

Philip  
Gibbs

*Life's  
Adventure*

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*Title:* Life's Adventure

*Date of first publication:* 1957

*Author:* Philip Gibbs (1877-1962)

*Date first posted:* July 26, 2019

*Date last updated:* July 26, 2019

Faded Page eBook #20190753

This eBook was produced by: Al Haines, Cindy Beyer & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

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THE AUTHOR, 1930

**PHILIP GIBBS**



**LIFE'S  
ADVENTURE**



**ANGUS AND ROBERTSON**  
LONDON SYDNEY MELBOURNE WELLINGTON

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Guildford and London, and bound by The Dorstel  
Press Limited, Harlow, Essex*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The publishers thank Mrs. George Bambridge (daughter of the late Rudyard Kipling), Messrs. Methuen and Co., Ltd., and The Macmillan Company of Canada, Ltd., for permission to quote four lines from *Recessional*.

FOR  
W. B. R.  
Husband of Joyce, father of Richard,  
and the author's good friends

# I

## THE POWER OF THE WORD

I HAVE been an onlooker of life. Since I was a very young man I have been watching, listening, recording, among many people in many scenes, but never as one of the actors in its drama. I was always “a chield amang ye takin’ notes.”

That is the role of most writers in this modern age; though far back in history, as in ancient Greece, the poets and philosophers were often men of action—soldiers and statesmen. Our own Winston Churchill in our own day ranks high among historians who helped to make history.

Now most of our professional writers stand in the wings of life’s drama, watching its performance with critical and sometimes despairing eyes. What is the meaning of this eternal merry-go-round called Life? What sense is there in it, or what purpose? Will there never be an end to man’s madness or wickedness? Will humanity always fling itself into the fiery furnace of war or be doomed to misery, starvation, and torment?

These lookers-on, these writing men and women, seem aloof to life in the eyes of those who are in the hurly-burly. There they are tapping out words on their typewriters, living in solitary places, consorting with a few chosen spirits of their own profession, turning out novels or plays, or crossword puzzles which they call poetry. What importance have they in the world of action? That question may be asked—and I have heard it asked—by foolish people who have an ill-concealed contempt for the man or woman who is busy with words.

In the beginning was the Word. Behind any action there is an idea. The word-makers are those who have changed the course of history and directed the drama of life. For sometimes their words are explosive and dynamic—even terrible and destructive.

There was a middle-aged man with a white woolly beard and white woolly whiskers who sat day after day in the British Museum; a quiet, harmless old gentleman he looked. His name was Karl Marx. He wrote a book called *Das Kapital*, and many others. It is not too much to say that they have caused the death of millions of men and women, following the Communist revolution in Russia, and that the menace of a third World War now casting its shadow over the minds of men is due in its origin to the words he wrote in a London lodging-house. So the French revolution was inspired and set in motion by a group of intellectuals called the Encyclopædists. On the other hand, the noblest ideals, the awareness of life’s beauty, the love of humanity have been inspired by the written word—written in prison by John Bunyan, written in blindness by John Milton, written back stage or on a tavern table by William Shakespeare, written by Dickens in rooms crowded by the immortal characters of his imagination.

I do not want to be too portentous about all this, but only to claim that the writers of words—our novelists and playwrights and poets—those who stand in the wings of life’s drama, as it seems, may be those who pull the strings of this puppet play called Life.

I have known a few writers who have changed and moulded to some extent the minds of men and women during my own lifetime. One of them was H. G. Wells. I knew him when he had a dynamic energy of mind, with an inexhaustible sense of humour, and a wealth of whimsical ideas which leapt into his mind without effort. At my own dinner table more than once he enchanted the company by chasing some idea and building it up into some fantastic tale. In my club, with Arnold Bennett and others, his comments were mirth-raising. In his own home in Essex he was a delightful and amusing host, playing a game of his own invention with a ball which bounced in a most unexpected way, rushing to a pianola to pedal out the magnificence of Beethoven, entertaining his guests by his prankish mind. But behind all this playfulness, which poured into his early books like *Mr. Kipps* and *Mr. Polly*, he had a serious and almost desperate purpose. It was to awaken the intelligence of that new class of young men and women who had reaped the reward of elementary education and were reading, going to night classes, and beginning to think of the big problems of life. He wanted them to use this intelligence to make a better kind of world for themselves and others. He had a splendid vision of this better world: without war—that monstrous anachronism—with an ordered prosperity, a finer and more beautiful civilisation, illimitable in its possibilities. He saw it coming. He believed he saw it coming. He was its prophet and hoped to be in some measure its architect. It was his time of hope and optimism and faith.

There was another road down which his imagination went exploring. It led to the future of scientific discovery, not altogether favourable to humanity as forecast in his *War of the Worlds*, the *First Men in the Moon*, the *War in the Air*, the *Food of the Gods*, and so on. A prodigious worker, he plunged gallantly into his *Outline of History*, taking the whole of the world's story from the beginning—a good enough achievement for one man's lifetime. One has to criticise many of his ideas, and one has to smile at his fierce prejudices, but it did not deserve the ridicule and contempt poured upon it by men like Hilaire Belloc. On the contrary, it is a brilliant sweeping survey of world history, and for the first time put the great historical events and personages into their true perspective and their place in time. His anticipations of things to come in many of his books were uncannily prophetic and well in advance of scientific discovery. But his importance as a writer who influences the mind and morals of his own time is that he awakened and inspired city clerks, night-club students, the white-collar young man, the shop assistant, the students of the London School of Economics—the new intelligentsia. He was as a humorist, satirist, and social historian in the true line of succession to Charles Dickens. He knew and understood these young people groping for truth, eager for guidance, seeing themselves through his eyes, and his humour, sharing his faith in the glorious future ahead. They were pacifists as he was. They believed in Progress with a big P, and—poor dears!—through no fault of their own they were all wrong, as he was. Two wars came to spoil the picture. Humanity was not pursuing an inevitable line of progress, but was harking back to the Dark Ages. The youth of the world was mown down by machine-gun fire; cities were burning; ruin was widespread. The sum of human agony was immeasurable. Cruelty came out of its old lairs. There were torture chambers and concentration camps.

Wells himself died in despair. All his dreams had gone crashing into the mud. Reason

had not prevailed. Human intelligence had failed. Civilisation itself was shrinking and crumbling. In his last phase he could see no light anywhere, and this man of hopefulness, this laughing jester of life, this prophet of Progress, fell into a dark pessimism. One of his last pamphlets was called *Man's Mind at the End of its Tether*.

It was a tragic ending, and it is best to remember H. G. Wells as he will be remembered, not for his excursions into social philosophy, but for the comedy of his *Mr. Polly* and *Mr. Kipps*, or *Tono Bungay*, *Love and Mr. Lewisham*, and his genius as a story teller.

\* \* \* \* \*

There was another writer of great influence on the thought and character of his time with whom I came in touch. I can claim at least that I spent a fortnight—an astonishing fortnight—in the company of Bernard Shaw. That was when he came out to France in the First World War. I may have had something to do with his coming. I was asked by the Chief of Intelligence, General Macdonagh, what writer I would recommend as a visitor to the Front who might produce something good about the life and heroism of our men. Almost in jest, with my imagination running wild, I said, “What about Bernard Shaw?”

The Chief of Intelligence laughed.

“Good heavens, what an idea!”

But not long afterwards out came Bernard Shaw, with his beard blowing in the wind of France and Flanders.

I went about with him to places like Ypres and Vimy and Arras. I sat with him at luncheon and dinner in generals' messes. In whatever company he was he looked the most distinguished man, and wherever he was his wit flashed out. Adjusting his steel hat when going into Arras, which was under heavy gunfire, he turned to me and said, “Gibbs, if the Germans kill me today they'll be a very ungrateful people!”

A general who felt uneasy as his host broke the silence by saying,

“When do you think this war will be over?”

Shaw may have been waiting for that question.

“Well, General,” he answered, “we're all anxious for an early and dishonourable peace.”

The general was not amused but there was a yelp of laughter from his junior staff officers.

He was very mischievous, as usual. He went back to write a screed called *Joy-riding at the Front*, which deeply offended the people at home. It seemed heartless and lacking any sense of compassion. It seemed to make a mockery of the war. I have not read it since it was first published, but I wonder whether I should be shocked with it, or whether it would read now as the clear, cold light of a keen intelligence not sparing the truth. I ought to read it again.

He was not unpatriotic and not a passionate pacifist, and one day he made a confession of faith to me.

“This war,” he said, “runs on parallel lines of thought. One of them is that it is a complete degradation of all that we mean by civilisation. The other is, my dear Gibbs, that

we've got to beat the Boche."

I was never converted by Shaw to any of his political and social ideas. Sometimes I wish I had been as a young man. Perhaps I ought to have been one of his Fabians at a time when there was great and desperate need of raising the standard of life for the labouring classes. The slums were still there. Wages were low and hours long. There was child labour in the factories, defended, I remember, by Franklin Thomasson, proprietor of that ill-fated paper *The Tribune*, dedicated to the gospel of Liberalism, of which I was a literary editor—Thomasson owing his wealth to the cotton spinning of Lancashire.

Bernard Shaw and his friends declared war on that kind of thing and Shaw, above all, had a pen like a sword as champion of justice and fair play against the monsters of greed and side-whiskered humbug. But I didn't like his full-fledged Socialism (and don't like it now), and in later years I didn't like some of his friends—those egregious Webbs—Sidney and Beatrice—who swallowed all the propaganda of Lenin and company, and defended the Communist régime in Russia and its iron tyranny of dictatorship, regardless of its cruelties and mass executions and the slave state of the Russian people.

Shaw's plays were a catalytic influence on the thought of our time. They broke down many absurdities in our old-fashioned Victorian view of life. They cut clean through many falsities. They had an audacity and brilliance of wit which for a time was shocking to the conventional mind. Looking back on their first productions it is astonishing to think how many people were shocked. I remember well going to see *Arms and the Man* when it was first performed. Nowadays there does not seem anything to quarrel about, any spark of explosive material. But that night when I went several people rose to leave their seats indignantly. They could not stand Shaw's satire on war and the quality of courage, as soldiers are supposed to have it in heroic style. It seemed to them in the worst possible taste and very near to blasphemy.

Shaw's discussions on marriage, on women, on kings and capitalists and dustmen and window cleaners did at least let in a lot of fresh air through the closed windows of Victorian and Edwardian homes. They made people think, and to laugh at these satires on life. Never to weep—except perhaps at St. Joan.

There is no sweetness or warmth in Shaw's plays. His characters are not fully human, but, like those in the plays of Molière, to whom Shaw has some affinity, appear on the stage as types and exponents of one side or another in his argument on life. One does not find them lovable. But as a satirist of social life, penetrating in his analysis, he stands unrivalled in our time.

\* \* \* \* \*

Another writer of genius was good enough to give me his friendship. His was a jolly kind of genius and no one enjoyed it more than himself, astonished by the fantasy and wildness of his own imagination, delighted by the quips and quiddities of his play with words. He was the first to laugh and chuckle at them as he wrote an article in a Fleet Street restaurant or on a table in an A.B.C., though without the slightest self-conceit. It was of course G. K. Chesterton. He was a laughing philosopher, but underneath his glorious sense of humour he was intensely serious as a witness and preacher of what he believed to be the truth. He loved justice and hated injustice. He fought for the liberty of the soul. He

believed in God and the Christian virtues of faith, courage, and the splendour of chivalry, with the Cross and the sword. He loved life, including beer and wine, and beauty and laughter, and hated anything which denied or frustrated or cramped its enjoyment. There was an undying romance in his heart, the romance of history, the boyish enthusiasm for noble deeds and heroes and saints. Even in his most jesting moods and in his most playful tricks with words and ideas, this message came through.

It is a pity there was no Boswell to record his conversation, for his wit and wisdom flowed through it unceasingly, as I had the joy of hearing him from time to time. He was a generous friend with a warmth of loyalty for those he liked.

Once at a dinner given to celebrate the first production of that Liberal newspaper *The Tribune* he uttered a panegyric of its young literary editor, who was myself. It was embarrassing to me and annoying to Franklin Thomasson its proprietor, but Chesterton enjoyed himself and it did me no harm.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nobility is rare among those who write books, and nobility is a rare quality anyhow in this modern age, but there was one author I knew who had a certain touch of it in mind and manner, not as a pose, for he was without pose, but in a born natural way like an aristocrat of a previous age. That was John Galsworthy. Some people were put off by his style and manner. They thought him a snob, whereas he loved the common man—farmers and sheep-shearers and all rustic folk. But he had never known poverty. His clothes were cut by the best tailor; he bought his boots at Lobb's; he was in every sense of the word that somewhat old-fashioned type in this careless age, "an English gentleman." That was at first sight, perhaps, a little intimidating. There was no hail-fellow-well-met touch about him. Yet when I was an impecunious journalist, shabbily dressed, he was charming to me and was not above drinking a cup of weak coffee with me in an A.B.C. round the corner in Fleet Street. I found in him a very human sweetness and sensitivity to all human suffering. At that time we were both troubled by the wave of unemployment, and together we tried to do something about it by an appeal to high powers through the Press. That was how I came to know him.

Like Chesterton, whom in no way did he resemble in the faintest degree, he hated injustice. He also hated cruelty, the vulgarity of wealth, meanness and intolerance and lack of fair play. The plays he wrote are based on these themes. That is their weakness from the point of view of art. They are plays with a purpose, to put over some denunciation of the things he most disliked or to preach pity for human suffering. So it was with *Justice*, in showing the agony and terror of solitary confinement. Winston Churchill saw it as Home Secretary and was deeply moved, and promised to do something about it. Galsworthy's characters and plots are not always true to life, the plots being somewhat obviously constructed, but they are still impressive and poignant. In broadcast productions by the B.B.C. they still hold one's interest and stir one's emotion.

His best work was *The Forsyte Saga*. His portraits of those old Forsytes, and of Soames himself, are perfect, written with a complete sympathy and understanding. They belong to a period of social history now gone. Their types no longer exist, their way of life in a prosperous, secure middle-class England has departed after two World Wars and a

social revolution levelling us all. He was not successful with his younger crowd. They are not quite authentic in their manners and speech. He invents his own slang for them. But the book as a whole is a work of genius and there are many passages of great beauty in it; his descriptions of Soames's garden in sunlight and moonlight, and all through its pages there is the revelation of a mind sensitive to all human agony and to the troubled ardour of youth. I believe *The Forsyte Saga* will live in English literature, though it is a fashion now to doubt it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Living in the country now I don't see many authors with whom I can discuss books and ideas. But one of them was my great friend until quite recently he died. I find it hard to believe that he has gone, and sometimes glance at the big armchair in which he used to sit—and take a nap—half expecting to see him there, with his thin-lipped smile, amused perhaps at having dropped off to sleep.

“What about another game?” he would ask, rousing himself.

James Lonsdale Hodson was not one of the most famous writers, but he had made a distinguished place for himself as war correspondent, diarist, novelist, playwright, and speaker on the B.B.C. A Lancashire man, he had a great following in the North of England—many of his novels and plays dealt with its life and character which he knew to the very marrow of its bones.

He was the most industrious of all writers I have known, never far from his typewriter, which he would bring with him on week-end visits. Having been a newspaper man for many years in the old days, he could write anywhere and at any time between interludes for work and play. But he didn't like work for its own sake. He much preferred a game of golf, or billiards, or a wild form of croquet into which I initiated him. That was called Madders because it makes you madder and madder, and he became so keen on this that often we would start our duels on the lawn soon after breakfast and go on until dusk, with interludes for refreshment and a bit of talk. With a fine eye and a delicate touch, with his long thin hands, he was good at any game, and towards the end I had to acknowledge his superiority on my lawn.

He had a boyish enthusiasm for this kind of thing, putting all he knew into any game he played. He was out to win because otherwise he thought it childish, but he was a generous loser and delighted if I made a good shot or a winning stroke. To the end of his life, within a week or two, he played a fine game of golf and was seldom beaten by his friends. Perhaps that was the cause of his untimely death, because he may have strained himself too much on a golfing holiday.

A soldier in the First World War, he went through the battles of the Somme and all the mud and blood of those terrible days in High Wood and the places of death. That experience was always in the background of his mind and his emotion was deeply stirred when he wrote about it or spoke about it. The last novel he wrote was *Return to the Wood*, that wood being High Wood in which so many of his friends had been killed. It followed a talk he had given on the B.B.C., which greatly moved his listeners because of the emotion in his voice, so intense that he could hardly get through his script.

He became half a pacifist, hating war, yet he believed that there were times when war

is necessary for a nation's honour or the defence of liberty. In the Second World War he became a correspondent and took all risks, going out to meet them in France, North Africa, Burma, and in convoy at sea. During this time he wrote his diaries, published in a series of books by Gollancz. He puts in every detail of his day's experience, which he noted down with penetrating observation, recording conversations on these ways of adventure. They contain the raw material of history, and later on will be used as such by future historians. For here are the facts, the colour, the character, the thoughts, the blurting out of truth by officers and men and young pilots of fighting planes, and the Mercantile Marine taking their ships through minefields and enemy submarines. One of Hodson's finest books—in my opinion the best, though not in his own judgment—is a novel called *English Family*. It is all there, that Second World War as seen and suffered by a typical family in different ways of service.

Hodson, in spite of the sweetness in him, was a severe critic of men and affairs. He had no patience with dishonesty, slackness, or any touch of crookedness and charlatanism. He had a complete honesty of mind and his intellectual integrity was absolute. In newspaper articles and in "Letters to the Editor" he exposed what he believed to be anything fraudulent or unfair; and doubtless he made enemies by so doing, but he made many friends who admired his courage.

He was a generous-hearted man and my own best friend. When I was a patient in Charing Cross Hospital for two operations he came to see me every day, getting on the right side of the nurses, and finding a private staircase leading to my room, he would appear, regardless of visiting hours—even sometimes when the hospital was settling down for the night. When he was taken ill himself I went to see him in hospital, and as I sat by his bedside he smiled at me and said: "The boot is on the other leg now!" These were the last words I heard him say. A few days later he was dead.

\* \* \* \* \*

I rejoice in still having a good friend among my brothers of the pen. He comes into my room from time to time and fills it with laughter and lively anecdotes about authors past and present, and private information behind the scenes of the publishing world, and fantastic characters whom he has known on his way through life. So I have a good time with Frank Swinnerton, novelist, historian of books and bookmen, critic, essayist and, privately, a born mimic.

It is one of the best of my pleasures to go to tea with him in a very old house called Old Tokefield, where Mrs. Swinnerton and her charming young daughter Olivia give one a kind welcome to a table with hot scones, currant buns, buttered toast, and a rich variety of attractive cakes. Here in the bosom of his family and in an atmosphere of peace and happiness, Frank Swinnerton has always another story to tell, another rich episode in life's comedy; and his wife and daughter laugh in the right place as though they had heard it for the first time. Two cats, or three, come into the room haughtily or stealthily, and their master talks to them in their own language which he understands perfectly, having long been a student of cat psychology. Lately we have been pleased to pretend that he is one of the strong, silent men, because no less than two of his friends apologised for having talked too much. When I write to him I venture to hope that he will break his silence when next he comes. In the next letter he writes in the tiniest handwriting—each letter perfect,

though microscopic—he hopes that I will pardon his miserable speechlessness. This seems to us both a very good joke.

Dear Frank Swinnerton has a genius for friendship. He knows, or has known, a great number of contemporary writers. There was a long comradeship between him and Arnold Bennett, whom he understood so well that once when somebody asked Bennett what he thought on a certain subject, Bennett, inhibited by a stammer, said, “You tell him, Swinnerton.” He can imitate Bennett’s way of speech and manners so perfectly that it is quite uncanny. It is Arnold Bennett himself, as I used to know him in the Reform Club, to which we both belonged, or as I used to meet him for a morning greeting in Cadogan Gardens, when both of us were living in that neighbourhood. But I didn’t know him well. He was an extraordinarily shy man. I actually saw him blush when I thanked him for an act of kindness to a young friend of mine. But Swinnerton established with him one of those ideal friendships which exist sometimes, but not often, between two men utterly unlike each other in character and temperament.

Frank Swinnerton has a tremendous correspondence with writers (both men and women), publishers, and critics. They write long letters to him telling him of their troubles and asking for his advice. For they know that this friend of theirs is kind, knowledgeable, and wise as well as witty.

He makes one laugh, but if one needs sympathy, a cheering word in sickness or in sorrow, one gets it generously and quickly from this hard-worked author—always working, always writing—whom I am lucky to have as my friend.

## II

### A CAT MAY LOOK AT A KING

A STORY is told of Oscar Browning, a Cambridge Don (generally regarded as an incurable snob), when he showed the Kaiser round his college. Afterwards he was surrounded by undergraduates who were anxious to know what he thought of "Kaiser Bill." To whom he made reply: "He is one of the most charming Emperors I have ever met."

I make no such boast, but as a cat may look at a king, so may a journalist and war correspondent and writer of books. I find it a curious thought that as an impecunious young man with no more than a few shillings in my pocket, I have banqueted with Kings, even with one Emperor who was Kaiser Bill himself (they were unaware of my presence), and on other occasions have had conversations with them at home and abroad. It never did me any good.

It was from Fleet Street that I was told off now and then to attend a royal banquet at Guildhall. Nothing could be more magnificent in colour or pageantry, with the guests in every kind of uniform, naval and military, wearing their orders and decorations, and the Lord Mayor and Aldermen in their robes of office, and old Gog and Magog looking down upon the treasures of gold plate glistening beneath the timbered roof and minstrels' gallery of this ancient shrine of history. Into the courtyard had clattered a King's escort of cavalry. Trumpets sounded. Music ushered in the turtle soup. From turtle soup to Waterloo port, the banquet was cheering to the soul and stomach of a young journalist who, as a rule, paid one and twopence for his lunch and a penny for the waiter. And there at the high table sat the German Kaiser, an impressive figure with his upturned moustaches, or Alfonso of Spain, or Manoel of Portugal, the boy king whose reign was brief. I remember that boy whom afterwards I met when he was a king in exile. He was in a merry mood and winked at his gentlemen in attendance and raised his glass to them from time to time, not at all overawed by all this splendour and ceremony.

The first king with whom I had any conversation was a wily one. It was King Ferdinand of Bulgaria. It was a chance meeting during the Balkan wars which were a prelude to the First World War. With some other war correspondents—English, French, and German—I was standing at one end of a little bridge across the river Maritza from which the Turks had retreated. Presently Ferdinand came up in a big car and halted at the bridge. Because of the weather I wore a fur cap and sheepskin coat like a Bulgarian peasant, and I suppose this costume—no disguise for my English look—caught the eye of the King, for he beckoned me to come up and speak to him. He was very civil, smiling down his long nose with little piggy eyes, and a cruel mouth. He asked what paper I represented and made some general remarks about the progress of the war. He spoke perfect English and I seem to remember that he had an English chauffeur. I remember he said, "The Turks are still up to their old tricks." With one foot on the running-board of his car I felt perfectly at ease—perhaps too much at ease and too easy in my address to a

reigning sovereign, whom I failed to call “Your Majesty” or anything of that kind beyond a simple “Sir.” But I felt that this little conversation might be useful to myself and my fellow-correspondents. We had been utterly frustrated and humiliated. Now I thought the censorship might be relaxed. He seemed very friendly and afterwards spoke to some of my friends, walking on to the bridge with us. . . . Three days later I was arrested by order of the King himself (who had spotted me in an area from which we were barred). Old Fox Ferdinand!

After young Manoel had lost his throne, I was received by the Queen Mother of Portugal, who thanked me for some help I had given to the release of many of her aristocrats who had been put into horrible prisons and treated like convicts. At the request of the Duchess of Bedford, Lord Lytton, and others I had gone out to Portugal, bribed my way into the prisons—it was rather like an adventure in the French Revolution—and afterwards wrote a series of articles in the *Daily Chronicle* which alarmed the Republican leaders, who wanted to retain England’s friendship. Anyhow, for some weeks came to my little house in Holland Street, Kensington, a number of these released prisoners to kiss my hands. A few weeks later they forgot all about me. But the Queen Mother pinned a little enamel cross to my breast. I have it still in a cabinet, and to this day I don’t know whether or not I was decorated with the third class of the Order of the Holy Ghost or some other minor honour of the former régime. This happened in a country house to which the ex-King arrived with a number of his gentlemen. He was not overwhelmed with grief for the loss of his crown. He was, indeed, in a larking mood, and when he went upstairs he leaned over the banisters and one by one knocked off the top hats of his gentlemen in attendance. Their laughter did not ring quite true.

King Edward VII had a horror of reporters but, again, as a cat may look at a king, I was close to him on many occasions and once helped to save his life, though he was unaware of it. It was when his horse, Minoru, won the Derby. The crowd went wild, and when the King went out to lead his horse in, they surged forward in a great mass of shouting and cheering humanity. A crowd on the move is a dangerous monster, and for a few minutes the King was in grave danger as those behind pushed forward those in front who could not stop. Some twenty of us linked arms and made a ring round the King, pressing backwards with all our strength, while the King’s detective—a tall Irishman—struck at the foremost faces with clenched fists. The King stood there panting a little. I saw the rise and fall of his chest. The Prince of Wales, afterwards George V, stood by his side deeply alarmed until his father retreated with dignity to the royal enclosure.

I went over to Ireland when Edward VII attended the races at Punchestown and Leopardstown and other Irish racecourses. Those were the gay days, with the nobility and gentry of Ireland and England crowding the stands and the paddocks. I remember a day when I met General Pole-Carew, who was in command of the arrangements for the King’s visit. I happened to know him and he greeted me cheerily. “Hulloa, young fellow! What are you doing here?” On the spur of the moment I told him a fairy-tale.

“I’m looking for the prettiest girl in Ireland.”

He looked interested and amused.

“Are you, indeed? Well, you’ve come to the right place and the right man. Wait here a minute.”

He led up a number of the most marvellous young beauties in their summer frocks,

and having told them of my quest their Irish eyes were full of laughter.

Often I went to Windsor when there were Royal visitors at the Castle, and I think we “special correspondents” had a better time in the Castle inn than the crowned heads at the royal banqueting. There were Falstaffian scenes in our private room. One of us—J. D. Irvine of the *Morning Post*—had a rich voice and a dramatic gift with which he rendered arias from Pagliacci and other operas in the grand manner after regaling the company with ribald stories. Another—an artist on the *Daily Graphic*, before photography killed black-and-white drawing—could, with the assistance of his table napkin and an india-rubber face, convert himself into an exact likeness of Queen Victoria in her later years. As a shy young man—it took me many years to get over that shyness in spite of the rough and tumble of Fleet Street—I took no part in these entertainments except that of a laughing and sometimes blushing listener.

During those visits to Windsor I was an eye-witness of the royal shoots when the Kaiser and others went out with the guns. It seemed to me a massacre of birds rather than any form of sport. The best shot, I remember, was the Prince of Wales, afterwards George V. Alfonso of Spain looked bored and chilly in our English climate. The Kaiser, always dramatic, wore a Robin Hood hat with a feather in it. At a respectful distance I breathed the same air as these exalted ones in windy and generally pouring weather at Cowes.

Once I watched the arrival of the Kaiser at Kiel shortly before the First World War, when he was cheered by a group of English people who afterwards hated him. As I have mentioned elsewhere, my Aunt Kate, who was in service with the children of Queen Victoria, once had to chastise this august personage when he was a naughty boy at Windsor (that at least is our family tradition), and when I saw him on State visits I used to think with amusement, “Yes, my fine fellow, an aunt of mine once gave you a spanking.”

Not that I had any hatred of him. History records that at the eleventh hour he tried too late to prevent the war with urgent pleas to Nicholas of Russia not to allow the mobilisation of the Russian Army which would force him to mobilise the German Army, that last request being withheld from the Czar until the fatal decree was issued. After the war I was against the popular clamour of “Hang the Kaiser!” and annoyed some of my friends in Fleet Street by a letter to my paper, the old *Daily Chronicle*, deploring this outcry for vengeance.

I never had any interview with him, but years afterwards, before the Second World War, I sat at a luncheon-table in Berlin next to his only daughter—the Duchess of Brunswick—who was very charming and gay. She took a fancy to my wife and gave her a photograph of herself and her five handsome young sons. For a time she had been impressed by Hitler and the Nazi spirit of German youth, but then saw the terrible danger to which it was leading and the arrogance and folly of men like Ribbentrop who were abominably rude to her. When Neville Chamberlain flew to Munich she and her husband took hands and danced a few steps of joy like two bourgeois Germans because it seemed to be a promise of peace. So she told my wife. And during the lunch the Duke of Brunswick—a lineal descendant of George III—turned to me and spoke some grim words.

“It’s a dirty world, isn’t it?”

I had to agree with him when the world was plunged into a second World War before the wounds and agony of the first—“the War to end War” as it had been called—had not yet been healed in the bodies and souls of men.

I once caused King Alfonso of Spain to take shelter in a butcher's shop. It was in the Isle of Wight where my son and I were on holiday. Alfonso was walking at a slow pace with the Empress Eugénie, a very old lady, who was leaning on his arm. We did not like to pass them and walked behind very slowly, also while I was touched by seeing a lady who was once a great beauty and Empress of France before the defeat at Sedan and the tragic years of exile. Lovely she had looked in many paintings and engravings, and now, when I saw her, she was a frail-looking, little old woman, lined and worn by age. King Alfonso did not like those two men walking behind him—he was always in danger of assassination—and suddenly dodged with Eugénie into the butcher's shop and waited there until we had passed.

I saw him several times in San Sebastian and for the last time after he had lost his crown. That was in the dining-room of a small inn in France. After his lunch, the French innkeeper brought him a visitors' book and asked him for his autograph, which he gave without a word. He took no notice of me as I stood up out of respect when he left the room. People who knew him as King said he was a gay and high-spirited fellow, passionate and boyish, but some of his own aristocrats were against him and he lost the loyalty of his people. "Well," he said once, "I may not always be King of Spain but I hope to die a Spanish gentleman."

I was one of the very first to learn of the death of King Edward when I went at midnight into the equerries' entrance of Buckingham Palace after I had seen King George and Queen Mary drive out in tears, but that is a story I have told elsewhere. As I have said, Edward VII detested the very sight of a newspaper man, but by the wish of Queen Alexandra a select few of us were allowed into the room where he lay on his deathbed. He lay there more handsome I thought than in life. Death had given him a greater nobility and we few were hushed and awestruck as we stood in silence.

I was in the Abbey for the Coronation of King George V, thrilled by the splendour and solemnity of the scene within that ancient shrine of history where many ghosts walk—the ghosts of lion men and tiger men, of saints and sinners, of kings and princes, queens and princesses, heroes and villains, martyrs and traitors. The old Duke of Norfolk, black-bearded and broadshouldered like a medieval baron, was Garter-King-of-Arms, and at one moment when the King was being unrobed he had trouble with a shoulder knot. As Alexander cut the Gordian knot with his sword, the Duke pulled out a clasp-knife and solved his difficulty. The flash of the knife about the King's throat looked a trifle alarming.

We had been in the Abbey at 7.30 in the morning, and to ease the pangs of hunger during this long ceremonial—we should not get out until after three in the afternoon—my wife had prepared some sandwiches for me which were neatly packed in a tin box. I laid them on the parapet of the place where I sat and left my seat to watch the entrance of the peeresses. When I came back my sandwiches had gone. But there was a lady who had been sitting next to me. It was Marie Corelli. I thought she had a sleek look, but I had no evidence to bring against her and any dark suspicion I entertained may have maligned her. So I went hungry.

I was one of four journalists who accompanied King George V on his Coronation tour, when all the pageantry of Scotland came out to greet the King. The roads were lined with Scottish territorials, who afterwards fought and fell in Flanders, the fine flower of

Scotland's youth. The people sang the old Jacobite songs. There was the skirl of bagpipes. Outside Edinburgh Castle the King was kept waiting for quite a time while the heralds made question and answer as to the credentials of this man who demanded entrance. In Stirling, in Perth, in other cities there were loyal addresses, and it was as we entered Perth that I had one of the best laughs of my life. I have told about this before, but perhaps one of the Ancients may be permitted to repeat a good story.

There were four Daimlers in the royal progress and we four journalists were in the last one. Curiosity had been aroused all along the way as to whom we might be and there were conflicting theories. Some thought we were foreign representatives. Others suggested that we were detectives. But as we waited while a loyal address was being delivered in Perth, two old Scots standing close to our car consulted with each other.

Said one with very blue eyes and a fringe of reddish hair under his chin:

“Who mun they be, Jock?”

The other gazed at us intently.

“Eh,” he answered solemnly, “they mun be the King's barstards.”

I was tempted to pass this story up to the King, who I am sure would have roared with laughter, but I dared not take the risk.

When George V came out to France during the First World War he insisted upon going very near to the Front line, somewhat to the alarm of his generals. The young Prince of Wales, then a lieutenant in the Guards and familiar with trenches, dug-outs, shell holes and gunfire, was in attendance. On one morning it seemed as if the enemy had spotted the King and his company—I stood a yard or two away from him—for while he was looking across a ridge at the German lines shells began to fall rather close. He was asked to draw back a hundred yards or so, but the German gunners lengthened their range. This happened three times, but the King himself was quite unperturbed. On this visit His Majesty was good enough to receive us five war correspondents and spoke very friendly words to us, thanking us for our dispatches which he read every day. He shook hands with us and I noticed how small his hand was, like a boy's, when for a moment I held it in mine.

One morning after the war I was summoned to Buckingham Palace for an investiture. A number of distinguished officers of the Army and Navy and a few others, of whom I was one, were to receive honours and we waited for our turn. The King came out after breakfast wiping his moustache after the morning cup of coffee. When my turn came I knelt down on a velvet cushion while he gave me the accolade and put the ribbon and cross of a Knight Commander of the British Empire round my neck. He spoke a few words:

“I am very glad to give this to you.”

It did me quite a lot of harm, that honour, as a literary man and journalist. Many of my former associates in Fleet Street (from which I had departed not long after the war) could not bear the thought of it. One of them was Hamilton Fyfe who had been my friend and now hated me, and I don't think H. M. Tomlinson has ever quite forgiven me. But it has not made any difference to my own way of life nor instilled any poison into my pen—any taint of snobbishness. Titles mean very little nowadays when they are handed out in batches.

I spent a day with the Duke of York before he became George VI. It was when he went down to visit his boys' camp in Suffolk, which was one of his special hobbies, paid for out of his privy purse. It was an experiment in sociology and, as he told me on the way down in his car, none of his friends thought it would work. Boys of all classes, from Eton and Harrow and from elementary schools in the East End of London and elsewhere, were brought together for this period of holiday camping, divided up into teams in which they were all mixed, feeding together, sleeping together, having sports together, without the slightest difference of class.

"It works marvellously," he told me. "Eton boys chum up with Bermondsey boys, and Harrow boys with those from Hoxton or wherever it may be. There is no snobbishness or class consciousness on either side. The secret is in the team spirit and terrific competition between the teams in sports and games. Whatever class of boy can run fast in a relay race or pull hard in a tug-of-war he is cheered on by his fellows. Before the end of the holiday they are on the best possible terms of friendship."

During that long day I was able to discover some of the characteristics of the young man who was destined, against his wish, to become King. He was very shy and confessed that he hated being stared at by crowds. He pulled down the blinds of the car when we passed through towns. He had an immense admiration for his brother, then Prince of Wales.

"He's going to make a speech lasting nearly an hour," he told me. "I couldn't do that to save my life."

He loved a joke and a good laugh, and he was happy and easy in the company of boys, as I saw throughout the day when he bathed with them, letting them throw water at him; lunched with them, leaving his own place to join them at one of the tables; and taking part with gusto in their sing-song round the camp fire.

Later in history, as King George VI, he came out to France at the beginning of the war when, for a time during the "phoney war," I was a correspondent again, feeling like a man in a dream, or the ghost of myself, because all this was a dreadful repetition. I had seen it all before. Our young soldiers looked exactly like those who had sung "It's a long, long way to Tipperary" in 1914. They were in the same places—Arras, Amiens, Lille, Monchy and villages around. They were drinking in the same old *estaminets*. Only one thing was different and that was all the difference between life and death. There was no thunder of artillery, no bursting shells, no swish of machine-gun bullets.

Sir John Gort, Commander-in-Chief, presented me and others to the King. He shook hands with me and laughed and said, "Back to the old job, Gibbs?"

But I saw nothing of the Second World War except the blitz over England, having come back just before Dunkirk. When the great attack was made on D-day I was out of it, being too old perhaps for that adventure, though I didn't think so. Partial blindness had made it impossible before then.

Some little time before the Second World War I was invited to meet young King Leopold of the Belgians at the house of a friend in Brussels. It was at a time when there was a political crisis—there was a frequent political crisis—and in conversation with ordinary citizens in Brussels it seemed that the King himself was unpopular, though I couldn't think why.

That evening in Brussels about a dozen people, including several ladies, were present when the King arrived—a handsome young man, quiet and unaffected, with a real charm of manner. He spoke English perfectly, and during the evening he beckoned me to come and sit next to him and entered into a conversation which lasted for nearly an hour.

At that time Hitler was becoming aggressive and the possibility of war was in many minds, and undoubtedly his.

“If it comes,” he said, “I think Belgian neutrality will be respected this time. That will be of advantage to France by safeguarding her left flank. Anyhow, I don’t think the Germans will attack through Belgium. They have a different plan of action. But I hope it won’t happen at all.”

After further talk about this he spoke some words which I noted down at the time.

“There won’t be a war anyhow until the late summer of ’39.”

He was right about that. He knew what was being talked about behind the scenes in Germany, but he was wrong—tragically wrong—about the inviolability of Belgium. All his sympathy was with Great Britain and France, and he had a profound admiration for England and, I thought, an exaggerated optimism regarding its future.

It was when he had launched into a philosophical discourse on the subject of world history. Obviously he had read a good deal and had thought over what he had read, with ideas of his own which he put modestly and with a smile.

“There are cycles of civilisation,” he said. “If one follows the story of the old civilisations one sees how each one of them ascended in a curve of power and prosperity until after a thousand years or so they reached the zenith and began to decline down the descending curve. England is beginning the upward climb and has at least a thousand years of progress until they reach their culminating point.”

That seemed to me altogether too hopeful a view and I told him that I thought we were well on the downward curve, but he would not agree to that and assured me with a laugh that England was only just beginning her ascent, according to Destiny.

He spoke always of England, but I think he must have been thinking of the British Empire, as we still called it then, and if one includes Canada and Australia and New Zealand in one’s vision of the future, his optimism does not seem stretched too far. But little old England, without the great Dominions, is visibly declining in power, having given up so many of her possessions, having yielded—perhaps too hastily—to the new ideals of self-determination and fanatical nationalism, having become ashamed, with a guilt complex, of her old Imperialism or what is now used as a reproach by her critics, including the Americans, her “colonialism.”

“Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre.  
Judge of the nations, spare us yet,  
Lest we forget, lest we forget.”

Kipling’s lines of pride and warning come back to my mind as I remember the prophecy made by the King of the Belgians. We are not yet one with Nineveh and Tyre.

Our conversation was interrupted and then ended by a visit from one of Leopold’s ministers, who brought news of some new political trouble. He was always in difficulty,

as he told me, owing to the two races in his kingdom—the French-speaking Walloons and the Flemish folk.

“If I try to do something favourable to the Flemish,” he said, “the others hate me for it. And if I am fair to them I get into hot water with their political opponents. It’s all very difficult—and quite impossible to please everybody.”

He was the target of world criticism when he surrendered to the German Army after a brief spell of resistance when his troops were routed and outmanœuvred. He did only what we had to do before Dunkirk, and now no one holds it against his honour and courage. But after the war he had many critics in his own country and was forced to resign in favour of young Baudouin. I should like to have another talk with him. I found him charming and highly intelligent.

Now I come to think of it I did, like Oscar Browning, have the opportunity of meeting an emperor—“the most charming Emperor I have ever met”—being the only one. I had lunch with him, and sat next to his daughter. It was the Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, which we call Abyssinia. One had to speak French to him, and in the third person, which I found difficult.

*Sa Majesté se trouve bien, j’espère?*

He is a handsome man with his well-trimmed beard and moustache, jet black before it became silver, and the look of a saint and a hero, almost too good to be true. He was very amiable, but I found myself more at ease with his daughter, who spoke very good English. I ventured to tell her that she was remarkably like Princess Nefertiti, and she laughed and said, “I accept that as a compliment.” She was studying to be a nurse in a London hospital.

Since then I have had no encounters with kings or emperors, and have not even had the privilege of a cat except the one who was asked, “Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been?” To which she made answer, “I’ve been up to London to see the Queen.”

### III

#### THE DANGERS OF BEING AN AUTHOR

IT is generally thought by people not connected with literary men—not their wives or their families—that the life of an author is highly enviable. As friends of mine have said: “You can write where you like and when you like, and you are not tied down to office hours, and you are entirely your own master.”

That sounds good and there is a certain amount of truth in it, provided that the author is sufficiently successful to write where he likes and when he likes—how many can do this?—and does not have to suffer torture, financial anxiety, and lack of ideas as his own master, with a typewriter and a wad of white paper, on which he has to write an incredible number of words which must be the right words, pleasing to himself, to his publisher, to his critics, and to the reading public.

All that is very difficult, and if an author has written one successful book, or even two or three, he has no sense of security. What about the next? Will he ever get another idea or work out a plot or theme for another story? That is when he begins to agonise and sometimes to become panic-stricken. He chases an idea like a will-o'-the-wisp and it eludes him. He goes for long walks hoping to find an idea at the next turning of the road, and comes back without it, moody, irritable, frustrated.

Lady Cynthia Asquith has told in her portrait of James Barrie, to whom she acted as secretary, that for ten years he could not find an idea for a new play. I can imagine no more horrible ordeal for an author. Ten years of nagging thought and barrenness of imagination. In Barrie's case it caused no financial anxiety because he had made a fortune with his previous work, but imagine the torture of a writer dependent upon his next book for the nourishment of his wife and family, for the schooling of his young boys, and for the due payment of Income Tax already in arrears.

Forty years ago, when I gave up a regular job in Fleet Street to be a writer of books, I was haunted by this sense of insecurity. The success of one book might never be repeated, and I had those awful periods between one book and another when my mind was as blank as a sheet of paper in a silent and unused typewriter.

“I'm finished!” I would announce to my incredulous wife. “I haven't an idea in my head. I shall never write another novel.”

It happened every time between the publication of one book and another, while my friends would say, “How easily he writes! He is never at a loss for an idea.” And my dismal groans were received with ridicule by my family, who would say, “You're like the boy who cried, ‘Wolf, Wolf!’” But I reminded them gloomily that one day the wolf came, and no one believed it.

Some years ago I wrote half a novel and could not finish it. In despair I flung it into the coal-hole. Then for two months I paced the country roads and heaths in search of another idea. No idea came. Then at last I thought of that unfinished work in the coal-hole

and wondered if it still lay there. Strangely enough I found it—covered in coal dust. I took it out, re-typed it and finished it. It was duly published and was a fair success, but I did not dare tell this story lest my critics should say—how could they resist it?—“It’s a pity he didn’t leave it in the coal-hole!”

It’s dangerous to be an author.

It’s dangerous, or at least extremely hazardous, to rely upon the writing of books or poetry—God help the fellow!—as one’s sole source of income. It is indeed foolhardy to say as a young man, “Now I’m going to be an author,” and to retire to one’s bedroom in the parental house with a bottle of ink and a penny exercise book (now threepence, perhaps) and cheap editions of the great masters on the bookshelves. It is still more hazardous if one has no parental home but a bed-sitting-room for which the rent has to be paid, in addition to light, fuel and food cooked on a gas-ring.

The first danger, of course, is starvation, or at the best under-nourishment. I am inclined to think that this way of ensuring an early death, and the favour of the gods who take them young, is now out of date. The modern poet does not starve in an attic, but has a job in a publisher’s office or writes snappy little articles for the popular papers, or serves behind the counter of a big store, writing only in his spare time when he delves into his sub-consciousness, smoking too many cigarettes which he can ill-afford (3s. 10d. a packet), or awaiting inspiration from the divine Muse which, alas, very seldom comes. So it is with the young novelist if he is a prudent man and willing to work overtime.

When I wrote my first novels I was a hard-working journalist in Fleet Street and a married man. My hours were very irregular and often I came home late at night; but somehow I found time and will-power to begin and finish a novel, which is no light task whatever the quality may be.

I wrote *The Street of Adventure*, my first success, when I was out of a job after the death of *The Tribune*, that great Liberal newspaper on which I had been literary editor. I wrote it with desperate industry for one purpose only—apart from an imaginative urge to tell the story of a Fleet Street romance—and that was to maintain the upkeep of a little house in Kensington.

My wife and I went down for a month to a coastguard cottage at Littlehampton. All day long the noise of a fun fair blared forth with the joyous screams of children building sand castles or riding on donkeys. I wrote for dear life late into the night, and by the end of the month wrote the magic words “The End.” I took it up to town and, having to change at a railway junction, left it on the mantelshelf of the station waiting-room. Upon reaching town I became aware of my loss. It was my only copy, hand-written. I telegraphed to the stationmaster and two hours later received a reply, “Manuscript found.” A prayer of thankfulness rose from my heart, but afterwards I was not so sure that its recovery was a blessing. That was when I was threatened with half a dozen libel actions. Most of my characters in the novel were easily recognisable portraits of *The Tribune* staff. In the innocence of my heart I thought they would be liked by the originals, except perhaps by the proprietor, Franklin Thomasson, of that ill-fated journal, of whom I had been slightly critical. They did not like these portraits in prose, and it was my “hero,” Christopher Codrington, in real life Randolph Charlton, who resented my humorous caricature of him. By going to law (but not taking the case into court) he cost me a good bit of money deducted from my earnings by the publisher, who had to foot the bill.

So, as I have said, authorship is one of the dangerous professions. The risk of libel is perilous and often difficult to avoid. The choice of a name is apt to lead to trouble, and however unusual the name one may use for a disagreeable character, there is sure to be someone who bears it and takes umbrage because he insists that he is suffering professional or social damage by being falsely identified with my sinister or disreputable fellow. Having been in trouble over this several times, I tried to safeguard myself by choosing names of obscure stations out of a railway timetable. No sooner had my novel been published than I had a letter from a Catholic friend of mine—a priest—saying, “Why did you take the names of two of my cousins and make them fall in love, when they hate each other like poison?”

My most unfortunate, and expensive, experience was connected with a non-fiction book called *Ordeal in England*. It covered the period of the Abdication, which could not be passed over. Having been devoted to Edward when he was Prince of Wales, I wrote with great sympathy and without malice, but when 40,000 copies of this book had been ordered by the bookshops, I received a letter from the Duke of Windsor’s solicitor demanding its immediate withdrawal. Now this was a staggering blow. The offending chapter had been examined by no less than three of my publisher’s professional readers and by two lawyers intent upon avoiding all cause of complaint by the Duke or Duchess. They had passed it as impeccable. Now, Charles Evans of Heinemann was deeply anxious to avoid trouble of this kind, having already been taken into court for a book dealing with the Abdication and sternly rebuked by the Lord Chief Justice, with a warning that if it happened again severe consequences would follow. My book was withdrawn from all libraries and bookshops. When 40,000 copies had been returned I knew that I was sunk, for each one had to be paid for. The publishers shared the loss with me and my bill of costs amounted to £1,500.

Did I say that it is dangerous to be an author?

The younger novelist has a hard time nowadays to get his work published and, if published, to get sufficient reward by sales to make a fair income. Owing to the increasing cost of book production because of the rise of printers’ wages, the price of paper and binding, and the overhead expenses of publishers themselves—in rents, rates, salaries and advertising—always going up, the publishers are not inclined to take a risk with a novel by an unknown writer which is unlikely to sell several thousands of copies. It must have some special and sensational interest. For a time this was provided by extreme frankness on the subject of sex, but now, after several prosecutions at the Old Bailey and elsewhere, that form of sensation is too dangerous. Though I hate police censorship of books and made a public protest against it, I must admit that some of these recent novels were not much this side of pornography.

Now and again a novel like *The Cruel Sea* leaps into a prodigious sale. The lucky author enjoys a rich reward, increased almost certainly by the vast publicity and payments of film and television rights. That happens only once now and again. More often, but still uncertainly, a new writer has his novel chosen by one of the book clubs and is assured of a big sale. The odds on this are slightly better than the chance of winning a prize in the “Pools.” Failing this luck, the novelist without an established reputation, which has given him a faithful public, is frozen out. His sales are meagre and do not provide a living wage. He must find some other way of keeping a roof over his head and avoiding under-

nourishment.

In any case, whatever an author earns is apt to turn into fairy gold. The officers of the Inland Revenue fasten upon him with courtesy and kindness—"we beg to remind you"—and by the time he has paid his Income Tax and Surtax he wonders how he can economise. Shall he sell his car? Shall he give up smoking cigarettes? For the author is naked to the slings and arrows of the social system in this so-called Welfare State. Unlike business men he has no "cover," as they call it. He cannot put his car down to office expenses. He cannot charge up his way of living on a high scale, apart from reasonable expenses, to the office account. He has no loss on one business which he can set against the profits on another, unless he buys a farm and has the genius to run it at a loss.

This same lack of "cover" applies also to artists, actors and barristers. My old friend Forbes-Robertson was worried about his Income Tax and had a visit from the local inspector. All was well, but Forbes-Robertson in a nervous way kept putting his long, thin, sensitive hand up to his jaw. Upon leaving, the Income Tax official, who had been very courteous, hesitated at the door for a moment and said, "Excuse me, Sir Johnston, but have you paid tax for the crest on your signet ring?"

Fairy gold? I earned a lot of it on a lecture tour in the United States—so much so that I was ashamed of fleecing the American public for my poor oratory. I need not have worried. My lecture agent took 40 per cent. The American government took, let me say, 20 per cent. (I have forgotten the exact amount), and when I returned to England the government took more than 50 per cent. of the remainder.

While I was in America for a time during the Second World War I had to come to the aid of some relatives who had gone over to save the children from German bombing but were now penniless.

I had money owing to me in the United States for the sale of books, and in entire innocence drew it out for this rescue work. From certain remarks made to me by friends I became uneasy about what I was doing. I went to see our Treasury representative in Washington to consult him on the subject. He was a most charming man and quite sympathetic, but he uttered some very terrible words.

"My dear sir, after what you have told me I can only say that you are committing a crime by every breath you breathe, if you go on drawing out dollars and spending them here."

"I can't let my family die on a dirt road in Massachusetts," I told him.

It was a crime during the war to use the money one earned in the United States for any purpose whatever in that country.

When I came back to England I went to see my literary agent. He thumbed through an official-looking book and spoke thoughtfully.

"I don't think you'll be brought up at Bow Street," he told me. "I think it'll be the Guildhall."

"I don't want to be brought up anywhere!" I answered miserably.

However, I need not have worried, for my crime was overlooked.

Several authors I know—highly successful—avoid the rapacity of the tax collectors by living abroad for six months in the year. They have villas on the Riviera and bask in sunshine and drink little golden liquids on their terraces. Others migrate to the Channel

Islands or the West Indies. I would not care for that exile and prefer to stay in England, even though I have to pay my Income Tax. For years and years I have contributed, like most others, to the upkeep of the Government who leave me hardly enough to make both ends meet. As I walk through my village people nudge each other and say (I have been told), “How does he spend all his money? He must be rolling in wealth!”

At my advanced age and after a lifetime of moderate success I ought to be able to push my old typewriter into the dustbin, use the last of my typewriting paper for spills, play chess with old friends, paint little pictures, mug up a bit of Greek, and read all the books I ought to have read before.

No such luck! I have to write another book to pay my next instalment of Income Tax. Oh, lord! Supposing my ideas give out!

It’s dangerous to be an author—young or, worse still, old.

## IV

### THE MUSIC OF MEN'S LIVES

*How sour sweet music is when time  
Is broke and no proportion kept!  
So is it in the music of men's lives.  
Shakespeare's Richard II.*

LOOKING back on life I sometimes wonder how many happy people I have met and what is the secret of happiness if it can be attained. The sweet music of life is so often jangled by false notes and disharmonies in one's own nature or by the rough insensitive hands of an unkind world.

Perhaps at the best some of us can only expect moments of happiness, a brief and passing ecstasy, when one seems to be filled with the glory and splendour of life—how rare and wonderful!—or an occasional period of peace and contentment.

The Thinker, the Poet, the soul who is sensitive to human misery and the world's agony, is not, as a rule, a happy fellow. He suffers because of other people's sufferings. He despairs because of other men's folly and wickedness. Certainly for the past forty years or so they have had some difficulty in keeping cheerful and have not done so, poor lads! My own lifetime has been a period of war—three wars of our own—and a world in chaos. The chance of atomic warfare and the hydrogen bomb does not encourage a happy optimism. Between the wars our poets did not sing glad songs. They found life senseless and abominable. In his *Waste Land*, T. S. Eliot had no hope to offer. Dylan Thomas, Day Lewis, Stephen Spender and the rest expressed a dark melancholy. No one could cheer them up or get a laugh out of their words.

But even in war-time, even when London was burning and the streets were littered with glass, there were cheery folk about. What was their secret? If we could find that we might get a clue to the quest of happiness. Was it some supernatural courage in them, or perhaps some spiritual faith, which annihilated the fear of death, or was it just unconquerable valour of the average man and woman?

Our Cockney folk, for instance? I used to talk with them when their shops had been blasted overnight, or when their little homes had been knocked about above their cellars.

"Weren't you afraid?" I asked a girl who had come to her tobacco kiosk after a night of bombing over Brixton way.

"Afraid?" she asked with astonishment. "What's the good of being afraid? That's silly!"

She wasn't a saint or a heroine, but there was something in her spirit which rose above fear.

"They can break our windows but not our spirit." . . . "We believe in fresh air." . . . "Business as usual." . . .

So they wrote these slogans after a night of gunfire and bombardment.

“Hadn’t you better get away from here?” I asked an old woman in a mews from which her neighbours had fled.

“Get away?” she asked indignantly. “I’m not going to be budged by that man Hitler.”

In that old woman’s mind was some tremendous pride stronger than the fear of death—and death isn’t pleasant even if one has faith in the next world.

It is the people with a strong and simple faith who, I believe, have the best chance of happiness. It gives them a sense of proportion regarding the things that matter and don’t matter, a better sense of values. I am not thinking of the great mystics who had the beatific vision, but of ordinary simple men and women sustained by a belief in divine goodness and pity and love.

During the last war a community of nuns came to dwell in a Surrey house built in the midst of a wood. It belonged to my son, who was away from it. I saw them from time to time and marvelled at their cheerfulness. The Reverend Mother is a laughing lady. Whenever I saw her she seemed to find some cause for merriment, and the other nuns seemed to be filled with the same spirit of serenity and humour. They went for long walks across the heaths and commons, and the villagers stared at them and smiled, because they were like children in the enjoyment of nature, with the wind blowing their black gowns. Yet they were not removed from the perils of war. The German bombers came over the chimney tops. A falling bomb made a hole as big as a cottage within a hundred feet of their front door. One night a load of incendiary bombs was dropped over the house and garden, starting many little fires. One crashed through the roof and was burning in the attic. If not put out the whole house would go up in smoke and flame. One of the nuns, a buxom, merry-eyed lady, climbed up a ladder and crawled through a trap-door and poured water over the smouldering fire. All through the night, with the help of a girl from a neighbouring cottage, they dealt with other incendiaries scattered about the grounds. Their laughter rang out as they described this alarming adventure.

I have known other men and women who have “the Faith,” as the Irish call it—priests, sisters of charity (who call on me once a year), nurses in hospital and padres in time of war. One might imagine they would be lacking in humour and laughter. They have given up a lot—home life, the love of women, children of their own. Yet those I have met are remarkably cheerful, quick to see a joke and glad of one. They have a serenity which saves them from fussing over the minor irritations of daily life. They have some inner light which saves them from the darkness of despair even when life around them is tragic and terrible.

One of the gayest men I know is called Father Paul of Warsaw. There is always a laugh in his blue eyes in spite of tragic memories when he was in the midst of the Warsaw Rising among the wounded and the dead. It was he who led the survivors from an annihilating bombardment through the sewers on a *via dolorosa* of filth and stench.

A great help to happiness is a sense of humour, and that must be born in one—the luckiest gift of the good fairies, enabling one to get a laugh out of one’s own misadventures and adversities. It is best of all and a rare quality if one can laugh at oneself for one’s own foolishness. These humorists not only get a lot of fun out of life for themselves but give it out to the company around them. I have known men and women

who light up a room when they come into it. Life becomes less dull in their presence. They warm up the atmosphere about them. I am reminded of one of them I knew by a book I have just been reading—*The Life of Beerbohm Tree*, by Hesketh Pearson.

In spite of an explosive temperament which caused him to rage and storm when rehearsals were going badly and when he was exasperated by overwork and worry, his abiding sense of humour came to his rescue, and his rage would often end in a gust of laughter. He just could not resist seeing the comic side of things or enlivening a scene by a practical joke or a flash of wit. Hesketh Pearson describes how, when Tree played in *The Light that Failed*, he was supposed to be lying dead under the Union Jack while the Last Post was sounded above his body. But he endangered the solemnity of the scene by blowing up the flag from his face by every breath he expelled, “the rest of the company having to appear unconscious of this uncorpselike proceeding.” I was with him at a luncheon when he entertained a Sicilian player named Grasso who had astonished the play-going public by the terrific passion of his acting. In private life his manner was emotional and alarming. Upon entering the room he kissed Tree on both cheeks. He kissed H. B. Irving on both cheeks. He kissed me on both cheeks, as though his heart were bursting with love for us. He had given an amazing performance of Othello in which he had interpreted the Moor as a human furnace of primitive emotion. He had to leave our luncheon-table early for a matinée.

“I regret that Signor Grasso has had to leave us so soon,” said Tree, “but he has forgotten to kiss the fireman at His Majesty’s.”

He added a thought that had just come to him.

“It is perhaps a mistake that he should play the part of Othello because of that trouble about a handkerchief. It is difficult to believe that Grasso’s Othello would have had a handkerchief.”

(It was a humorous suggestion that Grasso himself, a Sicilian peasant, would not bother about the formal way of blowing his nose!)

Berbohm Tree was described by his half-brother Max Beerbohm as a radiant man, and that was true. There was a radiance in him because of his wit and humour and love of laughter. He liked his own jokes. When he said a good thing, as often he did, he would say, “Excuse me,” and make a note of it for future use. The witticisms which flowed from him were never cruel or malicious like those of W. S. Gilbert, who said of Tree’s Hamlet that it was “funny without being vulgar.”

The English people on the whole are not witty like the French, who have a quick verbal wit with which we cannot compete. Not long ago, for instance, a young husband and wife who live in my village went for a holiday abroad and took their car. In the French port they became separated because of trouble in getting the car off the boat. Somewhat distressed, the pretty young wife approached a gendarme on the quayside and said in her best French, “I am getting alarmed. I have lost my husband!”

“Madame,” said the gendarme, “now that you are in France you will be able to find many husbands.”

Nor have we as a people the gift of rapid backchat like the Americans.

Stepping out of a club in New York in a blinding snowstorm I went up to an American “cop” and said in an absurdly English way, “I say, I want to go to the Union Club.”

“Well, why the hell don’t you go there,” he answered with a good-natured grin.

I asked an American girl what she thought of a certain politician.

“Well,” she said, “he keeps himself in the public eye—like a cinder.”

We don’t indulge in verbal wit of that kind, but the English people have an underlying sense of humour which keeps them sane and keeps them steady even in times of crisis. They refuse to meet trouble halfway. They don’t get panicky when other nations have the jitters. During the Suez crisis, when Russia was uttering threats of a menacing kind, there was extreme nervousness in Paris, I was told. Many people were getting ready for flight and there was a lot of food hoarding. In the United States the government ordered the Fleet out to sea to avoid another Pearl Harbour, and every night there were watchers along the Atlantic coast for the possible arrival of Russian bombers. In England there was no sign of panic, though we were vulnerable to the guided missiles suggested by Mr. Bulganin to President Eisenhower. There was no slackening in the attendance at football matches. And people refused to be rattled.

Now and again one is tempted to take a poor view of our present-day character, especially among the younger crowd. Some of them adopt the attitude of “I couldn’t care less.” The working man dilly-dallies with his job and spreads it out by tea-making and chit-chat. He is always asking for higher wages and shorter hours, though he knows, or ought to know, that every increase in wages without more production means a further rise in the cost of living and less value to the pound sterling. The Teddy boys, the cosh boys and the juvenile delinquents are a distressing problem in our social life. In some districts the police are afraid to tackle those young ruffians. This side of the picture is painted in dark colours by social observers, and it is not a pretty picture. But one tends to exaggerate the importance of it in the country as a whole. When I was getting material for a book called *The New Elizabethans* I went forth to have a look at the younger crowd in the Army, Navy and Air Force, factories and training schools. It was a reassuring experience. So far from being a poor lot I found them keen, high-spirited, and splendid in their cheerful acceptance of life and work.

I spent some time in the training schools of the R.A.F. One could not meet a finer crowd of young men if one searched the world. At Cranwell I sat at table with them one night after seeing a good deal of their activities and discipline, and after talking with many of them. As I looked along their line I was glad to be in their company. They take great risks. It is no safe game to fly these jets and faster-than-sound machines. These lads, I thought, have inherited the spirit of those who saved England in the Battle of Britain.

So it was in the Navy. The Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, told me he had never had a finer crowd of youngsters, and the Commander of our submarine fleet said “the best vintage ever.”

I was present in an aircraft carrier—*Implacable*—when there was a sham battle in progress, very noisy and exciting, and afterwards I watched the return of a squadron of planes to the upper deck. One by one, at intervals of a few seconds, they swooped down, alighted, and at the end of their run folded their wings like birds. A perilous exercise, I thought.

“Do you feel nervous about it?” I asked one of them.

“Well, it’s always a bit tricky,” he confessed.

One of these pilots had been in action off Korea. He looked no more than an apple-cheeked boy, but he had had some pretty close shaves. Once he came down into “the drink,” and it didn’t look good until a helicopter came hovering over him, let down a hook, and pulled him up. It was an American who rescued him. Not long afterwards our lad went down into the sea again. A helicopter hovered over him. “What, you here again!” shouted an American voice. And, incredible as it may seem, it happened a third time, and all the American could say was, “Well, I’m darned! You’re making a habit of it!”

When I was at Manby, a kind of post-graduate college for senior officers of the R.A.F., I suggested that I might have a flight in a Meteor jet.

“Why not!” was the answer of the commanding officer. “How about four o’clock this afternoon?” At four o’clock a Meteor jet arrived from another station. It was a jet fighter with seats for two, one behind each other. The pilot was a very young fellow, who might have been my grandson as far as age goes. He seemed amused to have me as a passenger, the oldest bird who had ever flown with him. He helped me to put on the necessary gear, which was so cumbersome that when I had got it all on I could hardly move hand or limb. He instructed me what to do in case of accident.

“You pull this if you want to be ejected. You pull that if you want to use your parachute.”

“My dear fellow,” I told him, “I shan’t pull anything. I’m certain to pull the wrong handle.”

He grinned good naturedly, and I had every confidence in this child who had my life in his hands. I sat behind him and he talked to me through the intercom.

“Feeling all right, sir?”

“Quite all right.”

“Lovely afternoon, isn’t it?”

“Grand!”

He did a kind of weaving through the sky. There was no vibration. There was no sound. We left our noise behind us. One was unconscious of speed, unless one passed a slow-going plane—as we did. We passed it in a flash. Certainly we were travelling. I suppose I was up about half an hour. We covered a lot of space over land and sea. When we came down as gently as an autumn leaf my young pilot smiled at me, still amused by this ancient man.

“None the worse?” he asked.

“All the better for it.”

He announced to a group of officers that I had been “a perfect passenger.” But he had been a perfect pilot, and I marvelled at the skill and valour of youth that can handle such a box of tricks at terrifying speed with such cool nerve and confidence. They know the risks they take. Within a few months of my flight there were several crashes of these Meteor jets. “Risks?” they ask. “Well, life is very uncertain anyhow. There are lots of accidents on the roads down below.”

So there is nothing wrong with the courage of the younger crowd. They have the heroic tradition in their blood, though they would hate me to say so as they are very shy about that kind of thing.

I went to the research department of a great factory which provides light and warmth to most of this country, as well as radar equipment and many miracles of modern science. It is an immense place, crowded with young men and women doing their jobs in different rooms but getting together after hours for dancing, music, ju jitsu, and many forms of exercise and entertainment. Many of the girls, as well as the men, were swotting to get a B.Sc. I spent the day talking to them and finding out something about their private lives and their ideas about life itself. They were just the ordinary dwellers in suburban homes, having to train or bus to their daily work, getting home in time for an evening meal, listening to the news on the wireless, doing a bit of study in their bedrooms because the kids are making a noise downstairs, with no great margin of time or money for a bit of fun outside the home. But they were happy in their work, which I thought was a tribute to the management and to some inner glow in their own minds. I am sure they were happy. One could see that by passing them down the corridors and talking to them on the quiet.

“Happy? Yes, why not? We’re keen on our jobs—always something to learn. And this place provides a lot of fun if one wants it. Have you seen the ballroom?”

Yes, I had seen the ballroom. It was magnificent, and as I looked at it I thought of the miracle that had happened in the industrial life of England since the days of sweated labour and child labour in factories and Tom Moore’s “Song of the Shirt.” They were all level-headed, unaffected, and straight in their answers to my questions. No simpering or blushing among the girls. They looked you in the eye and answered thoughtfully and honestly. I have a conviction that the modern girl of this class has produced a type more intelligent, better poised, better educated, and more self-confident than any previous generation. That is a great hope for the future and a cure for pessimism.

There are, of course, others of a different class—those silly creatures who get hysterical over film stars, go mad to the rhythmic beat of “Rock an’ Roll.” But those are small groups in the flare and fever of Vanity Fair.

I have found another cure for pessimism about the character of our English folk. Curiously enough, that is on the “wireless,” which often, I confess, causes me to groan over some of its programmes which are supposed to be funny. Wilfred Pickles in “Have a Go” has done much to reveal the true quality, the splendid stuff of life, the courage and humour and happiness—yes, happiness—which still characterises our people up and down the country. He goes about to many cities and many small towns and villages, sometimes very remote, and there he gets together an audience who laugh heartily at the very sight of him and know in advance the ridiculous questions he is going to ask them.

“Now, love, have you had any embarrassing moment in your life?”

“Have you got a young man, dearie? What, not a young man yet? I say, that’s a pity!”

“Can you give the names of the songs we’re going to play for you? Half a crown if you answer the first of them right. Give her half-a-crown, Mabel!”

“Now, if you had three wishes, what would you ask for?”

“If you had the power to reform the law of the land, what would you do to make the world a happier place?”

Simple, almost childish questions, asked with the greatest good humour and a friendly human warmth, but not likely, one might think, to reveal anything remarkable. But they do! By some skill or good fortune, Wilfred Pickles summons up from his audience a series

of astonishing and sometimes glorious types of character—old women of unconquerable spirit after a life of toil, full of humour and wisdom; old men and young men with never a grouse against fate, and who take life smiling and like their jobs and do a bit of good to their neighbours, and keep a little flame of idealism to light the way ahead; and young girls, laughter-loving but straight-thinking and straight-speaking about love and marriage and having babies and getting happiness out of life by just living.

Listening to “Have a Go” I think these people are wonderful. They’re the salt of the earth—these old charwomen; these mothers of big families; these sturdy, simple men; those of the soil and the sea; frank, unaffected young women. England is all right. There is nothing wrong with it in town and country. And, thank goodness, they still know how to laugh and to get a lot of happiness out of life.

Nobody finds happiness by searching for it. Those who go pleasure-hunting find that it eludes them. The most bored people I have ever met were those who put up in the luxury hotels of Monte Carlo and the Riviera—those rich, elderly women who hired gigolos to dance with them; those frequenters of the gambling rooms who went night after night to back their luck at the tables. I used to watch them now and then, grim-faced, repulsive-looking, horrible in their obsession with the spinning wheel of luck, which made a mockery of their “systems” and led them down the road to ruin almost certainly in the long run. One could see by the strained look on their painted faces and by their crisped fingers when they grabbed their winnings or put down their chips, that behind their masks they were racked by greed and fear.

Some literary friends of mine lived on the Riviera because of the climate, but they did not go much to the Casino and found pleasure in their work and talk. One was Phillips Oppenheim, who wrote “thrillers” dictated to his secretary; and another, W. J. Locke, author of *The Beloved Vagabond* and many other amusing novels. It pleased Locke to give elaborate luncheon parties to his friends. He provided them with exquisite food and wines of famous vintage years. He was a genial and courteous host to those authors and publishers and literary agents and journalists, and pretty ladies in the very short frocks of the time.

Conversation at table was always amusing, until the guests were stupefied by too many wines, followed by old brandy in immensely big glasses. The luncheons lasted long. Outside a hot sun was shining. It was not really one of the haunts of happiness.

There were gala nights in the luxury hotels. Saxophones wailed and cackled, middle-aged women banged balloons at their men and danced on crowded floors to the monotonous beat of jazz hands. But it was an artificial gaiety without joy.

“I find this kind of life horrible,” said a lady I knew. “It all seems so senseless.”

She had come out in search of pleasure, but she found only a false and futile waste of time.

Where can one find the key to happiness, as far as happiness is possible in a tortured world? There are, perhaps, several keys which unlock the golden gate. I think one of them is self-forgetfulness. The intellectuals and the egoists are not among the happy ones. They are always worrying about their inner conflicts with dissatisfied yearnings to solve the riddle of life. It is those who look outward rather than inward who find contentment.

“Thank goodness I’m not an introvert!” says my friend Frank Swinnerton. “I was born

an extrovert interested in other people. It never occurs to me to analyse myself or reveal my secret emotions. I don't believe much in self-revelation."

Happy is the man who forgets himself in his work or in his hobbies. At least he has the best chance of escaping from the nagging misery of introspection. Artists, musicians, actors, singers are among the lucky ones if they are not too desperately troubled by financial anxiety.

"Why do you go on painting?" I asked an old friend of mine, who still produced pictures which, alas! nobody would buy.

"Two reasons," he told me. "One is that it's an anodyne. One forgets oneself and the annoyances of life. The other is that I do it to please myself."

I met an artist carrying his easel and sketching-stool and oil-colours. It was at a time when few pictures were being sold.

"A hard life!" I said after a few primary remarks. He smiled at me cheerfully.

"I enjoy every minute of it," he told me.

Winston Churchill encouraged the amateur artist by his little book on painting for pleasure and by his own work in the Royal Academy. When I spent a day with him in his house at Chartwell he showed me his studio (built by his own hands as a master bricklayer) and some of his paintings.

"I regard a day as ill-spent," he told me, "if I haven't painted two pictures."

"My dear Mr. Churchill," I exclaimed, "the professional painter is more than satisfied if he paints two pictures in two months."

When for a time the political situation turned against him he went to Italy for a painting holiday, and a friend of mine—a brigadier general—entertained him.

"What time lunch today, sir?" he would ask.

"Oh, just as usual—one o'clock," said Churchill.

He was still out with his easel at two o'clock—half-past two—a quarter to three. At three o'clock he returned, with apologies and a wet canvas. He had not been worrying about the political situation. He hadn't given it a thought.

For a time I was a passionate amateur with oils. A brother of mine, equally enthusiastic, drove me to the mountains behind Nice, on the outskirts of St. Pol or Vence. We hardly exchanged a sentence. In a pair of old jeans I wallowed in oil-paint. We forgot to have lunch until the pangs of hunger assailed us in the afternoon. When one is painting with the fine frenzy of an enthusiastic amateur one forgets everything—one's family and friends, one's financial worries, one's need of nourishment, and by this forgetfulness one finds one of the keys to happiness. For the secret is to get outside oneself.

There are moments in life very rare and very wonderful in which one has a sense of ecstasy. It is nearly always when the beauty of nature seems to make one a part of it and to fill one for a moment with its glory and vital force. It need not be because of some wonderful view or splendour of scene, but when the trees come to life with the fresh green of awakening spring, or when a wet wind blows in one's face on an open heath, or when the first crocus is glinting with gold in the garden. It comes to young people in their revelation of life's enchantment. A tiny boy I knew came into my garden and saw the first snowdrops of the year. He gave a cry of joy and, kneeling down, kissed them. I was

deeply touched by this nature worship. Then there is the ecstasy of love when two young things are drawn to each other in worship of mind and body, beyond their understanding, beyond the commonplace of experience, beyond the material world around them. That is the most divine revelation of human happiness. But all that has been written by the poets, and now one hardly dare speak the word of Love because it has been debased and made ridiculous and vulgar by those dreadful crooners, those harsh-voiced women who imitate the American cabaret singers, and all the false and ghastly stuff which pours through the radio. Some other name ought to be invented for that beating of the heart.

The music of men's lives, to use Shakespeare's words again, is jangled nowadays by false notes and dissonance, and the noise of conflict comes crashing in from the outer world, but there are still many people who have found a quiet harmony in their own way of life. They are the workers, the home lovers, the country and suburban folk who are not feverish in their search for happiness but find it in a garden or a playing-field or even at the kitchen sink.

They are the ordinary folk with a living wage and not much more, with families to raise, and friendly neighbours, and a hobby of their own for leisure hours. Nobody writes about them. They are not spurred on by ambition or fame. They just do their jobs and carry on with common sense and cheerfulness. Without seeking it they have found, to some extent, the whereabouts of happiness, not in the seats of the mighty or in *hôtels de luxe*, but more often in a bed-sitting room, a cottage parlour, a council house or a pre-fab.

# V

## HOUSES AND GARDENS

I HAVE lived in a good many houses since I began to earn my living with the pen. There is a legend in my family that when I am motoring through Surrey I turn my head from time to time and say, "I lived there once." Indeed, an old friend of mine assures me that he has put down thirty different addresses of mine in his notebook, but that undoubtedly includes temporary dwelling-places which my wife and I took for a few months.

My wife loved to design a house, or beautify it, and make a garden, but when that was done in one place she became restless and wanted to start on another.

She made a beautiful garden in one old village not far from where I now live. We had a little old Elizabethan house named Bildens. It had low beams and a crooked staircase, against which visitors knocked their heads. The vicar, who was about six foot four, was so apprehensive of bashing out his brains that when he came to tea he would advance in a crouching posture. When we bought the house we asked the lady who sold it what kind of soil it was built on. "Very loamy," she told us without the flicker of an eyelid. It was on pure clay, hard to work, but suitable for roses. My wife made a marvellous rose garden. It was in the shape of a fan, the spokes being narrow paths between the roses, which were chosen for their harmonies in colour. When they were in full bloom they were a song of glory and people used to walk our way to stare at them in delight. My wife knew roses and loved them. When I first met her in my boyhood she was in a rose garden belonging to one of her uncles, who was a great rose grower, and she snipped her scissors at me, and I fell in love with her because she had the beauty of a rose.

She made another garden near a village called Puttenham. Our house was named Overponds, because it stood opposite two big ponds large enough almost to be called lakes. We were not among the first inhabitants of this countryside around us, upon which our windows looked across the common and the heath. Two thousand years before our arrival Romans and Gauls had walked this way. A Roman legion had camped on the common. Some high officer had built a villa for himself, and some years ago a tessellated pavement of considerable size was found beneath the turf.

We had a tennis lawn and a croquet lawn and winding paths through flower beds and herbaceous borders, all designed by my Agnes. On Saturdays and Sundays young people came to play games, and elderly people from the district around, or motoring down from London, came to tea and talk—so many that at last my wife thought this social entertainment was too much of a good thing and wanted to flee from it. So we fled.

For some reason we were not happy there. During our time there was something sinister in our neighbourhood. The charming wife of our lord of the manor went out one morning and drowned herself in one of the ponds. A horrible murder was done in an old house nearby. One of our neighbours had a young butler who shot himself on the other side of a line in the garden which his mistress would never cross because of a spooky feeling. Other tragedies happened round about, and one house to which we used to go had

a sinister atmosphere because its owner had brought back weapons and war-drums and sacrificial stools and hideous masks from Africa, which he hung lovingly upon his walls. For two years he had once been a slave of the Abyssinians. He had been taken prisoner with a fellow cavalry officer on a hunting expedition and kept in chains. When they escaped they made their way to the Sudan, until one of them died on the way and the other was found by one of our outposts crawling on hands and knees with his tongue hanging out. Yet I must say he was a gay and amusing fellow and his Christmas parties were full of fun, though he would alarm some of us by transforming himself into a monkey, so exactly that he became inhuman.

Then we built a house on the top of a hill above the village where I now live. My wife was her own architect and a very pleasant house it is, with a lovely garden looking across a wide view to the Sussex Downs with old Chanctonbury Ring plainly visible. We laid out the garden and planted many trees, which are now full grown. When the builders were still at work and planks were lying about we had a distinguished visitor who stayed for the week-end. He was the head of the Dominican Order in England, by name of Dom Bede Jarrett. A scholar and historian, he was also a boy at heart with a great simplicity of soul. Dressed in his white habit, he trundled a wheelbarrow and did a good job of work, to the astonishment of passing villagers who at first thought this white figure must be a ghost in the dusk of a summer evening.

The house was bought from us by the family who now live there, greatly to the reluctance of my son, who tried to persuade the beautiful lady who came to see it that it was a very objectionable house, full of snags and almost unliveable. She was not to be put off by him.

One of the best gardens which once I owned, and one of the most interesting houses, was not in the Surrey countryside but in the midst of London's roar of traffic. The garden of two and a half acres—large for a London house—had a giant mulberry tree on the lawn, which used to bear a prodigious amount of fruit—red, ripe and juicy. It was in the north of London in a backwater called Stamford Hill which had escaped from the encroachment of the surrounding slums. We bought that during the First World War at a very cheap price because my wife was the guardian angel of a lot of boys who came here for a spiritual retreat. I was well away for most of the time on the Western Front.

The house itself must have belonged in the old days to a merchant prince. It was surrounded by a ditch which might be called a moat. It had imposing cellars in which, no doubt, the aforesaid merchant stocked his wines. The sitting rooms had ceilings painted with nymphs and cherubs and star-spangled skies. Every door leading into the garden or the front drive had heavy bolts and chains to keep out footpads and bad boys of the eighteenth century. They aroused the suspicion of a policeman who came one night with two air wardens because of a spy scare directed against us on account of mysterious signals seen from one of the bedroom windows. (It was due to my wife turning up the little lamps on the dressing-table before pulling the curtains.)

“Heavily barricaded, aren't you?” he asked. “What's the idea?”

The house and garden have now been obliterated to make room for blocks of flats.

It is fortunate for posterity that I am not famous enough to have a plaque put upon a house in which I lived. There would have to be a mass production of plaques.

I lived once for seven years in Holland Street, Kensington, still unchanged with its row of eighteenth-century houses at one end and its tailor's shop opposite a row of smaller houses, in one of which I lived, and a little antique shop higher up. No street could be more exciting or more delightful when I was there. On Mondays one heard the squeal of a Punch and Judy. On Tuesday came a German band. On Wednesday appeared an Italian organ-grinder with his monkey. At dusk every day the muffin-man came ringing his bell with a message of glad tidings.

We had an interesting neighbour. Instead of going through his front door he came in and out of his window. It was to avoid being served with a writ, or having the bailiffs in, the house being constantly watched by two sombre and melancholy men. Somehow, by some legal loophole, the window way of entrance and exit frustrated them. Then one night he did a moonlight flitting and I missed this little drama.

22, D'Oyley Street was mine for a while. It was a little timbered house which had once been on the estate of the Duke of Westminster when Eaton Square was a market garden. Twenty-two is a good number, but as there are no other houses in the street—it faces a big block of flats—it might just as well be No. 1. When we went to see it it was in the hands of an arrogant young German who was living there with a pretty lady. He had two maids, very neat, and all lights were on to give us a welcome and conceal the truth that the house is a little on the dark side even when the sun is shining. The pretty lady, clad in a silken dressing-gown, was not at all disconcerted when the young German showed us into her room, which was mostly filled by a bed almost worthy of Madame de Pompadour.

When we left, having decided to buy it, we heard the young German gave a command to his maids.

*Alle Lichte aus!* All lights out!

That little house must have stored up many vibrations, for when I was there my friends came to fill it with their conversation, their laughter, or sometimes their tragic tales, and afterwards it did not lack for the drama of life.

There was another house nearby which I owned for a few years. It is in Cliveden Place, between Sloane Square and Eaton Square. The houses on each side are pleasant-looking, and were built either at the end of the eighteenth century or the beginning of the nineteenth. Next door was a day-school for "the sons of gentlemen," God help them, and rowdy little devils they were at times. Opposite, in one of these red, tall, thin brick houses, was a workshop for young women making hats for the Smart Set, poor girls. Stitch, stitch, stitch they went over those bits of felt, but they left off stitching one day and crowded to the window to stare at me. It was in the days of my first passion for oil-painting. Garbed in a white overall, I kept looking out of the window to observe the scene of a street cutting down from Cliveden Place to Pimlico. This I was painting with intense concentration of mind, until I became aware of girls' faces regarding me with astonishment.

During the German "blitz" over London in 1940 two of the little old houses on the same side as mine were destroyed by direct hits and another was flooded when the water-pipes were damaged. A husband and wife were living in the basement as caretakers, and as they had been very friendly and helpful folk I went to see them. They were in a dreadful state. A rush of water had swept through the house and everything was floating about—books, cups and saucers, pots and pans, chairs and tables. But the man and woman

were quite calm in the midst of this chaos.

“It might have been so much worse!” they said. “It’s a wonder we’re alive.”

We gave up having a town house and country house when the Commissioners of Inland Revenue became more greedy in their demands. We bought another house and garden on the village green below that which we had built on the hill. The garden is my little paradise in which I have found my greatest happiness in life, and my greatest sadness, because at the beginning of the Second World War my beautiful wife Agnes went away from her garden and left me lonely. Covering somewhat under three acres, it is not one of those spacious gardens for which Surrey is famous, but it holds a lot of loveliness for me with its lawns and rose gardens and orchard and tall old trees and flowering bushes.

Many children have come to play in it and, as in Kipling’s story *They*, I think sometimes that their voices and tinkling laughter may be heard when they have gone.

There is an old cottage at the end of the garden which was used as a school in war-time, and I have told in another chapter how they used to come running to an air-raid shelter under my study when the alert sounded. Other children followed them into the garden, year after year, playing hide-and-seek and dancing across the lawns. They grow up too rapidly, these little ones, and sometimes I see a young woman smiling at me when I am waiting for a bus.

“Were you one of those who used to play in my garden?” I ask, and my guess is right. But there are always children to follow them; for instance, Lindy Loo who likes to take off her clothes if there is a glint of sun. There are cricket matches which do no good to my lawn but much good to my heart. Young Richard Rowland, one of my best friends, brings a school fellow down from Colet Court, the preparatory school of St. Paul’s, and with other boys from the village, another and smaller Richard among them, swipes the cricket ball so hard that half the time is taken up in finding it in the bushes or the long grass in the orchard.

Then there is my hut, once a giant’s castle or the palace of a king or the hiding-place of pirates. For a time I used it as a studio, and here something new in the history of art took place. My nephew Barry Rowland had spent some considerable time in painting a portrait of me. Layers of oil-paint were laid on layers until it became almost a bas-relief. Suddenly he had an inspiration. He took a pocket comb from his breast pocket and combed the hair of his masterpiece. I laughed until the windows shook, but I am bound to admit that the effect was remarkable. Now the hut is a workshop fitted up with many mechanical gadgets and rows of shelves and electric light. Lindy Loo’s mother and Sally who helps her, and a tall young man with very deft hands for any kind of carpentry or any kind of job, come here to make distinguished-looking trays, framing old prints and very beautiful table mats, and matchboxes and other dainty things which find their way into many of the best shops, signed as a guarantee of fine workmanship and art by the now well-known name of *Eve Branson*.

So I have good company in my garden, the company of young people whom I love best. But I am not quite sure that it is entirely my garden. For there is a man who lives in it all day long and every day except Sunday, and who makes it beautiful with flowers, who keeps it neat and tidy, and who grows good stuff in the kitchen garden. “My garden” he calls it with a just claim. For Batchelor is a hard worker and in this garden, attended by

two dogs who never leave him, he has made his life's work. He never stops working.

"Batchelor," I say from time to time, "you're working too hard. Go home and get a rest."

"I'm interested," he says.

I have other friends who live in this garden. Thrushes and robins and blackbirds who fill it with song in spring-time. They know me and come very close when I appear, cocking their heads and watching me with hopeful eyes for the bits of biscuits I throw to them. A Tom Chaffinch hops about the table. A bird watcher counted fourteen different specimens in my garden one afternoon. He came on a bicycle to my gate and said, "May I sit in your garden and look for nuthatches?"

"Certainly," I said. "I'll bring you a kitchen chair."

Presently another man arrived and said, "May I sit in your garden and look for nuthatches?"

"Certainly," I said, "I'll bring you a kitchen chair. There's another fellow there already."

A third man arrived.

They sat for some time looking for nuthatches and didn't see one, though my housekeeper sees them often.

"God Almighty first planted a Garden," wrote Sir Francis Bacon in a famous essay.

# VI

## THE LONG ARM OF COINCIDENCE

NOVELISTS are under the fire of criticism if they allow themselves the privilege of a coincidence—two lovers meeting unexpectedly, someone finding the clue to a mystery in an old chest or teapot, the discovery of a strawberry mark (beloved in early Victorian melodrama) on the arm of the heir to a great fortune. “Then you must be my long lost brother!”

I admit that this use of coincidence is regrettable, but in real life coincidences are not uncommon. A long time ago when I was a young freelance journalist, I was asked by the editor of the old *Daily Graphic*, then illustrated by black-and-white drawings, whether I could suggest a good subject for attracting correspondence. I suggested “Curiosities of Coincidence,” and the idea being accepted on the terms that I was to receive a guinea for every letter used, I wrote about a hundred letters to distinguished people whose addresses I found in *Who’s Who*. A great number of them had had amazing coincidences in their lives about which they were pleased to write for the benefit of the *Daily Graphic*; and for several months I drew a steady income from their published narratives. It was easy work!

In my own life I remember many curious coincidences.

As a boy I was walking on Clapham Common with my mother and one of my brothers, afterwards well known as a playwright and novelist under the name of Cosmo Hamilton. This youth, then about nineteen and hard up, as all of us were, uttered a moan of misery.

“Oh, lord, I’m down to my last half-crown!”

“Not yet,” said my mother. “Look there.”

And lying in the grass almost at his feet were three half-crowns.

A somewhat similar good fortune happened later to myself. It was in the days when gentlemen, and others, wore little sovereign purses holding five of those golden coins. I was travelling on a tramcar to Waterloo Bridge and opened the little purse to see my financial state. By some clumsiness I dropped a sovereign and it slid down the panelling with which the tramcar was lined. Nothing but taking the car to pieces would restore the coin, as I was told by the conductor when I reported my loss. With a heavy heart (being very hard up at that time) and a lighter purse, I walked across the bridge and went straight into a restaurant in the Strand. It was on the first floor and I walked upstairs. There, almost on the top stair, was a golden sovereign. I spoke to the girl in the cash desk, and we agreed if nobody claimed it by the end of a week we would divide this treasure. Nobody claimed it, and I was ten shillings to the good. A few days later I had a letter from the tramcar company informing me that they had removed the panelling on one side of the car and recovered my lost sovereign.

As a writer I have had some queer coincidences (not resulting in material wealth), and I often wonder whether other novelists have had similar experiences. Immediately after

the First World War I wrote a novel called *Back to Life*. It was about a young British officer who married a German girl and brought her back to England where she had a rough time from his relatives. A young officer I knew only slightly came to see me and said, “Your novel describes exactly what happened to me and my wife. How did you know?” I didn’t and the plot was obvious enough, but he assured me that the details were uncannily correct to his own experience.

Then I wrote a novel about a doctor who hung up his plate in Chelsea. His first patient was a young man who tried to commit suicide. I thought I had better have the novel vetted by a doctor friend of mine, and when I saw him next he looked at me searchingly.

“How do you know so much about my practice?” he asked.

“I know nothing about it,” I told him.

“The characters in your novel are my patients,” he told me. “Those two girls over the shop in the King’s Road, for instance. The one who wanted a shilling to put in the gas meter.”

“Very odd,” I answered, “except that life in Chelsea is like that.”

“Yes, that’s right,” he admitted, “but my first patient after I had hung up my plate was a young man who had tried to commit suicide.”

I arrived in Pittsburg one morning when a short story of mine appeared in *The Saturday Evening Post*. It was called “A Château in Picardy,” and was the love story of an ex-officer in the war and a French girl who was a daughter of the Comte de Maresquel. I had used that name because it belonged to one of the villages on the Somme through which I had passed many times on the way to the trenches and the ruins.

I had to lecture that night in Pittsburg and before I left I was handed a letter from an unknown correspondent. He was a lawyer and told me that he had just read my story in *The Saturday Evening Post* and was particularly interested in it because his great-grandfather had been the Marquis de Maresquel, Master of the Ordnance in Boston after escaping from the French revolution. He wanted to know whether I could tell him anything about the family in France or the old Château de Maresquel. That was an odd coincidence to happen in Pittsburg of all places. But later I had a second letter from him in which he wrote that he had been turning up family papers and discovered that his ancestor had married a lady named Mercy Gibbs. Could I place her as one of my own family in the distant past? Another queer coincidence!

Then there are the accidental meetings in unexpected places which seem beyond the range of probability. I remember that on a flight to San Francisco our plane dropped down at Denver, Colorado, in the middle of the night. When the passengers stumbled to their seats again there was only one vacant seat, which was next to mine. A man came in late and sat next to me in the dim light.

“Hullo, Gibbs!” he said. “The last time we met we were having dinner together in Wimbledon—about a fortnight ago.”

He was on his way to the Far East. It was strange that our paths should converge at Denver, Colorado, of all places in the world, and quite a long way from Wimbledon.

In one of my novels, I can’t remember which, one of my characters was an impecunious artist in Chelsea who, for lack of other models, painted the old woman who “did” for him in the mornings and whom he called “the Duchess.” She was a stout old

body who always wore a hat like an inverted flower-pot with a thing like a shaving brush sticking out of it. He also painted an onion boy, and to get his detail right bought a string of onions like the one the boy carried round his neck. His studio reeked of onions and he ate and slept with this aroma. Now, a little time after my novel was published I had a letter from a Spanish artist living in Chelsea who sent me photographs of his recent paintings. One of them was of an old charwoman with a hat like an inverted flower-pot and a thing like a shaving brush sticking out of it at a saucy angle. My old woman as I had imagined her. The other was of an Italian onion boy with the string of onions round his neck.

Is there any way in which one may account for these things? Perhaps Einstein or some other mathematical genius could work out the law of coincidence to the last decimal dot. But I wouldn't understand it—and I wouldn't believe it.

## VII

### THOSE AMERICANS

**I**N spite of all the books—heaven alone knows how many—that have been written about the Americans there is still an immense ignorance, prejudice and misunderstanding about them in the English mind, especially among people—the vast majority in this country—who have never met them. The same is true of the American mass opinion of ourselves. Not knowing us, they don't like us. Some of them, knowing us just a little, still don't like us.

I was standing on Waterloo Station one day in the last war and while waiting for a train fell into conversation with an American G.I.

I asked the inevitable question.

“How do you like England?”

He looked at me with a slow smile.

“Gee, it's a *great* country!” he said with enthusiasm. And then added, “For a week.”

That was just as much as he could stand of us. He hated this exile in England. He hated our affected accent, as it seemed to him. He hated our food, our climate and our frosty reserve. He hated our guts, as they say. He was also, I must admit, very, very drunk.

The American boy begins his education with hostility to “the Britishers.” King George III is the tyrant who had to be overthrown by the valiant lads of Boston, Mass., and other young Americans (who were then English), but vowed to liberty and independence. The red coats were defeated always by men from the farms and the smithies and the carpenters' benches—the glorious champions of freedom. Now the grandsons of Czechs, Poles, Italians and Irish glory in the victories over the brutal enemy, which was England. Even educated and friendly Americans have to overcome this early prejudice instilled into them by their school readers.

On our side the mass mind nourishes certain grievances against “those Americans” and certain dislikes. The slogan of “We Won the War” after World War I was hurtful to those who had been fighting desperately and with enormous losses for two years before the Americans came in. It was the cause of pitched fights between American sailors and our own “Limeys” every night in Constantinople when I happened to be there in 1920 and later. Blows were exchanged almost at sight in many drinking saloons in many countries where British and Americans came face to face.

Now, after the Second World War, with American air bases in England, there is jealousy of the American soldiers who have their wallets bulging with dollars, which they throw about, while the National Service man has little to spare out of his poor pay and watches the best girls being taken out and treated by these rivals from overseas; and not such best girls, who fling themselves too often at the G.I.s because of their pay packets. And doesn't the American continent boss the world nowadays under the sign of the almighty dollar? Haven't they the darned impudence to capture our British supremacy

when we bossed the world? Why should American admirals take over the chief command of the seas? Wasn't it Britannia which ruled the waves? The curious thing is that these causes of ill-will persist even in spite of a progressive Americanisation of English life and its entertainments. American films invade the British cinema and the audience likes them. American songs come over the wireless and the listeners sing them. American plays, novels, musical shows have outstanding success. Why, then, this intolerance and this dislike? It leads to a kind of ambivalence—attraction and repulsion. *Odi et amo*, wrote the Roman poet Catullus. I hate and I love. There is a secret admiration and envy of the American way of life in the mass psychology of our middle classes. Imitation, it is said, is the best form of flattery. We are imitating the Americans in building higher, following their lead in automation, using their advertising methods, and producing our newspapers with sensational headlines. In a thousand other ways we are touched and changed by the tremendous far-reaching influence of American methods and manners; yet there is this mutual dislike, or, at least, critical approach to each other.

It is partly a matter of accent. On both sides it seems comical or even objectionable—until one gets used to it.

I was checked in a lecture I was giving in the Carnegie Hall, New York, by a stentorian voice from the gallery.

“Why don't you take the marbles out of your mouth?”

An American friend of mine named John Tunis—a well-known writer and a delightful and whimsical man—came to stay with me in my country house. In his honour I invited some of my friends in the neighbourhood—colonels and their dames, a few young girls, some Oxford young men, perhaps. John Tunis had to retire now and then in order to laugh behind the door. The English voices to him were just too comical. He told me it was like listening to a Somerset Maugham play—*Our Betters*, I guess.

My brother, who called himself Cosmo Hamilton for his writing name—our mother was a Hamilton—was lecturing in some city of the United States and afterwards, as often happens, many people came up to thank him and shake hands. One of them was an elderly lady.

“Oh, Mr. Hamilton,” she said, “I didn't understand what you were talking about, but I do so love your English accent!”

There were deeper differences when I landed in New York for the first time. It seemed to me that I had left the world I knew and come to another planet. New York itself frightened me. In spite of all the pictures and photographs I had seen, the first aspect of this city rising out of the sea was staggering, with its immense buildings reaching to the stars, as it seems, its astonishing beauty when these skyscrapers are flushed in the dawn by a rose-coloured light, or when at night the lights shine from a myriad windows, and into the blackness flash innumerable signs and slogans—not messages from heaven, but advertisements of fifty-one varieties and chewing gum and Lucky Strikes and other commodities. One is taken up to the top of the Empire State Building, seventy-odd storeys up, and one looks down into the deep ravines between these castles in the air. Millions of little creatures are moving down there, rushing about like those in an upturned ant-heap. Far below is the tide of traffic, each automobile like a tiny toy. Those ants are human beings, all of them seeming to be in a great hurry, all of them seething with the ordinary emotions of the human heart, no doubt—love, envy, hatred, ambition, faith in some kind

of God or gods. So might a Spaceman look down upon the restless, squirming activities of life on this earth ball.

They were quite human and wonderfully friendly, as I came to know. I had not been in the Plaza Hotel more than five minutes before a pleasant girl's voice spoke to me over the telephone.

"Welcome to our city, Sir Philip, and here's another cable for you."

What a friendly greeting to a frightened stranger!

And, now I come to think of it, those telephone girls in the United States are not mere cogs in a machine. Something of their personality comes over the wires. I put in a call to be awakened early one morning, and at the appointed hour I was startled out of my sleep by a sharp ringing on the phone. Hardly awake, I picked up the receiver and said "Yes!"

"There's something burning," said a girl's voice.

I sat up, slightly alarmed. Had I set the bedroom on fire by a smouldering cigarette?

"There's something burning," said the voice again. "Time is burning. It's time to get up."

I was fully awake.

I have done four lecture tours in the United States and still remain alive. I once used to think I should die in Omaha, which is about halfway across the States, and once very nearly did in a small-sized aeroplane which flew into a snowstorm. It is an exhausting business, this lecturing, if one is driven at the pace I was by my lecture agent, the famous humorous and admirable Lee Keedick, who became my friend and with whom I have had many a good laugh.

One boards a train at midnight after a lecture in New York. It is overheated according to English physiology. One suffocates, and sleep is difficult. (When one night I felt I was being roasted I heard a voice down the corridor calling out angrily, "Say, can't you get any heat into this train?") Nine o'clock in the morning, after a shave in the washplace, where American travellers strip to the waist and make a big thing of it with conversation through the lather on their faces. Breakfast follows, and an American breakfast starting with grape juice and fried bacon is always excellent. Detroit. Oh, lord! the day begins.

There is a deputation on the platform. "Glad to meet you, Sir Gibbs. We've arranged a little programme for you." Yes, a busy little programme. A talk to a group of journalists, a luncheon at the Rotary Club, with a speech of course—well, not more than twenty minutes—then tea with the Women's Club—"they'll expect a few words from you, say twenty to twenty-five minutes maybe." Then a tour round the city with plenty to see, before dinner with Mrs. Curtis J. What's-her-name, one of the leading hostesses, who has arranged a little party for you. A speech? Well, just as you feel about it. Then the lecture and a little informal conversation afterwards.

I was always intensely nervous on the lecture platform and I never became hardened. I remember my panic when I first spoke at the Carnegie Hall in New York, and another—one of the worst—in Baltimore. The Governor of the State with his wife and daughter arrived early and for courtesy's sake, after being introduced, I had to join them when they took their places. The audience was flowing in, many of them in evening dress, and there below me was the platform looking like a ten-acre field, on which, in a few minutes, I should find myself alone. I became cold with fright from the top of my scalp to the soles

of my feet.

The Americans are devoted to lectures by personalities of distinction. For a time I came into that category because of my work as a war correspondent which had appeared on the breakfast tables with the grape juice every morning for several years in the *New York Times*. They came to see me as well as to hear me, and I felt a most awful fraud, for I must have bored them excessively: but now and again my poor words about the First World War and its aftermath and then, years later, about the blitz over London in the Second World War seemed to touch their emotion. In San Francisco, in 1941, the platform after my lecture was stormed by a number of middle-aged ladies who kissed me ardently to show their love for England. A young Harvard man—Bob Keedick—who was travelling with me as a kind of A.D.C., retired to laugh behind the stage. But there was a telephone call for me, and the gentleman who had sponsored my lecture listened in while I answered it. I heard the voice of an elderly woman which was shrill and not friendly. “Why have you come to tell us lies? Who asked you, anyhow? We don’t want you over here. The sooner you go back the better we shall like it.” And so forth, with venomous abuse.

The other listener could not restrain his indignation. “Madam,” he shouted, “you are a voice crying in the wilderness! A great audience has just gone mad with enthusiasm. How dare you insult our lecturer?”

In his anger he forgot that the voice crying in the wilderness was the one which announced glad tidings to a nation of unbelievers.

In 1922 or thereabouts I had a spot of trouble with the Irish, who regarded me as one of those English Tom-noddies rejoicing in the work of the Black and Tans. Little did they know or care that I had resigned my position on the *Daily Chronicle*, of which Lloyd George was part proprietor, because I would not stand for that kind of thing. Nearly all my lectures on the international situation were broken up after the first five minutes.

It started in the Carnegie Hall. Looking down from the platform to the stalls, I saw an elderly lady rise from her seat and strike a bald-headed gentleman in evening clothes a smart crack on his pate. This seemed to me astonishing. It seemed also to be the signal for a riot. Irish flags were unfurled from the gallery and balcony. Women screamed in shrill voices and men shouted hoarsely. Free fighting developed between the Irish and the friends of Great Britain outraged by this unseemly demonstration. I could not understand what was going on. From my solitary place on the platform I enquired mildly from the front row of stalls, “Can you tell me what all this is about?” But I could not hear their answers. After three-quarters of an hour the police were called in to restore order with their batons, but too late for my lecture to be delivered. The hall was cleared.

So it happened elsewhere on my tour, and rather alarmingly in Chicago. During my stay for three days in that city I was guarded, even if I took a taxicab, by two cops. They were Irish, and on the third day one of them put me wise about their own attitude.

“Sir Gibbs, it ain’t your life we’re worrying about, but our reputation.”

After this adventurous tour I was given a dinner by a great and distinguished company who wished to disassociate themselves from this Irish turbulence. Speaker after speaker said the most friendly and flattering things about me, but in between the speeches, and indeed while they were in progress, notes were handed to me from the outside world.

“You’re a dirty English rat. Get out! We hate your guts. Go back to your own place among the English swine.”

It is only fair to say that on a later visit, when Ireland had gained her independence, Irish men and women came up to me, shook hands in the friendliest way, and said, “No more ill-feeling, Sir Gibbs!”

After the blitz over England in the Second World War I spent nearly a year in Massachusetts, and came to know American home life, and small town life, rather well. It filled out my more superficial and broader knowledge of the American scene in many States of that great country which I had observed on my lecture tours.

I saw deeper, I think, into the American character and way of life and, with a few reservations, I liked them both. They are a friendly folk, friendly to each other as well as to the stranger. It was a pleasure to walk down the Main Street of Middleboro, Mass., with my two grandchildren and their dog.

“Mornin’, Sir Gibbs! Mornin’, missy! And how’s the little dorg today?”

Then on high stools in the drug store for glasses of Coca-Cola sucked through straws. The man behind the counter would have amusing talk with the children. Others would join in. Enquiries would be made about “the Major,” who was my brother Arthur. Returning from a journey, I would be met by the driver of a hired cab who would shake hands cordially with hopes that I was doing fine. I had a feeling always that the American small town folk get more out of life than their opposite numbers in England. At least they are more outwardly cheerful, quicker to laugh, seeing the humour and the fun of life more easily, and utterly uninhibited by any class distinction. They are more like our own northern folk in Lancashire and Yorkshire, though more expressive and often with a lively wit.

There are, of course, different classes of wealth and power and quite a sense of superiority in these favoured spheres. The ladies of the Back Bay, Boston, are not hail-fellow-well-met with small shopkeepers and their wives, or the ordinary rank and file of American citizens. They maintain their social status jealously, as the upper classes in England used to do, though now his lordship helps with the washing-up.

A distinguished lecturer in the United States should not be overwhelmingly impressed by the fuss made about him in city after city, with parties in his honour, crowded receptions, warm hospitality in wealthy houses where he is put up for a night or two. It is all extremely pleasant, gracious, and generous. But he ought to realise, and surely does, that it is all part of a social routine. The hostess, so eager to welcome him, is upholding her reputation as the leading lady of her town and the patroness of men of letters and foreign notabilities. He is not the only pebble on the beach. The copy of his latest book, which he finds carelessly placed on one of the bedroom tables, will be replaced by the copy of another book by another author who will arrive next week. The grey-haired lady who says goodbye to him with such a charming warmth of regret will welcome the next on her list with equal warmth and charm.

There is another side to the picture. Some of those so lavishly entertained are remembered mainly for their lack of good manners and complete failure to play their part good humouredly. I have heard some painful stories about this.

The average American, and especially the American woman, hates loneliness and likes

to be in a crowd. It is the cause of their social habit of “getting together.” They get together in multitudes.

The swing doors of the hotels let in tidal waves of women—or of men—belonging to some “convention.” I was once asked to lunch with some ladies, and when I arrived it seemed to me that there were 2,000 of them—but that figure may have been exaggerated in my morbid imagination. Perhaps it was only 800. With one other man I was put on a high dais to have lunch with the lady chairman—her name, I remember, was Mrs. Catt—and members of her committee.

In one of these majestic hotels, such as the Palmer House in Chicago, one could live and die without going out for any necessities of life. It has shops, writing-rooms, dance halls, cinema, a theatre, book stalls, swimming baths, drug stores, and everything a human being may want in sickness or in health. An elevator, which we call a lift, takes one up towards the stars to reach one’s bedroom, and at every floor where it stops, if it is late in the evening, one hears for a brief second the wild dissonances of a dance band. One gets a fleeting glimpse of American boys and girls in evening dress or fancy dress, the girls with strapless frocks and bare backs, the boys with false noses or fancy headgear. Another floor, another dance or another reception in full swing.

I used to get confused at these receptions. There were so many people, so much handshaking, so many faces. At one of them a friendly fellow came up and said, “Hullo, Gibbs. How are you getting on?” He could see by my look that I had not the slightest idea who he was, and he enlightened me.

“I’m the guy who was having tea with you this afternoon for an hour and a half.”

And yet one can be as lonely in New York as in an Arabian desert; and to be alone and poor in New York can be as cold and cheerless as it might have been at the North Pole before that became the Clapham Junction of the air.

I was never like that, thank heaven, though I have met some who were.

I was fortunate in meeting all classes of American life from presidents downwards. It is extraordinarily easy to meet the President if one has the right credentials, such as being a journalist, or the friend of a journalist, in Washington.

When I first went to Washington a journalist friend of mine named Leggett said, “Who would you like to meet? Care to see the President?”

“Is that possible?” I asked. “I’m only here for a day.”

Leggett rang up somebody and said, “The President will see you at four o’clock.”

It was President Harding, who blotted his copy book by being too much in the hands of “the boys” who had put him into office and now wanted their price. I found him genial and good-natured, and he surprised me by calling England “the Old Mother.”

To my son, who was with me, he said, “Ah! A block off the old chip, I see!”

Then, one evening in New York, a future President—Mr. Hoover—called on me unexpectedly, when I had returned from a journey and littered my hotel bedroom with collars, shirts, socks and pyjamas. That untidiness did not seem to worry him, and he stayed for an hour talking of the world situation which worried him. Then I had a long talk with President Roosevelt. It was one of the darkest days of the war, when two of our great battleships, the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*, had been sunk by the Japanese. I went into the White House with my spirit at low ebb. When I came out my hope was renewed.

Roosevelt radiated optimism. Crippled though he was from the waist down, he looked in splendid health as he sat behind his desk, and there was not a doubt in his mind about ultimate victory. I have never met before or since a man from whose personality came out this radiance and utter confidence in the destiny of his own nation and of those who fight against the forces of evil. But at that time, and afterwards, there were many Americans who hated him and called him “that man.”

Towards the end of the war his health and judgment failed. He had won the war with us, but he lost the peace by too much faith in Stalin and a queer suspicion of Winston Churchill, with whom formerly he had seen eye to eye.

So now and then I met the mighty, but I was pleased also to get in touch with the fellows in Main Street, the girls in the coffee shops, the college boys and girls, the taxi drivers, and the farming folk of Texas and Kentucky.

The coffee-shop girls used to interest me, and I came to have an admiration for them. Many of them are well educated compared with our own type of shop girl, and read all the books intelligent Americans are supposed to read—the Book of the Month. Many of them have been to college, some of them are undergraduates who work in the vacations to earn their expenses next term. They used to chat with me for a few minutes when they had served me with breakfast, having seen that I was going to lecture in their city that evening.

It was one of them who confided to me that she had a hunch that the Japanese would attack without warning. Now, the Adjutant-General of the American Army had told me that there was not the slightest possibility of the Japanese attacking the United States. That was shortly before Pearl Harbour. The coffee-shop girl was right.

American education in colleges and universities is more widespread than ours. It is, I am told, not quite up to our standard of learning. It is more superficial, and the examinations are not so stiff. But it reaches out to far greater numbers than ours, and they get, at least, sufficient scholarship to awaken their interest in things old and new, with a bit of history in the background of their minds and a liking for poetry and the arts, however elementary their knowledge may be.

American manners on social occasions are more formal than ours until after the third cocktail, when they loosen up. Their form of introduction is less casual than our own.

“Sir Philip, I would like to have you meet Mr. Silas K. Schumacher, the President of our Club.” “Mrs. John Babbitt, allow me to present our distinguished lecturer who, as you know, has a European reputation and whom we are honoured in having with us tonight.”

After the third cocktail there is less formality. At one public dinner at which I was a guest something went wrong with the service, and we were kept waiting such a long time for our food that possibly the third cocktail was followed by a fourth.

A woman novelist of great fame was called upon to speak when coffee had been served. She made a polite plea to the chairman.

“Mr. Chairman, sir, as I should find it difficult to stand up, may I have your permission to make my speech sitting down?”

“Certainly, my dear lady! By all means!”

She made an excellent speech, sitting down.

There are too many cocktails at American parties and among American friends, and too many Old Fashioneds, and too many Bourbon whiskeys and mint-juleps, and horses’

necks, and other agreeable but dangerous forms of refreshment and stimulation. It is, I think, a menace to the social morality of American life, and the habit of drinking hard alcohol is begun early even among some of the college boys and girls. One Old Fashioned is more than I can stand with a clear brain, but I have seen college girls sip down two Old Fashioneds without blinking an eyelid. It cannot be good for them.

In the time of Prohibition, when I was in the United States, there was far too much private and illegal drinking in high places and low, and much of this bootleg whiskey was sheer poison. Being prohibited, it had an additional temptation among those who resented the temperance law. Invitations were given on the quiet.

“Old Bob Tracy is throwing a little party tonight. He has some pretty good stuff. Can you keep a secret?”

I went to one of the best houses in San Francisco. It was thronged with beautiful women with their less beautiful men.

“May be our last chance of a drink!” said one of the men.

They made the best of this chance, which doubtless happened the following evening and the one after that, and so on during the time of so-called Prohibition. Before I left that night most of the beautiful women, and most of the men, were very hilarious and uninhibited.

Giving a dinner party of my own in a New York restaurant, the waiter whispered discreetly, “What would you like to drink, sir?”

As a joke, still in the belief that Prohibition was strictly enforced, I said, “Oh, let’s have some vodka.” To my astonishment and horror—for vodka is terrible stuff—coffee cups arrived with a dose of this liquid for each guest.

In Kentucky I was taken to see the Mint-Julep King—a very genial and charming man with almost eighteenth-century manners. Now mint-julep, when taken seriously, is a ritual as well as a drink. I was served with a silver goblet containing a full measure of Bourbon whiskey with sprigs of mint sticking out to tickle one’s nose. I drank three sips and felt a pleasing sensation going down from my throat to my heels. I had to give a lecture that evening, and after taking six sips I knew that I should be incapable of making a coherent speech if I drank to the bottom of the goblet.

The Mint-Julep King told me of a popular saying.

“One mint-julep is good for any gen’leman. Two mint-juleps are too much for any gen’leman. Three mint-juleps are very encouraging to any gen’leman.” (It was something like that.)

A young man in my company drank three mint-juleps and looked as though he owned the world.

There is more drinking in the United States than in this country, partly no doubt because they can afford it and we can’t, and partly because many of our men prefer beer to spirits. But I don’t want to give the impression that the Americans are a drunken people. The great majority of them—the vast majority—keep perfectly sober on Coca-Cola and other non-intoxicating beverages with only an occasional jollification.

There are bad men in the United States as in all countries in the world, and perhaps more to the square mile of city populations than elsewhere. This may be due to the foreign elements which have poured into “the Melting Pot” from all the races of mankind and not

yet assimilated, although overwhelming the old Anglo-Saxon stock. They produce the gangsters, the gunmen, the racketeers and the political bandits. Some of them are coming over to England with other American fashions. But I must say that I have never met any of these bad men in spite of my many journeys in the United States. I had the good fortune to meet only pleasant Americans, on long railway journeys when I talked with other passengers, and in many cities in many States. My general impression of them is of a friendly and kindly folk, generous-hearted and hospitable, quick witted, full of humour and able to express themselves more intelligently than corresponding classes in England. I only met one disagreeable and hostile American. It was after the First World War and he was an American marine. Recognising me as an Englishman he addressed his fellow-travellers:

“The English in the war were only good at running away.”

This was more than I could pass in silence and my hot rebuke was supported by the other occupants of the carriage. So that one exception among all those to whom I talked is negligible.

Wherever I went I met with great politeness, and I think special interest and friendliness, because I was an Englishman. Whatever their prejudices against England, they have a warm feeling towards the individual Englishman.

Over in Europe they are not popular in the mass. American tourists are as objectionable in the mass—as English tourists. The American G.I.s look rather arrogant as they stroll through a German city or an English town on the east coast. They look as though they were the lords of creation, somewhat over-fed. But if one gets detached from his crowd one finds him—at least, I have found him—not at all arrogant, but modest, almost too polite, and quite grateful for a friendly conversation.

“Those Americans” are not to be described as though they all belonged to one type or had been mass-produced like their motor-cars. The mass production of the mind threatens us all in these days of television, comic strips, sensational newspapers, and entertainment addressed to the lowest common denominator of human intelligence. But I have found much individuality in American life, among their writers and artists and journalists and young people in the homes.

They are the People of Destiny, as once I entitled a book of mine. Whether they like it or no, and many don't, they are up to their necks in world affairs. They have lost their old tradition of isolation. In their hands, very largely, is the shape of things to come. Will that be for good or evil? Knowing the Americans fairly well, I believe they will defend human liberties and rights, in spite of many mistakes, self-interest, the greed of the oil kings, and the defects of their political system, as it seems to us. Some of us in the Old World resent this new American leadership. It is no use resenting the coming of Tomorrow.

## VIII

### BENEVOLENT HOSPITALITY

**T**HE dictionary definition of hospitality is “the kind and generous reception and entertainment of strangers or guests.” So I use the title of this chapter to mean the unbounded hospitality of those great institutions with ever-open doors and seldom empty beds for the relief and rescue of suffering humanity.

For twelve years I was vice-chairman of a great London hospital—Charing Cross. The chairman, for whom I deputised from time to time, was the present Lord Inman—he allows me to call him Philip—who has a special genius for this great work; and when the hospital had to be supported entirely by voluntary contributions, never allowed it to fall into debt and raised its fortune and prestige to a wonderfully high level.

During my term of office I saw the life of the hospital from the point of view of the council table, with occasional visits to the wards and the out-patients’ department, into which flowed unceasingly a tide of men, women and children in need of medical or surgical treatment. The traffic of the roads took its daily toll in accidents. Factory workers got caught between the wheels. Old women fell off stepladders, young women burned themselves at gas fires, children cut their fingers or swallowed keys, marbles, or coins of the realm. But the great majority of cases were due to physical ills requiring diagnosis and treatment beyond the reach of the general practitioners, or needing the quick and urgent skill of the surgeon.

During the Second World War there were the casualties from the blitz over London, many of them being terribly cut about by broken glass. In those days and nights the hospital was like a battleship cleared for action, every one of the staff on the alert, from the house surgeon to the lift man, from the matron to the youngest nurse.

The nurses were marvellous, never losing their nerve, never showing a sign of fear, although bombs were crashing and fires burning all around this very old hospital. During that war I had the honour of receiving Queen Elizabeth, now the Queen Mother. Her first words to me were an acknowledgment of this dangerous locality.

“You’re bang in the middle of everything!” she exclaimed.

That was true, and it seemed a miracle that the hospital stood up from first to last in the very centre of the nightly raids and, towards the end of the war, the arrival of the “doodlebugs.”

I was chairman of a small committee sitting at the council table when one of those abominable machines of death passed very low and close over our rooftop. Suddenly my committee disappeared. They had all ducked under the table. A few seconds later they emerged with great dignity when the Thing had passed—to kill somebody else.

At this time we had a matron—Miss Cochrane—who was a tower of strength. The popular idea of matrons is that they are rather grim ladies. Miss Cochrane was a laughing lady, very jolly, fond of a joke, full of spirit, as brave as a second lieutenant in World War

I. I went with her one night to inspect various outposts of Charing Cross nurses and doctors—in the tube stations. Into that subterranean world masses of people had dragged their mattresses and blankets to shelter from the raids, with their young children and old grandmothers and friends and neighbours. As we walked through the streets in the black-out a raid was in progress. Many fires were burning in London and the sky was scarlet above us, throbbing from the rising flames and smoke. Walking alone one had every right to be frightened. Walking with Miss Cochrane it was impossible to be scared. She was telling humorous stories. Her laugh was very comforting. She didn't care a damn for the German bombers. When she appeared on one of the platforms the nurses made a rush at her, and I was touched by their devotion to this great soul. Like the captain of a ship she was a disciplinarian, but lightened discipline by her sense of humour and her understanding of sisters and nurses. They knew that she fought always for their interests and a fair deal for the nursing profession.

Charing Cross Hospital, like all others, is now controlled by the State under the National Health Acts. The old council on which I served is now a board of management, with public officials. Surgeons, doctors and nurses have the status of Civil Servants.

There were weaknesses, no doubt, in the old voluntary system. It had to be financed by begging campaigns and constant appeals to the charity of rich and poor. In the case of Charing Cross, under the inspired leadership of Philip Inman, that never failed; but many hospitals were heavily in debt and lived from hand to mouth.

Many people have it in their heads that under the old system hospital service was less efficient, more expensive, and not available to the general mass of suffering people. This, I think, is untrue. When I was at "the Cross" we were presented every month with the figures of the number of out-patients and the amount of payment received from hospital patients. Most of the former were treated for no payment at all and the others according to their means after consultation with the lady almoner. Thousands of people who subscribed 4d. a week to the H.S.A. paid nothing extra for this treatment, that society paying the hospital direct out of their funds. Some of the doctors and surgeons complained that they were getting a poor deal by having to attend to patients who could well afford their professional fees but posed as paupers.

One distinguished surgeon, excitable and hasty-tempered, came hurrying down one day and spoke with violence.

"This is too much! I'm supposed to operate for nothing on a woman whose fingers are crammed with diamond rings. The whole system is a farce and a fraud!"

The ward sister went up to see this bedizened dame and came down with a report consisting of one word.

"Woolworth's!"

I marvelled at the generosity of consulting surgeons and physicians who, under the old voluntary system, gave their services for nothing, doing several operations on their visiting day before attending to their own private practice. When I expressed astonishment at this benevolence to our chief surgeon, telling him that I was not called upon to write novels gratuitously for the public weal, he laughed and shook his head.

"We're not entirely without self-interest. We get prestige. That enables us to charge big fees to people who can afford them."

He received a fee of £1,000 for an operation on an Indian Maharajah, flying out to India for that purpose.

Nevertheless, I still think those distinguished men were extraordinarily generous, with a high sense of vocation in giving all their skill and knowledge free of charge to the poorest of the poor lying in the wards. Towards the end they did receive a share of the payment made by the H.S.A., and I was chairman of the committee which heard their claims and reported on them favourably.

Something, I am told, has gone out of this hospital service by the abandonment of the voluntary system—some human warmth, some of the old spirit of service, the charity and love which was called out from many kind hearts eager to relieve human suffering by personal generosity. Many rich people left legacies to the hospitals. Many people contributed their shillings or their pence. Donations came to “the Cross” from Covent Garden porters and others who had been treated in the wards. Now all that has dried up. The State pays for everything out of the weekly contributions to the National Health Service by every Tom, Dick and Harry who licks the right number of stamps on his employment card.

That may be so—I think it is—but our surgeons and doctors in the hospitals still devote their skill and knowledge with unflinching devotion to their patients. Of that I am certain, for I have seen their work under the new system and the old.

A knowledge of hospital life differs from the point of view of the council table and that of the patient in the bed. I have seen it from both sides, having enjoyed, shall I say—or suffered?—the hospitality of these institutions rather too frequently during recent years.

To face a serious operation needs as much moral courage as one can summon to one’s aid, and the first is the worst, because one’s imagination conjures up many horrors, and is filled with the dread of pain and, inevitably, the fear of death. If one has any faith or philosophy they are needed now.

But many of these morbid anticipations are unjustified. There is one source of comfort nowadays which takes the horror out of an operation. I was reminded of it by a doctor friend of mine who wished me good luck.

“You can thank God that you live in the age of anæsthetics. Think of the time when operations were done without them!”

I thanked God, and the scientists, for that enormous boon. There is no more pain under the surgeon’s knife. One is put to sleep on the way to the theatre. One knows nothing until it is all over. The hedger and ditcher in my village, a one-legged man, always chatty and cheerful, reassured me when he heard that I was to have another operation.

“That’s all right. Don’t you worry. I’ve had nineteen operations and I wouldn’t mind having another. There’s nothing in it.”

The first experience I had was not serious to life or limb but serious enough to my future happiness as a lover of life and beauty. It was an operation for cataract, which had prevented me for two years from reading the written word and seeing the faces of my friends with any clear vision. That time I did not go into a hospital but took a bed in a nursing home—the oldest nursing home, I believe, in London. Rudyard Kipling had lain in the very room I occupied, and I hoped that I might be inspired by any vibrations of his genius which might linger there. That did not happen. I was operated on by the greatest

expert in England. It was with only a local anaesthetic, but was quite painless except for seven unpleasant moments. He had begged me to lie still and afterwards patted my shoulder and said, "You were as still as a Red Indian." I had to lie still afterwards. Any jogging about would ruin the success of the operation, and for two nights I had my hands tied to the bed lest in my sleep I might rub the eye from which he had removed the lens, and which was now bandaged.

It was during a period known as the February Blitz in the Second World War. Night after night this nursing home was in the centre of heavy bombing. Explosions shook the old house and made the walls and floors tremble as though in an earthquake. Around us fires were burning. Every night before the expected raid the matron, dressed in an air warden's uniform, came to each patient and asked whether he would care to go down to the cellar. No one did. During these raids my room became the rendezvous of the nurses, who never showed the slightest sign of fear, except perhaps an extra gaiety. They brewed tea in exchange for my cigarettes. It was a pleasant little party in the midst of hell-fire.

There were several Irish nurses among them, and one of them, my night nurse, was a highly intelligent lady who afterwards became a doctor.

"Let's have a talk about Ireland one night," I suggested, in a light-hearted moment.

She looked at me searchingly and then laughed.

"That would take some time," she warned me.

She came in one night and said, "How about that talk on Ireland? I'll make a pot of tea to keep us going."

It was dawn stealing through the window blinds before we had dealt with the woes of Ireland, the rebellion of '16, the executions which made martyrs of condemned men, the policy of de Valera, and the times of "the troubles" with shootings and burnings by Sinn Fein and Black and Tans.

The prettiest nurse, not Irish, looked after me by day, and the first time she appeared some practical joker had pinned a notice (taken from one of the doors) on to the back of her frock. It bore the word "Engaged."

In one of those dreadful forms of entertainment called a Brains Trust I was asked whether, as a hospital patient, I would prefer to be looked after by a plain-looking nurse of great experience or by one of the young and pretty ones. There was loud laughter when this elderly man voted for youth and beauty as a help to convalescence. Needless to say I spoke to get that laugh.

In Charing Cross Hospital, which I had served so long, I was rewarded for this voluntary service by having a room of my own when I lay abed. It was a green tiled room backing on to the near neighbourhood of Covent Garden Market. Across the passage was one of the men's wards from which, when my door was open, I could hear the sound of men talking or coughing. Not much noise. It is astonishing how quiet they are, these patients suffering from every kind of physical distress. There are few groans or moans. Often there is laughter in the ward from men not too ill to see a joke or to make one.

I came to know all the little noises—the grinding of the lift outside my room, the trundling of the wheeled carriage conveying a stretcher case down the corridor, the clatter of teacups in the nurses' pantry; and one tremendous noise in the small hours of the night when Covent Garden Market became alive and active. It was the arrival of motor-lorries

bringing in the country produce for that day's marketing. The din and clatter were terrific. The lorries seemed to be charging each other. I had an idea that there was a battle raging between the lorry drivers, with shoutings and cursings. Perhaps those bringing in potatoes had a deadly feud with the conveyors of cabbages. Perhaps the aristocrats with tomatoes were being attacked by the plebeians with turnips. They seemed to be using their lorries like tanks, charging each other with fury. So it sounded to me until two little red pills brought in by one of the night nurses drugged me into sleep.

To one of the nurses I put a difficult question before an operation.

"Nurse, do you think I'm going to get through this?"

She answered in a matter-of-fact way:

"You know as well as I do, Sir Philip, that it's all a question of luck."

A question of luck as to whether death was waiting for me a few hours hence. That was a queer thought. I had no sense of fear, but a certain curiosity as to what the adventure of death might be. I had faced it before many times in World War I. Nor was I troubled with any remembrance of sins by a guilty conscience. Into thy hands, O Lord . . .

That little nurse might have reminded me that I should be in the hands of one of the most distinguished surgeons in England. She might have told me that most patients recovered from the operation I was going to have. But no, it was only a question of luck, she said.

I was made ready for the theatre. I was given a prick in the arm which made me drowsy. A big, strong man came into the room, lifted me off the bed as though I were a featherweight, and put me on to a stretcher. I was trundled down long corridors and wheeled into a lift. I was still semi-conscious when I reached the theatre. A strong light projected on to the operating table, and there were white-coated surgeons moving about and two nurses in masks over nose and mouth. One of them seemed to be swaying from side to side. Another prick and I was dead to the world. No pain. No consciousness. Utter oblivion. Not even a sense of sickness—no vomiting—when I found myself in bed again in the little green tiled room; only a pleasant drowsiness. There is nothing to be afraid of in these operations. Only the morbid imagination conjures up a terror of them due to ignorance before the experience. The anaesthetist is a modern miracle-worker at the side of the surgeon, and it is he who keeps one alive.

Strange things happen to one's mind when one is back in bed again and for a little while still under the influence of the "dope."

A medical student, now a doctor, who came into my room told me that I spoke to him in a perfectly normal voice as though fully intelligent.

"Have you a revolver?" I asked him.

"Yes, as a matter-of-fact, I have," he answered.

"Will you lend it to me?"

"Certainly."

"Thanks very much."

"But I haven't any cartridges."

"Oh! Well, then, it's no use to me."

Now, to this day I wonder why I asked him for a revolver. Did I want to shoot

anyone? That is quite outside my character, as far as I know it. I have never wanted to shoot man or bird or beast. I have a peaceful disposition and will not even kill a spider when I find one in my bath.

One has to adapt oneself to the discipline and routine of hospital life. Nurses seem to have a passion for making beds—they hate it really—and that is their first activity when the day nurses take over from the night shift. Two of them come in, merry and bright, sturdy young women who will not be denied.

“Time for a wash and shave. No shirking!”

“Oh, lord, it’s very early in the morning and one is still a bit weak.”

During the First World War I lay in a Canadian hospital in Amiens, next to a General.

“I’ll be blowed if I’m going to shave at six o’clock,” he told the nurse. “I’m a General. I’m going to shave when I like, or not at all.”

The Canadian nurse looked down upon him sternly.

“You may be a General when you’re in uniform,” she told him, “but when you’re in pyjamas in this hospital you’re going to do what I tell you.”

Every morning they had a mock battle on this point of order. The nurse always won.

They always win, for a patient in his weakness becomes a child in their hands and has to submit willy-nilly to their ministrations, which are kindly but firm.

“Now I’m going to give you a blanket bath.”

“Oh, lord, must you?”

“Now you must have that injection. Sorry!”

“So am I. I believe you like torturing me.”

“Rubbish.”

They do not pet their patients. They have no tenderness or sentimentality. They are mostly cheerful, humorous, matter-of-fact and friendly. What more can one expect of them? Though every patient is apt to think that he is the only pebble on the beach.

They have a hard life, these nurses. No rest for them on day duty when they’re on their feet, and oh, the weariness of the long night hours in the wards. Some of them are able to go through their month of night duty without wilting, the young ones and the strong ones, but others are utterly exhausted before the changeover. One of them used to come into my room with heavy sighs, looking ten years older than when she had begun the night. And I remember a probationer nurse on her first day in the hospital. She arrived young, keen and pretty. As the day wore on her face became lined, her eyes tired and anxious, with a look of going through a terrible ordeal.

“Do you think you will be able to stick it out?” I asked her.

“I don’t know. I want to.”

Probably she had been bullied about by the ward sister and the experienced nurses impatient of this novice who didn’t know how to do anything.

Every morning a buxom lady, not a nurse, and dressed in pink, came into my room to sweep it out. She was a Cockney of the old type and, leaning on her long broom handle, would tell me about her life and how she was admired for her face and figure by gentlemen down Lambeth way. If a nurse darted in to bring a jug of water or do some

other small task she would stop talking and get on with her sweeping, but as soon as the nurse had gone she would wink at me and continue her conversation. Then she fell in love with me. She announced this a few mornings after my operation.

“Oh, I do love you, Sir Philip. You’re such a nice gentleman.”

That was embarrassing, and her declaration of love was repeated many times.

“You’re such a lovely gentleman! I do love you, Sir Philip!”

I was thankful when a nurse came in.

I had distinguished visitors. Lord Inman paid me several visits, and the first time was pushed on one side and kept waiting by one of the day nurses who was looking after me and did not know his importance, and didn’t care anyhow. Then every day the matron arrived, attended by two nurses. It was not Miss Cochrane, but her successor, Miss Dickenson, sweet-natured and merry-eyed. Then at night, when lights were out in the wards except for dim little lamps, and I was waiting for the two little tablets which would send me to sleep—the battle in Covent Garden had not yet begun—I was aware of someone of tremendous dignity entering my room very quietly, also with two nurses in attendance, like a General with his A.D.C.s. On her first visit I felt that I ought to get up and bow, but I was not in a condition to do that. I felt as though someone like Queen Victoria, with the same majesty, had entered my room. It was, I was told afterwards, the Sister Superintendent, in charge of the hospital at night. I need not have been so awed. She was very gracious and unaffected.

I have had experience of another hospital since then and give it full marks. All over the country there are these wonderful hospitals served by doctors and surgeons and anæsthetists, for whom I have the deepest admiration. They are the targets of criticism if anything goes wrong or if—according to the laws of human nature—they make mistakes sometimes, never sparing themselves and giving all they have in knowledge and skill and devotion to ailing men and women who fill the wards, in which there is never a spare bed.

## IX

### THE CURTAINS OF YESTERDAY

**D**UFF COOPER wrote an autobiography under the title of *Old Men Forget*. It was a quotation from King Henry's speech before the Battle of Agincourt.

"Old men forget; yet all shall be forgot, but he'll remember with advantages what feats he did that day."

But some old men remember, and, as one has heard lately on the "wireless," are able to summon back the horrors of childhood—not very horrible really!—and many memories of the nursery days. My own earliest memory goes back as far as a terrific snow storm in 1881, when I was four years old. It was an historic storm, worse perhaps—or perhaps not—than anything of the kind that has happened since in our hardest winters. I was reading about it the other night in a diary written by my father. He was a Civil Servant in the Education Department, and came home to the bosom of his family—a large family of boys and girls—as regularly as clock-work after office hours. We were living at Enfield, then a country place surrounded by cornfields and farmsteads. On that terrible night snow drifts were piled high and there was a blinding blizzard. Many people could not get to their homes and died of exposure, buried in this white sepulchre. My father had to fight his way through a barricade of snow at his own front door.

I remember looking out from our nursery window on to a world of whiteness utterly still and silent.

Apart from trivial childish memories, my next remembrance of English history was when I stood on the roof of my father's office in Whitehall amidst a crowd of ladies and gentlemen in Victorian dress—the ladies with bustles and long, flowing frocks—watching a great procession in the street below and listening to the music of many bands and repeated roars of cheering. The crowds down there were cheering a little old lady in black who passed in her carriage, before which, and behind, came many kings and princes, a tide of cavalry in glittering helmets and breastplates, or in Indian turbans and the head-dresses of soldiers from all the countries of the British Empire. It was in our days of Imperial power when Britannia ruled the waves and vast areas of the earth were under our dominion. It was the Jubilee of Queen Victoria. That was a long time ago, but to this day I remember a magnificent figure with a golden eagle on his helmet and a white tunic with golden epaulettes. It was the Crown Prince of Germany, who died too soon.

Looking back upon that scene seventy years ago I think the little old lady would have dropped dead in her carriage had she foreseen for a moment the future of the Empire over which she ruled with the loyalty and reverence—the almost religious reverence—of her subject-peoples. India has gone. Egypt has gone. There is no longer an Empire, but a free association of peoples loosely connected into a Commonwealth. And the Queen's heart would have melted into tears, because she was compassionate of "her dear men"; and her soul would have been filled with despair and horror, had she been given a vision of the massacre of youth in wars to come. Two of them were against Germany, her blood

relations, the people of her beloved Albert and of her eldest daughter.

So in my youth I belonged to Victorian England. In my youth I lived in what are now called “the good old days.”

They were not so good as all that. We were unconscious, anyhow, of the peace we had—we took that for granted, as we did the value of money when a sovereign was made of gold and when Income Tax was 4d. in the pound. For men of the middle and upper classes—caste was strong in our social distinctions—it was the age of top hats, frock coats—I can still feel in memory the long skirt of that garment—and striped trousers tight to the leg. The aristocracy were rich, powerful and—with charming exceptions—arrogant. Many of them believed unconsciously that they were made of different clay from the “lower orders.” I knew an old lady, Lady Violet Greville, the daughter of the Duke of Montrose, who was made to gargle, she told me, if as a child she went too near the proletariat. In church on Sunday her family was preceded to their pews by two footmen in livery, who carried their prayer books on silken cushions, while the whole congregation stood up in humility and respect.

“God bless the Squire and his relations  
And keep us in our proper stations.”

If one wants studies of arrogance *in excelsis* he should read *The Reason Why*, by Miss Woodham Smith, with its portraits of two military gentlemen who were monsters of snobbishness, stupidity and ruthlessness. Snobbishness is too feeble a word to express their unswerving belief in their own God-given superiority to men of lesser rank.

The other day when I was lunching in Paris with my friend Harold Callender of the *New York Times* we spoke of this book, and he said, “It’s curious that the English people, who are so gentle and good-humoured, could at times be so cruel and ruthless and brutal. How do you account for that?” It reminded me of a question asked humorously by a German friend of mine. “Sir Philip, when did the English become good?”

The lower orders, as they were called, were not among those who enjoyed “the good old times.” They were over-worked, underpaid, ill-nourished and crowded into the foul slums created by the industrial era, During my own lifetime a social revolution has taken place which has changed all that, but I can remember being shocked as a very young man—a boy of seventeen or so—by the sights and scenes which met my innocent eyes when I ventured into the poor districts of London. On Saturday nights there was a saturnalia of drunkenness round the “pubs.” The women were worse than the men when gin was cheap. They became madly drunk, fighting each other with fury, tearing each other’s hair out and fighting the police who intervened. Some of them had to be strapped down on stretchers and carried off screaming. It turned my young blood cold.

They were the days when the Salvation Army did its best work among the unfortunates. The Salvation Army lasses in their blue frocks and poke bonnets, carrying their tinkling tambourines, would go into the roughest places, preaching the love of Jesus to men who used this Name only as a swear word. They were never molested, and now and again rescued these “sinners” (more sinned against than sinning) from the depths of their hell on earth.

Later, as a young journalist, I went into Salvation Army night shelters and doss houses, where hundreds of men lay in beds like coffins. A terrible stench came from their

unwashed bodies and ragged clothes. I listened to their hard breathing, coughing and snoring, with now and then a groan.

I came to know General Booth himself and attended some of his meetings when, like the Jongleur de Nôtre Dame, he danced for the love of the Lord. He was a saint, and if he had lived in the Middle Ages would have founded an Order like that of Ignatius Loyola. His heart was filled with compassion for the down-and-outs and the children of misery, but he could be stern as well as tender, with the sternness of a Hebrew prophet, and then his officers became pale in his presence, as once I saw.

I may have told before how I was sent to him by Alfred Harmsworth, afterwards Lord Northcliffe, with whom he had some quarrel. At the end of our conversation he took hold of my wrist, forced me down on my knees, and said, "Now we'll pray for Alfred Harmsworth." I don't know whether it did Harmsworth any good, but I got the sack from the *Daily Mail*.

The Salvation Army never gave up hope in the regeneration of any man or woman however low they had fallen, and they had an astonishing record of success among old lags and wild women and the poor drabs of the London streets. The cashier of one of their homes had served long sentences for theft and forgery. Now they put their trust in him and he did not betray it.

Years later—half a lifetime later—I went again to one of the Salvation Army homes to see what type of men were using them. They were different from the old crowd—cleaner, better-dressed, and mostly young men during a time of widespread unemployment. I sat down at one of the tables and had some food. On the opposite side, some seats down, was a good-looking fellow, like a typical young officer of World War I. I saw him glancing at me from time to time, and when some of the men had left, he came to sit facing me.

"You're Philip Gibbs, aren't you?" he asked. "Have you come down to this?"

"Not yet," I told him, wondering how he knew my name.

"I have," he said.

He told me his story. He had been abroad with his battalion. He had played too much poker and drunk too much whisky. He had got into trouble over the mess accounts and was dismissed from the army. Now he was down and out, sponging on old friends who shunned him, doing an odd job now and then but unable to get a good position because of his record.

The night before I met him he had walked out to a suburb where one of his former friends was living. He hoped to "touch" him for a pound or two. He would have to swallow pride and the horrible humiliation of being a cadger. He stood outside the house. It was getting dark, but the blinds had not been drawn and he saw his friend seated at a little dining table opposite a pretty girl who was his wife.

"I couldn't bring myself to ring at the door," he told me. "Some last remnant of decency prevented me. I walked back to this doss house."

I tried to do something for him but failed. I have nearly always failed with men like that. They let one down because they cannot resist a bout of drinking and lose any job they get. Despair is sometimes the cause of it, or an incurable urge which amounts to a vice. Being an addict of cigarette smoking, which is also a vice, I cannot find it in my heart to blame them.

Despair, squalid environment, low wages, horrible little homes in overcrowded tenements, the joy of an hour or two of forgetfulness, and cheap alcohol as the way of escape, caused the drunkenness in the old slum life which I saw as a boy. But it would be wrong to paint this picture of Victorian England too darkly. In spite of poverty and insecurity the mass of the working classes as I knew them were decent, law-abiding folk, who found quite a lot of happiness at a cheap price. Money went far in those days. An old carpenter I knew in a Surrey village some years ago told me that in his opinion the old days were best.

“We could get a good evening’s pleasure for sixpence in the village inn,” he told me. “Fourpence for beer, twopence for baccy and no charge for a sing-song which warmed the hearts of us youngsters. There was more fun, more laughter, more spirit when I was a boy. Now everybody has high wages and discontent. Nobody satisfied!”

Certainly Somerset Maugham’s story of *Liza of Lambeth* is not a picture of misery and gloom. They were a high-spirited crowd. My own memories of Derby Day bring back a picture of rollicking, roaring fun along the roads out of London to Epsom Heath, where my friends the gypsies had gathered with their caravans. There was an endless procession of coaches, gigs, dog-carts, pony-traps, donkey-carts, and brewers’ drays laden with coster ladies in their enormous feather hats, and costers in their pearlies, and sporting gentlemen from Mitcham and Clapham and the Old Kent Road, and every type of old-fashioned Cockneys who have passed into the shades. They went singing and shouting along the roads. Horses were greeted by roars of laughter as they trotted past dressed in women’s knickers. It was London with the lid off, but with nothing vicious in it.

Then there were the music halls with a rousing chorus—“Chorus, gentlemen!”—filled with an aroma of oranges, beer, cigars and shag. The crowds queued up for seats in the galleries of the old Gaiety and Drury Lane when Marie Lloyd was darling of the gods, and Albert Chevalier sang: “Knocked ’em in the Old Kent Road” and “My Old Dutch.” Dan Leno was the lord of laughter, in direct line of descent from Pierrot and the forerunner of Charlie Chaplin. Charles Evans, the head of Heinemann’s, the publishers, told me that he used to laugh so much at Dan Leno that he dribbled on to the plush-covered rail in front of the pit. Once, when this little magician was playing the Widow Twankey at Drury Lane, I stood in the wings while he was on the great stage quite alone with the spotlight on him, describing the difficulties of being a mother-in-law. For several minutes—I should say for ten—he seemed to be improvising in a melancholy way; and as I stood in the wings I heard repeated gusts as though a storm were blowing through Drury Lane. They were gusts of laughter in a packed house.

Wealth was not needed in those days to be a patron of the drama. Once, on the Surrey side, my brother and I paid twopence each for a seat in the gallery, from which we saw a remarkably good performance of *Les Cloches de Cornéville* which still lives in my memory. I hardly dare think of what the players earned. They must have had a hard life, undernourished, in theatrical lodging houses of the cheapest and dingiest kind.

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In those late Victorian days there were extremes of poverty and wealth, not so sharply contrasted nowadays. Gilded youth painted the town red on festive nights, golden

sovereigns jingled in their trouser pockets—so much more like real money than our dirty paper notes. They captured policemen’s helmets, raced down Piccadilly in hansom cabs, surged into the fancy dress balls in Covent Garden (after a visit to Willie Clarkson, the costumier) with little ladies dressed as Columbines or cats. They drank too much bad champagne, assaulted the Covent Garden porters, had a hilarious and expensive night, and were brought up at Bow Street next morning.

A sporting peer gave his patronage to this Bohemian side of life. It was Lord Lonsdale, who loved to consort with cabmen, pugilists, bookies, jockeys and the young bloods of the racecourse and the ring. I met him one night when London seemed to be a sleeping city. All was quiet down Bond Street, where a bobby on his beat flashed his lantern on to the doorways of the shops. The theatre crowd had gone home. Homeless men and women were already asleep in their rags under the Adelphi arches. A few cats prowled in the gutters. London by night.

*“Dear God, the very houses seem asleep.  
And all that mighty heart is lying still.”*

But suddenly into Bond Street came a cavalcade of hansom cabs filled with laughing youth—the young gentlemen of the Guards with little ladies of the Stage. They were on their way to the Butterfly Ball, arranged secretly to avoid publicity. Most of the ladies were in costume, and I remember one dressed as a tee-to-tum; that is to say, with a very tiny skirt which spread out when she whirled round. It was she who caught the eye of Lord Lonsdale when he arrived a little late. A tall, handsome man with side whiskers and a twinkling smile—though he had a hot temper at times and was a formidable pugilist—he stood there for a moment on the staircase, a superb figure in evening clothes with the ribbon of an Order across his shirt front.

“*Enchanté!*” he said to the crowd below him, and then, seizing the little lady dressed as a tee-to-tum, danced down the floor with her.

Horatio Bottomley gave a party which I had the pleasure of attending. It was a Costers’ Ball. I had a little doubt as to what I should wear and decided upon an ordinary lounge suit. I was wrong. The coster ladies had hired evening frocks and wore golden slippers with high heels. Horatio Bottomley was in full evening dress. I was a shabby fellow. But Bottomley greeted me warmly and was in a genial mood. It was the first and last time I met him, a man of remarkable character who had publicised himself as a lover of the English people, critic of the Government, and the soul of honesty, through his paper *John Bull*. He had so impressed his journalistic colleague Alfred Harmsworth that later in history the *Daily Mail* ran him as a future Prime Minister in a “Business Man’s Government.” That little plan had to be hastily shelved when Horatio was tried and sentenced for financial fraud.

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It was a changing England. Something was happening in the minds and manners of the people and among those who used to be called the “lower middle-class.” Elementary education was beginning to show results. Thousands of young people went to night classes. They read eagerly after working hours. They read the books of H. G. Wells, who stimulated their curiosity with life and was the Charles Dickens of their class,

understanding them, stimulating them, opening up new vistas of knowledge and imagination. They read the Fabian essays of Bernard Shaw and others. They grabbed at scraps of fact which they found in *Answers* and *Tit Bits*. They had learnt to read something better than *Ally Sloper* and the *Police Gazette*. London University was turning out a new intelligentsia. The Birkbeck was crowded with students who had been doing day-time jobs as clerks and office boys.

Alfred Harmsworth had the genius to see the enormous potentialities of this rising intelligence among the masses. For them, but not only for them, he started the *Daily Mail*, read by countesses as well as shop girls, by dons as well as dustmen, by young gentlemen of the Guards as well as by bank clerks and shop assistants.

“A paper written by office boys for office boys,” said Lord Salisbury scornfully.

That was a libel. At one time its literary editor, I know that among its contributors on page 4—its literary page—were the most brilliant writers of the time. Of Harmsworth himself, afterwards Lord Northcliffe, I have written much already, and here I need only add a few strokes to a quick sketch of him. He was a born journalist, with a quick eye and ear for what was interesting in life and human character and the changing world. He revolutionised journalism, then very stodgy and dull, not by sensationalism alone, but by directing his staff to see and report the things of most interest to the average man and woman; not long political speeches but changes of fashion, some humorous incident in an historical scene, food, the problems of home life, glimpses behind the scenes of the world’s drama, new inventions, new adventures, and history in the making. A handsome man, not unlike Napoleon in his prime, always well but loosely dressed, he was essentially democratic in his social life. In the *Daily Mail* office the youngest reporter was encouraged to suggest an idea, and received the praise of “the Chief,” followed by promotion, if it happened to be a good one. He could be ruthless, and even cruel now and then, but generally he was generous and good-hearted. Often he was astonishingly generous to those who served him.

“Chief,” said Charlie Hands, his whimsical, brilliant and unreliable reporter, lingering behind one day after the Press Conference, “do you mind lending me a hundred pounds? I’m devilish hard up.”

“I do mind,” said Harmsworth. “Certainly not.”

“Oh!” said Charlie Hands, looking down in the mouth.

Harmsworth was silent for a moment, then he said:

“I never lend money. I prefer to give it.”

He wrote a cheque for £100.

That is a trivial incident which I happened to see. He gave thousands of pounds to a lady I knew—lately dead—when she retired after long editorial service in the Amalgamated Press. That is only one case out of many I know. At his best, Alfred Harmsworth (Lord Northcliffe) was one of the pioneers of the New Age which began in the late Victorian era. He cannot be left out of account.

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Before the old Queen died the South African War began. I remember standing in the

courtyard of Guildhall when the Lord Mayor of London announced the declaration of war to a crowd gathered there. He condemned old Kruger and the Boers, and they cheered lustily. I was not one of those who cheered. Curiously enough, as I look back on it—I was a very young man—I was for a time “pro-Boer,” like Lloyd George and some others.

It seemed to me unfair and immoral for a great nation like ours—the British Empire—to make war on a little, unarmed, non-military force of farmers and ranchers. It was only when ghastly lists of casualties were published—those of “Black Sunday,” when we went into mourning for so many dead—that, unlike Lloyd George, I turned away from this pro-Boer sympathy.

Now almost everybody agrees that it was one of our tragic mistakes in history, an unjust war which was the beginning of our decline in power.

By thinking back to the early days of that war I can still hear the blare and thump of bands, the roars of cheers as the C.I.V. rode through the streets of London, the excitement and enthusiasm of the young men who volunteered for service in South Africa; Kipling’s doggerel of “Pay, Pay, Pay” was sung in every music hall, until gradually all this passionate patriotism cooled down because of the long-drawn ordeal, the stupidity of generals, and the failure to secure victory. It flared up again on Mafeking night, which put a new word into the English language—“mafficking.”

London went mad at the relief of that beleaguered town. Baden-Powell became a national hero. Thousands of top hats went spinning down the Strand over the heads of the massed crowds. Buses and cabs were stormed and taken by riotous youth. There was singing and dancing in the streets. Champagne corks popped merrily in every restaurant. Had something happened to the character of the English people, supposed to be so stolid, so unemotional, so phlegmatic?

Not until little Lord Roberts was sent out by the old Queen did the end of the war come in sight. Before its end he went to see the little old lady of Windsor, to whom his heart paid homage. When he came out from that last audience his eyes were wet with tears. He had found her frail, and weak, and tired—so very tired.

The death of Queen Victoria at Osborne came as an immense shock and grief to all the people, high and low. It seemed impossible to believe she had gone from us at last after all the years of her reign in which we had been born and brought up. We were Victorians. Now an era had passed with her going. What would happen to England and the Empire?

Everyone went into mourning. Duchesses, charwomen, shop girls, middle-class wives, the flower sellers in Piccadilly, draped themselves in black. The newspapers had black borders to their pages and poured out emotional prose.

“Never since the death of Jesus Christ,” wrote one newspaper man, carried away by emotion and alcohol. He was writing in the post office at Osborne, but he wrote his despatch mostly on the post office counter. It never reached his London office.

Twice I had the honour of meeting that great little soldier “Bobs,” as his men called him. The first time was when I called at his house in Portland Place. He was going out to dinner and was standing in the hall when the door was opened to me. He was in evening dress with rows of decorations, a tiny fellow, with keen bright eyes.

“What can I do for you?” he asked.

I told him that I wanted him to join the committee to promote a Shakespeare Memorial

Theatre.

“Shakespeare!” he exclaimed. “Well, I owe a lot to Will Shakespeare. There’s hardly anything I wouldn’t do for him.”

He joined the committee. Afterwards I travelled in the same carriage with him in a train going from Aldershot to London. He was reading *The Times*, but I took the opportunity when he raised his eyes to get him into conversation.

“That was a fine speech of yours in the House of Lords last night, sir,” I said as a tactful opening.

“Think so?” he asked dryly. “The public think I’m a damned old fool because I warn them of dangers to come.”

The danger to come, with which he was obsessed, was a war with Germany when, after the South African War, we were letting things slide and were utterly unprepared. He wrote a series of articles on this subject for the old *World*, of which at the time a brother of mine—Cosmo Hamilton—was editor.

And I came to know the hero of Mafeking, Baden-Powell, a gallant soldier with a sense of humour, an artist’s eye, and the heart of a boy. I attended his great Jamboree, when Boy Scouts from many countries in the world came to pay their homage to a man who understood the spirit of boyhood, its love of adventure, the camping life, and the easy discipline of comradeship under a scout master. That was a fine work he did for the boyhood of the world.

So we went from the Victorian era into the Edwardian, and people write of it now as though it were an abrupt transition from a period of Puritanism to one of moral licence and social high jinks. Perhaps in “high society,” as it was called, there was a relief from the somewhat dull decorum of the Victorian Court. King Edward, so long repressed, denied all the responsibility of Heir Apparent, scared in the presence of the Queen herself, had long broken with all that, and his private life and character were somewhat in the tradition of the Merry Monarch, though without the charm, and sparkle, and wit of Charles II. He was popular with sporting men, who welcomed his appearance at all the big race meetings. He was genial in his dignified way. He was gracious to women. But I doubt whether the coming of the Edwardian era made any difference to the ordinary folk, whose home life continued as before, without any new joys or junketing. They owed their gradually improving conditions of life with higher wages, shorter hours, and free education for their children to a general recognition by whatever government was in power—Liberal, Labour and Conservative—that social reform and a higher standard of life for the working classes was long overdue. The Trade Unions won many victories in forcing the pace of these reforms, and a doughty little champion of the people’s rights by name of Lloyd George was challenging the Bastilles of privilege and class prejudice by his fiery oratory and dynamic spirit.

For a short time in the early years of King Edward’s reign I became a special correspondent of the *Daily Express* under Sir Arthur Pearson before he became blind, and, through blindness, a noble benefactor of those afflicted like himself. He sent me to report Joseph Chamberlain’s campaign for Tariff Reform, of which he was an ardent advocate, like his journalistic rival Harmsworth, who had suddenly been converted to that economic theory after a talk with his gardener—according to satirists in Fleet Street.

Chamberlain had enormous and enthusiastic meetings all over the country, but failed to convince the nation as a whole. He failed to convince me, though I admired and liked this man with a monocle and an orchid in his buttonhole, who had the most charming manners and persuasive eloquence.

One of these meetings caused me distress of mind and body, which I still remember. It was at Newport in Monmouthshire. The *Daily Mail* correspondent, an earnest Scot, had written a series of articles in defence of Free Trade. Now suddenly he had been ordered by Harmsworth to become an advocate of Tariff Reform. That night he was moody, miserable and conscience-stricken. To ease the struggle in his soul he ordered a bottle of red wine before the meeting and invited me to share it. They called it red wine. It must have been poison. When I sat down at the Press table and heard the outburst of cheering which greeted the appearance of Joseph Chamberlain something very strange was happening to me. The hall in which I sat was revolving. The massed audience seemed to be on a merry-go-round. On the platform with other supporters of the great man was my chief, Arthur Pearson, and I saw all those faces as in a mist, moving round, and round, and round. There was, it seemed, a steam hammer in my head. I felt very, very ill. I was very, very drunk. How it was I managed to write an intelligible description of that scene, with a running commentary on Chamberlain's speech, I cannot imagine. It must have been a terrific effort of will-power, forcing my poor little brain to steady itself in this hideous whirligig of alcoholic sensation. It is worth recording that the little Scot who sold his soul to the devil received a due reward for this bargain, and in later years became one of the pillars of the House of Harmsworth and a very rich man. I remained poor.

Joseph Chamberlain's campaign was killed stone dead mainly by two men in Fleet Street who became friends of mine. One was J. A. Spender, editor of *The Westminster Gazette*. The other was F. C. G. (Carruthers Gould) who drew the cartoons for that paper. They killed Chamberlain by ridicule—brilliant, biting, annihilating. F. C. G.'s drawings were delectable in their humour and genius. What a pity, what a tragedy, that nowadays we have no paper like *The Westminster Gazette*, sometimes called, like Robespierre, "the sea-green incorruptible," because it was printed on green paper.

The election of 1906 was a sweeping victory for the Liberals. Among them in the Government was a young man already famous as a soldier and war correspondent by name of Winston Churchill. He became Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, two years later President of the Board of Trade, and in 1910 Home Secretary. I met him first when I went to interview him shortly after his marriage with a beautiful lady.

On the night of that election in 1906 I stood on a high perch above Temple Bar with a vast crowd below. My only companion in a little hut up there was an artist who drew political squibs projected on to a screen by a lantern, while I improvised rhymes and skits for the delectation of the crowd. Anything went—the most elementary doggerel, the feeblest joke—and gusts of cheering rose up to us, and it was curiously as though one played on human emotion and made a mass of people dance to one's tune. I was then working for the old *Daily Chronicle*, which I long served.

Something was moving under the surface of social life. Women were on the move, asserting their claims to equality with men, demanding votes for women, ready, even eager, to become martyrs for their faith in the liberty of womanhood. From the beginning I was in sympathy with them, though shocked now and then by their acts of violence. I

wrote a novel on the subject—a very bad novel—called *Intellectual Mansions S.W.*, and the Suffragettes, as they were called, bought up the edition, bound it in their colours, white and green, and killed it stone dead.

I came to know Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughters Christabel and Sylvia. Afterwards I had the friendship of Mr. and Mrs. Pethick-Lawrence (afterwards Lord and Lady of that name), leaders of the movement with Mrs. Pankhurst until they had differences of opinion with her.

Christabel was a remarkable young woman, not at all as hard as nails or with the fierceness of a fanatic, but looking like one of Jane Austen's heroines, shy and demure—looking like that but not like that. She had a sword in her spirit. She had the finest form of courage, forcing herself to endure the horrors of prison life which she knew would be inflicted upon her because of her acts.

The Suffragette demonstrations, their marches to the House of Commons, their struggles with the police, chaining themselves to the railings, filled the average man with fury. It was a challenge to his sense of superiority over womanhood, the old conceit, the age-old tyranny, the coarseness of the male. The worst and lowest character of the foul-mouthed men was stirred up by this campaign; and not only men of their type, but arousing the hostility of Members of Parliament and Ministers of the Crown who called themselves Liberals. Looking back on all that, it seems extraordinary now that so many liberal-minded men resisted the claims of women who had justice on their side so obviously and so long delayed.

The majority of women in all classes were equally hostile and strident in their abuse of the Suffragettes. "Disgusting!" . . . "Scandalous!" . . . "Outrageous!" . . . "Shameful creatures!" I remember some of those epithets spoken across tea-tables and dinner-tables.

The Government which called itself Liberal allowed these women, some of them physically frail and delicate, to be treated cruelly. In Holloway they were put among the lowest types of criminal and treated as ordinary convicts. When they went on hunger strike they were forcibly fed—a form of torture—and the disgraceful Cat-and-Mouse Act allowed them to be released until their health improved and then imprisoned again under the previous charge.

I watched many of their demonstrations and tussles with the police, surrounded by laughing and jeering crowds. Often a tall, handsome man, with a pointed beard and moustache getting grey, walked with them. It was Henry Nevinson, a paladin among journalists and war correspondents, always on the side of liberty. At a public meeting in the Albert Hall, broken up by the Suffragettes, his chivalrous soul was outraged at seeing one of the stewards knock a woman out by a blow under the chin. Blazing with fury, he leapt from his box and fell upon a group of stewards, with whom he had a Homeric fight until they flung him out.

The police revealed a surprising snobbishness. They handled well-dressed ladies with good humour and patience, but one day when a number of factory girls were brought down from the north, as sympathisers with the slogan of "Votes for Women," they isolated them, drove them into a quiet place behind the War Office, pulled down their hair and flung them about brutally, as I happened to see. Because of her title, Lady Constance Lytton, sister of the Earl of Lytton, was treated with class distinction until on another occasion she went into the dock under an assumed name, was sent to prison, and forcibly

fed.

I was in court when Mrs. Pankhurst made her famous defence in a speech which has gone down to history. Many barristers crowded in to hear it, and friends of mine among them said it was the most brilliant oratorical effort they had ever heard. But Christabel, whom I went to see in a room behind the court, was not in good form when her time came to defend herself. She could hardly speak for tears.

Well, they won their victory and the vote was granted to women at last when their service and spirit were needed, and given, in a great war.

I saw the first woman introduced to the House of Commons as a Member of Parliament. It was not one of those who had fought and suffered for the cause. It was Nancy, Lady Astor, that very humorous, high-spirited, and loquacious lady who added much to the gaiety of the House and to the annoyance of her political opponents. She was good enough to ask me and my wife to her receptions in the hope, I think, that she could convert us to Christian Science, which she failed to do, so that she lost interest in us. Philip Kerr, Lord Lothian, who gave up a brilliant career in the political world to become a reader in Christian Science, was often one of her guests, and I came to know him as a most charming man. Lunching with him at his house one day, just the two of us, he fell asleep at the luncheon-table. I felt slightly embarrassed, and not liking to disturb him, smoked a cigarette. He went on sleeping. I smoked another cigarette. Then he woke up and, as though continuing our conversation, said, "What were you saying, Gibbs?"

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In the years before the First World War I went abroad now and then as special correspondent of the old *Daily Chronicle*, and often to Paris in times of crisis. With a French colleague named Bourdin I kept late hours and had a meal which was either breakfast or dinner at four in the morning at the Chien qui Fume in Les Halles (which was the French Covent Garden and Smithfield combined), where some of the night birds of Paris sat around drinking absinthe; or in Le Croissant, which kept open all night, in the rue Montmartre. Bourdin and I sat on the red plush sofa with its back to the window. One night after we had left, a man named Jaurès sat on that red plush seat and was shot dead through the window. He was the leader of the French Socialists, a man of integrity, a great orator and a lover of France. I went to his funeral. It was at the very beginning of the Great War and all political leaders of whatever party followed his coffin and the Red Flag, which hung next to the tricolor of France.

Before then I had been to Germany. There had been talk of a coming war. The *Daily Mail* had a series of articles on the subject of *Der Tag*, which was, they said, the toast of the German Navy drinking to the glorious day when they would sink the British Fleet.

"War!" exclaimed middle-class Germans with whom I talked. "War with England? Impossible! A horrible thought. We're blood relations. We have no quarrel with England."

But government officials, the editor of a German newspaper, and some highly placed people revealed anger and hostility against us. There was a Cardinal, a personal friend of the Kaiser, who spoke to me angrily.

"England has insulted us. England denies our right to a navy equal to her own. England has allied herself with France and Russia and has built a ring of enemies against

us. It is intolerable. I do not deny that it may lead to war.”

I ventured to hope that, as a Prince of the Church, he would do his best to prevent war.

He rang the bell.

“Show this gentleman out!” he commanded.

I went to Northern Ireland when there was a threat of trouble between Ulster and the South. Sir Edward Carson had raised an army of young Ulstermen. Sir Hubert Gough and our officials in the Curragh had issued a provocative challenge to the Government—proclaiming their loyalty to Ulster should any attack come from the other side. Winston Churchill lost his temper in the House and spoke angry words about this threat of the army against the State. Arms, it was said, were being smuggled into Northern Ireland for Carson’s volunteers. I was sent over by my editor to investigate this accusation. I found arms coming openly into Ulster and stacks of German rifles in the cellars below Royal Avenue Hotel. I wrote a secret report on the subject, sent by my editor, Robert Donald, to Mr. Winston Churchill. He returned it with some words written across the front sheet.

“Gibbs has had his leg pulled.”

But the truth of my report was confirmed soon afterwards by gun-running incidents which could not be concealed.

So at this time there were anxieties and troubled thoughts and lurking fears in many minds, but not in the mind of the nation as a whole, carrying on with work and pleasures, keenly interested in sporting events, out for a bit more pay and a bit more fun. The old aristocracy felt secure in their mansions and estates. The industrialists were prosperous and not much worried by German competition. The young gentlemen of England were having a good time with their girl friends. There were still liveried servants in the great houses, maids in caps and aprons in suburban villas, nannies in the nurseries, grooms in the stables of the country gentry, and a great inheritance of wealth.

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The murder of an Archduke at Sarajevo did not seem to matter very much—until the earth shook to the tramp of marching men and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse came riding across the fields of Europe, one on a white horse and one on a red and one on a black. “And behold a pale horse and he that sat upon him his name was Death and hell followed him. And power was given to him over the four parts of the earth to kill with sword, with famine, and with death.”

As a war correspondent on the Western Front from beginning to end, I was an eye-witness chronicler of all that history with the heroism and slaughter of our finest youth in the deadly routine of trench warfare and the flame and fury of great battles.

There is a lingering belief that we war correspondents—there were five of us—were “spoon-fed,” kept very much in the dark behind the front, and prevented from telling the truth about the war by severe censorship. That is very untrue, except in the early period of the war when Sir John French was Commander-in-Chief, and General Macdonagh his Chief of Intelligence, a timid, over-cautious man who cut our despatches to ribbons during the Battle of Loos.

When Sir Douglas Haig succeeded French we gained his confidence and he gave

orders that we should have access to all reports—Army, Corps and Divisional—during the progress of a battle, and that we should have liberty to go to the front in any place and at any time accompanied by one of the Intelligence Officers who were attached to our little unit and who became our comrades and friends, taking the same risks as ourselves in front-line trenches and dirty places under shell fire, and fields where the dead were strewn. We were only observers. We did not share the extreme perils of the fighting men. We were non-combatant. But in modern war there is no safe place within range of the enemy's guns. It was only a question of luck whether one could get through Ypres between the arrivals of long-range shells which smashed that city to rubble and dust, or get some way up the Albert-Bapaume road through Fricourt and Mametz and Contalmaison, and past High Wood and Delville Wood—Devil's Wood—during the battles of the Somme. Young officers liked to show us their "beauty spots"—an observation post very near the enemy's lines, sometimes beyond our own front line. Often I was scared stiff, being no hero. As a sergeant in Lillers announced in a loud voice when he stood on guard outside a base headquarters which once every minute was the target of a long-range gun, "If any man says he ain't afraid of shell fire he's a bloody liar." I was often afraid, but had to hide my fear under a mask of courage, like many others. I met a few men who were not afraid of shell fire. One of them was General Freyburg, who once told me that he could not imagine what it was to be afraid. "There must be something the matter with my glands," he told me. Another was Colonel Hotblack of the Tanks, wounded many times. Another was an officer of the Gordon Highlanders, who strolled out under shell fire—and thought I should enjoy strolling with him—as though going for a country walk in a Surrey meadow. The dead bodies of some of his men lay about and within a few yards of them a group of Scotties were playing cards. They were beyond the trenches and the enemy was uncomfortably near.

My point is that our little band of five war correspondents were not kept back behind the lines. We became familiar with every position along the front from the beginning to the end of the war up to Passchendaele, outside Cambrai, across the Hindenburg line, until one day when Sir Douglas Haig rode on to the Hohenzollern Bridge across the Rhine at Cologne at journey's end. With him was an escort of Lancers. He dismounted, and it was to the war correspondents that he spoke first, paying us a generous tribute, and then hoping that there would not be a peace of vengeance.

Because it was impossible for any one of us to describe or record a great battle along a wide line of front we split up, each man getting what news he could from the reports coming into the Corps or Divisional headquarters, talking to slightly wounded men, watching the awful barrage fire.

Only now and then, very rarely, could one see the actual fighting, though I once saw an enemy counter-attack, when the German soldiers linked arms and advanced slowly towards our line until they were mown down by machine-gun fire. And I saw the fantastic charge of our cavalry up Monchy Hill, near Arras, when they rode against a sweep of machine-gun fire and had no chance at all. And I saw our men in a snowstorm advancing to the attack on the Vimy Ridge and other actions when the bunches of men trudging to an attack under their heavy packs were visible through the smoke.

At the end of the day we pooled all the facts we had gathered and kept back only our personal impressions and experiences. This gave rise to the legend that we were "spoon-

fed.” But the result was, as I honestly claim, that no war before or since has ever been so fully described as in our daily despatches to the world’s Press. For a time, showing the confidence in us of the Commander-in-Chief, Beach Thomas and I wrote a weekly report to which he put his signature. The only restrictions imposed upon us by the censorship were to refrain from giving the names of battalions during an action which would be helpful to the enemy’s Intelligence Service, to avoid mentioning the number of casualties, and to refrain from any criticism of the generalship. Other facts, like the whereabouts of our gun positions, came under a self-imposed censorship. We did not wish to jeopardise the lives of our men.

At home we were criticised bitterly for not mentioning the units taking part in a battle. “Scots,” “our lads from the North,” “a battalion of West Country troops,” were not good enough for the relatives of our officers and men, who wanted to know whether their sons or husbands of, say, the 3rd Battalion of the 56th Division had been in action.

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At the beginning of the war Lord Kitchener refused permission for correspondents to go to France, but some of us like Beach Thomas and Hamilton Fyfe, H. M. Tomlinson, Massey, and myself went out as free lances without credentials and subject to arrest if found in the war zone. We had strange adventures, not knowing the whereabouts of the enemy, and sometimes getting into unpleasant situations. Hamilton Fyfe was surrounded by a patrol of German cavalry, who were too busy to be bothered with him and passed him down the road to where they knew he would be caught by a stronger force. He escaped by driving his car into a wood until the second group of cavalry had passed.

Massey, Tomlinson and I went by train to Beauvais one day and found it very lonely and deserted except for the station master and another man, who seemed to be awaiting inevitable doom. The Germans were on the hills above the town. French machine-gunners were taking cover on the outskirts.

“The Germans can take Beauvais when they want,” said the stationmaster. “Perhaps in the next hour or two.” That, anyhow, was the meaning he conveyed to us.

Massey, Tomlinson and I looked at each other anxiously. We didn’t like the situation.

“Better get out of here,” said one of us.

But how to get out? It looked as though we were caught like rats in a trap. But the hand of Destiny was at work. It was the very day when General von Kluck swerved in his line. Instead of coming down into Beauvais and striking for Paris, he fell back to get into line with the Crown Prince’s army, which had been forced to retreat by the French Army under Foch. It was very lucky for three journalists from Fleet Street favoured by this stupendous event, which changed the whole aspect of the war and saved Paris. We got out in a train which drove between the two lines shelling each other’s positions with heavy gunfire. After that we came into the backwash of the retreat from Mons.

During those early months of the war it was difficult for us to get our articles back to our newspapers. Several times I crossed the Channel with my own reports, which were anathema to the War Office but welcomed by the Foreign Office and Fleet Street. A young man named F. E. Smith, afterwards famous as Lord Birkenhead, acted as a liaison between the Foreign Office and the Press and passed my articles in a friendly way, not

believing in Kitchener's Secret War. But this Channel crossing was frustrating, and I adopted another way of getting my writings to the *Daily Chronicle* after the arrival of the first British Expeditionary Force.

Retired generals, acting as King's Messengers, took back despatches from the Commander-in-Chief to the War Office. Approaching one of them, I would ask this distinguished old gentleman to do me a small favour. Would he be so very good as to deliver a letter to the War Office? It was addressed to the editor of the *Daily Chronicle*, care of the War Office.

"Certainly, my dear fellow! By all means."

So to the surprise of my editor he received my articles by War office messenger at the very time when I was down for arrest at any port of France. It was, I admit now, very naughty, and I had to stop this trick when I received a warning from my editor that I had better not do it again.

I had a narrow escape from arrest when I travelled one day next to a good-looking young lieutenant of the French Army, who fell into friendly conversation.

"Do you happen to be an English journalist?" he asked politely.

I admitted this crime.

He smiled with a little secret smile.

"I have several of your friends under arrest," he told me. "You know they are forbidden to go near the Front."

We had become very friendly. Perhaps this influenced his sense of duty, but there was another reason. He had been French master at one of our public schools and wanted to get a private letter to England. He wondered if I would take it back if I happened to be crossing the Channel during the next few days. It was addressed to a lady. I was delighted to oblige him. I escaped arrest that time.

In the end the game was up. Arriving by boat at Havre I was challenged by three Scotland Yard men in the uniform of lieutenants.

"General Bruce Williams would like a few words with you. We will take you to see him."

General Bruce Williams was very fiery and formidable.

"I've a good mind to have you shot against a white wall," he told me.

I was not alarmed. I felt sure that this threat would not be carried out. It was not. After a severe bullying I was put under house arrest by the three gentlemen of Scotland Yard in one of the hotels in Havre which was in their hands. I was not allowed to communicate with the outside world. I found them friendly fellows, and one of them was an Irishman and pleasant spoken. I stood them many drinks, which they accepted willingly. I was anxious to get a letter back to my editor, and one day after a week or two I asked the Irishman to slip it out for me. He agreed after a little hesitation. Robert Donald of the *Daily Chronicle* went into action. The Foreign Office used its influence on my behalf. General Bruce Williams was ordered to release me, which he did reluctantly.

Some months later, to my own surprise, after many misdemeanours against War Office orders, I was appointed with the consent of Lord Kitchener himself one of the five official war correspondents on the Western Front.

I happened to meet my three jailers in an *estaminet* near British headquarters.

“For the love of Mike!” exclaimed the Irishman. “You here again!” The three of them advanced upon me in a menacing manner. I satisfied them that I was a fully accredited war correspondent, beyond their interference.

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It was then that I began a long innings as an onlooker of war, with all its monstrous tragedy during the great battles and the routine of trench warfare. I suffered a secret agony from first to last because of the slaughter, and the blinding, and the wounding of so many thousands of our men.

And yet it would be false to say that there was no respite from tragedy, or humour and laughter, among the men. On the contrary, there was no battalion without its group of jesters. The London battalions especially were the humorists of the army, finding a joke in the grimmest places.

“You can’t beat the Cockneys,” I was told by General Haldane, Scot of the Scots.

When relieved and down behind the line, men who had been through frightful ordeals quickly recovered their spirit. One heard roars of laughter in the *estaminets* and billets. Up in the trenches they had their little jokes, and found humour even in the fact that further down the line another company was getting it hot from trench mortars or guns.

“Crikey! Those blighters are copping it! Jerry has a grudge against them. Well, we’re all right.”

“Alf a mo’, Kaiser,” said Old Bill, trying to light his pipe under shell fire, as depicted by the glorious cartoons of Bruce Bairnsfather.

I was very often in touch with the Australians, and followed them into Bapaume when they took it for the first time at the end of the Somme battles. They were a grand crowd of men, without the discipline of the British Army but magnificent in team work. Seeing some of them one day in Amiens Cathedral I thought they looked like medieval knights with their fine clean-cut features and hard, tough look. They were proud of their slouch hats, which they wore even in the trenches until an order came from the General commanding them—General Birdwood, once of the Indian Army, and a dapper little soldier—that every man was to be wearing a steel helmet when he came round the trenches for inspection.

I was with him on that day. Grudgingly the Australians had put on the new headgear, which they hated.

“Very good,” said the General.

But as we passed a dug-out one of the Australians emerged with a tin hat on his head, not of the regulation type. It was a French chamber pot, painted blue.

General Birdwood turned a blind eye to this disobedience of orders and reserved his laughter for some time later.

I wrote my experiences and impressions of the First World War in a book called *Realities of War*, which the Americans called (without my permission) *Now It Can Be Told*, a phrase which has been used many times since in other reminiscences.

The book was held up against me chaffingly in the Second World War by staff officers

who remembered some biting phrases I had used against their predecessors.

Those four years on the Western Front were my most stupendous experience in life—only touched on here—and I came back a changed man, as most others did who had been through that long ordeal, in what seemed to them afterwards a separate life beyond the imagination of those who had not known it.

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Many of the homecoming men found it difficult to adjust themselves to “Civvy Street.” This life of peace seemed strange and unnatural after those years of war. In the army they had had their lives ordered for them, with no responsibility beyond that of a fighting soldier, or, if an officer, looking after a bunch of men. Food, clothing, billeting had been provided for them by high powers far away at the base or G.H.Q. Now they were thrown back on themselves. They missed something. What was it? They couldn’t explain—the comradeship of the battalion, perhaps, the comradeship of the trenches, those encounters with death which somehow by amazing luck they had survived.

Many of them had gone out as boys—hardly more than that. Now they had come back as men who had crammed a lot—all the meaning of life and death—into those war years. Others had left wives at home to whom they returned as strangers, quite different from what they had been.

It was difficult to get back to where they had started. The women were different. They had been working in factories, singing while they worked, making new friends, making their own way of life, not always glad to welcome this stranger at the door who said “Hullo, Ethel!” or “Hullo, Gladys!” in a sheepish kind of way. They were nervy, some of them. They jumped when a door banged. Some of them seemed to be suffering from a kind of delayed shell-shock, and were moody and silent, and had nothing to say about the war or their part in it. “Oh, hell! Don’t let’s talk about the war!” Others were hungry for love and sore if their girl did not respond enough. Peace did not bring the paradise they had imagined.

The officer class shared in this disillusionment and all these difficulties of readjustment. They took their war gratuities and were out for “a good time.” One day they would have to get a job, but meanwhile they went in search of that “damn good time,” and somehow it eluded them in night clubs and cabarets and dance halls to the thump of jazz and the gobblings of the saxophones.

The months slipped by into what are now called the Gay Twenties. Were they as gay as all that? Did this orgy of jazz and the fox trot and the two step bring joy to the heart? Old Clemenceau watching the dances made a comment which is still remembered.

“Je n’ai jamais vu les figures si triste, ni les derrières si gai!”

Then it was necessary to face the realities of life. Time to get a job. What kind of a job for men who had no experience of office work or business?

I met young ex-officers who complained bitterly that they weren’t wanted in time of peace. They had been second lieutenants, even majors, in a murderous war when they were wanted. Now if they were interviewed by some white-collared bloke behind a city desk they were received coldly.

“Can you do shorthand and typing? Any knowledge of bookkeeping or

salesmanship?”

“No, I’m afraid not. I was a pretty good machine-gunner.”

“Any business experience?”

“No, I’m afraid not. I joined the army straight from school.”

“Well, I’m afraid we can’t offer you anything. Sorry.”

Some of them bought chicken farms, and lost their money. Some of them opened wayside garages, and lost their money.

Out in the streets of London were little bands of armless or legless men playing old war-time tunes—“Tipperary,” “Pack up your Troubles,” “The Long, Long Trail.” One of the band held up the passers-by with a collecting box, which he rattled at them. “Thank you, sir. Thank you, lady.” One was held up to ransom by a play on one’s sympathy half a dozen times between Sloane Square and Piccadilly, until one tried to dodge them. Behind the scenes of the Gay Twenties there was the spectre of unemployment and the bitterness of men without work, until gradually most of them were absorbed for a time—for a few years—when there was a tidal wave of unemployment.

I left Fleet Street not long after the war and went abroad a good deal to gather material for books and lectures. I went to the United States and Canada as a lecturer, and to Russia and Germany and Austria and Hungary and Czechoslovakia, but between these travels I had plenty of time to observe the state of things in England and to meet all manner of folk in high places and low.

It was not the England I had known before the war. There was a great gap in the manhood of the nation, sometimes visible and noticeable, as when I went into Hyde Park on a Sunday morning. Where was the old Church Parade and the gilded youth I had known, immaculate in top hats and striped trousers and shiny boots. They were not there. They lay, so many of them, in Flanders fields and the cemeteries of the Somme. But their younger brothers were growing up. They became the plus-four boys who volunteered for service during a General Strike which threatened to stop the life of the nation in 1926—a foolish and unnecessary episode hated by the Labour Party as much as by the Government. Winston Churchill was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, restricting credit so that the pound sterling might look the dollar in the face, and causing thereby a gradual plague of unemployment so that he could not look thousands of workless men in the face, as my own son, then a young fellow, observed one day with bitterness.

Churchill failed in his main purpose. I was in a Paris restaurant when the news came through that England had gone off the gold standard. Suddenly I was surrounded by several French waiters, one of whom had seen the news in *Paris-Midi*. They were excited, astounded and deeply perturbed.

“England has gone off the gold standard!” they exclaimed. “Ce n’est pas possible. C’est incroyable!”

To them the Bank of England had seemed to be the bastion of international wealth and security. They could not believe that it would ever abandon the gold standard. They were more dejected than I was.

The fact of the matter was that we had exhausted our national wealth in four years of war, when we had expended more than in two and a half centuries previously. We had given enormous loans to our allies, never to be paid back.

As far ago as 1916 I had met Lloyd George in Paris.

“How are things going, sir?” I asked him.

He answered with a laugh.

“I can tell you something which is going. Our reserves of wealth. We are the milch cow of Europe!”

Now it had gone and we were laden with a staggering burden of debt. The tax collectors were turning the screw. Income Tax and Surtax were causing a social revolution, bringing down the old aristocracy to a state of genteel poverty, making them sell their pictures and treasures and many of their mansions. It hit the middle-class as well, mercilessly, and the punishment still continues, not by any wickedness of any government but by the inexorable laws of arithmetic.

The General Strike had nothing to do with this except as one symptom of industrial unrest and the demand for higher wages—then pretty low. Winston Churchill lost his temper when the printers of the *Daily Mail* refused to set up a leading article condemning the threat of strike. It seemed to him, as indeed it was, an attack on the liberty of the Press.

I had some personal experiences during that General Strike, when the railways came to a standstill except for a few odd trains, when not a wheel turned in the factories, when the nation’s food and milk supplies were brought down to London by the plus-four boys and their high-spirited sisters, with a great assembly in Hyde Park.

I went down to the London docks to see what was happening there.

“Better not go near the dockers,” said a friend of mine. “They’re a tough lot and they have their tempers up.”

I found them a friendly lot when I went up to a group of them and asked the way to the dock gates.

“You won’t get in,” said one of them. “It’s taken over by the military. No one else admitted.”

“I think I shall be able to get in,” I said.

They stared at me and laughed.

“Not on your life!”

They accompanied me as far as the gate and waited to see what would happen.

A policeman opened a kind of *guichet* and said, “What do you want?”

“I want to come in and have a look round. Here’s my card if you care to take it to one of the officers.”

The bobby read my name and seemed to know it.

“Philip Gibbs! You don’t say! I saw you several times on the Western Front. I used to read your stuff. Glad to meet you, I must say.”

He shook hands warmly, said “Come in!” and opened the gate for me. I saw the look of astonishment on the faces of the dockers.

The docks looked deserted except for some sentries pacing up and down and a few officers of the Guards—(Grenadier Guards I think)—walking about.

There was the sound of music in one of the sheds. It was the music of a regimental band. They were playing selections from Gilbert and Sullivan. I heard the strains of “Dear

little Buttercup.”

“What’s that for?” I asked. My policeman friend explained.

“Doing their bit! No one to listen, of course. That’s a pity.”

They were playing in a great empty warehouse with not a soul to hear them. Wonderful! I could not help laughing. It was so utterly absurd and so utterly English, and so—in a way—magnificent, as a gesture of loyalty in a time of trouble.

I wanted to go to Manchester to see how the strike was affecting the north of England. I heard that a train might run from Euston the following morning at an uncertain hour.

On the platform next morning I found a group of people anxious to get up north to join their relatives and friends. Some women were among them.

The engine-driver appeared and made himself known to us. He was a tall young man with a little moustache, dressed in a lounge suit with a bowler hat. He was putting on a pair of kid gloves.

“Morning all!” he said cheerily. “I hope to drive this train to Manchester—with a little luck.”

I took my seat in one of the carriages.

“Wonderful, ain’t it?” said a woman opposite. “All the young gentlemen volunteers! Makes one proud of the old country.”

It made me uneasy. I didn’t quite like the terrific jerk with which the train began to get a move on. I didn’t quite like the unusual vibration with which it gathered pace. We didn’t get as far as Manchester. This side of Harrow we ran off the rails with a tearing and screeching noise of brakes.

We all got out. The engine-driver got out, adjusting his bowler hat.

“Well, that’s torn it!” he said. “No chance of getting to Manchester. Sorry, and all that!”

The plus-four boys and ex-officers of the World War were running the buses and enjoying themselves.

“No fares charged. All the way to Hampstead. Jump on, lady. Want to go to Bond Street? Well, it’s not on our route, but we don’t mind making a little *détour* for a pretty girl. Charles, old boy, there’s a charming lady who wants to go to Bond Street.”

One of the conductors, undoubtedly an ex-officer of the Guards, asked the permission of his passengers to stop at a house in Eaton Square. He wanted to collect his morning letters.

“Shan’t keep you a moment.”

No newspapers appeared except an official Gazette edited by Winston Churchill and his friends. Thousands of city clerks and office girls trudged across the bridges every morning from the suburbs and made their way home again on foot—long and weary walks to Clapham and Streatham or places north and east, unless they could get a lift from private cars taking anybody along their own route. There was something heroic in their spirit, as always there is in times of crisis—an unconquerable spirit, as later we saw when London was burning and the streets were littered with rubble and glass.

Under the pressure of Ramsay Macdonald and the leaders of Labour and the Trade Unions the strike was called off. The plus-four boys and their sisters had beaten the

attempt to throttle the whole nation by holding up essential services.

# X

## BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

**M**Y son and I were in a ship sailing from Constantinople to Smyrna. It was just before the irregular cavalry of Mustapha Kemal swooped down upon that city of Asia Minor, killing and burning, in revenge for the massacre of some Turks by Greek soldiers.

On board was a Greek girl with whom we became friendly. She spoke English remarkably well. She also spoke Greek, Russian and American. She could sing American minstrel songs and did so to us on deck at night under a sky full of stars. Her parents lived in Smyrna and she was going to see them after seven years. For most of that time, she told us, she had been in Russia during the Revolution and the war between Reds and Whites.

She had gone to Russia as a governess to two German children. Their father was a Baron and the mother had treated her kindly. But when the Revolution came in 1917 they became panic-stricken and fled with their two children without a thought or care for this girl who had been in their service. There she was, a young Greek girl, alone and penniless in the midst of revolutionary excitement, developing afterwards into a murderous civil war. For a time she kept herself alive by playing the piano to Russian soldiers in low-class cabarets, and afterwards seems to have followed the Red Army, and sometimes the White Army, as the fighting swayed to and fro. She had seen the most frightful things. Both sides did a lot of hanging. Many times there were dead bodies hanging up in the villages. She gave a realistic description of how they looked with their tongues hanging out. It was a tragic story, but she told it gaily, without self-pity and even without pity, like a child who accepts everything it sees as natural to life.

While she talked our ship was ploughing through a calm sea as though it were made of jelly. The moon made a broad pathway of light. The stars above us were big and bright. There was a phosphorescence on the water and a myriad diamonds were scattered in our wake. From where we sat on deck we could see the huddled forms of the steerage passengers down below. Among them was an Armenian girl whose family had been murdered by the Turks. She had a photograph of a pile of skulls with a Turkish officer sitting on top and smoking a cigarette.

The Greek girl had her own philosophy of life which she expounded to us. War killings, hangings, were, she thought, an inevitable part of life. Life is like that, she said, and peace is only a brief respite between the struggles of nations for self-preservation or power. It was wrong to be afraid of death, she assured us. After a time, with death always round the corner, one becomes careless of it. It doesn't matter. Sometimes it comes as a friend. It is an escape from other things. When one becomes very tired, death is no more than a sleep.

So she talked, very cheerfully, until dawn, with an occasional little song and often a laugh.

She had reached Constantinople in the uniform of a Greek sailor. It was her only way

of getting ashore without a passport or papers.

She could not have remained very long with her parents in Smyrna because she was going to Alexandria on a P. & O. liner. From our window in a hotel we waved to her with our towels, and she waved back and pretended to be rinsing out her tears at parting from us. Not long afterwards, Smyrna was in flames, with the dead bodies of Greeks and Armenians in the smoking ruins.

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I have had some strange railway journeys in my time, travelling in cattle trucks, sitting for long hours on the edge of my suit-case in trains packed with refugees, crawling through Russia in a train which halted every twenty miles or so until the *provodnik* and his men had gone forth to find wood to stoke up the engine. And on many of these railway journeys I have had some of the most interesting conversations with chance acquaintances and remarkable characters, some of them very wise in their knowledge of life, some of them with tragic tales to tell, some of them quite mad.

There was a madman in a cattle truck on a train from Paris to Nancy, crowded with French soldiers called up by general mobilisation on the eve of the First World War. My man was mad drunk. He was in a company of Zouaves, most of whom were drowning their sorrow after parting from their wives and sweethearts by frequent swigs of wine and brandy. They were also singing something resembling *La Marseillaise* without regard to each other's time or key.

*Allons, enfants de la patrie . . .*

I sat on my suit-case, jammed in among these sweating, excited and emotional men going off, as most of them knew, to almost certain death at some future date—The Somme, Verdun, Nôtre Dame de Lorette, Souchez—any of those places where French manhood was mown down in swathes.

A man facing me discovered I was an Englishman. This delighted him and he grasped my hand in his big fist, a blacksmith's fist, and shouted out, "Anglais! . . . Camarade! . . . *A bas les Boches!*" He did this not once but every few minutes.

"Anglais? Camarade!"

He thrust towards me a half-filled brandy bottle and insisted upon my drinking to the death and damnation of *les sales Boches*. I took no more than a sip of this fire-water, but he drank another gulp.

He described to me in great detail all the unpleasant things he would do to the first German who fell into his hands. Butcher's work, the thought of which he found enjoyable and comical, so that he roared with laughter. To illustrate his proposed butchery he pulled out and opened a big clasp-knife and flashed it within a few inches of my nose while the train lurched over the points and rails, making him sway heavily against his companions.

After some time and frequent repetitions of the word *Camarade*, he became suspicious of me with a drunkard's change from good humour to surliness. Perhaps I did not show sufficient enthusiasm at the thought of cutting a German to pieces. Perhaps he thought, in his fuzzy-mindedness, that I was a German. His big clasp-knife became menacing. It was dangerously near my throat.

One of his fellow Zouaves, a young soldier who had smiled at me now and then, seemed to realise the situation and came to my assistance very effectively. With a clenched fist he gave a knock-out blow to my persecutor. The man slumped heavily like a felled ox and remained quiet for a long time. Probably the blow had sent him to sleep. One by one, as we travelled through the night, the others fell asleep, with their heads drooping on their companions' shoulders. From wayside stations came the sound of singing faintly and hoarsely into our cattle truck.

*Allons, enfants de la patrie . . .*

The youth of France—its young manhood—was answering the call to the colours.

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Not long ago I was in the restaurant car of a train travelling from Waterloo to Portsmouth. As I went down the car to get out at Guildford, a friendly looking gentleman of middle-age, who had several empty glasses on his dining table, stared at me with astonishment and delight.

“Good heavens!” he exclaimed in a loud voice. “If this isn’t my old friend George Arliss! My dear fellow, I thought you had been dead for years. Have you by any chance come back from the other side? How charming of you, and how delighted I am to see you again, dead or alive. Shake hands my dear fellow. This is a real pleasure.”

He seized my hand and held on to it with enthusiasm.

Then he addressed the other diners in the restaurant car.

“A most astonishing thing! This is my dear old friend George Arliss, the famous actor, you know. You must remember him in *Disraeli* and *The Green Goddess*. He has been dead for years, but here he is again in the flesh, looking remarkably well. What a pleasant surprise!”

There was a general laugh in the dining car as, with some difficulty, I released my hand from his grasp when the train slowed down at the platform.

He beamed on me and raised his hand in salute.

“*Au revoir*, my dear man!” he called out. “Sorry you have to get out. God bless you! Splendid meeting you again like this.”

I must be very much like the late George Arliss, though I am not particularly flattered by the thought. When he was still alive I was lunching one day at the Garrick Club with old Forbes-Robertson. During the luncheon, one of the club members passed with a friendly nod and said, “Hullo, Arliss!” Ten minutes later another man passed and said, “Hullo, Arliss!”

So there is no getting away from the likeness, and that reminds me of two American ladies who saw the bust of Disraeli in Westminster Abbey and expressed surprise.

“I didn’t know they put up busts of living people in Westminster Abbey, but that’s very good of Mr. Arliss, isn’t it?”

No one in Westminster Abbey will ever say, “That’s very good of Philip Gibbs, isn’t it?” But if I am like George Arliss I must be like Disraeli.

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A new Life of Colonel Cody, Buffalo Bill, has just come out as I tap these words on my typewriter, and I may almost claim to be the only man in this country who met and talked with him. One of the few, anyhow. As a boy I had seen his Wild West Show and thrilled to the excitement of it, with its cowboys and Red Indians, an attack on a covered wagon, marvellous feats of sharp-shooting, lassoing, bare-backed riding and all the romance and adventure which still holds the imaginations of boys—young and old—in the vast circulation of “Westerns,” to say nothing of the “pictures” in thousands of cinemas.

Colonel Cody himself was a romantic-looking man, very handsome with his long hair, his little pointed beard and moustache, his fine, soldierly figure. He was no ordinary showman because his own life had been a long adventure in the Wild West itself. As a boy he had ridden in the famous “Pony Express” which took the mail from the Western States to California, a distance of nearly 2,000 miles, each rider doing 75 miles a day. Then he became a scout and guide to the United States Army and fought as a cavalry man in the Civil War. In 1867 he made a contract with the Kansas Pacific Railway to provide their workmen with buffalo meat while the line was being built, and from that time he was known as “Buffalo Bill.” Afterwards he fought as a cavalry man in the Sioux and Cheyenne wars, and at the battle of Indian Creek killed the Cheyenne chief, Yellow Hand, fighting man to man. It was in 1887 that he started his Wild West Show, and four years later, when I was a boy of ten, brought it over to England for the first time.

I can’t remember the year when he disbanded his troupe, but it was sometime before the First World War. I was present at his farewell dinner, which I believe was in the neighbourhood of Nottingham. Colonel Cody was no longer a young and dashing fellow, but he was still handsome, straight-backed and active. I had a talk with him and remember his dignity and charm. He had none of the glib-mouthed style of so many showmen and that evening was a little sad.

I sat next to a giant and opposite a dwarf. The giant had a poor appetite and pecked at his food. The dwarf did justice to the dinner. Around us was his crowd of cowboys, Red Indians, girl sharpshooters, wagon drivers and crack shots, and all the rest of his company who had enchanted millions of spectators throughout Europe. Now he was saying goodbye to them in a moving and eloquent speech. Some of them were in tears, and at the end he was given a tremendous ovation. That was the last appearance of Buffalo Bill in England. He died in 1917 and was buried in a tomb blasted out of a rock near Denver, Colorado.

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I knew another Colonel Cody. He, too, was a Westerner, but a rougher type than “Buffalo Bill,” with whom he had no relationship. He had long hair reaching to his shoulders, but he tied it up in a knot behind with a skewer stuck through it. When he wanted to pick his teeth, as he always did at mealtime, he would pull out the skewer, use it for that purpose, wipe it on his knee-high boot and push it through his hair again.

He first became famous as “the kite man.” He went up to incredible heights on box kites of his own design and making and learnt a great deal about the problem of flight and the way of the bird. Then he became one of the early pioneers of flying in aeroplanes and, like all those first aviators, risked his life many times with dauntless courage.

I used to watch him building an aeroplane with the help of his son. It was, and looked, a home-made affair, and with its engine was enormously heavy. We newspaper correspondents called it “the Crystal Palace” and were utterly sceptical of it ever getting into the air. Then one morning he announced: “Boys, I’m going up today.” We laughed and followed him to his hangar. The machine was wheeled out and some of its wires looked like corkscrews. After great delay and many glances at the little flags fluttering in the wind above the sheds, Cody started his engine, and we heard its roar and felt the rush of air from its propeller. Suddenly “the Crystal Palace” began to move. It gathered speed down the runway; to our astonishment it rose into the air and at no great height flew—yes, flew—round the aerodrome like a monstrous albatross. Then he made a crash landing, and I was one of those who helped to drag him, bleeding, from underneath his machine. He was exultant and careless of his wounds.

“By God, she flew!” he shouted.

That could not be denied, and from that moment I was convinced that the victory of flight had been attained, for if “the Crystal Palace” could fly, there was no limit to the future of the heavier-than-air machine.

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There was another showman who professed to come from the Wild West when I was a boy living near Clapham Common, then a quiet and old-fashioned suburb. He called himself Sequah and was accompanied by a band with brass instruments and big drums, summoning the populace by tremendous noise to attend his demonstrations of healing almost every known disease. His medicines were probably herbal and harmless, but his chief occupation as a medicine man was the extraction of teeth from the jaws of nursemaids, butcher boys and other members of his audience suffering from the tortures of toothache. To drown their cries of agony, the brass instruments blared out and the big drums beat furiously. Needless to say, he used no anæsthetic.

I was not operated on by Sequah, but as a very young man in my first job—it was in the Belle Sauvage Yard, Ludgate Hill, the ancient house of Cassell and Company—I did have two teeth pulled out to the sounds of martial music. It was on a Lord Mayor’s Show day, when, tormented by toothache, I climbed the stairs leading to a dentist’s rooms in Ludgate Hill and delivered myself into his hands. No anæsthetic and just butcher’s work at half-a-crown a tooth. While he was hauling at my jaw the bands were passing down Ludgate Hill playing “Rule Britannia” and the tunes with which our boys marched away to the Boer War. Bugles were blowing, drums beating, while I gripped the arms of the dentist’s chair and suffered brief but abominable pain.

Years later my dental afflictions were attended to without musical accompaniment by a charming young Irishman, who was assistant to Sir Francis Farmer, a distinguished dentist who looked after the Royal Family. For kings and queens, like dustmen and dockers, are not immune from the need of stoppings and extractions. One day, when Sir Francis Farmer was unwell, the young Irishman was summoned to Buckingham Palace, where Queen Alexandra awaited him. She came to sit in a chair facing the light and held a silver-backed mirror. He was very nervous, but after a brief examination was relieved to find that the offending tooth was very loose and only needed a slight tug to come out. He

gave the tug and out came the tooth. At the same time the silver-backed mirror descended upon his head with a frightful whack.

“You ought to have warned me,” said Her Majesty.

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“My boy,” said Sir Thomas Lipton, planting his big hand firmly on my shoulder, “beware of Princesses. They’ll always let you down.”

I told him I was in no danger, as princesses were not among my girl friends.

For a time I became friendly with Sir Thomas himself, that tall, grizzled Irishman who had begun life by selling newspapers on the quayside at Belfast (that seemed to be the preparatory school of many wealthy men) before becoming the biggest grocer and tea vendor in the world. I met him several times at Cowes, where he sailed his champion yacht, the *Shamrock*, in which he entertained pretty ladies and princesses and the King himself—Edward VII—but because of the abominable snobbishness of the time was barred from membership of the Royal Yacht Squadron.

He told me many amusing stories of his life. He was a tremendous egoist, like all “self-made men,” as they are called, though we are all self-made as far as we are allowed to be by heredity and environment. His anecdotes had a rich flavour because of his Belfast accent, which remained with him all his life.

He nearly always wore a yachting cap, a blue reefer jacket and white ducks; and once on an ocean liner a haughty lady, taking him for one of the deck hands, asked him to fetch her a chair.

“Certainly, ma’am,” said this millionaire, and she rewarded him by tipping him sixpence, which he kept as a souvenir.

Once, when he was in Rangoon, he visited the famous temple of the Schwedagon and walked through two lines of Buddhist monks eating rice out of their little bowls. One of them spoke to him—with a familiar accent.

“Hullo, Tommy! Sure and it’s a long time since we sold newspapers together in dear old Belfast.”

He invited this Buddhist monk to his hotel and they sat on the balcony in view of people below, who were astonished and impressed by the fluency with which this king of tea planters spoke Burmese with his shaven-headed friend.

I took lunch with Lipton at his house near London, and we were waited on by Cingalese servants with long hair done up in buns, moving about silently in bare feet. After lunch we were driven out beyond this northern suburb and at several crossroads groups of children waited for us and cheered.

“They’ve been waiting for my arrival,” said Sir Thomas, and he handed out boxes of chocolates—Lipton’s best.

Once or twice afterwards, remembering his warning, I found myself in the company of princesses, one of them Russian and another the daughter of Kaiser Wilhelm, as I have mentioned on another page. No misadventure followed my meeting and I found them charming.

Quite recently I had the honour of making my bow to Princess Marie Louise—it was

at one of Mrs. Neville Chamberlain's At Homes. She was an old lady when I met her, not long before she died, but full of spirit and interest in men, women and books.

"I've read quite a number of yours," she told me, "but I didn't like the last one—all about Poles. Too many difficult names!"

At Charing Cross Hospital I helped to receive another old lady who was Princess Louise. She was, I think, very nearly ninety. I had met her years before when I used to take tea with her husband, the Duke of Argyll, in Kensington Palace (I took tea with him because, being a poet, he liked talking about books and was a lonely old man). Of course, the Princess didn't remember me. She made a vigorous little speech and afterwards, in the hall of the hospital, tapping her stick on the ground to emphasise her words, uttered a grave warning to me and the world.

"My advice is: Don't put your fingers into other people's pies."

I think she was alluding to the international situation, which, as usual, was very perilous.

Now that I am on the subject of princesses, I remember a young and pretty one whom I met several times at parties in Monte Carlo given by the Baroness Orczy, author of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. She was the Princess of Monaco long before the coming of Grace Kelly, and her husband was a handsome young Frenchman of the noble family of Polignac. The Baroness Orczy herself was a stout and motherly lady who assembled in her rooms most of the notabilities who came to the Riviera. Her husband, a little old man in an invalid chair, took literally a back seat in his wife's *salons* and amused himself by painting naked nymphs.

The Princess of Monaco was simple and unaffected, and I had no need to remember the cautionary words of Sir Thomas Lipton.

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I had the honour of knowing Ernest Shackleton, directly in line with Drake, Raleigh, Hawkins, Frobisher, Franklin and all our great seamen and explorers. He often used to come to the old *Daily Chronicle* office, being a great friend of Ernest Ferris, its dynamic news editor. I used to join them and listen to Shackleton's stories of his expedition. A powerfully built man, sometimes with a sombre look in his eyes, and deep down inside him a streak of melancholy, he had—curiously, perhaps, for a man of action—a passion for poetry, and I envied him his gift of memorising masses of it. I remember him telling me that it was his greatest consolation when pacing up and down the bridge on one of his Antarctic voyages.

I crossed the Atlantic in the same liner as Shackleton when he was on his way to join his ship the *Quest*. I have an idea that it was before his last voyage to the South Polar regions, but I may be wrong about that. We had long talks, pacing up and down the boat deck, and I am sorry that I did not jot down some of those conversations, for Shackleton had thought deeply about life and was an idealist underneath his bluntness. One night, as a favour to the captain, he gave a lecture about his Antarctic explorations and most of the passengers assembled to listen to him. As a lecturer he had a natural gift of oratory, quite simple and unaffected, and utterly unassuming. There was no heroic pose in his narrative, but he made it come alive, and his descriptions of this white world of ice and snow were

vivid and, to my mind, enchanting. But not everyone thought so.

At the end of the lounge, standing up, was a small group of Americans who behaved abominably. What bug was biting them I don't know. Whether a misguided sense of patriotism made them hostile to an Englishman of such great achievements it is impossible to say, but they were quite audible in their jeering comments and ironical laughter. This was extremely annoying to Shackleton's audience and to the captain of our ship who presided. Shackleton himself was visibly distressed.

Two or three of the ship's officers came to me with a message from the captain. Both he and they were furious at what had happened, and I was asked to write a tribute to Shackleton which could be printed that night and distributed next morning to all the passengers. I wrote this gladly and with emotion, and I am glad to say that Shackleton himself was touched by what I had written and thanked me for it.

I have no copy of it. I have never kept up my own writings except in book form, but I dare say that among all the passengers on that trip across the Atlantic there may be one or two who kept this leaflet turned out by the ship's printing press in praise of a hero.

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I was asked to write a pageant for Hemel Hempstead, which was shortly to be transformed into a satellite town. Its old estates were already doomed. Streets and houses would be built on pleasant meadows and park lands. I had nothing to do with that, and, after digging up some local history, I devised a merry pageant for many players. It began as far back as the legendary past, and my first character to appear would be a monstrous dragon with fiery eyes and menacing teeth. A prelude was to be spoken with noble eloquence by an orator in Tudor dress.

Under the stimulating direction of several enthusiastic young men, one of whom was the Press agent of the new town, the pageant was prepared and rehearsed. Ancient Britons, Romans, Saxons and Danes mingled on the pageant ground with Elizabethans and other characters in later periods of history as far as the Victorian era. An orchestra practised appropriate music. Costumes were made and hired at no mean expense. An immense amount of trouble was taken by all concerned.

There was a natural amphitheatre where the pageant was to be performed—a pleasant field with rising ground on which were clumps of trees. Seating arrangements were made for a great audience who were to be charged a shilling each for entrance. Something like 3,000 people assembled on the great day upon which the sun was shining.

Now there is one thing about pageants which I and others ought to have remembered, at least as a warning. Nature, in this isle of ours, is hostile to them.

There had been an epidemic of pageantitis before World War I, beginning with the beautiful and memorable Oxford Pageant. As a descriptive writer I had been to many of them and many times had seen them spoilt by heavy rain soaking the women's silken dresses, splashing the courtiers and men-at-arms with mud. But nothing in that way could be compared with the calamity at Hemel Hempstead. No sooner had the pageant begun than the rain began. It was not a gentle, pattering rain. It poured down in torrents mercilessly. The orator who was to recite the prologue gallantly braved the storm, and his rich voice rang across the field while water poured off his Tudor cap and soaked him to

the skin. The dragon came forth from his lair looking fierce and terrible, but few people saw him. The audience of 3,000 fled, to take refuge—a damp refuge—under the trees or in the pavilions. It went on raining for hours and all that night. My pageant was washed out.

It is extraordinary that, with never-failing hopefulness in our capricious climate, the English people continue to arrange outdoor entertainments, invite their friends to garden parties and garden fêtes, and swarm down to the seaside every summer with happy anticipation. In the Coronation year of our young Queen, every village in England arranged outdoor celebrations and every village green fluttered with bunting. Heavy rain storms and icy winds swept these scenes of would-be jollifications. Pitiless rain fell upon the millions who waited all night in London for the Coronation procession.

Among the festivities in our village was a comic football match in fancy costumes—very fancy costumes. The centre-forward was in full bridal dress. Other men were in girls' frocks. Fine fun if it hadn't been for the rain and the wind! I had undertaken to give away the prizes so could not leave the field. As a result I caught a fierce cold and had to take to my bed. England in that Coronation year was one Big Sneeze.

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Yet hope, it is said, lives eternal in the human breast. Undaunted by the memory of Hemel Hempstead and by the prevailing weather of the year, I had written the script of a pageant to be performed on the green as part of our Coronation celebrations.

The scene was an Elizabethan Fair, with all its mirth and jollity among maids and men. A thief is caught stealing the jewels of a pretty lady who cries out “Lawks-a-mussy-me!” and falls a-swooning into the arms of a gallant gentleman, while the thief is chased by the crowd, brought before the Court of Pie Powder (*pied poudre*) and sentenced to the stocks, where rotten apples are thrown at him. Queen Elizabeth herself, riding on a white horse and accompanied by her courtiers, comes to see the Fair and goes from stall to stall. There is another horse in the field—a comic horse with two boys inside it, very mettlesome. A Strong Man lifts enormous weights. A Fat Lady (the local postman) excites the amorous affections of the Clown. A Jester flits among the crowd, whacking them with his bladder.

Outside an ancient inn (made of wood and cardboard) sit three or four old yokels who quaff old ale and sing ribald songs. The Fair Master strides about shouting to the people: “Come to the Fair! The greatest Fair on Earth. Come and see the Fat Lady and the Strong Man . . . Buy! Buy! Buy! Trinkets for the ladies, fancies for the men. Oddities and quiddities . . . Come to the Fair!”

Was it washed out by the rain? The day before the sky was menacing and heavy rain fell. The day after the wind howled and wet gusts drove people off the green. But by some miracle of luck the sun shone on the Elizabethan Fair and nature for once was benign to a pageant. It was really a beautiful and merry scene, with many ladies in lovely frocks and the courtiers in splendid costumes (costly to hire) and scores of laughing children, very natural in their playfulness. One incident might have led to a tragedy. The big white horse of the young Queen disliked the shouting and cheering and went mad and bad. I was scared for the children and for the girl who was riding, but she had the courage of the

Queen herself and with fine horsemanship kept her seat and waved her hand as she rode away. So once in a while the sun shines on an English day in summer so that the beauty of it lingers in one's heart and one is tempted to give another garden party or set out the chairs and tables for tea on the lawn.

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I think it was in 1924 that a box of magic was delivered at my country house. Two men busied themselves with wires which they arranged over my bookshelves. Then one of them, down on his knees, turned a knob. Out of the box came majestic music of a Beethoven symphony, played by a full orchestra.

“What do you think of it?” asked one of the men, grinning at me.

I answered in an awed voice.

“I think it's a miracle.”

Previous to that I had been present among friends with crystal sets. Round a table they had become excited by stroking the crystal with what was called the “cat's whisker.” (To this day I don't know what that little object really was.) There were muttered exclamations.

“Half a minute. Don't make such a row there! Listen. Can't you hear 2LO calling . . . London calling.”

And, sure enough, if one listened carefully through headphones one could hear faintly but distinctly the music and announcements of world news from Savoy Hill.

That was in 1922. I was late off the mark in getting a valve set in 1924. I think I must have been disappointed with the early programmes, in spite of the miracle of the microphone. Anyhow, I was led into an indiscretion which afterwards I much regretted. At that time my wife and I had a flat in Lyall Street, round the corner from Eaton Square, and we wanted to get rid of it. Through some house agent a man arrived to have a look at it. He was a very tall man. He was so tall that he had to stoop to get under the front door and bedroom doors. After a brief survey he announced his decision:

“I'm too tall for this flat!”

He accepted my invitation to have a cigarette and, sitting in an armchair with his long legs outstretched, he asked whether I was interested in broadcasting.

I did not exhibit much interest.

“What do you think of the B.B.C. programmes?”

“I don't think much of them.”

The long gentleman who came into my flat was John Reith, afterwards Sir John and later Lord Reith, through whose genius for organisation and long-range views, courage and drive, the tremendous progress and power of the B.B.C. is largely due.

He never forgot our brief encounter and years afterwards chaffed me about it in mixed company. I could only plead that my lack of enthusiasm was in the very early days of experiment and experience.

Since then, like millions of others, I have come to have a deep admiration for the B.B.C. and a real sense of gratitude. To me and to those millions it is an essential part of daily life, and one could hardly do without it, mainly because of the news which comes

from all parts of the world—most admirably reported by its correspondents—and its complete fairness as a rule in presenting all sides of world problems and events.

For the small sum of £1 per annum it brings a vast amount of entertainment into one's own room. What could be more pleasant after supper than to relax into one's favourite armchair and listen to a good play? It is very annoying, of course, if it happens now and then to be a bad play.

The B.B.C. have a team of actors and actresses who, when they have something really good, are quite remarkably good in their character studies; as perfect, perhaps, as any performance could be in which the human voice alone—before the coming of television—had to hold the interest and emotion of millions for something like an hour and a half. Where could one find more beautiful and delicate rendering of women's parts than those by Mary Wimbush, Gladys Young, Belle Chrystall, Dorothy Holmes-Gore, Grizelda Hervey, Marjory Westbury, to name only a few.

Lovely is some of the music which pours out of one's radio set, a joy to listen to from the B.B.C. Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargeant, or from many other orchestras and programmes in which now and then one is startled and ravished by an exquisite voice. Unstinted must be one's praise for all that, unstinted one's thankfulness for this richness which has come into the home life of the people.

Alas, horrible noises emerge from one's radio set if one is not quick enough to make a dash across the room to switch it off. Is it possible that there are human ears who actually enjoy these combinations of excruciating sound—these hyena-like screams, these insane experiments in dissonance and cacophony? Yes, there are such human ears—millions of them—or the performers would not be paid at a high rate by the B.B.C., who have a very accurate knowledge of what is popular or not.

Then there are the comedians—God help us!—and the crooners; and the dreadful women's voices imitating too well the American harshness and long-drawn monologue of artificial anguish, and the squeaky sopranos who use the word "love" so often and with such sickening repetition that one would wish another name for this emotion.

So however high one's praise for the enormous boon of broadcasting, it is modified by the thought of all the very painful and distressing things which assault one's ears if they are untuned to the row and rhythm of modern "music," as it is called.

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I was once turned down heavily as a possible broadcaster by a committee of the B.B.C. It was suggested that I should do a series of talks to be introduced by the Prince of Wales as then he was. I went up for a voice test and was put into a little room and asked to read over certain passages from books provided. This I did, no doubt nervously. Then I was taken into a room where seven young men had been listening to me. They were in attitudes of extreme pain, as though taken suddenly with gastric influenza. I was informed by one of them that they had never listened to a worse delivery. My voice seemed to come from the bowels of the earth. It was monotonous, melancholy and miserable.

In view of this verdict I did not do the series of talks. I confess I was both humiliated and surprised. I had lectured to big audiences in the United States and many critics had commented on what they were pleased to call my agreeable English voice and its carrying

power. The doors of the B.B.C. seemed to shut in my face. But later, perhaps without the knowledge of the seven young men who had suffered so intensely, I was asked by Leslie Baily to take the part of compère in his Scrapbook for 1917—that year of war on the Western Front.

I was rehearsed several times and thought I knew to the tick of time when the little red light would give me the signal for my part. I sat in a room with a microphone and a little man. In other rooms beyond my hearing there were the sounds of battle, the roar of gunfire, the wail of the bagpipes, the chatter of machine guns. There was a terrible delay, it seemed to me. I waited for the little red light. It did not come, I waited tensely and it did not come. In a moment of anguish and apprehension I gave a cry.

“My God, they’ve forgotten me!”

The little man rushed at me and put his hand over my mouth. My cry of anguish went out to the world but fortunately was drowned by the noise of battle. If anybody heard my cry they may have thought it was supposed to come from a wounded soldier on the battlefield.

During the Second World War I did quite a lot of broadcasting to the Dominions, and the only comment I heard in the B.B.C. was that my voice had a bell-like quality. Anyhow, I got away with it (until my eyesight failed for a time), and I was greatly helped by a delightful man who called himself Anthony Weymouth but who was a distinguished doctor in Harley Street. He sustained my morale and coached me through my scripts.

\* \* \* \* \*

Not long ago I had a visit from Leslie Baily, who has arranged all the Scrapbooks of the years gone by, bringing back many nostalgic memories, recalling half-forgotten periods of history and those who took part in them: statesmen, and soldiers, the old stars of the stage and screen, the living voices of men and women who had been famous in all our yesterdays. He wanted me to speak in a programme he was doing on “The Gay Twenties”—not so gay as they seem in retrospect.

He had brought a recording machine with him which he arranged in my study where I am tapping out these words. I had already written out several pieces about the ’Twenties and together we worked out others, which I then spoke into his machine.

“Fine!” said Leslie Baily.

He is a man who inspires one with confidence and puts one completely at ease. He makes everything seem easy, even to a nervous fellow like myself.

He seemed to be highly satisfied with the recording, but only two days, I think, before his programme was to go on the air, I received an S.O.S. from him. His machine, he said, had not recorded as well as he had hoped. Could I possibly go up to Broadcasting House and do it all over again?

Of course, I had to go. My own opinion is that there was nothing wrong with his machine but something wrong with the way I had spoken my words, perhaps with too little emphasis here and there or a lack of animation.

In Broadcasting House there was a charming man, whom I met afterwards down in the basement. He is the editor of productions and the expert trimmer of faulty elocution,

including the time and style of the spoken word. He was able to speak constantly with Leslie Baily without my hearing his voice or comments. I was asked to repeat several passages. That critic in the basement had a sensitive ear. It was rather an ordeal, but finally everyone seemed satisfied and I went down to the basement to meet my critic, who was good enough to say I had done very well. I was not so sure of it, but after the broadcast I received telegrams and messages of congratulation from friends and strangers. They were surprised, they told me, because my voice sounded so *young*—the voice of a young man instead of one of the ancients. I was comforted because it was the last time, I think, that I shall ever broadcast to a listening world.

\* \* \* \* \*

During the “phony” period of World War II, the war correspondents (of whom there were far too many compared with the five on the Western Front during World War I) were billeted in the old city of Arras. Geoffrey Harmsworth and I had bare and cheerless rooms in the Hôtel de l’Univers, without heat in a bitterly cold winter. Others, like Douglas Williams and Richard Dimbleby, found more comfortable billets in private houses.

Dimbleby, always a charming companion, was not so famous then as he has now become. He was one of the first to record war not by the written word but by the spoken word from the scene of action, and in that way he had an immense advantage over the old time war correspondent because of the immediate and more dramatic effect of hearing him on the B.B.C. as an action was in progress. In the later stages of the war, after D-day, he used this new medium with splendid effect—he is an artist on the microphone—which made him famous throughout the English-speaking world as he has continued to be in times of peace.

A young man of some weight in physique, he had an old-fashioned French bed in his room—a four-poster affair—and he was lying on it when I called upon him one morning; he was also playing some instrument of accordion type, from which he produced sweet and soothing sounds. But suddenly under his weight, as I remember, the bed collapsed and down came Dimbleby and all. Undaunted, he went on playing the accordion amid the ruins.

That winter of ’39 was devilish in Arras. The roads were ice-bound and like sheets of glass. It was impossible to keep one’s feet, and on the way to the military post office I used to slither and fall. Once three French soldiers came to my rescue and fell in a heap on top of me. On a day like that Gracie Fields was to entertain the troops—and hold them spellbound—at the old theatre in which, during a former chapter of history, Robespierre, “the sea-green incorruptible,” used to watch the plays of Molière and Racine after a busy morning with the guillotine.

I had not received a ticket and, disappointed, sat alone in my ice-cold room until there was a tap at the door and my batman came in with the news that he had secured a ticket for me.

“I’m afraid it’s only for the gallery,” he said. “I hope you don’t mind.”

I didn’t mind at all, with the prospect of hearing Gracie Fields. But I was late. The Commander-in-Chief and the French Commandant de Place, and all the high officers, had taken their places. But the French guard of honour was still there, and when I arrived last

of all they had the idea that I was a very important fellow indeed. After a shout of command, they drew their swords and gave me an almost royal salute. It must have been disappointing to them when, instead of turning towards the stalls, I took the entrance to the gallery which was crowded with Tommies.

But from there I was able to watch and hear the magic of Gracie Fields. She held this great audience of soldiers under her spell of genius. Their laughter came in gusts until suddenly one could hear a leaf fall when she sang with beauty and pathos which brought tears to many eyes.

“The British Army would follow Gracie from here to Berlin,” said one of our officers, “and they would go cheering all the way.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Between the wars I made good friends in Budapest, beautiful on both sides of the Danube with its bridges spanning two cities—old Buda on the hills above the right bank and Pesth with its modern buildings, factories, offices and slums stretching away from the left bank. As I write these words in November, 1956, many houses are on fire, dead and wounded are lying in the streets and cellars, and the survivors of a heroic struggle for liberty are still holding out hopelessly against Russian tanks and guns and murderous cruelty.

It was easy for an Englishman, and especially for an English journalist, to make friends in Hungary if he were sympathetic to their grievances, against the Peace Treaty imposed upon them after the First World War. The Treaty of Trianon had amputated the country. Millions of Hungarians had been put under alien rule. Every one of them, high and low, vowed in his soul that this injustice must be reversed. They would never sit down under it. No. Never! as they proclaimed on their posters, in their tramcars, on their postcards.

For some reason they had set their hopes on England as the champion of liberty who would come to the rescue. Lord Rothermere, proprietor of the *Daily Mail*, who denounced the Treaty and had become their advocate for its revision, was received in Hungary as a knight errant and garlanded with flowers. A group of Hungarians were ready to offer him the crown of St. Stephen. He was flattered by this hero-worship, but kept his head and his sense of humour.

The Hungarian propaganda office was untiring in its entertainment and hospitality of an English visitor of any importance. Beautiful ladies of title invited him to tea. Little groups of Hungarian politicians invited him to lunch and dinner. Canon Hannay (who wrote delightful books under the name of George Birmingham) told me that when he was English chaplain in Budapest he paid for only one meal a day. That was breakfast.

I enjoyed some of this entertainment. There was a little Hungarian countess with languishing eyes who undertook to be my propagandist-in-chief. She was my hostess at parties of pretty women. She took me to the opening of Parliament by Admiral Horthy with his bodyguard of Hungarian cavalry in the old historical uniforms. Like Lord Rothermere, I kept my head and my sense of humour, but it was all quite pleasant.

When I first went to Budapest after World War I there was an international commission on the Danube, including a British gunboat with some very lively young

officers who did themselves well at the Duna Palota (where I used to stay) and danced with the loveliest ladies. The hotel lounge had been filled with strange company. There were international sharks who had come to make business out of a defeated nation. Russian exiles, who had retreated with Wrangel to Constantinople, sat about brooding and chain-smoking. Little adventuresses, once spies, perhaps, had found their way to Budapest as a place where they might begin new chapters of adventure. And away from this luxury hotel, out beyond the city, millions of landless peasants were half-starved and miserable because of the economic collapse of the country.

I had my own friends. Among them was a distinguished scholar and his wife, on the outskirts of Buda. When I last saw them they were deeply anxious, and the lady was distressed to the point of tears.

“We’re drifting towards war again,” she said. “Everybody is talking of another war—twenty years after that last one which ruined us all. It’s as though we were all doomed by some frightful destiny. What is the meaning of it all—this life?”

I came to know Count Teliki, for a time Prime Minister of Hungary. He was a scientist rather than a politician, but in his house he talked to me of the explosive state of Europe. He saw the abominable menace of war. He was a grave, thoughtful, pleasant-mannered man, a peace-lover and an idealist. When war came, with its overwhelming tragedy for Hungary, as for other nations, he shot himself.

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In Petrograd one morning in 1922—after the Bolshevik Revolution and Civil War—I saw the arrival of a train. Nearly all its passengers were dead. They had died of typhus. A few of them were still alive. I remember a pretty peasant girl who lay on the platform, unconscious, with a flushed face. She was dying. The others—the dead—were dragged out and thrown into the morgue—old men, women, children, flung on top of each other like autumn leaves. The keeper of the morgue beat his breast and groaned.

Russia at that time was swept by typhus. In children’s homes to which I went, hundreds of emaciated little creatures like monkeys lay naked, four or five to a bed. Their clothes had been stripped from them because of lice. Along the Volga, down which I went in a ship crawling with lice, there was a frightful famine. Two fierce summers had burned the seed corn in the most fertile soil of Russia, and there were no reserves because the stores of grain had been taken to feed the Red Army. Twenty-five million people were threatened by starvation until the United States and ourselves, and other nations, brought rescue by organising famine relief. Some four million died.

Even in Moscow there was hunger. In one hospital to which I went with an American officer, the nurses rushed at us, fierce and frantic because of lack of food. They thought we could bring them food. As individuals we could do nothing except hold out a promise of help to come.

In villages beyond the Volga into which I went there was no food at all. Families lay in their overheated rooms waiting for death, but by the greatest act of international charity ever done—and now forgotten—the American people and ourselves and the Red Cross and the Save the Children Fund, and the pleas of the Pope, saved millions of them in time—just in time.

To a crowd of starving people came a man named Stalin. I had a translation given to me of one of his speeches. It was the first time I had heard his name. (Afterwards we called him, affectionately, “Uncle Joe.”)

He pointed with his stick to one man after another.

“How old are you?”

“Fifty-two” . . . “Fifty-five.”

“You’re old enough to be dead. Russia only wants young people.”

The rulers of Russia have forgotten all that. Some of them were children at the time and, perhaps, were kept alive by the food parcels. Since then, Russia has become powerful and highly organised, and industrialised, and prosperous. Great Britain and the United States are denounced as capitalist hyenas and oppressors of democracy and imperialist dictators.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was due at an evening reception by Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler at Columbia University, New York, of which he was President. It was an affair for full evening dress—white tie, white waistcoat, tail coat, and so on. Because of a snowy night I put on my goloshes.

“Going to see Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler?” said my taxi driver. “Well, I dare say he’s a good old guy.”

The reception was what the Americans would call “swell.” There were a great many distinguished-looking men, and even more elegant ladies in elaborate evening gowns. Having handed my coat and hat to a footman in the hall, I advanced towards the President and made my bow. Upon retiring somewhat from this august presence—“not a bad old guy” the taxi driver had called him—one of the footmen came up to me and whispered in my ear:

“Say, you’ve got your gums on!”

On my feet were those clumsy things we call goloshes which I had forgotten to cast off upon arrival. I retired to do so with some loss of dignity.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some little time before the Second World War I had a long interview in Berlin with a man possessed by seven devils. I still think him to be one of the wickedest men who ever lived. It was Himmler, chief of the S.S. and the German police. At the time I did not know that he was quite so terrible, but I was sufficiently aware of his reputation to warn my wife that I might have to wash in carbolic soap after shaking hands with him.

Now the extraordinary thing about many evil men is that they have no trace of this in their physiognomy or in their manner. Himmler, in appearance, looked like a professor or a schoolmaster, and there was no look of cruelty in the line of his mouth or lips. On the contrary, he was genial, friendly and amusing.

My way into his presence had been past several young men in the black uniforms of the S.S. who saluted me very closely with such convulsive movements that I had some

difficulty in keeping a straight face. But Himmler greeted me courteously and brought up a chair for me.

“Let’s have a frank talk,” he said. “If you are perfectly frank with me, I will be perfectly frank with you and then we shall get on very well.”

I remember that he was satirical about the British Empire and our conquests and acquirement of so much of the earth’s surface. He went to a globe and twisted it round rapidly and said, with a laugh, “Look—Red . . . Red . . . Red . . . And then you English grudge Germany any *Lebensraum* anywhere.”

This seemed to him very amusing as well as a deplorable fact in history.

One of the frank questions he asked towards the end of the conversation, which lasted for at least half an hour, was as follows:

“Why do the English people think that Adolf Hitler is preparing for another war?”

I answered frankly.

“We have an idea that Herr Hitler may be tempted to cross other peoples’ frontiers. We think he may want to play the part of Napoleon. That would certainly lead to another war.”

Himmler raised his hands and laughed, and then spoke seriously.

“We Germans have read a bit of history. We know what happened to Mr. Napoleon. We know that if Hitler crossed other peoples’ frontiers it would be for Germany the road to ruin. That I can assure you is not in his mind.”

He seemed to be speaking with perfect sincerity. I sometimes wonder even now if he really was sincere at that time. There was no need for him to say such a thing—to prophesy the ruin of Germany if Hitler made war on his neighbours.

When, a year or two later, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia, I wrote a letter to *The Times* headed “Herr Himmler’s Prophecy.” According to Himmler it would be fulfilled by the ruin of Germany.

I heard afterwards from a German friend that when Himmler was shown this letter he was furious, but he never denied the words he had spoken. Instead he put me down on his Black List (afterwards captured and recorded) as Number Three on his roll of those to be liquidated in due course. It was an honourable place.

There are still Germans, but I hope not many, who maintain that Himmler was an idealist with a love of beauty in his soul! Have they wiped out of their minds and conscience the concentration camps, the torture chambers and the gas chambers?

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After the First World War I went to Rome with the audacious idea that I might get an interview with the Pope, who had been the chief advocate of peace since its beginning. An American cardinal, to whom I had an introduction, laughed at this idea and told me that no journalist was allowed inside the Vatican.

“Then I had better go back,” I said reluctantly.

“Well, wait a few days. There’s a lot to see in Rome.”

One morning a messenger brought me a card. It was an appointment for a private

interview with the Pope at twelve o'clock the following day.

At ten o'clock the following day I put on full evening dress according to the usual etiquette. I had some trouble with my white tie and made a wreck of it. I rang the bell for a waiter and he was good enough to lend me one of his. I drove in an old cab with an old horse to St. Peter's. The old horse ambled along at a slow pace and I was alarmed lest I should be late.

On the way to the Pope's private apartments I had to walk up a long flight of steps, where Swiss Guards saluted me impressively, and through many rooms where other guards in medieval uniforms sprang to attention and grounded their pikes as I passed, feeling somewhat weak at the knees.

I waited in an ante-chamber for a few minutes. Then a door opened and a papal secretary beckoned to me. A few feet beyond the door a slim figure in white stood waiting for me. It was Benedict XV. I went down on one knee, but he grasped my hand and pulled me up and led me to a chair like a small throne next to one in which he sat.

He spoke in French. He told me how, all through the war, he had spoken on behalf of Peace, but nobody had listened to him. The Germans had called him pro-English. The English had called him pro-German. They had gone on killing each other. It had been a massacre of youth.

He spoke of his hopes and fears for a wise peace, but nations were already quarrelling over the spoils. Vengeance and greed were at work. Greed! He made the Italian gesture of rubbing finger and thumb together to indicate the greed of money.

He spoke many wise and memorable things, but I felt embarrassed. I was not certain whether he knew that I was a journalist.

"I am a newspaper man," I told him. "Have I your permission to publish some of your conversation?"

He smiled at me and nodded.

"That is the object of this interview," he answered.

I could claim then, and I think I can claim now, that I am the only journalist who has ever interviewed a Pope for the world's press.

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It was not the only time I have had to borrow a waiter's tie. Once I borrowed, for a small tip, a waiter's black suit and white shirt front. It was when I had to attend a public banquet given by the Crown Prince of Denmark in honour of a man named Dr. Cook who said that he had been to the North Pole. That is another story which I have told before and do not intend to tell again.

Now this friendly waiter in Copenhagen was a much taller man than I am. His trousers had a concertina effect when I put them on. His sleeves reached halfway down my hands. The banquet was being held in the Palace of the Tivoli Gardens. I had to proceed up a tall flight of marble steps, looking and feeling an abject figure. My consternation was complete when to my fevered imagination it appeared that I was being saluted by two lines of Life Guards, who drew their swords at my approach. They were ladies from some Copenhagen Palace of Varieties in this military garb. I still find that a fantastic memory.

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Once again, later in history, I was in trouble over my clothes. It was in Brussels and I was suddenly notified that King Leopold (the father of the younger one of that name) would see me that afternoon. It was necessary, I was told by one of his secretaries, that I should wear a frock coat and tall hat. Now that was difficult, for I had arrived in Brussels with only my blue serge suit. It was a Saturday and some of the shops would be closing at midday. I made a hurried expedition in search of a frock coat and tall hat which I hoped to hire for the afternoon. After many disappointments I found a frock coat which the tailor was willing to hire out for a small sum. Unfortunately it was too big for me. It must have belonged to a *bürgermeister* of ample girth. Still, it might pass, I thought, with a little adjustment.

Then for the hat. I discovered one which certainly set well on my head, but it was of old-fashioned architecture, low crowned and with a curly brim. By the greatest good luck I did not have to present myself in this costume. The King was called away suddenly and the appointment was cancelled.

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In Rome again, during the time of Mussolini, I had an introduction to a very wise old man, named Cardinal Gasparri, who had been for many years an adviser to the Vatican on foreign affairs. He lived now in retirement in a palace near the baths of Trajan, beyond the city gates. Outside his own gate on this Sunday afternoon was a man in black livery talking to a soldier, and a few servants were sunning themselves. They straightened up when I stepped out of the hired carriage and asked to see the Cardinal.

“His Eminence is not receiving today,” said the man in livery.

I handed him my letter of introduction and asked him to deliver it.

*E molto importante.*

After some delay the man returned and said, “His Eminence will see you.”

I was shown into an ante-chamber which led into an immense drawing-room with a painted ceiling and heavy candelabra and long curtains which kept out the sunlight. An unseen hand touched some electric switches and the candelabra were lighted one by one until their cascades of crystal were all glittering.

The man in livery appeared, said, “His Eminence,” and bowed before retiring with a sign that I should enter the great drawing-room.

An old man in a black gown, with a red sash and red skullcap, stood in the centre of the room peering at me.

“Why have you come to see me?” he asked in French. “I do not understand.”

I tried to make him understand that I wanted his views on the international situation and the state of the world.

He raised his transparent hands and a smile touched his thin old lips.

“I am in retirement. I have no special information.”

He was very old and very tired. I may have awakened him out of a nap. During our conversation he half dozed off once or twice. But he began to talk with the knowledge and

wisdom of an old man who had held all the threads of history in his hands and who now looked at the seething troubles of the world and all its perils, and all its wickedness, with the dispassionate vision of one from whom life is slipping away.

Some of his words, spoken before Hitler invaded other peoples' countries and before Mussolini had invaded Abyssinia, are as true today as then.

“The situation is, no doubt, grave. There is no real peace in the minds of nations, no sense of security. Everybody speaks of the need for disarmament but everybody increases armaments. It is all very unwise. It is all very dangerous.”

This old man knew what was coming. His words were prophetic. What he said would happen and did happen.

“Germany has a hundred thousand officers fully trained—the *cadre* of her army staff. All her young men are drilling as soldiers. There are evil minds in Germany, though the mass of the people are good and honest.”

Because they were not sufficiently armed it would be some time before Hitler attacked France. That would happen later.

He thought the Japanese were a world menace at that time.

“The Japanese have captured Manchuria. Next she will dominate China. When that happens Europe will have to be careful. That is true, Europe will have to be careful!”

He saw the Rising Tide of Colour, the dangers smouldering in the great Asiatic hinterland.

“It is better for the European nations to stand together,” he said. “It is indeed urgently necessary.”

So I listened to this wise old man. There was nothing he did not know. All that he said has come true. His warnings are still to be heeded.

# XI

## BOTH YOUR HOUSES

**A**s a journalist I was an onlooker of the political scene, believing, and I think rightly, that a writing man should hold himself aloof from any party, not labelling himself or entering the political arena. He should be the observer, the critic and sometimes the judge.

Instinctively I was a liberal, with a small l, but over a long span of years I never used my right to vote, being indifferent to all the party slogans and sceptical of election promises, and not an enthusiastic follower of any political personality.

My particular form of journalism, when I was not in an editorial chair, was descriptive reporting, and this did not bring me much into touch with the political world nor its actual strife across the floor of the House. But now and again I had to attend a debate, or go down, sometimes late in the evening, to get information from some M.P. I remember waiting in the lobby for this purpose. The scene was always the same. A few tired men sat about waiting to see their own member or some other. The policeman on duty yawned, silently. Scraps of paper lay about the marble floor. There was a general air of weariness, boredom and frustration amongst those waiting, while inside a debate was going on.

In the House of Commons smoking-room it was more amusing, and I have listened to exciting conversation there. The Division bell rings and there is a sudden exodus.

“What’s the vote about?” I asked on one occasion.

“My dear fellow, I haven’t the faintest idea! But I shall have to get into the right lobby. Excuse me for a very short time.”

He hadn’t the faintest idea, but party allegiance drove him like a sheep into his own pen. To the outsider this party discipline and obedience seem ludicrous and a surrender both of intelligence and conviction. But a two-party system could not work without it and governments would come and go like those in France if members were left to vote as they pleased or as their conscience bade them. One has to admit that among those outside who are not fanatically party men or women, it leaves a sense of sham and falsity. Seldom does serious argument have the slightest effect upon the voting which follows. The Opposition must always oppose, though secretly they may agree with the Government speakers. The Government must always attack the motives and morals of the Opposition, though they are carrying out the same policy and following the lead of their predecessors. Sham fights . . . Shadow boxing. A registration of votes without any intellectual conviction behind it, or even against private conscience. Party first and party last. The whole nation seems to breathe more freely with a sense of relief when, all too rarely, there is a free vote of the House. There is honesty about that. Now and then admiration goes out to a man who, risking the anger of the Whips, perhaps jeopardising his political career, votes against his own party on a point of conscience. That needs courage.

Although no party man, I have had friendly encounters, mostly pleasant, with many of

our statesmen and politicians. One quality they have has always astonished me—their physical endurance. They must be able in times of crisis to do without a full ration of sleep and to keep going at full strain for long hours of the day and night. Take, for instance, a day in the life of Lloyd George. He began in the early morning, having to glance through many papers before breakfast. Then came one of his famous breakfast parties. At the table were friends from whom he wished to get views and news, and although he was gay and amusing and an excellent host, there was nothing he missed in the conversation.

Was he getting unpopular? What effect had he made by his speech in the House the previous night? What was the latest news from France, the United States, Germany, Ireland?

“Tell me, my dear fellow——”

After the Battle of Loos he sent for me from the Western Front.

“What do you know about the battle, Gibbs? The War Office doesn’t tell me the truth. I’m kept in the dark. Tell me what you think of French as Commander-in-Chief.”

I was just a war correspondent without authority as a military critic. But here, he thought, is a fellow who can give me the real dope which lies behind official despatches and Army intrigues.

After one of these breakfasts he took me into the hall and glanced at a row of red despatch cases arranged on a settee.

“Reports from Ambassadors,” said L. G. with a laugh. “I shan’t be able to read one of them. No time!”

He had a Cabinet meeting that morning. He had to see deputations from the Trade Union leaders. He had to give interviews to the C.I.G.S. and the First Sea Lord. At luncheon, in the House of Commons, he had to keep his mind alert to a knowledgeable journalist who had interesting things to say about political opinion in the country, and a newspaper proprietor who had threatened to withdraw his support unless he was promoted to the peerage like several of his rivals. Very important to keep in with the Press. Following lunch there would be question time in the House.

“May I ask the Prime Minister . . . ?”

He would be heckled by political opponents. That was not without enjoyment. It was amusing to score off the fellows with a sudden flash of ridicule. Later there was to be a debate on the world situation. The P.M. would open it with a speech covering the whole range of the world situation. That had kept him up with his secretaries until two last night, when one of those young fellows had shown signs of exhaustion. He must really get to bed a bit earlier. He must really get a little more sleep . . .

At an hour after midnight he was in the throes of a conversation with his real pals, those who played golf with him at Walton Heath, those who were advising him to buy the *Daily Chronicle*, those who knew what was happening in the City, those who would stick to him through thick and thin whatever happened. He felt at ease with them. They amused him with their cynicism and frank speech. A pity to break the party up. Bed? Oh, not yet

...

That was a typical day in the life of Lloyd George. Did he weaken under it? Did he ever show signs of mental and physical fatigue? Did his digestion go wrong? It was the other fellows who weakened and became nervy and had tummy trouble. Whenever I met

him, in France during the war and afterwards, his eyes were bright and humorous, his sense of humour undimmed, his energy unabated and dynamic.

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I have said that most of the politicians and statesmen I have met have been pleasant people. That is very disarming to their political enemies who want to hate them. Personal contact is apt to dispel prejudice. That happens so often to Labour men who get elected to the House of Commons and arrive with a fixed idea that all Conservatives are arrogant, contemptuous, cynical and unprincipled. After a few sessions in the House this traditional hatred of the other side fades out and has to be artificially stimulated in debate. Friendships are made in the House of Commons smoking-room between men who use bitter words across the floor of the House. Attlee and Winston Churchill exchanged jokes after denouncing each other's political ideas. Herbert Morrison has made many friends with his so-called enemies.

I once found myself sitting at a little dinner party next to Aneurin Bevan. It was at a time when he was the most hated man among Tory-minded folk. Elderly and philanthropic ladies would willingly have seen him hanged. Had he not described the Tories as vermin? The Tory Press marked him out as Enemy No. 1. I myself was not prejudiced in his favour, but there I was sitting next to him and presently enjoying his company, impressed by his pleasant manner, gift of repartee, complete self-assurance when the conversation ranged over many subjects. It was obvious that he had read a lot. As a young lad in Wales he must have burned the midnight oil. He was able to hold his own in this fairly distinguished group of men with ease and humour. He spoke the King's English—now the Queen's English—remarkably well. A dangerous fellow, no doubt, if ever he gets into power, but in private life, as at this dinner table, an agreeable and humorous companion.

So if one wants to nourish hatred it is best to avoid direct contact with a political enemy. That, I admit, is not an invariable rule, and sometimes the more one sees of certain people the less one likes them. Disraeli and Gladstone were never on friendly terms. Asquith and Lloyd George did not love one another.

The most charming politician I ever met was Austen Chamberlain. His manner was old-fashioned and exquisite, without any affectation. It was dictated by kindness, simplicity of heart and mind, and instinctive courtesy.

I came to know him during the meetings of the League of Nations at Geneva when he was trying to ensure the peace of Europe by bringing Germany back into the League—before the coming of Hitler—and formulating the Locarno Pact. That idea had really been suggested by Lord D'Abernon, our Ambassador in Berlin, who had established the complete confidence of Streseman.

In France, Aristide Briand, often insincere in his oratory, a bit of an old play-actor, but deep down in his heart an idealist and lover of peace, was willing to pledge his country to a friendly co-operation with Germany, turning away for ever—for ever?—from that long road which was strewn with the dead of many wars, and lit by the flames of burning cities.

Austen Chamberlain adopted this plan of hope and backed it with enthusiasm. He had to encounter many delays and much hostility. At times it seemed as though it would be

wrecked by adverse votes on the League, but at last success was in sight, and one morning in Geneva I heard the historic speech of Briand, so wonderful in its oratory, that it brought a wetness to many eyes—even those of hard-boiled journalists. I had talked with Austen Chamberlain on the previous day, when he was still anxious and uncertain, but now he was a happy and hopeful man. I remember how debonair he looked, in a light summer suit, among the other delegates who were all in the black of official costume. He was given the Garter for this achievement, and no one yet saw the apparition of a man named Hitler.

I once wrecked a dinner party—without malice or intent—at which Austen Chamberlain was an honoured guest. It was at the house of Lady Askwith. I sat opposite Chamberlain and raised an argument by expressing an unguarded opinion that the younger crowd had the right to repudiate an agreement made by their elders if they disagreed with its purpose and policy.

Chamberlain regarded this as political heresy—and very immoral. Eloquently, but without heat or any touch of anger, he argued against my suggestion and upheld the sanctity of agreements and the continuity of our foreign policy from one government to another. With an audacity which now surprises me, I upheld my proposition against a man whose wisdom and experience were so much greater than my own. It was, I think, to draw him out, and this it did so successfully that the company at table sat entranced by his revelations of little-known history, behind the scenes of diplomacy and foreign affairs.

The guests sat on. Coffee was served. Our hostess gave no sign for the ladies to leave the table. The servants came to have a look at us, surprised by this departure from the usual order of things. An hour passed. Two hours. Then, at last, Austen Chamberlain rose with a laughing apology.

“Good heavens! I have spoilt a very pleasant dinner party. My dear lady . . .”

But I was the guilty cause of that long session at the dinner table, and I was pardoned by the hostess and her guests because it had resulted in such an interesting evening.

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I had a few brief encounters with Balfour. Watching him now and then in the House of Commons, I had come to have a prejudice against him. He seemed to me a cold fish with a hard mouth. He seemed to me too rigid in his political obstinacy. As Prime Minister he had been, I thought, a somewhat arrogant and intolerant man, with no human sweetness in him. I had heard that he drove his secretaries hard and relentlessly. On the other hand he had many friends, especially among women. As a young man he had been one of the “Souls” who were in Margot Asquith’s favoured set. My judgment of him was no doubt too harsh and without sufficient knowledge of the man himself. So I rebuked myself one day when I had lunch in his company. I found him the soul of courtesy. I had just been for a lecture tour in the United States and he asked a number of questions about American life. He was startled and shocked when I told him about a visit I had paid to an automobile factory with their speeding up of work—always a little faster—for the men on the moving band. The manager had told me that men had to be scrapped after two years. They could not stand the strain longer than that.

“That’s terrible,” said Balfour.

I had lunch with him one day at his house in Carlton House Terrace. Nobody could have been kinder. Not a word of politics was spoken. He showed me his collection of pictures by Burne-Jones, beautiful and wonderfully decorative on his walls.

A group of young people arrived, and Balfour spoke to them on the level without pomposity or desire for deference. Perhaps he flattered them a little by his interest in their light-hearted remarks. I had to modify my mental portrait of a famous statesman.

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A long time ago now I heard the last of our orators in the grand style. This was Lord Rosebery. A very extraordinary man and a failure as a statesman, he spoke with silver eloquence which was unrivalled in his time, and never equalled later. I was present at several great meetings when he had to address big audiences. He held them spellbound, and yet I remember how aloof he seemed, how untouched by any human warmth or humour. He might have been an aristocrat of the eighteenth century, contemptuous of "the mob," intellectual and austere. Later in history I heard some of the speeches he made during the Coronation tour in Scotland of H.M. George V. He was an historian, steeped in the annals, legends and lore of Scotland. Standing in Stirling Castle he recalled the great figures of the past and the drama of the olden days. I found it enchanting.

I knew a man who had been his private secretary. That was Harry Graham, who wrote delightful verse and parodies, very whimsical in their humour. He told me that Rosebery was extraordinarily nervous and restless and unhappy. He would suddenly announce that he was going to Paris by the afternoon boat. That would mean much packing and preparations by his valet and servants, to say nothing of his private secretary. So they would arrive in Paris. Graham would dine with him and he would sit at table silent and moody. Then he would give a sigh and announce that he would be going back to England the following day. There must have been some morbid and melancholy streak in him. But he lived to be an old man. Once I was driving in a car with my wife along a road leading to Epsom. There were many cars on the road, but suddenly they all slowed down. It was to give way to an apparition from the past—an open carriage and four, with outriders in livery. Sitting there with a shawl wrapped round him was the Earl of Rosebery, looking very old and very frail. This worn-out figure seemed to me like a ghost in these days of motoring and speed and noise. Those outriders! Could it be possible? He belonged in his blood and spirit to the history of Scotland. As his titles showed, he was not only 5th Earl of Rosebery but Baron Primrose and Dalmeny, Viscount of Inverkeithing, Baron Rosebery of the United Kingdom, Earl of Midlothian, Viscount Mentmore of Mentmore, Baron Epsom of Epsom. And there he sat, wrapped in a shawl, behind four lovely horses, and not all his titles had made a happy man of him.

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I knew Ramsay Macdonald well enough for him to call me Philip. Nobody yet, as far as I know, has revealed the true personality of this remarkable man. Of humble origin, though all Scots have a proud ancestry, he was educated in a Scottish elementary school, became Secretary of the Labour Party in 1900, Leader of the Opposition in 1922, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury, and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in 1924.

What secret of personality, by what combination of qualities did he rise so high? He was not one of the thrusters. There was nothing vulgar and aggressive in his manner. He was quiet, thoughtful and romantic. He had, I think, a certain vanity, but of a harmless kind. Before I knew him I heard him give an address before the British Association, and as I listened to his paper I thought, that is a vain man. He was aware, perhaps, of his good looks, and no one could deny that he was a handsome man, with a lock of hair falling over his forehead, and dark, deep-set eyes. A strong face he had, but with a hint of the poet or the mystic in his look. Afterwards, when I knew him, I did not see the touch of vanity, which had gone with his youth. Ambition he certainly had, but not the blatant, pushful ambition of a professional careerist. I think he must have known that there was something inside himself which would bring him far along the road to fame and power if he followed his star. Quietly, persistently, untiringly he worked, and walked, along this road of Destiny. His origin had been poor and obscure, but he knew, something told him, that he would attain greatness, and consort with the great, and sit at the tables with the most exalted.

I'm only guessing. It would be interesting to have more light upon the development of his character through the years of his climb up that ladder of fame.

He married a beautiful lady, to whom he was devoted. She was a Gladstone, and by this marriage he was lifted above the social obscurity of his early days. She was his counsellor and guide in social life and he owed much to her in that way alone, apart from their happiness together.

Was there a strain of weakness in him? That was charged against him later by many of his own party when he departed from them to form a coalition government. But for many years he had dominated their counsels and policy.

It was when he was Prime Minister that he sent for me to do a job which wasted a great deal of my time for something like two years, without reward. We had been lunching together with a lady who was one of his devoted friends, a noble-hearted lady who spent her life in work for the poor and unfortunate. I think this luncheon and our talk together gave him the idea that I was the man he wanted to fill a gap in his appointments to a Royal Commission to investigate the traffic in arms and to report on the possible control of the armament industry. As it happened I went travelling about the country and he sent telegrams to various addresses in the hope of finding me. One reached me, and in his private room in the House of Commons he explained the purpose of the Commission and its terms of reference.

“We don't want it to be a fishing expedition,” he said.

“In what way?” I asked.

“Fishing for scandals. On the other hand we don't want a whitewashing affair. If this traffic in arms is as bad as many people think—they may exaggerate—you have every right to say so.”

So it was that I found myself burdened with a heavy task, putting a strain on my eyesight—there were masses of documents in small type—and interfering heavily with my literary work.

We were under the chairmanship of a retired and distinguished old Judge, Sir John Eldon Bankes, then over eighty, but with a mind crystal clear, a dignity unassailable, and

very great experience in hearing and analysing evidence. We had to examine many distinguished witnesses at great length, and Dame Rachel Crowdy and I did dig up, almost by accident, a scandal of some magnitude. But that is another story.

Among our witnesses was Lloyd George, a former Minister of Munitions, and he invited me to lunch at the House of Commons after giving his evidence. He was in good form and amused himself by caricaturing the members of the Royal Commission. They were very witty and very wicked. Of one of our most distinguished members he said:

“He looks like a butcher who kills his own meat!”

Ramsay Macdonald thanked each one of us personally for our services, but our Report on the Private Manufacture and Trading in Arms dropped stone dead when it was presented to Parliament. The Conservatives thought it too radical in its recommendations, and the Labour members were disgusted because we did not recommend a complete nationalisation of the armament industry. A pity!

When Ramsay Macdonald agreed to form a coalition government with Stanley Baldwin in 1929, he was deserted by many of his former followers, who went over to the Independent Labour Party. They regarded him as a traitor to his principles and as a man who had given up honour for power. I believe myself that he was genuinely convinced that a coalition government was necessary at that time for the sake of the country.

There was one man, a friend and colleague of passionate sincerity, who was equally convinced of this. It was Philip Snowden, Chancellor of the Exchequer. I was dining in his company one night in the House of Commons. I cannot remember who was our host, but I remember that one of the guests was Kingsley Martin, editor of *The New Statesman*. After dinner we had to cross one of the courtyards in the Palace of Westminster and I adjusted my pace to that of Philip Snowden. It was a snail's pace because he was crippled and walked with difficulty. It was a dark night with heavy clouds scudding across the sky and a crescent moon. I felt the presence of historic ghosts, but Snowden was in no romantic mood. Standing still and leaning on his crutches he began to denounce the old Labour Party of which he had been a leader. All his professional life he had been an ardent Socialist. He had led the debates in the House of Commons with passionate attacks on the Conservative benches. His followers had cheered him excitedly the more bitter his words had been. But tonight, standing with me there, he turned violently against those very men he had led into the parliamentary battles. With a kind of cold and venomous rage he denounced them for dragging the country down to ruin. They had ignored his warnings. They had rushed down the slopes like the Gardarene swine.

I cannot remember now his exact words in this long tirade. I wish I had made a note of them that night as I wish I had noted down at the time many remarkable conversations I have had—I have let so much slip by owing to my total inability to keep a diary. But what I do remember is the touch of a cold finger down the spine as I listened to Philip Snowden. I had no allegiance to the Labour Party, but it seemed to me tragic and terrible that this little crippled man should turn against his own followers and flay them with words of hatred and contempt.

Ramsay Macdonald himself had no such hatred. I do not think he was capable of hatred, though he could be severe and harsh at times.

Many of those who served under him, and his journalistic critics, jeered at him, when

he led the coalition, for his fondness of titled folk. “Snob,” they called him. Why was he so often dining with Lady Londonderry, and Lady This and Lady the Other, and peers of ancient lineage? I do not think it was vulgar snobbishness. I think it was due to a romantic view of life and history. To the young Scot from Lossiemouth who, as a lad, had sat up late at night reading the novels of Sir Walter Scott, there was something rather thrilling in sitting at table with people who bore the old names in history—Stuart and Douglas and Hamilton, Talbot and Howard and Cecil.

The secret of Ramsay Macdonald is that he was a romantic more than a realist, a sentimentalist and not a cynic, a poet in his view of life rather than a party politician.

He fell ill while still holding his position as Prime Minister. Like many other people, I was aware of some failing of his mind and health. I sat at public meetings and dinners when he had to make a speech. What was he talking about? What did all those words mean? Sometimes they seemed to mean nothing at all.

I have an idea that he felt very lonely at this time. He seemed to me pathetically in need of a friend. He did not know me really well and it seemed to me curious that he should call me Philip. Once, when I drove with him to the House of Commons, he held on to my hand and spoke distressfully:

“My dear Philip, I can’t put two ideas together, or two sentences!”

His eyesight was failing and he had to peer at anything he tried to read. I was told that he was being spared the difficult tasks of government and was given material of no great importance, like a *roi fainéant* playing with toys. I had a great pity for him, but it seemed to me terrible that a man so afflicted, so obviously breaking, should be our Prime Minister. I still blame those who kept up the pretence that he was still in power.

Between the wars I had the honour of spending a day with Winston Churchill at his house at Chartwell. I had some secret information to give him on the subject of our weakness in the air, and, although he knew most of it, he was glad to read the documents I had brought him.

But we had time to spare and he walked me over his beautiful estate and we lingered beside a little lake upon which swam many multi-coloured ducks. He had cemented it with his own hands, but when for the first time he turned the water on the cement cracked: Not to be defeated he cemented it again. This time he called in professionals. When they had done the job the foreman said, “You mustn’t turn the water on for thirty-six hours.” “Right,” said Winston Churchill. But after twenty-four hours or so, after looking at his wrist-watch several times, the strain of waiting became intolerable to him and he turned on the water . . . By good fortune the cement held.

He was then out of office and in the House of Commons “the Right Honourable gentleman below the gangway.” But there was no lack of work for him with his political interests and activities.

I had had occasional meetings with this remarkable man—once during the First World War, and years back when, as a young journalist, I had interviewed him shortly after his marriage with a beautiful lady.

Once I was actually taken for him and roughly handled in consequence, though he would find that hard to believe. It was before the First World War, when there had been a threat of revolt by the officers of the Curragh in the event of civil war in Ireland. Churchill

had denounced this and was very unpopular in Ulster, but with his usual courage he came out to Belfast to make a speech to the Celtic Irish on a football ground outside the city. He took lunch at the Royal Avenue Hotel, and a crowd of young Belfast “toughs” had tried to overturn his motor-car but were thwarted by the police. Afterwards he made his speech on the football ground and the Belfast crowds expected he would return to the Royal Avenue Hotel. But he took a train from a station outside, and it was I who returned, to write my report of the day’s events. Now Churchill wore a bowler hat, and so did I. He wore a double-breasted overcoat, and so did I. He had been in a dark blue motor-car, and I was in one of the same colour and type.

“Here he is!” shouted the mob outside the Royal Avenue Hotel.

I had a companion named Randal Charlton, the “hero” of my *Street of Adventure*, and we had a fight to get through to the hotel entrance. Charlton lost his collar and his coat was torn. For two hours afterwards, as I wrote my “story,” the mob went on booing in the belief that Churchill was inside the hotel.

Years afterwards, when Winston Churchill had led the nation through its dark and terrible years to ultimate victory—the greatest leader this nation has had in its hours of peril—I was able to give him some information which I thought he might like to know. I had been in Germany and I was astonished to find that these people, whom he had done so much to defeat in the war years, were all singing his praises as the greatest statesman in Europe. They were filled with admiration for his personality, his physical appearance, his victory sign, and the Elizabethan spirit within him. I wrote to Churchill, now Sir Winston, telling him about this, which I thought would amuse him, if it had not been reported to him before, and he sent me back a telegram of warm thanks, expressing his great pleasure at the news, which had not been reported to him before and which he was very glad to have.

I had no personal friendship with Stanley Baldwin, afterwards Earl Baldwin, but I once had to make a speech in his presence at a public dinner—the thought made me blanch—and at other times I had the pleasure of listening to him. He was not one of our great Prime Ministers and I was critical of many of his political actions and inaction, but whenever I heard him speak on subjects outside the political arena—on the English countryside, the character of the English people, and English villages and fields and streams—my heart warmed towards him. Talking about that kind of thing he had a captivating eloquence. It was not dramatic or emotional oratory, but his sentences were beautifully phrased and had a human, kindly warmth in them. He loved rural England and knew it as a lover—its beauty, its history, its trees and flowers and birds, its beasts of the field.

In a private house with an old lady as hostess—her dinner parties were the best in London—I often sat next to Lady Baldwin, and from time to time was ticked off by her for saying something with which she strongly disagreed. She was a formidable lady with a blunt way of expressing her own opinions which she did not open to argument. Baldwin himself never came to these dinner parties, preferring a quiet evening with a book.

They had a rebellious, high-spirited and highly amusing son, now Earl Baldwin, and strangely aloof, it seems, from public life.

Oliver Baldwin had been an officer in the Coldstream Guards and now and then came to a restaurant in Sloane Square, which every Wednesday at luncheon was the resort of an

interesting company of men who talked freely about every subject on earth. They included, nearly always, several officers or ex-officers of the Coldstream Guards, and I noticed the warmth of their greeting to Oliver when he turned up. This surprised me in a way, because he was a Socialist, antagonistic to his father's politics and seething with ideas rather contrary to the convictions of the ordinary Guards officer. In his biographical note in *Who's Who* he records that he had been "educated in football at Eton; in other things beginning to learn."

He has had an adventurous and perilous career, serving with the Coldstream Guards through the First World War and as an eye-witness of the Armeno-Russian War of 1921, when he was imprisoned by both the Bolsheviks and the Turks. In 1922 he was a correspondent in East Africa. Then he turned to politics on the Labour side, and after experience as a Parliamentary candidate, became Labour M.P. for Dudley in 1929.

As the author of several books, he was interested in me as a brother of the pen, and on one of his appearances at our luncheon-table in the old Queen's Restaurant, told me that he would like to come round and have a talk with me one evening.

"That would be good," I said. "Any time."

One night just after midnight the bell rang in the little house I had in D'Oyley Street. My wife had gone to bed. I was sitting up unusually late. When I went to the front door, there was Oliver Baldwin with a bulldog.

"I have come to have that talk," he said.

We talked for two hours; but perhaps I bored him. He never came again. I am sorry, because I liked him.

A future Prime Minister came out to France in 1940, during the "phoney" period of the Second World War when, with other correspondents, I was billeted in Arras. It was Anthony Eden, the perfect English gentleman, debonair, with an exquisite manner and a charming smile. I had come across him now and then at Geneva when he was Minister for League of Nations Affairs.

As Foreign Secretary he had served his country well and sometimes brilliantly by his intimate knowledge of foreign affairs and his personal influence of foreign statesmen, who regarded him as a man of high principle and unswerving devotion to the cause of peace. He stood for allegiance to the Charter of the United Nations. All his political life he had upheld the cause of international justice and conciliation. Yet it was he who startled the nation, and the whole world, by the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt after twelve hours' ultimatum, following the attack by Israel in the Sinai peninsular and the Gaza strip. He acted without consultation with the United States and our own Dominions. Did he ask himself or his colleagues any vital questions as to the worth of such action? Would he not antagonise many of our friends in the Commonwealth and elsewhere? Might he not jeopardise our friendship with the United States? Would it not be judged as a violation of the United Nations Charter? Was it not on the cards of Fate that Russia might intervene on behalf of Egypt? Might we not be cut off from our oil supplies by the Arab States? All that happened for a time and the situation became perilous and alarming. But with astonishing nerve and unexpected obstinacy, unshaken by any argument or hesitation even among his own followers, he went straight ahead with his plan of action in collaboration with the French. His motive never seemed quite clear, but doubtless it was inspired by his

detestation of Nasser, the Egyptian premier, and his flagrant violation of treaty obligations by nationalising the Suez Canal. Eden looked back to the actions of other dictators—Mussolini and Hitler, who had not been checked in time when they first showed the cloven hoof, and went from one aggression to another. No more of that, he thought and said, not caring whether his own action of invading Egypt might be condemned as an act of aggression. He was utterly confident in the righteousness of his own view, which comes to men who believe in their own nobility of purpose. That gave him a moral tranquillity. He stood unmoved by the fury on the Labour benches. He answered the searching questions and severe indictment of Gaitskell, the Opposition Leader, calmly and without loss of temper.

When Great Britain was condemned by fifty-four nations in the Assembly of the so-called United Nations, he was still unshaken, and took the view that they had been misinformed and one day would reverse their judgment.

This raises again the question of loyalty to party overriding private convictions. There is no doubt now that at the time of the Suez crisis a number of Conservative back benchers, and even some of his own Ministers, were seriously disturbed by the Prime Minister's actions. Did they express this in the lobbies of the House of Commons? They did not. One of his closest supporters, Mr. Nutting, the Assistant Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, resigned because he could not defend the Prime Minister's case. He was followed by Sir Edward Boyle of the Treasury. One private member expressed his objections. But the others gave their votes to their leader and cheered him vigorously every time he appeared in the House, until the final tragedy came with his breakdown in health and his sudden resignation.

It was a drama not often known in the House of Commons and future historians will have a good time with it.

But the question I have put remains unanswered. Should party loyalty always take precedence over private opinions, deeply involving a man's conscience or sense of honour?

Nine times out of ten, perhaps, the vote in the lobbies does not matter very much, being on subjects of no vital importance and subordinate on the government side to its general programme and policy.

But when the safety or honour of the nation is at stake, or when high principles and ideals are threatened, a Member of Parliament would, I think, do well to ignore the Whips and vote as he thinks right.

There is another aspect of the parliamentary system which touches on this point. The old-fashioned oratory is dead. No longer does one hear the thunderous eloquence of a Pitt, a Burke, or a Gladstone. But with that death of oratory has gone the persuasion of eloquence itself and the power of words to influence the human mind, or at least the mind of a politician. Those debates in the Commons very rarely convince one side or the other. Is there a single case within recent years when the eloquence and argument of a speaker have actually converted a member and altered his decision which way to vote? So why all these sham battles, this flood of talk, this fervour of debate? It seems useless and time-wasting. It causes cynicism in the man in the street who, looking up at the lights in the Palace at Westminster when the House is sitting, says with a smile and a shrug: "The Talking Shop. There they go again!"

The non-party man, the fellow who belongs to what is called the floating vote, is impatient sometimes of this party game. He, like Mercutio, when he had his death wound, is inclined to say, "A plague o' both you houses!"

## XII

### THE LITTLE PEOPLE

A FEW days ago, as I write these words, a little lady came dancing into my garden with her small brother—she was to spend the afternoon with me and suggested that as a preliminary to other forms of amusement I should turn her into a goddess. Still under six, with an uncanny knowledge of Greek myths and English history (due to a Nanny who read out for hours on end), she favoured the idea of being Aphrodite the Goddess of Love. This was easy. Assuming the awful mien of Zeus, the father of gods and men, I said, “Hail, Aphrodite,” as she emerged from her hiding-place behind a flower bed, before dancing alluringly across the lawn. “Now,” she said, “there must be a sacrifice.” I was commanded to cut out a bull and a goat from a piece of my typewriting paper. This done, she put them on a box representing a pagan altar as they were slain by her brother, aged four, armed with a golden dagger from my writing desk. Little splodges of red chalk indicated the mortal wounds. After that she insisted that I should be a Red Indian chief and that she would be my “squawk.” Attired in a red dressing-gown, I became the Red Indian chief, and our wigwam was a table-cloth draped over four garden chairs. But then it occurred to her that it was not a wigwam but a medieval castle, and that by standing on one of the chairs she could be a princess gazing from the battlements to see one of her knights riding across the plain. So it went on until we retired to my study to do a bit of drawing and look at a book or two, one of them being a classical dictionary with many illustrations of Greek gods and heroes. Her drawings are always of “noble ladies” with turnip-shaped faces, wasp waists, and flowing robes coloured richly with chalks. Before going she made a request.

“Uncle Philip, when you are dead, will you leave me your classical dictionary?”

An unusual child in her knowledge of history, but not unusual in her imaginative quality and her power of make-believe. To many of these little people the dividing line between reality and fable is very thin and sometimes non-existent.

Not long ago a mother and her little daughter boarded our local bus and had to separate because there were only two vacant seats. The small girl sat in front next to a nun in her black habit and white bib. To her mother’s surprise, knowing her child’s shyness, she chatted very happily with the nun until it was time to get out.

“What a nice talk you had with that lady!” said the mother.

The little girl looked at her with astonishment. “Oh, she isn’t a *lady*, Mummy! She’s a penguin.”

Their power of make-believe is unlimited and transcendental. Many a time I have gone hunting bears, tigers, rhinoceroses and other wild beasts with a young friend of mine in the jungle parts of my garden, armed only with a croquet mallet (to be used as a gun) or a home-made bow and arrow. To him, treading softly, with an occasional whisper, the danger, the need for caution and courage, the excitement of the hunt, have been very real indeed. A table turned upside down has been our *Golden Hind* in which we have made

perilous voyages on stormy seas, our blanket sail torn from its mast by savage winds. We have been shipwrecked on desert islands, we have fought with pirates. We have discovered great treasure, including the brass ornaments on my mantelshelf—to the distress of my housekeeper.

On many mornings, during week-ends and holidays, this young friend of mine—we understood each other perfectly—would come into my bedroom any time after half-past six and say, “What about a story?” We made up the story together, he suggesting new incidents and fantastic twists of plot, and comic situations. This story lasted for six years, the main characters being a puppy and a wolf, great friends and great adventurers. Puppy himself was always successful and heroic. In the course of years there was hardly anything he did not attempt and achieve. He became chief of the fire brigade, a successful publisher, an aviator of distinction, the navigator of a ship made by himself and Wolf. He was decorated with the Victoria Cross and many other medals for acts of valour. He founded a town entirely for dogs, and he became king of an island of puppies off the coast of South America which is now marked in my *Times Atlas*.

Alas, this story came to an end not abruptly but, as it were, by default. I noticed that my young friend no longer came into my room very often with his usual question of “What about a story?” and now does not come at all. The reason? He is now a schoolboy keen on the Test Matches and all forms of sport. At week-ends he reads *The Three Musketeers*, and D’Artagnan has taken the place of Puppy. To my regret he is no longer one of the little people.

That is the worst of it, from my point of view. They grow up so quickly, these little people. During the last war there was a school in the cottage at the end of my garden. The children, mostly under the age of seven, were good friends of mine. When the sirens sounded the alert they came scampering across my garden to an air-raid shelter below my study, utterly unafraid and delighted with the chance of riotous games in that underground room, furnished with bunks and beds which they converted into a railway train or an ocean liner.

Every morning on summer days one dainty little lady came to school across the lawn where I was sitting at a typewriter. She stopped a moment to say “Good morning,” and I noticed a tiny scar down her cheek due to enemy action which had destroyed her former home. Not long ago two ladies called at my door for a contribution to some charity. One of them had lived in the next house to mine, and I asked if she knew what happened to the little girl with the tiny scar on her cheek who had come so often through my garden like a fairy thing.

The lady laughed, looked over her shoulder and said, “There she is!”

It was unbelievable! The child I knew had grown into an elegant young woman. And those other children with whom I had romped and had pillow fights, and desperate scrimmages, had not remained among the little people. One of them has just finished his National Service in the Army, another is a sub-lieutenant in Her Majesty’s Navy. Sarah Gordon Lennox, who once lived in my house, had her portrait in *The Tatler* as one of that year’s débutantes. Timothy Patteson, son of a distinguished father, who was a small and chubby boy with whom I played hide-and-seek in the woods, is now a tall young giant who looks down on me.

But other little people arrive and take the places of their predecessors, and, strange as

it may seem, are pleased to have me as a friend and comrade, not bothered at all by the enormous distance of age between us.

To one of the ancients, that is one of the agreeable qualities of childhood. Age does not matter to them, if the very old are able to talk to them on the level, and play the right kind of games, and refrain from saying "Don't do this" and "Don't do that," unless strictly necessary.

There is Lindy Loo, who sets up a high-pitched scream indicative of joy when she sees me at a distance, as though this ancient man had the glamour of youth and beauty. She has explored all my rooms and knows the contents of my cabinets, and strews my books about the study floor, but never breaks a thing. She lives across the green in a little old cottage like a picture in a fairy-tale, with a young mother who has a gay heart and a lively, ardent spirit, with always a new idea for adding a little to the small fees earned by a barrister husband—grossly underpaid as all young barristers are, but destined by his face and quality to be a judge like his father before him. In a hut at the end of my garden she has set up a factory for works of art—trays which frame old prints, and matchboxes of gay design, and dainty things for a lady's dressing-table. The fairy-tale cottage across the green vibrates with intense activity in which Lindy Loo, aged three, and her brother Richard, just turned six, go upon their own occasions and find each day a new adventure.

Young Richard is an early riser. At half-past six every morning, when his parents are asleep, he gets up, dresses himself, mounts his little red bicycle and rides across the green to the smallest post office in England. Then he blows a whistle as a signal to the postman that he is ready to go on the rounds with him. But one morning he made a mistake in the time and at half-past five he blew his whistle. The postmistress and her daughter woke up, dressed themselves hurriedly, and were alarmed at sleeping late.

He has made friends with all the village boys and knows every dog on the green. And one morning in his garden he met a bird who scared him by saying several times "Hullo." He rushed into his father and said, "Daddy, a bird has just said 'Hullo' to me!" "No, no," said his father. "Birds don't say 'Hullo,' they say 'tweet-tweet.'" "But this bird said 'Hullo!'" insisted young Richard. "Come and see, Daddy." His father went into the garden and a bird put its head on one side, looked at him, and said, "Good morning!" It gave him quite a turn. It was a jackdaw.

In my garden there is a paddling pool of no great size or depth, and this small stretch of water, in which lie the wrecks of ancient ships, is of irresistible attraction to the little people who come across my lawns. I could not count up those who, in spite of all warnings, fall into it with their clothes on. There is a sudden scream. Small brothers and sisters run to announce that Johnny or Josephine is wet all over. If they do not live in the immediate neighbourhood I have to provide dry clothes from my wardrobe, and for the rest of the afternoon the latest victim of misfortune goes about in a vest twice too big for him and pyjama trousers tied up with string and bedroom slippers going flopperty-flop. The danger of falling in with their clothes on does not arise on warm days. They shed their garments and prance about naked and unashamed.

Are they little angels, these small people with whom I am on friendly terms? They are not. Do they come trailing clouds of glory, as Mr. Wordsworth suggested? They do not. They are chock full of original sin. That is to say they arrive in this world uncivilised and untamed like other small animals with primitive instincts. They are terrific egoists. If there

is anything good going there is a cry of "Me first!" until they have been taught the painful obligation of waiting to be served. They glare at somebody else's toys and will fight with fists and feet to retain possession of some coveted thing from an elder brother or sister, unless restrained by mother or the English nannies who undertook the duty of taming these individualists. Those nannies who taught the young gentlemen of England to wash behind the ears, to pass the cake to ladies first, to leave the last bun on the plate "for manners," to behave with perfect propriety in the presence of their elders—whatever hell there might be in the nursery—have disappeared from our social life. Some of them inflicted tortures upon their unfortunate children, being tyrannical and bad tempered, but that was rare, and mostly they were gentle and well beloved, and English families owed them much in gratitude and love. If I were a sculptor I would put up a statue to the English Nanny.

Among the primitive instincts inherited from their ancestors is the love of fighting and the need of imaginary enemies. They revel in battles and bloodshed at an early age. There must be pirates, Red Indians, wild beasts, and bad men of some sort or another whom they attack with whatever weapons they own or make.

The modern boy has a perfect arsenal of pistols and guns and it is quite useless to preach to them the blessing of peace. In fact, they are remarkably like the adult man who now has nuclear weapons for his toys. What, perhaps, is more true, they are very similar in instinct to the knights and heroes of early history who went forth to kill dragons or to slay Frenchmen, Spaniards and infidels with great enthusiasm. Richard Cœur-de-Lion and his like, in their passionate temper, in their quickly changing moods, in their boastfulness and courage, in their vanity and egoism, were just children like these of seven or eight today. Wars and talk of wars have not been helpful to peace-loving parents who object to tin soldiers and toy guns.

During the last war a small boy looked at a portrait in my dining-room and asked, "Who's that?"

"My father," I told him.

"Oh! Where is he now?"

"He's dead."

"Oh. Who shot him?"

It had not entered his head that anyone could die in this world of ours without being killed by enemy action.

But it is wrong to talk of all children in the mass as little devils or troublesome brats. Everyone born into this dangerous and difficult world has an individual character which it reveals in the earliest babyhood. Some are born placid and good-humoured from the start. I know a fellow aged one-and-a-bit who finds life wonderful and most amusing. He crows with ecstasy when the wind stirs the leaves above his head, when the birds are singing in my garden. The sight of a cat fills him with a humorous delight and he laughs loudly at one of nature's jokes. Introduced to a small girl a year older than himself, he becomes passionate in his adoration. He delivers long monologues in his own language when there is good company around. A most cheerful soul, and yet at three months old he was the victim of polio which put one of his legs out of action.

It is astonishing how quickly some of them develop certain qualities of mind—

scientific, mechanical, artistic, or musical. Musical talent seems to be inherited or to come from a previous existence, like the genius of the infant Mozart. My eldest brother's grandson exhibited a passion for music at a very early age—indeed, before he could talk. If they put on a gramophone record of jazz he would howl loudly in disapproval, but if it was Bach or Beethoven he had a look of delight. He became a musical prodigy, but, alas, those whom the gods love die young.

Some of these little people acquire a secret philosophy of their own at an early age. They turn a deaf ear to the nonsense talked by their elders and have a shrewd knowledge of human nature as it belongs to parents, nurses and other grown-ups. For their own peace of mind they have to adapt themselves to the tiresome intervention of those who say “Don't do that” when they are experimenting with the secrets of nature—such as uprooting a flower to see how it grows, or breaking a toy to see how it works, or having to leave a game at its most thrilling moment because it is time for bed. They need, and accept, a certain amount of discipline. They bear no grudge for an occasional whacking if they know the reason for it and acknowledge its justice. But so often it seems to them unjust because the grown-ups simply do not understand the reason or motive behind the behaviour of the little people.

“Would you like to send a message to Daddy while he is in hospital?” enquired the mother of that young fellow (aged four) who slew the bull and the goat with my golden dagger.

“Yes, I should like to send him a message,” he answered thoughtfully.

“What shall I write?”

“Write and say Mummy is too strict. She is like a Puritan!”

The message was duly sent. But what did he know about Puritans?

The children of today are, I am sure, more advanced in their minds than those of my own time. Because of the lack of nurses, due to economic conditions, they live more with their parents and elders and absorb far more information in this company than the grown-ups realise. In my young days we were taught not to speak until spoken to—children should be seen and not heard. We hated coming down to the drawing-room when visitors arrived. Now these little people mostly feel at ease with their parents' friends and are pleased to talk to them in a reasonable way.

The schools have a good deal to do with this, especially the preparatory schools for very young people. The old terror has gone out of schooling, almost entirely. The rod and the birch are no longer the chief instruments for the inculcation of knowledge. Happiness is found to be the best companion of goodness. If children are happy they are good, as I have always found. The children in my village do not creep “like snail” unwillingly to school, but go tripping on their way. They are bored with the long school holidays and yearn to go back to school again.

The lady who had a little school during war-time in my garden cottage now has a big school with nearly a hundred pupils, many of whom she collects each day in the school bus from the surrounding neighbourhood in a radius of five or six miles. Those children up to seven or eight years of age are a happy crowd with good manners, high spirit and individual character—not ironed out by any severity of discipline, though there is discipline enough. For Ursula Fairfax-Cholmely, now Mrs. Fitzgerald, has a real and rare

genius for bringing up children in the way they should go. They are fearless of her and call her “Chum,” and are devoted to her. She brings out the best in them, and one of her ways of developing them is by singing and dancing and acting. She has built a theatre in her grounds. It can seat about two hundred parents and friends. And on the stage there the other day, as I write, they recited scenes from “Alice” and danced a ballet called “The Toyshop.” It was an enchanting show by these little ones, and afterwards one saw their happiness at receiving prizes for good work during the term. It seemed to me that almost every pupil received some prize as a reward of merit.

Thank God for the happiness of the little people. Doubtless they have secret fears, tragedies, causes for tears which begin with life itself, but those moments pass quickly when there is sympathy and understanding of the child mind among those who have the luck of a good home life and teachers like “Chum.”

# XIII

## THE OLD PEOPLE

ACCORDING to our novelists in the Early Victorian era, old age began at fifty. Now it begins—reluctantly by those who attain this number of years—at seventy. Medical science has made such progress that it has added ten years to the average span of life, and the trouble with some of the ancients is that at eighty the doctors won't let them die. They pooh-pooh the perils of pneumonia, which formerly popped off the old folk, and modern surgery, with the blessing of anæsthetics, performs something like miracles.

Something also has happened in human psychology. Formerly people above the age of fifty resigned themselves to old age and therefore became old. Elderly ladies put on lace caps, sat in their parlours with folded hands and awaited the inevitability of death with patient and pious resignation. Now they still play a good game of golf and put the teenagers to shame by their vitality and energy. So it is with the men if they are blessed with good constitutions. Formerly they ate too much, drank too much, groaned with gout, became wheezy and asthmatical and played the part of the old 'un according to the tradition of their time. They made old age very tiresome to their families and friends. Now at seventy onwards many of them retain a youthfulness of mind and spirit, call each other "young fellows" and go on playing games. They are like the Greeks of Athens as described by Plato:

"The Greeks are always boys. There are no old men in Greece. They are all young in spirit."

I think a refusal to accept boredom is one of the secrets of keeping young. It was an accepted fact that when men had to retire from their business or profession, quite literally they died of boredom. Now they take up a new hobby, such as oil or water-colour painting, like a number of my friends. It gives them a new lease of life. One of my friends in particular had a look at my paintings and thought in his secret heart, perhaps, "I think I could do as well as that." He borrowed my brushes and paints, never having held a brush in his hand before, and at the end of a couple of months or so drove up to my house with six oil paintings of considerable merit. Later he exhibited in the local art society. It was J. L. Hodson.

I was once sitting at dinner with Lord Samuel, then round about eighty. He told me that he had taken up a new branch of study. In answer to my question he spoke one terrific word. "Physics." At the age of eighty-odd he had the courage, the heroism, as it seems to me, of tackling a subject which would daunt most younger men who had had no scientific training; and in a year or two he had advanced so far that he challenged Einstein himself on certain fundamental theories in such a way that the great man took notice of it and wrote a long piece for the book which Lord Samuel produced a year or two ago.

But then, of course, the author of it is the most outstanding example in his country of youthful old age. In fact, it is impossible to think of him as old. His mind remains as young as when I first came in touch with him as a member of the Reform Club. That was

many years ago—forty years ago. A few months before writing these words I attended a luncheon in honour of Lord Attlee, Mr. Attlee then, who had just produced his autobiography. Samuel's speech was delightful and witty, and, as he afterwards claimed with a smile, "tactful." It was young in its amusing and easy delivery. It might have been made by the President of the Oxford Union. There is only one reason for thinking him relatively old. It is his wisdom, his wonderful balance of judgment, his facility of getting to the heart of the matter in a difficult discussion. But that would be a wrong reason, for all through his political and public life he has had the same penetration of mind, the same balancing of argument, the same felicity of wit.

I have known a number of old people and now, reluctantly, take my place among them. Though I have to remind myself of this from time to time, it is always difficult and, indeed, tragic when the time comes to reconcile oneself to being one of the old 'uns. Tolstoy tells in one of his writings what a shock it was to him when for the first time he heard himself called "that old man." And it is still a shock to me now and then when a pretty girl offers me her seat in a bus, as happened the other day. One girl to whom I offered my own seat refused it indignantly as though I were pretending to be a young and gallant fellow. Some men I have met remain gallant if not young. In the next village to mine there is an old inn called the "Grantley Arms." I happened to go there one day during the last war when an old gentleman came in with an attractive young woman who spoke with a foreign accent—French or Belgian. The old gentleman ordered two liqueurs and fell into conversation with the landlord.

"I used to own this inn," he said.

"Indeed!" said the landlord.

"Yes, I used to own a lot of country round about here."

"Indeed!" said the Landlord again.

"Yes, I'm the Earl of Grantley."

He was then over eighty, and not long afterwards he was divorced. When this news reached White's Club, with the announcement that he was shortly to be married again, several members rose, I am told, and drank to the health of the Earl of Grantley as a tribute to his romantic youthfulness. His son and successor to the title, which he did not live long to enjoy, tells a remarkable story in his autobiography about his father's love for the lady who became the author's mother. The young Earl of Grantley, as he then was, had a cousin recently married who was the heir to his title and estate. His lordship had never met the lady but thought it would be a civil thing to ask them to lunch. They arrived at one o'clock. At four o'clock Lord Grantley went off with the lady and his unfortunate cousin lost his wife and the title and the Grantley estate, as in due course a son and heir was born.

After the First World War I used to be invited to lunch by Sir Ian Hamilton at his house near Hyde Park. They were big luncheon parties with many interesting and pleasant people, mostly young, and Sir Ian was a delightful host, very distinguished-looking as he came into the room with a straight back, tall and soldierly. There was nothing old and decrepit about *him*.

"Ian," said Lady Hamilton in a whisper to me—she herself was always lively, amusing and witty—"always picks out the prettiest girl in the room, but with strictly honourable

intentions.”

“When I am no longer attracted by a pretty woman,” said a literary friend of mine, well into the sixties, “I shall know that it is time for me to go.”

That is an amiable quality in old age, but it has its tragic side, for there can be no more romance, no more competition with youth—only resignation. The shaving mirror, the photographic snapshot, the date in the calendar, are dreadful reminders of senility.

There is another tragedy of old age—perhaps the worst. A man who reaches eighty, or less, loses his friends one by one as the months pass, and the years. They go as the autumn leaves fall from the trees. I hardly dare enter my old Club because nearly all my friends have gone—H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, A. G. Gardner and many others who used to form a group in the coffee room for amusing conversation. Not long ago I went there to lunch and sat next to an elderly man who was unknown to me.

“Do you know many people here?” he asked me. “There are so many young members.”

“I don’t know any of them,” I told him.

He groaned: “You are in the same case as myself. All my friends are dead. To me this room is full of ghosts.”

I have an old friend and neighbour who always turns first to the obituary notices in *The Times*. He reckons up the number of his former schoolfellows at St. Paul’s who are still alive. Not many of them. He tells me gloomily that another of his fellow undergraduates at Oxford appeared that morning in *The Times*. It makes him feel lonely. “I am always digging my own grave,” he tells me.

That sense of melancholy does not overcome some of my elderly friends, except perhaps in secret moments of self-recollection. They look death in the face, of course, but they have stoic courage and, if lucky, a religious faith. Life is still worth while to them.

“I love life,” said a remarkable old lady whom I knew very well and admired greatly. One day I remember we stood outside the gate of platform 7 on Waterloo station. A train had just come in from Portsmouth and a crowd of naval men swarmed out with their kit on trolleys. Lady Edmonstone was hustled by them, but she stood there with smiling eyes.

“This is life,” she said. “I find it very enjoyable.”

She had been lady-in-waiting to one of the royal princesses and had the grand manner, though in perfect simplicity and without the slightest affectation. She was still beautiful in her old age. Her old age, did I say? She had the heart of a child and was ready for any adventure. One day during the blitz, when squadrons of German bombers were passing over her chimney-pots in a village next to mine, she put a dressing-gown over her nightgown and walked up and down the village street watching the flare of fires in the sky. After the war she made a confession to me. “Do you know, I find life rather tame now that there’s no more danger!”

She used to invite me to the theatre, but I never saw more than the end of the second act and sometimes only the first. She would whisper to me, “Don’t you think this is rather boring? Shall we go and have tea somewhere—somewhere amusing?”

She always carried three or four bags like shopping bags, very light, though she would never let me carry them. I often wondered what was in them and had an idea that they contained fairy wishes, benevolent thoughts, magic charms. For she delighted to do little

acts of kindness and to leave a trail of happiness on her way. Once during war-time I told her that I could not get any turpentine for painting in oils. It was a prohibited product. She went to seventeen shops and then walked to my house—a couple of miles—on a warm day with a bottle of the precious liquid.

Dame Mary Scharlieb was one of the most wonderful women I knew. She was a great friend of my wife, and, as a surgeon, saved her life twice when she was desperately ill—once in the small hours of the morning, though she was over eighty at the time. She was one of the pioneer women doctors with Mrs. Garrett Anderson, and together they founded the Women's Free Hospital. Every morning she rose very early, prayed for an hour, and then set out to do several operations before midday. Yet she had brought up two sons and a daughter while studying medicine. Once I asked her what was the secret of being a fine surgeon. "One must be a good needlewoman!" she told me. At over eighty she did delicate and dangerous operations and saved many women's lives. But apart from being a doctor and surgeon, she was wise, with a deep knowledge of life and all its troubles. She was not gay like Lady Edmonstone, and like others I have known in their old age who, by some magic in them, retain the spirit of youth. Gertie Miller, afterwards the Countess of Dudley, was one of them, and so was Vesta Tilley, afterwards Lady de Frece.

Nor can I leave out my sister Helen, who was once a nun and afterwards, like most of the Gibbs family, a novelist, under the name of Helen Hamilton. She had a tempestuous and emotional character until she became old and bedridden. Even then she had the mind of a young woman, keenly interested in books, people and places, passionate in her views, verbally violent—Aneurin Bevan, Colonel Nasser, Archbishop Makarios, most members of the Labour Government, are only a few of those whom she would have shot at dawn, though if any of them had come into her room she would have found many of them charming and would have exchanged jokes with them, for in spite of fierce words she had the kindest heart. Indeed, during her illness she became a saint, with wonderful courage and fortitude.

Eighty is recognised nowadays as "getting on." But what about ninety? Well, I have known some nonagenarians who still get a good deal out of life and put a good deal into it. There is one who lives round the corner from my house and garden. We gave him a party on his ninetieth birthday a year or so ago, and he was called upon to play the violin, being the Master of Musick (though an amateur) in our social life. Did he totter forward to his instrument and play some quavery notes with a tremulous bow? By no means! Tucking the violin under his chin, he drew the bow across the strings with a fine, steady, powerful touch. For twenty-five minutes he played Mozart without a shaky note or a false note, and all the time there was a beautiful smile on his lips. Once a week he has a quartette at his house, and on one evening a week for years he has had a play-reading and takes the most dramatic parts himself and has the gift of a born actor—very thrilling to the congregation in church when he reads the lessons, and startling to strangers because of his dramatic elocution. It is a pity that he has become rather deaf—a common ailment of old age—but otherwise he shows but little sign of those ninety years and strides across the green as though about to catch a bus.

At ninety, George Bernard Shaw was still writing. At eighty-odd Bertrand Russell has a mind like a sword and an untarnished sense of humour, as all the world knows who has listened to his recollections on the B.B.C.

These are remarkable and outstanding characters. Do not let me pretend that growing old is always easy, or that old age is a sweet and pleasant progress on the last lap of life. Often old people are a nuisance to themselves and others. The old man in the corner, wheezy, querulous, suspicious, cantankerous—has long been a figure in English drama and tradition.

“The lean and slipper’d pantaloon  
With spectacles on nose, and pouch on side,  
His youthful hose, well serv’d, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank: and his big manly voice  
Turning again to childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound.”

However gallantly a man may try to reconcile himself to advancing years, there is always a sad undertone to his private thoughts. Will he live to enjoy one more summer? Will he see his rose garden in bloom again? How soon will he have to play his last game of golf, or his last game of chess with that old fellow who takes such a long time to move?

He meets ghosts in the garden and about his house, perhaps the ghost of a beautiful woman—his wife—who laid out this garden and loved its roses, and by whom everything upstairs and downstairs had its place and touch. The very tapestry on the chairs was of her needlework. Even when people are talking and laughing, when he is telling one of his stories, there is a sense sometimes of being lost and lonely because she is not there. There are other ghosts, perhaps of children who come to greet one of the Ancients from what seems like another life, it was so long ago. Kipling heard this laughter and whispering of ghost children in his story *They*.

Sometimes these ghost memories become blurred and uncertain. It is difficult to remember names after a certain age. Those girls with whom a handsome youth used to dance, and particularly that very pretty one with whom he was ardently in love for a time—Sylvia, Phyllis, Gladys? Oh, dash it all, he has quite forgotten! My old friend Forbes-Robertson was annoyed by this forgetfulness.

“I went to see her one day, and she was bathing some babies. She adored babies. And the first time I saw her I was caught up by her beauty. She was exquisitely beautiful, and I adored her. Good heavens! I shall forget my own name next! Who was she, my dear?”

“Ellen Terry, Papa.”

One of my old friends, a distinguished scholar, is so forgetful in his old age that he has difficulty with the names of quite ordinary things such as those he needs on a morning’s shopping. Those breakfast fish. Good heavens, what are they called? “You know,” he says to the fishmonger—or did once, anyway—“those flat, salted things with a tail at one end.” “Kippers?” asked the man. “Oh, yes, kippers!” The same with bananas. He now writes them down in a little notebook for immediate reference if needed. And yet he remembers his Greek and Latin. I once tried to catch him out. “What’s the Greek for mother-in-law?” He knew. And he’s very familiar with Greek and Latin history, with the masters of Italian literature, and with the whole span of English history.

Are there any compensations for growing old? Does one acquire more wisdom? No, sir! There is no fool like an old fool, and my own experience is that I do the same foolishness today as I did in my green youth, that I am less certain of my judgment, that I

become less wise. That is very disappointing. Nor does one reach peace and placid waters. The little worries of life still bear down on one and the morning's papers or family news provide new anxieties and perhaps new sorrows.

There is only one cure for the tribulations of old age, and that is never to grow old. There are some who have the gift of keeping young in mind and spirit and find every day a new adventure of the soul.

Ninety is a good age for those who have this magic. A hundred is better. As a young journalist I used to be sent now and then to interview centenarians. I found them always happy and humorous, with nimble wit and ready jest.

There was one, I remember, who was a retired clergyman in a remote part of the country. I drove to him from the nearest station, seven or eight miles away, in a hired carriage, before the days of motor-cars. He had been associated with Dr. Arnold of Rugby, and I tried to get some of his recollections, but his mind was in the present and not in the past, and he was interested and pleasantly excited in the local celebrations for his hundredth birthday. He was handicapped, but not afflicted, by being very deaf, and hearing nothing that I said to him he did all the talking himself and every now and then put his hand on my shoulder with smiling and cordial thanks for what he believed to be my kindness.

"How very good of you, young man, to come down to sing at my concert tonight! And such a long way! I must say, I am very greatly obliged to you."

"I haven't come to sing at your concert tonight, sir," I shouted at him. "I wanted you to tell me some of your reminiscences of Dr. Arnold of Rugby."

He smiled charmingly and patted my shoulder.

"Very good of you indeed!" he repeated. "I must say people are making a great fuss about my hundredth birthday. No credit to me, of course, and I don't feel any different! I must introduce you to my dear wife."

He introduced me to a smiling old lady who came in for a moment.

"My dear," he said, "this is the young man who has come to sing at my concert tonight."

"How very kind of you!" said the old lady, taking no notice whatever of my denial as I tried to explain the purpose of my visit.

I left after renewed thanks and friendly smiles without having obtained any further light on the subject of Dr. Arnold of Rugby.

On my drive back to the station I saw a solitary young man coming towards me in an open carriage.

There, I thought, is the young man who is going to sing at the concert tonight.

I have often wondered how he explained himself to a puzzled old gentleman.

One of the most beautiful messages on old age was written and spoken to his fellow nonagenarians on his ninety-fourth birthday (how wonderful!) by Eden Phillpotts, famous for his plays and novels.

He had noted a certain apathy among them which he regretted.

"Not only the normal hardening of the arteries appears to be responsible for this, but the channels of life seem to become blocked and barred; our apprehension grows dull; our

familiar responses to environment seem to be withheld. It is as though Nature were pulling down the blinds, blowing out the candles, and bidding us go to sleep before the day is done.

“But these are odious and ignoble emotions, and we must arm ourselves against them and strive to find some inspiration or hobby still beyond reach of our apathy to destroy. Do not let your curiosity perish, and on no account seek a hermit’s cavern, or sever yourself from the Welfare State we hear so much about. Pay regard to your family circle, if you still possess one, and let your relations feel proud of you. Be a worthy museum piece in the show-rooms of humanity as long as you can. An old man may become twice a child, but there is no earthly reason why he should not be a good child—an active, reasonably intelligent, obedient, and patient child. Abstain from carping and censure: remember your opinions are now archaic to later generations, so bear with the chatter of youth and the babble of middle-age, recollecting that, when you were young, you talked the same sort of nonsense and did the same impulsive, silly things. Above all, keep your nerve and preserve the even tenor of your way. Granted we have to pay rather a stiff price for weight of years; but, so long as our lives are bearable, we should strive to make them bearable for others also.

“Science has shown us how we can destroy our planet home and blow earth and ourselves back into cosmic dust if we decide to do so; but let science now turn from physical to psychical research and seek moral ways on which our spirits shall be purified, our humble reasoning powers quickened, and the gracious values of humanism made welcome until there sparkles for us the dew of a morning brighter than any that yet dawned upon the children of men.”

## XIV

### DREAM WORLD

AFTER FREUD'S research into the dreams of his patients, it is rash for anyone to tell his dreams in public and especially in the presence of a psycho-analyst, who is almost certain to interpret them in a most embarrassing way. But I think Freud put too much stress upon the libido of sex and I am doubtful of the authenticity of the dream stories to which he listened with gravity and of which he made detailed notes as in a scientific report. Many people let their imagination fill up the gaps in a dream or invent it as they go along. That is why it is very boring sometimes to listen to such narratives. Few people remember their dreams accurately even as far as the breakfast table. On the other hand, it is possible to train oneself to do so, and I have known one or two men who have kept a writing pad by their bedside and scribbled down a dream immediately upon waking. One of them was my old friend William Archer, the dramatic critic, who made a book of them which I found very interesting, though I could find no clue in them to the secrets of his soul. They were very matter-of-fact, if one may so describe the wanderings of the mind in sleep. It was William Archer who dreamed the play of *The Green Goddess*, which became a big success, with George Arliss as the Indian Rajah. It was a melodramatic play—a “thriller”—utterly out of tune with Archer's dramatic criticism and his devotion to the Ibsen school of thought.

I have had only one dream which helped me—or perhaps hindered me—with a novel I was writing. I dreamed that one of my characters, a perfect lady, and, indeed, the “heroine” of my story, threw a glass of wine into the face of another lady who had insulted her. This was so startling to me that I could not refrain from using the incident. It seemed dictated.

My eldest brother, as a young man, used to claim that he could dream what he liked. Before going to sleep he would say to himself, “I think I'll have a night with Don Quixote” (for whom he had a passion), or, “I will follow up that chapter of *Pickwick* which I have just been reading.” Hesketh Pearson claims that his life was saved twice by dreaming of a scene from Shakespeare's plays. Desperately wounded in World War I, and given up by doctors and nurses, he woke up laughing, having had a good time with Falstaff or the men-at-arms in *Henry IV*.

He was lucky. Some of my friends have distressing dreams. A retired Judge confided to me that he was almost afraid to go to sleep because his dreams were so terrible, and yet he had led a blameless life as far as any man can and he was not haunted by remembering the criminals he had had to condemn. Perhaps he was getting on to second childhood, for many children wake up in terror of their dreams of beasts and bogies. I used to scream wildly when I was a very small boy until there was a rush to my bedside by startled parents.

I have an idea that the childhood dreams of terror are caused by primæval race memories going back to the Stone Age and caveman life when monsters roamed about

seeking whom they could devour.

It is not only the dipsomaniac who sees snakes. I have read of a man parched with thirst and weak with hunger on an island from which his boat had drifted away who “saw” enormous reptiles crawling towards him out of the sea.

My dreams are not so horrifying, though I have had bad ones now and then and have been known to yell out for help. Generally they are just worrying. During the First World War I had a recurrent dream. It was always that I was looking at the pictures in the Louvre until I turned to go out, but at the end of the corridor were two German officers in *pickelhaube* helmets seated at a small table. Startled and alarmed, I retreated and walked down another corridor on the way out, but there at the end was another small table at which two German officers in *pickelhaube* helmets were seated. The dream consisted of going down many corridors and advancing towards the same danger. I told this dream to a distinguished psychologist and said, “Of course, it was my fear of being taken prisoner.”

“Not at all,” said my friend. “That’s quite wrong.”

For ten minutes or so he gave me his interpretation of the dream. Briefly it was as follows:

“You are a man who all his life has been searching for beauty—the beauty of life and art and spiritual values. The pictures in the Louvre represented that quest. But always you have been frustrated by ugliness, by your own psychological difficulties, by the materialism of the modern world, and by the abomination of the war. Those German officers were just symbols of that perpetual frustration.”

So dreams are not all that they seem to the uninitiated!

I have another recurrent dream which takes different forms but is basically the same. Always I am lost. Generally I am in a foreign city—with which I am now quite familiar though it is a dream city. I have put my bags into a hotel and then go for a walk. But when I go back I cannot remember the name of the hotel or its whereabouts. I enquire in many hotels but they are all wrong ones. I am lost. Sometimes it is not in a foreign city. It is in London, where in my dreams I have a small house. My wife is there, but I cannot remember the address. I go to different parts of London—mostly in the Kensington neighbourhood, but I cannot find the house and I cannot find my wife who is waiting for me. I am lost again. I fear this is the revelation of a painful fact. I am a lost soul wandering about in search of what I cannot find.

Not long ago I had a queer dream in which I can find no rhyme or reason affecting my own subconscious mind. I must preface my account of it by saying that at the top of the staircase in my country house there is a cut-glass chandelier which once came from an Austrian Schloss. It was given to me before the Second World War by German friends, who called it the *Friedenlampe*—the Peace-lamp. When the war came I thought it might fall down in a glittering cascade, but it remained in its place.

Well, this was the dream, so vivid and so amusing, I thought, that I wrote it down. A young man and woman, both rather elegant, were sitting in the saloon of an ocean-going liner. Over their heads was a cut-glass candelabra, similar to my own.

Said the young woman, “I wonder how the ship comes to have a candelabra like that.”

Answered the young man: “It’s probably Austrian, from some old Schloss.”

Presently a young man approached the first speaker, bowed, and said: “Would your

Royal Highness like a cup of coffee?”

He answered angrily:

“Haven’t I told you not to use that title in this ship? Please don’t do it again.”

The second young man apologised and went away.

“Are you one of those?” said the girl.

Her companion admitted that he was one of those.

Then a young woman approached, made a little curtsy and asked the girl, “Would you like a cup of coffee, Princess?”

She also was answered angrily:

“Haven’t I told you not to call me that?”

When the second young woman went away with an apology, the young man turned to his girl friend with raised eyebrows and said: “Are you one of those too?”

The answer came with a laugh.

“Yes, I must admit I am, but I’m going to England to learn shorthand and typewriting.”

“Fine idea!” said the young man.

Now in my dream I was aware that three evil-looking men were aboard ship with the intention of killing the elegant young fellow who had been addressed as Your Royal Highness. He was aware of it, too, when suddenly they came towards him. He had his hand in the pocket of his dinner jacket and held a revolver, with which he shot through his pocket, not at his intending murderers but at the candelabra above his head. It fell in gobbets of glass and the saloon was plunged in darkness. Under cover of this he seized the girl’s hand and ran with her to his own cabin. Then he laughed as he spoke again.

“In moments of crisis I always shoot at the candelabra.”

The dream shifted to Trafalgar Square. The young man and woman were walking there when they observed that the three evil-looking men were coming towards them menacingly. The Prince, as he certainly was, looked above his head and spoke despairingly.

“My God, there are no candelabra here! What shall we do?”

“Let’s get into a taxicab,” said the girl brightly. “I have often wanted to drive in a London taxi.”

There was one passing and they jumped into it.

“Where to?” asked the cabby.

“Drive to Trafalgar Square,” said the Prince.

The taxi driver snorted.

“You’re in Trafalgar Square already.”

“Well, drive to number thirty-seven,” said the young man.

“That won’t do you any good,” said the cabby. “It’s a greengrocer’s shop.”

“That’s all right,” said his Royal Highness. “This young lady and I are very fond of tomatoes.”

End of dream.

Now I have not submitted that dream to any psycho-analyst, but I defy any one of them to find some Freudian complex in that narrative, nor can I see that it had anything to do with my own subconscious experiences. I played no part in the affair except as an observer.

Another dream I had was extraordinarily vivid. I was one of a number of young aristocrats in the time of the French Revolution. We were all being tried for our lives and we knew perfectly well that we should be sent to the guillotine, but we were laughing and joking among ourselves quite carelessly. The dream was so realistic that I kept pushing the peruke back from my forehead because I felt hot.

(When I awakened I was aware that a corner of the sheet had fallen over my face.) I am still half inclined to believe that it was a race memory—there is a technical name for it which I have forgotten—due to a French ancestor in the time of the Revolution.

One other dream of mine:

I was walking with my friend and brother war correspondent, Beach Thomas, outside the Law Courts in London. We had an appointment inside, knowing that we were sentenced to death by hanging. I glanced down one of the streets leading to the Thames and wondered whether it wouldn't be better to drown myself, but I decided otherwise and fumbled at the gate leading into the Law Courts. Turning to Beach Thomas, I said:

“It's difficult to get in here, but it will be more difficult to get out, old man!”

That remark seemed to me rather witty when I woke up. Several times I have had a dream of trying to drown myself after getting into trouble with the law, but have always hesitated to plunge into deep waters for that purpose.

This dream, I think, is not difficult of interpretation. It is due no doubt to a sense of guilt for unknown, and as far as I am aware, uncommitted crimes. In the opinion of my distinguished psychologist friend, I am what he calls “guilt prone.” Yet—so far—I have never committed any crime which would justify my appearance in the dock of the Old Bailey, and the police have never been on my track or desired to get my fingerprints.

I envy those who have lovely dreams of scenes beyond the beauty of this earth, of spiritual experiences beyond their reach in everyday life, of flying outside their bodies into illimitable space. A great friend of mine is convinced that he has escaped from his body in this way, not merely in a dream, but actually from the bed upon which his body lay. He saw it lying there, and I have read of many others who believe they have had this experience and have had some difficulty, it seems, in getting back to their habitation of the flesh.

## XV

### BEYOND ONE'S KEN

**I**LIVE, it seems, in a ghost-haunted countryside. That is to say, many of the old houses round about—some of them historic mansions—seem to be reeking with ghosts, according to stories I have heard by their owners or occupiers. Also some of my friends, honest and truth-loving people, when questioned on this subject assert, sometimes reluctantly, as though loth to reveal secrets rather too private for general conversation, that they have had ghostly, or let me say, mysterious experiences beyond normal explanation. More often they tell stories not at first-hand but second-hand, which they have heard from their own friends and find themselves bound to believe because of the honesty and credibility of their informants. Born with a sceptical mind I listen with interest but without conviction—with interest because if one believes in only *one* ghost story among the thousands told in books or heard over the coffee cups it is of important significance to one's enquiry into the mystery of life and death. Does personality exist after death? Do the spirits of the departed come back to their old places on earth? Or, as another possible explanation, can one's mind get into tune with the past and perceive scenes which have happened long ago?

I have never seen a ghost, though once the voice of someone whom I had greatly loved spoke to me. That is to say, I believed I heard that voice and the words spoken to me, as Joan of Arc believed she heard her voices and died for that belief. Once I was in the company of one who saw a ghost. It was a young boy aged about six, utterly normal and trustful, as most healthy children are.

He was staying in my house and came down to breakfast, merry and bright. He was looking out of the window into the garden when suddenly he gave a queer little whimper which I have never heard from him before or since.

“What's the matter?” I asked.

“There's someone in the garden looking at me,” he answered. “Someone in white.”

He became excited and dashed out of the room into the hall and tried to open the front door to get into the garden, but it was bolted and he could not manage it. When he came back he looked out of the window again, but what he had seen had gone. For some reason—a respect for a child's mind—I did not question him, but he said, “I know what you're thinking about.” That was all, but to this day I have a belief that he did see, or thought he saw, a spiritual being in my garden.

Not long ago I went to one of the historic old houses in my neighbourhood and the lady who owned it at the time—she has since died—told me about its “ghosts” and took me upstairs into the rooms where, she said, they appeared. She was a very matter-of-fact lady, fond of gardening, and blunt of speech, without any nonsense about her. They were unusual ghosts.

“In this room,” she told me, “a luminous lady appears on the walls—more living and

alight than a portrait—if you know what I mean. Come into the other room.”

In the other room a ball of light was in the habit of moving around slowly.

Then there was the grey lady—there is always a grey lady in these ghost stories of haunted houses. This one was an old lady who frequently appeared in the children’s bedroom. They were quite used to her and not at all frightened, but thought she was rather a bore.

“Shut the door, mother,” they used to say, “or the grey lady will come.” I don’t know whether a shut door kept her out. That seems unlikely, if ghosts are ghosts.

Can one believe a word of all this? I can only vouch for the apparent honesty of a typical English lady, unhysterical and unemotional, who talked about ghosts as she would about her vegetable garden or herbaceous border, in the nature of things.

Another friend of mine, an eye specialist and Quaker—Quakers are honest folk!—looked after a number of refugee children during the last war in an old house five miles or so from my village. It was noticed after a while that every afternoon at four o’clock the drawing-room bell rang. Some mischievous child, it was thought. But after a while this explanation did not seem correct. All the children were sent out one afternoon, carefully checked—and the bell still rang at four o’clock precisely! Very odd!

A new nurse arrived from London, and having been told about the bell, revealed that she was “a bit of a medium.” She seems to have been more than a bit, because she went off into a trance and said that a certain old lady, whose name she gave, rang the bell for afternoon tea. Now the name of the old lady meant nothing to her, but my Quaker friend knew it belonged to a former owner of the house who had been dead for many years.

It is a comical reason for a return from the other side! It suggests the spirit of a very English old lady still craving for the cup that cheers.

A queer story told to me by one of my very close friends was of a house which was once the priory of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. It was my friend’s brother, Sir Harry Johnston, the famous explorer, who owned it and had his dining-room where the chapel used to be. One afternoon Alec Johnston set off from my house to visit his brother, and when he arrived he leaned his bicycle up against the garden wall. As he did so he heard music. It was a curious chanting in an oriental scale.

“Dash it all!” thought Alec. “My brother has some of his African natives singing on the lawn.”

But no one was singing on the lawn, though the music was still going on. There was no one in the house. Sir Harry and Lady Johnston were both out. The servants were out. There was something uncanny about that chanting. With a sense of gooseflesh Alec Johnston mounted his bicycle and rode off as hard as he could. Some time afterwards he discovered that both Sir Harry and Lady Johnston had heard this mysterious music several times but had said nothing to each other about it. The end of the story is interesting.

Alec Johnston went to Lourdes and watched the long procession of pilgrims winding their way up to the grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, singing as they went. One group of monks from Greece came along chanting. They sang in the old Greek scale. It was the same kind of hymn which Alec Johnston had heard in his brother’s garden in Sussex, and it was in the old Greek scale that the Knights of Jerusalem would have sung in this priory seven hundred years ago.

One looks for an explanation. Is it possible that sound may be stored up in certain surroundings—a sloping field, a wood near by—as it is on the disc of a gramophone, and repeated when the atmosphere—a slight wind, a warm sun—sets up the exact vibrations? Would that theory cover the experience of the two ladies at Versailles who saw, who believed they saw, the liveried servants and the scene as it was in the time of Marie Antoinette? It might be the explanation of many other apparently supernatural manifestations of past events and characters, for it is impossible to believe that those who have passed on should revisit their old haunts and repeat an action—a murder, a suicide, some passionate act—over and over again.

Then the theory of time enters into the argument. Our so-called Time has, we are told, no reality except as a little man-made clock. From the point of view of a star there is not this division into minutes and hours. Time—past, present and future—is all one.

The author of *Experiment with Time* dreamed of things—quite trivial events—in advance of their happening, and several friends of mine claim to have this prescience. I knew a talented pianist who would come down to breakfast—before the days of broadcasting—and startle his wife by saying, “That was an awful train smash,” or “That shipwreck is very tragic,” before opening the paper lying folded on the table.

A neighbour of mine was urged one morning to put on a black tie and somewhat later heard that a close friend of his had died. There are innumerable stories of people receiving a sudden cognisance of a friend’s death, perhaps on the other side of the world, and of being visited by an appearance of this friend at the very moment of death or within a short time of that. This is shrugged off by sceptics with the word “Telepathy!” But that does not explain everything. Telepathy itself is one of the mysteries. Can one transmit a message across space to another mind? If so, that suggests extraordinary powers of the brain beyond present scientific knowledge. Can another human being read the secret of one’s mind like reading an open book? I am inclined to think some of them can.

I was once in a tent with some foreign Gypsies. They could not speak English but had picked up smatterings of other languages. A Gypsy girl whose palm I had crossed with silver, and who had done some funny stuff with twigs and effervescent water, spoke to me in German. They were startling words.

“You are anxious about a woman who is going to have her throat cut.”

They were exactly true. My wife was about to have an operation for goitre.

Now how did that Gypsy lass get that out of my mind like plucking a berry from a bush? Telepathy? Yes, and miraculous, if a miracle is something beyond the known laws of nature.

Almost everybody, including myself, has had familiar experiences of what might be called short-wave telepathy. One thinks of someone, not seen perhaps for a long time, and the next morning there is a letter from him or her. I have put it to the test. Standing in a London club I suddenly thought of an old man whom I had not seen for a long time and who, to be honest, I was not keen to see. It was William Hill, once editor of a paper on which I served.

“I wonder why I am thinking of him,” I said to myself. “Perhaps I’m going to meet him.”

I walked out into Trafalgar Square and in the crowd there came face to face with old

Hill.

“Hullo!” he exclaimed. “I have a letter for you in my pocket.”

That, I think, was more than a coincidence.

Clairvoyance, if one accepts its possibility, goes farther than telepathy because it sees the past and the future. It has very ancient claims as far back as the Greek oracles, and the old crystal gazers, and the more modern practitioners who read fortunes in tea leaves, packs of cards, and the human hand. One is inclined to dismiss all that as rubbish, but there is an immense amount of evidence that some people are able to “see things” which have happened, or will happen. Even some of the professional old women in back rooms and seaside apartments, who scrape up a living by fortune-telling, contrary to the law, and who doubtless indulge in a certain amount of fraud in their pretence of foretelling the future, make lucky shots now and then in what they tell to their customers. Two recent cases come to my mind connected with relatives of mine. Just as a joke this mother and daughter went to see a woman in Brighton who did this kind of thing. The girl—a sort of niece of mine—had an uncertain future as a physiotherapist, and she was told that she would travel across the sea and marry a man in a far-off country. So it happened. She went to Canada and married a Canadian. Her mother was equally startled by an accurate forecast of her immediate future as a traveller in many countries of the world. Lucky guesses? Possibly, but quite astonishing.

I read a serious French book on the subject of clairvoyance. During the First World War a group of people in Paris tested the truth of this super-normal knowledge. By holding a handkerchief, or some other object once handled by soldiers serving in the war, the “mediums” described in great detail what was happening to them, and very strange and tragic some of them were, as afterwards confirmed by letters arriving from these soldiers. If any of these experiments were truly reported they reveal extraordinary powers in the human mind far beyond the range of our normal senses and the known mechanism of the brain cells, annihilating the limitations of distance, time, and communication between one mind and another. There are great mysteries here.

Then there are the claims of the faith healers. Have they any power beyond intense suggestion upon emotional minds? It is accepted by many medical men, though by no means by all, that we are only on the verge of discovering the immense power of the mind over the body. Morbid thought can produce diseases and physical ill-health. The reverse may be true, and right ways of thought may cure these maladies. Almost every medical practitioner would go as far as that by frequent experience. The bedside manner of a cheery doctor often helps a patient to feel much better, and actually be much better.

But there are extraordinary cases of more sensational character.

I sat one evening at dinner with a Russian princess. We were eating mutton cutlets and talking about the mysteries of life (Russian women of the old régime delighted in such conversation). In a casual way, as though saying something commonplace, she informed me that once she had been brought back to life after she was dead.

All I could say was “Really?”

“Yes,” she told me, “as a girl of sixteen I died. Candles were put at my head and feet and my family were on their knees around me. Of course I knew nothing about that, but suddenly in my sleep of death I heard a rough peasant voice. He said, ‘Sit up!’ and I sat

up. I saw a bearded man who looked like a monk, with strange eyes full of light.”

I hasten to add it was not Rasputin, but a saintly man named Father John of Cronstadt.

“He said, ‘Get off the bed,’ and I got off the bed. Having been dead I was brought back to life. Now we are eating mutton cutlets.”

To a doctor friend of mine I told this story, and he shrugged his shoulders.

“She wasn’t dead,” he said. “She was in a cataleptic trance.”

This is a reasonable explanation, probably true, but it seems to me remarkable that Father John of Cronstadt was able to bring her back to consciousness by his urgent command. If he had not been there at the critical time she would have been buried in the family vault.

A friend of mine named Lewis Hind, a distinguished writer and editor, was desperately ill, and his doctors diagnosed cancer and gave him only a short time to live. But a fortnight later or so I saw him walking jauntily across Holland Street, Kensington. I expressed my astonishment and he laughed.

“No, I’m not dead! I have been cured by Christian Science, in which I didn’t believe.”

It was his wife who had summoned Christian Science friends to his bedside.

My doctor friend dismissed this story carelessly.

“It was a wrong diagnosis. He didn’t have cancer.”

Quite likely, but he had been desperately ill of something and suddenly became well. The explanation is not complete.

There is a faith healer living in my neighbourhood. I have never met him, but people I know have been to him and report cures or semi-cures. He gave a public demonstration of his “powers,” and a friend of mine—a Catholic lady—went in a critical mood and was staggered by what he did. He straightened up an old man bent double like a pair of scissors, who had been in this state for years. Now he walked across the platform. The “healer” took the irons off crippled children and they too walked. So it was with cases of rheumatoid arthritis. Did they walk next day or next week? It is more than probable that the great majority of these cures or so-called cures are due to very powerful suggestion, but that in itself is beyond the range of ordinary medical men and is one of the unsolved mysteries of the human mind and body.

What about the miracles of Lourdes and other Catholic shrines? They are well authenticated by the most careful evidence. Purely nervous cases are excluded from all claims to the miraculous, but there are others—not very many and becoming less in number, I think, during recent years—which cannot be accounted for by the ordinary laws of medical knowledge, even allowing for intense religious emotion in surroundings of great beauty and reverence and faith, as once I saw.

I have touched lightly upon some of the great mysteries which lie beyond our common experience of life and self-knowledge. They cannot be dismissed by a shrug of the shoulders. They are supernatural in the sense that they are beyond the known laws of nature. They are beyond the ken of our poor ignorance.

## RETROSPECT

LOOKING back over a long life and trying to find some clue to the pattern and purpose of those years, I think first of all of the tremendous changes which have happened in our way of life. They have been caused not by any great advance in the minds of men and women—we do not seem to have acquired more virtue or more wisdom—but to scientific inventions which would have seemed miraculous to our ancestors, adding much to our comfort, mobility, and power over material things.

When I was a young boy my parents' house of middle-class means was lit by oil-lamps and at "evenings at home" in the drawing-room by candles. We knew an old man named Wimshurst who demonstrated to us children his famous Wimshurst machine for producing electrical power, but it was years later when electric light came as a great boon into our houses and streets.

There were no telephones. It was not until I was twenty that I spoke down one of these instruments, and was rather scared of it.

There were, of course, no motor-cars, and lying abed in a London house I used to hear the klip-klop of the cab-horses and the slither of hooves in the wet streets. In the country, away from the railways, the pace of a horse was the limit of man's speed.

The miracle of "wireless" was still far ahead. Even the gramophone did not come into our home during my childhood. We had to make our own amusements, playing the piano with ten fingers or one, acting our own plays, listening in the drawing-room to songs warbled by our girl friends on social evenings.

There was no music at the turn of a knob. We had no moving pictures, no television, but plenty of pleasure in our home-made entertainment.

There was no traffic in the air and the sky was quiet.

Life was leisurely and peaceful, but we were quite unaware of these blessings, and, anyhow, there were troubles enough and tragedies enough, of disease, poverty, and the usual conflicts of love and passion.

In one important way, morally and mentally, we who came to manhood in the Victorian era differed from a later generation. It was an age of optimism. We believed in the inevitable progress of humanity towards a finer civilisation, and many of us were keen to hurry up that process.

There was much to do in the way of reform and social legislation, and that gave an excitement and moral purpose to the political scene. Liberal-minded men and women had something to fight for, and they were on the winning side. There was no doubt in our minds that elementary education would raise the standard of intelligence. The infernal stupidity of war would become an anachronism. Civilisation was set fair for a new splendour of life. So thought H. G. Wells and all his followers in the night classes and the public libraries, keen to learn and keen to know.

The South African War came as a shock to this type of mind, but patriotism prevailed over pacifism and all classes were caught up in a wave of jingoism. That was followed, after many disasters and long casualty lists before final victory, by a heavy reaction. Kipling's songs of Empire were discredited. It had been an unfortunate episode. Now peace would prevail. The Liberal spirit was on the ascendant. Civilisation was on the

march again.

That hope of the idealists lasted for fourteen years. Then the First World War came as a cataclysm which swept away the very foundations of our national faith in the unchanging security of our way of life and our supremacy in world power. The exalted heroism and sacrifice of patriotic youth, when the finest flower of our manhood went down into the mud of Flanders and the Somme, was followed by bitterness and disillusionment in the years of unemployment and frustrated hope.

We had called heavily upon our reserves of wealth and mortgaged our future.

In four years of war, as I have recorded earlier in this book, we had spent as much as in two and a half centuries of previous history.

It caused a social revolution, intensified and completed by the Second World War; a dreadful repetition before the ruins of the last had been removed. The old aristocracy had already been brought low by Income Tax and death duties. Now it was the turn of the middle-classes. The tax collectors were after them. How could they make both ends meet? How could they send their boys to school? Those problems still confront them. They have no margin for domestic service. Young mothers have to look after their own children and do most of the household work. Husbands have to help with the washing-up at week-ends. There is nothing intolerable about that, but it is very different from life, as I knew it long ago, in an average middle-class home, with two maids in the kitchen and a nanny upstairs in the nursery.

Less tolerable is their financial anxiety, caused by the constant depreciation in the value of money, and, month by month, the rising cost of living. When England went off the gold standard the value of the pound sterling began to drop. It has been dropping ever since and we are living on watered currency.

Yet we have the Welfare State. That is the most astonishing result of our social revolution. The so-called working classes (are we not all workers?) have attained a standard of life immeasurably higher than in the late Victorian era. The old squalor has been lifted. In spite of watered money, which makes prices go up, they have a margin for the fun of life. Their babies are pushed about in shining perambulators. Their young sons have motor-bicycles. There is television in many little houses. The State looks after their health, provides them with council houses, gives the old people pensions, comes to their assistance in cases of dire necessity, provides them with free hospitals, clinics, school meals and scholarships for the most intelligent. The great majority of people in this island are, I believe, happier and healthier than at any time in our long history.

But a few anxious questions must be asked. Are we living in a fool's paradise? Is this State Socialism (willy-nilly we are all Socialists now) undermining the old sturdy qualities of our national character? "The Government will pay" is the easy-going watchword. There is a constant demand for higher wages and shorter hours. How long will the Government be able to pay in this time of dwindling exports and the menace of international competition? There are ominous signs that we are living beyond our means.

This retrospect of social history is one of tremendous change and transition from one kind of world to another; it is an utterly different world, due mainly to the invention of the internal combustion engine and the jet-driven plane.

The aeroplane has annihilated distance and, alas! has created a new menace to human

life by carrying bombs as well as passengers from one country to another.

There is a worship of speed. It is regarded as “progress” when a new record of flight is made—500 miles an hour, 600 miles, through the sound barrier, ever faster—faster—faster. Progress towards what? The answer is rather terrifying.

By the rapidity of communication the nations of the world are brought closer together, but they do not love each other any better. The spirit of fanatical nationalism is making many primitive peoples restless and aggressive. Throughout the world there is a demand for independence and self-government.

Great Britain has yielded to this pressure, and following a liberal policy has encouraged it by giving self-government to many of her dependencies. It has not increased our prestige in countries like Russia. The withdrawal from India has been interpreted as a sign of weakness. Britain, like ancient Rome, was, they thought, withdrawing her legions and surrendering her Imperial power. They did not realise the strength and loyalty of the Commonwealth which has replaced the old Imperial idea with government from Whitehall.

During our own lifetime our people—the common folk—and all social classes have revealed an inexhaustible heroism and have kept their old qualities of humour, fortitude and good nature. There is not much cruelty among us. We wish to live in peace if our leaders would let us. But in the same period, during the past fifty years, the old ideals of civilisation, formerly inspired by Christianity in Europe, have been violated by many countries. The old devil of cruelty, intensified and intellectualised by the modern scientific mind, has had a hideous renaissance. The mass murder of Jews in Germany would have seemed unbelievable by our forefathers, and by the Germans themselves.

Torture of body and mind have inflicted hideous suffering and death upon millions behind the Iron Curtain. In many countries the Secret Police terrorise their prisoners with merciless brutality and a studied art of torture. By the decency of our own traditions we have escaped all that.

Yet there is a certain discontent—perhaps also a fear—in the minds of our young men and women in spite of, or because of, this so-called Welfare State. It has made thousands of them emigrate in recent years to Canada or Australia and there are long queues waiting for the chance of that. What are their reasons for wanting to leave the old Mother Country? They give different reasons. Income tax and the high cost of living put a continual strain upon the men. However much money they might earn in the future by skill and toil and ambition, much of it will be taken away from them—so what’s the good? Socialism and nationalised industries will keep everybody on a dead level of mediocrity. Professional men, scientists, skilled technicians are “fed up” with what they believe to be a lack of opportunity in what is called this Opportunity State. Reports come to them of the much greater rewards and a larger life to be found in Canada, especially, with its illimitable resources. So why not go? ask the young husband and wife after anxious discussion.

There is also, I am told, a hidden fear in their minds. Are not Russia, the United States and ourselves competing in the production of terrible weapons which if they were used—the hydrogen bomb, guided missiles—would destroy civilisation itself as well as its cities and their teeming populations? It has been admitted by our own government that there is no defence against such nuclear weapons, and all of us know that this island of ours would

be Target Number 1 because of the American air bases on our soil. By what insanity, by what devilish immorality do we go on making these things? Should there not be from every country in the world, from every woman of the world, a great cry of horror and protest and anger? But the Tests go on and the excuse—the justification—is that on our own side they are a deterrent against war. Their monstrous power of destruction, we are told, is so great that no nation will ever dare to release it, knowing that by doing so they would be signing the death warrant of their own people.

But some people I know—young people—are not sure of this “deterrent” so much on the lips of our leaders. They have an uneasy feeling, they tell me, that someone in supreme power—someone in the Kremlin perhaps—may go drunk or mad with power. That is the hidden fear which is one of the reasons for the urge of young parents with children to leave this overcrowded island for the larger spaces of the world, though personally I do not think it is the chief reason.

There is still a hope that mankind will refuse to commit suicide. There is still a chance that the statesmen of the world will be forced by the pressure of their peoples for self-preservation to agree to some gradual way of disarmament and the total abolition of nuclear weapons. If that hope could be fulfilled—it needs only one step forward by common sense and sanity—an era of new prosperity and security would be opened for all of us with glorious possibilities. In God’s name, why not?

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Life's Adventure* by Philip Gibbs]