisfied. Information had already reached us of a hold-up in national munitions and we knew the workers were getting a raw deal. The trade unions had agreed to dilution ; indeed, they had lowered all restrictions, so that they had no means of safeguarding the skilled man from untrained competition, either during or after the war. The miners, allowed to join up, had flocked into the army in their thousands, and their places had been taken by every kind and sort of outside labour, from hairdressers to umbrella-menders, all eager to get a non-combatant job and good pay.

As a consequence many of the mines were ruined from a development point of view. The new-comers " picked the eyes out," as the phrase goes, making for the rich seams indiscriminately. That was the beginning of the curse, which reduced the prosperous Rhondda valley to a country of the doomed, for many pits were so grievously mis-handled that they could be worked only at a loss. These things were yet to come, but their shadow fell on Cecil and on me.

We walked to Wimereux in the afternoon, the sun suddenly shining, lit up the cliffs, the blue paint of the cafes, the white walls of the Casino. We sat at a table outside a small *estaminet.*

" You know I want to join up, kiddy ? "

I nodded. He had rushed to a recruiting office early in August, but had been turned down for active service ; varicose veins relegated him to the reserve.

" I mean to get into the Army," he continued, " I shan't rest until I'm passed A 1 ."

" You'd be doing more important work on the *New Witness,*" I protested.

" There's nothing so important as fighting to-day," said he, " and I can't go on speaking and writing for the Allies, if I stay outside the ranks. It'll take a devil of a lot of doing, but I mean to get there all the same. And then—" he paused—" when I'm passed for the front do you think you could marry me ? "

It was the old story, but this time there was a difference. He was so wistful, so indomitable that somehow I could not refuse. It was impossible to visualise him in battle, and in a rush of feeling for what seemed to me an inevitable heartbreak, I promised. But when I said " yes " there came into his eyes a look of such adoration, such unfathomable joy that I felt suddenly, strangely humbled.

We left Boulogne one morning just after the dawn. The quay looked tired and dirty, and the big station, where huge engines run like little lambs at the toot of a tin whistle, was crowded with our soldiers newly landed. They were sleeping before they set out for the front, flung down anywhere upon the platforms.

From the deck of the little steamer we watched the white cliffs tinged with the early sun fade into the mist—cliffs that in so short a time were to be sown with wooden crosses marking the graves of British dead. In the distance came the boom of the guns, so insistent and unceasing that like enemy planes to-day if the sound stopped the silence ached. . . .

Late that evening Cecil rang me up from Warwick Gardens. Gilbert was dangerously ill.

CHAPTER NINE

SOME PROBLEMS AND SIR THOMAS BEECHAM

GILBERT hovered between life and death from November, 1914, to March, 1915. He was unconscious, it was said, the whole time but, quite probably, interiorly, he loafed and invited his soul all the while on some blissful, unknown shore.

He was due for a breakdown. His body had to rebel against its condition. He had put on considerable weight since he moved to Beaconsfield, and was just on twenty stone, which for a man still in the thirties was dangerously abnormal. Over six feet tall, his figure had lost its outline and, for lack of use, his muscles sagged. He had never cared for physical exercise. His feet were inadequate for much walking, but it was not only that he did not go outside his house—except when he went by car and rail—but that he hardly moved inside, and having left his room in the morning, sat hour after hour in his little study, spinning words, which now and then flamed to genius. Only occasionally did he go upstairs again until night.

This sedentary existence was not helped by his diet, which should have included only the lightest dishes. But his food was hearty and he suffered continually from indigestion, without in the least knowing what was wrong with him. The family teeth, like the family bones, needed care, but G. K. simply would not go to a dentist, and sheerly

refused ever to wear a denture, though the need was apparent and essential. We all knew he was heading for a smash, but nothing could be said or done to prevent it. Like his father Gilbert shrank from any comment on his health. It was a taboo that must not be broken, and the obvious fact that he was in a bad way had to be ignored.

Gilbert not only dreaded illness, but had an invincible antagonism from the word and the practice of hygiene, with which he always associated unwarrantable interference with the homes and the children of the poor, and though this prejudice as part of his personality was interesting and amusing, it had unfortunate results.

Intellectually speaking, G. K. had been feeding largely on himself since he left London, his occasional sorties on the platform merely serving as a fillip to his incomparable powers of debate, so that between public appearances he was driven to argue with himself in ever-narrowing circles. In the old days, his vitality had flowed in a variety of channels ; shut off, to a large extent, from the full stream of masculine association his mentality congested.

But if men were scarce, nieces, nephews and cousins were plentiful. The Oldershaw girls, at school in Beaconsfield, had a second home with their Aunt Frances, whose cousin, Michael Braybrooke, lived for years at " Over-Roads," which was a port of call for the whole family. In a critical study of G. K., written about this period, by Julius West, the author stated that he saw so many boys and girls in the garden, that he credited Gilbert with having a large family, with whom, said the writer, he seems to spend very little time.

Gilbert, like his brother, would, I think, have been a very joyous parent ; neither of them were ever condescending to the young mind, but always big-brotherly and generous.

But in spite of her family, it always seemed to me that Frances had not found quite the satisfaction she had hoped for in her new life. She was, I think, conscious that all was not right with Gilbert, but found herself powerless to affect a real change. She looked very harassed in those days, as if for the first time she had realised that to play Providence to a man of Gilbert's complexity was not a tame task for an ailing woman.

She had suffered for years from curvature of the spine, a disease which has the most unfortunate effect on body and nerves. But the complaint had never been tackled, though as time went on the curvature grew worse, setting up innumerable aches and pains and temperamental difficulties. Like Edward's heart, however, her spine was never definitely treated or examined, until the complaint became so bad that under expert advice she had to wear an iron support.

Curvature is not conducive to the duties, or the privileges, of everyday existence, and indeed Gilbert, who so eloquently upheld the fundamental importance of normal marriage and the home was cut off from the first, which affected his pleasure in the second.

The opening chapters of the married life of Gilbert and Frances had gone strangely, pathetically awry. He was fathoms deep in love, and in that first transcendent moment of their honeymoon when, far beyond time and space, they found themselves utterly, unbelievably alone, he

must have heard the sun, the moon and the stars singing together. And then the whole world went crash. The woman he worshipped shrank from his touch and screamed when he embraced her. A less sensitive or more experienced man would have regarded the affair as distressing though by no means irremediable, but he was hunted by the fear that his brutality and lust had frightened the woman he would have died to protect. He dared not even contemplate a repetition.

He went to Cecil, quivering with self-reproach and condemnation. His young brother took a completely rationalistic view of the contretemps, and suggested that some citadels must be taken by storm, while others yield only to long siege. Anyway, he insisted, nothing had happened that could not be put right ; they could both be happy and have lots of children. But the mischief had been done. Gilbert hated himself for what had happened, and Frances could not reconcile herself to the physical realities of marriage. Temperamentally ascetic, physically sickly through spinal disease, the experience must have shocked her profoundly. Her tragedy was that desiring children, she shrank from sex. The final adjustment between them seems never to have been made, and Gilbert, young and vital, was condemned to a pseudo-monastic life, in which he lived with a woman but never enjoyed one.

For there was that about the Chestertons which would not let them be unfaithful. It was a family idiosyncrasy, apart from religion, belief or social tradition. Once married, they were dedicate for life.

The story of the wedding night was ancient history when I heard it from Cecil, but the effect still survived. Even fidelity exacts its price, and as the years went on, physically speaking, Gilbert ran to seed, while from the psychological point of view his social segregation kept him from contact with the practical and economic problems of everyday family life. It was this segregation, I always thought, that made him regard the economic position of the young, unmarried woman in such hermit-like fashion. He pleaded, wisely and unanswerably, that a home atmosphere is healthier, happier and more desirable for a girl than mass employment in an office.

"But," as many an impassioned young thing has said to me, "we know that; most of us would far rather live at home in comfort, instead of getting up early, chasing to the tube, and battering a typer. But we *can't* stay at home, our fathers don't earn enough to keep us, and as we haven't husbands, what are we to do? Will Mr. Chesterton tell us that?"

But Mr. Chesterton had no feasible alternative to offer.

Then again, his utter lack of money sense affected his judgment. He had not the slightest idea of what it cost to support a wife, a home and children, even on the most moderate scale, and he had no direct information as to the market rate of wages. In weighing up Gilbert's genius and humanity against the queer aloofness and imperviousness of his later life these things, I think, should be considered.

Marie Louise had the worst months of her life during G. K.'s illness. She had lost her first child,

Beatrice, and now she had to face the prospect of death for her elder with its risk for the younger son. Meanwhile, she had to wait news of Gilbert, with occasional glimpses of his sick bed ; but she kept in good heart. Not for any consideration would she have worried Edward, who remained persistently optimistic.

Long before Gilbert was awake to the world, Cecil had gone to America on a lecture tour. Like most things in his life, it was all fixed up very quickly. He had a cable from Feakins, the famous agent in New York, suggesting he should come over and speak for the Allied cause and debate with various supporters of the German. Lecture tours were not so general then as now, and those who knew the States gave him the most varying advice. He was to travel light ; take as many suits as possible ; he must avoid English politics ; analyse Cabinet ministers ; he would only need a lightweight coat because of overheated trains ; he must not stir an inch without a fur coat. The last item, in some extraordinary way, appealed to Cecil, who suddenly decided he wished to look like a financier. Accordingly a huge object was obtained at cost price from a friend, including a vast collar of astrakhan and deep cuffs. He lost suitcases, money, MSS., every imaginable thing on his journeyings, but his fur coat remained with him and was brought safely back.

Cecil intensely enjoyed his experiences. He was fascinated by America, the sense of equality, the appreciation of ideas, the varying aspects of life in each state ; the movement, the change, the fundamentals of the Constitution ; the whole great fabric laid hold of him. The essential differences

between the average Englishman and the American gripped Cecil closely. He was conscious of a new outlook, a fresh viewpoint that had jettisoned the slow, cumberously loitering processes of our own political procedure. Life was violent, graft open and unashamed, lawlessness triumphant. But the remedies were equally swift and sudden, exposure as flaming as offence. Pinkerton's police shot down strikers, but strikers bombed the police, and partisan outcry on each side drowned the other.

I had the most enthusiastic and absorbing letters from him. He was thrilled by Chicago, the lakes, the canning factories, the darkies—especially those with obviously Jewish features ; the Southern States appealed to his historic sense, he soaked himself in their tradition and then and there decided to write the History which he was to finish at Ypres.

Cecil was a big success on the platform, judging by the press reports, and scored both in his lectures and debates. He planned to go back to the States after the war, when we agreed that while he was in America I should explore Soviet Russia. We were to meet at Vladivostock.

America did not attract Gilbert to the same degree as his brother. Perhaps unconsciously he was looking for European culture in American tradition and could not fully reconcile himself to the exuberance of the younger civilisation. He found life more mechanised than he expected. It was one of Gilbert's chief paradoxes that while he used all available machinery—he loved taxis even more than hansoms—typewriters, railway trains, motor 'buses, steamers and the telegraph, he always

argued against them, whereas Cecil revelled in every new invention. Gilbert told me that one of the differences between England and America was that at home you could have a very bad, a very good or a medium cigar, but in the States they were all medium. Moreover, he did not find the same diversity in human types.

"I find it difficult to recall the appearance of any of the very charming hostesses who entertained us," he told me. "In my mind there is a composite picture of a lady with grey hair, tastefully arranged, and wearing a becoming gown."

Cecil did not smoke cigars and seemed more lucky in his hostesses. He brought home delightful stories of them all from every point of the American compass.

While he was away I edited the paper for him; the leaders were written in the office by Eccles or me, or whichever contributor specialised in the topic of the week. Gilbert was a great loss, but we still had Belloc with his war notes and Squire—by this time literary editor of the *New Statesman*—would always let me have a poem or a review, and new writers continued to arrive.

Of these the most interesting and delightful were Cora Gordon and her husband Jan. They had gone to Serbia in 1914 with a Red Cross detachment and had experienced exciting food and adventures, all of which are set down in the first of their many books, "The Luck of Thirteen." Painters as well as writers, the fascinating thing about their work and their life is that Jo—as Cora is called—is the perfect feminine complement of the masculinity of Jan. They learn languages as other

people smoke cigarettes, in an unbroken chain, and will set off to the other side of the world with nothing but a change of boots and a cooking pot, or load themselves, like camels, with all their worldly possessions, including tables and chairs. They wrote for us for years—on their travels, their life in France, their reactions to England. Jan became our art critic under the name John Salis, with such distinction that he was spotted by the *Observer,* where he deputised for Konody, and eventually succeeded him.

Like most successful authors, Jan had led a roving life. Starting off as a mining engineer, he had managed a tin concession in Malaya, until in violent revolt against the exploitation of the natives by the owners, he decided that commercial life was not for him and went to Paris to study painting. There he met and married Jo and they started house in a studio in the Quartier until war broke out.

Back from Serbia they established themselves in a top flat in Soho, where Jo would compound enticing Balkan dishes and entertain hordes of hungry friends. Turned down for the army, Jan worked for months in a munition factory and was ultimately commandeered for the naval camouflage service, where he designed the most marvellous disguises for our ships. His chief belonged to the medical profession, but by some ministerial sleight of hand had been wafted to his seafaring position.

The Gordons brought life and colour to the *New Witness.* They also introduced John W. N. Sullivan, who later forged ahead as scientific reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* and

other weekly journals. His jumping-off ground was the *New Witness,* for which he did some very good work. He was a mathematical physicist and had held an executive post in the American Telephone Service, but he was cantankerous in his temper and could never stay in the same place long. He was tall and dark, and because of his woolly hair and wide mouth we called him the Gollywog. He was an incorrigible climber from the social point of view, otherwise he was amusing and had a good brain. He was for ever seeking the ideal country and had a habit of adopting a new land every little while, and ramming it down people's throats. He started off with France, but midway through the war changed his allegiance to Russia. The divergence to Bolshevism shook him, and after a temporary flirtation with Austria he decided that Switzerland was the most stable of them all.

Financially speaking, the *New Witness* was not doing badly, and I was able to hand over the paper safe and sound when Cecil returned.

He wired from the boat the time he hoped to arrive at Euston and begged me to meet the train. His carriage was at the far end, but he was on the platform like a shot, leaving his luggage and his marvellous fur coat on the knees of the: gods. He literally flamed with joy on seeing me and insisted that we should spend the day going places—the whole world of shopping lay before me, he insisted, where to choose. He had made a lot of money in the States, but it was quite hopeless to try and stop him spending lavishly—buying me the most expensive hats and gloves and extravagant

etceteras. Cecil, wickedly indifferent to his own clothes, had an amazing eye for mine, and knew exactly what suited me. His taste was extraordinarily good. We had a completely non-war lunch and talked until the late afternoon. He was very hopeful about everything, especially the Derby Scheme, under which he felt sure he would be able to join the army sooner than he had anticipated. His goal still remained the same, to be A1 and marry me.

The next day he plunged immediately into an attack on the conditions of war workers and reproduced *in extenso* an article from *Forward*, edited by Tom Johnston—now-a-days Secretary of State for Scotland, stating the case against the Ministry of Munitions. This issue of *Forward* had been seized by the police, who suppressed the paper, but the *New Witness* had already received a copy and proclaimed it to the world.

The usual difficulty with the printers followed. By this time we had left Odhams; so many compositors and machine hands had been called up that it was with the greatest difficulty the firm coped with their own issues and outside work was almost impossible. The last number of the *New Witness* printed in Long Acre had a rough time. All the men who knew our particular job were gone, and I was left to grapple with a comparative stranger, who lost his head completely and muddled up our type with that of a fashion journal that was running a special page on stockings. There was a paragraph written in the most enticing style which called the attention of the readers to a music hall comedy star, whose peerless calves shimmered through the silver sheen of the sheer hose alluded

to. By some diabolical means, the notice found its way into our leader which dealt with the steel shortage and the desperate position of our army at the front. I threw it out with contumely, and the compositor dutifully took the type away. The par turned up again in the City article, right in the midst of Raymond Radclyffe's chaste prose, and finally reappeared in a review by Desmond of a somewhat gloomy Norwegian play. Not until I had personally superintended the distribution of the metal line by line did I feel assured that the peerless calves of the comedy star would not creep back into our columns.

After that we printed at Polsues in Gough Square. The firm was run by a sturdy Cornishman, in a most ramshackle building, which used to tremble like an agued man at the reverberations of the most distant bomb. Polsue refused point blank to print the *Forward* article, and begged us to cancel it. But Cecil firmly refused.

The article was printed and was duly blacked out, a note being inserted to explain why it had been defaced, and that facsimile copies of the original would be sent post free on application. We were snowed under by requests, and most of our correspondents joined the Clean Government League and became regular subscribers to the paper.

Asquith's enforced resignation split Fleet Street into factions. Among the weeklies the *New Statesman,* which had made an assured success, took up the cudgels for the departing Premier, and in an inspiring article, "Had Zimri Peace who slew his Master?" Clifford Sharp reduced Mr. George to pulp. The *New Witness*—it was typical of the

moment that every enterprising journal called itself" new "—clamoured for munitions but warned the public of Mr. George's piebald reputation.

We always referred to the Welsh politican by his surname only, which was bitterly resented by his fellow Liberals. There is something in a double-barrelled name that suggests to the simple a loftiness of character, an integrity of purpose that a plain surname does not convey. Nothing, I think, irritated our antagonists more than that Cecil, like his paper, was no respecter of persons, and perpetually put pretentious politicians in the pillory. This resentment survives to this day, and is, I feel, testimony to the vitality and significance of all for which the paper stood.

In his introduction to Messrs. Dent's recent re-publication of Cecil's " History of the United States," Professor D. W. Brogan alludes to " the personal devil of the *New Witness,* that distinguished statesman, which it persisted in calling Mr. George."

The two most serious sensations of 1915-16 were, I should say, the Sinn Fein rising and the Silvertown explosion. The first, politically speaking, was a sequel to Sir Edward Carson's provision for the arming of Ulster. It will be remembered that this distinguished advocate was responsible for large consignments of munitions which, ordered from Germany, were landed on the Ulster coast, and it has always been felt that, but for the outbreak of war, occasion would have been found for the invasion of Southern Ireland by the North and the precipitation of an Anglo-Irish struggle. The whole affair was slurred over without the slightest blemish on the patriotism of Sir Edward.

The Easter rising, the leaders of which actually did what Sir Edward Carson hoped to do, met with what most thinking people even at the time felt to be hideous reprisals. That strong measures had to be taken was obvious, but there was a quality of actual sadism in the executions. One recalls the death of Plunkett, who faced the firing squad with open eyes, and Connelly, who was carried to his death on a shutter.

There is a rather dreadful similarity between this war and the last on the question of values as between life and property. This year of 1940 has seen the actual division between protection from aerial warfare of the poor and the rich. The latter, as a matter of course, have well provisioned shelters of a sufficient depth to provide immunity from bombs. The former, specifically denied deep shelters by the Government, have to herd in the tubes, or take refuge in surface retreats, mainly water-logged, or cower in the steel dog kennels of the Anderson type. Again in this war meat without coupons in restaurants is available for the rich at times when the workers have had to go short of rations and with them their wives and families. But for those who can pay to eat well there is no stint.

To me this is paralleled by what happened after the great Silvertown explosion in 1916 which de-housed hundreds of working-class families, and wrecked street upon street of dwellings. The Silvertown slums were then among the very worst in London, many of the houses being built over cesspools, while open gratings gave access to the main drains. The First Commissioner of Works was then Sir Alfred Mond, afterwards Lord

Melchett, under whose aegis the estate was rebuilt. It was discovered that the dwellings were being erected once more over cesspools, and that the gratings or manholes had not been removed. In the course of a debate on this appalling state of things, the Commissioner pointed out that had the estate been replanned according to modern sanitation, it would not have housed so many tenants, thereby depriving the landlords of a portion of their revenue. The magnificent fight put up by Lord Henry Bentinck against this main drainage rehousement mitigated the full consequences. He was always on the side of the workers, and to this day his name is honoured by the miners as well as the slum dwellers.

It was at this moment that Sir Alfred had an inspiration. He was M.P. for a constituency in Glamorganshire and decided to raise a Battalion of London Welsh to be known as Mond's Own. We were touched by this evidence of patriotism and decided the First Commissioner should have his meed of fame. Henceforth—with apologies to Shakespeare's John of Gaunt—the *New Witness* called him "old Alfred Mond, time honoured Pontypridd." For some strange reason he did not like it. His secretary wrote and complained.

It must, however, be admitted that financially speaking "old Alfred" was better entrenched than the *New Witness.* Nevertheless, I felt that from a money point of view the paper resembled that courageous institution known as Muller's Orphanage, which carried on a noble work with inadequate resources. But, though in difficulties, it never collapsed. Dinnerless, a joint would mysteriously appear on the doorstep ; penniless, a

cheque would drop through the front door. Very much the same sort of thing used to happen to us. Godfather, hit like most people by the war, had been obliged to cut down his subsidy, and for a while we had to relapse into twenty and sometimes sixteen pages. And then the tide suddenly and whirlingly turned. Another and a dazzling backer came upon the scene.

The particular benignity in this case was that brilliant and original personality, Sir Thomas Beecham. He had sent occasional letters to our correspondence columns, but that had been our only contact, until one day he rang up and asked Cecil to lunch. The combined efforts of the staff induced the Editor to change his suit and polish his hair, and looking unusually trim he went forth in the best of spirits. They had a gorgeous lunch and a most fascinating conversation on the effects of bad government on art. Moreover, Sir Thomas was keen on the paper and decided to invest capital in the company, and would join the Board and instruct his man of business to act on his and our behalf.

Beecham was full of ideas and suggested right away that Ernest Newman should write us a weekly article on music. This fresh access of influence and capital sent us sky high with hope. Budge by this time had left, and a highly honest, extremely deaf individual managed in his place. He knew more about the production and distribution of papers than his predecessor. But the *New Witness* was too much for him ; he had not the imagination to grasp its possibilities on the commercial side and, unable to expand its income, contented himself with cutting down expenses,

which meant that something was saved, if not made.

He was intensely overjoyed at Beecham's accession. The poor soul, it appeared, had nourished vocal ambitions in his youth and was so delighted at the news that we heard strange sounds issuing from his office, which had a queer suggestion of the Toreador Song from Carmen. Cecil and I listened spellbound outside his door. The idea of our manager, thin as a piece of string, and passionately pale, battling with a bull gave us huge delight.

But the high water mark of excited activity was reached at the board meetings. For hours before the directors were due to arrive, the telephone was busy. Was Sir Thomas coming ? What time would he be there ? Would we deliver a message from Blank to say he or she had rung ? I never knew anyone so relentlessly stalked and hotly pursued as the great conductor. The staff fended off all enquiries over the wire, but was not able to guard his coming or going. Beautiful ladies in Rolls Royces waited unremittingly before number 22, aspirant tenors, sopranos or what-nots, congregated on the steps. They never caught him ; he would wave a greeting to the lovelies, smile and nod to the rest, and calmly walk through the crowd without turning a hair.

Very often the meetings terminated with the departure of Sir Thomas and the Editor for dinner, preliminary to a party, which continued in serial form until the early dawn. Beginning at one house, it went on at another and another, frequendy winding up under a totally strange, but invariably opulent roof, miles from the first.

" It's really like one of our rags," said Cecil, " where we begin in a Fleet Street pub and end at the Six Bells at Chelsea. The only difference is that there's a lot of money and titles, oceans of drink, and the talk isn't quite so good."

That never applied to Sir Thomas, perhaps the wittiest man of his time with a rapier quality of repartee. A story is told of a season in Liverpool, where a reception in his honour by the Mayor and City Council had been arranged. Somebody made a muddle of the time, and instead of turning up at five p.m. after a rehearsal, the Lord Mayor, complete with robes and chain, arrived at the Guildhall at four-thirty. When, punctually to the tick, Sir Thomas appeared, the Lord Mayor complained bitterly that he had been obliged to wait.

" But, My Lord Mayor," the distinguished visitor replied, " everything comes to him who waits, even Sir Thomas Beecham."

Gilbert by this time had recovered sufficiently to take up his life, I shall always admire him for his efforts to become a special constable. He would have loved the opportunity of meeting his fellow-man at work and going to a pub after duty. But he could not pass the medical test, and started his series " At the Sign of the World's End," which endured until the *New Witness* ended.

He rejoined the Board, more from the decorative value of his name than for any practical advice he could furnish, and his " doodles " during the deliberations were unbelievably *à propos.* He sketched his idea of the *New Witness* and the *New Statesman* one afternoon, in which the first was represented as a queer Struwelpeter creature with

wild outstanding hair, giving testimony on oath, while the more decorous Fabian organ was a trim, morning-coated figure, half politician, half stock-broker.

It was just after Sir Thomas joined the Board that a new member came on the staff. She was very young—just about sixteen—very pretty with masses of fair hair, the bluest of eyes and a disarming smile. She also had a vivid personality and the unusual gift of getting other people's wave-length, and understanding just what they would, and would not do, without any explanation. She was the first secretary who impinged on the editorial consciousness, and although the Manager engaged her for the business side we promptly annexed her. She used to wear a little white fur round her throat, and her teeth, like Marie Lloyd's, were wide spaced like a rabbit. I called her "Bunny" and "Bunny" she became to G. K., Cecil and the rest. She was the stable centre of a whirlpool of queer managements, uncertain finance and political cataclysms. She stayed throughout the *New Witness* régime, was Gilbert's right hand for the first buffeting years of *G. K.'s Weekly*, and is now the prop and stay of Cecil Houses for Homeless Women. The story of these Houses comes later—at the moment Bunny is at Essex Street, smiling her way through bombs of a morning, defying them all day and going home in the barrage at night.

The young things of that generation were bell metal, steady nerved, with cool courage and a lovely sense of humour.

The period of Cecil's editorship was drawing to a close, and perhaps for that reason his energy and

output seemed to redouble. It was in this year he published " The Perils of Peace," which forecast many of our political mistakes and injustices. Furthermore, men on leave, or just joining up, came in and out of the office with greetings and grievances. Indeed we had so many callers in khaki that we laid in a stock of refreshments to save the Editor from having continually to pop in and out.

One special evening, just before Cecil left us, typifies the atmosphere. Leonard Magnus, an old schoolfellow, arrived in great distress. He was a marvellous linguist, but could not do justice to his gift, being afflicted with a most frightful stammer. He was outraged that the Foreign Office would not employ him on Secret Service, and he wanted Cecil to do something about it.

" B-b-but I should m-make the most perfect s-spy," he reiterated, and the thought of the poor chap trying to communicate military secrets of extreme urgency overcame us. He departed sorrowful, but buoyed up with the hope that Cecil might get him a Censorship job.

He had only just left when Gilbert arrived with Desmond MacCarthy, who in the intervals of Intelligence work still wrote for us. An article from him should already have been in the printer's hands, but it was no use remonstrating, and I settled him in the Manager's office to get on with it and asked if he would like a whisky.

" Soda or water ? " I added.

" I don't mind," said he softly, " it's the creature comfort that counts."

Gilbert was already writing in the **Editorial room** with Eccles busy on his proof. They shared

a bottle of Burgundy and chicken sandwiches, while I kept a discreet watch that none of them broke from their work and went out, Cecil being at the printers. All was very quiet and peaceful until the Editor rang up, asking for help.

" Belloc's here," he said, " in his most irresistible mood. He's in perfect form, but I can't get on with the paper ; he won't stop talking. Shall I bring him over to the office ? "

But that would have meant the complete irruption of the prisoners, who would immediately have escaped. It was a difficult situation. But light came.

" There's a new restaurant opened in Covent Garden," I suggested. " It's French, Boulestin is the name, and I hear the cooking is too wonderful for words."

Cecil hung up with a contented grunt. But I waited apprehensive of the avalanche, which, however, did not arrive. Boulestin had done the trick.

I shall never forget one day in Lent when Belloc, wanting something to drink, asked for cocoa. I cannot imagine a more heroic vow of abstinence.

We had a great coup for the *New Witness* while Cecil was still in charge. Bernard Shaw answered our views on the land in verse, under the title " Fanny's First Ode." It is as topical to-day as it was racy then, and the issue was sold out on the strength of it. Shaw used to send Cecil postcard invitations to lunch, written in his beautifully finished Shavian characters familiar throughout the world. As a vegetarian he always added a reassuring intimation, " My wife will provide a corpse " was the inevitable ending.

The end of the period came soon after, bringing to a close one of the most vivid, vital and amazing adventures in journalism.

Cecil was called up.

CHAPTER TEN

THE EDITOR IN THE RANKS

THE editorial control of the *New Witness* now passed into Gilbert's hands. In this connection it would not, I think, be disrespectful to remark with apologies to Goldsmith that G. K. wrote like an angel and edited like poor Poll. He was an extremely bad editor, and could not realise the necessity for a cohesive policy for the paper, or a close association with its staff. One of the secrets of CeciPs success lay, I think, in the personal co-operation between him and his contributors. He was always available, and continual discussions threshed out all points of difference and agreement.

But from Beaconsfield this could not be done, though a strenuous day in town each week might have gone a long way towards achieving essential reciprocity. G. K.'s visits, however, were occasional and fugitive, most of the time being occupied in the dictation of his articles, so that there was no opportunity for contributors to meet their Chief and talk over possible developments.

Gilbert's leading articles had not the decision of CeciPs, though his amazing journalistic flair kept them succinct. On one point, however, he was a little difficult. His ingenuousness in corporeal matters would sometimes influence his phraseology, so that he suggested what he did not in the least desire to indicate. We had a really trying time **over an** allusion to Mr. George. I was still Assis-

tant Editor, but had the help of Tommy Pope, the Balladmonger—on press days. We were at the printers when the proof of Gilbert's article came up, and read with astonished glee the following pronouncement:

" Whenever Mr. George is in trouble he goes into a corner, by himself, and makes a nasty mess."[5]

Tommy rang up Beaconsfield and respectfully suggested a modification.

" Of course," said Gilbert at his kindest and most mellifluous, " if you think I've been too hard on him you might tone it down."

Tommy mumbled, choked and gave up altogether, whereat I firmly blue-pencilled and recast the line.

We felt Cecil's departure financially as well as editorially. Somehow Gilbert did not inspire the same enthusiasm for the *New Witness* that his brother kindled. His attitude lacked confidence, his outlook seemed blurred. Godfather, terribly disappointed, almost resentful that Cecil had gone into the Army—he felt his political work was far more important—was less beneficent, and though Sir Thomas was still our supporter he was no longer so spontaneous, added to which of course was the war curtailment of revenue. We managed to carry on all the same, and during the first six months of the régime by a miracle the paper made a profit.

I have to take the credit of this achievement. G. K.'s signed articles just then were of world significance, and I was able to arrange the sale, both of the American and the second British rights, for a good sum weekly. Gilbert, bless him, was most astonished and I think a little troubled by

the sum raised by this re-sale. He never could understand that his copy would have fetched two hundred per cent, more than he asked, and until Dorothy Collins took him in hand he continued to let it go at a preposterously low rate.

Alas ! this additional income for the *New Witness* was only temporary. Someone wrote in from the provinces on a local issue—whether one village constable was sufficient to keep order in war time among a hundred people, and Gilbert, with infinite courtesy and aggravating parochialism, dealt with the problem for two or three weeks. The articles, though fascinating to read, were impossible to sell —to America at any rate—and so the contract lapsed, and we were financially straitened once again. But our contributors were not only heroic but sacrificial, and when we could not pay them they wrote for pure enthusiasm.

Gilbert's queer idea of his financial value extended to the platform. I was rung up once by a movie magnate who was starting a publicity campaign, to know if G. K. would speak on the Art of the Films. I said I would put the proposition to him, but that I knew he would not entertain it under a fee of fifty guineas. And then I rang up Beaconsfield. Gilbert's consternation and surprise at my audacity in asking that amount were incredible. He even came to the telephone, personally, to remonstrate. I insisted that I had only quoted half of what he was worth to the magnate, but it was only under the greatest pressure that he gave way. His speech was racy and invigorating, the meeting was crowded and the magnate overjoyed.

The paper continued to trundle along at a

steady pace, which now and again broke into a gallop with a punching article by Scott Moncrieff or a moving description of Belgium under the German heel by Emile Cammaerts. Public optimism with regard to the war was cooling down as the casualties went up, and bombing grew more frequent. The afternoon when the news of the Battle of Jutland fell upon London cut complacency like a knife. I was in Holborn just by the tube station when the papers came out. Balfour was First Lord of the Admiralty, and with cynical detachment centred his communiqué on our losses. One after the other the names of battleships, cruisers and destroyers hit the eye like acid. The crowd was silent, stupefied, almost drugged. I crept into a side street and tried to grasp the significance of what I read. Then—the conclusion was like death—our belief in the Navy had been a myth ; we were stripped of safety, left naked to the enemy.

Later editions balanced our losses with Germany's, but the first impact of that ghastly bulletin could not be wiped out. We had lost the sense of security.

Outside London Cecil was settling down to a fresh existence. He never looked back either with regret or longing, but always grasped the experiences and interests offered him with unfailing eagerness. He had been drafted to the East Surreys, and was already keen on the honours and tradition of the regiment. He arrived for a few hours' leave one evening, full of an anniversary they had just celebrated when the East Surreys had held the fort or raised the siege or something equally glorious. He had cast editorial cares and

apprehensions far behind, and while he asked most sympathetically about his paper, it was evident his heart was no longer there. This capacity for concentration on immediate issues was one of his greatest assets. He looked a queer bundle in his uniform, and I wondered how he ever managed to put his puttees on comparatively straight. He was in B2 category, and his fellow soldiers included an ex-Guardsman who had gone a little groggy at the knees. It was from him I heard this story.

" We was all in the hut," said the Guardsman, " and I was watchin' Cissel a-putting on his puttees. There he was a-windin' and a-windin' fit to kill hisself, right to his thighs, and then I speaks. Here, mate, says I, them ain't no baby's binders : they goes on yer legs."

" Cissel," as he was always called, was very popular and generally looked after by the men. He was a heavy smoker and liked to put on a pipe in the early dawning. The fumes of his pet briar were a little overpowering in the tent, but his comrades liked him so much they hated to interfere. At last a compromise was effected. A hole was made in the canvas, just above Cissel's head and large enough for it to pass through into the open. Pipe in mouth he puffed outside the tent while his body remained between the blankets.

There was a group of middle-class recruits in the company, but, though he got on with them quite happily, he preferred the society of the rank and file. He was terribly proud that during his service he was not once crimed, even for a dirty bayonet, and that there was never anything absent from his kit. It was not *he* who escaped being crimed—he hadn't reformed in the least—it was

his comrades who protected him. The ex-Guardsman explained that as each man's belongings were inspected and found correct, he would smuggle an article on to Private Chesterton's untidy heap waiting the officer's investigation. Half of Gissel's necessary objects of equipment were always missing or lost, but he was never caught out, thanks to his fellows.

After a few months the regiment was moved to the Isle of Thanet, where the men were billeted in empty houses. I used to go down for week-ends when sing-songs were arranged and other entertainments. Sunday tea was a great institution. They used to make a black decoction in a metal dixie—from which the traces of a preceding meal of Irish stew had not entirely disappeared—and serve it up as sweet as treacle, with slices of bread and marge and highly curranted cake. I really quite enjoyed it, besides I couldn't possibly offend the cook. He was an intellectual in private life, and was making his name as a sculptor when war suspended his career. He had been put in charge of the kitchen because, according to the Sergeant Major, his knowledge of carving could be applied to meat equally with marble. The resultant eats were gruesome to begin with, but his sense of the artistic triumphed, and at the finish he could roast or boil with anyone, and make rice puddings quite efficiently.

Marie Louise and I supplemented Private Chesterton's rations with ham and sausages, especially sausages, and large consignments of treacle tart. Like most recruits, he developed a taste for toffee and boiled sweets. It was a gala for Warwick Gardens when he had leave. Sometimes he brought

a comrade, whom the parents made completely at home, listening, a little wondering but very happy, while the senior soldier discussed army routine, grousing professionally at rations and unnecessary discipline. But the conversation was not all on one side. At camp Cecil, by request, used to speak on politics and foreign affairs, with a dash of history and geography. He was heard with great attention, and some of the remarks from the audience were refreshing. Once he was explaining the importance of Poland in the war, and the heroic part the Pilsudski legions were playing.

" Poles ? " said a young soldier. " Poles, oh yes, I know 'em. There are thousands in Leeds where I come from. They eat kosher meat and go to synagogue—we call 'em Jews."

It was difficult at that time to explain the difference. The soldier—as the French had done before him—remarked that Poland wasn't marked on the map, and where was it anyway ?

But he proved to be highly adaptable, and when I turned up at Westgate one Saturday I found him reading the *New Witness* with rapt attention.

Cecil's particular set included a young man of fine build, with such a superb torso that the casual eye did not observe farther than his waist. He was always being sent to a medical board on the ground that he was obviously A1 and must not be allowed to skulk behind B2. He went up uncomplainingly, but over and over again was rejected. He suffered from a queer and irremediable defect. His legs were back to front so that, as he himself expressed it, if he wasn't careful, when he tried to march he sat down.

Then there was a delightful little Cockney, thin and spare with an Old Bill moustache and an invincible humour. There had been a raid at Westgate and the billets got it rather badly.

" It was like this," he said. " I'm in my kip when I hears a noise. I sits up and sez to the chap next to me, Mate, I sez, them ain't no Beecham's pills adroppin' around—somefink's fell."

There were no casualties in the billets, however, and bombs were accepted as part of the routine.

Sunday was an off day after church parade and given to walks over the cliffs. Cecil, as a Catholic, had the morning free as there was no church within possible distance. His companion was a Jew whose synagogue was also beyond the radius. The time passed pleasantly with reading, talk and an occasional game of chess until they were " inspected " by a casual Major who decided to end their leisure.

" Let the Catholic clean the dixies," he commanded, " and the Jew scrub the kitchen floor."

The reason for the discrimination remained a mystery.

One recruit who vainly tried to scrounge Sunday morning off had a real grievance. He was agnostic in the matter of creed, but Army regulations did not admit this particular category. The Sergeant Major tried him with all the standardised brands of worship, and when he declined them filled him in as Church of England.

" That's where we puts all the odd bits," he explained. " Church parade for you, and don't forget it ! "

It was at Westgate that Cecil won the first round in his military objective. He was looking very fit,

had lost weight and, so the ex-Guardsman said, could put up a decent show at drill. He had steadily bombarded the authorities ever since he joined the East Surreys and at last succeeded in moving up a category, being made B1 instead of B2.

Shortly after he was drafted to the H.L.I, and sported a kilt and a bonnet. He was intensely proud of serving with the Scots, but he was also entitled by his birth to the distinction. Marie Louise was the daughter of a Scotswoman of distinguished descent, in direct line from the Earl Marshal Keith whose portrait in the National Portrait Gallery suggests the Rev. Jack Grosjean, her grandson and Marie Louise's nephew. It was Nora Grosjean who told me of the custom by which one son in every generation throughout all the branches of the family bears the name of Keith—the latest example at that time being G. K. G. Cecil's hard brain and sense of logic came through his Scots descent, and also won him a welcome from the Highlanders.

Marie Louise was not overjoyed at this news. It seemed to her another step towards the inevitable day of parting when her son would go to France.

It was at one of his week-end leaves that Cecil had an amusing interlude. He was asked to recommend our office boy at the *New Witness* for a commission. We were very doubtful if a mere ranker like Cecil would be competent to recommend an aspirant officer, but the young man was confident it was in order. So Private Chesterton signed and the application was accepted. The office boy was a nice lad named Dunbar, brother of John Dunbar. At that time John was on the advertisement department of the *Encore,* a music

hall paper published by Odhams. After his discharge from the Army he went on the editorial side, where he gained the confidence of Elias and finally succeeded to autocratic rule over Odhams' many publications. He sits on a lofty pinnacle, not too softly cushioned, and saith unto one Editor, go and he goeth and to another—less frequently—come, and he cometh and he is indisputably lord over all. But to me he seems a lonely, almost a pathetic figure. . . .

Then again he has another side. I am told that socially he is very popular. He keeps a stable and rides in Dulwich Park, where he is very much admired.

Cecil's own affairs, both in and out of the army, went forward rapidly. He wrote numerous articles for the general press and got on with his History of America. He was always scribbling, to the irritation of his Sergeant Major, who must have found him a queer sort of cuss. The same Sergeant Major rejoined in 1940 and told a friend of mine of a *tete-a-tete* with Cecil.

"At it again, are you?" he complained one afternoon. "You're supposed to be a soldier, aren't you? What *are* you writing, anyway?"

Cecil looked up with a chuckle.

"I'm writing a book on sergeant majors," he replied, and his look said all the rest.

Quite suddenly Cecil's life took an abrupt turn. He had fought his way persistently through the barbed wire of official regulations and the barrage of medical opinion, and had finally been passed for active service—I always felt he must have fairly **blitzed the Board** into consent. **He** rushed **up to** London, coming straight to the flat where I was

living with my niece. It was past midnight when he arrived, and ringing loud and fiercely at the bell he almost fell into the hall in his excitement, and seizing me tightly shook me in his eagerness.

" I'm through," he said. " I'm through. I'm A' and I'm going to the front, and I've three days' leave. You'll marry me, kiddie—now?"

His hands trembled and his eyes were full of a deep questioning, which in a moment turned to unbelievable radiance. At last, at long last he had won his wife.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A WAR WEDDING

THE next days were hectic. Cecil raided Doctors Commons for a special licence and discovered that he had left his identification papers behind. By the time they were recovered it was late afternoon, and only by characteristic determination did he get through. Then there was the question of a new uniform. His kilt was admirable, but the tunic was evil fitting and the boots quite shapeless. He insisted on being measured for a tunic and on getting quite expensive footwear. This was Cecil in a new guise, with carefully brushed hair and a comparatively decent pipe. He spent the next day rushing round to friends ; he lunched with Shaw, and went in and out of innumerable newspaper offices and taverns. Tommy Pope, as his best man, nobly took over at the *New Witness,* which gave me time to get a frock and to pack. It was arranged that I should go down with Cecil to Sandwith, where he was in camp, and stay at the nearest hotel.

Marie Louise was inexpressibly dear and sweet to both of us. She said she had always wished to have me as a daughter, and Mister was equally affectionate. The parents gave us a hundred pounds for a wedding present, and Cecil joyously paid it into his account, where it did not remain for long. In the afternoon he rushed to the tailors, bought the wedding ring and an opal to go with it,

depositing all the parcels at the office, where by special request I met him for dinner, picking up the impedimenta on the way home.

He said good-bye to me and drove back to Warwick Gardens, and left behind in the taxi uniform, boots, ring and everything else. He was due at the Registry Office at noon the following morning, it being agreed we should be married in what was then my " church " and afterwards in his. The loss of his goods did not overcome him. He arrived at Essex Street by half-past eight and when the staff appeared had covered considerable ground. The tailor altered an adjacent tunic, new boots were unearthed and other rings purchased—the original ones with the rest were for ever gone.

It took the united efforts of Tommy and Bunny to get him fixed up, and when at last he was ready he could not find the licence. Bunny recovered it from the waste paper basket and handed it to Tommy for safety's sake. After an exciting chase for a sovereign—the Catholic Church required he should endow me with gold and silver—Private Chesterton was ready.

They took a taxi to Henrietta Street, where the bridegroom insisted on going into the office of Williams and Norgate the publishers in mistake for the Registrar's. Having been frustrated, he suggested they should adjourn for a drink, but here Tommy put his foot down. He had borne enough and, still protesting, Cecil was taken to the authentic official. He was waiting for me when I arrived with my brother and my niece. The parents, Gilbert and Frances, were all there, and the **Registrar, a friendly old man,** gave us **a nice welcome.**

The walls of the office were plastered with all sorts of rules concerning alien marriages, both white and coloured. One huge poster set forth such really frightening regulations should you take a negro wife or husband, that we lost count of what the Registrar was saying and began to whisper our amusement. My brother pulled me up with a shocked remonstrance. He was a very strict agnostic and as such demanded reverence and respect for his ritual. But Cecil was past all that. He looked very young, and the smiling soldier and the central figure in the Marconi trial might never have met.

The June sun was on the pavement, the crowded streets were gay—London had snatched a holiday.

We joined up again at Corpus Christi in Maiden Lane.

The Actors Church, as it is called, was decorated for Whitsun, and red roses flamed from the high altar and on the little shrines and the church was filled to the doors, though we had only expected a handful of friends. But the papers had splashed the announcement of the wedding, and it seemed as if everyone we knew were there. Fleet Street had turned up in force—army, navy and the air ; Conrad Noel made a special journey from the wilds of the country to see us married at what he always called the Church of the Italian Mission to London. He was with the parents, Gilbert and Frances, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes and a tall distinguished old lady, with a lovely carriage and a lace head-dress, whom I recognised as Madame Belloc, mother of Hilaire. She was a remarkable woman with a particularly clear and bell-like voice, and she gave us her blessing and good wishes.

When I reached the altar and my brother handed me over, Cecil leaned forward and said a few impressive words.

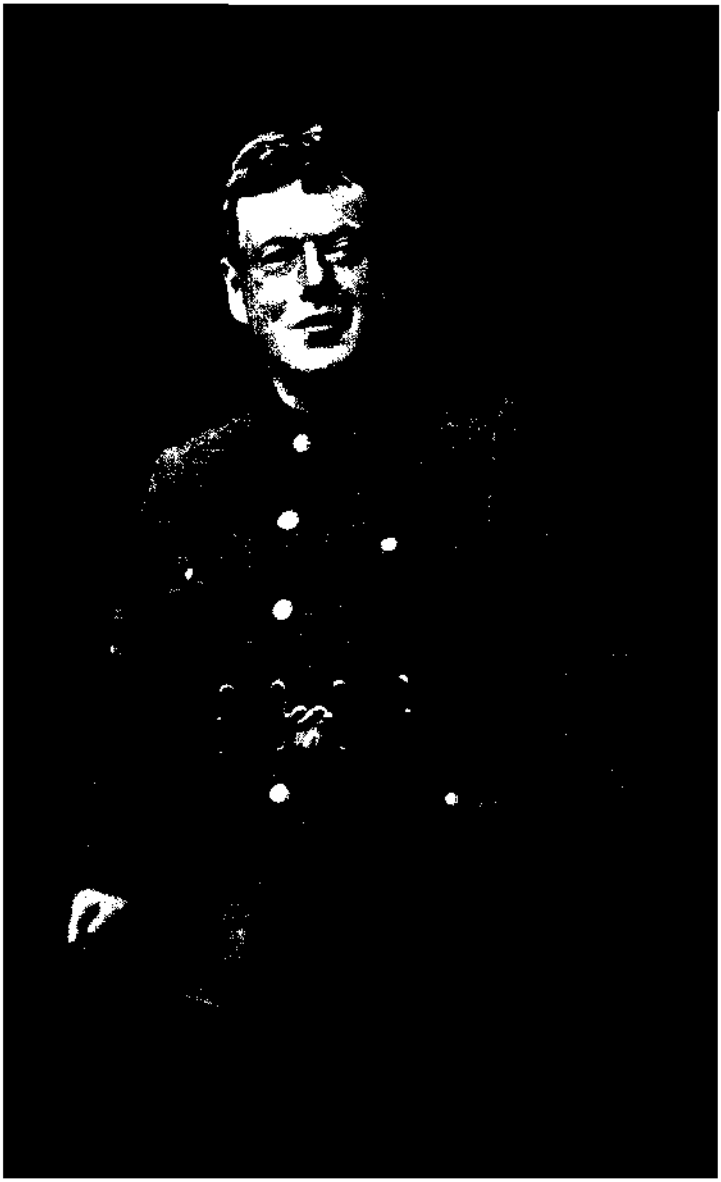
" I warn you," he remarked, " they'll sprinkle you with Holy Water and you'll say my beastly religion has spoilt your hat. But don't worry, I'll buy you a new one ! "

I was sprinkled all right, just after I was endowed with the ritual gold and silver. But the hat wasn't hurt, and we walked down the aisle, talking to people all the way. Indeed, in his delight at the whole proceedings Cecil swept up the spectators in a comprehensive invitation to the Cheshire Cheese. There had been no time to arrange any special festivities, and we had planned to have a small luncheon there. But this quiet suggestion went by the board, and the management, who only expected a few guests, found that the famous lark pudding had run short. But they produced alternative dishes, and there was plenty to drink.

Everyone made speeches—Hilaire Belloc, Raymond Radclyffe, Conrad Noel, Gilbert and Sir Thomas Beecham. Godfather did not turn up. Weddings, he said, were not in his line. We had a number of cheques and presents and Jack Squire and Thomas Seccombe gave. Cecil a silver flask, and Fleet Street in general presented a cigarette case.

We left the Cheese amid a tumultuous send-off, and went to the Waldorf for the night.

It was Saturday and early next morning we had to start for Sandwith and the camp. Tommy had booked a room for us, but had neglected to mention that he was acting on behalf of a private soldier. It is difficult in these less snobbish days to realise



{Elliott & Fry.)

Cecil Chesterton—"the smiling soldier," *(See p. 203)*

[Facing p. 204.

the social indignities consequent at that time on fighting for your king and country in the ranks. Privates were not allowed in saloon bars, except on their home ground, and for a ranker to dine at a table adjacent to an officer was unthinkable. Hotel life in such conditions was insufferable. A soldier had to step aside, salute and look ashamed of his existence all over the place. It was almost punishable to enter a lift if a Captain were present. By discreet dodging, however, we avoided any contretemps.

We had decided to have dinner at the Café Royal and go on to a show, and in honour of the occasion I wore a dress of green and gold,—a favourite combination of Cecil's. I was all ready when he emerged from the bathroom, astonishingly well groomed. He looked at me from the door, and his face lit up, almost ecstatically, as though he had glimpsed some sort of vision.

". . . For mine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, sweetheart," he said softly, and I wondered at the worship in his eyes. For it has always seemed to me quite marvellous that any man should adore a woman to the danger of his peace of mind—as he did me. But as an old countrywoman remarked, " They men aren't like anybody else," and Cecil could be included in the description.

We arrived at Sandwith at five o'clock the next day after a pleasant journey with a khaki crowd. The little town looked most attractive in the sunshine and the hotel, old-fashioned and comfortable, had a cosy lounge and a jolly little bar. Cecil was due at camp next morning, and soon after dawn he set out for a six-mile walk.

Later that day I had a telephone call from the *New Witness* office. Bunny informed me that she had sent an urgent letter by train, due to arrive that afternoon, and would I meet it.

I did. It was a communication from the bank. Cecirs exploits during the last few days, loss of kit, rings, etc., mammoth entertainment at the Cheshire Cheese, had cleared out every penny of the parents' present and another hundred pounds.

But Private Chesterton was not downcast. He rejected the idea of approaching Mister or trying to borrow from Gilbert, and arranged for a loan from Archer Thomson, the long-suffering family solicitor. Meanwhile the hotel cashed an immediate cheque.. He was a genius in that line, and could negotiate a cheque in any part of the globe, civilised or savage. He strewed cheques all over France and Belgium, in the mud of Ypres and in the *estaminets* of Etaples. He cashed them in the trenches, from whence they emerged dirty and crumpled but undefeated. His signature, in the most unfavourable circumstances, was as clear as his faith in its results. Like homing pigeons they came back, and were duly honoured.

The parents arrived at Sandwith the next day. Marie Louise had thought I should prefer to be without them, though at the same time she realised that Cecil could only look in at odd hours. But I overcame her scruples, and for the next two weeks we explored the Isle of Thanet, went for long drives and in the evening came back to Cecil and a good dinner. Marie Louise was a delightful companion. I had been away with the family before on *entente cordiale* trips, when we stayed at Breton inns and journeyed through the wine

country. But this was the first time we had been thrown intimately together for so long. She savoured life with the palate of an epicure, without undue anticipation and quite void of disappointment, but extracting the pleasure and the humour of every incident, pleasant or the reverse. She had been for so long the protector of Edward's health that instinctively she adjusted her rhythm to his slower pace. But at rare moments she forgot his heart and her self-dedication, and re-flowered with the zest and expectancy of youth.

She was always brave, and on the afternoon before Cecil went to France she smiled at her son without a tremor of anxiety. He hugged her with unusual fervour and gripped Edward's hand. Marie Louise and I left them together; we felt his father might have a secret word to say. But though he was emotionally shaken he did not break from his usual calm. And presently he overtook us and, his hand linked in his wife's arm, walked with her to the station.

Cecil spent the last night with me at the hotel, and we talked till the dawn when for a little while he snatched some sleep. I always think of him as the most courageous man I have ever known. Others are quite as brave, physically and morally, but he had an attribute that, even among the most fearless, is rare. He never showed, nor do I think he felt, the least tinge of apprehension as to what might be coming to him. He was never depressed, and was quite untouched by self-pity, nor did he cling, as sometimes the most devoted lover clings, to his woman for sympathy, almost for protection. His one concern was that I should know his whole thoughts and future hopes were fixed on me, and

that he could never thank life sufficiently for all that it had given him.

Cecil went off the next morning at an unearthly hour with flags flying and pipes skirling. I was at the station and watched the long, long train move out. The colonel, who was going to France the next day, told me he had never met greater courage and determination than Cecil had shown in his long fight to get to the front.

"He's a fine chap," he said, and the words stayed with me.

Back in London I set about making a home. Neither Cecil nor I had any money but our earnings, so that it was impossible to buy new goods and chattels. We started home with the furniture left me by my mother, who had died a few years previously, and settled in quite comfortably. It had been difficult to decide just where we should live. I did not care for Kensington; it never seemed my spiritual home. Indeed my affinity turned towards the City, and by great luck and to Cecil's complete satisfaction, we found an upper flat at No. 3 Fleet Street over a tobacconist's named Weingott.

Number Three, which stands just between Child's Bank and the entrance to the Temple, is very old in parts, one section going back to 1600. The Bank, nowadays, is merely modern stucco, but originally it was a venerable pile, and chosen by Dickens as the site for "Telsons," where the clerks in their first youth were kept underground, until they became as green and mouldy as old cheese. The front door of Number Three, protected by a species of portcullis, opened on a long stone-paved passage, of which about half was roofed in.

It was in this passage that Jeremy Cruncher must have sat in the " Tale of Two Cities "—one could almost hear him breathing on a foggy night. The whole atmosphere was full of Dickens, and we used to peer through the pavement lights at the end of the passage over the Bank's strong room, and wonder if the French Crown Jewels were still sheltering there.

We took the two top floors—four rooms and a loft—reached by the most precipitous staircase terminating in a narrow green door, which opened backwards, so that the unwary were thrown off their feet. On the door we painted in large white letters " The Cottage," and an artist friend decorated the landing walls with roses, evergreens and other country flowers. As a clause in the lease, hundreds of years old, forbade me to keep a cow on the premises, we felt the atmosphere was really rural.

Ada and I moved in one grey November Saturday. Transport was terribly difficult and in the absence of ordinary vans we had to be content with ancient carts, which for hours were on the road. We had almost given up hope of their arrival when strange noises, like echoes of a drum and fife band, rose from the street. We rushed to the window. Number Three stands immediately opposite the Griffin, marking the spot where the gates of Temple Bar once stood, and craning out, we saw a large piece of furniture, which, laid across the fabulous beast, was being sawn in two.

" Good God ! " said I, " it's the family wardrobe."

We rushed down and discovered it was even so. Various household effects were strewn upon the

pavement, but the foreman insisted that nothing could be done until the larger objects had been bisected, and had fetched a neighbouring carpenter, who was busy on the job. Measurement was dead against us. None of the goods would go through the windows or up the stairs, truncation was the only chance.

Moving is always a discomfiting process, but 1 have never experienced anything so queer as watching the severance of objects endeared by familiarity and use. We had a bed to sleep in that night, but that was all. Everything else was chopped chaos until the morning.

It was a queer but delightful place ; the sitting-room windows running its whole length, looked over the Griffin, straight into the Law Courts, with Chancery Lane beyond. To the right stretched the City, through Fleet Street and Ludgate Hill up to St. Paul's, and from the back windows you looked down Temple Lane, sloping to the river.

But our great joy was the loft, reached by a ship's ladder, fastened by grappling hooks to a trap door ; long, low-ceilinged, with gigantic pillars supporting the roof, and a huge water tank which, painted red, blended with the scheme of decoration. We polished the floor, distempered the walls, fixed up electric lights and generally achieved a most festive appearance. It was the scene of many unforgettable " rags " that overflowed on to the leads, which after the war we made into a roof garden, with Chinese lanterns and garden seats. The view was haunting and in the dim light the archway at the bottom of the lane had a magic quality.

High above us, and all round, were forests of

chimney pots and fascinating roofs, enticingly perilous to climb.

Evelyn Waugh, as president of some extraordinary mountain society, used to walk roofwards up and down Fleet Street, turning off to the Temple Lane and frightening timorous women *en route* by tapping at their windows. He returned one evening from an Alpine excursion, rather put out.

"I wish you'd keep your roofs better dusted, Keith," he complained, "my hands are quite dirty."

He was an attractive creature, with faun-like eyes, and his tongue could spellbind or be serpent-barbed.

Fleet Street accepted us—not only in the newspaper but in a general sense. It was like living in a village with the local post office, the local stores and all the gossip of the Temple. It was the only flat, and we the sole residents in that ancient thoroughfare. If I were wanted at home quite suddenly, a message *via* a chain of newspaper sellers would reach me by verbal telegram, and the shops were all helpful and considerate in the way of war rations.

Cecil spent several leaves in Fleet Street. It was a queer, truncated sort of married life, but when, during tragically short periods he was at home, existence suddenly grew strong and splendid. I realised also that love and war, which can change the heart of a man, can also alter his habits. To my amazement, the impossibly untidy creature of the *New Witness* days developed a real concern for his appearance, kept his shoes polished, his hair brushed, and even attempted to arrange his possessions in some kind of order. His dreadful briar

was comparatively innocent from nicotine, and never once was I awakened by the smell of tobacco in the early dawning. He was always in the highest spirits, went eagerly to shows and had a vast appetite for parties—of ,the Fleet Street variety.

We possessed at that time a household gem of uncertain age, long hair and an incredible temper. She was, however, a most efficient cook and housekeeper, and as my niece and I had to be out all day, we were very thankful to be able to leave the Gem to cope with rationing and the rest. But this particular brand of family retainer has generally one great drawback, and Hannah, like the rest of her tribe, suffered—as we did—from an over, whelming sense of possession. She regarded the Cottage as her special domain which we were permitted to inhabit, and woe betide us if we were late for meals or failed to praise her marketing excellence and succulent dishes.

We all paid lip service quite glibly and, generally speaking, it sufficed. But the question of a party was a different matter, and if we so much as mentioned the word, she would spring like a tigress to the defence of the rations, and intimate that if the week's supplies were tampered with, she would forthwith depart.

There were, however, certain foods which though couponed could be got hold of, albeit feloniously. It was therefore proposed that, on the Saturday before Cecil's leave was up, we should have a rag, independent of the store cupboard, and I was rash enough to mention the proposal before Hannah, who went up in the air at the idea, only coming down to earth when Ada undertook to restrain our

lamentable propensities to waste substance on the undeserving.

All the same, we were determined that Cecil should have his party, and Ada and I conspired to get Hannah out of the way. We gave her a week-end ticket to the family home in Sussex, as a reward for her devotion, and arranged that she should catch a train mid-day, which would leave the coast clear for preparations. Early that morning, Cecil and I set out on a foraging expedition. Various friendly hostelries let us have illegal portions of ham, which gradually totted up to round about two pounds ; we procured some large loaves and Marie Louise presented a pound of butter. Further, we discovered a Belgian cake shop where we bought buns and brioches, and a delicatessen store unearthed a small but succulent bundle of sausages. Loaded like dromedaries, we got back to the Cottage just before one o'clock, feeling certain that the Gem would be safely out of the way.

But she must have had a suspicion that we were up to something, for at the last moment, she had informed my niece that she was catching a later train, as she could not feel sure what might happen in her absence. Ada assured her that we had no intention of upsetting the place, and under pressure, she agreed to go, and then, just as she was descending the stairs, we bounded from a taxi and rushed up the rickety steps, running full tilt against her avenging figure.

" You've been shopping, Madam ? " she said.

I could feel her eyes boring into the ham, and desperately shook a huge bag of buns in front of her. " Shoes ! " I said, " I've been buying shoes." At this moment Cecil let fall the parcel of bread,

which bounced from stair to stair until the paper finally gave way, revealing the loaves in all their guilt. In his confusion, he dropped the sausages, and in face of this evidence, I cowered against the wall, still murmuring " shoes."

But the day was not yet lost. With magnificent presence of mind, Cecil cast all parcels to the winds, and firmly grasping Hannah by the arm, led her down to the street and put her in a taxi.

Gathering our party remnants together, we laughed our way up to the Cottage and to celebrate the rout of the enemy decided to go out to lunch.

That was a really funny day. Having ordered a meal, we were enjoying a cocktail in the bar, when my brother entered. In reality, he and I were the best of chums, but he had a knack of evolving strange grievances against me, of which I was always profoundly ignorant. On this occasion, he returned my greeting with a sombre formality which augured the worst, and while Cecil went for some drinks, I asked him what special enormity I had committed.

His reply was astonishing.

" That," he said majestically, " I cannot explain, in the presence of your husband."

It might have been Mrs. Boffin to whom he was alluding, and as I had never visualised Cecil as the kind of person his words suggested, I began to laugh. Cecil, who had heard what Charlie said, protested that he might as well have been described as a Victorian sideboard, and that he had always loathed mahogany. But my brother regarded this pleasantry as out of place and, with a Dickensian bow, abruptly left us.

I never discovered the particular offence which I had perpetrated, but for a long time I alluded to Cecil as the sideboard, until he threatened to grow long and spidery whiskers if I persisted.

Our rag was a great success and went on until the small hours of the morning. But Cecil was up like a lark and went off as fresh as paint, his dear face smiling and happy.

"You can't think how marvellous it is to be home, kiddy. I am taking back enough happiness to last me until I'm here again."

His voice had such a joyous ring that the few passers-by upon that early Sunday morning turned and looked and wondered that a soldier could so cheerily return to a front of mud and lice.

And then he was in the taxi, and I went back to help clear up the last guilty traces of the rag.

It was by Cecil's special wish that I did not go with him to the station. He said it hurt more to leave me standing on the platform than in the Cottage, which he knew and loved so well.

Cecil was sent back sick from France once or twice. But his spirit was so unconquerable that he rallied very quickly and returned to the front within a very short time. Whole troops of friends always came along when he turned up, and most evenings fellow journalists would arrive, bearing bottles of beer or wine. That period saw the beginning of the bottle party, though its latest development is but a shoddy substitute of the original idea of a splendidly communal feast. On the occasion when we defeated Hannah, we had hoped that Gilbert would be with us. He had indeed promised to come along, but could not manage it. He contrived, however, to look in for

tea with Frances, early in the afternoon—before the Bodega was open, leaving while it was still shut.

For the first few months of 1918 Cecil was steadily in France. Meanwhile the news grew worse, the casualties greater, and there were rumours of a division in our military command and grave discontent among our troops. Scomo, as his friends called C. K. Scott Moncrieff, had been sent home, grievously wounded. He had made his reputation as a fearless soldier and fine officer and had been decorated for gallantry in the field. He was in one of the big houses in Carlton House Terrace, lent to the War Office as a hospital, and I was intensely relieved to find him looking better than I had expected. But the mischief was deep seated. One of his feet had been terribly shattered, and only by the greatest skill was it saved from amputation. As it was, most of the foot had to be cut away. He had had a bad bout of trench fever in France, and the poison never really left his system, but flamed out again and again until at last it killed him.

But he was far from death that spring morning, and his bed was surrounded by relatives and friends. The Scott Moncrieffs were not only a most distinguished, but a much inter-married family. Scomo's father and mother were cousins, and one of the younger members of the clan declared that they were so spread about the world that he never could escape his kith and kin, and that wherever a Scott Moncrieff went another arrived, so that you had to go very far afield for a wife, to avoid any risk of consanguinity. The Judge, Scomo's father, was not at the hospital, and his

mother was in command. With her was a most distinctive, almost awe-inspiring lady dressed in fine and all enduring tweeds. I had the misfortune to create an unfavourable impression on her. I was wearing a new coat and skirt because Scomo liked nice clothes, and I always think a woman should look her best by a hospital bed.

She looked at me, and I knew the worst.

" Your husband is fighting ? " she said.

I meekly agreed.

" It's queer how some women can dress up when their men are in danger," she said coldly. " You mustn't take what I say unkindly," she added, " but war calls for staid clothes and sensible thinking."

It was her point of view and I quite appreciated it. But Scomo suggested that his mother had an appointment with his father, and it was time for her to keep it. She departed, and with her went the friend, dignified, but bristling, and Scomo took my hand and grinned. Dress was a vexed question in the last war. Women gloried in their uniforms, which, for the most part, were so evil-fitting that the wearers very often looked shapeless and puffy. On the other hand, women out of uniform either adopted a worthy style or became flippant in cut and challenging in head-gear. It was with this variety that the soldiers seemed to walk out.

When Scomo was better he asked me and Robert Nichols to lunch at Simpsons. It was forbidden for any officer to entertain in a public restaurant, consequently he had to pay the bill through a friend, generally a woman, slipping the cash under the table. Robert Nichols, high spirited, magnetic, full of temperament, was looking very well; slight

and eager, he always seemed poised for flight. He had just published his first book of poems, "A Faun's Half Holiday," and Scomo had given it a glowing notice in the *New Witness.* Nichols was a very joyous person in those days. Vivid and impatient, he would never wait for the office door to be opened, but would jump through the window of the lobby with a laugh and a big bag of fruit for the staff.

He was in the most amusing mood at Simpsons, which still groaned with every kind of food. But suddenly he grew overcast. A very fat, gross-looking man, the *beau ideal* of a profiteer, was eating at the next table. He had already consumed his meat coupon, grumbling at the smallness of a huge helping of beef with vegetables and sauce and bread and butter—the last named feloniously obtained—when he ordered cheese and sent for the manager because there were only three kinds for him to choose from.

That finished Nichols. He was on his feet in a flash, pouring out his opinion on pigs and profiteers who guzzled in safety while young men faced the guns. Scomo backed him up with Scots invective, and at the finish Nichols, springing on the table, addressed the entire restaurant, when the profiteer turned tail and fled.

Alec Waugh met Scott Moncrieff also through the paper. Scomo had praised "The Loom of Youth" sky high, and Alec was charmingly appreciative. Sensitive and a little shy, with a sudden radiant smile, he has a capacity for friendship that neither time nor separation can ever dull, and I have never called on him for help in vain.

It was soon after Scomo's exciting lunch at Simpson's that Cecil had a most devastating blow. He was sent from France with a septic hand—discharged from active service. He did not return to the Cottage, however, or to civilian life, but was invalided to Bridge of Allan, and installed in the regimental office to answer the telephone and take care of the records. I was allowed to visit him a week or so later.

My arrival had been preceded by much excitement. To find accommodation for a soldier's wife does not strike one as providing excessive difficulty, but it required much search and considerable finesse to fix me up. It was impossible to go to an hotel, owing to the military social distinctions which cropped up on every hand, and any letter of lodgings sniffed at the idea of a private wanting rooms for his wife, and being unco guid, would not entertain the idea of housing a woman living in sin. At last, in desperation, Cecil trotted out his Scots lineage, and immediately the little widow he was trying to get round became entirely malleable. No descendant of a Keith, she was sure, would bring shame on an honest home, and she would have his wife and welcome.

It was a small and rather stuffy house with a huge, gaunt press in our bedroom and a gas bracket under the mantelpiece that poked its way through red velvet curtains. The landlady was bursting with national pride.

"And isn't it gey fine the way Scotland's condoocting the war?" she asked, leaving poor inconsiderable England unmentioned.

It was indeed almost like living under a conqueror's rule to stay in the lovely little township.

No London paper was on sale, and no London fashions were to be seen in any of the shops.

Mrs. Mac Andrews had welcomed me, but I am not at all sure she accepted me. When, after Cecil had gone to camp, she brought me an early cup of black tea, strong as gunpowder, she was genuinely shocked to find her lodger wearing a silk night-gown.

"And it's the bare flesh ye ken?" she said, gazing at my throat. "Ye poor body, I'll be fetching ye a tidy." And she forcibly draped round my reluctant shoulders a thick crochet antimacassar of wool. Whether she thought I was cold or merely shameless I never discovered.

I was relieved to find that though Cecil was very cut up at not returning to the trenches, he was not too gloomy. But, knowing how quickly he always recuperated, and that, so soon as he was fit, he would strive to get back to France, I asked him to promise that he would accept the authorities' decision and not attempt to volunteer again.

"You've had your way," I urged, "you've been in the front line, seen hard service, and I think you should reconcile yourself to remaining in England for the duration . . . if only for my sake."

He gave me his word, and we took a deep breath and began to discuss the future. It was the first time since our marriage that we had been able to have a long talk apart from the fret of hectic leaves, and as always when we wanted to arrange things of importance, he suggested we should go for a walk. It was a gorgeous day, and the sun shone on the long stretch of moorland, purple with heather, reaching to the ridge of hills that marked

the Highlands. The world was full of adventure and romance, and for once war seemed banished from the earth.

All the same, it was queer that we should devise the coming years in wealth of detail, while over the Channel the news grew worse and worse ; but we had learned to concentrate on those moments which life occasionally brought us, and there was much to say.

Cecil started on what we were going to do, and what he wanted me to do after the Peace. He told me it had always been his hope that after we were married—he had steadily visualised the possibility—I might be able to quit the daily grind of journalism and devote myself to writing things of more permanent value.

" You could do such fine stuff, kiddy," he said, " such wonderful stuff, if you had breathing space, and needn't fag about getting money for the moment."

He went on to outline his scheme. He was afraid he could not part with me as his assistant on the *New Witness,* but I was to be relieved of all detail at the office and at the printers, and only give him a day, or at the most two, in the week. He was quite confident, as I was, of his future, from a financial point of view. He felt sure he would be returned to Parliament, and his salary as M.P., with his earnings as a speaker and writer, would have kept a home quite comfortably without my having to contribute very much.

It was a lovely dream, but even as he outlined his ideas, his hopes, his aspirations for me, I felt in my bones that ease was not my portion. For I am Saturday's Child, and to the end must work

hard for my living. Sometimes I wonder what it must feel like to be without the spur of having to find rent and rates and food and fire. To be free to write what I wish, unhampered by the lack of pence which inevitably stands in the way, and I imagine myself turning out fine stuff in such a warm-lapped security. And then I remember that security makes for smooth ways and easy thoughts, and that I am at home with neither, but must always make my bread in venture and striving.

But on that morning, under the clear sky, the picture Cecil painted of our future had a great attraction. Never for a moment did I think it was only a vision in the mirror of hope. For already his will was set, his brain fired for accomplishment, and he was so eloquent, so earnest, that I believed all that he desired for us would come to pass.

We had lunch at an old inn on the hillside, and Cecil, to prove his Scots blood, tossed off a neat whisky to prepare his throat for ale—a process he repeated more than once. It was late afternoon when we got back to Bridge of Allan. But the shops were still open, and he darted into a little florist's and reappeared with a bunch of my favourite deep red carnations which had been specially brought from Stirling. We wandered along the High Street, and Cecil suddenly saw a rather charming silk scarf of different shades of blue.

" That looks like my mother," he exclaimed, and duly bought it. I took his gift to Marie Louise with a note, and her delight was very charming. That Cecil should have thought of her and troubled as to her taste, was infinitely precious to the little lady.

I walked back to the camp with him that evening —I was leaving the next morning early—and he could not get leave to stay the night or to see me off at the station. But he did not grumble ; indeed I never saw him more joyous or complete.

He watched me down the hill until I was out of sight, his sturdy figure lined against the sky, taut and triumphant. And I felt completely sure that save for drills and routine duties, Cecil's army life had come to an end.

While he was stationed at Bridge of Allan, Private Chesterton contrived to put in several week-ends at Glasgow with Professor Phillimore. He wanted to look up documents and authorities on American history, and at the same time had a keen appreciation of his host's society. He had a thoroughly good time, and the book made considerable progress. Phillimore used to arrange gatherings of those likely to interest his visitor, and Cecil seems to have made an impression on most of them. I heard about his visit when, years after, I went up to Glasgow to lecture. Men spoke of his marvellous memory, his easy flow of narrative, the quickness with which he would seize on an unexpected point of discussion, and his ready wit. I heard also from some of the students of the dreadful sacrilege Private Chesterton had committed. The Professor had an objection to the soft, green sward of the quadrangle facing his house being trod by profane feet. Cecil, blindly unconscious, had tramped all over the sacred lawn, but the Professor, visibly wincing, had said nothing.

Meanwhile, the *New Witness* was pegging along, and the war news grew worse and worse. Just when the crisis was at its gravest Cecil wrote me

the most unexpected letter. I had left him looking forward to our life in peacetime. Suddenly, he crashed all plans in a violent upheaval. He wrote to tell me, with the most impassioned appeal, that for the first time in all the years we had known each other, he had broken his word. He knew he had promised not to volunteer again, but the Colonel had made a vital request which he could not withstand. Our armies were in a dangerous fix ; man power was short, reinforcements urgently needed, and Cecil, on an immediate impulse, offered to go. He was passed as fit, and would I please forgive him?

And two days later, after a few short hours with me, he went.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE END OF A CHAPTER

WARTIME life in London during the spring of 1918 became extremely hectic. Queer cafés sprang up and queerer clubs. The Armenian in Beak Street, run by a pathetic little man known as Bolo, collected all the international flotsam and jetsam, with home-grown products thrown in. Artists were very popular; Augustus John was often there, with Epstein, and very occasionally C. R. W. Nevinson would look in. Nina Hamnett, a regular habitué, used often to scrap with a lady known as the "Virgin of Soho." There was a standing challenge between them as to which had the best figure, and on one occasion so heated was the argument, that the Virgin stripped out and, like Phryne, called upon the people to judge. Bolo hustled draperies around her, tactfully preventing a vote and an inevitable free fight between their supporters.

Nina was a very brilliant artist, but her male portraits always seemed to have a family resemblance to King Alfonso in a kind of perpetual Spanish Succession. Rowley Smart, perhaps the finest etcher of this particular time, was always surrounded by admiring females. He had a penchant for brunettes of a slightly flamboyant type, and would turn up at our flat in Fleet Street early in the morning with a brilliant beauty and ask if I could give them breakfast.

" You see," he would say, " we have just been married, and I feel it calls for celebration."

I really believed it the first time, but after a succession of variegated wives, I did not argue, but accepted the situation. They always had coffee.

The Black Cat used to collect large crowds of the same people, with contingents of Tommies, few of whom seemed quite happy among the striped walls, all green and orange, the blue lamps and dance partners in pseudo-Eastern costume. Dancing was very much the rage, the smaller clubs had their orchestra, and enthusiasts would fox-trot in a space little larger than a kitchen table. It was the idea that " the boys " must be entertained, and devoted women from offices would rush from their work to the West End for cocktails and a sandwich, and plunge into strenuous gaiety until the small hours.

Everyone gave parties—mostly bottle—all hopelessly overcrowded and rather drunken. Pretty girls, in an excess of mateyness, would sit on perfectly strange knees, which often seemed to have no possible relation to their owner's face. Literary fads and fancies crowded the air. Aleister Crowley was acclaimed a poet on the strength of his immortal lines on Amorous Cannibalism :

" Only her face and hands and feet
I kissed all night and did not eat."

Anna Wickham, the Queen of the Café Royal, wrote Free Verse—" I have no physical need of a Chair "—and was hailed as the voice of the future. The graver the news, the more eager the desire to cheer the men returning to the inferno, the more

poignant the craving to forget the fear which clawed at every woman's heart.

The *New Witness* carried on at a slower tempo and a noticeable caution, except on the literary side, where Scomo fixed pretentious persons with a dagger pen and welcomed shy talent with winged praise. He was back in France by this time, not, alas, with his regiment, his military days were over, but attached to G.H.Q. as an Observer. This period, I think, saw the beginning of his acquaintance with that brilliantly irritable writer, Captain Osbert Sitwell. They were great friends at first, but later temperamental stress set in, which culminated in a lively correspondence in the *New Witness.*

Scomo reviewed a book of Osbert's, which alluded to the author being at the front, though at that time he was at home. Scott Moncrieff, suddenly enraged, likened Osbert to those casual callers at a club or an hotel who use the headed note-paper as their address. This produced a violent reply, suggesting that Scomo, who had played the part of the keeper in the mad scene of the Duchess of Malfi at a Stage Society production, had been well chosen, inasmuch as sadism was his natural relaxation. Our correspondence columns bristled with accusations and rejoinders, until, in grave perplexity as to what it was all about, Gilbert decided that the gallant young men, who appeared to be throwing their wounds in each other's faces, must now cease.

Years after, on his last visit to London, Scomo, at the Russian Ballet, saw Osbert in the foyer during a performance of *Petrushka.* Turning to a mutual acquaintance, he asked him to suggest that

Osbert and he should have a drink and be friends. The message was delivered, but Captain Sitwell did not respond. He came to within shouting distance and announced that he would never forgive Scomo his detractions, adding : " But I admit your translation of Proust is sheer genius ! "

" It's not his fault," Scomo explained. " The Sitwells are like elephants. They never forget."

There was another dust-up of a minor character with this distinguished family. We had published a notice of Edith Sitwell's " Wheels " in which the author's style was described as " diaphanous." Osbert and Sacheverel called to complain. They would not sit, neither would they stand, but prowled the office up and down like hungry wolves, tearing the word diaphanous to pieces. They insisted it was an opprobrious epithet and asked if I should like such an adjective applied to me. The vogue for boyish figures at that time going strong, prompted my eager affirmative, for which I was permanently banned. Even that witty and most genial woman, Eliza Aria, could not induce the Captain to shake hands with me—diaphanous barred the way. All the same, I like good haters ; the more irrelevant the more virulent, seems to be the Sitwell rule.

Meanwhile, I was doing a lot of work for Sidney Dark, feature editor just then of the *Daily Express.* I had written for the paper on and off, since I was first in Fleet Street, when as their representative I went as chorus girl in a Drury Lane pantomime. I wrote my articles, played two shows a day and had a most amusing time. My friends used to sit in front and grin at me. One of them, a press

colleague, brought a serious-minded High Church curate on one occasion, who was a little shocked.

"Would St. Paul have done it?" he asked, when Joe explained my reasons for wearing tights.

"It depends on St. Paul's legs," was the reply, and the discussion dropped.

Sidney Dark is the most accomplished writer, and I begrudge his embalmment as Editor of the *Church Times.* But though interred he retains his marvellous knowledge of food, and still talks incomparably of wine—and sometimes women.

He was irretrievably anti-Polish, however, and even the most eloquent member of their National Committee could not interest him. In this respect he was like Clifford Sharp, who about this time joined the Army as a ranker. He 'phoned up to tell me the news and we had a drink together. Clifford Sharp came of a deeply religious family, his father and mother having a great deal to do with the foundation of the China Mission. They had also been strong supporters of Moody and Sankey and their Evangelist campaign. Clifford—or Dyce as we used to call him—remained Victorian in many of his tastes and traits, and would never swear or tell the mildest story of a *risqué* character before a woman. He did not remain a private long; he was whisked out by the authorities and went to Sweden as an intelligence official.

By 1918 London was practically a khaki encampment. Where Bush House now stands at Aldwych were military huts where first the Canadians and then the Americans were installed. Lastly came the Australians, who were intensely popular. Crowds used to gather to watch these splendidly built, soft-voiced men. They were always helpful

and encouraging. I remember when walking home through many a raid, while the shrapnel spattered, I would hear their friendly injunction : " Hurry home, Cissy, there's a raid on."

During raids No. 3 Fleet Street was the gathering place for newspaper men and friends living in the Temple. It was a different war then, and no one felt undue apprehension at being on the top storey. We had bombs fairly close to us—in Pump Court and in Chancery Lane—but the damage was inconsiderable. We used to talk, or someone would play the piano, or we would start a game of cards. The police would occasionally call upon us—the City Force are very friendly with a large-hearted contempt for the " Mets," as they call the Metropolitan contingent, whose frontier is marked off by the City Griffin. It was not unusual to see a poor dishevelled reveller of either sex gently but firmly shepherded by the City constables over the dividing line, to be drastically returned by their Metropolitan rivals. The human shuttle-cock might eventually be sobered by the time one or other of the contingents decided to accept him.

We had a big gathering the night Foch took over the Allied command. The relief was inexpressible, it seemed as if at last we might dare to begin to hope. Cecil at Ypres, wallowing in mud, but full of ardour, had been given a liaison job as his French was fluent. He had a bottle of wine a day for extra duty, and seized the opportunity to cash additional cheques ; but though, like the eternal reign of the war years, they seemed to fall unceasingly on the bank manager's head, Private Chesterton always negotiated funds to meet them. His letters, invariably vivid, full of amazingly swift

pictures of the men he met, had outbursts of tender passion, aeons away from rat-ridden trenches, waist deep in water, verminous dugouts, all the foulness and the stench of slaughter, as though he remembered only his wife . . . .

Marie Louise was keeping open house for all Cecil's khaki friends on leave, including stray Chestertons of the Games Section, who always came to see her. She had taken to her heart and home a young war widow—previously a maid in the Chesterton service—and her small boy. For years these two had the most loving, understanding home at Warwick Gardens, where they remained until the death of its mistress. Marie Louise and Edward consoled the mother, and cherished her son with infinite care and kindliness.

Vast parcels were despatched to Cecil, and socks were perpetually knitted, but in her heart Marie Louise, I think, had a quiet but unending fear, as though she knew her boy would not come back to her. Never for a moment had I any such misgiving. Cecil did not seem to have the least touch of depression, even the mire which apparently coagulated in a dense mass about his body was a source of amusement to him. He was full of delight and admiration of an American soldier, who had joined the British Army in 1914. They had met each other in hospital, where Cecil had gone sick for a few weeks. Lance-Corporal Wood, of the King's Own Liverpools, had hailed from Massachusetts and Private Chesterton had revelled in his reminiscences. Cecil's " History of the United States " was dedicated to this comrade.

The Armistice with its sudden, incredible cessation of war came almost as a shock. The youth

of the nation found it difficult to ease the tension. There was a feeling almost of flatness.

"Why, there'll be nothing to get excited over," said a young thing unable to visualise a future without air-raids or food rationing. She largely expressed the reaction of her generation. All the same, the night of November nth was wildly hilarious. Every restaurant was crowded, and in every restaurant the National Anthems of the Allies were sung. These Anthems were one of the minor ordeals of the war, especially the jiggy rhythm of the Belgian and the absurd twiddles of the Japanese. At Piccadilly Circus a sailor climbed the pillar which enshrined the statue of Eros, while an excited mess-mate tried to drive a baby Pujol car up the plinth. All London had flocked into the streets. Omnibuses, cars, lorries, crowded with human beings clinging like flies, rushed up and down the Strand discharging and picking up cargoes at random. It was the same in every thoroughfare. Everyone cheered, for everyone believed that the old bad days of food shortage, broken sleep, and unspeakable transport were over, and that a new era including homes for heroes and jobs for all was to begin.

Like the *New Witness,* I did not share these hopes or beliefs. We had defeated the enemy abroad, but the professional politicians were still dug in on the home front. In my case, however, the future was brightened by the prospect of Cecil's speedy return, with his election for Parliament and his resumption of the editorship of the paper, which badly needed his vigorous and incisive pen.

Fleet Street on Armistice evening was an excited mass of khaki and friendship. The Cottage seethed

with people, eager to wish good luck to both of us, and a swift come-back for Cecil.

But there was no word from him that day, nor any answer to my telegram of joy. His letters had come so regularly, always brim full of love and anticipation that I felt terribly anxious. But day followed day without a line, in spite of my frantic appeals for news. I had previously arranged for the Polish Committee to hold a meeting at our flat the following Saturday evening, to elucidate the territorial claims of their country, and I felt I could not disappoint them. A jolly crowd turned up. Geoffrey Howard, one of the most delightful poets writing for the *New Witness,* arrived unexpectedly on leave, and added to the general gaiety by some marvellous conjuring tricks. Nowadays he is at the Bar, but he still juggles with words and cards and produces the same ecstatic effects.

The claims of Poland, reinforced by Voodka, went down very well, though even then there were those who suspected the official Poles of what we now call Fascism, then described merely as " oppressive tendencies." It was, I am sure, a stirring evening, but my heart was very heavy. An alarming note from Cecil arrived by the late post, which, inexplicably delayed, should have reached me days earlier. He explained that he had not been feeling at all well, but had not gone sick until after the Armistice, when he felt he could be spared from the line. He wrote from a hospital at Wimereux, and there was an underlying note of pain and disappointment that gave me a queer foreboding, which deepened as the night wore on.

He did not say, what I afterwards learned, that

on reporting sick he had had to march from Ypres for twelve miles in the heavy rain, until at last the Officer Commanding, seeing how ill he was, told him to fall out. He was by then soaked through and through and when, after a long train journey and a bumpy passage in a lorry, he finally reached the base, he was seriously ill with nephritis. It was another instance of the ghastly muddle that seems to dog so many of our military arrangements.

The night of the Polish meeting I only knew he was in hospital. On Monday morning I had more serious news. I received a telegram from the War Office which should have reached me on the previous Friday, It stated that Private Chesterton was on the danger list, but regretted that owing to transport difficulties I could not be allowed to visit him.

This, coming after the Armistice, was not only inhuman but preposterous, and immediately I got busy.

The situation was tragically ironical. I 'phoned up the War Office, and was informed that, if my husband were an officer, transport would be forthwith arranged. But he was not an officer—only a private soldier—and red tape said I could not go to him. I turned to Fleet Street for help, and the papers did not fail me.

They splashed the story, hitting at officialdom hip and thigh. But still I could not go. I tried then for a journalist's pass, which was easy. I could have it in three days—not as the wife of a Tommy, but as a newspaper correspondent. But in three days Cecil might no longer be—even in danger, and I fought desperately for some way out.

It was then that a friend in the Air Force—I do

not give his name as he is still under military jurisdiction—rang me up to say that, if I would come to Folkestone, he would fly me over to Wimereux and chance Court Martial. I accepted eagerly and was just 'phoning to Warwick Gardens when Gilbert turned up at the office. Like a dreadnought, he was always slow in getting under weigh, but when at last he got going he pushed ahead. He told me he had seen Maurice Baring, who had put wires in motion, and late that afternoon I was informed that transport *was* available, and early the next morning I left Charing Cross with a crowd of soldiers' wives and mothers. The usual ghastly muddle had been made, and at the time I was told I could not go to France there were passages by train and ship in plenty and to spare.

Class distinction is never more cruel, I think, than in moments of great anguish. Officers' wives, in their first-class carriages, had physical space and comfort, in which they could, if they wished, privately cry. We were herded like cattle in compartments dense with humanity. Six of us stood all the way to Folkestone, while a short distance down the corridor were first-class carriages holding, in many cases, only two or three occupants. It was a miserable crossing. We propped each other up in heaps upon the deck—second class—under the care of a little Salvation Army Captain who tried to cheer us with hymns. Mercifully, he did not interpolate prayers—we were past vocal expression of our hopes and fears, for to each one of us sounded the dread rhythm—shall I be in time, shall I be in time ?

Red tape enveloped our arrival. We were

checked up at Boulogne Station, and again when we were deposited at a bleak hostel for soldiers' dependants. We were taken to a long bare room and given tea—there was no escape, though we all felt it would choke us. And then after a wash and brush up we were taken to our respective omnibuses *en route* for the different hospitals.

Our 'bus had a friendly look—it was my own familiar No. 11 which careers in droves down Fleet Street to this day. Over the rough cobblestones, along the winding roads, across the cliffs, it was already evening when we reached Wimereux where, such a little while ago, Cecil and I had sat outside an estaminet and talked to workmen, taxi-drivers, grandmothers and family men.

But darkness had fallen on the estaminets and on the country, and as I peered through the windows of the 'bus I could only see a row of queer gargantuan monster-looking buildings crouching on the ground. They were Field Hospitals, known as Missen huts, and instinctively I dreaded them.

I stumbled across the entry of one of these places, dark and to me full of gloom. The Matron, lamp in hand, looked at me coldly when she learnt my name.

" So you've come—at last," she said. " We've been waiting for you for weeks. Why didn't you come when we first telegraphed ? "

I felt like crying at that moment. I just held out the telegram from the War Office and waited.

She looked up quickly.

" I'm very sorry," she said kindly. " They must have sent our message to you to someone else—and you got theirs."

I had to be content with this explanation, but the thought kept turning in my brain—had Cecil been an officer and not a common soldier, had the War Office been even moderately efficient I should not have had the wrong wire, I should have been with my husband for days and days.

I was half across the ward when Cecil's voice rang out clear and strong as on his marriage day.

" Kiddy ! " he said. " You've come."

He talked and laughed, and declared he felt much better. But he said nothing of the future and asked a little wistfully about Fleet Street and the Cottage, his mother and our friends.

After a while he grew tired and closed his eyes. One by one the lights went out, till only a glimmer of lampshine remained. Vast shadows flickered across the ceiling ; the Missen hut seemed to crouch lower on the ground and in the distance the sea broke softly on the shore.

" He's sleeping now," said a nurse, and asked me to come to another room.

Before the dawn I was back again. There was a change—for the worse. And when the first pale gleams of lovely sunshine crept through the windows I knew it was the end.

" It's good-bye, Kiddy darling," he said smiling, and clutched my hand.

There were screens round the bed in that long bare room, but from the other side came the sound of cheerful voices. The men, mostly convalescent, whistled and sang and polished boots and kit, joked and laughed until, with the kindliness of the soldier, they remembered that their comrade was going out, and hushed their voices.

As I watched I realised that the news that he

was dying would have been flashed to Fleet Street, to be followed very soon by the announcement of his death. Marie Louise might hear it cried out in the streets. I could not bear that she should learn in such a way that Cecil had left us. But if I went, even for a minute, I might come back to find him gone.

A nurse helped me. She took my message to Gilbert and got it wired through to Beaconsfield. But Gilbert could not face his brother's death, He left it to Frances to tell his mother—which added to her hurt.

She told me later how she had asked—only I knew how broken-heartedly—" Can't I speak to my son, even now ? "

And then, but not till then, she heard Gilbert's voice. . . .

Cecil looked up and smiled. Life was all round him and me : only in the brave face that still kept courage was it ebbing little by little, until it passed beyond the last faint breath.

Suddenly the consciousness came down on me that all our hopes and dreams, light-hearted plans, ambitious undertakings had gone. The future—our future—had ended. I should never hear him speak again. I should never feel his touch, or watch the light in his eyes when unexpectedly he saw me.

I could not think. The blank was so intolerable, the pain so limitless I could not stay inside the hut. I **had** to get into the open ; but the sky and the sea and the earth in their vast aloofness were frightening. I could find nothing to lay hold of.

I think I was on the borderline of endurance when suddenly, without conscious wish or will, the

long slope of the cliff side, curving out and down to the channel far below, held my eyes. It was a carpet of sea lavender, grey and blue and pink. The sheer fact of the small proud flowers brought a dim sense of security. In a world of torture they remained serene. Right up to the door of that grim squatting hut, soaked in the blood of sons, husbands and lovers, beauty had laid a tender touch. Before time was, perhaps, sea lavender had cloaked the shores in merciful rejection of man's cruelty to man.

I gripped at self-control and went back to my husband. He looked happy and quite peacefully at rest.

The Matron and the staff were most good to me. They let me stay quite quietly at the hospital till the evening, when I returned to the hostel and red tape. Perhaps red tape in some cases is a tonic. Even in my anguish I felt so angry at being card indexed like a sheep that it awoke my heart. A young girl, tragic and lovely, broke into passionate crying when the Superintendent checked up her past. Her husband had died that afternoon. They had been married in 1914 and she had a child. I never knew under what auspices the hostel was conducted, but I gather it was run by the War Office or some Ministry on strict institutional lines.

I have always loathed and hated officialdom. In State offices it is bleak and barren, and in human relationships it is lifeless and callous.

The hostel hurt like frost on an open wound, and I left it the next morning inexpressibly thankful for escape. At the little shop on the Square, where I bought the black hat and gloves conven-

tion demanded, Madame gave me a warm sympathy which helped on my journey to the Cemetery. There I found Cecil's special nurse waiting, and together we listened to the burial service and watched the coffin lowered into the narrow grave that, like hundreds of others, lined the hills. The Last Post echoed across the sea. . . .

The life of Private Chesterton was over.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

ESCAPE

THERE were, I felt, two ways of healing a great emotional hurt. I could either endure familiar surroundings until time softened the sting of reiterated memory, or by a swift effort break from my previous way of life, and in new experience and fresh efforts try to retrieve a certain measure of peace.

I chose the latter course. I could not have borne just then to live and breathe and have my being in the Street where Cecil and I had worked and planned and loved together, and I felt the only chance of building a future on anything like sure foundations lay in a temporary absence from daily and hourly recollections and comparisons. I had to face the fact that the strongest tie of my life was broken, and to guard against ignominious collapse I had to go away.

I turned my eyes towards Poland that Cecil had always contended would provide the key to post-war conditions in Europe. Her sudden miraculous gift of freedom opened amazing possibilities of rebirth. I decided to try my utmost to get there—and I succeeded, though at that time it was not easy. News was confused, the land frontiers were closed, and the only possible route was by sea to Danzig. These were considerable obstacles, **but** I did not let them worry me. The first thing was

to fix up a contract as special correspondent—opportunity would do the rest.

The *Daily Express* agreed that I should act as their representative, and it only remained to reach the land of newborn independence. For this I had the help of the Polish Committee. They had news that an American warship was taking a cargo of flour to Danzig as a gift to the Polish people. The English port of call would be Falmouth, and U.S.S. *Westward Ho !* was expected any day.

Admiral Sims, the American Naval Commander-in-Chief, gave me permission to sail. He was most kind, and I may say his consent was not half so difficult to win as the necessary passport from the British Foreign Office. They objected to my going to Danzig ; I was a woman, and both my name and my paper bristled with anti-Germanism. Reprisals might take place—Danzig was in a ferment, and they—the F.O.—did not want to be involved in my probable bumping-off. Patience and persistence broke them down, however, and at last I received the permit to travel, delivered with a final warning.

When every arrangement was complete, I went down to Beaconsfield and told Gilbert what I proposed to do. He was sympathetic and kindly, and it was agreed that while I was away W. R. Titterton, a clever pressman and a friend of Cecil's, should act as Gilbert's assistant, reinforced by Bunny's capacity and tact. Gilbert asked me to send him articles on Polish affairs, which I could dispatch with my personal letters through the Foreign Office. I had already had a talk with Marie Louise, and all I had to do was to await the arrival of *Westward Ho !* And how I waited, and

how the Polish Committee dillied and dallied over the sailing date.

The Poles, possibly by reason of inherited sabotage against their conquerors, are always uncertain as to dates. Like the Welsh, on matters of transport, they have a charming habit of telling you what they think you want to know. In this case the ship was to arrive each day, and every day it had not come.

I got through finally to Admiral Sims, who at a moment's notice rang me up to say that *Westward Ho!* was sailing from Falmouth the next day, February 14th, 1919. I packed wildly through the night, fighting against an awful heart-sinking at all that I was leaving, and grasping my baggage and a fur coat, said good-bye to Ada and the Cottage and dashed off.

Westward Ho ! carried officers and crew to the number of a hundred and fifty, and I was the one passenger and the only woman aboard. The Captain, an American Pole, was extremely charming, but felt a little perplexed as to my disposal. He finally decided that I should have the use of his cabin—near the bridge—and that he would shake down next door.

My quarters were most comfortable, almost palatial, with bathroom attached, and I used to join the Captain for morning coffee and rolls. It was a fascinating experience to be on that ship, able to roam where I liked, with someone always ready to answer innumerable questions. Those were the days of prohibition, and not a drop of beer, wine or spirits was allowed near the sacred precincts of *Westward Ho !* The Chief Engineer, with a delicious Irish brogue, compensated future

thirst by long hours of refreshment at Falmouth, from whence he was assisted by a devoted boat's crew. That was the only symptom of alcoholic festivity I saw throughout the voyage.

But the desire for God's good liquor quite obviously remained, and to assuage the craving all the officers and men ate pounds of candy. Whenever I had tea with a member of the executive, I always found in every cabin vast boxes of chocolate, fudge, caramels, any and every kind of sweetmeat, which my hosts would devour by handfùls.

The weather was very bad and the sea boisterously rough. We were the first ship since the Armistice through the North Sea, and as a consequence went mostly at half speed, with men constantly on the look-out for mines, ready to shoot at sight when they appeared. So stormy was our passage that for two days and nights the Captain did not leave the bridge. I would hear him come into his salon, shake his mackintosh and then, obviously stone cold, try to heat up with a lump of coconut ice or chocolate cream. His fingers fumbling with the paper really distressed me, it seemed cruel that a man could not have a nip on such an awful night. At last I could bear it no longer and, slipping on a dressing gown, I poured out a good drink from my travelling bottle of brandy and opening the door an inch pushed it through on the other side.

" Please, Captain," I whispered. " You'll die of cold if you don't."

I did not wait to see what happened. I only hoped ! We never mentioned the incident—it just faded into limbo.

The voyage usually takes three days and is a pleasant journey, but through those bleak and dangerous waters it was over a week before we reached the fine old Hansa port. *En route* we had exciting times. We saw the handing over of the German ships to the British Navy at Dogger Bank. The slim swift vessels came through the grey day like shadows until, suddenly lit up, they had a magic glow. They merged with their captors—or guardians—in a long and lovely line.

Then again, we had a queer experience at Rotterdam, where we shipped a German pilot who took us to the mouth of the Kiel Canal. He was an oldish man, obviously very flustered not to say frightened. His English was halting but intelligible, and he asked if he could be protected from the crew who he felt sure would try to kill him. He was not reassured until he sat down to a vast meal of cold roast pork, sausage, cheese and butter, with new bread and coffee. He actually cried at the sight of the pork, the second officer told me. He had not tasted it for three whole years, and he trembled as he devoured the crackling. He had not dreamt of eating food like that.

The next pilot was a different type. He was Prussian and in the war had commanded a submarine. Arrogance dripped from him, and he strode the deck with enmity. He gave the second officer a nasty time. This officer came from Charleston, which was, I think, the only town in the States to be shelled. There were few casualties, but among them was the officer's mother. The pilot, recognising the Southern accent, turned the conversation to Charleston and gave a spirited

description of what his submarine had done. I met the officer as he rushed for a moment from the bridge. His kind face was grim, and his warm and healthy tan had gone a queer, green hue.

He told me what had happened. "And I can't even hit him," he went on. "I can't even say what I think of him. I've got to be with the devil until we get to Kiel."

All along the banks of the canal silent crowds were gathered, watching us with a hate that seemed almost palpable. We were taking flour to Poland, and away from them—and they solemnly spat as we passed.

Late that evening, when we had reached the harbour, a dejected figure dressed in civvies came to the ship. He was the Chief Engineer of Kiel, and humbly begged our Irish Chief for a piece of soap.

At Danzig—or Gdansk as it is called in Polish—we were received by a German officer in full uniform. He was not arrogant, but his subservience was even more distasteful. He saluted the Captain, shook hands with as many of the officers as he could reach, and bowed to me. The Germans I met in Danzig mostly divagated between these two extremes. The Prussians still bullied—or tried to bully—the rest were pliant and occasionally cringing.

I left *Westward Ho I* and my kind hosts with regret. An American army officer took me along to the Danzigerhof where General Webb was in charge of the U.S.A. troops. He was a superb looking person, tall and thin and eagle eyed, and had seen service in Mexico. I was just in time for lunch and he gave me a seat next to him and a

glass of the golden champagne for which the city is famous—actual particles of gold dust shimmer in the wine.

General Webb suggested I should catch the afternoon train to Warsaw.

" The sooner you're away from here the better," he said. " There's already fighting in the streets in the centre of the city, and it's dangerous for you to remain."

I thanked him for his kindness, and as soon as lunch was over slipped from the hotel. The fighting between the German revolutionary soldiers and the regular army could be heard in the distance, and I was eager to see what was happening.

I was told that the rebels were short of ammunition, but that the rank and file of the regular forces were not keen to attack them. I watched one spirited scrap, but the fighting was not nearly so fierce or feverish as I witnessed later in Lwow.

I left Danzig the next day, after a laughing rebuke from the General, who told me he had guessed I did not mean to obey his injunctions.

The journey to Warsaw took twelve hours instead of four. We stopped at every station to be examined and cross-examined by the military or State officials. The Poles were thoroughly enjoying their re-emergence to authority, and would insist on the filling up of forms on every possible occasion.

The snow, already piled feet high along the streets of Warsaw, was still falling heavily, and only with great difficulty did I get a sleigh to the Hotel Bristol. There is, however, a key word in most languages which by incessant reiteration gets you a long way towards what you want. The key word in Polish is *prosha*—Please !—attached to

Pana—sir—or *Pani*—Madam, They are universal methods of address from prince to peasant, countess to charwoman.

The enthusiasm of the whole nation was expressed in the hero-worship of Paderewski, who had leapt from the piano stool to the Premiership, He had his headquarters in a flat at the top of the Hotel Bristol, with a marvellous view. Occasionally he invited the foreign correspondents to join him and his friends in the music room, when he would play until late into the night. State affairs fell from him as he touched the keys ; his face cleared, his eyes grew luminous, he took us with him into the land of enchantment. Those evenings at the Bristol were unique and unforgettable.

Madame Paderewski watched over her cherished husband with the most devoted care. Throughout his musical career she had guarded his peace of mind with Argus eyes. Before a recital she stood between him and letters, telegrams and telephones. She adopted the same measures during his political life. Nothing was allowed to disturb him before a Cabinet meeting ; indeed, on one occasion she held up a wire with the news that the Czechs had crossed the Carpathians so that the Premier met his fellow ministers in complete ignorance of what had happened. Madame was responsible for Paderewski's nickname, " Monsieur Five Ps "—Polish, patriot, pianist, premier and *pantoufle,* said the people, who though they smiled at him, loved him all the same.

Warsaw was a gay capital with charming parks and delightful cafés. Unlike Danzig, food was very plentiful and quite cheap. Lours, opposite the Bristol, was famous for its coffee, and was

always full of newspaper men for *petit dejeuner*. For some weeks I was the only English correspondent in the city, until one afternoon I found Rothay Reynolds waiting for me in the lounge. He had come out for the *Daily News* and was already knee deep in Polish newspapers. He spoke the curiously hissing language like a native. He and I used to have food together at Simon Stecki's famous little restaurant, where Warsaw pressmen and black and white artists gathered. On his brief visits from the front Pilsudski would sit at a small table by himself and order a simple meal with generally only a glass of mineral water. He habitually wore a shabby, almost threadbare uniform, which enhanced the spareness of his frame. His face was of a disconcerting pallor, illumined by deep-set glowing eyes. He looked like an ancient prophet, I always thought, with his impressive beard and suggestion of inward fire. He was regarded by the peasants and workers with sheer idolatry. He combined their two root hatreds against Russia and Germany; he had suffered tortures from both, and his endurance and exploits had become historic legends.

Meanwhile I was sending my despatches by wireless to the *Daily Express* and enclosing my articles for the *New Witness* in the British diplomatic bag. Gilbert was very pleased with my descriptions of peasant life in Lublin, where everything for home use was produced by the people. The only things they lacked were argicultural implements, top boots, and great coats, which the cities, divested of machinery by the Germans, could not supply. With that rooted antagonism between rural and urban populations, the Lublin

people, in retaliation, held up their grain. It was certainly an ideal opportunity for Distributism !

I stayed some weeks in Lublin, going from village to village, and always I was received with a charming courtesy. On Sundays the peasants were *en fete* in national costume—the Lublin colours were wine and green and flaming gold—and as they walked over the fields to church, emerging from the luminous grey mists which veiled the plains, it was as though fields of daffodils had come to worship.

But I not only enjoyed the peace and beauty of all that is real and enduring in Poland. I had my experiences in the fighting line.

At that time Lwow was beseiged by the Ukrainians. All the young and able-bodied men were with the main Polish Army under Pilsudski at Kiev, and the defence was in the hands of old men, schoolboys, girls and women. I have never seen anything like the fighting spirit of Lwow. Munitions were very short ; they had no artillery, not many rifles and insufficient cartridges. But the opposing forces were almost as badly commissioned, though they hopelessly outnumbered the besieged. There was hand-to-hand fighting in the streets, and, hard-pressed, the women helped to pour boiling water on the attackers from the housetops and the windows, with occasional ladles of molten metal. The indomitable courage, the inspired passion of the Polish women flamed above all else.

There was hardly any food left, but the city held on till Pilsudski arrived with his troops, when the Ukrainians retreated and Lwow breathed again.

From Lwow I went to Vilno in the north. It was a very long and toilsome journey. The train crawled—in more senses than one—and every carriage was sardine-packed with humanity. During the small hours of the morning, when I was suffering untold discomforts from verminous attentions, a Polish officer appeared, and having examined my press credentials, waved out my fellow passengers—they were all Jews with the ritual curls, long beards and gabardines—and had the carriage scrubbed down with birch-brooms and antiseptics, finally locking the door against further intrusion. For the rest of the night I slept in peace.

I found Vilno battered but not beaten. Here it was the Bolshevist invaders who had been driven back, leaving at their headquarters masses of papers and books—amongst them Russian translations of Gilbert's " The Man who was Thursday " and " The Club of Queer Trades "—a selection which greatly intrigued the Poles as well as me.

For twenty-four hours I went in an armoured car with the Polish Army in pursuit of the retreating Bolshevists, and the landscape of long low-lying plains was lit up by flame from the burning forest which an advanced Polish guard was battling to put out. So close, so fierce was the fire, that as we sped through our car was scorched and blackened. But we did not overtake the enemy, and gradually the fire slackened and died out, and I was thankful for the hospitality of a remote farmhouse where I had a hot bath and a luxurious breakfast with honey, hot rye bread and delicious coffee.

In contrast with this exciting adventure was a later delightful experience when I accompanied a

parliamentary deputation from Warsaw to Poznan. It was almost like musical comedy, for we stopped at every station *en route* to be greeted by a local band, speeches by the local mayor, bouquets and huge baskets of fruit and cakes. During the tour I accumulated a small Covent Garden of roses and a crate of apples.

It was towards the end of July, when the plane trees in full leaf cast a queer greeny shade on the pavements, and the frogs had toned down their marital croak, that G. K. wrote to ask me when I was returning. The sight of the beautiful Gothic script with all its familiar associations made me decide, almost in a moment, that I had been absent long enough. I put in my application for a seat in the diplomatic train, and started off for France at the end of the month.

I arrived in Paris in time for the peace demonstrations, and saw the processions from a window overlooking the Place de la Republique. The cheers which seemed to fill the earth and sky still echo—sadly—in my mind.

And so to London and my own dear Fleet Street. I was home.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE LESSER BROTHER

ON my return from Poland I launched out on a new enterprise. I had made many contacts abroad, not only with correspondents in Poland but with those in neighbouring countries, and I was able to rely on effective reports from varying sources. Accordingly I started the Eastern European News Service, which gradually became a success. I began in a funny little office off Mitre Court with a secretary and a boy. The former—Olga Buckley—subsequently married my old friend Conal O'Riordan. She had been born in Russia, and the baffling array of consonants which distinguish the Eastern national medley had no terrors for her, and between us we did very well.

Meanwhile I resumed my dramatic criticisms for the *New Witness* and also wrote articles as J. K. Prothero. W. R. Titterton was carrying on as Gilbert's assistant, and the paper, though it lacked political challenge, still stood, to quote Gilbert's own words, " for the privacy of the poor who are allowed no privacy . . . for the private property of those who have none."

And then in 1920, when my News Service was going well, the unexpected happened—it could never be said my life was static—Gilbert wrote to say that he particularly wanted to talk things over with me and would I go down to Beaconsfield.

" Top Meadow," the final home of Gilbert and

Frances, was built round the studio and the little room where G. K. used to write. He had been very fond of the big place with its stage and general atmosphere ; mentally I think he had regarded it as a playground which he peopled with histrionic doodles. It was odd to visualise this theatre as a dwelling, and I was very curious to see how it had materialised.

Local talent and Mrs. G. K.'s own ideas were responsible for the result. Approached from the front, through a pleasant tangle of flowers and crazy pavement, the studio with its wide windows and gracious line was most attractive. Once inside, however, the effect was confusing. In the first place the stage, on which amateur talent used to shine, some feet above the auditorium—or should I say floor level?—had been made into a dining-room. It was reached from the small front hall by a narrow passage and you entered, so to speak, by the doorless wings direct on to the dining-table, almost flush with the proscenium curtains. The place was heated by an anthracite stove backstage, which could not be kept at a pressure sufficient to warm the whole, as those with their backs almost against it would have been slowly roasted.

It gave one the oddest sensation to eat a meal facing a hidden audience, for I always had the feeling that at any moment the curtain would go up " discovering the family at dinner." On the other hand, if your back were towards the " house " you had to be particularly wary for fear of moving your chair too near the edge of the stage in case you tumbled headlong into the " auditorium."

Whenever the maid appeared through the wings,

I waited instinctively for a telling line for, as we know, a dramatist always gives a domestic effective dialogue. And it was a long time before I lost my feeling of disappointment at the lack of applause when Gilbert dropped a brilliant epigram.

Beyond the stage, and at the lower level, the auditorium stretched through a hinterland to Gilbert's cubby-hole. In the front of the hinterland there was an open brick fireplace with space for a small low chair on either side, where Frances would sit for hours, watching the logs crumble into fiery particles. The huge room, open to the passage, was terribly draughty and the logs burned for most of the year; but inside the fireplace all was warm and cosy.

Small tables filled with knick-nacks were ranged in the corner near the stage, and at Christmas Gilbert's toy theatre stood on one and a Nativity Crib on another. Beyond the small tables were those of a larger size holding books and flowering plants and—unexpectedly—a bust of G. K. Oases of easy chairs and Chesterfields culminated in a desert of carpet, while high up near the vaulted roof a toy musicians' gallery appeared—where no musicians played.

Full of people, the stage curtains drawn to show the table spread with good things, the studio had a most festive and attractive air of spectacle. It was indeed delightful as the theatre of its original intention, but as a home, to my mind, the *raise en scene* fell short.

There were no rooms above the stage or the studio. The kitchens and garage were on the ground floor of the new wing, above which reared another storey. A tolerably wide staircase led up

to a narrow corridor from which opened little monkish cells gratefully provided with gas stoves, running water hot and cold. The queerness of the elevation culminated in an unusually tiny W.C., quite incommensurate with Gilbert's outsize. The poor darling had to contort himself unbelievably to get round the narrow door which opened inwards. His stumbling efforts and protest noises were audible all over the house and were so funny that I choked with suppressed laughter and wished that he could share the joke. Frances never turned a hair during these Homeric combats. I don't think it ever struck her that " Top Meadow " was utterly lop-sided in design—one half being framed for a giant and the other for a gnome. The battles between an irresistible force and an immovable object went on for years, until more ample accommoda-tion was built on, together with a man's size bathroom and proportionate bedroom. Other queer domestic noises still persisted however. Round about breakfast time the house would resound with Indian war-whoops—Gilbert's method of summoning Frances to knot his tie. After they moved to Beaconsfield he had broken his forearm, and as the bones never re-knit properly he could not easily bend the joint.

Gilbert, I am sure, missed his old playground. " Over-Roads" had been a more comfortable if more commonplace environment from which he could always escape to the big studio, so grateful for delectable dallying, so untoward as a domestic habitation.

The gardens stretching luxuriantly at the back were always ajoy. Frances I think found undiluted happiness in their superintendence. They were

lavishly kept and a local man worked unremittingly. I remember one gorgeous summer day when flaming pokers, delphiniums, lupins, peonies, sunflowers—all the piled-up wealth of scent and colour—streamed across the lawn.

"Isn't the garden lovely, Gilbert ? " I exclaimed.

He gave his usual chuckle. " The garden's all right—to play pirates in, but "—he paused—" I don't play pirates. . . . I don't really care for gardens," he ruminated as though talking to himself, and as he sauntered past the pergolas I wondered if he were thinking of those grey streets of London that blossom like a rose.

On the eventful day of the suggested talk, we got together after dinner, not on the stage but round the hearthplace. Frances sat in her fireside chair, her pale delicate face set in the curious graven expression it wore for questions of finance.

For it was finance. There was, Gilbert intimated, very little money in the *New Witness,* and he could see no possibility of raising more. This meant that there would be no salary available for an editorial assistant, and no fees for contributors. He did not put the case in those bald terms, nor were his statements so direct, but his web of beautiful words came to the same thing ; the *Mew Witness* must close down.

It was a possibility that I had never visualised. I simply could not believe that the paper which had won through so many and such gallant fights was to end. I went straight to the main point.

" The sales ought to pay the printers ?" I suggested.

Gilbert agreed.

" And the rent," I found myself arguing, " the rent is not due for another three months."

My brother-in-law looked uncomfortable, and suggested that the manager felt the paper should not go on.

" But we must go on," I protested. " The paper *can't* stop."

Frances looked up.

" It's impossible for Gilbert to find the money to continue," she said, and her voice had a finality I recognised.

I urged that we could raise additional capital, cut down expenses, and that I would gladly work as Gilbert's assistant without salary while our contributors, I knew, would continue to write for us in sheer enthusiasm.

I finally won the day. But Gilbert, though he consented, was not enthusiastic. I did not then realise why this was ; I was at that moment too eager, too ardent—if I may use the word—for the *New Witness,* to analyse his motives or understand his attitude.

And so the next week I wound up the News Service, and went back to Essex Street. It was hard work to keep things going, but the contributors were magnificently loyal, and I got additional financial backing and carried on with Gilbert, determined not to let go.

I had to work overtime those days, writing articles for the general press after I left the office and reeling off preposterous serials for ready cash. More than ever Warwick Gardens was ease and refreshment. Marie Louise had been inexpressibly sweet and tender to me since Cecil's death. Her loss was for her alone—her sympathy was for my sorrow. She

was the same lovely person, understanding, witty, spreading a glow throughout the house.

" Mister" had aged during the last twelve months. He was more absent-minded, and not so keenly interested in his photography. But he always gave me a cheery welcome when I went there. Marie Louise had taken to sit in the bow window of the dining-room of an afternoon. Sometimes she stayed there until the light grew dim and evening darkened the sky.

" I like to watch the top of the street," she said. " So that I can see my dear girl when she turns the corner."

I used to think of her sitting there in rare serenity, and then as I reached the gate even my short-sighted eyes could see her smile, and she would hasten to the door and let me in herself.

And so the months went by. Old contributors stayed with us and new ones joined our columns, notably Dr. Downey, the present Archbishop of Liverpool, and E. T. Raymond, the *nom de plume* of the then Editor of the *Evening Standard*—that charming schoolboy of a man contributed most of his brilliant " Corrected Impressions " to the *New Witness.* But though our literary quality remained high and we unmasked several political scandals, our sales did not increase and our advertisements grew less.

And the harder I worked, the more the paper struggled, the stronger grew the faint foreboding which had been with me since that night at Beaconsfield. I felt that the virtue had gone out of the *New Witness ;* that minus its creator **it** could not flourish. The mainspring had broken.

But—so **I** thought in my enthusiasm—**like the**

Phoenix, it could live again, rising in new form from its ashes.

Cecil's had been a name to conjure with. Why should not Gilbert's have the same magnetic power? He was far more widely known than his brother, world famous in every literary avenue. I came to the conclusion that a weekly review called after him would enlist enough financial support to enable us to re-start on a sound financial basis.

I put the idea to my brother-in-law, and I could see that the notion appealed to him. He consulted friends and advisers who thought as we did—even Frances was not too discouraging. Quite naturally she had resented Gilbert editing without a salary and the suggestion that, if he must have a paper, he should be paid for running it appealed to her. It was finally decided that the journal should be called *G. K.'s Weekly,* and the prospectus was drawn up. Printed in the *New Witness,* it brought in an encouraging number of applications for shares in the new company. I also wrote innumerable letters to likely supporters with the most successful results, and some thousands of pounds were raised.

And so in May, 1923, the *New Witness* died, and its interment was marked by a spontaneous and rather lovely tribute.

Joe Clayton organised a Contributors' Dinner with me as the guest of honour. It was an inspiriting occasion, and nearly all my faithful colleagues and friends came along—Scott Moncrieff, Father Vincent McNabb, Geoffrey Howard, Raymond Radclyffe and many others, and they toasted Cecil, the *New Witness* and me.

Meanwhile, though the capital for *G. K's Weekly* was ready, nothing happened, apart from Gilbert's instructions to the manager to pay his own and Bunny's salary and the usual office expenses until such time as plans were matured. Having no salary to receive I fixed up other work, though G. K. and I used to meet at Warwick Gardens and at Beaconsfield, when he would talk of the paper and its chances most enthusiastically—though the date of issue was still undecided. But I knew that he could never be hurried, and that it was characteristic of the great man to dally on the brink of action long after he had decided to act.

But month followed month until over a year had passed, and still there was no sign. And then in the forest of procrastination something stirred. Gilbert, after a long absence, came to Essex Street and I went to see him. I was full of schemes and plans for the new project, which I eagerly poured out, unmindful at first of the absence of response.

After a while Gilbert explained that even yet he was not quite sure when he was starting the paper, and, in those lovely verbal undulations which flowed so easily, conveyed the impression that he was going to run *G. K.'s Weekly* by himself.

I did not quite take this in for a moment. I forgot Gilbert's characteristic acceptance of service from others without question, and remembered only what I had done to raise the necessary capital.

At last the inner kernel of his feeling found expression.

As, fascinated, I watched him trace the curves of a French cavalier on the blotting pad before him, he murmured : "I think, do you know, that one Chesterton on the paper is enough."

I could not think that I had heard correctly. It seemed incredible that Gilbert, ignoring the years I had worked with him for mutual ideals, should have no further use for me.

But what could I say if to him that time and all for which it stood was nothing ?

The beautiful modulations of his voice flowed on, but I was too indignant, too hurt, to appreciate them. And then with a sudden incredible diversion to the family side of his temperament, he gave me a fraternal pat.

That fraternal pat ended the matter for Gilbert.

It is only now, in writing the story of the Chestertons, with its inevitable psychological analyses, that the probable explanation of his attitude has emerged.

Remembering his proposal at Beaconsfield that the *New Witness* must end, and his lack of reciprocity when I showed him how it could be carried on, I have come to the conclusion that even then he was striving to break from certain old influences. In persuading him to continue I realise now that my first aim was to perpetuate those things for which Cecil had primarily stood, and that I regarded Gilbert somewhat in the light of a caretaker for him. It still seemed to me that the paper was the expression of Cecil's forceful personality, and perhaps Gilbert, too, felt something of this. It must be remembered that he had followed Cecil to the Editorial chair, to the political arena, and even then was standing on the brink of the Church his brother had already entered.

Thus when later it came to his own paper,

under his own initials, Gilbert perhaps felt that, if I still worked side by side with him, Cecil's ideals rather than his own must inevitably have been pushed to the front in the policy of *G. K.'s Weekly*.

This theory in the light of later happenings must, I think, hold good. For under Gilbert's personal and sole editorship, the family journal gradually dimmed its torch and lost that challenge which had been the trumpet call of the lesser brother's crusade.

In the family circle Gilbert and I continued the best of friends, and Marie Louise never knew why I did not join him in his new venture.

It was about this time that she was a littie troubled over "Mister." He developed an obstinate cold, and though there was nothing sinister or alarming in his symptoms, the condition increased his nervous apprehensions and he decided to go to bed. At first he would get up in time for tea and grow quite cheerful over buttered toast and cress sandwiches ; but as the days shortened he left his bed less frequently. The doctor recommended a change of air, and though Marie Louise always hated to leave her beloved London, she eagerly seconded the idea. But Edward did not want to move ; he had not the energy.

There was, however, no cause for fear. His heart, the doctor said, had never been stronger, and the rest would do him good. All the same, his periods of inertia grew more frequent, and he would sometimes remain silent for quite a long time. Gilbert and his wife came up occasionally and the son would go upstairs to the father for a few moments, while my mother-in-law and Frances

waited in the dining room. Thirza, the maid, was most devoted, and when Mister was well enough he would tell her young boy fairy stories. Mister had a turn for invention that way, and would elaborate simple tales into exciting legends.

I did not take my father-in-law's illness very seriously, and felt sure that when the weather grew warmer he would rapidly improve. Marie Louise herself was not too anxious. When you have lived for years with a man who has been most deeply interested in his own health, you lose apprehension as to his condition. My mother-in-law nursed him with an almost extravagant devotion ; specialists were called in, and different diets prescribed. But he did not mend—I think he felt the effort was too much for him—and gradually his time in bed lengthened until he remained permanently there.

Little by little his mental keenness was overclouded, and he drifted into lassitude and inertia, so that when at last he went out the end was not wholly a surprise. He had had a good life, much happiness and the unfailing devotion of Marie Louise, who had given him many years of her buoyancy and eagerness, adapting her swift pace so beautifully to his slower tread.

Edward was buried in the Chesterton grave at Brompton, and Jack Grosjean officiated. In the tradition of the family all the members of the clan came back to Warwick Gardens for a hospitable tea, with the little lady herself presiding.

It was in this year of Mister's death that Gilbert made his great decision. The final impetus which joined him to the Catholic faith was, I think, an increasing sense of family loss, and he had dwelt

so long in spiritual uncertainty that he yearned to find himself anchored to a definite belief.

His entry into the Church created world-wide interest, and from that time he seemed to find peace of mind.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

KING BALUDA AND THE BEGGAR MAIDS

GILBERT started *G. K.'s Weekly* in March, 1925. But before he assumed the editorial responsibilities and cares of his paper he took part with the utmost gaiety in a joyous Fleet Street revel. It was his playboy side, I think, that mostly endeared him to his journalist friends ; he so eagerly embraced any opportunity for a game of make-believe. Mock Trials still appealed to him immensely. I recall an amusing occasion when he appeared in his favourite rôle as Judge at the Garret Club, the name we gave a big attic among the roof tops over Warren Street Tube Station. A crowd of writers and artists used to meet there on Saturday evenings ; our subscriptions paid the rent, and we brought our own refreshments—generally in small suit cases !

This particular Mock Trial concerned Cecil Palmer, the publisher who brought out the first edition of G. K.'s poems, and was charged with being sober on the premises. C. K. Scott Moncrieff appeared for the Prosecution and Louis McQuilland for the Defence, their barrister friends lending them wigs and gowns and appropriate trimmings. The two counsel were not privately on the best of terms, and seized on the opportunity to score off each other as much as possible. Moncrieff insisted on adopting a broad Scots accent, and when McQuil-

land complained that he could not understand the barbarous language, retorted that his learned friend's own Ulster twang was totally unintelligible. The witnesses played splendidly. William Armstrong, now the famous director of Liverpool Repertory, posed as Palmer's deserted wife in a flowing gown and large feather hat, with rings outside his gloves. He was followed by Rothay Reynolds garbed in a fur coat and hat as a Bolshevist emissary who testified he had plied the prisoner with vodka until he was totally drunk. Next came Strube, the *Express* artist, who gave evidence of the prisoner's arrest.

Strube has a delightful habit of addressing everyone as "George," but in the witness box his Georges were so mixed, not to say irrelevant, that they confused the value of his testimony, and Judge Chesterton, appropriately attired, stopped the case for the elucidation of who or what George really was. Gilbert's assumption of judicial ignorance was one of the funniest episodes of the evening.

The "public" on that occasion included Will Dyson, the famous cartoonist of the Great War, and Beverley Baxter, who was always genial and hospitable on these occasions.

Later some of us launched out on more ambitious theatrical projects. With Ralph Neale as producer we turned ourselves into the Peasant Players of Fleet Street. Ralph was full of enthusiasm for the impromptu performances of the people of the Austrian Tyrol, and insisted that we could provide as good an entertainment as the villagers. Given a theme, the Players invented situations, improvised dialogue, entirely on their own initiative, with technical professional aid.

We all met at the Cottage, where the dramatic impromptu entitled " St- Wanglia, the Witch of Fleet Street" (from the noble verb " to wangle ") grew into being.

We had the greatest possible fun over rehearsals, improving our lines and actions as we went along, and growing familiar with stage positions and cues —the two last remaining fixed through every possible mutation. We sent Gilbert a sketch of his part, which he filled in with supreme gusto. He gave a magnificent performance, doubling his characters with perfect ease, though he was only actually present at the dress rehearsal, to which he gave up a whole day with the evening performance to follow, and enjoyed himself all the while.

We rehearsed until after 6 p.m., and as the show started at 8.30 there was no time to change our costumes or get rid of our make-up professionally applied. We therefore walked in procession from the Inns of Court Hall, Drury Lane, to the Wellington Restaurant in Fleet Street, where we had a meal : " white wine or beer only " insisted the producer.

We went back full of zest to find that the small child of W. R. Titterton, one of the Peasants, had been brought to the hall by her mother. Jane, aged three, felt rather bored with the proceedings, more especially as there was no dressing-room back-stage, and most of the players had to wait their cues on a steep stone staircase leading to the upper regions. But she went comfortably to sleep in Gilbert's arms as he sat upon the stairs quite patiently, while she snuggled serenely, implacably resting.

" St. Wanglia" was an unique occasion in

Fleet Street history, and to my mind showed indisputably that taken for all in all, the writing crowd have a spontaneous gift of humour, repartee and aptness. It remains, however, the solitary example of what " we " can do in that line, and has I think a significant interest, for which reason I include the following extract from the *Referee* (by kind permission of the *Sunday Chronicle and Referee)* as an example of our press notices—for every paper did us proud.

" There was a glorious rag at the Inns of Court Mission Hall in Broad Court, Drury Lane, last night, when Mr. G. K. Chesterton and a troupe of journalists who, maddened at seeing the way other people act, determined to do it themselves for one wild night and risk all consequences.

" The scene inside the hall was reminiscent of a Ranch concert in a Western film. Bare boards, crazy chairs, a piano and a small fit-up stage. The walls were decorated with placards addressed, not to the audience, but to the Peasant Players. One such legend ran : ' Remember the man at the Back of the Gallery. He does not want to hear ; but do not let that deter you.[5]

" On curtain rise we began straight away with Chesterton as King Baluda, a burlesque monarch with tilted crown, beneath a notice ' Swearing prohibited, except on stage.' As the throne showed signs of breaking down, Mr. Chesterton delivered himself of an obviously impromptu but really witty speech on furniture. . . . This was quite jolly and delivered with an excellent, slow rumbling hauteur.

" Then we were introduced to the Monarch's wife, Mrs. Cecil Chesterton, who like the lady in Anatole France's play was supposed to be deaf and dumb. Mr. Chesterton told us that he had divorced her but that she refused to understand. ' I've accordingly,' he added disconsolately, * given up the attempt, and there she is.'

" Afterwards we were treated to the burning of the Witch of News (Mr. D. B. Wyndham Lewis), plenty of red fire and shouting, bewailed in capital skitting of the Greek Chorus manner by four loud speakers. This was great, Mr. Titterton especially looking tremendously tragic. . . .

" At the finish Mr. Chesterton, in the character of Famine, entirely unable to disguise himself as a skeleton, summoned

the victims of the Witch in procession. These included War and Peace (so much alike that the same figure could do for both), and Drink and Prohibition, similarly combined, and a Cricklewood reader who had been made to realise that he was only one of a million circulation.

" Altogether a merry romp revue, full of fearless and pungent but good-hearted satire on the ' Genteel Press,' ' The Boost Press,' ' The Cocoa Press,' and so on. Mr. Hugh Martin as the News Editor was particularly good, also Mr. Louis J. McQuilland with a strong Beaverbrook accent as the Boost Press, together with Mr. Victor Bourne as Mistress Priscilla Primrose, one of whose many jobs was to proclaim the prologue.

" There was no author, everybody had written his or her own part—it had been produced, or shall we say ' assembled,' by Mr. Ralph Neale, known to *Referee* readers."

We all trooped back to the Cottage after the play and Gilbert was in such form that he joined us for an hour. He would indeed have stayed longer, but the Beaconsfield time-table forbade. Among other happy developments of " St. Wanglia " was the marriage of my niece Ada and Victor Bourne a year later. Gilbert, who had known her almost from childhood, came to the wedding with Frances and proposed the health of the bride and groom in a joyous speech tingling with witticism. The flat nearly burst its walls that afternoon. Victor, one of the star turns of the *Daily News,* was a most popular man in the newspaper world, and hosts of his friends came along. Indeed our united acquaintances spread into the loft, out on to the leads and flowed into the kitchen and up and down the stairs. Gilbert had a beautiful appreciation of weddings as of all family gatherings, and was never more kindly or likeable than at such functions.

But intermingled with these festivications were more serious matters.

(By courtesy of the " Daily Sketch.")

" King Baluda for one wild night." *(See p.* 269)

[Facing p. 270.

One evening, round the fire at the Cottage, the problems of those shabby and down-at-heel women, who haunt the pavements, was discussed. Somebody said that any woman could get work as a domestic servant, reference or no reference, if she wanted it.

The argument waxed hot, and I found myself with a theory all my own.

I would be a homeless woman—with all that it implied—and discover for myself what really happened. I was then working for the *Sunday Express*, and the very next day I decided to put my theory to the test. The Editor agreed, and it was arranged that for a fortnight I should leave my home, without a penny in my pocket, chance my luck on what I could earn or beg, and not until the time was up go back to the Cottage.

" I doubt if you'll stick it," said the Editor. " I bet you sixpence you'll have to send an S.O.S. to me in three days."

I took the bet. But it was he who lost, for I managed to put in the allotted period, though often it was very hard going.

I have had many adventures, and my life has been full to overflowing with love, sympathy and friendship. I have never been bored, indeed it has often seemed that time would not stretch sufficiently to cover all that I longed to do and feel and savour. But of all my experiences I think the first night as a down-and-out remains the most vital and discovering. It is a queer feeling to shed your habits, identity, clothes, customs, and without protective social covering emerge in the raw.

During that fortnight I went right to the depths of penury and hunger, sampled filthy beds, met

thieves and prostitutes, hard-working and respectable women, courageous women whose only crime was poverty. I found mere girls completely down and out, the bloom still on their cheeks, though hope was dead in their hearts.

I had to walk the streets when I could not get a bed, for I found there were too few beds for the destitute, and I tramped and tramped, until I was drugged with tramping and my sodden clothes clung to my tired body. I was walking drunk, and hungry drunk, and could not look a well-fed human in the face.

It was also an anxious time for my people and my friends, for it had been part of my bargain that I should slip quietly away and not communicate with my home.

My niece was continually rung up as to my whereabouts, and at *G. K.'s Weekly* Bunny had to face the same fusillade. Jo and Jan Gordon met me at Piccadilly Circus one day selling matches and, after their first shock, pleaded that I would have dinner with them. Bless their hearts, it did not occur to them that the dirty bedraggled creature I had become would have been frowned on in any West End restaurant. Other friends caught glimpses of me, but I always managed to mizzle in the traffic before they could get to me.

I did not go home throughout my adventures, but as my articles had to be typed I would look in at a house in Mecklenburgh Square, the home of my friend Nell Denston Fennelle, who used to tap out my copy on her typewriter. She is that same valiant suffragist who, as I have told, was sent home to tea by a huge policeman on whom she thumped her demand for votes. It was in her house

I slept when, my last piece of copy finished, my contract with the *Sunday Express* and destitution ended. The bed she gave me that night was sheer Elysium.

The articles subsequently appeared in book form, and "In Darkest London," * as the Street says, went like hot cakes. A steady and increasing mail reached me from every English-speaking country and the burden of all the letters was the same—if conditions were as I said, I must do something to rectify them, and my correspondents would help.

The Press was very kind, and I had some marvellous reviews. Perhaps the one I liked most was by Clifford Sharp in his own *Mew Statesman.* He gave the book ungrudging praise and commended it emphatically, almost fiercely. Later he rang me up, and we had dinner together at the Eiffel Tower, where we talked of old times, and each confessed astonishment that the other should have grown so much nicer. We became great friends after that—Sharp had a charming smile.

And so the snowball of sympathy for the homeless grew in size. The Bishop of London preached a sermon on the book. Her Majesty Queen Mary, always so mindful of her poorer subjects, sent a handsome cheque for the project, which by this time had coalesced into an Association under a Committee with Laura, Lady Lovat as Chairman, Major J. Brunei Cohen as Treasurer, and Nell Denston Fennelle as a member, and most eloquent and popular speaker on behalf of homeless women.

In 1927 ideals became translated into bricks and mortar, and we opened our first Public Lodging

*** " In Darkest London."** ***is.*** **per copy. From Cecil Houses, Inc., 193, Gower Street, N.W.I.**

House, where any woman—no matter how lonely, how unfriended, could get a clean bed, with plenty of hot water for baths, tea and biscuits, for *is.* a night. We had only one rule, that no questions should be asked of any applicant. The need of a bed was her passport, and if she could not pay the shilling she was to receive hospitality from the small fund specially set aside by friends for the purpose.

The question of what the House should be called puzzled us all. The Committee wanted to link my name with it—but my sense of humour rejected the notion that it should be called Chesterton House, remembering that the family firm were estate agents and auctioneers.

And then it suddenly came to me that here—in the most unlooked-for fashion—was my opportunity to raise a memorial to my husband who had always fought on the side of the poor.

So there came into being Cecil Houses, of which pre-war we had five, and the spirit of comfort and human feeling pervades them all.

I never dreamed my experience in the underworld would bring such a harvest to the homeless, or that its outcome would have such a repercussion on my personal life.

Marie Louise told me what acute anxiety she had endured during my absence, continually apprehensive as to whether I should be really starved or frozen, in those bitter February nights.

Gilbert was not only interested but concerned. I knew that both my mother-in-law and he would feel quite deeply on the matter, but I was unprepared for the sympathy and indeed enthusiasm of Frances. She seemed suddenly to flower—I mean in relation to the women we were trying to help.

She revealed a tender tact, a quiet helpfulness, and reached out surprisingly to the most destitute.

She reviewed " In Darkest London " very beautifully in her husband's paper, and accompanied him to a meeting at Wyndham's Theatre, where he spoke on behalf of the Houses. I have never heard him more effective than on that afternoon. He declared that he would love to disguise himself as an apple woman, that he might enjoy the ease and pleasantness, and above all the individual freedom, inseparable from Cecil Houses. G. K. as an apple woman was a gorgeous idea, and a sketch of him in that ample disguise promptly appeared all over the Press. John Drinkwater, Margaret Bondfield, Sir Gerald du Maurier and Lady Lovat also spoke that afternoon, with John Galsworthy in the chair. Men and women famous in literature, drama and the world of music, have been very good to Cecil Houses—Bernard Shaw, Hugh Walpole, Clemence Dane, Edith Evans, Louis Golding, Sir Cedric and Lady Hardwicke, Aldous Huxley, Sir Thomas Beecham, Ian Hay, Alec Waugh, Sheila Kaye Smith, Beatrice Kean Seymour, Lady Simon, Harold Nicolson—to mention but a few of the distinguished people who have helped us. We raise funds from these theatre meetings towards the building and equipment of each House. But once that House is open it supports itself from the shillings per night paid by our guests.

Perhaps, as someone has said, Cecil Houses are a faint realisation of Christina Rossetti's lovely dream :

> Shall I find comfort, travelsore and weak ?
> Of labour you shall find the sum.
> Will there be beds for me, and all who seek ?
> Yes, beds for all who come.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

FEMININITY AT GLASGOW

GILBERT undoubtedly started *G. K.'s Weekly* in the highest spirits. Editorially the paper was a one-man show with Bunny as assistant. The old contributors remained, and new and equally brilliant names were included. But he hardly ever saw them, and except for those who were his personal friends barely seemed conscious of their existence. Discussion of policy was not in his line ; and contributors as a whole chose their own subjects and took their own line. The result, though arresting, was confused.

G. K. was in the office once, and sometimes twice, a week, dictating his copy, and helping to put the issue to press at a remote firm of Clerkenwell printers, and I am sure he thoroughly enjoyed the scope his paper brought him. But he neither directed nor controlled ; and in the absence of a strong executive in such circumstances a paper, like a ship, is liable to go upon the rocks.

After a year the late *New Witness* manager removed himself, to be followed by a series of gentlemen who did not bring financial success to the *Weekly.* By this time W. R. Titterton was once more acting as G. K.'s assistant, and the Board—there *was* a Board including dear old Cedric Chivers, the almost perennial Mayor of Bath—asked Bunny to act as Company Secretary and to sign the cheques with Gilbert as Chairman.

All went well for a time, but a break came when before asking Gilbert's signature to an increased amount for office expenses, the young Secretary asked for his and the Board's approval of the details. The matter was ratified, and it was agreed that in future new items of expenditure should be approved before being incurred. But Gilbert's large-hearted vagueness which did not worry about financial carts before horses, troubled Bunny, legally responsible for carrying out Company law. In all the circumstances she decided to leave the paper and to accept my reiterated offer to assist me in organising Cecil Houses. Much puzzled as to why what was to him a trifling irregularity should break Bunny's ten years of devoted service, Gilbert blessed her on her way.

As time went on, schism succeeded schism. Titterton left in a cataclysm of factionism, in which rival cliques fought to control the paper, and his place was taken by a group of inexperienced young men who, week by week, took it in turn to help the Editor—a most confusing business, as none of these successive letters of the alphabet could determine what his predecessor had decided.

Gilbert, mystified and uncomprehending, was never able to unravel any difficulty or to arbitrate on any dispute—on one occasion, when matters boiled over into a heated meeting of all the rival cliques, he insisted that " all, all were honourable men," and left it at that.

So gradually, in spite of his own scintillating articles, dry rot set in. The paper left Essex Street for smaller and smaller offices, more and more remote, until the financial upkeep once again fell almost completely on Gilbert's shoulders.

G. K.'s power of objective decision—in regard to his paper at all events—seemed to be almost atrophied. It was, I think, impossible for him to readjust his Beaconsfield focus to that of a London Editor's perspective, and he was swept this way and that by opposing currents.

Meanwhile *G. K.'s Weekly* had founded the Distributist League, which arranged a series of interesting meetings, including a full dress debate between Gilbert Chesterton and Bernard Shaw on the Nationalisation of the Mines. It was held at Kingsway Hall, and not only was the place crowded, but an additional disappointed audience stormed the doors and had literally to be held back. The debate was relayed on the wireless, and brought quite a good sum to the League in addition to an increased membership.

One of the most surprising turns in Gilbert's career was his sudden and complete triumph on the wireless. As we know, he loathed mechanical devices, and had been diffident of trying out the microphone ; but he handled it perfectly, and was as much at home as on the platform, and his easy delivery, his beautifully modulated voice made him an ideal broadcaster. He neither " announced " nor " lectured" ; he just talked in the same inevitable fashion as he talked by his own fireside with friends, and in consequence he gained a new and idolatrous following.

But it was through the Distributist League that I had a most exciting adventure. It happened that the Rectorship of Glasgow University fell vacant, and the local branch of the League, which had a strong following among the students, put forward Gilbert's name as candidate. His rivals

were Sir Austen Chamberlain for the Tories, while the Liberals had another nominee. A special body of supporters were speaking for Gilbert in Glasgow, including E. C. Bentley and Jack Squire, and most unexpectedly I had a combined telegram from the Glasgow League and the special speakers asking me to help. It was an exciting proposition, made more so by the description from various Scots pressmen of what I might expect. I was warned that the students might hotly resent being addressed by a woman, and that they would be tempted to launch a bombardment of peasemeal, if not haddocks' heads and bags of Reckitt's blue, as tokens of disapprobation.

" But whatever happens," said an ex-student of the University, " keep your temper—and your sense of humour."

I caught the night train from Euston and was seen off by encouraging friends. I slept quite peacefully—I am lucky enough to be an easy traveller—and arrived about 8.30 the next morning, to be met by a deputation which included my host, Professor of the Arts of Engineering, Leaguers and students. I was to speak in the University Hall for twenty minutes if—it sounded ominous—the crowd would listen for so long. But I was not unduly frightened. A challenge to me is always stimulating, and I thought out my line of support for Gilbert's candidature quite cheerfully. I had plenty of time My hostess was away and my host engaged in professional duties, so that it was not until lunchtime that I saw him again. There were several women guests, and the Secretary of the League, and everyone was in high spirits, though once

more I was warned not to expect attention, let alone respect, from the audience,

I gathered that my help had been enlisted more as a novelty than for moral support, and I felt I must fit into that rôle. I made up my mind, all the same, that somehow or other the great crowd of turbulent, headstrong spirits must be persuaded to give me a hearing.

How should I hold them? I revolved all kinds of expedients, and at last, just as we were crossing the threshold to take the Professor's car to the University, I had an inspiration. With a muttered apology I darted back into the dining-room, took an apple from the sideboard, and dropped it into my bag.

I have never heard anything more rampant than the noise which greeted us when we entered the great building. The meeting had already started and a local man was speaking—or trying to speak. It was difficult, to say the least, for a series of really terrifying whoops and catcalls filled the hall. Tier upon tier of young, critical faces looked down upon the table which, perched on barrels, served as a platform, precipitously reached by two chairs.

Bentley captured attention and was heard in comparative quiet, and so was Squire. And then it was my turn, and I clambered up to the wildest reception that can be imagined. Howls of derision greeted me, every and any noise was added—whisdes, mouth organs. But I remembered my directions, and stood smiling and silent.

But they were quite merciless. They did not want a woman to talk to them: they would not have a woman. So I opened my bag, produced the big red apple and took a bite. It was the funniest

sensation to watch the sudden surprised faces, the gradual slackening of noise as I methodically munched.

And then a clear, boyish voice called from high up, near the ceiling :

" Garry on, Eve—we've fallen ! "

And they had. I never met a more appreciative audience, and when I finished they broke into cheers, and a student called for their special war cry on my behalf. I have forgotten its name, but the sound might be the battle shout of savages and, I understand, was first introduced by a Maori student full of tribal lore, who resuscitated his ancestors' triumph call. Three times the blood-curdling slogan broke over my head, and then I was lifted from the table and borne shoulder high by a crowd of students to their committee room, where I was toasted in white wine.

Polling day was enthralling. Lorries rushed up and down the city carrying munitions of the most revolting description, in which haddocks' heads were the least objectionable. The rival parties were pelted with horrid objects, and the capture of a Liberal munition wagon by the Tories sent the excitement up to frenzy.

But at a given hour when the polling booths were opened the noise stopped. Lorries disappeared, blue bags subsided, decaying fish remained unhandled. A queer silence succeeded pandemonium.

But Gilbert was not returned. He lost the election through the women's vote. The girl students—Tory, Liberal and Labour—combined against him. All his deep and fundamental feelings for home and family availed him nothing. By his writings the younger generation judged him.

He is an anti-feminist, and nothing but an anti-feminist, they said, and Sir Austen Chamberlain headed the poll.

My apple-eating interlude, warmly received by most, earned certain criticism in some feminine quarters. My host told me of a conversation he had heard between two of his own girl students.

" And you say she ate an apple ? "

" Yes—took it straight out of her bag."

" And she didn't even peel it ? "

" Oh, no—just bit."

" Well," was the final summing up, " I call it most unladylike."

All the same, I was asked to speak on election evening at a big sing-song organised by students of both sexes, and my health was drunk in quarts of tea until past midnight. It was a new experience and a valuable one. Hitherto, our particular Fleet Street crowd had largely taken Gilbert's position in letters for granted. We counted him among the foremost and most popular men of his time. The Glasgow election showed an unexpected criticism.

I often wished that G. K. would have debated the woman question from an economic point of view, but he never took up the idea of a challenge. His attitude in regard to modern female youth—everyone on the family hearth—was a little like distributism : a pious hope and no more.

On this question of the younger generation G. K. was alone in the Chesterton family. Even Edward had realised that middle-class incomes no longer allowed for perpetual daughters in the home, and from a psychological point Marie Louise had such an intuitive understanding of young people that

Gilbert and Frances—" The Chester-BIogg." (*See p.* 296)

(London News Agency.)

[Facing p. 282.

she sympathised with the longings and ambitions of the post-war girl.

Had Marie Louise's small daughter grown to womanhood I am sure that her mother would not have opposed any desire for a career, though in the particular unity of the household it seems probable that Beatrice would not have been eager to break away. This unity extended even to the holiday periods, for until Gilbert married he and Cecil had always gone away with the parents for their annual vacation.

After Cecil's death it became an established custom for me to join Marie Louise when she went to the sea. We both enjoyed ourselves extremely, and I felt very sad when, as the years went on, she told me she felt she could no longer take the exertion. I hated to leave her in London, but she insisted I should go off on my own.

The first year of a separate holiday Bunny and I went abroad on the initial trip of our travel experiences which gradually extended farther afield. It was quite by chance I decided not to remain in England. A friend had observed she was going to the Canary Islands for a trip, but that she supposed I should be faithful to Brighton—Marie Louise's favourite town.

For some queer and inexplicable reason the remark piqued me and then and there I resolved to go to Czechoslovakia. Marie Louise was most interested in the project, and as she feared I might find myself stranded in a foreign country without money, she wired me some *en route.* I remember in Prague a Post Office emissary in imposing uniform arriving at our hotel carrying an enormous tray on which were piles and piles of notes—the

translation into Czech kronen of ten English pounds.

In other years Bunny and I went through Italy and Yugoslavia, and also, greatly daring, to Soviet Russia, which at that time was almost unexplored by individual travellers, and where Bunny met many and various types of the national fauna—with extremely irritating results !

Later we set off for China and Japan—Ralph Neale promising to go to Warwick Gardens every week while we were away, and to let me know how the little lady was faring. We left Liverpool on S.S. *Menelaus* on a gorgeous August day for Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Yokohama, and a host of other mysteriously attractive places. A detailed account of our adventures in the Flowery Land forms no part of this narrative, but there emerged from them a decisive factor in Bunny's life. She and Mark Phillips, an Engineer Officer on board, fell in love and later married. The fact that she was single astonished the female population of those parts of China we visited. To use their own pidgin English they could not believe " Missie no have Master," and hoped the deficiency would be rectified.

Little seemed to have happened at home during our months of absence, but at Warwick Gardens I was sensible that Marie Louise was not quite her vital self.

It is, I think, more devastating when change—sometimes so sudden and abrupt—creeps quietly, by slow degrees. Yesterday, to-day, to-morrow—it is difficult to differentiate between their rhythms. And yet despite her courage and vivacity I felt the pulse of this great little woman's life was flagging.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE GOING OF MARIE LOUISE

MARIE LOUISE had always loved to receive and to visit her friends. Occasionally she had come to the Cottage on a Saturday afternoon, when a crowd of journalists used to meet for tea and talk. But now I noticed in her an absence of energy. She seemed disinclined for fatigue, and sat at home more and more. All her life she had loved the London streets, but she was no longer capable of walking and could not tolerate the idea of a bathchair—it was, she said, the tomb's waiting-room—and when I suggested that it would make a change if we had a few days at her beloved Brighton, she insisted that to sit at the hotel window and look out on the sea front was absurd, she had far more interesting things to see from Warwick Gardens. But she liked to talk of the good times we had had, and how we had explored the old streets of the Regency period, and the special welcome we had been given year after year at the Queen's Hotel, where Gilbert had always contrived to join us for a day or two. He was inevitably happy at the sea, the only drawback being that Frances, who suffered from rheumatism, could rarely accompany him.

G. K. liked the Queen's. His friends and mine used to come from London and we would all meet for smokes and drinks in the lounge, where the little lady was very popular. She treasured every

detail of our holidays, and recalled our amusement at the old landau in which we used to go for ceremonious drives, and the joyous tales the coachman used to tell us. He was a lovely liar of the old tawny vintage, and would narrate fairy stories of how he used to drive Queen Victoria and John Brown to the Downs for a cup of tea and a talk.

Marie Louise herself was inexhaustibly interesting in her reminiscences. Long before her boys were out in the world she had entertained the Beerbohm Trees, especially Herbert, whom she described as a talkative, gawky youth of great charm. He had been a keen amateur before he went on the stage professionally, and used to bring his press notices for her to read. She had sidelights also on G. H. Lewes and George Eliot. In her opinion Lewes could not be overblamed for leaving his wife who, said Marie Louise, was a very trying woman with no idea of running a home in comfort.

Her views on art and literature were always worth hearing, and remained uninfluenced even by Mister's criticisms or Gilbert's. Edward, who had some fine pictures, was always interested in contemporary painters. At a one-man studio show to which the parents were invited they found an impressionist study of me. Edward liked the artist's methods, and especially admired the colour technique. He was indeed inclined to purchase it, but Marie Louise was not so pleased.

" I may not know anything about painting," she said, " but I do know what my girl looks like, and she does *not* look like that."

Edward emphasised the particular genre of the effort, but to no avail.

" That is not Keith," she said, " and all the

colour technique in the world won't make it Keith. I don't like it."

Which settled the matter.

She was equally determined not to tolerate Gunn's painting of G. K., Belloc and Maurice Baring.

" I fail to see anything remarkable," said she, " in what is merely a picture of two fat men and one thin man."

Meantime her home at Warwick Gardens maintained its even, peaceful tenor. Edward's death had not curtailed its hospitality, though it had simplified Marie Louise's wants—her personal tastes were always frugal. The garden missed his skilful hands, but the climbing roses, though unpruned, were luxuriant, the wisteria was lovely, the jasmine as prodigal. The house seemed to close round my mother-in-law in tender protection. Her spirit impregnated the mellow dining-room, the kindly drawing-room where she still occasionally entertained.

I continued to spend Sunday evenings with her, and Bunny, who had come to live at the Cottage, would go with me and share a charming welcome. Very often Ralph Neale came too, for he had a great devotion for my mother-in-law, and she liked his sense of humour and eagerness for life. She would tell us of her home as a girl and how she enjoyed the Sunday services at the Chapel with her favourite hymns. After that it became an inseparable part of our Sunday evenings for Bunny and Ralph to share a copy of " Ancient and Modern," and carol the numbers she preferred. They both had clear sweet voices and sang with charming unconsciousness. Ralph had been a choir boy,

and Bunny, through a church-going girlhood, was familiar with the entire hymn book. Occasionally they would turn to old ballads equally pleasing to the little lady—it was the familiar melodies she liked, and she would chuckle when in the true Victorian spirit they would clasp hands and render : " We met, 'twas in a crowd " and other sentimental ditties.

It remains an unforgettable picture ; the soft firelight, the velvet hangings, the two clear voices and the quiet figure of Marie Louise, listening with humorous eyes in the shadows.

But, though my mother-in-law was ever so little failing, she would not admit it. Only on Sunday nights I noticed she no longer made even a pretence of eating, content if we all did justice to the lovely meal. It was an effort for her to move, so that by tacit consent we now remained in the dining-room all the evening.

It was the little things that made me realise that life was becoming an effort for Marie Louise. She would say good-night to me from her small upright chair, instead of coming to the front door as she had done for years. She did not talk much as to the future, but she still looked forward to seeing Gilbert, though his visits came at rarer intervals. I used to feel sorry that he could not look in on her more often, for I knew there were times when she hungered for a moment of her son's companionship. But she never complained, or indeed mentioned the topic, though she would talk of his visits to London for his literary and broadcasting engagements.

Jack and Nora Grosjean came whenever they could, as did her intimate friends. One of these,

after a trying illness, died rather suddenly, and her daughter sought to break the news tactfully to Mrs. Chesterton, who described the incident.

" I knew my friend was dying," she said, " and expected any day to hear she had gone. But when I asked the daughter about her mother, she just looked at me and, pointing her finger, did a series of spiral movements towards the ceiling, murmuring 'there.[5]

" Now," said Marie Louise, " my friend I know was a good woman, but I cannot help feeling that her daughter took a lot upon herself, for, in the absence of any direct information, she might quite as properly have spiralled down the other way."

My mother-in-law no longer sat up late, as she had always loved to do, but went to bed so early that it a little alarmed me. But she insisted that she felt quite well and was merely lazy, and when, before leaving London on a short holiday, I told her I should worry about her while I was absent, she was peremptory.

" I am only tired," she said. " There's nothing to be anxious about. . . . I'll let you know when I'm going to die, my darling girl."

She did, but not till later.

One Sunday evening she did not seem quite herself. That is to say, she spoke very little. The marvel was that she kept going at all. For as I was leaving and stopped to kiss her good-bye, I noticed that she winced as I held her hand. She assured me it was nothing—nothing at all, but persistent questioning of her maid gained the information that, a few hours previously, Marie Louise had missed her footing and fallen down the stairs. She had forbidden Thirza to tell me what had

happened, so that I might not be distressed, and had sat in agony with a strained back and a bruised arm.

It was the next Sunday that she told me quite quietly that I must forgive her but she did not want to go on any longer.

" I have had a wonderful life, my dear girl, with far more happiness than I deserve. But now I find it painful. I have to struggle to get up and down the stairs and I feel I may soon be a nuisance to myself and everyone else. I think I must go, my dear."

She went to bed that night and did not get up again, but it was by no means an immediate death-scene. She felt rested and comfortable, and her wit and vigour lit up the days. She had the impregnable will, the ineffaceable endurance of a deep-rooted tree, under whose branches many wayfarers had rested. She herself had sent for the doctor and agreed to have a nurse, although as she remarked, " I don't really like strange women about me, however clever and kind."

She had many letters of enquiry, some of which amused her.

" Answer that, please," she said, handing me a note. " It's from a foolish fellow whom I haven't seen for over twenty years. He wants to come and call on me. Tell him, will you, my dear, that I feel no useful purpose would be served by renewing our acquaintance on death's doorstep."

Her passage was slow but dreadfully sure. Sometimes I could not believe that she was dying, but each day she lost more strength, only her voice had the old ringing quality.

I had been in the habit of taking her flowers

occasionally on our Sunday visits, and one afternoon I brought some early tulips.

She looked up at me and laughed.

" Darling," she said, holding the flowers in her kindly hands. "You're too early for the funeral . . . even yet. . . . Don't cry, Keith, please don't cry. . . . I *want* to go."

Later she asked me to open a drawer in her wardrobe full of dainty lacewear, and with them the blue and green scarf which Cecil had bought her years before at Bridge of Allan.

" Under the other things you'll find my wedding veil," she said. I found it, a lovely cobweb mist of fine net and embroidery. It had a faint scent of orange blossom as though the fragrance of that far-off day still held.

" I'd such a pretty dress," she said. " White silk with puff sleeves. I want you to have the veil, my dear, and I want to give it to you now ; then I shall be sure you've got it."

I took the flimsy bit of beauty, leaving Marie Louise with her memories.

She grew worse that evening and I sat up all night dreading the dawn. Gilbert and Frances arrived early in the morning, and later, a smile on her face, a last tender look in her eyes, Marie Louise fell asleep—and did not waken.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

EXIT!

WITH the going of Marie Louise the house at Warwick Gardens went also. The family treasures, accumulated through the years, were parted amongst friends and relatives. Gradually the rooms grew empty, almost to blank walls—which to the last seemed to hold a hospitable glow—and the gaunt board "To Let" *put finis* to the old home.

The den at the end of the passage, where Edward used to do his carpentry and develop his photographs, was left undisturbed till the very end. It had remained almost untouched since Mister's death, and was still strewn with the odds and ends of his hobbies. But it was part of the duality of his temperament that, while as an individual he was absent-mindedly untidy, his business training had induced considerable order in his papers. Deed boxes, drawers and writing desk were all full to overflowing with family documents, diaries, correspondence, including some of the Regency Chesterton, with records of a more modern date, packets of Gilbert's and Cecil's letters and early manuscripts which Marie Louise had faithfully treasured.

From the point of view of the biography of both the brothers some of these papers would have been of considerable value, but one day Gilbert drifted into Warwick Gardens on his own and the worst happened. It is said that before Dorothy Collins

could catch him up he got into the den and launched on prodigies of destruction.

It has always seemed to me that G.. K. must have visualised the documents blazing up to heaven in a giant bonfire—he loved bonfires—but at any rate the dustman's somewhat untimely arrival aided Gilbert's design, and he swept Edward's neat sheaves, together with priceless data, to the rapacious bins. By the time the guardian angel Dorothy arrived irreparable damage had been done.

What was left from the holocaust was taken to Beaconsfield, and amongst the salvage, Frances told me, were various mementoes of Cecil. It was tentatively suggested once or twice that I should go down to Top Meadow and look through a big black tin box in which they were presumably reposing. But it was not until after the death of Frances, and the beginning of this book, that I definitely asked for access to them. Then to my great distress and complete amazement I learnt that everything of Cecil's—those intimate letters to his mother and his father, full of descriptions of his travels, witty character sketches, records of general experience, poems and essays—were non-existent, together with hundreds of invitations from earliest friends which Cecil treasured " because it was so kind of people to ask him." All that the black tin box produced for me was one small book full of the queer drawings of Cecil's beloved Bloppa with their delicious nursery rhymes. I have an infinite regret for the loss, for I feel this book would have been helped intensely had I been able, through Cecil's letters and memoranda, to recreate more intimately his earlier life.

In the months following the death of Marie

Louise, Gilbert and I saw each other only casually. But one Saturday in August of that year we had a cheery afternoon. It was the occasion of Bunny's wedding to Mark Phillips, to which G. K. and Frances both came. Bunny was married at St. Clement Dane's of the old jingle " Oranges and Lemons," and Gilbert loved both the jingle and the church. But there was another and more personal association for him and indeed for all of us in the event. Marie Louise linked up the present with the past in the wedding veil which, at my wish and to her own delight, Bunny was wearing. It seemed to me that this legacy of a long and rarely happy union must be of good augury for the young friend for whom the little lady had a real affection. Nothing, I felt, could be more endowering than this symbol of the fluttering joys and hopes that had filled the heart of Marie Louise, when long ago she had made her marriage vows before the altar. And now for the second time under that gossamer lace, in auspices as happy, the same vows were made two generations later—a consummation which I knew Marie Louise would have welcomed with her most revealing smile.

Back at the Cottage after the ceremony G. K. made a charming speech, describing the bride as she was when first she came to the *New Witness.*

" We called her Bunny," he said, " but it was we who were the rabbits eating out of her hand. Many have tried to win her from us, but it has taken a man of the sea to bear her off."

He stood, his sensitive fingers raising a glass of champagne, toasting romance, adventure, in the spirit of spontaneous gaiety that always bubbled

up in him at happy gatherings. On such occasions the mantle of good fellowship fell on Gilbert with a joyous magic, and when he and Frances had to take an early leave we all became a triumphal procession to the street. I can see them now waving good-bye to us from the open taxi, while casual passers-by, beaming at the sight of confetti, must have thought we were cheering a bridal pair !

Gilbert did not come to the Cottage after that day, for by a malignant twist of fate my much loved home had to be abandoned. The demolition of old buildings in the neighbourhood had upset the family life of the mouse population who, scenting domesticity, decided to come and live at No. 3. It was too much for me—I have a horror of the creatures—and, as even the City Mouse Catcher could not dislodge them, it was we who had to go.

I always think that in a case of definite uprooting half measures are fatal, and I did not try to find another home in the neighbourhood—the Temple or any of the Inns—but turned my eyes to Bloomsbury. Finally we—that is Bunny, her husband and I—divided a house in Gower Street between us. It was the greatest possible contrast to the Cottage, with big rooms, long corridors and wide staircases.

Gilbert preferred our new home, which certainly gave him more space and he was able to climb the stairs quite comfortably. He and Frances would look in when in town, and as G. K. always settled himself in a sizable chair I knew he felt at ease. They were both interested in our Chinese treasures which, in the more commodious premises, we were able to have around us, and they gave a mammoth

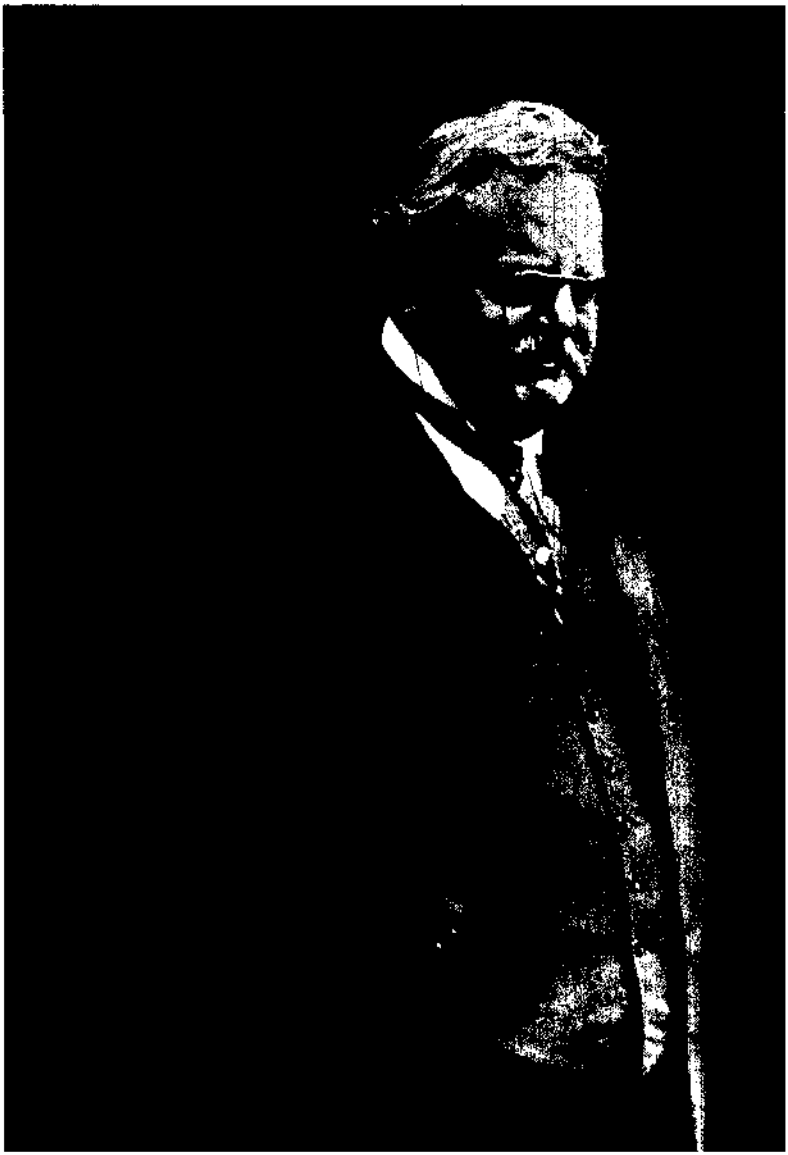
tea-party at Top Meadow at which they asked me to describe my adventures in the Flowery Land.

Then there was a Kith and Kin party—almost as large as the Silver Wedding celebration that took place when I was abroad—which included every possible connection of the Chester-Blogg, as Gilbert loved to describe himself and his wife.

I seemed to be more often at Beaconsfield in these days. I think Frances no longer saw me as a synonym of Fleet Street—I did not live there and had no responsibility for the activities of *G. K.'s Weekly* apart from my dramatic criticism which Gilbert had asked me to continue. He was making an unexpected stand for his namesake. He told me that on his last visit to the States he had made a considerable sum of money, over and above his usual income, by lecturing, so he felt he could quite legitimately sink it in the paper. For the first time he seemed aware of his earning capacity, and his determination to have his way intrigued me. He would not give up the child of his choice, the mouthpiece of all his fervours and his faiths, so week after week Frances had to sign the cheques on his behalf for salaries, rent and printing bill.

He seemed to have made plans for *G. K.'s Weekly*, and in a vast sweep of self-confidence appeared to visualise a steady circulation solidly rooted. I felt he had an opportunity for vigorous effort to accomplish this when, shortly after, he and Frances came up to London for a few weeks, so that she might be near a sick relative.

But nothing concrete in the paper's interest seemed to transpire. Bunny and I went to dinner with the G. K.'s at their hotel several times, but conversation always kept to domestic matters,



(Fox Photos Ltd.)

"' The mantle of good fellowship fell on Gilbert." *(See p.* 295)

[Facing p. 296.

Gilbert's contribution being almost entirely reminiscent. One evening he reminded me of an absurd incident at Warwick Gardens, when Cecil —who never outgrew his passion for dressing up— disguised himself as a Russian refugee in full beard and top boots. He was a clever mimic and completely hoodwinked Marie Louise who, in her dislike of all things Russian, informed him coldly that her sons were both out, and requested him to leave at once. This was too much for Cecil who, roaring with laughter, relapsed into his own personality. His attempt at a bearlike hug of joy nearly frightened the little lady out of her wits.

As she protested afterwards : " The horrid whiskery fellow tried to kiss me. How *could* I know it was Cecil ? "

On their return to Beaconsfield Gilbert's flicker of enthusiasm for running *G. K.'s Weekly* on business lines seemed to die down. Editorially there was a new note in some of his leaders. He seemed to have a growing admiration for Mussolini, and for the alterations the Duce had made in the national administration. His attitude on the invasion of Abyssinia was unexpected. Remembering his passionate pro-Boer days, when he held his own with the stormiest Jingo crowd, protesting vehemently against the violation of a weaker country's independence, I expected a flaming denunciation of Imperialist aims against the simple Abyssinian.

But the voice of the defender of small peoples was silent. Gilbert's attitude was that, while he could have wished Mussolini Had not made war, he felt Great Britain was the last country that could reproach him. It astounded me that this genius, who had built up a vast reputation as a

protagonist of fundamental liberties, should sidetrack the issue by suggesting that, having once bullied, you had no right to protest against bullying.

This was a difficult period for me in regard to the paper, as I was met on many occasions by the suggestion that this attitude could only mean that *G. K.'s Weekly* was receiving Fascist support, monetary and otherwise, a statement which in itself was an outrage, though in my opinion understandable. I am quite sure that Gilbert never realised he had performed a *volte face.*

My own explanation of his view is that, like so many ardent converts, he failed to distinguish between the fundamentals of the Catholic Church and the acts of her living disciples.

This slackening down of fire was apparent in other directions. During his years of exile he had, I think, not only come to accept his Beaconsfield mode of life, but quite possibly to appreciate it. But if he were no longer insurgent, neither was he dynamic. He would sit for hours in his little cubby-hole at home, weaving endless tapestries of sinister trees, flying daggers and stealthy footsteps, through which Father Brown as hero threaded his way. I always felt these stories were an unconscious escape. But in the quality of their imagination, and in their writing, they are worlds apart from the immortal fantasies of his freedom. Moreover, he no longer wrote poetry, though I remember in the cubby-hole he once read to me the opening of a lovely lyric called " The Golden Key." But the luncheon gong sounded mid-way, and I never **heard** the **end**—nor **did I** see the poem in print. Possibly mealtime quenched the impetus.

Usually of an evening Gilbert seemed to find his way back to his cubby-hole. I do not think he always worked, but rather sunned himself in other days and boyhood's associations. He had a soft spot for old music-hall songs—rather low he feared—that he and Cecil delighted in. He was never tired of hearing on the gramophone that Edwardian absurdity :

" Father's got the sack from the waterworks
For smoking of his old cherry briar
The foreman's sent to say, he's got to go away
For a'setting of the waterworks on fire."

Sometimes I would hear him " singing" this ridiculous ballad to himself with the oddest effect as, like Cecil, Gilbert was completely tone deaf and neither of them ever knew " Rule Britannia " from " God Save the King," which on patriotic occasions was awkward.

I always thought that Top Meadow was at its best in the spring and early summer. It certainly looked most attractive when one afternoon in May I went down to speak at a local function, run by an enterprising group of players who had fitted up a big barn into a quite well decorated theatre. They were reviving " Magic," and as it was the vogue at that time to have speeches and debates at special shows I had been asked to open the proceedings. I was so fond of the play that I was very pleased to do it.

As I walked from the station to Top Meadow, I thought of the first night of another play—" The Man who was Thursday," which Ralph Neale and I had dramatised from Gilbert's book. We had carefully enshrined the poetry of his writing in the dramatic action and his humour burbled through-

out. It had been a great first night at the Everyman Theatre and G. K. was delighted with the way we had shaped the play. The days of the week took human form, and the anarchist scenes seemed incredibly lifelike. After it was over we all went back to the Cottage and had a jolly party, and things were so festive that Gilbert lost the last train to Beaconsfield and went home to Warwick Gardens where he spent what was left of the night.

I was still pleasantly reminiscent when I arrived at Top Meadow, but Gilbert was distrait and in bad spirits. He did not cheer up at all during dinner and ate very little. His eyes, focussed on space, did not seem to see, and his hands looked strangely gaunt. He hardly spoke throughout the meal and, when I said good-bye, barely roused himself to give me a brotherly kiss—the last he ever gave me. . . .

There will, I suppose, always be controversy as to whether Gilbert profited or lost by his retirement to Beaconsfield. Like Swinburne the caged bird, he no longer shook the spaces of the day with song, nor do I think that his health benefited by the divorce from London. He had hardly endured a day's illness up to his collapse at Beaconsfield in 1914-15 when, largely separated from men's society, the wine he took began to impair his bodily condition. I say bodily advisedly ; the liquor was never yet fermented that could affect his clarity of intellect. He had a brain of steel, kindled by talk and libation to molten eloquence. He consumed no less of God's good drink at Beaconsfield than in London—but there was this essential difference. Talking, drinking, with chosen companions, his vitality ate up stimulant as an engine eats up coal and with the same result. In the residential

suburb of his later home what he drank was not consumed by divine fire, it went to his weakest organ—his liver. And it was his liver, poisoned, resentful and inert, that killed him.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

BLITZ!

GILBERT died in June, 1936, after a short illness, during which he was, for the most part, quite unconscious. Friends and relations knew what was happening, but the huge public, who tuned in for his broadcasts, followed Father Brown's adventures and read and re-read the essays and poems, did not know that G. K. was dying. There were no press bulletins.

I think when Frances realised that Gilbert was irrevocably ill, her protective instinct reached out to cover him and herself from public interest, even public sympathy. That curious reaction against Fleet Street, which she had felt for so long, became actively resentful, and she could not accept the inescapable fact that Gilbert, like every artist, had two soul sides, and refused to admit that one of those could be claimed by the world for which he had written. This, at least, is my explanation of her decision not to let the Press know that Gilbert was dangerously ill. She herself told me about Gilbert on the telephone, and at the same time asked my promise not to give the news to any paper.

I have always regretted that Frances should have exercised this embargo. The Press had given Gilbert a paean of praise from his first beginning, competing for his articles, lavishing columns of publicity on his genial self. Moreover, he had

always liked the personnel of Fleet Street, though he held strong opinions as to the dangerous power of newspaper proprietors. I felt I could not press the point with Frances, but suggested to Dorothy that it would be quite impossible to keep the facts from filtering through to Fleet Street as every national daily has local contacts whose business it is to report all items of news, so that the facts would inevitably come along. Dorothy, however, took Frances's point of view, and held that my suggestion was not possible. Beaconsfield, she said, was loyal, and would not reveal Gilbert's condition, which, I felt, was just a little feudal.

Finally, when the story broke, a reporter from a daily paper went down to Top Meadow. He was, however, sent empty away. Indeed, I think Dorothy felt that his call was a great intrusion.

For this reason, the news of Gilbert's death came as a severe shock to crowds of people, to whom the big man seemed almost a personal friend. E. C. Bentley broadcast an appreciation of him on the evening of his death, and obituary notices were many, but always Frances seemed to hold close the feeling that his death was so personal to her that the grief of the world outside, the messages of sympathy and telegrams of condolence, savoured almost of a violation of her wifely rights.

It was, I think, the final expression of the long, long struggle she waged against those forces which drew her husband ever so little from his home, and which found utterance in what she said to me on the occasion of Gilbert's funeral.

" I feel I ought not to grieve too much, remembering that I had Gilbert for so many years, and you were with Cecil for so short a time. You know

women used to 'phone me up in America, and ask how it felt to be the wife of a genius. It seemed to me ridiculous. I told them that Gilbert's genius was not the important thing to me ; what really mattered was the sort of husband he was. . . ."

A solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated at the Beaconsfield Catholic Church, in the building of which G. K. had been personally interested. The service started at 10.30 a.m., but this early hour did not deter those who admired him from paying their last tribute, though to many this entailed a long journey. I do not think Top Meadow anticipated that, apart from in-laws and personal friends, Gilbert's funeral would gather a large crowd. But there was a considerable congregation in the church that overflowed into the porch, following every word of the long ritual. Belloc was there with his daughter Eleanor and her husband Reginald Jebb. The family had been obliged to leave their home at Horsham round about 6 a.m., and there was no opportunity for them to break their fast until they arrived at Top Meadow in the early afternoon, as was the case with all those who came from London and farther afield.

From the church intimate friends and relations were taken in cars to the cemetery, while the rest of the crowd followed on foot to the graveside, now marked by a stone of Eric Gill's. Personally I do not think this memorial to Gilbert suggests either the poet's flaming spirit or that combination of faith and fantasy which made him unique.

We finally reached Top Meadow after two o'clock suffering, as might be expected, both from emotional strain and physical sinking. Gilbert had always appreciated the classic tradition of

funeral baked meats, and had frequendy praised the understanding of the poor, who always provide sustaining ham for the burial of their nearest and dearest. But in her secluded vision of Gilbert, Frances had not anticipated the attendant throng of sincere and loving followers. There was no banquet of the dead. The idea of solid provision for those ravaged by long journeying and sense of loss had not occurred to a household which, in its outlook, was dominantly feminine.

Frances was not in the studio to receive the condolences of her husband's friends. She went straight to her room, and downstairs there was a sense of utter emptiness, accentuated by a quite inadequate supply of food. A few ladylike sandwiches, with sherry, spread on a long table, disappeared with the first arrivals. Forlorn little groups stood about the garden, others crowded the hall and inner rooms, and I was sorry for Belloc, who tired and hungry was looking vainly for refreshment. But nothing further was forthcoming and, gradually, hunger overcoming the desire to linger in the hope of seeing Frances, to express their sorrow in the place where Gilbert had lived so long and worked so arduously, the crowd finally departed.

And yet all the while, in one of those tricks of memory that play such havoc with self-control, I saw the figure of Gilbert in the little flat at Battersea, pressing us to lashings of sausages and beer.

I had a short talk with Frances before I left, in her own tiny room where she wrote her poems and her plays for children. She was very quiet and very brave, but it seemed to me that underlying all her grief and desolation there was a sense of

relief from temporal anxiety. Now, after long, long years of safeguarding, yearning, wondering over Gilbert, she could rest secure ; she knew that he was safe.

The homely side of G. K. as a writer and a man was exemplified at Beaconsfield. The pageantry, the tumult, the trumpetings of his genius were made manifest in the Requiem Mass at Westminster Cathedral when Monsignor Ronald Knox preached one of the most eloquent valedictories the building can have heard. He painted Gilbert's achievements, aspirations, in words as glowing as the dead man himself could have used, and in the triumphant sentences one could hear the leaping of the sword from the scabbard in challenge of justice and oppression.

Gilbert Chesterton has left no peer. Unique in his style and paradox, he founded no school. The imitators, who so often re-hash the remnants of a literary banquet, have not materialised. He remains a solitary knight at arms, who in his journey through Fleet Street was the guest in every tavern of hospitable wit and gay companionship.

For myself I was conscious of the passing of a great personality with whom very often I did not agree, and who had evoked in me eddies of protest over and over again. But no matter what his weaknesses, he was a tower of strength in the cause of the poor, and I remembered that, when first I knew him, he would fight on any field with any weapon in the name of liberty. With the Brothers Chesterton there seemed to go something of the passion for individual freedom which had bound so many to their cause. It had been their battle

cry, and the echoes of their combat still come down the years to join the last rallying call against darkness and oppression. The estimate of freedom has fallen lower in world opinion since they died, but those afire to defend the lamp of liberty must, I feel, find inspiration from those two, who spent ungrudgingly their talent in her service.

In the little while that Frances had to spend without Gilbert nothing of significance happened to her. She still had her lovely garden, and reaching back to earlier years she spent some time with her cousin, who had married a German professor in Homburg. After the cousin's death, the Professor stayed at Top Meadow with his young daughter ; a kindly, scholarly old gentleman, and a repository of what used to be called German culture, with its fairy lore and understanding of young people.

I often spent week-ends at Beaconsfield, but it became gradually obvious that Frances was on the verge of illness. She rarely went beyond the garden, and sat for hours in the new study which Gilbert had so little used. She died just before Christmas in St. Joseph's Nursing Home, after a period of considerable pain and suffering, which she quietly and courageously endured. Dorothy, for whom she had a deep affection, was with her night and day. Her death, quite happy and peaceful, took place two years after Gilbert, and she lies beside him under the Gill memorial.

Top Meadow, with its theatre studio and stage dining-room, has passed into the hands of the Catholic Church, together with a considerable part of the grounds, sufficient land being reserved for a cottage for Dorothy, where she now lives and

discharges her trusteeship of Gilbert's writings and estate.

* * * * *

But for the grace of God those words would have been my last. . . .

Bombs had punctuated the writing of "The Chestertons" from the beginning, stimulated by our brave barrage. We had left the house in Gower Street for smaller premises and were living at a block of flats in Bloomsbury. On the particular evening of which I write, the place had rocked for hours to the crash of nearby explosions, and towards the early dawning I had a sudden premonition of danger. I went along to Bunny and her husband—home on leave—and they got up also. We were only just out of bed when a most terrific thud shook the entire building, followed by a sinister hissing noise in the lift shaft outside our door. In a flash we were in the street, the occupants of the other flats behind us, dashing through falling shrapnel to an hotel opposite, chased by the terror of the grim thing at our backs. It was only as we crowded there together in the hotel vestibule that I remembered I had left "The Chestertons" in mortal danger. Something had fallen through our roof and if it went off my months of work would go with it. I gazed round in wild despair, and then Mark came to the rescue, and fighting through obstructions returned triumphant with the MS.

Looking back, it seems impossible that in a moment of such ghasdy danger my immediate feeling was not fear of death, but acute chagrin that the final chapter on which I had been working was missing from the literary salvage. Quite

oblivious of the surging mass of people round me, in every incongruity of garment, the only thing in the whole world that seemed to matter was the missing pages. It was, of course, utterly foolhardy and absurd, but at the time it seemed quite natural that, under cover of the confusion of a fainting woman, I should slip out with a young actor friend who was staying at our flat, cross the shrapnel zone, dodge the police on guard, and, splashing through the rushing water from broken pipes, recapture my precious papers.

Within a minute of our return to the hotel, the orders came to evacuate on the spot, for a mine was hanging from its parachute on our top storey and the vibration of a gun might dislodge it and raze the district to the ground. Once more, like the Children of Israel, we fled under the barrage and the bombs through the blackout, and with us came our fellow tenants, most of whom were unknown to us—two old ladies from Vienna, with a cat and a spaniel, a Czech couple with a Scotch terrier, an agitated pianist with her maid and yet another dog, while the porter's wife clutched her particular pet feline.

We tried another hotel beyond the mine radius, but already it was overflowing, for on that awful night—the worst central London had known to date—there were literally hundreds who, like ourselves, had been Hitlered into the streets.

It was then I realised that we were close to a Cecil House, and at 3.30 a.m. the whole band, old ladies, cats and dogs, Czechs and Viennese, picked its way, past shelled homes, through broken glass to Boswell Street, where the first of our houses still stood, unscarred.

It is against the terms of my licence as a lodging-house keeper to admit men over the age of ten after 8 p.m., but nice customs curtsey to emergency, and all of us, men and women, cats and dogs, crowded into the sitting-room, with its cosy fire, bright lights and glowing orange paint.

The matron gave us a motherly welcome, as if our arrival in night attire were all in the day's work, and with a strange feeling of having come home, we gratefully drank hot tea with some of the lodgers, who, unable to sleep for the noise, had remained by the fireside, resolute and cheerful. The comfort of the room seemed intensified by the hellish racket outside. Wave after wave of bombers passed over the house, dealing destruction on all sides, and even a particularly hardy little soul, who, come what might, inevitably went to her bed, emerged blinking from a dormitory to join us.

She did not know me, nor I her—but she had the ready and the lovely sympathy of the poor. Eyeing the bedroom slippers and pyjama legs, which peeped from beneath my house gown, she put a friendly hand on my arm.

" Bombed out, are you, dearie ? There'll be many like you this night. But aren't you thankful for this nice warm place to come to ? "

And as I sat there in Cecil's House, from the bottom of a deeply grateful heart there welled up the answer :

" Yes, indeed I am."

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